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HEALING, SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND SPEECH: NARRATIVE RE/CONSTRUCTION IN THE FICTION OF JULIA O'FAOLAIN AND LEE MARACLE

by

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For Woody Woods (1991-2000); The English Canons; the Trickster; and Diablo.

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Healing, Self-knowledge and Speech: Narrative Re/Construction In the Fiction of Julia O'Faolain and Lee Maracle

Designed more as a *parallel* than a *comparative* project, this thesis has developed out of a combination of post-colonial theory and post-structural ethics. Working from Ron Marken's notion that sharing a commonality can be "restorative," my thesis considers how both the Irish writer Julia O'Faolain and the Native Canadian writer Lee Maracle contribute to the restoration of the localized, internal and domestic realms of both Ireland and Native Canada.

Ron Marken, in his essay "'There is Nothing but White between the Lines': Parallel Colonial Experiences of the Irish and Aboriginal Canadians" (1999), identifies a key motif (and the title) for the thesis in the "connected metaphors of healing, self-knowledge, and speech" located in both Irish and Native Canadian writing (Marken 158). Drucilla Cornell's ethical feminism, which I define in greater detail in my Introduction, is the basis for my understanding of re-writing myth and, more generally, what I have called "narrative re/construction" in contemporary women's writing. As Cornell argues, quoting Hans Blumenberg, though myths are "'distinguished by a high degree of constancy in their narrative core,'" they also have a "'pronounced capacity for marginal variation'" (172). With this in mind, I will also consider the multiple meanings of "myth."

In O'Faolain's and Maracle's fiction, female characters struggle both to regain and reshape traditional ideas of femininity, many of which are bound up with their respective cultural mythologies and the regressive reproduction of myths surrounding women's role in history-making as well as familial (re)structuring. In O'Faolain's *No Country for Young Men* and Maracle's *Sundogs*, women peel back the suffocating layer of history that has kept them under heel and driven their families to political recumbency and self-abuse in the context of the 1980s and 1990s. Healing and self-knowledge thus begin when the wounds are opened afresh and speech finds currency in the voices of women.

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INTRODUCTION

THE ETHICS OF READING

My task does not consist in constructing ethics; I only try to find its meaning.
- Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 90.

I would like to think that the title of my project is self-explanatory, though I realize that post-structuralist theory interrogates such assumptions, forcing the modern scholar to not only explain everything s/he says but to constantly consider *other* possible meanings. Considering the more recent alliance between deconstructionist theory and ethics, *interrogation* gives way to: respectful readings of texts; paying attention to the minutia of texts; respecting the otherness of texts. In the context of Emmanuel Levinas' work, particularly his *Ethics and Infinity*, this respectful consideration is imagined as a kind of "ethics of reading," which I have described in the following way:

> It seems that I am always thinking what has already been thought, and that I am always saying what has already been said: such is my situation [or position] in relation to the other who has never fully heard what I have articulated. In Levinas there is a sense that *what* I say — which includes what I have gesticulated and, before that, what I have thought — is never enough to satisfy the other; that, in fact, what I say is already too much, already oversteps my responsibility to the other: I have, in other words, *answered* for the other. Responsibility to the other thus seems to be more at the level of *watching* and *listening*, or "harkening" as one editor clarifies [Richard Cohen, translator of *Ethics and Infinity*, 7]. The verbal potential of this kind of communication could be expressed as a *reading* of sorts, in the sense that I listen to the need being articulated, or rather *not* being said; never determining its significance, I continually *read*, therefore perpetuating its always having significance, its always being exactly that: a need. I would not read, therefore, in order to discern or discover [as the definition of "reading" would suggest], but to continually *not* say, to continually listen to what the other is saying. . . .
>
> It would seem that the difficulty of posing [an] ethics of reading lies in the very fact that reading is the manifestation of desire: the desire to know oneself. Yet, as part of my responsibility to the other, I continually reveal my desire which, though it can never be exhausted, traces and retraces this responsibility of care, of attentiveness, of the necessity to "close read." [i]

In this way, I am taking the *ethical* approach as I proceed to locate the critical material that has shaped this project and provide some explanation regarding the significance of "healing, self-knowledge and speech" and "narrative re/construction."

I - ETHICAL FEMINISM, RE-WRITING MYTH and COMPARATIVE STUDIES

Drucilla Cornell's "ethical feminism" is the basis for my understanding of "re-writing myth," re-metaphorization, and re-imagining feminine writing and narrative voice. Cornell's reliance on myth to defend the feminine ("Feminine Writing, Metaphor and Myth" 165) is part of this re-imagining, and to re-imagine is to re-work the images that already exist, to rewrite the mythologies that have already been deposited by men (Irigaray 10). In "Feminine Writing, Metaphor and Myth," Cornell notes that "the inability to simply escape our genderized context explains why the role of myth in feminist theory is essential to the reclaiming, and retelling, of 'herstory' through the mimetic writing that specifies the feminine. I am . . . emphasizing the word 'myth' deliberately, to emphasize the hold that myths of Woman and the feminine have over both individuals and cultures" (172). I want to clarify that I am interested in both the negative and positive aspects of myth, so that "myths about women," "mythologizing," or "the mythical" are not always already signifiers of oppression and domination. "Myth is one way in which the feminine achieves what [Hans] Blumenberg calls 'significance.' Significance is the deeper meaning we associate with

myth's capacity to provide our life-world with symbols, images, and metaphors that not only give us a shared environment, but an environment that matters to us and inspires us" (173). In this way, re-writing myth involves the re-interpretation and recreation of mythical figures, which can "give body to the dream of an elsewhere beyond patriarchy and the tragedy imposed by a gender hierarchy which blocks the alliance between the sexes . . ." (173).

The "ethical" part of re-writing myth is in the belief that Woman is not something that can be fully captured, that is to say, "woman" is not a definable category: "There is always more to write" ("Feminine Writing . . ." 171). Elsewhere Cornell notes: "There is a theoretical need to understand how the symbolic constructions we know as Woman are inseparable from the way in which fantasies of femininity are unconsciously 'colored' and imagined within the constraints of gender hierarchy and the norms of so-called heterosexuality" ("What is Ethical Feminism?" 75). This whole approach is very applicable to post-colonial or anti-colonial writing, and the ethical aspect of feminism is an important addition to post-colonial and post-structuralist theories in general. As a challenge to sociological and historical approaches, feminism involves "an ethical appeal, including an appeal to expand our moral sensibility" (79). Ethical feminism, in my understanding of it, combines the rigor of Derrida's language interrogation with Levinas' emphasis on responsibility for otherness, which one can imagine as a cautionary gesture on Levinas' part, a cautionary gesture

which in turn alerts us to the signs of destitution — an open hand or a face, for example.[ii] Using this dual approach of interrogation and appeal, I want to illustrate how Julia O'Faolain and Lee Maracle can be read in the context of ethical feminism and Cornell's notion of re-writing myth. By "myth," I am not only thinking of mythological tales but mythological motifs, figures, *names*, as well as the stereotypes or *myths* that surround women's experience in both contemporary Ireland and Native Canada. However, before I provide specific examples of O'Faolain's and Maracle's methods of re-writing or re*constructing* myths, I want to locate another important source for the project, indeed the source for the parallel approach in the first place.

Ron Marken's article "'There is Nothing But White Between the Lines': Parallel Colonial Experiences of the Irish and Aboriginal Canadians'" (1999) was the initial impetus for a comparison or a "parallel study," as I like to call it, of Irish and First Nations fiction.[iii] In the piece, Marken relates the time, in 1981, that he taught a group of fifteen Cree students in La Ronge, a northern extension branch of the University of Saskatchewan. Some of the students' responses to one text in particular, Brian Friel's *Translations*, vividly illustrate some of the common experiences of the Irish and First Nations people. Briefly, the play is set in a small village in Donegal, the northwest of Ireland, during the 1830s, when the British army and its surveyors were sent in to the island to systematically change all the place names from Irish to English. One student in Marken's class mentioned that he had, like Owen in Friel's play, worked with a survey crew whose job it

was to translate place names into English. "'Just after New Year's,'" the student says, "'my grandfather died and then I found out that he was born at Nelson's Crossing [Saskatchewan], only it wasn't called that. It had a Cree name, but the white men—and surveyors like me—rubbed out that name. Part of my grandfather and me disappeared when that happened'" (quoted by Marken 159). The characters in Friel's play experience the same kind of loss, as the various Gaelic place names — Dún na nGall, Bun na hAbhann, Baile Beag, Lis Maol, Machaire Buidhe, Mullach Dearg, each with their own sound and sense and history — are erased and replaced by an English near equivalent. Though Friel's play is not my main concern, it does provide a pathway into the discussion of literature and healing and, more significantly, a further exploration of parallel experiences of the Irish and Aboriginal Canadians, particularly those of contemporary women writers. As Marken notes, quoting Seamus Heaney, "Sarah's struggle to pronounce her own name [at the beginning of *Translations*] 'constitutes a powerful therapy, a set of imaginative exercises that give her [and Ireland] a chance to know and say herself properly to herself again'" (158). Hence the connected metaphors of healing, self-knowledge and speech.[iv]

While I have combined the efforts of Marken and Cornell, it became apparent to me that Cornell's ethical approach interrogates as much as it *promotes* comparative studies, cross-cultural or otherwise. Indeed, the very definition of "ethical feminism" highlights the complexity of maintaining difference while also attempting to show commonalities. "[E]thical," Cornell

describes, indicates "the aspiration to a non-violent relationship to the Other and to otherness in the widest possible sense. This assumes responsibility to struggle against the appropriation of the Other into any system of meaning that would deny her difference and singularity" ("What is Ethical Feminism?" 78). While Marken is sensitive to the parallel colonial experiences, even noting that sharing a commonality can be "restorative" (Marken 160), he does not provide much room for cultural *differences*—historical, geographical, literary, religious, and so on. The seven parallels he provides, which include governmental attitudes towards colonial policies in both Canada and Ireland, the imposition of language laws and education, the employment of a Royal constabulary for surveillance and punitive measures, and a literary revival of sorts, are not always exactly *parallels* per se, especially since many of these events took place at significantly different periods. For example, English colonial policy in Ireland is generally located in Edmund Spenser's era, in the 1590s, while Marken matches this up with Duncan Campbell Scott's administration in the 1920s. Another example is the contemporary literary revival in Native Canadian literature, which Marken matches up with the Irish literary revival beginning in the 1890s. The most problematic parallel involves the resistance movements in both Ireland and Native Canada. Marken notes that "[t]hirty years [after Ireland's literary revival] . . . Eire [sic] was born (in blood and civil war, yes, but as an independent republic)" (170). Not only does Marken perpetuate the myth of Mother Ireland (Éire being one of her many names), but he

completely glosses over the partition of the island and the resulting acts of terrorism, especially since the 1970s.[v] Comparatively, Native people have employed peaceful methods of resistance throughout the twentieth century and especially in the last twenty or so years.

Keeping in mind Cornell's ethical approach, I want to stress the gaps in Marken's essay — for example, the consideration of Ireland's "independence" alongside the ongoing colonial subordination of Natives in North America today. What Marken neglects to treat — and what I want to focus on in the fiction of two contemporary writers — are the differences between the two cultures in the contemporary context. (In my conclusion, I will consider the varying degrees of violence in each culture's resistance movements.) Native Canadians have not — by any stretch — decolonized, and considering the obvious geographical differences between Native Canada and Ireland, especially the federal government's territorial domination in the former context, they cannot free themselves in the same way that Ireland did. Another curiosity is the near absence of women's voices in Marken's essay. To give Marken his due, however, it should also be noted that his essay is set up as a "work in progress," especially given the elliptical conclusion (171). There is something admirable in Marken's anecdotal and intimate approach to the two different cultures, and he confides:

> I have been nurturing these separate episodes and others like them for many years, sensing that some good might come, first, by rehearsing a series of coincident events in the histories of Ireland and the Natives of colonized Canada; and second — and this is the main thrust of my theme — by arguing the favourable effects of artistic expression as one

> of the most dependable roads to recovery and healing from the wounds of post-colonial trauma. (161)

Cornell's work encourages this kind of comparative approach, and comparative studies require that special attention be given to the different texts and contexts and respect for the otherness of the texts. "Feminists are continually calling on all of us to re-imagine our forms of life" ("What is Ethical Feminism?" 79), and this implicitly acknowledges *difference* among women. Rather than focusing on a straight comparison, I want to provide two examples of contemporary women's writing, from two different cultural contexts, relying on a similar theoretical perspective and the accompanying analytical tools. Thus, while I am fascinated by Marken's rigorous attention to parallel colonial experiences of the Irish and Aboriginal Canadians, I am equally cautious of *forcing* the comparison. Let it be said, however, that Marken's article is a positive beginning for a further study: as he notes, quoting Buffy Saint-Marie, "'We're only getting started'" (171.

II - NARRATIVE RE/CONSTRUCTION and GESTURES OF HEALING

As I will argue, Ann Owens Weekes' specific analysis of Julia O'Faolain's work in *Irish Women Writers: An Uncharted Tradition* (1990) is rooted in a more general reading of women's writing and feminism since the 1960s: " . . . O'Faolain's texts, along with those of other contemporary women writers, add a new reviving, ameliorating, restorative layer to the palimpsest, a layer which not only alters the future but which also restructures the literary past" (190). Weekes focuses on O'Faolain's Booker Prize nominated novel *No Country for Young Men* (1980) and an earlier

short story "A Pot of Soothing Herbs" (1968) both of which engage with myths of one form or another. The former story focuses on the lives of two women in particular, the one having lived through Ireland's independence movement in the 1920s, the other having grown up during the more recent "Troubles" of the 1970s. In these two contexts, O'Faolain traces the destructive pattern of myth that has governed these women's lives, opening up spaces for them to find their own voice. While *No Country for Young Men* is the most extensive exploration of re-writing myth and re/constructing narrative, a number of shorter pieces stimulate further considerations of how Ireland's religious and political institutions have contributed to the proliferation of these dominant myths ("Daughters of Passion" [1980]), and how myth has affected the lives of women from other cultures ("This is My Body" and "Man in the Cellar" [1974]). "When I first read her work," Weekes says, "I was struck by the acid intelligence that strips away layers of tradition, affection, affectation, exposing an often grotesque core" (175). Indeed, a story such as "Man in the Cellar" — described by one reviewer as "'brilliantly disturbing'" (Weekes 175) — is as acid a tale as one will find in O'Faolain's canon, a tale which sharply challenges the whole gamut of myths about femininity in a series of knife-like letters. Also employing an epistolary style, "A Pot of Soothing Herbs" offers a more humorous look at swinging 1960s Dublin and the extremely conservative views towards sexuality. As in *No Country for Young Men*, this piece indicates the negative impact that the long tradition of myth and the more recent "literary

revival" has had on women. Therefore, in Chapter One I want provide a section on the development of one particularly powerful myth, that of "Mother Ireland," which spans back as far as the sixteenth century but which is rooted in the much older, pagan world.

Lee Maracle, on the other hand, does not engage with myth to the same degree, though she focuses extensively on myths and stereotypes about women, especially as they have been reproduced by white males down through Canada's colonial history. One thing that is noticeable in her fiction is the author's voice, and Maracle makes no bones about being present in her work. The personal voice is powerfully present in her first novel *Sundogs* (1992) and in a number of other short stories from her first collection *Sojourner's Truth* (1990) where the narrative voice is frequently in the first person. This form of narrative seems to be rooted in her semi-fictional style in *I am Woman* (1996),[vi] where she says: " . . . I shall try to grasp the essence of our lives and to help weave a new story. A story in which pain is not our way of life" (6). This is the approach she takes in *Sundogs*, where she details the life of a family living in the East end of Vancouver in 1990. Through the narrative of Marianne, a young Métis-Okanagan woman, Maracle interrogates the existing colonial subordination in the context of the Meech Lake Accord and the Oka Crisis, targeting the country's educational system which continues to be a source for many of the myths that surround Native women. Darker stories such as "Bertha" and "Maggie" also focus on education and its alliance with colonial

subordination, indicating the sources for women's lost social status. As Danielle Shaub argues, "Maracle insists on the importance of the matriarchal educational system, its message of love and respect so contrary to the colonial destructiveness and insidious source of self-hate for the colonised" (Shaub 158). "Polka Partners, Uptown Indians and White Folks," like the other stories, offers a counter-narrative to the "official" ones that produce statistics on health and welfare in Native communities and, however unintentionally, often contribute to the negative image of Native people in Canada. I will focus on a more recent text, Wayne Warry's *Unfinished Dreams: Community Healing and the Reality of Aboriginal Self-Government* (1998) which, while it offers a plethora of statistics on contemporary Native communities, is limited in its ability to focus on systemic racism and, more importantly, women's voices. An additional story, "Yin Chin," expands upon the issues of racism and education by considering the commonalities between Natives and Asians in contemporary Vancouver. This story interrogates Maracle's other fiction that focuses solely on Native communities, using a brilliantly ironic tone to expose how "the world . . . school[s] us in ignorance" (278) — a statement which (deliberately/ironically) negates *personal* responsibility.

In both O'Faolain and Maracle, then, female characters struggle both to regain and reshape traditional ideas of femininity, many of which are bound up with their respective cultural mythologies and the regressive reproduction of myths surrounding women's role in history-making as well

as familial (re)structuring. My reading of O'Faolain has influenced my reading of Maracle, and vice-versa: this has led to interesting divergences, as well as alarming parallels. Keeping in mind the complexities of Marken's parallel approach, I nevertheless want to show how sharing commonalities can be restorative. As I will indicate in my conclusion, narrative re/construction takes different forms, and is accomplished through different methods, in each writer's fiction. However, I am not reserving my focus on healing and rejuvenation for the conclusion, and I want to provide the space in the body of my thesis for a lengthy discussion of each writer's method of narrative re/construction and the kinds of healing that occur as a result.

The notion of "reconstruction," of course, is largely based on my reading of Cornell, though Marken and Weekes emphasize the ameliorating or restorative potential of a reconstruction. Other critics, such as Sheila Rabillard, Manina Jones, and Danielle Shaub, in the context of Native literature, and C. L. Innes and Gerry Smyth, in the context of Irish literature, add to the discussion of the construction and deconstruction of myth, the way in which women are colonized once for their race and twice for their gender, and the various strategies women have at their disposal. As much of this criticism is rooted in post-colonial and/or post-structural theory, the general focus is "writing back" or "re-writing."

§

Chapter One, as I have suggested, deals with O'Faolain's engagement with Irish mythology, including a number of specific tales, the powerful cult of

"Mother Ireland," and the stereotypical notions about femininity that have been created as a result. I have broken the chapter up into the following sub-sections: "Feminine Writing and Re-writing Myth," which introduces the arguments of Cornell and considers how O'Faolain engages in a similar practice of re-writing myth; "The Cult of Mother Ireland/Mother Church," which provides a brief historical consideration of this powerful myth and its eventual alliance with Irish politics and religion; "Escaping Names: the Mythology of Genealogy," which re-iterates Cornell's arguments in the context of O'Faolain's *No Country for Young Men*, exploring the ways in which women's maternal experience is displaced and replaced by a complex system of male-dominated genealogies; and "Re-writing as Restoration: Literary Communities of Women," which expands the discussion to a consideration of O'Faolain's short stories, emphasizing how (re)writing becomes a restorative process, especially when this fosters literary communities of women.

Chapter Two considers Maracle's emphasis on the matriarchal educational system, and how this is disseminated through the voices of her female protagonists. I have broken up this chapter in the following sub-sections: "Narratives and the Palimpsest," which offers a closer look at the metaphor of the palimpsest and Maracle's method of "peeling back the layers of history and myth" in two short stories; "Education and Healing Journeys," which considers, in the context of *Sundogs,* how education, like myth, can be turned to account for itself and become a means for self-

empowerment and, eventually, healing; "Stories as *Sorties*," which considers Cornell's notion of finding "ways out" of the current system of gender hierarchy in the context of Maracle's other texts; and "Literary Communities of Women," a companion section to Chapter One, which focuses on Maracle's method of joining women together in her fiction, allowing for a communal healing.

As I want to demonstrate in both Chapter One and Two, the "appeal to the mythic heightens the intensity associated with [women's] struggles to survive within patriarchal society and to find [their] ways out, [their] *sorties*" (173). This informs my sense of "escaping names" in O'Faolain's fiction and narrative "journeys" in Maracle: in these two particular sections (section III in each of the two chapters), a journey is implied as women must move within and, often, *toward* the place of entrapment, whether this consists of physical spaces such as convents or houses, or psychological spaces of imprisonment. This, of course, looks towards my conclusion, which will take into account all of the major themes discussed in the two chapters.

CHAPTER 1 - JULIA O'FAOLAIN

I - FEMININE WRITING and RE-WRITING MYTH

> I wonder can I make you understand? Am I mad to try? How could you see my reality with my eyes? But I want you to. I want to make you. Once. Even if only while you read this. Then you will reject it, feel contaminated and try desperately to wash off the memory and flush it out with talk, exclaiming and wringing your hands.

Taken from one of O'Faolain's earliest short stories, "Man in the Cellar" (14), this passage is an example of what Drucilla Cornell identifies as the "mimetic" practice of feminine writing. Una, the narrator of this epistolary piece, wants her readers to imagine her situation as a woman *through* her writing. As a "failed" or recumbent designer, she wishes to assert herself through another art form, writing; though as this story and a number of other O'Faolain pieces suggest, fantasy has often served as a surrogate reality for women down through the ages. As O'Faolain herself notes in her only non-fiction work to date, *Not In God's Image* (1973):

> The woman who believed she was a witch, the bride of Christ who keenly imagined his embraces and smelled his presence, the nun subject to ecstatic seizures, the barbarian queen (Radegonde) who burned Christ's initials into her flesh, the ladies who spent years discussing the refined and over-refined subtleties of Platonic love—each of these, in her own way, is a female Don Quixote.
>
> (Introduction, xviii)

As I will argue, these fantasy worlds are frequently the product of men's imagination, of their believing the myths they have helped to sustain. The "mad woman," Irish or otherwise, is one of these myths, superimposed over the actual feminine experience. In a deeply ironic tone, Una breaks down the situation for us: "A woman has her own weapons. A true woman uses tact, charm, humour, patience. Translate: guile, pussy and a readiness to let herself be humiliated" (11). The statement challenges the notion that

women should be passive or subservient, and exposes the way in which resistance to this role is frequently cast by the male as typical feminine wiliness. “Being a female,” Una concludes her narrative, “doesn't make us different. ‘Feminine’ strategies are responses to an objective situation: lack of power. There is no ‘natural’ love of subservience in women” (48). One of these “strategies” is to expose the systems of patriarchal power which have helped to reproduce “pregiven stereotypes” about women (Cornell 168).

“Man in the Cellar” neatly sets the tone for O'Faolain's other works, which treat feminine mythology and feminine stereotypes in the context of Ireland, but also London, Italy and ancient Gaul. *No Country for Young Men* (hereafter to be abbreviated as *NC*) deals with two recent periods of Irish history, the 1920s and the 1970s, which figure as the two waves of “Troubles.” Through the memory of an old nun, O'Faolain traces the destructive cycle in three generations of Clancys and O'Malleys, weaving a taut and interrogating narrative that probes the various sources of women's oppression in contemporary Ireland. While “Daughters of Passion” also looks at the troubled period of the 1970s in Ireland, detailing the memories of a hunger-striker imprisoned for IRA activities, “This is My Body” goes back to the root of Christianity's powerful, if ambiguous alliance with war and politics, focusing on the oppressive atmosphere of a convent in sixth-century Gaul. There is also the potentially ameliorating resonance of “A Pot of Soothing Herbs,” a rather humorous take on swinging 1960s Dublin, which once more offers a powerful — if slightly schizophrenic — response

to myths about Irish femininity. Keeping in mind issues of feminine writing and metaphor, I want to specifically focus on the ways in which the women in *NC* and in the other shorter pieces offer alternative narratives to the ones that have been thrust on them. One of these narratives or myths is the cult of the Mother, rooted in the Christian devotion to the Virgin Mary and also in the old Irish folk tradition, but more recently valorized and *anthologized*, one might say, by the efforts of the late 19th- and early 20th-century literary revivalists in Ireland. Related to this are a number of mythological tales in which women figure as representative symbols of the Irish landscape and, by direct association, Irish cultural identity. So, by the first decade of the 20th century, both the Catholic Church and the Anglo-Irish élite, led by W. B. Yeats, managed to fashion an extremely powerful myth or set of myths about Irish women. While C. L. Innes and Nancy J. Curtin provide important historical observations on women's involvement in modern Irish nationalist movements, especially in regards to this re-creation of Irish femininity, I want to begin with Drucilla Cornell's general study of feminine writing, metaphor and myth.

Drucilla Cornell, whose arguments form the basis of my own understanding of "re-writing myth," provides important insights into the various levels on which O'Faolain incorporates myth. "Feminine writing," Cornell notes, ". . . does not so much try to reach the truth of Woman through metaphor" ("Feminine Writing. . ." 169), rather "the attempt to specify the feminine is understood as proceeding through a process of

metaphorization that never fully captures Woman. There is always more to write" (171). Women cannot simply reject these myths, Cornell continues: as long as they exist, as long as they continue to be told and retold, they will maintain their power. An active engagement with these myths, however, provides the possibility of altering, and possibly subverting meaning and significance. At the same time, re-writing myth carries with it the danger of reproducing existing stereotypes and "knowledge" about women. This is a risk that Cornell and, as I will argue, O'Faolain are willing to take. Besides, as Hans Blumenberg notes, though myths are "'distinguished by a high degree of constancy in their narrative core,'" they also have a "'pronounced capacity for marginal variation'" (quoted in Cornell 172).

Though O'Faolain—or Irish literature in general—is not mentioned, much of what Cornell describes in regards to contemporary women's struggles with oppressive mythologies is very relevant to O'Faolain's work, and it is apparent that, outside her fiction, O'Faolain is concerned with similar issues. *Not in God's Image* is an earlier example of this concern, as seen in the passage quoted above, while a later interview with Ann Weekes (1985, quoted in *Irish Women Writers*) and a more recent essay (1997) confirm that O'Faolain has consistently sought to engage myth. "'Myths like lego constructions,'" O'Faolain notes, "'can be taken apart: a double bonus for the writer, the magnifying effect of invoking myth in the first place, plus the energy involved in revoking its agreed values. Destruction releases energy'" (*Irish Women Writers*, Weekes 176). This playful approach is

suggestive of ethical feminism and its alliance with deconstruction theory,[vii] though O'Faolain never specifically acknowledges such influences. Nevertheless, I feel that Cornell's approach or *gesture* is a sensitive one which *opens up* rather than *closes off* the possibilities of finding a way out of current systems of gender identity ("Feminine Writing. . ." 169). In this way, O'Faolain's fiction may be read in the wide spectrum of women's experience.

In "The Furies of Irish Fiction" (1997), a provocative on-line essay, O'Faolain focuses on the more recent "mutant strains" of Irish "angers," particularly noting how inherited colonialism is often internalized and re-enacted by both men and women, and is frequently staged within the home. Again she notes the importance of myths which "themselves can be turned to account often by turning them around." It is clear, then, that feminine writing must pay close attention to what *has* been written in order to affect what *will* be written, for, as Weekes notes, " . . . if we accept the myths and legends passively, then they, like the bog, will contain and transform us, making of us mythic fuel with which to warm a future generation" (*Irish Women Writers* 176). This certainly resonates in a text such as *No Country for Young Men* which consistently employs the metaphor of the bog. As Weekes once more notes: "A natural palimpsest, the bog can be read both as the repository of a nation's culture and as the archetypal feminine place" (*Irish Women Writers* 182). O'Faolain challenges this myth of femininity, however, emphasizing the importance of

memory and retrieving memory: buried language turns into fossilized myth otherwise. "Myth" for O'Faolain includes actual mythological stories (from the pagan and Christian worlds), including specific names and their genealogical significance, particular mythological motifs, and the stereotypes about women that are formed as a result.

Alluding to the work of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, two feminist critics who collaborated on the popular book *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1979), Weekes notes that "male authors and critics alike, equating the penis with the pen and imagining the author as pregnant with his text, have reserved both the origin and the nurturance of texts for themselves, have, we might say, devised an unnatural dynasty of texts sired, conceived, and borne by fathers" (*Irish Women Writers* 8). This dispossession of power and identity is very prevalent in the mythology of the Mother, as it is presented in O'Faolain, and is enhanced by the very valorization of motherhood and the maternal function.

II - THE CULT OF MOTHER IRELAND/MOTHER CHURCH

Before dealing more directly with O'Faolain's fiction, it is important that something be briefly said in regards to the history of women's involvement in Ireland's independence movement, and more specifically, the modern formation of feminine mythology. The men who proclaimed the Irish republic in 1916—among them, Pádraic Pearse, James Connolly, and

Thomas MacDonagh—were implicitly drawing on a long history of similar, if largely unsuccessful, militant political movements, including the 1798 rebellion, led by Theobald Wolfe Tone, the rather short-lived but deeply resonant coup of 1803, led by Robert Emmet, and the Fenian campaigns of the 1860s, led by James Stephens who had also proclaimed an "Irish Republic" (Somerset Frye 242-43). Of course, numerous other attempts at sovereignty go back as far as the beginnings of English-Irish relations, when the Normans first came to occupy Ireland in the 12th century. Yet, my concern is with the more recent events, which had the immediacy to help bring about the genesis of an independent Ireland; the older mythology inevitably surfaces, one could say with an even more powerful face, in these modern nationalist movements. "Who fears to speak of '98?" (i.e., 1798) was a popular refrain in Pádraic Pearse's day, in both political rhetoric and folk ballads, just as "remember the Alamo" could be heard on the lips of U.S. citizens (and North Americans in general) during the world wars. As Nancy J. Curtin notes, the United Irishmen, the radical young men who led the republican movement in the late 1790s, conceived of a democratic, secular republic allowing citizenship to all Irishmen, Catholic and Protestant, rich and poor, native and settler; however, women were almost completely excluded in this imagined democracy. Women served as activists within the United Irish organization, "as symbols of an oppressed nation," and as models of republican morality, yet they were discouraged from participating actively in the actual rebellion (Curtin 133).

As C. L. Innes notes, W. B. Yeats repeatedly encouraged this view both in his letters and in his poetry. In response to the push for the "higher education of women" in the late 19th century, Yeats writes to a friend, Katherine Tynan: "'Why should women go through it, circumstance does not drive *them*? They come out with no repose, no peacefulness, their minds no longer quiet gardens full of secluded paths and umbrage-circled nooks, but loud as chaffering market places'" (quoted from Yeats's *Selected Letters* in Innes 79). Though partly a reflection of his distaste for the tedium of public education in general, this quote is clearly an indication of Yeats's romantic (and essentialist) view of women and Ireland, and of his consciously traditional method of aligning the one with the other. Education of the "weaker sex" inevitably meant exposure to politics. "As Yeats claimed to 'free Irish literature and criticism from politics' he also sought to free beauty, especially female beauty, from politics" (Innes 76). What this meant was that women had no place in the political realm, and should, as described in "A Prayer for my Daughter" (*Selected Poetry* 125-27), restrict their activity to being beautiful,

> And have no business but dispensing round
> Their magnanimities of sound . . .
> [. . .]
> An intellectual hatred is the worst,
> So let her think opinions are accursed.
> Have I not seen the loveliest woman born
> Out of her mouth of Plenty's horn,
> Because of her opinionated mind
> Barter that horn and every good
> By quiet natures understood
> For an old bellows full of angry wind?

What Yeats was concerned with, particularly after the Easter 1916 Rising, was the formation of a body politic, a political order that could be rendered artistic, free of its own politics, if you will. Therefore, it is not surprising that the female body and the body politic became analogous (Innes 76): indeed, this is vividly conceived of in his poetry as "a body which does not speak about politics, which supports but does not contest" (76-77). Once more, then, we can refer back to earlier examples of this thinly-veiled misogyny, in the United Irish movement where women figured as mere symbols, at once inspiring and beguiling men, as in Derry in 1797 where female (U. I.) agents were encouraged to befriend the militiamen who were billeted throughout the town and lure them into their confidence, swearing them to secrecy (Curtin 135). This ambiguous role in Irish political movements is explored further in O'Faolain's *No Country for Young Men* and "Daughters of Passion," where women are caught between the pieties of the Church and the loyalty to their country.

"Locked into confrontation with Britain and contestation over the mother land, Irish literature and Irish history have created males as national subjects, woman as the site of contestation" (Innes 3). The focus on the English-Irish conflict tended to encourage the stifling gender binaries of male/female, with the English in the role of the aggressive male figure and the Irish in the role of the passive or helpless female figure. Poets of the Bardic period (ca. 1200-1600) employed this gender-based myth in a highly metrical form known as the *aisling* or "vision" poem. These poems, usually

structured in a half-dozen or so quatrains, often with a "knot" or summarizing stanza at the end, envisioned Ireland as a woman in distress, waiting for a saviour to rescue her from her plight. The messianic figure in aislingi was often James II and, later on, Prince Charles Stuart, popularly known as Bonnie Prince Charlie; in the Ulster (Northern Irish) tradition, the messiah was one of the O'Neills, the local Gaelic lords. Between the period of 1600 to 1800, the enemy of Ireland shifted from that of the invading English noble, buying off Irish nobles and undermining their aristocracy, to that of the malicious English empire--"ag adharcach foireanndubh mioscaiseach cóirneach buí" ("that black, horned, foreign, hate-crested crew"), as is described in Aogán Ó Rathaille's famous aisling "Gile na Gile" ("Brightness Most Bright," *New Oxford Book of Irish Verse*, 195).[viii] In this particular aisling, composed probably sometime in the early 1700s, the female figure is described as having been created "in a higher realm," which suggests the otherworldliness of ancient Irish mythology. Writing into the 1720s, Ó Rathaille was contemporaneous with such prominent Irish political figures as Jonathan Swift, and was only too aware of the decline of Ireland's culture, one aspect of which included the mother tongue. I use "mother" here deliberately as it was this feminine Ireland figure who was thought to possess all of what Ireland stood for: beauty, poise, valour, as well as the sweet Gaelic *teanga* or tongue. This mythologizing, however, turned woman into a symbol so that, as Kristeva has noted (see Cornell 172), little was said about women's actual experience: indeed "woman"

became as illusory as "Ireland." The Irish artists and politicians of the modern nationalist movements continued to present Irishness and femininity in terms of the old mythology.

I am deliberately shifting back and forth between the early modern and modern periods of Irish history so as to illustrate how Irish identity has been formed over the centuries. Indeed, in most cultures, the significance of one era is often only realized or expressed many years later, as historians seek to explore untouched areas and as artists and politicians seize on images and motifs that can act as rallying points. A poet like Yeats, then, could draw from the numerous retellings of myths just as de Valera would in the years following Irish independence. Missing in all of this are any real examples of women artists and rebels and political figures. Just about the time that Irish women were being exploited by the United Irishmen, English women were voicing their opinions concerning rights to education and political involvement. Jan Cannavan has argued, quite convincingly, that the Enlightenment and Romantic paradigms shaped the discussion of women's rights as well as national rights (213), Mary Wollstonecraft being the most prominent proto-feminist figure. The women, like the men, were inspired by the political figures who had fueled the American and French revolutions, though they had their own conflicts to worry about within Ireland. There is, Cannavan notes, a detectable feminist agenda in the writings that surfaced especially in the later political movement of the 1840s. Such figures as the pen-named "Eva," "Speranza"

and “Mary” contributed significantly to the nationalist papers, the *Nation* and the *United Irishman*, between 1843 and 1848, often challenging the restrictive gender binary of the political/domestic spheres. The women were, in order, Mary Anne (or Mary Eva) Kelly, Jane Francesca Elgee (later Lady Wilde, mother of Oscar Wilde), and Ellen Mary Patrick Downing, all of whom had strong republican or nationalist sympathies (Cannavan 214). Another contributor, calling herself “An Irish Mother,” offers particularly pertinent criticism of women’s lack of voice in Irish society, using a “nurturing discourse” to argue for the benefits of a new national government which shall “‘cherish and protect its children.’” As Cannavan argues, her argument “skillfully raises the question of how men can keep real women/mothers out of the public forum when they envisage the effects of a benevolent government as being akin to those of a surrogate mother” (216). Weekes’ earlier remark about “male authors and critics alike, equating the penis with the pen and imagining the author as pregnant with his text” resonates here: it is as though women can only function at the behest of their male creators, since they continually appear not as “real” women at all but imaginary figures, mythological or otherwise.

It cannot *suffice to say*, then, that Irish history has created men as national subjects, women as the site of contestation: examples should be provided. Up until only recently, very little was known or *said* of women’s involvement in revolutionary or at least rebellious activities in Ireland;

Cannavan is one of several Irish critics who have helped to develop this new area of study, and the results are fascinating.[ix]

"Throughout the history of its colonization," Innes notes, "Ireland has been represented by British imperialists as well as Irish nationalists and artists as female: she is Hibernia, Eire [sic], Mother Ireland, the Poor Old Woman, the Shan Van Vocht [Sean Bhean Bhocht], Cathleen ni Houlihan, the Dark Rosaleen" (Innes 2). And many of these feminine figures are based in old Irish mythology, which was where Yeats delved continuously for his poetic inspiration. By 1916, when much of the mythology of the so-called "Literary Revival" (known as the "Celtic Twilight" in the 1890s) had seemed to culminate in the Easter Rising, the cult of Mother Ireland had been firmly established.[x] Between 1890 and 1892, Yeats and Lady Gregory collaborated on prose and subsequent verse versions of a work called *The Countess Cathleen* based on the folk heroine Countess Kathleen O'Shea.[xi] The work was shaped by the powerful image of the aristocratic beauty who would become a martyr for the love of her people (Foster 97). Though put into form in 1892, *The Countess Cathleen*, or *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, as it came to be called, would not be performed until 1902; however, the decade would help ferment a greater political impact. Aside from its source in Irish Folklore and the suggestion that Yeats's life-long obsession, Maud Gonne, was the preferred prototype, *The Countess Cathleen* was fueled by another, more powerful image: this image of Mother Ireland. Apparently influenced by a dream of Yeats's, Cathleen became the figure of an old

woman who represented Ireland, and who begged her children, the Irish people, to rise up and fight for her. In the actual performance of 1902, the old woman, played by Maud Gonne, summons a young man to fight for Ireland instead of getting married (Foster 260). Before the play's production, Yeats composed other nationalistic poems, all of which show an attempt to purify nationalism, remove it from the "narrowly political to the wider cultural" level (Watson 100), or as Innes has noted, to de-politicize culture.

"[P]eople do commonly think and feel about Ireland," Sean O'Faolain wrote in the 1940s, "as if they were thinking of a personal demi-goddess. . . a beautiful queen, or as a poor little woman" (101). Having participated in the earlier nationalist movement, Sean O'Faolain became disillusioned with post-independence Ireland, particularly the version of Irishness disseminated in the 1930s and 1940s by Prime Minister/Taoiseach Eamon de Valera, himself a commandant in the 1916 Easter Rising. One of the dominating myths of this period was that the "real" Ireland was a rural-based community; and this was a myth that even Joyce, with his urban-centered fiction, could not completely deconstruct. The pastoral myth was closely connected with the figure of Mother Ireland, the Virgin Mother, untouched by urban progress yet somehow a figure of regeneration and nurturance. Again we see how myth is used to lock women into contradictory roles — on the one hand passive, pure and vulnerable, on the other, assertively maternal, challenging men to stand up and fight for them.

As Gerry Smyth notes, ". . . nationalism imposed *within* Ireland the economy of unequal gender relations that colonialism had contracted *between* Ireland and England" (56). This model was subsequently enshrined in post-colonial Ireland in Article 41 of Bunreacht na hÉireann (Constitution of Ireland) of 1937, and when De Valera also gave the Catholic religion a special position in Irish society as "the guardian of the faith professed by the great majority of citizens" (cited by Faughnan 101), Mother Ireland was officially fused with Mother Church (Smyth 56). A number of recent Irish critics, among them David Lloyd (1993), Declan Kiberd (1995), Seamus Deane (1997) and Gerry Smyth (1997), have noted the damaging effects of this oppressive mythology. ". . . [T]he wish to analyse and describe Ireland," Smyth argues "can very easily fall into the trap of reproducing the stereotypes of colonialist discourse, only this time with a fragile positive emphasis" (36). Ireland and Irish women were thus conceived as synonymous, or at least analogous, and Britain's surveillance of the country was merely exchanged for Ireland's surveillance of its women. "There was, if anything," Kiberd notes, "less freedom in post-independence Ireland, for the reason that the previous attempt to arraign the enemy without gave way to a new campaign against the heretic within" (263). And this eventually led to such drastic measures as Censorship, begun in 1929 and ending as recently as 1967. It is not surprising, then, that Julia O'Faolain, writing some thirty years later, was challenging those same myths that her father railed against in his periodical *The Bell*, offering

a variety of forms of Irishness which attempt to break the old gender-based mode of the Irish literary imagination.

III - ESCAPING NAMES: THE MYTHOLOGY OF GENEALOGY

". . . [I]n *No Country for Young Men*," Weekes argues, "O'Faolain uncovers a destructive pattern that, despite its inevitable trail of personal and political disaster, persists through myth and history into the present time" ("Diarmuid and Gráinne Again. . ." 90).[xii] Though myth, and particularly the Gaelic tradition of fantasy and the macabre, is a means to break the conventions of realism disseminated by colonialist discourse (Smyth 51), it can also reproduce those fantasies already posited by the colonial oppressor. And myth is rampant in O'Faolain's novel. The very title recalls Yeats's famous poem, "Sailing to Byzantium," which begins with the line: "That is no country for old men." As Timothy Webb notes, this "country" in the first line of the poem is often identified as Ireland, particularly as the "drafts of the poem make this identification very specific and even refer to 'Teig' (a pejorative term for an Irish Catholic) . . ." (see the note on "Sailing to Byzantium," *Selected Poetry*, 268). Though Yeats refrains from localizing his imagery, there is a strong suggestion that he is relying on his previous familiarity with the tales surrounding the Irish *Tír na nÓg* or Land of Perpetual Youth. And 1970s Ireland is anything but this, as James Duffy, the male protagonist in the novel is told by a Customs official at the Dublin airport: "'God help us, we've a population here that's totally unbalanced as to age: all old men and teenagers. The working population

emigrates, though they say that'll be falling off now with the Common Market. Yes, well, old men and young men dream, eh, Mr Duffy?'" (19). There is a nice ironic echo of the poem here chafing against the realities of contemporary Irish economics, suggesting that Ireland is indeed *not* a country for young men — or young women, as the novel ultimately reveals.

In some editions of the novel,[xiii] a genealogical "tree" is constructed at the beginning, listing three generations of Clancys and O'Malleys. The first line lists the principle characters of the 1920s plot, including Kathleen, Judith, and Seamus (the other brother, Eamonn, is killed in 1919 before most of the action takes place). Appropriately, the father is not mentioned and is listed as "Clancy," and throughout the text is simply referred to as "the Da," recalling the genealogical tree of the prehistoric rulers of Ireland, the Tuatha De Danaan, which lists as its progenitor a figure known as "the Dagda." Owen O'Malley marries Kathleen, beginning the O'Malley line, fathering Owen Roe and "Michael's father"; similarly, Gráinne's progenitor is listed as "Gráinne's mother." Two factors come into play based on this genealogy: the characters' awareness of their line of descent, and the historical and mythological significance of the actual names. Owen's name and especially that of Owen Roe may be a subtle allusion to the famous Irish family, the O'Neills, one of the most famous of which was Owen Roe, thought to have been poisoned by the English in the 1640s.[xiv] Judith recalls the Biblical figure of the same name, while Kathleen — and she explicitly acknowledges this at one point — is connected with the personified Ireland,

Cathleen Ni Houlihan. In the latest line, Gráinne O'Malley bears the first name of the famous heroine of pre-Christian Irish saga, though her entire name also recalls the historical figure from the 16th century, known in her day as the "pirate queen of Connacht" (Appleby 55). Other important characters, to be discussed later, include the two hero figures, Sparky Driscoll, from the 1920s, and James Duffy, from the 1970s, both Americans and connected to the central plot of the novel. For the most part, I am concerned with the significance of the female characters who are the offspring, the continuators of tragedy and the archetypal figures of defiance.

Studies of such an archetypal figure as Antigone (Cornell 1991, Irigaray 1993, Chanter 1995) have shown how genealogy itself becomes a powerful myth, pre-determining women's fate based on family history.[xv] Antigone, for example, must act within the shadow of Oedipus' horrendous sin while also attempting to claim her voice. Similarly, Gráinne, and her husband Michael who descends from Owen O'Malley, live with the knowledge of their family past: of their family's dedicated involvement in the revolutionary cause; of their aunt, Sister Judith, having been shut up in a convent for over fifty years, and to all appearances, mad. The old nun connects the two periods as she is the only surviving offspring of "Clancy" and as she is placed under the care of her nephew Michael: she essentially triggers the plot, as Weekes suggests ("Diarmuid and Gráinne Again. . ."

92), and allows the present narrative to shift back to the 1920s and locate the more recent cycle of family mythology.

Gráinne. ". . . pronounced Grawnya. . . . 'Do you hate it?'" she asks James at one point. "'It's the name of one of the love heroines of pre-Christian Irish saga. She was betrothed to the ageing warrior-leader, Finn Macool, but forced one of his fighting men to run off with her'" (170). As one version of the tale goes,[xvi] Fionn mac Cumhaill had chosen Gráinne to assuage his loneliness. Gráinne, however, was reluctant to marry the older man especially since she fancied the young and vibrant Diarmuid, one of Fionn's young warriors. On this young man Gráinne puts *geasa*, similar to obligations of honor in Arthurian legend (Weekes "Diarmuid and Gráinne Again. . ." 91), and he is compelled to flee with her. Fionn is, of course, furious and leads a cross-country hunt for the two lovers. Through magic — through a magical boar, it is often suggested — Fionn succeeds in killing Diarmuid; as one translation of the tale suggests, Fionn has the chance to save Diarmuid by offering him life-reviving water but refuses (see Ní Shéaghdha 95). Consenting to conquest, Gráinne agrees to return with Fionn and order is promptly restored, though resistance is bred in her children (fathered by Diarmuid) whom she orders to avenge Diarmuid's death. Numerous details are, of course, omitted here; the actual tale includes many plot twists and high deeds of valour. The basic plot that I have paraphrased is what I am concerned with, especially as it resonates throughout other mythological tales, Biblical tales, and Irish history: a

woman's luring of a man into her confidence, only to bring down the wrath of her (usually older) husband. The result is all out war and most often the desolation of the land.

As the story shifts from the 1970s back to the 1920s, we see how the myth has progressed as it works in the love triangle between Kathleen, Owen and Sparky Driscoll. The latter arrives in Ireland from America on an assignment to take the country's pulse, to discover how the Treaty talks are fairing, and to determine whether or not the IRA is worth financing. Though not much older, Owen is the authority figure, the aggressive organizer, and the fiancé of Kathleen: he is not romantic, and can even be seen as a foil to Sparky's romantic view of Ireland. James also arrives in Ireland with a somewhat romantic view of the country's culture and politics, and this runs against both the present social situation as well as the facts of the North-South conflict and the reality that Ireland's culture can be crass, its politics dirty. James is mistaken for Sparky by the old aunt on a number of occasions, though the first case is the most striking as it echoes an earlier exchange between Judith and Kathleen. "'Have you seen the Yank?'" Judith asks Kathleen who answers, "'He drops round. Why?'" "'No reason,'" Judith replies, and Kathleen begins to tease her, saying "'You like him. That's why.'" Judith retorts: "'He likes you. . . . I've watched him watching you'" (35). In the present period of the novel, Sister Judith exclaims to Gráinne: "'That was him, wasn't it?'" [gesturing to the retreating back of James] . . . Sparky? The Yank?. . . He's sweet on you. . . I can tell. I

watched him watch you'" (94). This, of course, connects the two women, Kathleen and Gráinne, as well as the events that occur in each period.

In Gráinne's case, one particular mythological strain continually locks her into the role of the *mother*: the notion of Mother Ireland, popularized by Yeats and incorporated into the revolutionary cause, so that women figured more as inspiring *objects* than active *participants* in a cultural negotiation. Evoking some of this mythology, Kathleen claims that Sparky is not interested in her—"He's starry-eyed about Holy Ireland. Caitlín Ni Houlihan, not Kathleen Clancy, has yer man's interest" (35). Clearly, however, Kathleen, like all Irish women, is meant to embody the attributes of Caitlín Ni Houlihan, as the mythical Gráinne did. Yet, it is Owen and not Sparky who fastens on to this abstract image of woman, who believes that Kathleen—like Caitlín—is only important for what she symbolizes, not for what she *does*. In a tone reminiscent of Yeats's early poetry, Owen reprimands Kathleen for supposedly "throwing herself" at Sparky Driscoll: "Maidenly modesty was one of the ancestral virtues which he hoped would flourish in the new, free and Gaelic Ireland to which all should be committed" (317). Owen Roe is a different sort of man, more pragmatic than his father perhaps, and with a less puritanical view on sexuality; yet he also warns Gráinne about making a scandal: "'Why can't you do your philandering across the water, anyway? It's traditional" (159). Clearly it is not adultery that Owen Roe is concerned with but the image such an activity might create in light of the O'Malley family history. Thus, there is the

double pressure of acknowledging, of continuing family traditions and, conversely, of concealing and denying the more scandalous facts about the family. The most significant secret surrounds the death of Sparky Driscoll, thought to have been murdered by Orangemen in 1922. Judith, who seems to know the details of Sparky's death, also becomes a "Gráinne" figure in the sense that she, too, represents a potential threat to the order established by her family and the IRA. She is the surviving figure of resistance, and can be seen as a ghost come back to haunt those who have refused to acknowledge the past.

In this way, myth recurs like a nightmare, like the nightmares experienced by Judith, Gráinne, and even Owen in O'Faolain's novel. One of the earliest examples of this is when Judith recalls one of Owen's nightmares during the war years:

> Owen was out of bed. She could make out his shape in the glow from the range. He was wearing a shirt and waving his arms, whingeing like a small child. 'Don't,' he pleaded in the child's voice. 'Don't do it. I don't know a thing, Mister. I swear to Jesus. Don't . . . Oh, how can I prove it? Please, please, Mister, don't, for the love of God, Mister.' And all the time that child's whinge as though he were fending something off while the voice broke and wavered. . . . The next day he asked again if he had said anything intelligible and she told him no. But another time when he was staying she had again heard the sound rising thinly and unevenly through her door. This time she let him go on dreaming, horrified at the memory of his crushed, reedy voice . . . Judith wondered what the nightmare meant. It could be a memory of childhood: an old, childish fear which had got mixed up with Owen's present one of what the Tans might do to him if he was caught. Or — and this was the solution she like least but thought likeliest — it might be a memory of some child Owen himself had tortured to get information. (36-37)

Placed as it is in the present memory of the old Judith, this chilling nightmare can be placed beside the present conflict in 1970s Ireland (on the verge of 19*80's* Ireland as the date is 1979). Judith's dreams are even more frightening, filled with images of blood, like the one that begins with

the creaking of cart-wheels. Discovered on the cart is a tarpaulin from under which blood oozes and trickles down onto the wheels (24). These dreams and visions are interspersed with actual memories of the 1920s, and as her interrogation is enhanced — as James, Owen Roe, and Gráinne begin to probe her secret — the two plots begin to weave and transform the Gráinne myth.

"As a source of disorder," Weekes suggests, "Gráinne, in both the myth and O'Faolain's novel, is related to that aspect of the country that resists control" ("Diarmuid and Gráinne Again. . ." 91) — and Judith can be included here. The mythological Gráinne is another version of the Mother Ireland figure, attesting to the notion that women are the root of all of Ireland's troubles. After all, as Judith was taught in her catechism, "it was an Irish woman's frail morals which led to the English first coming [to Ireland] in 1169. Women bore inherited guilt" (34). This is a reference to Derbforgaill, the wife of Tigernán Ua Ruairc, who was carried away by Diarmait Mac Murchada in 1151: the result of this act led to an intense rivalry between the two Irish kings, and ultimately a Norman invasion of Ireland when Diarmait sought the aid of Henry II (Somerset Frye 61). Sister Judith's flashbacks help to trace the development of this myth as well as its alliance with the androcentric politics of the IRA, as expressed by Owen. This historical event can be easily read as another version of Diarmuid and Gráinne, with the woman slotted as the cause of Ireland's shame and conquest. Such is the power of myth.

This "inherited guilt," passed down from Gráinne, to Eve, to Derbforgaill, to the women who were involved in the modern nationalist movements, builds up like the layers of a bog. The bog is very much a metaphor for secrets, for concealed memories, and for layers of narrative. As a symbol of "fallen nature," encouraged by the convent nuns, the bog becomes associated with women's minds, as Judith reminisces to herself: "Sometimes, in later life, Judith would say 'my memory is a bog', referring as much to its power of suction as to its unfathomable layers" (12). Digging, then, offers the prospect of recovery — in the sense of reclamation as well as restoration. As painful as these memories are, and as painful as family history and myth are, enacting them, actively engaging with them, can provide a way out, as Cornell has argued. "Stories" can be turned into "sorties": "The appeal to the mythic heightens the intensity associated with our own struggles to survive within patriarchal society and to find our ways out, our *sorties*" (Cornell 173).

"'"Graw" is the Gaelic for "love". . . I never lived up to it . . .'" (170), Gráinne says to James, acknowledging the weight her name carries and the weight Irish women in general are forced to carry. The repetition of this theme of inherited guilt thoroughly exposes and, I would argue, breaks down the myth of the Mother, of Mother Ireland, of Gráinne, of Eve, or Derbforgaill (take your pick). "To survive," Weekes argues, ". . . the weak distrust and reject the definitions of the powerful, believe in their own value, and, refusing the isolation which benefits the powerful, embrace their own

community and their mutual goals, making points 'by endurance and repetition' rather than by force" (*Irish Women Writers* 16). So, O'Faolain's first challenge to these myths is to fully engage with them, present them as they have been throughout Ireland's history so as to expose their oppressive nature but also, as Cornell has noted, their pronounced capacity for marginal variation. As the plot builds towards its climax, as the women continue to probe the myths that have described them, the margins become strategic locations of resistance. Having had enough of Owen, of "all the palaver," of living with the constant fear of Black and Tan raids — in an intertextual way, having had enough of Judith's narrative — Kathleen asserts herself in a lengthy speech to her sister: "'I've made up my mind!'" she yells, as she flattens bread into a greased pan that bubbles with the heat. "Her words spattered with the same angry heat" (321-22). Judith is only a source of resistance at the end of her life, when the myths have begun to work in her descendants, when she realizes that "[y]our memory was you" (9) and that recovering it could go towards healing the wounds of the past; and she does more to obstruct Kathleen's freedom than encourage it. As Kathleen suggests, Judith's ignorance has blocked out any ability to see the alternatives for Irish women. "'Let me have my say. You don't *know* . . . . Not really. What it was like . . . . The war was never exciting to me . . . . And another thing, you don't get braver. It's the opposite. Your nerves get ragged" (322-23). As this wonderfully terse speech sears towards its climax, Kathleen takes up the oppressive

narratives, kneads them, stretches them, nearly tears them apart, and hurls them like the flat bread she pelts to punctuate her sentences. "'I'm sick of being the woman of the house!. . . Alone! Everyone's mother and nobody's wife'" (325). This rare moment of resistance is one that Gráinne and Judith can draw on in the present. Indeed, Judith finds a second chance to alter history in the person of Gráinne who is actually said to resemble a young Judith (96). All three women, then, are Gráinne figures working within myth in order to escape it.

§

"Woman ought to be able to find herself among other things, through images of herself already deposited in history and the conditions of production of the work of man, and not on the basis of his work, his genealogy" (Irigaray 10). Irigaray's notion of genealogy, here and elsewhere in her book *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, continually evokes the mythical, speaking of "one's own horizon" in terms of "its imaginary, artistic, and cultural dimensions," as well as its "divine dimensions" (106); I read "horizon" as a reference not to one's *future* but to a "future" consideration of one's origins, what one has *been* and what one has accomplished. Seen in this way, genealogy does not merely signify what *family* one has descended from but what history, culture, body of literature, and mythology one has descended from; Irigaray's practice, like Cornell's, encourages a reconsideration of genealogy, a second look, if you will. O'Faolain's Gráinne, for example, is a product of family history (the

O'Malleys and the Clancys), Irish history and mythology, bearing the name of an ancient Irish heroine as well as a 16th century "pirate queen." John C. Appleby, in his study of the historical Gráinne O'Malley, notes that, "while there were no legal constraints preventing women from going to sea, folklore and popular superstition created informal barriers which were very difficult to break" (53). After her death in 1603, Gráinne O'Malley became identified as a symbol of Ireland's struggle for freedom against England. "At times," Appleby continues, "she became almost the embodiment of Erin and her people . . . . Interesting as these subsequent interpretations are, they bear little relation to the reality of Gráinne O'Malley's life and career" (58). Once more we see how the mythology of Mother Ireland works to lock women into a nationalist symbol, despite the reality of woman's singularity. This mythology also designates woman as the derivative of Ireland's great history. As Irigaray shows, women are not merely the derivatives of some patriarch, of "the Da" or "the Dagda," for example: "Women take part in the divine becoming, in the engendering of 'God.' But that mediation is often forgotten. Women serve the apparition of the god but do not appear themselves as *divine*. As *mothers* of God, as *servants* of the Lord, yes. As consorts of the god, as incarnations of the divinity, no" (106).

Kathleen's frustration at being "[e]veryone's mother and nobody's wife" can be seen as an awareness of this peripheralization, not only in the human realm but in the divine: the mythical Gráinne, as is the case with many mythological female figures, loses her divinity at the hands of

Christian (male) transcribers, becoming instead a mad woman and/or slut.[xvii] Just as the unreal, or divine figures are humanized — though perhaps "demonized" is more accurate — so the human figures are mythologized, given a more fitting mould than their physical bodies can accommodate.[xviii] I want to consider four shorter O'Faolain pieces, all of which add to this discussion of feminine writing and myth.

IV - RE-WRITING AS RESTORATION: LITERARY COMMUNITIES OF WOMEN

"This is My Body," an historical piece set in sixth-century Gaul,[xix] explores some of the roots of the Christian doctrines of penance, fasting and women offering themselves as the "brides of Christ." As part of a larger historical novel, the story chronicles the lives of Radegunda (alternately, "Radegund" or "Radegonde"), the Queen of Poitiers who abandoned her throne and riches for a life of penance in a convent she herself established, and Agnes, the child put into Radegunda's care who eventually became Abbess of the Convent of the Holy Cross. The story offers a glimpse into the cult beliefs that would dominate Christianity for hundreds of years. For example, the notion that the body is the temple of God and that one can only find significance through a kind of union with God is at the heart of "This is My Body," though as it will be shown, this theme is diffused through much of O'Faolain's fiction.

While *NC* dramatizes the alliance between Mother Ireland and Mother Church, locating this fusion of sorts in the bodies of Judith,

Kathleen, and Gráinne, "This is My Body" traces the beginnings of the Christian doctrine that would so profoundly influence Irish culture and politics. (Conversely, it could be said that Irish culture and politics profoundly influenced *Christianity*). There is a complex web of relations between religion and politics, as witnessed in *NC*, where the language of the one, while it may condemn the other, merely alters, and in fact, often reinforces the power of the other. As Agnes comments to herself: "What *was* religion, after all, but a channelling of dangerous passions into safe celebrations?" (60). In this way, pagan rituals of sacrifice are somehow made "holy" and pure under the writ of Christianity — goddesses become saints, misled rebels become Christian martyrs. "Padraig [sic] Pearse had gone too far," Judith meditates, "when he wrote that 'the old earth of the battlefields is thirsty for the wine of our blood'. The allusion could be blasphemous and nuns from Loyalist families — most were — found it out of keeping with the taste and refinement which this convent had always sought to inculcate" (34). At the same time, the very prospect that rebels like Pearse could die at any time — and he was executed after the shortlived but politically successful 1916 Easter Rising[xx] — "purified them," Judith reasons (22). What triggers Agnes' response that religion is a channelling of dangerous passions into safe celebrations is her discovery of some eastern Frankish novices preparing the "blessed bread": ". . . [S]he saw what was on the table. For a moment she thought it was a corpse: a man's. But it was only dough. They had moulded it into the shape of a life-

sized . . . naked man. With some skill. . . . Agnes's eye bounced off the generous penis and testicles of powdered white dough" (58-59). "'. . . [W]e do not eat our God,'" Agnes tells the young girls, knowing full well the ambiguities of the belief: "'Eat me,' said Christ, 'and do not eat others. Love me so as not to love other men. Let your mind dwell on me and lust will leave you. . . .'" (60). I want to consider how this ambivalent notion of sacrifice affects conceptions of femininity and feminine myth.

In the context of sixth century Gaul, the period of the Frankish invasions, women are seen as the ideal figures of sacrifice: they are vessels, or perhaps more accurately, blank pages, empty and available for the divine mark of God. Agnes, for example, silently scolds herself for using "I": "It was a forbidden vocable. Her 'I' should long since have been merged and lost in God. The brief character should have been erased by her monastic vow, leaving her blank as a fresh page or her own white habit" (52). The ultimate example of sacrifice is Radegunda who has been in "retreat," enclosed in a bricked-up wall, for three weeks. Once a queen, she now lives a life below the standard of a beggar: for beggars at least attempt to sustain themselves and often receive a pittance; Radegunda, on the other hand, refuses to eat or drink, or speak, or have contact with *any*one — except God, of course. In one way, this act is a refusal to acknowledge the world of men, as Radegunda continually notes throughout *Women in the Wall*, the novel the shorter piece is based on: the female body is hidden away, preserved for the Holy Groom. Fortunatus, the poet commissioned to

write the biography of Radegunda, indeed, the man who will make her a saint, imagines her "love-transaction with the Great Lover" in terms of a divine love-making that comes dangerously close to the physical act (51). While Fortunatus struggles with his rampant thought-life, he still maintains his purity in *act,* as do Radegunda and Agnes, both of whom remain pure in body *and* mind. Moreover, there is a heavy sense of repression in this text, of an almost mindless, not to mention *contradictory*, belief system which encourages physical torment, in the form of penance and fasting, and *dis*courages any human contact, sexual or otherwise. Such is why Fortunatus is so thrilled by sensual images; why Agnes is so shocked — mortified — at the dough sculpture of a naked man; and why the nuns are constantly finding abandoned babies — some of them dead, blue with cold — on the basilica steps, the "sinners" too afraid of being found with the product of their sin (54, 57).

Exactly what is Radegunda — and *Agnes* for that matter — accomplishing by fasting, by shutting herself up in a wall? (It may be useful to note that, at the end of the actual novel, Agnes resorts to shutting herself up in the same enclosed space.) For Radegunda, isolation is two-fold: she is cut off from the world inside the convent, and is then cut off from her sisters inside the wall. As is the case with many of O'Faolain's shorter pieces, the narrative becomes more insistent, more interrogating, as it moves forward, and as Agnes walks through it, she silently begins to critique convent life: the useless fasting, the futile attempts to offer comfort

to lepers — "'Give up,' she wanted to cry. . ." (58) — the delusive efforts to prevent procreation. One of the biggest ironies of the story is Fortunatus' initial belief that "the Christian's was a more ethical experience. The enraptured woman's will became absorbed into the Divine one. Radegunda became one with God" (51). As Cornell notes, "ethical" indicates "the aspiration to a non-violent relationship to the Other and to otherness in the widest possible sense. This assumes responsibility to struggle against the appropriation of the Other into any system of meaning that would deny her difference and singularity" ("What is Ethical Feminism?" 78). The last part of this sentence is the most important: union with God, as described by Fortunatus, denies woman her difference and singularity, since she is ultimately *absorbed* and erased. The unethical nature of this relationship is analogous to women's relationship with history and myth: both work towards *describing* woman, defining her under restrictive categories — good or bad women, saints or whores — and pre-determining her fate through a complex "genealogy" based on *men's* experiences.

As it has been demonstrated in *NC*, O'Faolain effects a disruption, a challenge to myth by re-writing it: in the case of "This is My Body," both history and myth are re-written with the keen understanding that the two are often interchangeable. Both Agnes and Fortunatus help to deconstruct the myth of Radegunda's sainthood: while Agnes silently disagrees with the conditions of convent life, including Radegunda's practice of kissing lepers' sores, Fortunatus comes to the conclusion that divine union is impossible

without human volition, or a kind of secular empiricism — "'Knowledge comes to us through the senses only'" (61). This doctrine of "sacrifice" is seriously challenged in two other short pieces.

"Man in the Cellar" is perhaps one of O'Faolain's sharpest criticisms of the patriarchy, of masculinity, and of motherhood; it is also one of her earliest attempts to imagine feminine writing, metaphor and myth, to use Cornell's trio of terms. Yet, while the story offers a powerful (and it could be said *radical*) strategy of resistance, it runs the risk of merely reversing the system of domination. After all, Una's "plan" involves putting Carlo in the position that she has been in throughout their marriage: a prisoner in her own home. She meditates humourously on the possibility that Carlo's mother, herself prone to "power games," may enjoy having her son chained up, helpless. ". . . [C]ould it be that . . . you might not release poor Carlo but keep him tied by the legs, the way you had him as a baby? That I've given him back to you just as you have always wanted him: dependent" (10). We never hear the response of Mrs. Crispi, though she is always an ominous presence, an interrogating mark on Una, the *bad* wife and mother. In this isolated narrative, the only voice we hear is that of Una's, since Carlo's responses are also given second hand. However, this narrative provides an opportunity for Una to tell *her* story, to write back after so many years. How, then, can she rationalize her behaviour? In its insistence, its rigorous repetition and constant probing of dominant narratives, Una's narrative constantly questions the motives behind domination in general. Thus,

Carlo's imprisonment, while it may be cruel and extreme, allows Carlo and the reading audience "to *see* how intolerable it can be to be always on the losing side, the weak partner, the one who must submit" (35). Besides, it is quite apparent that Carlo will *not* submit to this treatment, as least in the beginning stages of it.

"'What would it cost you to conform a bit?'" Carlo asks Una at one point (13), and we can trace this rhetoric of sacrifice through much of Una's narrative. Mrs. Crispi is Carlo's ideal woman whom he calls a "saint" (13), and it is clear that she is the perfect picture of sacrifice. She breeds these beliefs in her daughter Giovanna, whom she has iron Carlo's shirts on visits. Una particularly challenges la Mamma's religious beliefs, calling attention, as she often does, to her own practice of re/writing:

> I have to break into my narrative here, Signora, to remind you that superstitions are only metaphors. I am no madder than you when I make my own signs and patterns — they are a filing system for otherwise unrelated perceptions — no madder, I say, than you when you accept holus-bolus the ready-made metaphor of your religion. No, don't be angry. I am really trying to get through to you, not to mock you. (42)

This, a kind of companion piece to the passage cited at the beginning of this chapter, illustrates the positive and negative aspects of metaphor — how it can bind as well as free women. "Man in the Cellar" is perhaps the boldest, riskiest attempt to arrest feminine myth and metaphor, reproducing it, aggressively *writing* it with the force of a knife-blade. With regards to the notion of sacrifice, it can then be asked, What is Una accomplishing by deliberately engaging in physical battles she knows she can't possibly win? Once she has Carlo chained up, pathetically dependent upon her, she is

almost nauseous with the realization that she feels *worse* than before, that she has come into Carlo's realm of violence and "madness." As Cornell notes: "Without the aesthetic evocation of utopian possibility of feminine difference, we are left with the politics of revenge. . . . Feminism becomes another power-seeking ideology, a reversal that inevitably reinstates the old economy" ("Feminine Writing . . ." 185). However, Una, like Agnes, gains much by exposing the system rather than sacrificing herself for it. This narrative insistence, which works on a larger scale in *NC*, looks towards the *prospect* of winning, or at least of subverting the victory of the man, of the *men* who have controlled the production of history and myth, and who have helped to reproduce historical and mythological discourses about women, using both secular and religious means—whatever the particular cultural climate calls for.

Bringing the discussion back into the context of contemporary Irish society, "Daughters of Passion" demonstrates how these myths and the accompanying religious doctrines have remained a powerful force in Irish society, the practice of fasting and penance re-introduced as "hunger-striking." Evoking images of sacramental communion, the story is on a level with "This is My Body," taking us into the mind of a modern Radegunda. Quite cleverly, O'Faolain uses this theme of hunger to draw connections between fasting for one's religion and fasting for one's country, so that the "system" becomes, as it does in a number of other stories, a complex web of relations between religion and politics where the language of the one,

while it may condemn the other, merely alters, and in fact, often reinforces the power of the other. The hunger-striker Maggy, whose full name, Magdalen, carries that genealogical freight evidenced in *NC*, questions her own motives for this form of political fasting. Is it for God? country? both? "What *was* religion, after all, but a channelling of dangerous passions into safe celebrations?". This clearly resonates in "Daughters of Passion," which speculates on the ambiguous role women play in IRA politics in the 1970s. Maggy wrestles with the conflicting pressures of the Church and the "State," though she notes that "[s]he knew the system and the system didn't change just because some little Irish terrorist wouldn't eat her dinner" (41). Why the sacrifice, then? The reason gradually comes to light as Maggy reflects on her relationship with her two friends, Rosheen and Dizzy, and as we discover how she came to be imprisoned in the first place.

The three women are a collection of contradictions. Rosheen, whose name is literally translated as "little rose," is described by Maggy as "unmodulated and unskinned: an emotional bomb liable to go off unpredictably" (53). A bundle of nerves, she takes everything to extremes, like the time she throws herself down into puddle to pray to Saint Anthony when she loses her confirmation medal (46), or the countless times she returns to her abusive husband Sean, then retreats back to her friends only to wallow in the melancholia of old Irish ballads. Yet, her name is appropriate as it recalls one of the personas of Mother Ireland, *Róisín Dubh*, or the Dark Rosaleen: as with Gráinne, Rosheen is forced to bear

the weight of her mythological genealogy. Dizzy, whose name seems to belie the fact that she is made of hardier wood than Rosheen, is an Anglo-Irish woman who had "gone native in a programmed way" (41), eventually joining Irish republican political clubs. While Dizzy presents herself as the voice of reason, and Rosheen with her emotional fits is quite the opposite, Maggy would seem to be somewhere in the middle. And Dizzy complains about this, saying to her at one point: "'The trouble with you, Maggy, is that you're an adapter," which means that Maggy "listened to the other side." Yet, it is Maggy, who allows herself to sit back and consider the two (or more) sides of issues, who interrogates through her recollected narrative Dizzy's contradictory beliefs in sanctimonious terrorism, and Rosheen's nervous clinging to a ballady, mythological Ireland. Maggy herself admits that she is "boxed in by her ballady story," referring to the hoopla surrounding her imprisonment, and it is interesting to consider how Rosheen and Dizzy are two versions of her personality: she even says at one point that Dizzy is her anti-self (51), the sexualized bold spirit she knew as a child, while Rosheen would represent that romantic tendency encouraged now by the fact that she is something of a political hero. Indeed, as the story progresses, Maggy has the opportunity to study how each of her two friends respond to the religious doctrine taught in the convent and the equally oppressive political doctrine served by the IRA.

In many of O'Faolain's stories,[xxi] eating or *not* eating can either empower or disempower, and each choice does not always have the same

result. In both "This is My Body" and "Daughters of Passion" the motive behind the refusal of food, or of nourishment in general, is often muddled in the complex political and religious context. While Agnes helps to de-mythologize Radegunda's sainthood, she nevertheless exposes the root of this behaviour in male-oriented religious mythology — a mythology which imposes itself in the guise of a "holy" inspiration. Under a similar form of religious and political pressure, Maggy is, however, an Agnes put in a Radegunda's situation (and indeed, Agnes literally puts herself in Radegunda's position in the latter part of *Women in the Wall*): she probes and prods the narratives thrust on her, just as Agnes (and Kathleen, perhaps) kneads the dough, knowing that to act, to *speak* even, could lock her into a category — a "political" prisoner, for example, or a religious martyr. Maggy is sufficiently disenchanted by Rosheen's unhealthy marriage — the "Irish death wish," Dizzy calls it (45) — as well as Dizzy's rather "dizzy" sense of politics, and she almost succumbs to the exhilaration of becoming "political" when the little IRA man with the glass eye attempts to foist this image onto her (60). In a clearer state of mind, that is, when the hunger has not yet wore down her will, Maggy notes that "[t]he best myths had a dose of truth to them" (41), which helps to explain how she is "boxed in by her ballady story" (49), and also strongly suggests that she is interrogating these myths as much as she is succumbing to them. As with Gráinne and the other women, Maggy's story is "inexact but serviceable" (50), not exactly a defeat of her will, for we discover that she

has seized and shaped her own image of heroism. In the end, when we discover that Maggy had bombed a police station in order to protect Dizzy, who herself was to protect Rosheen's Sean, it is evident that history and myth *can* be altered: despite her claim that her motives are "'irrelevant to history'" (58), it is clear that Maggy has bypassed both religion and politics, appearing to support the one or the other, but *silently* resisting both.

Evoking images of healing and nourishment, Maggy recalls one of the convent prayers: "*May thy wounds be to me food and drink by which I may be nourished, inebriated and overjoyed!*" (55). Though Dizzy is ultimately ineffectual when it comes to protecting Sean, who has become as ragged as Rosheen because of his involvement with the IRA, Rosheen becomes a source of strength for Maggy, supplanting the religious authority continually evoked throughout the story. Once more illustrating her contradictory nature, Rosheen becomes a powerful inspiration for Maggy, offering, in her timidity, sound advice even as she represents, for Maggy, an otherworldly presence: "Rosheen, like one of those creatures in folk tales who hand the heroine some magic tool, had made Maggy potent" (58). While this allusion demonstrates how women's mythological roles are re-appropriated, it also neatly subverts the *male* presence in mythological tales, giving precedence to a potent *female* persona. In the final scene of the story, Maggy re-imagines the Christ figure in terms of her lover, which recalls Radegunda's supernatural union with the "Great Lover," noting that his wounds "were dry and not as food and drink to her at all" (61). Though

her nausea returns, it could be argued that a healing has also occurred through this — once more — interrogating narrative of resistance.

One final story, "A Pot of Soothing Herbs," which also evokes images of rejuvenation and restoration, presents a much lighter side to Irish politics and religion, even though it is no less sardonic about the ways in which mythology has been appropriated by men. As Weekes notes, the story "enacts the problems facing the writer who would find her own voice despite restrictive traditional patterns" (*Irish Women Writers* 176), and "A Pot of Soothing Herbs" (hereafter to be abbreviated as "Pot") vividly engages in the metafictional method of writing about writing. Sheila, a 21 year-old virgin, struggles to put her tension-fraught thoughts into writing: Irish talk, she tells us, "is not about activity. It is about talk" (655). Specifically, Sheila tells us, the 1920s generation tend to obfuscate both political and sexual mores, thrilling to tales of remembered romance, then upbraiding the newer generation for engaging in such activities (656). One particular passage parodies such glorification of the pub-born dreams of the "Irish Republican Middle Classes" in the 1960s:

> My mother's college-day memories are of raids, curfews, and dancing in mountain farmhouses with irregular soldiers who were sometimes shot a few hours after the goodnight kiss. She once carved up an ox and served it in sandwiches to a retreating procession of civil-war rebels. She has the track of a Black and Tan bullet in her thigh and spent a brief spell in prison. My father and all my friends' fathers have the same memories. Even the nuns in school had nonconformist quirks, traces of a deviated radicalism which crept with heady irrelevance into the conventional curriculum. (655-56)

It is true that her parents and her friends' parents *lived* these events, though it is apparent that such tales have become as airy as the frothy head of a pint of Guinness. In this same vent, Sheila says: "If I were talking

now instead of writing, the rush of my breath would be noticeable, a faint bravado at having taken even such a gingerly hold on the matter" (656). Yet language shapes Sheila, not she it (Weekes 177), as the anecdote she relates demonstrates.

Compared to the other O'Faolain stories, "Pot" is significantly more juvenile, a deliberately puerile piece of writing that is as tortured and frustrated as it is sarcastic, that is as angsty as it is interrogating. Despite all this, Sheila's narrative is an effective parody of the way in which Ireland itself is dazed and confused, its young people satisfied to spend hours reminiscing in pubs, yet prepared to tar and feather anyone who would dare to threaten the comfortable values of the Irish Republican Middle Classes (655). Her tale of sexual frustration, then, is analogous not so much to Ireland's *inability* to act, as its uncertainty about *how* to act and *who* to act for, or to put it another way, who to get it up for (I am thinking of such chanted slogans as "Up the rebels," etc.). I deliberately use phallic imagery here as O'Faolain herself deconstructs the male mythology based on Cú Chulainn and his potent "weapon."[xxii] Next to Fionn mac Cumhaill, Cú Chulainn was the most popular Irish mythological figure of the modern literary revival, and he was the symbol of Ireland's revolutionary struggle during the 1910s and 1920s; subsequently, a statue of this figure was constructed inside the main hall of the General Post Office in Dublin, which was the headquarters for the leaders of the Rising. While she is frustrated about her own impotence, Sheila demonstrates how, like the frothy pub

tales, male-oriented mythology can be taken apart, deconstructed in the way that Cornell describes.

The heart of the tale surrounds a party, during which Sheila attempts to hook up with Aidan who is, much to her chagrin, queer. Interestingly, she notes: "[a]nd I need hardly add that I don't know precisely what that [i.e., *queer*] means, either. I wonder how much precision matters? I mean anatomical precision" (657). Though I will resist making the argument that O'Faolain *queers* the text as well as Irish culture, it is significant that sexuality is deconstructed to the extent that gender binaries are displaced, and seemingly heterosexual tensions, like that between Rory and Sheila, are enhanced by the presence of a homosexual, or at least homo*social* dynamic, like that between Aidan and Rory (661), a dynamic which is suggested by Maeve and by the fact that, near the end of the tale, Aidan feels more comfortable sleeping next to Rory than next to Sheila (664-65). In this way, Sheila becomes a median between the two men, though such a triangle is never consummated, which is precisely the theme of the story: frustration. Added to this "queer" element in the tale, is the humorous parody of the Cú Chulainn figure. Enda, the host of the party, begins to reminisce about his family's history of IRA activity, brandishing his grandfather's gun at one point and threatening the partiers and the "gate crashers" (those who crash parties). "'My grandfather shot sixteen men with this,'" Enda says, and one person asks: "'Isn't that a poem by Willy Yeats?'" Whether s/he intends to or not, the unidentified person parodies both

Enda's as well as Yeats's glorification of the past. The actual poem is entitled "Sixteen Dead Men" (*Selected Poetry*, 122), a reference to those who were executed after the 1916 Easter Rising was crushed. One passage reads as follows:

> O but we talked at large before
> The sixteen dead men were shot,
> But who can talk of give and take,
> What should be and what should not
> While those dead men are loitering there
> To stir the boiling pot?

Considering the image of the "boiling pot," O'Faolain may have had this poem in mind for her title, especially as Yeats may have been alluding to a tale involving Cú Chulainn who was, it has already been noted, a significant mythological inspiration during the 1916 Rising. When Enda begins to threaten Sheila and her other friends, Rory snatches the gun away, saying: "'Remember that old Irish hero, Cú Chulainn, whose weapon used to get out of control and had to be put in a pot of soothing herbs? I think that's what *we* need here,'" and he plants the gun, barrel down, in a pot of geraniums (664). As Weekes once more notes, Cú Chulainn, "like the warrior Edna [sic] who wears the confirmation medal of a soldier of Christ, becomes a figure of comic impotence rather than one of romantic potency" (178).

The tale ends as frustrated as it begins, with Sheila having failed to consummate her friendship with Aidan, and with her seeming inability to grasp the intolerant reaction of her mother whose "outraged abuse was like a foreign language to me at first" (666). The mother, of course, mistrusts

her daughter's consorting with the fast crowd, though it raises the more serious issue of what Weekes identifies as the "national contradiction," that is, the manner in which the 1920s generation attempts to monopolize freedom, whether it be expressed through sex or art. This negative ending to a narrative which appears to rejuvenate itself as it progresses, does not suggest to me that the narrative has failed. Weekes concludes that Sheila is "unable to pierce the barrier, to uncover the activity hidden behind language" (179). I disagree. I think that, by exposing the various barriers, O'Faolain very effectively subverts their power; as in her other stories, she deftly probes the source of such restrictions, parodying the supposed male virility of the Cú Chulainn myth. Though Sheila herself is not relieved by the end of her narrative, she has nevertheless let off a considerable amount of steam. And, besides, it would be potentially dangerous to simply believe that the old mythologies, once subverted, will not rise up again. As Cornell notes: "there is always more to write," and I would add, there is always more to deconstruct.

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With the exception of "Man in the Cellar" and "A Pot of Soothing Herbs," O'Faolain consistently joins women together in her stories, creating little communities that work (sometimes unconsciously) towards a resolution of some sort. Radegunda, Agnes and numerous other women are placed together in the convent, sharing the commonality of their experience; Gráinne, Kathleen and Judith also share common experiences

despite their separation of age and history; Maggie, Rosheen and Dizzy share the experience of living under the stringent authority of religion — whether Catholic or Protestant — and politics. By grouping these stories together, perhaps another, larger community is created — a community that defies time and space, that shows commonalities even as it preserves singularity. “Man in the Cellar” and “Pot” can be neatly alligned as stories about writing, with the juvenile, frustrated narrative of Sheila, balanced and perhaps even comforted by the mature though equally frustrated narrative of Una: in both cases, writing is as painful as it is restorative, though the relief of *telling* the story cannot be missed in each case. It could be argued, then, that despite the physical enclosures of the convent, the prison, and the home, and the psychological traps presented in mythologies about women and in *texts* themselves, O’Faolain’s women manage to find escape routes. Gráinne accomplishes this by acknowledging her past, her genealogy, and her connection with other women like Kathleen and Judith; Agnes accomplishes this by silently — metaphorically — crumbling the walls that entrap her and Radegunda, that attempt to separate women from each other; Maggie accomplishes this, as it is suggested above, by silently resisting the power of myth and history, religion and politics, and by re-imagining her own story; Una accomplishes this by ultimately deciding that neither reconciliation nor complete annihilation will give her a victory, deciding instead to *write* her way out of the restrictive gender hierarchy; and Sheila accomplishes this by also employing writing strategies of parody

and paradox in the face of stagnant Irish mythology, a process of mimesis which indicates the author's self-reflexive mode. Anne Weekes locates this simultaneous resistance and re-interpretation in the context of women's writing since the 1960s: " . . . O'Faolain's texts, along with those of other contemporary women writers, add a new reviving, ameliorating, restorative layer to the palimpsest, a layer which not only alters the future but which also restructures the literary past" (190).

CHAPTER TWO: LEE MARACLE

I - NARRATIVES and THE PALIMPSEST

> Scribble . . . scribble . . . scribble . . . I gathered up a host of paper napkins, brown bags and other deadwood paraphernalia on which I had scribbled the stories that people gave me. Scribbled sitting in the back of buses, inside grungy restaurants and in the audiences of great gatherings. Typed out the scribbles between the demands of young children and worked them up for publication until finally they made their way to the printer.
>
> On all these are written the stories of people of my passion. In the early years of my political activism the passion expressed itself as a virulent hatred for the system which destroyed our lives, our families; today, the passion expresses itself as deep caring. I resisted publishing for a long time, not because I lacked confidence in the words scribbled on my scraps of paper—the voices of the unheard cannot help but be of value—but how can one squeeze one's loved ones small, onto the pages of a three-dimensional rectangle, empty of their form, minus their favourite colours and the rhythm of the music that moves them? (Lee Maracle, *I am Woman* 3).

These, the opening words of Lee Maracle's anecdotal work *I am Woman* offer a glimpse of the combined literary, political and spiritual struggles of the Stoh:lo Nation writer. What interests me is the way in which narrative is presented here, in its raw and fragmented form, and in its very intimate connection not only with the author but with the voices of her family and of her nation. Moreover, Maracle explores the origins of writing, of her own writing, and lays bare the layers of her own palimpsest. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (10th ed. 1999) defines "palimpsest" as: 1) "a parchment or other surface in which later writing has been superimposed on effaced earlier writing"; 2) "something bearing visible traces of an earlier form." A number of critics use palimpsestic metaphors to describe anti-colonial and/or feminist writing. In the Preface to *Writing the Circle: Native Women of Western Canada - An Anthology*, Emma LaRocque notes that "[t]o a Native woman, English is like an ideological onion whose stinging layers of racism and sexism must be peeled away before it can be fully enjoyed"

(xx). I do not want to over emphasize this motif but want to acknowledge that it is a useful way to approach women's writing and the *strategies* involved in re-writing history and myth. In this way, Cornell's ethical approach, as described in Chapter One, can be seen as an important addition to the notion of re-writing myth and re-metaphorization in Maracle's fiction.

Indeed, one could say that Maracle's texts bear the traces of other writing, whether this includes the author's own experiences or those of others she has consciously or unconsciously absorbed. Part of her practice involves interrogating the discourses that are not her own, and this is dramatized in *Sundogs* by Marianne whose voice makes points "'by endurance and repetition rather than by force,'" to quote Elizabeth Janeway (quoted in Weekes 16). This kind of narrative probing, exemplified in the young woman's research of divorce cases and domestic violence in the context of university education and familial experience, is an effective response to the probing forces of the largely white, male hierarchy, which controls the production of history and myth. In "Polka Partners, Uptown Indians and White Folks" Maracle probes the intent behind the creation of "centres" for disenfranchised Native people, noting how government-sponsored institutions do more to disempower than empower Native people. In "Maggie," female voices struggle to overcome both the degenerate domestic situation and the difficulty of *telling it*, though the diary of the title character acts as a powerful narrative of resistance, which

inspires the younger Stacey and, by word of mouth, women who may read this story. "Yin Chin" considers similar issues in the context of Vancouver's large Asian population, acknowledge the parallel colonial experiences of Natives and Asians, suggesting, as Ron Marken has argued, that sharing a commonality can be "restorative" (160). Lastly, I want to discuss the more sober issues brought up in one of Maracle's most powerful — perhaps one of her most "heartfelt" (Shaub 156) — stories, "Bertha," which treats the lost social status of Native women: the "dialogic" or "double-voiced" form of narrative (Lundgren 68) works to undermine stereotypes about Native femininity and the dominant ideologies that disseminate these stereotypes.

This chapter, then, considers Maracle's method of peeling back the layers of history and myth—an act both painful and rejuvenating. Focusing on the muting or "whiting out" of Native myth through dominant discursive practices, "Maracle insists on the importance of the matriarchal educational system, its message of love and respect so contrary to the colonial destructiveness and insidious source of self-hate for the colonised" (Shaub 1995: 158). Along with Danielle Shaub's article, "'Trapped. Emiserated. Resigned': Native Women's Lost Social Status in Lee Maracle's 'Bertha'," I want to include Maracle's own text, *I am Woman*, in which she says: " . . . I shall try to grasp the essence of our lives and to help weave a new story. A story in which pain is not our way of life" (1996: 6); as is suggested in the opening passage of this chapter, Maracle's passion changes from "virulent hatred" to "deep caring," and one can see the shift, or perhaps the struggle,

between the two emotions in her fiction. As regards colonisation, Manina Jones' article "Beyond the Pale: Gender, 'Savagery,' and the Colonial Project in Richardson's *Wacousta*" (1994) argues that English "'culture's negotiations of gender difference supplied both a model and a vocabulary for progressively constituting empire'" (46, quoting Suvendrini Perera). While Jones provides an early portrait of colonial practices, Sheila Rabillard, in her piece "Absorption, Elimination, and the Hybrid: Some Impure Questions of Gender and Culture in the Trickster Drama of Tomson Highway" (1993), notes how Eurocentric discourses continue to rely on a set of generalizations or characteristics considered to be "markedly female and thus — given the cultural inferiority of women — markers of the 'naturally' subservient role of the colonized" (8). Shaub's article will thus help to draw back the discussion to specific engagements with these cultural myths in Maracle's fiction.

II - EDUCATION and INTERROGATION

In her non-fiction piece *I am Woman*, Maracle says: "The result of being colonized is the internalization of the need to remain invisible. The colonizers erase you, not easily, but with shame and brutality. Eventually you want to stay that way. Being a writer is getting up there and writing yourself onto everyone's blackboard" (8). It is significant that Maracle uses an educational metaphor here, suggesting that resistance begins in the classroom, but perhaps as well, in the corporate board rooms and in "uppity" government conference rooms: whatever the venue, education is a

necessity. The blackboard would seem to be a more precarious kind of palimpsest considering that words can be completely erased and replaced physically: the insistence of Maracle's approach, however, suggests that "writing yourself onto everyone's blackboard" is an ongoing process — which *has* to be since the Canadian government insists on either glossing over, effacing or erasing Native rights. I use the present tense here deliberately, for Maracle, particularly in *Sundogs*, deals with very contemporary issues the repercussions of which are still being felt. "'Asking too much?'" Marianne's mother responds to the Meech Lake radio discussion. "'My good lady, you got the whole damn country, all of its resources, by dint of the bayonet and now you accuse us of wanting too much'" (61). Before dealing specifically with her fiction, I want to consider Maracle's position as an educator which is an important aspect of her method of re-writing history.

Events like Meech Lake and the Oka Crisis trigger memories of the colonial past and the more recent attempts on the part of white Canadians to simply forget or efface this past. Throughout *I am Woman* Maracle stresses the importance of education, first and foremost for Native children who are the continuators of their family traditions: for children "are not far removed from the earth and they do not mind digging. They are new, full of life and unable to be cynical" (12). Maracle is not idealizing here: indeed, Native people, as well as numerous other post-colonial cultures, lose their status and power precisely because they are cast as "underdeveloped" and

child-like, unable to govern themselves without the firm hand of an adult, *First World* power. Duncan Campbell Scott helped to promote such an image of Native people during his post as the Minister of Indian Affairs in the early twentieth century. As Stan Dragland notes, Duncan "'has become the most visible representative of a government whose Indian policy was based on the definition of an Indian as ward of the state — as little more than a child . . . The First Nations have almost literally been seen and not heard since' the creation of the Indian Act in 1876" (quoted in Marken 161-62). Education, then, must target these stereotypes which undermine and disempower Native attempts at self-government. Maracle's emphasis on education indicates the need to instill knowledge of Canadian history into children, particularly the Canadian history that is expurgated from public education. In this way, " . . . cultural integrity can be sustained, not by acts of revolution and rebellion, but rather by 'everyday acts' of resistance that are often hidden from the purview of the state, or so subtle in their symbolic content as to be misunderstood by outside observers" (Warry 23). Here it becomes important to note Maracle's fictional expression of rage, so powerful when it comes in the face of cultural genocide — indeed, a peaceful reaction to a violent physical and psychological threat.

Wayne Warry's extensive but by no means exhaustive study *Unfinished Dreams: Community Healing and the Reality of Aboriginal Self-Government* (1998) provides an important historical and sociological point of view often missing in theoretical and critical perspectives. Yet, while

Jones, Rabillard, Shaub, and Lundgren, among others, rarely engage with statistical analysis and specific data flux and influx in their given cultural contexts, their individual studies offer an imaginative alternative to the "cold" facts which often fail to explain why, for example, the Aboriginal high school drop-out rate is approximately 70% (Warry 67), or why unemployment rates on Northern reserves generally range from 60% to 90% (65), or why suicide accounted for 36% of status Indian deaths as recently as 1987 (78). As Warry shows, the latter statistic reflects the impact of the former two, though it is the psychological dynamic — the personal tragedy of internalizing these facts, of believing that, because you are poor and uneducated, you are better off dead — that I am concerned with. While Warry is consciously aware of how studies like his own are often appropriated by government institutions, commissions and the like, as a means to prove the general belief in Canada that Native culture is declining, he plays a tricky game in attempting to dispell such a belief while truthfully laying out the "facts" about Native communities. Despite Warry's caution, the First Nations people are often damned if the facts are released and damned if they are not. Therefore, Warry's text becomes more of a jumping off point, a starting place where various issues, such as poverty, alcohol abuse, and sub-standard housing are indicated but which may be further explored through Maracle's fictional portrayal. The imaginative, and I would add, *utopian* element in feminist critical perspectives, particularly that of Drucilla Cornell's ethical feminism, considers but looks *beyond* the limits

of facts and historical contingencies; these will provide a kind of counter-discourse to Warry's focus on infrastructure. As I want to argue, Maracle's fiction provides an intersection into the statistical and literary studies.

A story such as Maracle's "Bertha" offers a sober portrait of reserve life, including poor housing conditions and alcohol abuse. The story reads like a government document, perhaps like Warry's text at points, listing in almost statistical fashion the many social ills in a British Columbian Native village. Moreover, Maracle's piece has much to add to Warry's very factual account of living conditions on the reserve, though it might be argued that Maracle's fictional approach exposes the lax attitudes of Native and non-Native alike through a dialogic or "double-voiced" narrative, and through a very effective use of irony:

> The residence, taken as a whole, was not so bad but for one occasional nuisance. At high tide each dwelling, except the few nearest shore,[xxiii] was partially submerged in water. It wasn't really such a great bother. After all, the workers spent most of their waking time at the cannery — upwards of ten hours a day; sometimes this included Sunday, but not always — and the bunks were sufficiently far from the floor such that sleeping etc., carried on unencumbered. A good pair of Kingcome slippers — hip waders — was all that was needed to prevent any discomfort the tide caused. ("Bertha," 224)

Appropriately, the story is written with an educational tone, with the impersonal voice stating facts blandly, glossing over serious issues of poverty, yet very effectively demonstrating how social ills and physical ills are related (Warry 68). Inside the shell of this educational narrative is an actual narrative about education; within the impersonal, informative narrative there is a very personal narrative. We may read this story in terms of the palimpsest metaphor, that is, as a smaller (narrative) voice attempting to overcome the larger, perhaps "mainstream" (narrative) voice

(a term Warry uses frequently) — a voice that informs our sense of "Canadian History," our media coverage of Native land issues; a voice that pragmatically relies on facts to get across its message and then disempowers the very culture it presumes to speak for. The more specific relevance of Maracle's fiction to women's social status will be discussed later as I want to consider the correlation between poor housing and family illness, between overcrowded homes and family violence, as discussed by Warry.

"[C]rowded conditions," Warry notes, "serve as a hothouse for irritability and family violence" (73). The relief from this structural or spatial tension can lead directly to physical and mental rejuvenation. As well, Warry notes "[t]he building of a new day-care centre, gymnasium, or health centre can act as a major stimulus for community action, and stand as an important symbol of community pride" (74). Maracle's story "Polka Partners, Uptown Indians and White Folks" (hereafter to be abbreviated as "Polka Partners") treats this theme of community action, though the issue is complicated by the fact that an "uptown Indian" takes it upon himself to create a community centre in downtown Vancouver. Understandably, the "downtown Indians" are suspicious of the man's intentions, especially the female narrator: "He captivated the imaginations of the regulars. I am not sure whether it was him that scared me or his centre. No one here dreamed dreams like that" (291). *What is the purpose of setting up such a centre? For whose benefit is it? What if, after numerous Native people are*

employed, the place shuts down? These are some of the questions the story elicits, some of the questions that constantly surround *any* attempt to improve social conditions for Native people, on or off the reserve. These questions become even more pertinent when the narrator discovers that Polka Boy, as she sardonically calls the man, wants to run a medical clinic: "He went into a monologue about the number of accidents, the deaths of our people on their way to the hospital or in the emergency room, and patiently painted a picture of racist negligence for us" (296). Not surprisingly, these words, said as they are in the fashion of an informed lecture, are met with great suspicion — "*Where the hell is all this going?*" the narrator asks herself (296).

This interrogative approach, encouraged as it is by moments of self-doubt on the part of the narrator in "Polka Partners," probes the intent behind creating clinics and the like, especially when they do little to "unify," "combine" or "join" the community members together as the word "centre" would suggest. The pithy question, *Where the hell is all this going?* appropriately challenges the frequent attitude of Canadian politicians who don't seem to care what the hell happens to Native people, especially when — ironically — Canadian "unity" is at stake. Quite obviously, the smaller communities represented by Native people are sacrificed in the constant push for the larger, nation-wide unity Indeed, it is quite easy for facts and figures to *end* issues of poverty and violence in Native communities: as Warry notes, self-government and healing is impossible for Native people if

we (I'm thinking of my own demographic) continue to let the statistics dominate our understanding of them. "It is fair to describe the living conditions of many Aboriginal communities, particularly the remote North, as equivalent to those found in the Third World" (Warry 75). This *is* a fair description, though Warry is cautious of letting such statistics stand alone. The RCAP is largely responsible for releasing reports on the social and economic conditions of Aboriginal communities, is largely responsible for influencing our "knowledge" about Native people, and it runs the risk of fostering a negative portrait of Native communities. As Maracle's "Polka Partners" suggests, class issues further complicate racial prejudice, or at least biased views of Native life, and this is ammunition for those who already have a poor opinion of Native people: the Natives are fighting amongst themselves. And it is true that internal conflict puts further pressure on issues such as self-government and treaty rights, especially when non-Native opponents are supported by Native opponents. Opposition is not always the problem here, however: what concerns me (and Warry) is the frequent inability among Native community leaders to have the *opportunity* to support or oppose particular issues. Generally, any internal dispute is looked upon as typical of the Natives, especially when some disputes become violent. "'. . . [V]iolence within Aboriginal communities,'" the RCAP reported in 1996, "'is fostered and sustained by a racist social environment that promulgates demeaning stereotypes of Aboriginal women and men and seeks to diminish their value as human

beings and their right to be treated with dignity'" (quoted in Warry 80). This clearly balances the potentially damaging effects of straight *reporting*, of listing statistics as an explanation, and indicates the impact of ideology on social interaction. Indeed, statistics (as I risk overusing this word!) *become* an ideology — an ideology which is then internalized by Native people, as the narrator in "Polka Partners" reveals after she discovers that the clinic has been forced to move uptown: "My knees felt knobby, my legs too long, my hair lashed coarse at my face and the tawny brown of my skin became a stain, a stigma, like the street." Confronted with her own *difference*, she rejects her ability to be a citizen, to be part of a community, though the pain and anguish of having her hopes dashed are quite apparent: "Hope. Expectations. Great expectations I had never had. An office. A simple gawdamned office where we could breathe community into our souls was all we hoped for, and it had been too much" (299).

In Chapter Four of his book, Warry deals with issues of mental health, and one particular section, entitled "Personal Journeys: The Challenge of Individual Healing," is a refreshing departure from all the depressing statistics. (Though this one section makes up only a small part of the chapter, the theme suggested in its title is relevant for the sections that follow.) Community interaction, as discussed above, is imagined as a series of "healing journeys," which are frequently instigated by a purification ceremony or simply words of encouragement from an elder. "For a great many people," Warry notes, "recovery and cultural esteem go hand in

hand" (139). A number of personal testimonies further demonstrate how the colonial experience is internalized as Native men and women drink to blur the memories or take their own lives to permanently escape them. Warry's thoughtful commentary and the excerpts that he inserts — "'A healing journey is about dealing with those issues that you are carrying, that pain'" (138; names are unidentified for reasons of confidentiality) — bring us into the realm of narrative voice, which is a major part of my interest in Maracle. Since I am concerned with women's narratives, I want to draw attention to the ways in which Maracle's fiction can be read in terms of Cornell's ethical feminist approach. As I have noted, Cornell's emphasis on the utopian imagination, what she also calls the "imaginary domain" (Cheah and Grosz 41), expands upon a study such as Warry's, which is limited in its capacity to reach beyond its own factual and statistical scope. As well, Warry's text is restricted in its discussion of women's role in Native communities and their often precarious social status: "Thus owing to the rejection of traditional practices," Shaub notes, "women experience estrangement on two counts: as members of a 'colonised' group, but also as matriarchs deprived of their realm" (162). Cornell has much to add to the issue of women's lost social status, which is a major theme in Maracle's "Bertha," and the ethical approach "assumes responsibility to struggle against meaning that would deny her [the feminine 'other'] difference and singularity" ("What is Ethical Feminism?" 78).

III - HEALING JOURNEYS

The connected metaphors of healing, self-knowledge and speech (Marken 158) are vividly evoked as Marianne, the female protagonist of *Sundogs*, searches for her own voice and learns to appreciate the cultural traditions of her Métis-Okanagan heritage; without making too much of a stretch, this recalls Warry's concern with healing, self-*government* and speech, though the work of Marken, Cornell, Rabillard and Jones more thoroughly explores the dynamics of such metaphors as they relate to colonisation and gender hierarchies. The constraints on Native narrative voice are intensified in the context of the Meech Lake Accord and the Oka Crisis of 1990, events that are riddled with racism against First Nations people in the form of political manipulation of the media. Marianne's story, and the story of her family who live in the East end of Vancouver, is a narrative journey, indeed a *healing* journey, that reaches back into the past to retrieve and re-imagine the predominately white Western (Eurocentric) versions of Native history and myth even as it surges forward towards a more hopeful future.

One of the opening images of the novel sets the tone for what I have identified as narrative re/construction in women's writing. Scanning the walls in her bedroom, Marianne sees one of her niece's paintings: "It's a painting of what she [the niece] imagines Khatsalano's village to look like, and layered over it is a bunch of apartment buildings. It's kind of neat. Khatsalano's village is actually a line drawing, while the new apartments that crowd the old location are superimposed on the village in water colour"

(18). This image of superimposition resonates throughout the novel, especially as the niece, Dorry, continues to paint other striking images with similar themes; it is significant, however, that the narrator's commentary on the images are restricted to their artistic merit — "It's kind of neat" — and does not, at least initially, take into consideration their cultural significance. This indifference is even more pronounced in her attitude towards her mother who enjoys railing at the TV during the six o'clock news: "I withdraw emotionally," Marianne tells us, "and let her words drift into the dead file of my mind without feeling them. . . . It takes a lot of years of schooling to numb out like this" (20). Though perhaps a bit too cheeky to be a Gulliver, Marianne effectively exposes the insidious nature of the education system, which schools its children in ignorance, through her own naïveté. Initially, Marianne describes her family, particularly her mother, in comic terms: Momma arguing with the TV—with PM Mulroney—and with the unsympathetic responses to Native Land claims, including Elijah Harper's refusal to give his vote for the Meech Lake Accord. "Everything is connected to some sort of injustice in my mom's mind," Marianne confides with us once more. "My insides rage. At home, I am not Indian enough and at school I am much too Indian. The tension wire inside is stretched thin" (25). Thus, while she illustrates the racist politics of the "system," she resorts to blaming her household as a source for oppression which, as Warry has noted, is another form of suicide, or of "violence turned inward" (147).

The force of this kind of confession, however, ultimately does not confirm the old notion that *the Indians brought it on themselves*—whether this includes poverty, drunkenness, or domestic abuse, the three often interwoven in profoundly disturbing ways. Instead, Marianne's internal grumblings—within her own mind and within her household—bring down the protective walls that have been built around her by her family: "It is a house whose walls are built of secrets" (51), she tells us. "Lateral violence among Native people is about our anti-colonial rage working itself out in an expression of hate for one another," Maracle herself explains in *I am Woman* (11). It is a powerful moment, or series of moments, as Marianne discloses the fact that violence and political recumbency are *not* the result of some racial flaw but an internalizing of that stereotype. Appropriate to Maracle's concern with education and self-empowerment, there is a pedagogical dynamic between Marianne and her audience, and when Marianne responds to her mother, for example, she is also passing on this knowledge, this speech, to us: "Momma, it was never so simple as cultural genocide. You see, they not only invalidated all our thoughts and our thought processes, but they also cancelled out our ability to get a handle on theirs" (88). One example of this hierarchical control is when Marianne's sociology professor questions her ability to tackle Western philosophy and political science: John Stuart Mill is out of her intellectual range . . . evidently.

There is a double colonisation taking place here as Marianne is marginalized both for her race and her gender. Referring to 19th century colonial strategies, Suvendrini Perera notes: "'Increasingly, the process of managing empire and gender developed as a complex system of exchange and overlap, their interlocking vocabularies and discursive strategies authorizing and reinforcing each other'" (quoted in Jones 46). Clearly, Maracle is suggesting that these colonial strategies are still at work, and it is important that Native people, especially women, continue to remind Canadians of their history. Elijah Harper, in his refusal to capitulate on Meech Lake, takes on the role of educator, and his brilliant filibustering encourages Marianne, as well as the rest of her family, to stop contributing to the erasure of their cultural identity. Marianne ultimately sees heroism in her mother, understands that she really is waging "a horrendous battle against terrible odds. . ." (81). Momma is not merely arguing with the TV but with the real forces of domination, and Marianne sees the policies of her government for what they really are: the instruments of cultural genocide. And women are the ultimate victims as the men, badgered and bullied, probed and emasculated, lash out at their girlfriends and wives. A painful example of this is Marianne's brother Rudy who abuses his wife and children, slamming and staining his family with the violence and oppression he himself has suffered. Women, then, become the casualties of war, the inevitable victims of a battle between men.

Sundogs dramatizes the struggle between the personal and the public: the specific and the general problems occurring in Native communities; the attempts to represent personal narratives (Marianne's story, for example) in the face of general impressions, whether this includes historical or statistical accounts like Warry's book. Conversely, there is also, in Marianne's narrative, an obvious attempt to reach a larger group and not simply those in her family: this might include other Native communities across Canada (and the Oka crisis is a perfect example of this) and non-Native people in Canada. Of course the danger in targeting the larger audience is that individual voices are often muted out. This tension is dramatized quite effectively in *Sundogs*, with the added problem of existing colonial attitudes. In the context of 1990s Vancouver, Native women, in Maracle's fiction, experience this double colonisation at the hands of their own men. Perhaps, as Rabillard notes, "the female is the locus of an interplay between absorption and elimination — a counterpoint that has both physical and cultural dimensions" (7). Women — including Marianne — are vulnerable to various kinds of "penetration," including sexual, physical, and mental abuse and harassment. That women *have always been* subject to this oppression becomes a vicious circle of myth rather than an impetus for change, and Native men continue to believe this myth and help to reproduce it.

Added to the family trauma of Rudy's abuse is Marianne's strained relationship with Mark, a young Native man who, while he begins to find his

"place as a man" in society by working in support of Elijah Harper, tends to impose his new-found manhood on Marianne, scolding her at one point, "'Oh please. You aren't a fanatical feminist are you?'" when she asks him why "only men retreat to the backrooms to discuss strategy" (91). Marianne's quick retort is, "'Oh please, you aren't a fanatical patriarch are you?'" — a response that is scraped "out across layers of sharp stone and unrelenting" (91-92). She then meditates on the implications of Mark's attitude: "I watch Mark and see Rudy transform from a mild-mannered, benevolent patriarch to an incensed master when challenged. I wonder how close Mark is to this same pattern" (92). As the narrative progresses, then, Marianne's attitude towards Momma's "cultural genocide" theory and the feminist ideas of her sister Lacey changes from one of naïve disapproval to one of mature open-mindedness, and while Marianne is being educated, so is the reader who no longer is encouraged to mock the serious issues of misogyny and apartheid. "The self-hate is not real. It is a cover for systematic rage" (*I am Woman* 12). This theme is stressed throughout the novel, so that the probing nature of Maracle's narration works as a surgical instrument, cutting in order to heal.

§

There is a sense of movement in much of Maracle's fiction, a suggestion that narrative is kind of journey. While Marianne and the other female protagonists are clearly moving towards a particular goal, they are also searching for *ways out* of the spaces that confine this movement.

Marianne contemplates how the English language becomes one of these confining spaces:

> I loathe English, feel imprisoned in its dry and cold delivery of pain and truth. I never realized this until I saw Elijah speak. His English in translation is free of the dry, cold pain. Graphic and gentle, polite, free of the bullshit hierarchy, he drives on relentlessly, but not noisily. He carefully chooses each word so as to sound as unobnoxious as he possibly can, while he articulates, documents and advances the most obnoxious and despicable thing a Nation can do: attempt genocide on a people (81).

Elijah Harper's strategy of filibustering is another method of working within myth, as Cornell has described it, of taking apart the ideologies the English language imposes on its practitioners. This event, then, inspires Marianne and the other women in her family to engage with the language, the history, the culture that has restricted their voices. This engagement is necessary, Cornell notes, for even as the myths are critiqued "they retain a powerful hold over our imagination" ("Feminine Writing . . ." 172). The myths cannot be simply denied, Cornell continues, for "[w]e re-imagine through these myths. But we also disrupt the images of our own refiguration" (172). Thus, it is crucial that women learn to distinguish between merely internalizing stereotypes about themselves and overturning them. In *Sundogs* as well as two other short stories Maracle shows how the myth of the Mother, for example, cannot be simply rejected, especially as Native women frequently celebrate their role as protectors of the home, of the domestic realm. While Marianne mistrusts the feminist ideas of her sister Lacey, and disparages her other sister's decision to divorce her alcoholic husband Bill, these judgements are made in the enclosed space of male-dominated academia, and are not rooted in experience.

In an interview with Janice Williamson, Maracle says: "A lot of Native writers will be writing from a different place about the same thing, and come to the same place. We call it the medicine wheel and there are an infinite number of pathways to the centre of the circle" (Williamson 177). This recalls Emma LaRocque's metaphor of the onion and how Native women, and it could be argued, women forced to give up their native tongue for another, must find their way to the core. The core of *what*? it could be asked. Perhaps the core of their own personal experience—an experience that has been lost in the ideology of the oppressor. As Cornell notes: "The attempt to recover a language other than theirs, always an act of creation although frequently sought through the memory, motivated by loss, is part of the resistance of the imperialists' attempt to be the sole defining power of who the oppressed people are" ("Feminine Writing . . ." 187). The "infinite number of pathways" suggests the numerous narrative strategies available to Native women who will be writing from varying experiences but working towards the same goal; and clearly Elijah Harper's speeches provide inspiration in this regard. The "medicine wheel" metaphor is suggestive of a "healing journey," and *healing*, as it has been discussed so far, can only occur through education. As I have shown, Maracle adds much to the notion of community healing, and education is a major impetus for "recovery": especially in *Sundogs*, "recovery" signifies both reclamation as well as restoration. As painful as some memories are, enacting them and actively engaging with them can provide a way out, as Cornell has argued

("Feminine Writing, Metaphor and Myth," 173). Indeed, Marianne experiences the most pain when she begins to assert herself as a woman, the first example being her relationship with Mark. Appealing to the mythic, which is often interwoven with powerful stereotypes, "heightens the intensity associated with [women's] struggles to survive within patriarchal society and to find [their] ways out, [their] *sorties*" (173). "Stories," then, become "sorties." Maracle's story presents no easy or at least *visible* exit for women, especially when Native men continue to restrict narrative space; especially when the family structure tends to restrict narrative space as well. Confronted with divorce, domestic abuse, and feminist ideas that confuse her, Marianne is forced to come to terms with her own disparaging of traditional values that have tended to unite rather than break apart her family and her people.

"Bertha" also takes up this theme of women's social status, emphasizing how the lack of education leads directly to disempowerment not only for women but for an entire Native community. "Maracle prevents the reader from dismissing the problem as merely nostalgic because she plays on the duality of focalisation, and stresses the predicament of a whole community beyond the personal instance" (Shaub 158). Thus, though the story focuses on Bertha's journey through the cannery, it also weaves in the colonial history of the community. As I have suggested above, the middle section of the story presents a more sensitive, personal voice, detailing how Christianity had ended Bertha's and other children's

home education, and more crucially, had fractured the community's sense of itself: "Confusion, a splitting within her [Bertha], grew alongside the murmur that beset the village. Uncertainty closed over the children. Now, even the stories she had kept tucked away in her memory escaped her" ("Bertha" 226). This section also describes how "empowering ceremonies" became "pagan rituals of horrific shame," and how the "old women lost their counsel seats at the fires of their men." Cornell's notion of "lost language" is relevant here, and the isolation women experience in the colonial *and* post-colonial context is intensified as they are separated from one another. Bertha, who represents the older generation that has been deprived of its cultural identity, locates the dilemma in the present where matriarchs like herself are unable to connect with the younger generation who is in need of guidance and education. The loss of community and communication cuts off any hope for recovery, and the author notes: "No one connected the stripping of woman-power and its transfer to the priest as the basis for the sudden uselessness all the people felt. Disempowered, the old ladies ceased to tell stories and lived out their lives without taking the children to the hills again" (227).

Silence and the erasure of identity is vividly illustrated early on in "Bertha" in the anecdotal brevity of the story of X and his brother. The description of a fight between the two brothers over whether a certain foremen was a "pig" or a "dog" once more "illustrates the way in which Natives' rage against whites is expressed through violence directed at each

other" (Lundgren 68). The labeling of the brothers is, Jodi Lundgren argues, "a blatant indication of the absence of Natives within the signifying system . . ." (68). The absurdity of the story — with the concluding statement, "the water that filled X's brother's lungs settled the argument forever" ("Bertha" 222) — sharply challenges the relevance of the Marxist rhetoric that dominates its tone ("food being a much higher use-value" [222]), especially since it fails to address "systemic racism" (Lundgren 69). Bertha herself risks becoming another anecdote, her voice restricted to the few drunken words she manages to get out — "Fucking btstsh" (224) — her story all but submerged like the shack she is forced to inhabit. And we can interpret her relationship with the young girl she meets on her way through cannery row as a parallel story to "X and his brother": the deep pathos of X's brother's death, bleak in its double erasure of identity, threatens to repeat itself between "sisters," though Bertha clearly identifies herself as a "mother" figure to the girl. Though the girl clearly has a voice, and is sober enough to engage in a conversation (despite the fact that it is one-way), her own ignorance threatens to sever not only the fragile connection she has with Bertha but the connection she has with her Native culture, with her history. As Marianne discovers in *Sundogs*, "achieving competence within the system is always subsidiary to the goal of subverting it" (Lundgren 69). The young girl in "Bertha," her prematurely rotten teeth analogous to her corrupted spirit, does not have the advantages that Marianne has; does not have a family — despite all the pressures that go with it — to comfort her

and, most importantly, guide and educate her. Thus, Marianne's immature behaviour is inexcusable since she has been given the opportunities Bertha and the young girl were not. At the same time, however, Marianne exposes the strategies of the "system" that have destroyed the lives of such individuals and that threaten to destroy the lives of her own family.

Marianne admits that, ". . . to hold woman inferior requires help from the victim . . ." (*Sundogs* 92) — an empowering message she and women like her can find nourishment from. The young girl, in her intoxicated state, begins to see this truth as she watches Bertha crawl home: she is well on her way to becoming like Bertha. Her education, begun with the drink-drawled words of Bertha and ending soon after with the latter's death, nevertheless breaks the chains that bind her both physically — to her chair (230) — and spiritually: "Her throat broke its silence and a rush of sobs filled her ears. 'Damn wine, damn Bertie. Damn' . . ." (230). Even more powerful is the young girl's "agonized scream" that splits the silence at the cannery when Bertha's death is announced. The last sentence, which describes how the knife she was holding when she heard the news "slipped and deprived [her] of her thumb and giggle forever" (232), indicates that she has *indeed* broken a long-buried silence; it is also significant that her *giggle* is deprived, for this also indicates that she no longer laughs at the destruction of her culture.

Just as the young girl in "Bertha" helps to connect the past with the present, and exposes the seemingly unstoppable genocide of her people,

Dorry, Marianne's niece, acts as a bridge between Marianne and her mother, and exposes the pattern of an education system that schools its children in ignorance. Unfortunately, Dorry is killed in a car accident only months after Marianne has started to take an interest in her; the power of the niece's vision is such that her paintings reach back into the past and survive her fragile fourteen year old's body into the future. What Dorry leaves behind is an inspiring series of portraits which Marianne describes to Mark at the hospital:

> '. . . I want you to look at me . . . Dorry painted . . . She drew lines of hope across our despair, the despair of ugliness erased not by burying the images but by painting thin rays of beauty and hope on our faces. She . . . her work. The colours, the sculpting of us, women like me, the sensuous movement of our bodies. No Marilyn Monroe images to lie, just us. Bronze on rust, gilded by sun, moved by rain, tears of earth spilled on canvas all shunted aside and yet still clinging to our own beauty. Why don't you look at us and see . . . ?' (149)

This beautiful passage — one of a series of epiphanies for Marianne — eloquently challenges the stereotypes, the narratives that have been layered over Native femininity to the extent that women's voices, not to mention their *bodies*, have been buried in grotesque Hollywood images.[xxiv]

IV - LITERARY COMMUNITIES OF WOMEN

"Maggie" is yet another story that acts as a companion piece to the larger novel, especially as it focuses on communities of women and their mutual struggles with dominant stereotypes. As a coming of age story, it features a series of pre-adolescent trials and experiences, many of which are recorded in Maggie's diary. In one entry, Maggie describes how a young boy is injured during a baseball game, and when the children run off to get the boy's father, Maggie writes: "The story ends here, because adults

are not allowed in the diary" (251). That the narrator and her sister Maggie are only girls — Maggie, the oldest, only eleven — is significant since their struggle to gain adult status represents the general struggle of their culture. Thus, it may be taken as ironic when Maggie, answering her younger sister's question as to why mothers were allowed in the story, says: "'Mothers are girls, silly, they never have to grow up.'" As it has been noted, the colonized are cast as children who need to be governed, and the narrator confesses: ". . . it took me a long time to figure out what being an adult entailed" (251). Clearly, then, both Maggie and her sister have internalized this image of Native women . . . or have they? Maggie's irony is questionable since she is only a child of eleven, and the narrator is a few years younger and presumably more naïve. Another diary entry suggests that the older sister is more clever than her age belies. In this fictitious piece (a self-reflexive narrative perhaps?), a little girl named Annie, who closely resembles Maggie in her precocious veracity, is scolded for playing with a hammer. "'Why don't you play with your Barbie doll or something, for chrissakes,'" the fictional mother asks. Annie responds, to the dismay of the older women present, "'Cuz Barbie don't drive truck and I don't like pointy tits'" (251). Annie, and presumably her author Maggie, expose the stereotypes about women, and reveal their awareness of the way men think — "truck driving and tits" (252).

The narrator is shocked at hearing the word "tits": "No one in our village mentioned tits out loud. It was like we all pretended women didn't

have such things" (252). Jones locates this myth in the colonial strategies of mapping, where the sexual, political and topographical geography of the New World was "mapped either as a cultivated, asexual, feminine commodity or as a wilderness of excessive, sexualized 'savage' energy that remain[ed] unassimilated into the colonial economy . . ." (48). This kind of allocation has led to the creation of such stereotypes as the Indian princess and the "squaw," a binary relationship recalling the Virgin/whore of Western literature. Perhaps reacting to the "savage" image of Native women, the women in Maggie's village assume the opposite image. The narrator continues: "Maggie told me tits were used to feed babies, but I had never seen the young women feed them in such a way. I disbelieved her" ("Maggie" 252). The narrator's own ignorance, like that of Marianne and the young girl in "Bertha," allows this feminine myth to maintain its power. Referring to Kristeva's work, Cornell notes "the way in which the mythology of the Mother obscures women's actual experience of maternity, and even more primordially, the very instinct or drive for motherhood" ("Feminine Writing . . ." 172). Maggie's understanding of such a myth, however *plausible*, educates and ultimately empowers the narrator who is still timid when it comes to tangling with white authority. Interestingly, the narrator never identifies herself, and it is only when Maggie calls her "Stace," a few pages in, that we discover her name. Within Maggie's diary entries and within the narrative itself, there is the overwhelming sense of a journey, and as Maggie struggles back and forth to school through the wretched cold,

weighted down both physically and mentally with extra learning, so the narrative works its way towards recovery, quite like the "medicine wheel" described by Maracle (Williamson 177). The story, then, becomes another "healing journey," weaving its way through cold facts and figures about Natives (Warry), through the stultifying knowledge learned in the "state" schools (Maracle), and through the absorbing images passed down through history and myth (Cornell).

"Maggie" like "Bertha" ends tragically, with Maggie dying of exposure as she treks her way home from school after having been kept back for detention. Yet, the final message is powerful and empowering, as it becomes apparent that, through the diary, a community of women has been created: Momma, who finds her voice at the funeral home; Stace; and the deceased but spiritually present Maggie. The diary itself becomes a personality, a vessel in which to both retrieve and (re)place words — words that do not go unheard but which are picked up by other women. Moreover, Maracle continually joins women together, and with the exception of "Polka Partners," these women (sometimes unconsciously) work together towards a similar goal ("there are an infinite number of pathways to the centre of the circle" [Williamson 177]). The lack of other women characters in "Polka Partners," however, does not detract from the narrator's sense of community. In her refusal to follow the whims of the municipal government — who "could not justify funding a racially segregated clinic" (298) — the narrator reunites herself with the friends she had temporarily neglected

when she was employed at the clinic. Though she knows little about, and is therefore suspicious of, feminism, considering that she becomes squeamish at the thought of dealing with a lesbian feminist nurse (295), the narrator offers a more subtle but equally effective critique of institutions that are dominated by white men yet *run* by white women nurses: "Visions of assembly-line women office workers still going about their jobs and white women doctors setting up shingles in other parts of town crowded between the sight of him [Polka Boy] moving despite his better judgement" (299). The narrator places herself in the position of those assembly-line office workers, noting how she, too, would be marginalized, once because of her gender, and twice because of her race, if she did not refuse to accommodate the man.

An additional story, "Yin Chin," draws attention to other, non-Native communities that experience similar forms of marginalization. At the beginning of her tale, the narrator, a Native woman, finds herself standing in a crowded college dining hall looking for a place to sit, and her face is drawn to a group of noisy Chinese youth: "It's a reflexive action on my part," she says, "to assume that any company that isn't Indian company is generally unacceptable, but here it was: the absence of Indians, not chairs, determined the absence of a space for me" (272). This confession not only introduces a complexity into the Native woman's isolated life experience but more significantly raises the issue of her education; in other words, *Has she learned anything about Chinese people and their common experience of*

subjugation? The emphasis on education is apparent as she recalls a childhood memory involving a Chinese man who owned a discount grocery store, and whom everyone referred to as Mad Sam. Interestingly, the narrator separates herself from the memory by referring to her childhood self in the third person: "The memory of a skinny little waif drops into the frame of moving pictures rolling across my mind" (272). As the story progresses, then, the narrator takes on the role of the educator, alerting us to the ways in which knowledge about Chinese people is accumulated through stereotypes such as the Chinamen who steal little children. By setting up a parallel between the Natives and the Chinese, the intended readership becomes interestingly split: between white people who must acknowledge that the Chinese have also been marginalized in Canadian society, have been largely mistrusted, even feared; and Native people who must acknowledge that they share a common experience but also that they frequently ignore this fact and contribute to the proliferation of stereotypes about Chinese people. Perhaps deliberately, Maracle de-familiarizes the Chinese experience, focusing exclusively on the Native woman's experiences with racism against the other group.

In the first section of the story, it appears as though a common understanding has been established between the Native narrator and the group of Chinese people who share jokes about white people, and between the narrator and a group of Asian people who, a week earlier, had discussed the — albeit limited — joys of being noticed as a writer ("'We

really believe we are writers'" [273]). In a passage that recalls Marianne's hospital room speech to Mark, the narrator says: "In the face of a crass white world we [Native people] had erased so much of ourselves, and sketched so many cartoon characters of white people overtop of the emptiness inside, that it would have been too much for us to face the fact that we really did feel just like them [i.e., the Chinese]" (273). Yet, even more crucial than the admission of internalized racism is the resultant *external* expression of this towards the Asian population who, through the narrator's own ignorance, have become practically invisible. Yet, by the end of the first section, the narrator has taken steps towards healing this rift . . . or has she? The next section would certainly suggest that she is more sensitive to the Chinese presence in Vancouver, especially when she sees a Native man harassing a elderly Chinese woman. When the narrator calls the man off, he curses at her and then says sarcastically "that he didn't know she was a squaw" (274). So, in the same action, the Native man abuses a another marginalized Canadian and one of his own people, which suggests that the Native abuse of the Chinese is on a level with the Native abuse of other Natives, a form of internalized racism, or violence turned inwards (Warry). The narrator's voice, then, is very strong, especially when she admits that "somewhere along the line we forgot to tell the others, the thousands of our folks who still tell their kids about old Chinamen" (274).

In the manner of Marianne, the narrator of "Yin Chin" effectively exposes the source for self-hate among Natives, comparing it as she does

to the Native abuse of Chinese people. In many ways, this story challenges the isolated narratives of Maracle's other stories, noting how Native people have become so mired in the images they have assumed that they are blinded to their own hatred against other groups: it is important to note once more that internalized racism is often expelled and directed at other groups who, on the one hand, mirror the experience of subjugation, and on the other hand, represent the original source for this subjugation. In one particular, fairly brief section of *Sundogs*, Marianne recalls the memory of a Chinese woman whom she had befriended and shared personal experiences with. The woman, Sue, complains that she is constantly being singled out in her Asian Studies class as the "'Chinese in house expert,'" asking Marianne: "'How is a first-year student supposed to be responsible for correcting a Ph.D. in Asian Studies?'" This response — an ironic call for responsibility — interrogates the professor's hierarchical advantage over the student, exposing his own ignorance as well as his insecurity as an "expert." Marianne encourages Sue to tell the professor that he has a responsibility to teach, though Sue is too timid to voice her complaints (161). Despite her own belief that she is an educator, given the tone of the narrative throughout, the narrator in "Yin Chin" ultimately fails to follow her own advice. At the same time, *Sundogs* does not deal with the issue of Native-Asian commonalities to the degree that the shorter piece does: however, having provided a lengthy anecdote about her own people's poor behaviour towards Chinese people, the narrator's "education" is

questionable. Moreover, the question can be asked, *How much of the girl remains in the woman?*

Using the store window as a metaphor for the gaze, Maracle demonstrates how the Native gaze becomes distorted through education. Suddenly identifying herself as the "skinny little waif," the narrator recalls how, as she used to look out, the rain would splatter the window pane with round *o*'s: "Each *o* is kind of wobbly and different, like on the page at school when you first print *o*'s for the teacher" ("Yin Chin" 275). Here, the narrator illustrates how this educational distortion works by connecting the two kinds of *o*'s, by suggesting that her own precarious attempts to master English culture translate into a similarly "wobbly" attempt to understand Chinese culture. Perhaps the precariousness of this education is over-emphasized, especially as it becomes apparent that *ignorance* is the biggest obstacle preventing the narrator's connection with Chinese culture. The narrator is confronted by her ignorance, as the Chinaman, a projection of this ignorance, enters the store, catching the narrator unawares. Her scream is "indelicate," to say the least, especially as it is followed up with the explanation, "'The Chinaman was looking at me'" (277). In the last few lines of the story, the narrator brings us back to the present where she has been sitting with a elderly Chinese woman. In a profoundly ironic statement — which confirms the irony of the entire story — the narrator tells us that she had not even been listening to the woman, had not even spoke, but had been reliving her memory of Mad Sam: "'How unkind of the world to

school us in ignorance' is all I say, and make my way back to the car" (278). Perhaps a reflection of its having come before the empowering and uplifting narrative of Marianne in *Sundogs*, "Yin Chin" nevertheless interrogates the larger work, especially those moments of isolated, self-congratulatory victory, that is, those moments where the only two groups that exist in the universe are the Natives and the whites. I am not suggesting that *Sundogs* or any of the other shorter pieces are hypocritical, but I want to note that Maracle is aware of her narrative voice, is aware of how that narrative voice simultaneously exposes the limitations of representation even as it attempts to represent. I would further add that Maracle is taking an ethical approach in her inclusion of other marginalized groups. Perhaps even more effectively than Marianne, who overcomes her ignorance, the narrator of "Yin Chin" exposes how Canadians are *schooled* in ignorance, and how, as Maracle has noted, "everything you do and every word you speak, either empowers or disempowers" (Williamson 168).

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By grouping *all* of these stories together, another, larger community is created — a community that shows commonalities even as it preserves singularity (Cornell). Marianne and the women in her family; the feisty narrator of "Polka Partners"; the young girl in "Bertha"; and Stacey, Maggie and their mother are all resilient and adaptive characters who defy the penetrating powers of the colonial and patriarchal authority and "seize and shape the direction of their own lives" (Rabillard 10). Marianne is faced with

the pressure of choosing either the narrative that has been thrust on her by her political oppressors or the one that has been thrust on her by her own people. For Maracle, the rejection of the latter is the worst possible decision: "The nattering, the abuse," Marianne tells us, "catalyze self-inflicted wounds, and I, and children like me, grab daggers, aim them at our mother's hearts and gash holes in their hopes, dreams and codes of conduct" (82). She uses the same language to describe her reaction to the feminist ideas of her sister Lacey: ". . . fanatical feminism I called it, and in my mind and heart I slashed derisive lines through the truth of her woman heart. I didn't want to look in the mirror, imagine myself, re-create a seductive, worthy woman. I was willing to reduce my body to a vessel that pours out love until it is empty"; and later, "It isn't her feminism that scares me; it's the absence of my own" (167). Clearly, this kind of re-thinking informs a character like the narrator in "Polka Partners." As Cornell notes, inverting the feminine allows women to "separate the feminine from the imposed persona of femininity," which is "one way psychically in which sexual difference comes to have an affirmative 'life' rather than the death associated with lack" (Cheah and Grosz 24).

Especially in *Sundogs*, Maracle's narrative probes with the deft touch of a surgical blade, peeling back the diseased layers that have "been left to rot in the souls of men who have no language to translate grief into new life, into bright rainbows of living colour" (188). Femininity itself, as described by Cornell, becomes a wound (Cheah and Grosz 24), and this is

certainly evident in “Bertha” where the title character mourns the loss of women’s social status, a loss that has left the community feeling useless and unregenerate. Marianne silently weeps for her brother Rudy, who has inflicted the pain he has suffered from the white macho code of masculinity on his wife and children: “‘Rudy, where are you now? I am bleeding, Rudy. I bleed ancient wounds. I need a bandage, a healing hand only you can give me. Rudy, come home’” (82). The healing, in this case, is necessary not only for the women but the men who often inflict the wounds in the first place. Rudy must return home, which, metaphorically, suggests that he must re-direct his thinking, that he must, like Mark, throw off the burden of white masculinity. Until this happens, women continue to be absorbed. Yet, with absorption, Rabillard notes, comes elimination, so that it “is not just wounds that the women receive but food and semen which they incorporate, make their own, and re-produce as strength and life” (12).

The insistent yet sensitive narrative of Marianne is a gesture of healing that works through the utterance of buried language, of words that have been numbed and anaesthetized over time. Healing language is also encouraged by the events that take place *outside* the home: “The crisis at Kanesatake [sic.] and Elijah’s ‘no’ [in response to the Meech Lake Accord] persuaded us to stop inflicting the hell of the outside world on the corridors of our own private universe” (212). Maracle’s protagonist continually alerts us to the dangers of believing in the truths that are produced by the dominant culture and superimposed over those of the *dominated*. As

Richard Hill tersely describes in his wonderfully frank article for *Fuse*, "One Part Per Million": "Histories are unruly things. Some squirm to avoid the very meanings they feel they've learned through experience, and the dominating histories that have been constructed to lay their bloated, smothering forms on top of smaller, quieter histories"(15). The very act of *speaking* this oppression, Hill notes, can be "an empowering experience" (12). This is certainly the case not only in *Sundogs* but in "Bertha" and "Maggie" where the surviving women find their voices in the wake of tragedy and recover the images of themselves that have been lost in the depths of history and myth. The narrator in "Yin Chin" tempers these personal victories with the awareness of a larger community of oppressed women, once again attesting to the notion that commonalities can be "restorative." At the same time, however, the conclusion of this piece is unsettling, and it leaves the issue of Native-Chinese relations unresolved. Yet, it is clear that the issue concerns Maracle whose use of the naïve narrator exposes the ills of society. All of Maracle's female characters transform the abuse, the ugliness that has been painted over their skins, into something beautiful, but also something that has no definable category, for as Cornell notes, ". . . feminism needs to symbolize the space in which we keep the future of sexual identifications open, even if through the interpretations of old attachments" (Cheah and Grosz 25).

CONCLUSION

ETHICAL CONCERNS and the COMPLEXITIES of the PARALLEL APPROACH to IRISH and ABORIGINAL CANADIAN POST/COLONIAL EXPERIENCES

I think that across all literature the human face speaks — or stammers, or gives itself a countenance, or struggles with its caricature.

— Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 117.

One of the major differences between the Irish and Native Canadians is their contemporary situations, and this tends to complicate Ron Marken's parallel study of the two cultures. Ireland partially decolonized some seventy years ago, and the Irish are not a group that is frequently under the heavy legislation of a dominant power, whereas Natives in Canada are still subject to various laws restricting their rights to land, proper education and employment. I would like to address this issue of distinction and other lacunae in Marken's parallel approach before dealing with more specific issues in the fiction of O'Faolain and Maracle.

Ireland has been waging a war against itself since the partition of the island in 1921, and new forms of colonialism, such as the religious war between Catholics and Protestants, have stunted the country's economic and cultural growth. As the editors of *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* suggest:

> All post-colonial societies are still subject in one way or another to overt or subtle forms of neo-colonial domination, and independence has not solved this problem. The development of new élites within independent societies, often buttressed by neo-colonial institutions; the development of internal divisions based on racial, linguistic or religious discriminations; the continuing unequal treatment of indigenous peoples in settler/invader societies — all these testify to the fact that post-colonialism is a continuing process of resistance and reconstruction. (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffen, Introduction, 2)

It should be noted — as, I think the passage above suggests — that the focus on Northern Ireland as purely a "religious" problem distorts the fact that many conflicts in this region and throughout the island are based on class and, as I have shown, the oppressive gender hierarchy. "Decolonization," then, becomes a problematic term, though I do not want to dismiss the ways in which Ireland *has* decolonized. That being said, Northern Ireland has been particularly marginalized because of the focus on the violence occurring there, and the Republic, by contrast, is often still presented as a kind of fairy-land, that is, as the *real* Ireland. In this way, Irish "freedom" for individual groups, such as Northern Irish people, lesbians and homosexuals, and women, becomes lost in the roar for *national* independence. Since nationalism has proved to be so deadly — not only in Ireland but throughout the rest of the world — Irish group identity has become a more precarious thing, and the violence once directed at the old Empire, and then played out between Catholics and Protestants, has begun to dominate the familial realm, directed particularly at women.

As Chapter Two demonstrates, there are similar rifts in Canadian culture, similar cases of domestic violence in Native families. But, as Maracle has shown, especially in *I am Woman*, there is no sense that Native Canadians have decolonized: "Our communities are reduced to a sub-standard definition of normal, which leads to a sensibility of defeat, which in turn calls the victim to the table of lateral violence and ultimately changes the beliefs and corrodes the system from within" (*I am Woman* ix).

Marken anticipates a break from such neo-colonial forces, noting how, like the Irish, the First Nations people have experienced a literary revival (170). Yet, there is a danger in comparing the two resistance movements, especially since groups like the IRA and Protestant paramilitaries have often turned resistance into terrorism. Therefore, I want to consider the ways in which rage and resistance have affected Irish and First Nations families alike.

I - RAGE AND RESISTANCE

Julia O'Faolain's lively on-line essay "The Furies of Irish Fiction," provocative for its generous sampling of contemporary Irish fiction and film, is also very astute for the way in which it links Irish anger with moral discomfort in the home: "anger in the Republic of Ireland is a domestic matter," she notes. "'[T]he "war" is not Ireland's central drama,'" another contemporary Irish novelist argues. "'Ireland's central drama is — and always has been — the conflict between private life and public fantasy. . . . [M]aybe this new concentration on the dignity of individual lives is what is so powerful — and profoundly political — in the work of the new Irish writers . . .'" (Joseph O'Connor, quoted in Smyth 17). O'Faolain herself is included in this group. Indeed, a text such as *No Country for Young Men* locates Ireland's "central drama" in the home, showing how old notions about Irish identity, and more specifically, Irish femininity, prevent the country from healing the wounds of the past. Lee Maracle's similar focus on familial relations in *Sundogs* provides a parallel example of how the colonial

experience is internalized in Native Canada; and as Marianne notes, "[h]ate is old, decadent pain left to rot in the souls of men who have no language to translate grief into new life, into bright rainbows of living colour" (188). In this way, the home has become the new battleground.

Both Native Canada and, even more so, Ireland are frequently imagined in terms of their history of *violent* resistance, and even though violence *has* occurred and *still* occurs — the "North" in Ireland, for example, which has been compared with the violence in Bosnia and Kosovo; the American Indian Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, Wounded Knee, Ipperwash, and Oka — the media often forgets the motive and emotions that are behind these movements. Clearly, however, Ireland's situation is more difficult to account for, especially as a kind of civil war still continues in the North, resulting in periodic bombings and nasty terrorist tactics like "knee-capping" (a punishment dealt specifically to traitors).[xxv] Though it is apparent that the media plays up on such violence so as to almost completely discount any possibility of a peaceful future for each culture, more recent Irish newspapers (the *Irish Times*, *Irish News* and the *Newsletter*) have tended to promote the Peace Process in the form of counter-propaganda.[xxvi] More recently in Native Canada, the poor economic situation of Indian Reserves has become the media focus, a discourse which recalls the late nineteenth and early twentieth century ideology of the *plight of the Indian*, or the *declining Native culture* (see Francis 30, 36, 57, 82). Economics is a topic which inevitably surfaces in Chapter Two but

which is too broad to focus on extensively. It is still interesting — and perhaps this will lead to future projects — to note the historical parallels between Aboriginal Canadians and the Irish, particularly the colonial practices of compulsory education and the restrictions on language: in both cases, the cultural pressures have led to social pressures, and the poor economic situation (as Wayne Warry demonstrates, 1998) translates into both physical and mental illness. *Rage*, then, can be seen as an expression of a multitude of social, psychological, and cultural anxieties — a combination of historical and even mythological forces which batten upon colonized groups and determine their fate. O'Faolain locates in contemporary Irish fiction "an energizing anger" ("The Furies of Irish Fiction"), which would correspond to the positive forms of rage in a lot of post-colonial literature and, as I have shown, contemporary First Nations fiction. [xxvii]

"Rage" in O'Faolain's and Maracle's fiction is more specifically expressed by women whose voices are lost in the fury of their male counterparts who themselves take out their frustration on their female counterparts. This leads to a kind of internalized colonization. Though Maracle notes how her passion had changed from "virulent hatred" to "deep caring" by the time she began to write fiction (*I am Woman* 3), there is still a marked acidity in her narrative voice, an interrogative tone that strips away the shallow rhetoric of governmental policies and patriarchal hegemony, and refuses to blandish for her non-Native audience. "It is inevitable that

Europeans will read my work," Maracle says of *I am Woman.* "If you do not find yourselves spoken to, it is not because I intend you rudeness — you just don't concern me now" (10). Frequently throughout this early text she challenges language, and at one point, the metaphors men often use to describe the sexual act: "men take great pride in referring to sex in just that way: 'getting your rocks off,' 'changing your oil,' etc." This, Maracle argues, is on a level with "venting your frustration on your wife" (25), as if sex is something which has to be relieved. In a similar vein, Gráinne O'Malley, the female protagonist of *No Country for Young Men*, notes that "[m]onastic tradition had described woman as a bag of shit and it followed that sexual release into such a receptacle was a topic about as fit for sober discussion as a bowel movement" (155). In both passages, myths are turned to account for themselves and, in the context of Cornell's work, re-written from within their restricted boundaries. In stories such as "Man in the Cellar" and "A Pot of Soothing Herbs," anger or rage is vented through letters and, especially in the case of the latter story, the effect is "soothing" and ameliorating, despite the remaining sense of frustration at the end. Maracle's Maggie doesn't get the satisfaction of knowing that her journal has actually healed those who have read it, while Bertha's lost voice is reclaimed in the agonizing scream of the younger cannery worker.

Marken's parallels aside, one of the most notable similarities in contemporary Irish and Native Canadian fiction is the concern with domestic violence and the way in which colonial violence is internalized. As

I have noted, Native Canadians have not yet decolonized, so there is still a very concrete enemy in the form of a white male majority. This partly explains why O'Faolain argues that the targets of contemporary writers in Ireland are unclear. "For Irish Catholics the jolt at leaving the British Empire in 1921 — I am thinking of those who did not actively welcome this — must have been softened by the sustaining networks of family-solidarity, local community and the Church — all of which were still strong" ("The Furies of Irish Fiction").[xxviii] Yet, as Declan Kiberd has noted, "[t]here was, if anything, less freedom in post-independence Ireland, for the reason that the previous attempt to arraign the enemy without gave way to a new campaign against the heretic within" (263). The *Church* became the new enemy, and when this authority began to collapse, with the push for contraception, divorce laws and abortion rights, the family became the new target of abuse. Thus, while I am cautious of forcing comparisons, let it be said that the post/colonial experiences of the Irish and First Nations people are equally complex, albeit in different ways.

II - DRUCILLA CORNELL and NARRATIVE RE/CONSTRUCTION

Drucilla Cornell's notion of re-writing myth, which I have re-imagined as re/constructing narrative, aligns itself well with the notion of rage and resistance, though I would reiterate that her ethical feminist approach has alerted me to the complexities of comparing O'Faolain and Maracle. Indeed, reconstruction suggests *de*construction, and I have used such related words as "interrogation" and "narrative probing" to metaphorize, and

encourage a re-metaphorization of, women's writing in two different cultures. Re-writing myth, therefore, signifies a number of narrative strategies and discursive practices in the fiction of O'Faolain and Maracle, many of which are charged by an energizing anger: as I have attempted to show in Chapters One and Two, Cornell's ethical approach further energizes such writing. Referring to an exchange with Cornell in 1995 in the latter's Rhetoric Seminar at Berkeley, Judith Butler says: "One of the things I was persuaded by was the use of the feminine as a category that does not describe something that already exists but actually inaugurates a certain kind of future within language and within intelligibility that is not yet fully known now" (Cheah and Grosz 21). Keeping in mind O'Faolain's and Maracle's parallel focus on the domestic realm and the related myths about femininity, I want to discuss the varying methods of narrative reconstruction, the kinds of healing that take place as a result, and how each writer encourages what Cornell calls "re-metaphorization."

"Reclaiming voice" is one of the most common themes of recent feminist and women's writing in general. While O'Faolain and Maracle are clearly concerned with feminist ideas, I have tried to give strict attention to textual and intertextual nuances in their work, showing how Cornell is as much on a parallel with these women writers as they are on a parallel with her. There is a very noticeable movement of push and pull in these women's narratives as their female characters defend their positions and resist domination in a number of venues, and retrieve those aspects of their

femininity that have been covered in layers of myth and metaphor. It is not surprising, then, that the palimpsest becomes such a powerful metaphor for women's writing — in Weekes especially, though also in Native writers/critics such as Emma LaRocque and Marianette Jaimes-Guerrero. Jaimes-Guerrero's essay "Savage Erotica Exotica: Media Imagery of Native Women in North America" focuses mainly on film, though it addresses the relevant theme of Eurocentrism: ". . . movie scripts and cinematic imaging are about metaphors, which need to be deconstructed layer upon layer — a process that is like peeling the skins of an onion in order to get to the core of what motivates both racism and sexism, and to counter the Eurocentrism that permeates our Euro-American society" (187). Employing LaRocque's metaphor of the onion, Jaimes-Guerrero identifies a key narrative technique, which shows up in both O'Faolain's and Maracle's writing.

Of the texts covered, the two novels *No Country for Young Men* and *Sundogs* are the strongest, or at least most extensive, examples of re-writing myth and re/constructing narrative. In each novel, O'Faolain and Maracle contribute to the restoration of the localized, internal and domestic realms of both Ireland and Native Canada. Restoration requires a *wresting*, or tearing away of the stereotypes and images that Native women and Irish women alike have internalized. Hence the metaphor of the palimpsest and my emphasis on Weekes' book *Irish Women Writers: An Uncharted Tradition*, a text that encourages a parallel study of Irish and First Nations fiction, given the similar concern with myth and narrative strategies in

Native writing and criticism. As I have shown, characters like Gráinne and Marianne probe the language and myths that attempt to define women's experience and women's lives, and they accomplish this in a number of ways. Gráinne's struggles are aided by the old aunt's awakened memory, which alerts the younger woman to the destructive pattern of myth in the family history and in Ireland's history (Weekes, "Diarmuid and Gráinne Again. . ." 90). By cutting back and forth between the 1920s and the 1970s, O'Faolain also shows how women like Gráinne have found strength by knowing their genealogy, which means, the various historical, mythological and social conditions that have produced them. Irigaray's commentary on genealogy, mythological or otherwise, adds much to this discussion of "escaping names" and how, while notorious *human* women figures are *never* forgotten down through history, women's part in the "divine becoming," their mediation in the conception of mythical figures and actual myths, is often forgotten (Irigaray 10). Linda Alcoff describes geneology in a similar way: "geneology involves asking how a position or view is mediated and constituted through and within the conjunction and conflict of historical, cultural, economic, psychological, and sexual practices" (Alcoff 28). Gráinne ultimately escapes the myth surrounding her name by assuming the mythical character of her namesake: in those moments when she jokes with her lover James about not "living up" to her name (*NC* 170), Gráinne indicates the historical and mythological, not to mention *political* forces

which pressure women to "perform," exposing the way in which myth traps women in its web of meaning.

Though she is less concerned with mythological tales than with stereotypes and the alliance of sexism and racism in Canadian and European culture, Maracle is passionately concerned with education, and especially women's education. Danielle Shaub highlights this fact in her article on "Bertha," though one notices a recurring emphasis on education in the earlier *I am Woman* and in the more recent *Sundogs*. In the preface to a very recent edition of *Sojourner's Truth* and *Sundogs* (1999), Maracle says: "We, as Native women, are in the process of rediscovering and reclaiming our separate body of knowledge. I have felt the burden of having to drive through darkened tunnels of memory and magic to reclaim the internal world of women" (Preface to *Sojourners and Sundogs* 14). The first person narrative, so intimate and interactive in a text such as *Sundogs*, offers the reader a first hand — albeit *fictional* — account of a woman's living/writing experience: as Marianne's narrative progresses, we experience the process of re-writing, of interrogation, of education, of resistance, of rage, of reclamation, and of healing. As I argued in Chapter Two, as Marianne is educated, so are we as readers: as Marianne experiences the pain and pleasure of reconstructing a life, so do we as readers. As with O'Faolain, there is an emphasis in Maracle's fiction on *knowing where you came from*, which involves the two-fold strategy of gaining this knowledge yet subverting it where necessary, where it tends to

inflict violence, in other words. Thus, there is also a sense of a destructive pattern in *Sundogs*, especially as Marianne watches her brother transform from a benevolent patriarch to an incensed master when challenged, and wonders if her new boyfriend, Mark, will follow the same path. Encouraging an even greater awareness of cultural experience, Weston Lebarre notes that, "'to know only one's own tribe is to be a primitive, and to know only one's own generation is mentally to remain always a child'" (quoted in Scott 3). This is certainly the way Marianne feels, and she realizes that her ignorance towards the older women in her family — her mother, her sister, her aunt — adds to the deterioration of her Native community, her Native identity.

There is a great sense of urgency and, often, desperation in both O'Faolain's and Maracle's fiction. "We have so few tools available for the re-construction of our houses," Maracle says, "so few insights into who we all are, collectively and individually, yet re-build we must. I sometimes feel like a foolish young grandmother armed with a teaspoon, determined to remove three mountains from the path to liberation: the mountain of racism, the mountain of sexism and the mountain of nationalist oppression" (Preface to *I am Woman*, x). O'Faolain expresses a similar sentiment in the essay cited above. Yet whereas nationalism in Canada is often viewed in a positive light, despite the fact that it threatens to displace numerous groups who cannot identify with the restricted idea of "Canadianness" proclaimed in the media (I think here of Molson Canadian ads, which define Canadians

as white, male, home-grown, middle-class, hockey-playing nature-lovers) — whereas Canadian nationalism continues to be a top priority (for *worse* rather than for *better*), Irish nationalism has been exchanged for a kind of self-laceration,[xxix] and the Irish writer often expresses a schizophrenia where s/he does not no whether to valorize or vilify the family (and I use these two extremes deliberately). Hence Gráinne's eventual decision to *leave* the "nest," to flee Ireland as Stephen Dedalus did in Joyce's first novel *A Portrait of the Artist As A Young Man*: like Stephen, Gráinne must fly by the nets of nationality, language and religion, though the spaces she must move through are much smaller, much more restricting.

III - THE MYTH OF THE MOTHER

This leads to another important divergence between O'Faolain and Maracle. The former resists the historical emphasis on maternity and child-rearing: "Lots of women *liked* being with children. It made them feel fulfilled. It made Gráinne feel useless and used up like a ruff of old blossom drying in the dimple of an apple" (57). For Marianne, it is matter of being *stripped* of her role as a maternal figure that maddens her and forces her to come to terms with her own disparaging of traditional values that have tended to unite rather than break apart her family and her people. Women's lost social status is also a significant concern in Maracle's short stories, particularly in "Bertha" and "Maggie" where a matriarch and a young eleven-year-old suffocate under the narratives that replace their culture and displace their role in their community. As the narrator remarks in "Bertha":

"No one connected the stripping of woman-power and its transfer to the priest as the basis for the sudden uselessness all the people felt. Disempowered, the old ladies ceased to tell stories and lived out their lives without taking the children to the hills again" (227). Clearly, then, Marianne is challenging a dominant mythology just as surely as Gráinne is. In Gráinne's case the notion of Mother Ireland locks her into the maternal role and, as C. L Innes notes, this has been the case for women throughout Ireland's history: "Throughout the history of its colonization, Ireland has been represented by British imperialists as well as Irish nationalists and artists as female: she is Hibernia, Eire, Mother Ireland, the Poor Old Woman, the Shan Van Vocht [Sean Bhean Bhocht], Cathleen ni Houlihan, the Dark Rosaleen" (2). As I show in Chapter One, this myth, or collection of myths, was popularized by Yeats and incorporated into the revolutionary cause, so that women figured more as inspiring objects than active participants in a cultural negotiation. A story such as "Daughters of Passion" reveals the potency of such myths in contemporary Ireland. "That women mother in a variety of different societies," Chandra Talpade Mohanty notes, "is not as significant as the *value* attached to mothering in these societies. The distinction between the act of mothering and the status attached to it is a very important one — one that needs to be made and analyzed contextually" (Mohanty 263).

Julia Kristeva's analysis of the myth of the Virgin Mother, as well as other feminist studies which have included an archetypal figure like

Antigone,[xxx] focuses on "the way in which the mythology of the Mother obscures women's actual experience of maternity, and even more primordially, the very instinct or drive for motherhood" ("Feminine Writing. . ." 172). In this way, Maracle's fiction about retrieving the traditional experiences of women and mothers in particular is relevant to the present discussion. Judith's sister, Kathleen, angrily exclaims: "'I'm sick of being the woman of the house!. . . Alone! Everyone's mother and nobody's wife'" (*NC* 325), acknowledging the burden of motherhood within the home and within the Irish nation, considering that she is expected to nurture both her biological and her mythological children. While she rejects the myth imposed on her, Kathleen (whose name is synonymous with *Ireland*) reclaims another aspect of her womanhood: the freedom to choose a lover.

The female characters in O'Faolain and Maracle are faced with the pressure of choosing either the narrative that has been thrust on them by their political oppressors or the one that has been thrust on them by their own people, and in most cases, by their own "men folk." For Maracle, the rejection of the latter is the worst possible decision: "The nattering, the abuse," Marianne tells us, "catalyze self-inflicted wounds, and I, and children like me, grab daggers, aim them at our mother's hearts and gash holes in their hopes, dreams and codes of conduct" (82). There is a similar urgency in "Bertha" and "Maggie," especially in the former story where the title character becomes the author of her own demise. For O'Faolain, the *restoration* of the domestic realm is not so much a matter of putting the

pieces back together; with the disintegration of her marriage to Michael, and the growing sense of suffocation as a result of Irish politics and religion, Gráinne's approach comes closer to a final dissolution than a reconciliation. Indeed, acquiescence would mean spiritual death for Gráinne, just as it did for Kathleen, who never did escape the home, and Judith whose mind became warped after being enclosed in the convent for fifty years. Both O'Faolain and Maracle are concerned with the pressures of mothering in a dysfunctional and/or abusive household, and how imperial servitude is re-enacted within the home. Yet, Ireland's re-enactment, as I have noted above, has become a campaign of self-surveillance that has led to degenerate and abusive households and, even more alarming, the use of terrorist tactics even up to the recent day. Thus, Gráinne flees the home, and it is apparent that asserting "national identity" is not so much the solution as asserting a feminine identity within what is posited as "the nation." First Nations people in Canada (in North America as a whole) continually need to remind white Canadians of their presence, of their importance. Women in particular, as Maracle argues, need to reclaim their social status both as wives *and* as mothers — as adult women.

IV - HEALING, SELF-KNOWLEDGE and SPEECH

In both Maracle and O'Faolain, the *feminine* is brought into crisis and women such as Kathleen and Marianne challenge both the State's deprivation of motherhood and its method of burdening women with the task of nurturing the nation. Inverting the feminine, Cornell argues, allows

women to “separate the feminine from the imposed persona of femininity,” which is “one way psychically in which sexual difference comes to have an affirmative ‘life’ rather than the death associated with lack” (Cheah and Grosz 24). Indeed, femininity becomes a wound in colonial discourse. Marianne silently weeps for her brother Rudy, who has inflicted the pain he has suffered from the white macho code of masculinity on his wife and children: “‘Rudy, where are you now? I am bleeding, Rudy. I bleed ancient wounds. I need a bandage, a healing hand only you can give me. Rudy, come home’” (*Sundogs* 82). Similarly, Judith feels probed and wounded by all the efforts to pry her secret loose, and this involves an equally insidious method of psychological manipulation from both the Church and its ambiguous political supporters. O’Faolain herself, as quoted by Ann Weekes, notes that “‘Myths like lego constructions, can be taken apart: a double bonus for the writer, the magnifying effect of invoking myth in the first place, plus the energy involved in revoking its agreed values. Destruction releases energy’” (quoted in Weekes 176).

An Ontario Chippewyan author, Kateria Damm, has argued that “‘[writing] is a means of affirming the cultures, of clarifying lies, of speaking truth, of resisting oppression, of asserting identity, of self-empowerment, of survival, of moving beyond survival. . . . In words, the healing continues’” (quoted in Marken 169). How might this correspond to Irish fiction? It has been argued that *No Country for Young Men*, as one example of contemporary Irish fiction, *cautions* against these very assertions — of

identity, of self-empowerment — especially when they signify the internal disputes between Irish families. Clearly, then, Ireland has something to learn from Canada — which seems to reverse Marken's location of *Ireland* as a model of "successful" resistance; and I deliberately keep *successful* in quotations, as it is dubiously dealt with by Marken. Tempering this criticism, however, I would note Marken's admirable, indeed ethical, attempt to fuse literature and healing, as I myself have attempted to do throughout my thesis project. "Could literature also be instrumental, as Seamus Heaney hints, in healing wounds and scars, forging positive and creative visions for all our futures, giving ourselves a chance to know and 'say [ourselves] properly'?" (160). Another Native voice answers this question to a degree, noting that "'[t]he task before [the native writer] was not simply to learn the lost language of his tribe but rather to appropriate, to tear free of its restricting authority, another language — English — and to make it accessible to Indian discourse'" (Marken 169, quoting Louis Owens). Despite their more recent historical disparities, the Irish and Aboriginal Canadians can relate to each other in terms of the loss of their voice, and this has translated to the continued suppression of women's voices in each of the two cultures.

As a concluding point, I want to consider the restorative effects of narrative reconstruction in Maracle and O'Faolain. I want to reiterate that the insistent yet sensitive narrative of Marianne is a gesture of healing that works through the utterance of buried language, of words that have been

numbed and anaesthetized over time. Healing language is also encouraged by the joining together of women's voices — Marianne's and her mother's, Marianne's and her sister's. In this way, the women learn to "stop inflicting the hell of the outside world on the corridors of [their] own private universe" (212). O'Faolain effects a healing of sorts in a similar way, through Sister Judith's recovery of her memories, which allow Gráinne to both trace her heritage and challenge its restraints. As I demonstrated in both Chapters One and Two, O'Faolain and Maracle restore women's voices by joining women, from often disparate circumstances, together. Stories like "This is My Body," "Man in the Cellar" and "Yin Chin" alert us to women's experiences outside of Ireland and Native Canada, and O'Faolain's interest in other contexts such as Italy, London and early Christian Gaul, as well as Maracle's concern with the large Asian community in her own Vancouver indicate these writers' interest in women's experiences across culture and how these commonalities are often ignored in a single culture's push for independence. The grouping of these stories — *NC*, "Daughters of Passion," "A Pot of Soothing Herbs," "This is My Body," and "Man in the Cellar"; *Sundogs*, "Bertha," "Maggie," "Polka Partners, Uptown Indians and White Folks," and "Yin Chin" — creates a community of O'Faolain women and a community of Maracle women, which I have, in this conclusion, attempted to join together in an even larger community. Perhaps "join" is the wrong word, as I do not want to force a union, just as I have noted that I do not want to force each writer's work to fit a critical or cultural paradigm.

And perhaps it is best that I leave these communities as they are, singular; though it need not be repeated that, in several cases, O'Faolain and Maracle share a commonality in the context of contemporary women's writing. To conclude with the metaphors that shaped this project, healing and self-knowledge begin when wounds are opened afresh and speech finds currency in the voices of women.

> If woman has always functioned 'within' man's discourse, a signifier that annihilates its particular energy, puts down its very different sounds, now it is time for her to displace this 'within,' explode it, overturn it, grab it, make it hers, take it into her woman's mouth, bite its tongue with her woman's teeth, make up her own tongue to get inside of it. And you will see how easily she will well up, from this 'within' where she was hidden and dormant, to the lips where her foams will overflow. (Cixous, quoted in Cornell 173-74)

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Endnotes

[i] These excerpts are taken from a reader commentary entitled, "'Verbality' and 'Reading' in *Ethics and Infinity*," which I submitted to Dr. Glowacka for her Critical Theory class on October 4, 2000. The commentary is based on my close reading of *Ethics and Infinity*, particularly pp. 21-22.

[ii] One extraordinary passage in *Ethics and Infinity* clarifies what I mean by a "cautionary gesture" and how the face is "destitute": "There is first the very uprightness of the face, its upright exposure, without defense. The skin of the face is that which stays most naked, most destitute. It is the most naked, though with a decent nudity. It is the most destitute also: there is an essential poverty in the face; the proof of this is that one tries to mask this poverty by putting on poses, by taking on a countenance. The face is exposed, menaced, as if inviting us to an act of violence. At the same time, the face is what forbids us to kill" (Levinas 86).

[iii] I would personally like to acknowledge a colleague of mine, Kaley Joyes, who referred me to the article in the first place.

[iv] By "speech" I mean the English language, though it is clear that both the Irish and First Nations people share the common experience of language loss. It is worth noting this commonality, especially in light of the fact that the literary revivals in both Ireland and Native Canada were/are fueled by a desire to retrieve the old language — on the one hand, Gaelic, on the other, Cree, or Ojibway, or any number of Native dialects. While the language issue is an important one, my thesis focuses more on narratives/myths in English, on rewritings and re/constructions in English; a full consideration of language loss (and revival) would require another thesis. In Chapters One and Two I do refer to Drucilla Cornell's notion of recovering lost language ("Feminine Writing, Metaphor and Myth," pp. 187), though these sections specifically deal with *women's* loss of *voice*; and that is what I am mainly concerned with.

[v] It is also worth noting that Éire was *not* born as an independent republic but as a "Free State"; a Republic of Ireland was not officially declared until 1949 (Peter and Fiona Somerset Fry 324).

[vi] The book was originally published in 1988.

[vii] Cornell frequently acknowledges Derrida's work in "Feminine Writing, Metaphor and Myth." She discusses Derrida's suspicion of metaphor (167); how deconstruction "reminds us of the limits of the imagination" (169); and Derrida's notion of "double writing," which is based on the "recognition that the very idea of the limit of context, its de-limitation, also implies its non-closure, and the possibility of the transformation of any context" (170).

[viii] A) Translation by Thomas Kinsella. B) I realize that the emphasis on Yeats's contribution to the literary revival tends to overshadow numerous other important literary/political figures, particularly those who had a working knowledge of the Irish language, those who were interested in a *Gaelic* Revival. As Dr. Pádraig Ó Siadhail notes, Pádraic Pearse in particular was "a pioneer figure in modern Irish language literature and criticism and, in the field of education, was — unlike Yeats who knew no Irish — able to access, read and comprehend material in Irish." While my thesis does not deal specifically with the language issue (as I note in my introduction — see note 4), it does, however, acknowledge Yeats's notorious impact on feminine mythology, etc.; and in many of Yeats's poems one can

recognize the influence of Pearse's "A Mother Speaks" and "I am Ireland," two poems in which the voice is primarily Mother Ireland (Innes 24-25). Of course, Pearse was not the only political figure to have engaged in the cultural revival; the Gaelic Revival was a popular movement that preceded the Anglo-Irish "Literary Revival." The Gaelic League, for example, was set up by Douglas Hyde as early as 1893. Again, Irish language literature (as well as Native language literature) is a topic that goes beyond the scope of this project.

[ix] See *Women in Early Modern Ireland* (Eds. Margaret MacCurtain and Mary O'Dowd. Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1991) and *Gender Perspectives in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Eds. Margaret Kelleher and James H. Murphy. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1997), both in bibliography.

[x] This next section on Cathleen ni Houlihan is based on an essay of mine entitled, "W. B. Yeats: The Terrible Beauty of an Anglo-Irish Writer" (submitted to Dr. Guy Chauvin at Saint Mary's University, November 12, 1998; the course was called "The Politics and Government of Ireland"). I will, of course, cite as I did in the original piece.

[xi] Countess Kathleen O'Shea is more of a local (and minor) folk figure. See a fuller discussion of this modern Mother Ireland figure in Foster 97.

[xii] Some of this section, and perhaps my general reading of O'Faolain's fiction, is rooted in an earlier term paper, entitled "The Destructive Pattern in Julia O'Faolain's Fiction: Gender Negotiation and Re-imagining History (herstory) and Myth," submitted to Dr. Cyril Byrne in April 2000, and based on a seminar presentation. The notion of re-writing myth is treated to some degree, though I have expanded upon this in the present project, particularly in the context of Drucilla Cornell's ethical feminist approach.

[xiii] Including the first Penguin Books edition (1980).

[xiv] This is the subject of Thomas Davis's famous poem, "Lament for the Death of Eoghan Ruadh O'Neill," written probably sometime in the 1830s or 1840s. The first stanza runs as follows:

> 'Did they dare, did they dare, to slay Owen Roe O'Neill?'
> 'Yes, they slew with poison him they feared to meet with steel.'
> 'May God wither up their hearts! May their blood cease to flow!
> May they walk in living death, who poisoned Owen Roe!'
> (In *The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse*, 303)

[xv] I dealt with this issue in a paper entitled, "Lo(o)sing Antigone: The Prospect of Re-Metaphorization (sic.) within the Cavern of Hegelian Philosophy," submitted to Dr. Dorota Glowacka in December 2000. The paper is also rooted in ethical feminism, especially the work of Drucilla Cornell.

[xvi] I have not relied solely on Weekes' or Ní Shéaghdha's version, rather I have woven the versions together, further emphasizing (at least implicitly) how myths (and our understanding/ interpretation/ translation of them) become altered over time. Clearly, then, the tale I paraphrase is more of a mishmash of many versions, many retellings of the original tale (whatever *that* may be).

[xvii] A) By "**transcribers**," I mean the monks and religious scribes who translated and took down the mythological tales probably between the eighth and twelfth centuries. B) **Derdriu** is another example, and her story, told in the tale "The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu" (Jeffrey Gantz [trans.], *Early Irish Myths and Sagas,* London: Penguin, 1981, 256-67), represents an earlier version of the Diarmuid and Gráinne tale: like Gráinne, Derdriu is first betrothed

to an older man — in this case King Conchubar — and then falls in love and runs off with a younger man — in this case Noísiu — and is returned back to her husband after her lover is killed.

[xviii] Female bodies, moreover, often become vessels: to *receive* history, divine inspiration, the penis — each of which turns into something more than it is, the penis, for example, metaphorized and erroneously "realized" as the phallus: "In the end, it's just a penis," Cornell says ("Feminine Writing . . ." 179). This psychoanalytic reading becomes particularly relevant in my section on O'Faolain's "Pot of Soothing Herbs."

[xix] The story, from the collection *Man in the Cellar* (1974), was enlarged into, or at least makes up a small section of the novel *Women in the Wall*, published a year later (1975). Because I am already dealing with the larger work, *No Country for Young Men*, I want to restrict my further investigation to shorter pieces, and "This is My Body" encapsulates some of *Women in the Wall*'s major themes and provides a vivid sketch of the abbess Agnes.

[xx] As Peter and Fiona Somerset Fry note, though there was initially little sympathy with the rebellion (290), when word of the executions spread in early May, Dubliners became bitterly hostile (295), and militant groups like the Irish Republican Brotherhood (changed to the Irish Republican Army in the early 1920s) gained greater local support in the years to follow.

[xxi] See, for example, "This is My Body," "The Knight" (also in the collection *Man in the Cellar*, 97-115), and "Turkish Delight" (found in the collection *We Might See Sights*, 75-79) among numerous other stories.

[xxii] See note 18. O'Faolain is clearly engaging with the type of psychoanalytic rhetoric found in Cornell, and the theme of sexual "play" in "A Pot of Soothing Herbs" has interesting implications for *gender performativity* — but *that* is yet another thesis.

[xxiii] I understand this to mean, those shacks that were *not* already perched in the water. One particular passage clears up any confusion: "Immersed in salt water and raw sewage as they have been this past half century, they are beginning to show a little wear" (222).

[xxiv] Monique Mojica's play *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1991) presents one of the most vigorous challenges to such images in recent years, parodying a plethora of Hollywood mutations of the Indian woman. For further discussion of such stereotypes, see Marianette Jaimes-Guerrero's "Savage Erotica Exotica: Media Imagery of Native Women in North America" in *Native North America: Critical and Cultural Perspectives* (see bibliography), 187-210.

[xxv] See, for example, *The National Post* for Wednesday, February 3, 1999 (section A3). Carl Honoré's article "When peace came to Belfast" discusses the more recent tactics that IRA and Protestant paramilitaries have used against their own people.

[xxvi] I want to acknowledge (once again) Dr. Padraig Ó Siadhail who alerted me to this complexity: as he argues, "sensationalism sells but the majority of Irish papers [mentioned in my text] have engaged in such a massive boosterism in support of the Peace Process that they appear almost as propaganda arms of the sponsoring Governments and their spin-doctors."

[xxvii] By "rage" I mean the *emotion*, not the violent *act* it is so often confused with. See, for example, Terry J. Allison and Renée R. Curry, "'All Anger and Understanding': Kureishi, Culture and Contemporary Constructions of Rage," in *States of Rage: Emotional Eruption, Violence, and Social Change,* Renée R. Curry and Terry L. Allison (eds.) (New York: New

York U P, 1996), 146-66. The essay, and the text in general, focuses on expressions of post-colonial rage in contemporary Indian and Asian writing.

[xxviii] It should be noted that O'Faolain is referring more to the shock of *initiating* a break from the Empire than the actual break itself, which did not take place until 1949 (I would acknowledge Dr. Ó Siadhail again; see also note 4).

[xxix] Indeed, there is a strong tradition of self-parody in Irish writing if one considers such key texts as Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) and "A Modest Proposal" (1729); Bernard Shaw's *John Bull's Other Island* (1907); James Joyce's *Dubliners* (1905) and A *Portrait of the Artist As A Young Man* (1916); and Myles na Gopaleen's *An Béal Bocht* (translated as *The Poor Mouth*; 1941).

[xxx] See, for example, Tina Chanter's *The Ethics of Eros* (New York: Routledge, 1995), and Carol Jacobs "Dusting Antigone" in *MLN*, 111: 5 (Dec. 1996): 889-917.