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"The Foresight to Become a Mermaid": Folkloric Cyborg Women in Éilís Ní Dhuibhne's Short Stories

Rebecca Graham
University College Cork, Ireland

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Abstract. Éilís Ní Dhuibhne is both a folklorist and a feminist, who "took an interest in rewriting or re-inventing women's history, a history which had been largely unwritten" (Ní Dhuibhne, "Negotiating" 73). Folklore stories and motifs abound in her writing. Elke D'hoker argues that Ní Dhuibhne reimagines and rewrites folktales to "reflect and interpret the social values and attitudes of a postmodern society" (D'hoker 137). The repurposing of folklore allows Ní Dhuibhne to interrogate some of the complex and controversial ways that Irish society has attempted to represent and control women, entrenching taboos about female behaviours and sexualities. Using Donna Haraway's cyborg feminism and Karen Barad's deployment of Haraway's theory of diffraction, this article focuses on issues of voice and orality, and the female body in "The Mermaid Legend", "Midwife to the Fairies", and "Holiday in the Land of Murdered Dreams", to argue that Ní Dhuibhne's repurposing of folklore is a radically feminist undertaking. All three short stories, which feature female protagonists, reveal diverse, transgressive, sexual mothers and maidens whose symbolic connections with folklore allow them to challenge the restrictive constructions of women in Irish society, creating spaces to explore alternative, heterogeneous, feminist re-conceptions of identity and belonging.

Key Words. Cyborg Feminism, Diffraction, Shape-Shifting, Fairies, Mermaids, Female Sexuality, Maternity.

Resumen. Élilís Ní Dhuibhne es una escritora folclorista y feminista que "se interesa por reescribir o reinventar la historia de las mujeres, una historia que en gran medida no se había escrito" (Ní Dhuibhne, "Negotiating" 73). En su obra son abundantes los motivos, y los relatos en sí, tomados del folclore. Elke D'hoker opina que Ní Dhuibhne imagina de nuevo, y vuelve también a escribir, los cuentos populares "para interpretar y reflexionar sobre los valores y actitudes de la sociedad posmoderna" (D'hoker 137). Esta vuelta al folclore permite a Ní Dhuibhne cuestionar algunos de los controvertidos y complejos procedimientos por los cuales la sociedad irlandesa ha intentado representar y controlar a las mujeres, reforzando así determinados tabúes sobre el comportamiento y la sexualidad de las mujeres. Este artículo toma como metodología el feminismo cyborg de Donna Haraway, así como el desarrollo por

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parte de Karen Barad de la teoría de la difracción de la propia Haraway, para estudiar temas de voz y oralidad, así como de representación del cuerpo femenino en las historias "The Mermaid Legend", "Midwife to the Fairires", y "Holiday in the Land of Murdered Dreams". El objetivo último es demostrar que el tratamiento del folclore por parte de Ní Dhuibhne es un proyecto radicalmente feminista. Todos estos relatos, en los cuales encontramos una protagonista femenina, muestran diversas madres transgresoras y sexuales, así como doncellas cuyas conexiones simbólicas con el folclore dan pie a la subversión del restrictivo concepto de mujer en la sociedad irlandesa, creando a su vez espacios para explorar nuevas definiciones de identidad y pertenencia que sean alternativas y heterogéneas.

Palabras clave. Feminismo cyborg, difracción, cambios de modalidad, hadas, sirenas, sexualidad femenina, maternidad.

Éilís Ní Dhuibhne is a formally experimental contemporary writer whose published works include short stories, novels, plays, and children's literature, in both English and Irish. She has a PhD in folklore and has described herself as a "literary ethnologist … who is interested in the detail of life" (Ní Dhuibhne, "Negotiating" 70). Ní Dhuibhne is also a self-proclaimed feminist. Her feminism was galvanized by the Women's Studies forum at University College Dublin, started by prominent feminist Ailbhe Smyth in the early 1980s. Ní Dhuibhne has stated: "Feminist theory changed my world view … I began to write exclusively about women from that point. I began to focus on specifically female experiences. I took an interest in rewriting or re-inventing women's history, a history which had been largely unwritten" ("Negotiating" 73). One of the primary ways in which Ní Dhuibhne reimagines women's history is through the repurposing and revising of folklore stories and motifs. Using Donna Haraway's cyborg feminism and Karen Barad's deployment of Haraway's theory of diffraction, this article focuses on issues of voice and orality, and the female body in Ní Dhuibhne's short stories, to argue that her repurposing of folklore is a radically feminist undertaking.

The dualistic logic of Western ideologies whereby nature opposes culture and, woman as aligned with nature opposes man, has resulted in what Donna Haraway calls the logic of domination, that is, "domination based on differences seen as natural, given, inescapable, and therefore moral" (7). As Val Plumwood explains:

> the category of nature is a field of multiple exclusion and control, not only of non-humans, but of various groups of humans and aspects of human life which are cast as nature. Thus, racism, colonialism and sexism have drawn their conceptual strength from casting sexual, racial and ethnic differences as closer to the animal and the body construed as a sphere of inferiority, as a lesser form of humanity lacking the full measure of rationality or culture. (4)

The establishment and management of boundaries is vital to the preservation of this binary logic of domination (Legler 229). Western patriarchal societies diligently demarcate self and other, centre and periphery, culture and nature, and so on. Donna Haraway, in her cyborg manifesto, conceptualizes a way out of the dualistic binaries of Western ideologies: "My cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities" (154). Haraway's cyborg "is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self" (163), recalling the fairies and shape-shifters of folk tales and legends that are always in the process of being 'disassembled and reassembled' over time. Significantly, the tools of cyborg writing are "often stories, retold stories, versions that reverse and displace

the hierarchical dualisms of naturalised identities. In retelling origin stories, cyborg authors subvert the central myths of origin in Western culture" (Haraway 175). I would argue that Ní Dhuibhne's shape-shifting, vocalizing female protagonists in her folkloric stories enact a kind of cyborg feminism which breaks down the binary logic of Western patriarchy. In her article, "'Some Hardcore Storytelling': Uses of Folklore by Contemporary Irish Writers", Ní Dhuibhne reveals:

> I believe I refer to folktales and legends in my stories because I feel their rich images and symbols enhance and deepen the texture of my stories of contemporary life. I see them as a poetic thread in the tapestry of the thing I am trying to make. The rich coloured light of the folktales illuminates the grey shadows of modern life which I am trying to capture in my writing. (215)

Ní Dhuibhne's reference to light and shadow recalls Karen Barad's description of diffraction in which "there is no sharp boundary separating the light from the darkness: light appears within the darkness within the light within" (Barad 170). In scientific terms, diffraction is defined as "the process by which a beam of light is spread out or bent after passing through a slit or across the edge of an opaque body, typically accompanied by interference of the wave forms that result" (*OED*). As a result, diffraction

> troubles dichotomies, including some of the most sedimented and stabilized/stabilizing binaries, such as organic/inorganic and animate/ inanimate. Indeed, the quantum understanding of diffraction troubles the very notion of *dicho-tomy* – cutting into two – as a singular act of absolute differentiation, fracturing this from that, now from then. (Barad 168)

Ní Dhuibhne's intertextual interweaving of folkloric stories and motifs within and among her contemporary short stories diffracts notions of time, space, and gender, presenting partial, monstrous, feminist cyborg identities and possibilities.

Ní Dhuibhne, discussing her second collection of short stories, *Eating Women is Not Recommended*, says "[all] the stories are concerned with shape-shifting, with mutability" ("When Scholarship" 9). Ní Dhuibhne's monstrous female protagonists shape-shift, mutate, transform and renegotiate their bodies' boundaries to reimagine and recreate their lives. For Luce Irigaray, women's bodies are open containers, mutable, and malleable, and this ambiguity and openness threatens the stability and static certainty of patriarchal conceptions of identity (Irigaray 28). "The Mermaid Legend", from *Eating Women is Not Recommended*, comprises dual narratives of shape-shifting mermaids. The interposed, translated legend is set "in the old days" and is about "a man named Eoin Óg" (171). He is a fisherman and sees a woman when out on his boat. He has "heard talk of women of the sea and it was said that if they threw off a cloak they could not return without it" (171). Eoin takes and hides the mermaid's cloak and she has no choice but to stay with him, "and to make a long story short he had her until two children were born, two girls" (171). Some years later, with the help of her daughters, the mermaid discovers her cloak and escapes back into the sea, returning "now and again to see the children … [to] see that they were alright" (175).

This legend type, with its subtle and implicit discussion of contemporary marital relations, allowed societies to communicate with each other about important issues such as the roles of men and women in marriage, sex, and domestic abuse. Bo Almqvist, the distinguished folklorist and Ní Dhuibhne's husband, notes that this type of legend was very popular in Ireland. He believes this is because they are "simultaneously realistic and romantic … loaded with strong emotions: homesickness, love, conflicts between double loyalties" (8-

9). In contrast to the popular legend, Ní Dhuibhne's contemporary version of this story is told from the perspective of an English woman living in Ireland and working as a barmaid, who falls in love with and marries an Irish man and together they have two daughters.

As hard as she tries, the barmaid cannot assume the role of suffering wife. She thinks of herself and her husband as "just too different [from each other]. Not just the old English Irish bit, or the Protestant Catholic bit, or whatever. We were deep down different, like different species or something. Fish and fowl we were" (Ní Dhuibhne, "The Mermaid" 169). The barmaid feels trapped "between double loyalties", between her family life and the freedom she craves. Katarzyna Poloczek argues that mermaids are border creatures:

> becoming-mermaid requires cross-overs and intersections between earth and sea, human and animal, speech and silence … The mermaid is always located on the boundaries of the familiar and magical: between floodtide and ebbtide; between the rise and fall of water. (138)

Ní Dhuibhne's short story, in the ways that it formally and thematically undermines and contradicts structures of linear time and patriarchal knowledges, could be described as diffractive. As Barad explains:

> Diffraction is not a set pattern, but rather an iterative (re)configuring of patterns of differentiation-entangling. As such, there is no moving beyond, no leaving the 'old' behind. There is no absolute boundary between here-now and there-then. There is nothing that is new; there is nothing that is not new. (168).

The interconnected narratives of trapped mermaids highlight Irish society's prevailing disregard for women's rights. Patriarchal conceptions of linear progress are undermined by the interweaving of the women's suffering. "The Mermaid Legend" was first published in 1991. Divorce was not legalized in Ireland until 1996. In Ní Dhuibhne's contemporary story, the barmaid concludes that she must escape her unhappy marriage: "I had to get up and go. Desert the sinking ship. There was no other way. No divorce across the water … So it's divorce Irish style for me: out in the middle of the night when he's asleep" ("The Mermaid" 173). The barmaid's narrative reveals her trapped position as a married woman in Ireland, which intersects with the mermaid of the legend who is also trapped and powerless. The barmaid's self-described mermaid status symbolizes her in-between, "othered" position is Irish society, whilst also aligning her with the shape-shifting mermaid of the popular legend.

Unlike the omniscient narrative style of the legend, Ní Dhuibhne's contemporary story is told from the woman's perspective. The barmaid's narration is colloquial and conversational. Her highly sexualised, flirtatious, and crude language highlights her deviation from societal expectations. The visceral and oral qualities of her narration align the barmaid with the folkloric mermaid of the legend. Yet, in the interposed legend, the mermaid remains silent. Ní Dhuibhne has argued that "literary and narrative creativity has little to do with the invention of plot, and everything to do with how you tell the tale" (qtd. in O'Connor 271). Highly significant to Ní Dhuibhne's feminist reimaginings of folklore is the insertion of female protagonists as narrators of their tales. In "The Mermaid Legend", the otherness of women is foregrounded in a shape-shifting female protagonist who defiantly declares: "I'm a sea-girl myself" (175). According to Haraway, "we can learn from our fusions with animals and machines how not to be Man, the embodiment of Western logos" (173). Reweaving the traditional legend from the perspective of the "other", reverses the curtailing and controlling of women as objects and positions them as subjects in their own stories. Seamus Heaney, discussing the mermaid legend, says that "the sense of male intrusion is in it very strongly and

the loss of freedom" (qtd. in Almqvist 45). Ní Dhuibhne's cyborg mermaid overwrites this intrusion, remaking her possible futures.

Ní Dhuibhne's short story "Midwife to the Fairies", first published in 1988, also features a dual narrative of folkloric women. It comprises the interposition of a legend within a rewritten, contemporary version of the legend. Ní Dhuibhne uses an Irish version of this common legend, which she translated from a manuscript in the National Folklore Collection, housed in University College Dublin, to include in this story. The protagonist of Ní Dhuibhne's contemporary story is an Irish midwife who is visited by a man late one night and asked to accompany him to his house to help him with a woman he hesitantly calls "his wife" ("Midwife" 27). This mirrors the translated, interposed legend in which a "handywoman" is visited by a night-time caller and asked to accompany him on his mare to help his pregnant wife.

In Ní Dhuibhne's contemporary version of "Midwife to the Fairies", the imagery of the rural Irish landscape and the description of the midwife's journey to the man's house symbolize an uncanny return to the womb. As she travels along a country road in the man's car, the midwife can see nothing, "except the black night" (25). They travel in silence, foreshadowing the unspeakable nature of the events surrounding this pregnancy: "Neither of us said a word the whole way down" (25). This dual narrative of childbirth echoes the structure of Julia Kristeva's essay "Stabat Mater", in which she interposes a critique of the cult of the Virgin Mary with a personal account of her experience of pregnancy and childbirth. In "Stabat Mater" Kristeva describes "a mother [as] a continuous separation, a division of the very flesh and consequently a division of language" (178). This imagery of the pregnant body divided and multiplied recalls Haraway's cyborg which, as previously stated, "is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self" (Haraway 163). Thus, I would argue that the ways in which Ní Dhuibhne's short story is formally and thematically linked to maternity and childbirth, aligns with Haraway's cyborg feminist ethics.

According to Kristeva, the maternal body reveals the foreignness or otherness that is in all of us. The baby, which had been a "graft" (Kristeva 237) of the mother's body, becomes an "other". She argues, "[u]ncanny foreignness is within us: we are our own foreigners, we are divided" (181). Kristeva's theory of foreignness is influenced by Freud's famous essay, "The Uncanny", which is "concerned with the phenomenon of the 'double'" (Freud 629), in which the double comes to mean: "the frightening element [that] can be shown to be something repressed which *recurs*" (Freud 634). Ní Dhuibhne's doubling narrative of childbirth whereby the handywoman's tale "recurs" in the story of the contemporary midwife connects the women in a continuum of suffering propagated by linear, patriarchal ideologies and highlights the otherness of women and their multiplying bodies.

Kristeva developed a theory of textual memory called intertextuality, influenced by Mikhail Bakhtin, which she defines as "a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (37). For Bakhtin and Kristeva, "texts cannot be separated from the larger cultural or social textuality out of which they are constructed" (Allen 36), and these "dialogic, heteroglot aspects of language are essentially threatening to any unitary, authoritarian conception of society, art and life" (Allen 30). Intertextuality has a revolutionary power to destabilize, infiltrate, and complicate unifying, monologic discourses. Significantly, folklore is considered a revolutionary, subversive form of communication. Jacqueline Fulmer, paraphrasing Alan Dundes, explains that "folklore, as it forms both the medium and the material for many indirect communications, possesses a unique resistance to censorship, since it can pass from person to person in ways no state or media can effectively control" ("Indirection" 223).

The Irish word for folklore, *béaloideas*, directly translates as "mouth knowledge", highlighting the vocal, visceral aspects of the oral storytelling tradition, and drawing connections with intertextual theories of heteroglot discourses. Haraway argues that, "[c]yborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves. This is a dream not of a common language, but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia" (181). Ní Dhuibhne's short stories reveal a "powerful infidel heteroglossia" through the ways in which they diffract rebellious, subversive, reimagined texts, voices, and subjectivities.

The midwife of Ní Dhuibhne's contemporary story understands that there is an unwanted, illegitimate pregnancy to deal with. The description of the man's house is womb-like in its chasmic darkness. The house is "down a lane where there was absolutely nothing to be seen at all, not a house, not even a sheep. The house you could hardly see either, actually. It was kind of buried like at the side of the road, in a kind of a hollow" ("Midwife" 26). The description of the man's house mirrors that of the fairy mound in the legend, drawing the two stories together. The protagonists of the dual narratives share a dangerous calling which puts them in contact with marginalized others, covertly referred to as "fairies".

Fairies are marginal, dangerous, otherworldly creatures that have been used in folk tales and legends for generations to speak the unspeakable. As Angela Bourke explains, "[f]airies belong to the margins, and so can serve as reference points and metaphors for all that is marginal in human life" (28). When the midwife arrives at the man's house, the scene she describes adds to her sense of uncanny fear. While the family watch TV together in the warm kitchen, the pregnant young woman lies alone in another room. The midwife describes how Sarah "was lying on the bed, on her own. No heat in the room, nothing" ("Midwife" 26). The midwife delivers a baby girl to the silent, young mother and puts them into bed together because there is no cot for the baby: "God help her…That's the way in these cases as often as not. Nobody wants to know" ("Midwife" 27). Sarah's silence throughout the encounter, her inability to communicate her needs, underpins her voicelessness and her marginalization, and highlights the painful historical reality of illegitimate pregnancies for young women in rural Ireland. Ní Dhuibhne has said, "[t]he controversy about abortion in Ireland is one which has interested and angered me, as it has many women" ("Negotiating" 71).

During the 1970s and 1980s Irish women campaigned for equal rights on a number of issues. In 1983 there were fears that abortion might be legalised in certain cases in Ireland in the near future. As a result, a referendum was held to include an amendment to the Constitution of Ireland (Bunreacht na hÉireann), worded as follows: "The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right" (Article 40.3.3°). This amendment, though contested, was voted into the constitution, confirming Ireland's anti-abortion stance, and typifies the rhetoric and beliefs about women's bodies and reproductive rights at this time. Ní Dhuibhne's fairy story provides the creative space for explorations of Irish women's untold stories of unwanted, illegitimate, and dangerous pregnancies.

After the delivery, when the midwife has been returned home safely, she cannot stop thinking about: "the little girl, the little baby" ("Midwife" 28) and thinks she should have done more to help Sarah and her baby girl. The midwife's worries are justified when she sees Sarah, "her round baby face, big head of red hair" ("Midwife" 28), innocently staring out at her from the evening paper. Sarah's red hair is doubly referential, at once aligning her with fairies, as it is often said they have red hair, thus reinforcing the idea of her otherness and marginality, and also pointing to her familiarity, her sameness, as red hair is also associated with Irishness. The character of Sarah is at once a stereotype of the silent Irish mother and a

subversive, boundary-breaking fairy, a monstrous, multiplying cyborg. The newspaper reports that the baby has been found dead and Sarah is brought in for questioning:

> about a week later, didn't I get the shock of my life when I opened the evening paper and saw your one, Sarah, staring out at me … And there was a big story about the baby. Someone was after finding it dead in a shoebox, in a kind of rubbish dump they had the back of the house. And she was arrested, … In for questioning. I could have dropped down dead there and then. ("Midwife" 32)

Four years before the publication of "Midwife to the Fairies", there was a high profile case in County Kerry in which two babies were found dead in two separate places, both alleged to have been murdered. One woman, Joanna Hayes, was controversially arrested for both murders. Sarah's story parallels that of the Kerry Babies case in which Hayes was almost instantly condemned by both the Gardaí and the media. In this case, the judge threw out the charges for lack of evidence. A subsequent tribunal revealed the prejudicial attitudes of An Garda Síochána and of Irish society, in general, towards unmarried mothers. Ní Dhuibhne's dual narrative of secret childbirth becomes all the more uncanny for readers because it parallels these real and terrible events.

In Ní Dhuibhne's short story, church and state officials continue to ignore issues of women's bodily and reproductive rights in spite of numerous cases of rape, abortion, and infanticide. Ní Dhuibhne has stated:

> The position of the right suggests that abortion has never occurred in this country and cannot be allowed now. Sources indicate, however, that even if abortion was not practised much here, infanticide was common, and exposure of infants occurs even today. There is, as invariably in Ireland where any sexual issue is concerned, a stark contrast between the official version of things and the true story. ("Negotiating" 71)

The midwife's husband urges her to remain silent about her encounter with Sarah and her family. In the end, the midwife ignores her husband's advice and goes to the Garda station to tell her story. Outside the station a young man threatens her with a knife and sneers, "keep your mouth shut. Or else!" ("Midwife" 29). The final italicized interjection in the story describes how the "people of the hill, the wee folk" (29) take the handywoman's eye out because she recognizes and speaks to them. "You'll never see me again as long as you live" (30), says the man whose wife she has helped. The violent reactions to both women for speaking are a damning indictment of the perpetual silence of Irish society about issues relating to women's reproductive and bodily rights, and the trauma and distress it causes.

In both "Midwife to the Fairies" and "The Mermaid Legend", Ní Dhuibhne reweaves folk tales, establishing herself as a storyteller in the oral Irish tradition and wielding her influence over the stories she is telling. In the short story "Holiday in the Land of Murdered Dreams", Ní Dhuibhne rewrites her own story, "The Master Key", which featured in a collection of interlinked stories by seven female Irish writers, *Ladies' Night at Finbar's Hotel* (1999). This has implications for the ways in which Ní Dhuibhne's writing evaluates and represents Ireland's oral storytelling tradition. Ní Dhuibhne respects the craft and skills of storytellers to respond to the interests and concerns of their specific audiences and to shape their stories accordingly. I would argue that she continues in the craft of shaping and reshaping stories to suit particular audiences and thus, creates a sense of the oral tradition as continuing to thrive in the present through her writing. Her status as a female storyteller is also in part a signal towards the many female storytellers that have been at times overlooked in the study of folklore. Ní Dhuibhne has discussed the misconceptions regarding the number

of female storytellers in Ireland and the kinds of stories they would tell. She reveals that "a cursory check of informants' [storytellers'] names in the IFC archive indicates that somewhere between a quarter and one-third of the names are those of women" ("International" 1217). She also argues that women narrators had an extensive knowledge of all tale types ("International" 1217). I would argue that by reweaving her own story into her tapestry of interwoven stories, Ní Dhuibhne foregrounds the influence of women in Ireland's storytelling traditions.

"Holiday in the Land of Murdered Dreams" highlights the significance of women's storytelling in a number of ways. Early in the story, the point is made that storytelling is common in Ireland. The protagonist, Detta, remarks that her husband, Piet, is "as Dutch as a tin of cocoa", and his practical Dutch mind does not need to "embroider reality" ("Holiday" 92). In contrast, "In Ireland embroidery, often of a very complicated kind, had always been all the rage" (92). Telling stories is presented as a quintessentially Irish occupation. Detta returns to Dublin from Holland to reimagine and retell her story of herself.

Detta is a middle-aged Irish woman who lives in Holland but is staying in a hotel in Dublin. Detta's past is revealed in flashbacks which are interposed within the short story's contemporary narrative: falling in love with a boy called Conor, working in the hotel she is now staying in, her pregnancy and the subsequent adoption of her baby boy and Conor's desertion. Detta has returned to Ireland to meet her son Paul, to come to terms with the painful memories of her past, and to move forward with her life. Throughout the story, folkloric imagery diffracts Detta's identity, allowing her to reimagine herself and her past life.

Detta's younger self, Bernadette, was shy and quiet. She was never heard, especially not by men: "people usually seemed unable to hear what Detta was saying. A lot of her slow, low comments faded into the air …" ("Holiday" 95). Detta's naïve, voiceless compliance allows her to be "recreated by [Conor]" into a Romantic ideal, a Kathleen Ní Houlihan figure (103). Conor's favourite thing about Detta is her "Irish colleen hair" like a waterfall of red, "it curled and waved in gleaming cascades down to her waist" (102). Detta's red hair, like that of the young mother Sarah in "Midwife to the Fairies", enforces both her Irishness and her otherness. Conor "saw the body as a real enemy" (104), and Detta remembers falling in love with a perfect boy who "respects" her ability to restrain her sexual urges as he does. Detta tries to please Conor by dressing and acting demurely and modestly. Bernadette's mother taught her she would be "a martyr to men" and "she fulfilled her mother's expectations" (115). Walking around Dublin, the older Detta spies a statue of Saint Bernadette supplicating to the Virgin Mary. Detta's mother moulded her for her role as "heroic, saintly, put-upon Irishwoman" (116), as Saint Bernadette, supplicating and silent, without agency or control.

Detta as red-haired martyr recalls the many nationalistic constructions of Ireland as angelic and chaste, as a self-sacrificing mother for whom men fight and die. Prominent figures of the Celtic Revival of the early twentieth century, such as Lady Gregory and W. B. Yeats, developed Romantic images of Mother Ireland and notions of Ireland's heroic past to bolster their nationalistic political objectives. Folklore became subsumed in their project to promote a pure and ancient Celtic culture and race, separate and distinct from Britain and the rest of the world. As Claire Connolly writes, "such stereotyped images of idealized silent women and heroic active men are of course in many ways a travesty of the rich and complex roles played by women both now and in the past" (3).

Detta's secret pregnancy and her alignment with St Bernadette uncannily recalls the real-life tragic case of Ann Lovett, from Granard in County Longford. Ann was a fifteen-year-old girl who, on a cold day in January 1984, gave birth on her own to a baby boy at a grotto dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Passers-by found Ann hemorrhaging badly, and her baby boy was dead beside her. Ann died later that day. Her local community refused to comment on the circumstances which had led the young girl to give birth in such a setting. The revelation of

Detta's shame, rejection, and heartbreak as a result of her teenage pregnancy and the adoption of her baby, reveal the damaging effects of conservative Ireland's control and repression of female sexuality. The older Detta thinks of her reasons for hiding her pregnancy from Conor: "The society was misogynistic then; that was recognized by the budding, despised, women's libbers, who already then were creating a flutter of protest against the deeply ingrained hatred of girls and women in Irish society" ("Holiday" 115). Detta, looking back, realizes the prison of silence that kept her pregnancy a shameful, taboo secret.

Derek Hand describes Ní Dhuibhne's fiction as "offer[ing] the possibility of renegotiating and reimagining, of getting beyond restrictive stereotypes toward a more accurate appraisal of and engagement with contemporary Ireland" (219). As the older Detta narrates her story, she reimagines herself as a mermaid. Detta remembers her younger self as unable to speak up. Conor was different from other people because he seemed to really listen to her: "He could open her up … In his presence she was transmogrified from being one of the quiet ones to being great gas …" ("Holiday" 95). Detta undergoes a powerful transformation when she falls in love with Conor: "Detta felt herself descend into love as into a warm, teeming ocean. Further and further down she went, losing sight of everything that floated on top of this sea, losing all sight and all memory of common dry land. She transformed, girl to fish, girl to mermaid" (102). Haraway argues "[m]onsters have always defined the limits of community in Western imaginations" (180). She states that "[c]yborg unities are monstrous and illegitimate; … [providing] potent myths for resistance and recoupling" (154). Detta-as-mermaid has a voice and a language with which to reimagine her story of herself.

On the night of the leaving certificate results, Detta and Conor go to the Ocean Club with its "green and blue swirly door" ("Holiday" 106). Marina Warner identifies the colour blue as "the colour of ambiguous depth, of the heavens and of the abyss …[with] the tint of the marvelous and the inexplicable, of desire …" (243). Inside the club there is "a dark cave of a room … [decorated] with shells and mermaids and fish, its lights very low. A small jazz band played, deep throbbing tunes that quickly caught Detta under the ribs, jagged her heart" ("Holiday" 106). Dáithí Ó hÓgáin states that "the otherworld was long considered to be underwater in Irish tradition" (343). Ó hÓgáin describes fairy dwellings as "beautiful places, decorated with precious metals and with sumptuous food and drink and melodious music" (207), and "all [have] a certain aura of mystery" (211). In the mysterious, melodious Ocean Club, Detta and Conor dance dirtily together, alcohol and music transforming them:

> [Detta] bridged a gap. Swot to slag … On that night they transmogrified, as men become swans or monsters or beasts, and became what they normally were not. She did anyway. And he, if not transformed, at least acquiesced. He allowed himself to be carried along on the wave of her wildness. ("Holiday" 107)

Detta's shape-shifting allows her to cross the boundaries of acceptable behaviour and unleash her primitive, erotic *jouissance*. Later, Detta and Conor make love in a room at the hotel. Detta describes how the room "embraced them … its dark uterine redness cradled their first intercourse" ("Holiday" 107). The description of the hotel room is reminiscent of the womb-like journey to the fairy world in "Midwife to the Fairies", unifying Ní Dhuibhne's examples of the potent, transgressive power of female sexuality to transcend the constraints of patriarchal society.

At the end of the short story, the older Detta undergoes a kind of remaking or remodelling when she reconciles with her baby boy, now a grown man. At this point, her narrative becomes disjointed and fragmented so that "later and then became now" ("Holiday" 118), recalling Barad's description of diffraction in which "[t]here is no absolute boundary

between here-now and there-then" (Barad 168). Detta's narrative ends with a flowing, unstructured list of words: "Peonies burgeoning pink and powerful narcissi cream as newbirth … madness sunlight starlight moonlight riverlight … oh Danny boy she loves you" ("Holiday" 119). Detta's fragmented language breaks down barriers of past and present in her interwoven narratives, deconstructing all the different versions of Detta that have been created by external pressures. Detta's soul bursts into "a million singing fragments" (119), allowing her to be reimagined, regenerated, "monstrous, duplicated, potent" (Haraway 181). "Holiday in the Land of Murdered Dreams", through its diffractive use of folkloric motifs, creatively suggests ways for women to tell their own stories, to find their own voices, within the interwoven stories of Irish society.

Ní Dhuibhne has stated: "if a folklore item ceases to have relevance to society, it ceases to exist" (Ní Dhuibhne, "International" 1215). Ní Dhuibhne, as storyteller, remoulds and repurposes folklore stories and motifs to frame contemporary debates about women's rights in Irish society. The use of Irish folklore, an ancient oral tradition of storytelling intrinsically connected to the people and places of Ireland, connects generations of Irish women and their suffering as a result of a restrictive, patriarchal society. As Fulmer argues, "Ní Dhuibhne's magical folk women challenge erroneous and limiting assumptions about women in conjunction with patriarchal authority, whether from Irish males, remnants of colonial pressure, or the state" (*Folk Women* 77). Ní Dhuibhne's shape-shifting female protagonists break apart the rigid constrictions of their contemporary societies through the active engagement of their sexual bodies, and the recognition of their female voices echoing in Ireland's storytelling traditions. Her repurposed folkloric women enact cyborg possibilities for multiple, radical, feminist futures.

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Rebecca Graham is a PhD student in the School of English, University College Cork. Her thesis analyses Éilís Ní Dhuibhne's writing using theories of ecocriticism and écriture féminine. Her research is funded by the Irish Research Council. She is Postgraduate Representative for the International Association for the Study of Irish Literatures (IASIL) and Book Reviews Editor for Aigne, an interdisciplinary postgraduate journal based in UCC.

rebecca.graham@umail.ucc.ie