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Hélène Cixous's *Autre Bisexualité* and the Eternal Feminine
in the Works of Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill

Part of the *Innti* group of Irish-language poets, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill depicts the marginalised Irish language as a region of distinctive cultural and psychological opportunities.¹ Her *œuvre* resists alignment with any single theoretical framework, but in her essays she acknowledges influence from French feminist writing. Building on the observations of several critics who have recognised, in Ní Dhomhnaill's poetry, a form of *écriture féminine* embedded in Irish culture, this article analyses her creative interaction with the works of Hélène Cixous.² Both writers bring anti-essentialist convictions to their views of gender and cultural identity, which support their resistance to patriarchal and colonial systems of thought; yet they construct their respective poetics out of shared preoccupations with biblical and mythological figures and narratives often implicated in essentialism. Ní Dhomhnaill refashions images and concepts found in some of Cixous's most celebrated texts, such as '*Le Rire de la Méduse*' [*The Laugh of the Medusa*], '*Sorties*', '*La Venue à l'écriture*' [*Coming to Writing*], and '*Le Troisième Corps*' [*The Third Body*]; but the situatedness of Ní Dhomhnaill's poetry also sets the two writers apart.

As a woman, a Jew, and an Algerian colonial subject, Cixous is thrice exiled from any national or cultural identity, and her poetic prose is correspondingly multilingual and neologistic. She alludes frequently to her complex ethnic and cultural background, but these allusions can appear subordinate to her emphasis on the alterity of *écriture féminine* to the symbolic structures and cultural freight it works to exceed and disrupt.³ Toril Moi has criticised the resultant esotericism of Cixous's utopian texts, claiming that they bear little relation to the culturally embedded lives of flesh-and-blood women, and that they contain tensions resolvable only in visions of the Lacanian Imaginary, a pre-Oedipal fantasy of union with the mother in which difference does not exist.⁴ Moi identifies an apparent disparity between Cixous's concept of *l'autre bisexualité* [the other bisexuality], which deconstructs the gendered binaries of Western metaphysics, and the imagery invoked to describe it, often regarded as complicit with myths of the Eternal Feminine historically bound up with women's oppression.

By contrast, Ní Dhomhnaill draws inspiration from what is known in Irish as *dinnsheanchas* claiming to find her poetic voice in the particular ethos of the *Gaeltacht* [Irish-speaking areas].⁵ Like Cixous, she engages with figures and narratives dominant in the Western literary tradition; but she also draws on ancient Irish mythological texts steeped in allusions to '*an saol eile*', the 'highly elaborate conceptual framework' that exists in Irish to describe 'the otherworld': fairies and selkies, merfolk and

¹ The *Innti* poets take their name from a literary journal begun in the 1970s at University College Cork. *Innti* became a platform for Irish-language poets drawing on modern themes and a cosmopolitan spectrum of influences, such as Zen Buddhism, Beat poetry, and American folk music.

² See Linda Revie, 'Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill's "Parthenogenesis": a bisexual exchange', *Poetry in contemporary Irish Literature*, Michael Kenneally ed., Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1995; Helen Kidd, 'Cailleachs, Keens and Queens: Reconfiguring Gender and Nationality in the Poetry of Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill and Eavan Boland', *Critical Survey*, Vol. 15, 2003. Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, *Téacs Baineann, Téacs Mná: Gnéithe de fhillocht Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill* (An Clóchomhar Tta, 2005). Gerardine Meaney, 'Sex and Nation: Women in Irish Culture and Politics', *Irish Women's Studies: A Reader*, ed. Ailbhe Smyth (Dublin: Attic Press 1993), 230-44.

³ Cixous's father came from a family of Sephardic Jews who moved from Spain to Morocco and then Algeria. Her mother was an Ashkenazi Jew whose family hailed from various regions of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire.

⁴ See Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, 2nd ed/n (London and New York: Routledge, 2010) 117-125.

⁵ The word '*dinnsheanchas*' can be translated as 'sense of place', but has a depth of resonance that evokes the numinosity of notable landmarks and the folklore connected with them.

water-horses, gods and goddesses.⁶ She regards these texts as vital repositories of a marginalised language and culture; but she also challenges their patriarchal assumptions by filtering *Gaeltacht* culture and mythology through the prism of Cixousian theory. In doing so, she translates the tension between *l'autre bisexualité* and images of the Eternal Feminine into her *œuvre*. She draws on the Cixousian concept of bisexuality to celebrate and critique the Irish language and its culture but, counter-intuitively, she also mobilises images of the Eternal Feminine to the same end. A second, conceptual tension is thereby introduced into her poetry. On one hand, by translating Cixousian concepts into her texts, she undercuts the Revivalist reification of the Irish language as a site of cultural purity; on the other hand, by drawing on Cixousian poetics, she resists the deconstructionist impulse of Cixous's theory, fostering perceptions of the Irish language as key to an authentic cultural psyche marginalised by colonialism.

From colonialism to *écriture féminine*

In '*Sorties*', Cixous presents *écriture féminine* as a response to her formative experiences as an immigrant Jewess in colonial Algeria, where she was excluded from both the ruling French and colonised Arab populations. The narrator perceives Algerian society as symptomatic of a fundamental colonial dynamic, whereby the coloniser is dependent on the colonised as a foil for his self-image. This colonial dynamic is part of a paradigm of unequal power, in which '*il faut qu'il y ait deux races, celles des maîtres, celles des esclaves*'.⁷ Cixous aligns the status of the colonised and immigrant 'others' of Algeria with that of women, in that both are perceived, not as fellow human beings, but as the dark underbelly of masculine or colonial supremacy. To illuminate this dialectic, Cixous draws on Derridean philosophy, which exposes the binaries of Western metaphysics as hierarchies. The supposedly superior side of the binary is aligned with masculinity, while the other side is aligned with femininity and regarded as a defective mirror-image of the masculine. Algeria was regarded by the French as dangerously and inscrutably 'other', but nonetheless identified as a possession and dependent of France. Cixous's language blurs the distinction between colonised subalterns and the colonised bodies of women in patriarchal society: '*On a colonisé leur corps dont elles n'ont pas osé jouir*'.⁸

A similar model of analysis can be applied to the case of Ireland. Constructed as an anti-England for centuries of aggressive colonial rule, Ireland was feminised territory, a passive and inferior object of desire to be subdued by the enterprise of a masculine England. Yet although the Irish and their language were perceived as threats to the colonial order, Declan Kiberd argues persuasively that Ireland also appeared 'to English persons in the guise of their Unconscious', a locale for the reification of repressed desires.⁹ In later years, Irish Revivalist nationalists appropriated the colonial binary to their own ends. In doing so, they perpetuated the caricaturing of Irish and English people in feminine and masculine terms respectively. The Irish were depicted as antidotes to the rational and mercantile English imperialists – fey, sensitive, hot-blooded, and lyrical.

Cixous argues that this masculine or phallogocentric form of binary logic fuels a phobic rejection of the feminine, which is projected as a source of chaos, lack, or even death. According to Cixous, this destructive fear of difference generates prejudicial forms of hatred or violence. The masculine becomes a stand-in signifier for all that is repressive, prejudiced, or abusive, as well as denoting rational or logical modes of thought. Cixous's conception of femininity is best understood in terms of *écriture féminine*, which aims to annul this phallogocentric fear of differences. It works to move beyond the limits of binary

⁶ Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, '*Mis and Dubh Ruis: A Parable of Psychic Transformation*', *Selected Essays*, ed. Oona Frawley (Dublin: New Island, 2005) 80-88 (86).

⁷ Hélène Cixous, '*Sorties*', *Le Rire de la Méduse et autres ironies* (Paris: Galilée, 2010) 69-197 (85).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁹ Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Vintage, 1996) 15.

logic, both psychically and textually, and towards a celebration of alterity, a type of otherness that eludes comparison with the masculine side of the binary. Alterity is synonymous with Cixous's conception of femininity. This latter term floats free of the semantic field of gender, coming to denote anything other than, or marginal to, a dominant norm that is historically masculine.

To a large extent, '*écriture féminine*' is co-extensive with Cixous's vision of '*l'autre bisexualité*', a symbiosis of sexual differences and their associated desires, defined as '*repérage en soi, individuellement, de la présence, diversement manifeste et insistante selon chaque un ou une, des deux sexes*' [the location within oneself of the presence of both sexes, evident and insistent in different ways according to the individual].¹⁰ For Cixous, there are masculine and feminine elements in every human being. Maintaining the co-presence of both sexes within the self is considered a feminine capacity insofar as it refuses the binary logic that shores up fear of otherness within or outside the self. Cixous's metaphor of the '*troisième corps*' [third body] represents a bisexual alternative to phallogocentric modes of being. Following Lacan, she regards desire as an inescapable part of the human condition, observing, with reference to Genesis, that '*Toute entrée de vie se retrouve devant la Pomme*' [Every entry to life finds itself *before the Apple*].¹¹ The *troisième corps* is created only when two desiring subjects engage in a loving fidelity to each others' differences. Each lays him/herself open to the foreignness of the other but resists subsuming the other into a sameness which, by denying the life-giving dynamism born of their differences, amounts to a kind of death. This *troisième corps* can also be understood as the body of text born of Cixous's feminine practice of writing, in which the desiring subject makes contact with her unconscious, the other inside the self. In the latter case, the feminine is explicitly maternal and equated with the Imaginary.

Cixous's '*autre bisexualité*' and the Eternal Feminine

In her attempts to inscribe the (historically masculine) Symbolic with the drives and rhythms of the unconscious, Cixous has recourse to traditional metaphors of femininity – liquidity, diffusion, flow – and to corporeal imagery that contains the floating signifier 'feminine' within the (idealised) bodies of women. In *La Venue à l'écriture*, she draws on the story of the infant Moses, casting herself both as biological and adoptive mother, enslaved Jewess and Egyptian Pharaoh's daughter. The life-giving potential of *écriture féminine* is figured as a fertile womb, a mother whose gift of life asks for no return:

*je vais aux rives des Nils, pour recueillir les peuples abandonnés dans des berceaux d'osier, j'ai pour le sort des vivants l'amour infatigable d'une mère, c'est pourquoi je suis partout, mon ventre cosmique, je travaille mon inconscient mondial, je fous la mort à la porte, elle revient, on recommence, je suis grosse de commencements.*¹²

I go to the banks of the Niles to gather back the peoples abandoned in cradles of reeds, for the fate of the living I have the untiring love of a mother, that is why I am everywhere, my cosmic

¹⁰ Hélène Cixous, '*Le Rire de la Méduse*', *Le Rire de la Méduse et autres ironies*, 35-68 (52).

¹¹ Hélène Cixous, '*Extrême Fidélité*', *Travessia*, Vol. 14, 1987, 11-45 (20); Hélène Cixous, '*Extreme Fidelity*', trans. by Ann Liddle and Susan Sellers, *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, ed. Susan Sellers (London: Routledge, 1994), 129-138 (132).

¹² Hélène Cixous, '*La Venue à l'écriture*', *Entre L'Écriture* (Paris: *Des femmes*, 1986)7-69 (58-59).

womb, I work on my worldwide unconscious, I throw death out, it comes back, we begin again, I am pregnant with beginnings.¹³

For Moi, this biblical imagery is characteristic of Cixous's 'investment in the world of myth: a world that, like the distant country of fairy tales, is perceived as pervasively meaningful, as closure and unity'.¹⁴ This sense of 'closure and unity' equates the language of myth with the 'comfort and security' of the Imaginary. Moi's analysis is accurate insofar as Cixous draws on the language of myth to inscribe her text with the rhythms of pre-Symbolic union with the (m)other. She conceives of these rhythms as latent in all human psyches but known only through dreams and fantasy: '*Il y a une langue que je parle ou qui me parle dans toutes les langues*' [There is a language that I speak or that speaks (to) me in all tongues].¹⁵ In this sense, Cixous conceives of her *écriture féminine* as 'pervasively meaningful', an appeal to the collective unconscious ('*inconscient mondial*').¹⁶

Paradoxically, however, Cixous's imagery brings the plenitude of the Imaginary into contact with Derridean *différance*.¹⁷ In her introduction to the 1999 edition of *Le Troisième Corps*, she returns to the story of Moses, imagining her text '*dans le vaste mouvement de textes qui berce le motif des Genèses dans un moïse confié entre les roseaux égyptiens à la veille d'une femme toujours prête à recueillir le poème aventuré au fil du flot*'.¹⁸ The '*fil du flot*' evokes the uncertain fate of the *moïse*, of meaning confided to '*le vaste mouvement de textes*', the threads of which so easily unravel. This image suggests a fruitful instability of meaning, one that disrupts the self-referential boundaries of binary logic; it is also typically Cixousian in its association of maternal love with water. As Moi explains, 'For Cixous, as for countless mythologies, water is the feminine element *par excellence*: the closure of the mythical world contains and reflects the comforting security of the mother's womb'.¹⁹ The phonetic similarity of '*la mer*' [the sea] and '*la mère*' [the mother] allows the aquatic and the amniotic to overlap in Cixousian texts. In many instances, it is within such a space that Cixousian subjects are 'free to move from one subject position to another, or to merge oceanically with the world'.²⁰ According to Moi, this is the crux of a contradiction in Cixous's writing: 'the openness of the Giving Woman or the plurality of bisexual writing are characterized by biblical, mythological or elemental imagery that return us to a preoccupation with the Imaginary'.²¹ She concludes that Cixousian texts evoke, less the constant deferral of meaning within the symbolic order, than 'the polymorphous perversity of the pre-Oedipal child', which in turn calls up the paradigm of the Mother as an omnipotent source of selfless love.²² For Moi, this insistent return to elemental images of the Imaginary re-inscribes a reified femininity into Cixous's texts, one that is all too easily complicit with patriarchal myth.

Cixous defends her allusions to feminine archetypes as symptomatic of human experience: '*malgré tout, depuis la Bible et depuis les bibles, nous sommes distribués en descendants d'Eve et descendants d'Adam*' [in spite of everything, ever since the *Bible* and ever since bibles, we have been

¹³ Hélène Cixous, 'Coming to Writing', trans. by Sarah Cornell, Deborah Jenson, Ann Liddle, and Susan Sellers, *Coming to Writing and Other Essays*, ed. Deborah Jensen (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1991) 1-58 (48).

¹⁴ Moi, 118.

¹⁵ Cixous, '*La Venue à l'écriture*', 30; Cixous, 'Coming to Writing', 21.

¹⁶ Cixous, '*La Venue à l'écriture*', 30.

¹⁷ See Jacques Derrida, '*Différance*', *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. by Alan Bass (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982) 1-27, esp. 7-17.

¹⁸ Cixous, *Le Troisième Corps* (Paris: Des femmes, 1999) 7.

¹⁹ Moi, 115.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid, 119.

²² Ibid.

distributed as descendants of Eve and descendants of Adam].²³ In other words, because the desiring subject must enter into the Symbolic, all those who find themselves 'devant la Pomme' [*before the Apple*] are inevitably constrained within interlocking linguistic and cultural systems. Even as the word 'feminine' comes to be understood in terms of *l'autre bisexualité*, it calls up historical and cultural connotations that work simultaneously to glorify and oppress women. Cixous responds to this catch-22 by invoking biblical and mythological figures and narratives with a view to destabilising their traditionally accepted meanings: '*On pourrait les changer, on pourrait mettre des signes à la place, mais ils deviendrait aussi fermés, aussi immobiles et pétrifiants que les mots « masculin » et « féminin » et nous ferait la loi. Alors il n'y rien à faire, et il faut les secouer comme des pommiers, tout le temps*' [We could change them, we could put signs in their place, but they would become just as closed, just as immobile and petrifying as the words "masculine" and "feminine" and would lay down the law to us. So there is nothing to be done, except to shake them like apple trees, all the time].²⁴ The most famous manifestation of this technique is probably the Cixousian Medusa, who laughs in the face of phallogocentric demonising of the feminine. From this perspective, Cixous's poetics complement her deconstruction of the signifier, shaking traditional connotations like apple-trees, constructing new – if provisional – meanings.

Irish Mythopoeism and the Cixousian Imaginary

One aspect of Cixous's destabilization of archetypes is her tendency to place mythological figures in specific historical or cultural contexts. In *Le Troisième Corps*, she links the Exodus from Egypt with the uneasy co-existence of racial and cultural groups in colonial Algeria. Typically, the narrator conceptualises this experience linguistically: '*Imaginez que Dieu ait parlé à Moïse en égyptien. Moïse n'en aurait-il pas suffoqué? N'aurait-il pas hésité et même refusé de traverser la mer Rouge, même si Dieu lui disait que sur l'autre rive tout serait traduit?*' [Imagine if God had spoken to Moses in Egyptian, Wouldn't Moses have choked? Wouldn't he have hesitated and even refused to cross the Red Sea, even if God had told him that on the other shore everything would be translated?]²⁵ Cixous briefly aligns herself with the reluctant Moses of her text, who balks at being addressed in the Egyptian language: '*La langue qui m'a fait hésiter est l'arabe. Dans cette langue père est dit Baba. Porte est dit Bab. Que vient faire dans mes oreilles la langue qui parle contre moi, sinon dans le dessein de les percer?*' [The language that made me hesitate is Arabic. In this language father is said Baba. Door is Bab. What's it doing here in my ears, this language that speaks against me, unless it's here to deafen me?]²⁶ The image of the door recurs in '*La Venue à l'écriture*', where it bars the narrator's access to writing, enclosing language in a historically masculine domain.²⁷ In *Le Troisième Corps*, the narrator recognises a phallogocentric fear of difference within herself, connecting her internalisation of the Jewish-Arab conflict with the patriarchal texts of the Old Testament. But in her utopian retelling of the Exodus myth, the patriarchal divisions wrought by the '*structure surmoisée*' are absent from the Promised Land. Moving beyond fear of otherness, the narrator casts herself as Moses, transforming into a bisexual prophet of psychic transformation: '*C'est moi Moïse et je lève un bâton, et les eaux rouges se dressent à ma droite et à ma*

²³ Cixous, '*Extrême Fidélité*', 20 ; Cixous, '*Extreme Fidelity*', 132.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Cixous, *Le Troisième Corps*, 163; Cixous, *The Third Body*, trans. by Keith Cohen, (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999) 136.

²⁶ Cixous, *Le Troisième Corps*, 163-164; Cixous, *The Third Body*, 136.

²⁷ Cixous, '*La Venue à l'écriture*', 22.

gauche, et elles ne bougent plus [It is I, Moses, and I lift a rod, and the red waters rise up to my right and to my left, and they stay that way].²⁸

In Ní Dhomhnaill's oeuvre, fear of difference is manifest in the mentality of the colonised. *The Fifty Minute Mermaid* (2007) portrays a race of merfolk who, at some distant point in history, fled the water and made their lives on land. Throughout the collection, the merfolk function as a transparent metaphor for the colonised Irish, who, as they internalised English prejudices about their native culture, became complicit in their own subjugation. '*Bunmhiotas na Murúch / Founding Myth*' links the merfolk's transition from water to 'Promised Land' to the parting of the Red Sea and depicts it as a rejection of femininity and of their native culture. The leader of the merfolk is given an order by God:

*"Ardaigh do shlat is sín amach do láimh
os cionn na fharraige is deighil ó cheile í"*

"Raise on high your rod, and stretch forth your hand
over the waters and divide them one from the other".²⁹

The male leader's privileged access to the (transparently phallic) Word of God reproduces the dynamics of Old Testament patriarchy. As Cixous puts it, '*Dieu parle à Moïse. Il n'est pas dit en quelle langue mais on n'hésite pas à penser qu'il parle à Moïse dans la langue de ses pères*' [God speaks to Moses. It is not said in which language, but it's a safe bet that He speaks to Moses in his fathers' language].³⁰ The sea is defined and controlled by patriarchal language, but as the fate of the merfolk's pursuers makes clear, this feminine element is also a source of terror:

*Shlog an fharraige iad scun scan
is deineadh ciota fogha díobh
i mbroinn na bóchna*

The sea swallowed them whole,
and they were dashed to bits
on the bosom of the ocean.³¹

Subsequent generations of merfolk develop a sense of shame and inferiority about their underwater culture, evolving cultural practices designed to repress the sea-born other within their land-locked selves. In '*Na Murúcha ag Ní a gCeann / The Merfolk and Washing Hair*', the poet records:

*Níonn siad a gcoirp le híle is le rósuisce
is a gceann le seampú tirim*

Their bodies they bathe with oil and rose water
and they clean their hair with dry shampoo.³²

²⁸ Cixous, *Le Troisième Corps*, 163; Cixous, *The Third Body*, 136.

²⁹ Ní Dhomhnaill, '*Bunmhiotas na Murúch / Founding Myth*', *The Fifty Minute Mermaid*, trans. Paul Muldoon (Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 2007) 44-47 (44-45).

³⁰ Cixous, *Le Troisième Corps*, 163, Cixous, *The Third Body*, 136.

³¹ Ní Dhomhnaill, '*Bunmhiotas na Murúch / Founding Myth*', 44-45.

³² Ní Dhomhnaill, '*Na Murúcha ag Ní a gCeann / The Merfolk and Washing Hair*', *The Fifty Minute Mermaid*, 64-67 (64-65).

In ‘*Cuimhne an Uisce*’ / A Recovered Memory of Water’, a mermaid’s daughter periodically suffers from a psychosis in which the bathroom seems to be filling up with water. As in many of her mermaid poems, Ní Dhomhnaill associates psychic pain with the loss of the language that expresses a particular *mentalité*, a collective cultural experience that gives each signifier a connotative significance which overcomes its arbitrary relation to the signified. As for the mermaid’s daughter:

*Níl aon téarmaíocht aici,
ná téarmaí tagartha
ná focal ar bith a thabharfadh an tuairim is lú
do cad é “uisce”*

She doesn’t have the terminology
or any of the points of reference
or any word at all that would give the slightest suggestion
as to what water might be.³³

A therapist coaxes her to articulate her trauma:

*“Slaod tanaí,” a thugann sí air,
í ag tóraíocht go cúramach i measc na bhfocal.
“Brat gléineach, ábhar silteach, rud fliuch.”*

“A thin-flow,” she calls it,
casting about gingerly in the midst of words.
“A shiny film. Dripping stuff. Something wet.”³⁴

Cut off from her native language and its conceptual framework, the mermaid’s daughter is quite literally out of her (feminine) element. Ní Dhomhnaill thereby yokes femininity/alterity with a repressed indigenous culture, so that ‘the other inside the self’ can be understood, in the Irish context, as a pre-colonial self.

According to Ní Dhomhnaill, because Irish was outlawed for centuries of colonial rule, the *Gaeltacht* literary and oral traditions bypassed the rationalism of the Western Enlightenment and became peculiarly mythopoeic. She connects this myth-making tendency with the activities of the unconscious. In ‘*Cé Leis Tú?*’ [‘*Who Do You Belong To?*’], she speculates that the orality of Irish culture contributed to its mythopoeism, for ‘the spoken word, by its very nature and spontaneity, has a plumb-line into the subconscious’.³⁵ She is careful to add that these claims might be made for many languages, but her overwhelming concern remains with the preservation of Irish and its capacity to evoke *dinnsheanchas*, the ‘deeply resonant and highly articulated repertoire of myth, legend, folk-knowledge and local narrative’.³⁶ In ‘*Dinnsheanchas: The Naming of High and Holy Places*’, mythology is conceptualised as ‘an “objective correlative” on which we can hang the powerful and ever-changing dimensions and personages of our *paysage intérieure*’.³⁷ In her essays, Ní Dhomhnaill describes these psychic projections in terms that recall *écriture féminine*, claiming that they permit ‘easy interaction

³³ Ní Dhomhnaill, ‘*Cuimhne an Uisce*’ / A Recovered Memory of Water’, *The Fifty Minute Mermaid*, 30-33.

³⁴ Ibid, 32-33.

³⁵ Ní Dhomhnaill, ‘*Cé Leis Tú?*’, *Selected Essays*, 97-155 (105).

³⁶ Ní Dhomhnaill, ‘A Ghostly Alhambra’, *Selected Essays*, 69-79 (78).

³⁷ Ní Dhomhnaill, ‘*Dinnsheanchas: The Naming of High and Holy Places*’, *Selected Essays*, 25-42 (42).

with the imaginary' and express a non-rational aspect of human experience that 'has fallen foul of the dominant mind-spirit duality and disappeared into the chasm between them'.³⁸

In 'A Ghostly Alhambra', Ní Dhomhnaill draws an explicit analogy between the undervalued feminine aspect of the human psyche and the marginalised Irish language and its cultural cargo. Claiming that there is always 'a submerged female principle or image just beneath the surface of the collective subconscious', she cites, by way of examples, a host of figures from Irish mythology: the *piast*, or 'monster' of Loch Crawley; the inexhaustible Magic Cow, *an Ghlas Ghaibhneach*; the legendary Carbunde of Lough Geal.³⁹ According to Ní Dhomhnaill, this *Gaeltacht* mythology expresses a world-view that preceded English imperialism; it is a 'female presence [...] waiting for a brave act of repossession'.⁴⁰ To some extent, these references to a repressed femininity seem designed to convey the alterity of *Gaeltacht* culture to its Anglo-Irish counterpart. Ní Dhomhnaill argues that the Irish language gives Irish people access to a cultural psyche operating outside of the colonial and Revivalist binaries. In doing so, she anticipates and rejects the charge of claiming essential qualities for the Irish people and their language.⁴¹ What she does insist is that historical circumstances have constructed Irish such that its 'strengths and weaknesses' and 'imaginative possibilities' are different from those of dominant European languages such as English.⁴²

Ní Dhomhnaill's commitment to Irish and its cultural freight marks a conceptual divide between her *œuvre* and Cixousian theory, for Cixous cannot identify any language as her 'own': '*Je commence à parler, quelle langue est la mienne? le français? l'allemand? l'arabe?*'⁴³ She has described German as her mother-tongue, in that it is literally the language of her mother, but she chooses to write in French. This was the language of integration for Jewish people in Algeria, but also the language of the coloniser. Unlike Ní Dhomhnaill, for whom Irish is an integral part of her cultural heritage, Cixous has no allegiance to the language in which she chooses to write. As Monica Fiorini observes, she writes '*à travers la langue française, son regard d'étrangère, son écart de Française-pas-vraiment-française, de Juive et de femme*'.⁴⁴ According to Cixous, her initially traumatic sense of exile from a linguistic homeland spared her the illusion of any immediate or authentic relationship with a pre-existing linguistic system. One of the salient features of her neologistic prose is the use of 'phonemic resemblances' to 'weave together strands of meaning across different linguistic domains'.⁴⁵

Cixous disrupts the French linguistic system with linguistic 'others', making the colonising language foreign to itself. But this 'strangering' of French is also part of the utopian impulse of her texts. *Écriture féminine*, insofar as it can be defined at all, strives to operate outside of existing linguistic structures. Any potential meaning called up by a given signifier is always already different to itself, containing the seeds of its own deconstruction. Faithful to this ideal of interminable difference, Cixous resists subsuming the linguistic other into the selfsame: '*Surtout la garder en l'ailleurs qui la porte, laisser intact son étrangeté*' [Above all to keep it in the elsewhere that carries it along, to leave its

³⁸ Ní Dhomhnaill, 'Why I Choose to Write in Irish, the Corpse That Sits Up and Talks Back', *Selected Essays*, 10-24 (20); Ní Dhomhnaill, 'Cé Leis Tú?', 143.

³⁹ Ní Dhomhnaill, 'A Ghostly Alhambra', 78

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴¹ See Ní Dhomhnaill, 'Why I Choose to Write in Irish', 20.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Cixous, '*Sorties*', 87.

⁴⁴ Monica Fiorini, 'Comment «écrire français»? Rêveries d'Algérie dans l'œuvre d'Hélène Cixous', *Femmes écrivains à la croisée des langues / Women Writers at the Crossroads of Language*, eds. Agnese Fidecaro, Henriette Partzsch, Suzan van Dijk, Valérie Cossy (Genève: Métispresses, 2009) 111-123 (113).

⁴⁵ Jennifer Yee, 'The Colonial Outsider: "Malgérie" in Hélène Cixous's *La Rêverie de la femme sauvage*', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, Vol. 20, No. 2, Women Writing Across the World (Autumn, 2001) 189-200 (189).

foreignness intact].⁴⁶ Personified as an ‘other’ with particular traits and tendencies, each language is approached ‘*délicatement [...] pour la lécher, la humer, adorer ses différences, respecter ses dons, ses talents, ses mouvements*’ [delicately (...) in order to lick it, to breathe it in, to adore its differences, respect its gifts, its talents, its movements].⁴⁷ The sensual imagery communicates Cixous’s pleasure in the resources of each language, even as it emphasises the alterity of those languages to the writing subject.

Cixous’s poetic prose works to destabilise the very archetypes it conjures up, evoking a feminine utopia in the root sense of the word – a de-centred non-place. By contrast, Ní Dhomhnaill’s poetry is grounded in a specific cultural locale. She sees in Irish an existing medium for thinking and writing otherwise, one that is the source and repository of a pre-colonial *Weltanschauung*, a medium through which Irish people can ‘take proper cognisance’ of what she calls ‘the non-Aristotelian psychic architecture of our ancestry’.⁴⁸ Hence the merfolk’s underwater culture remains an integral part of their psychic make-up, one that can only find expression in their native language. For Ní Dhomhnaill, this notion of a deeply-ingrained cultural self is valuable in the postcolonial context. She concedes that ‘most things we believe in are probably no more and no less than enabling myths,’ but nonetheless argues that the psychic projections of Irish mythology furnish ‘a useful cultural container for our deeply held, heartfelt need for both mythology and a homeland’.⁴⁹ In this way, she conflates the idea of a repressed feminine part of the psyche with the fantasy of a lost mother country. In *The Fifty Minute Mermaid*, this fantasy combines with the mythopoeic character of her source material to recall the Maternal Imaginary.

Like Cixous’s feminine subject, Ní Dhomhnaill’s mermaid seeks to ‘merge oceanically with the world’.⁵⁰

*Ritheamair go léir isteach ina chéile, ba dhóigh leat uaithi,
faoi mar a bheadh na dathanna ó smearadh íle
ar an mbóthar tar éis cith báistí*

We all ran into each other, you’d swear to listen to her,
like the different colours in an oily puddle
after a shower of rain.⁵¹

Analogously, the Mermish language eludes the impulse to define and categorise: ‘*ritheann gach uile rud isteach ina chéile ann* [everything in the language runs into everything else]’ and ‘*nach bhfuil teoranna dochta i gceist idir rud ar bith* [there are no strict boundaries between one thing and another]’.⁵² Ní Dhomhnaill evokes this dissolution of conceptual and physical boundaries with images of water, so that the feminine element evokes the plenitude of pre-Symbolic union with the (m)other.⁵³ In this way, she taps into the potential of Cixousian poetics to call up essentialising images of the Eternal Feminine.

In ‘*Ceist na Teangan / The Question of Language*’, Ní Dhomhnaill draws on the story of Moses in the bulrushes to explore the potential of Irish. The poet, occupying the position of Jewish mother, places

⁴⁶ Cixous, ‘*La Venue à l’écriture*’, 32; Cixous, ‘Coming to Writing’, 22.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ní Dhomhnaill, ‘A Ghostly Alhambra’, 70.

⁴⁹ Ní Dhomhnaill, ‘*Dinnsheanchas: The Naming of High and Holy Places*’, 40.

⁵⁰ Moi, 115.

⁵¹ Ní Dhomhnaill, ‘*Teoranna / Boundaries*’, *The Fifty Minute Mermaid*, 128-131 (130-131).

⁵² Ibid, 128-129.

⁵³ Moi, 118.

her 'dóchas [hope]' on the waters of the Nile, afloat in what she calls 'báidín teangan [a little boat/ of the language]'.⁵⁴ This hope, carried by the Irish language, is embodied in an infant that eludes the Pharaoh's patriarchal and imperial control. The mother's hope for potential salvation lies with the 'iníon Fhorainn [Pharaoh's daughter]' who, as an Egyptian, represents the phallogocentric logic of colonial power but who, by nurturing the infant, represents the feminine capacity to embrace alterity.⁵⁵ In the context of the Exodus myth, this capacity is explicitly maternal, raising the spectre of the Eternal Feminine in the form of a life-giving, selfless mother. The consequent survival of the nurtured language also raises the possibility of a future return to some authentic cultural homeland. Yet although Ní Dhomhnaill strategically espouses this fantasy of cultural authenticity, she also makes it clear that the postcolonial Irish homeland should lie beyond the binaries of English colonialism and Celtic patriarchy.

Ní Dhomhnaill's *spéirbhean* and *l'autre bisexualité*

In common with Cixous, Ní Dhomhnaill's poetic inheritance is a wealth of mythological archetypes. Like Cixous, she shakes these archetypes like apple-trees, resisting their cooption to the cause of patriarchal nationalism. During the Irish Revival, male writers mobilised idealised archetypes of 'Mother Ireland' or 'Cathleen' to their rehabilitation of Irish culture and its language, but excluded women writers from the Irish canon and kept alive the patriarchal bias in Celtic mythology.⁵⁶ As Ní Dhomhnaill puts it, 'Woman, as woman, has only been accepted in the literary tradition as either Muse or, if she refuses to play that dreary, boring and unpaid role, then as Bitch'.⁵⁷ As she puts it in a dialogue with Medbh McGuckian, her poetry seeks 'to take Irish back from that grey-faced Irish-revivalist male preserve'.⁵⁸ In practice, this project necessitates a transformation of the cultural cargo carried by the language. In effect, Ní Dhomhnaill mounts a guerrilla attack on the cultural connotations of Irish, seeking to alter perceptions of its value by disrupting the masculine bias in the subject matter associated with it. That is, she translates Celtic myths into new versions that unleash the feminine elements enveloped in her source material.

An intertextual reading of Cixous and Ní Dhomhnaill reveals a parallel between the Cixousian *troisième corps* and a Celtic mythological motif recurrent in Ní Dhomhnaill's corpus, the transformation of the *cailleach* [Hag] into the *spéirbhean* [Goddess]. '*Spéirbhean*' literally means 'sky-woman', but refers in Irish mythology to a supernatural figure, usually Ireland personified, who transforms from a hag to a woman of extraordinary beauty. Ní Dhomhnaill's most extensive analysis of the *cailleach/spéirbhean* theme can be found in '*Mis and Dubh Ruis: A Parable of Psychic Transformation*'. Mis is the daughter of a warrior king, Dáire Donn, who is killed by Fionn Mac Cumhail. On finding her father lying decapitated, Mis drinks blood from his wounds and flees insane into the wilderness, where she grows fur and claws. Her madness is so intense that she runs down, attacks, and eats everyone who crosses her path. Yet although no one dares walk abroad in Clainn Muiris, the king, respectful of Mis's former status, decrees that no one should kill her. Instead, he offers half of his kingdom and Mis's hand in marriage to anyone who can take her alive. The best warriors try and fail; then the king's harper, Dubh Ruis, asks to try. Instead of attacking Mis, he makes love to her. Elated by the experience, Mis cooks him a deer and remembers that cooked meat is better than raw. He bathes her in the deer fat

⁵⁴ Ní Dhomhnaill, 'Ceist na Teangan / The Question of Language', *Pharaoh's Daughter*, 2nd ed/n (Dublin: Gallery Press, 2007) 154-155.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ See Ní Dhomhnaill, 'An Bhanfhile Sa Traidisiun: The Woman Poet in the Irish Tradition', *Selected Essays* 43-58.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 55.

⁵⁸ Ní Dhomhnaill in 'Medbh McGuckian agus Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Comhrá with a Foreword and Afterword by Laura O'Connor', *The Southern Review*, 31, 3 (July, 1995), 589.

and, rubbing her body with it, begins to remove the fur. Then he makes her a bed of moss, covers her with the deer skin, and lies down beside her. Having built a house around them, he repeats this same ritual every day for two months, until all of Mis's fur falls away and her memory, beauty, and reason return to her. Mis marries Dubh Ruis, has four children, and is considered one of the most beautiful and accomplished women of Munster.

Even this brief account makes it clear that, from a feminist perspective, the *cailleach/spéirbhean* theme could be thought highly objectionable, for the woman's transformation is dependent on conjugal union with a man. Since the right man is also invariably the rightful sovereign, and proven to be so by copulation with the *spéirbhean*, the narrative also seems to uphold patriarchal authority. In the same essay, Ní Dhomhnaill acknowledges 'a strong male bias in the consciousness of the Celts which denies the deep Feminine and is thus "rewarded" with a negative image from the repressed psychic contents' – the *cailleach*. Ní Dhomhnaill's understanding of the 'deep Feminine' has much in common with Cixousian femininity, in that it incorporates all that is other than the traditionally masculine side of the binary, and emphasises all that relates to the body and the senses as part of the rehabilitation of the feminine. In common with Cixous, she aligns the rejection of the feminine with an aphasic repression of 'what the French feminist literary theorists call the "language of the body"'.⁵⁹

In the case of Mis and Dubh Ruis, Ní Dhomhnaill draws attention to the 'fine psychological insight that it was the vulnerable man in all his nakedness who overcame the hag and not any of the conquering heroes'.⁶⁰ According to her reading of the myth, the death of the king signifies a need to 'break out of the dominant patriarchal ethos of the age' so that 'the Hag energy' can 'erupt':

The too-long repressed Feminine comes into its own, and, as we learn to come to terms with what is dark and frightening in ourselves, we can release others from the burden of carrying our resentment in one way or another. Then a new form of male energy asserts itself in the unconscious, and, challenging the hag, uniting with her, brings forth the conscious reality of the Goddess, as *spéirbhean*.⁶¹

In this description, the *spéirbhean* is not simply an archetype in the tradition of the Eternal Feminine, nor is she a symbol of Irish sovereignty. On the contrary, the Goddess is born of a 'challenging' interaction of the 'repressed Feminine' with 'a new form of male energy'. This is, in effect, a translation of the Cixousian ideal of *l'autre bisexualité* into the specific context of Irish mythology. In '*Mis and Dubh Ruis*', the 'repressed Feminine' is unleashed by means of an encounter that is tender and sensual – both historically devalued aspects of femininity. The masculine 'hero' is, in fact, a bisexual figure in that he is both harper and lover, uniting artistic gifts (the masculine) with an uninhibited pleasure in the body (the feminine) that couples with his willingness to make himself vulnerable to a terrifying embodiment of femininity, a literal man-eater. The *spéirbhean*, then, is a bisexual '*troisième corps*' brought forth, not by the dominance of the masculine lover over his feminine counterpart, but by the transformative interaction of masculine and feminine. And yet Ní Dhomhnaill admits that she has 'not yet personally met the *spéirbhean*' but is 'still working on that inner harper in all his powerful dream manifestations as Enemy, Sea-Horse or Minotaur, Bull of the Mothers'.⁶² In Cixousian terms, her poetry is concerned with the journey, through fear, to *l'autre bisexualité*. But the cultural locale in which the journey unfolds is not yet hospitable to the *spéirbhean* or the laughing Medusa.

⁵⁹ Ní Dhomhnaill, '*Mis and Dubh Ruis*', 85.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 86.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 87.

⁶² *Ibid*, 87.

L'autre bisexualité in postcolonial Ireland

In the majority of Ní Dhomhnaill's poems, *l'autre bisexualité* is inflected through the lens of modern Ireland and its colonial past. To some extent, *Gaeltacht* culture is equated with alterity, but Ní Dhomhnaill also acknowledges its coupling, in the collective Irish consciousness, with patriarchal nationalism and religious conservatism.⁶³ From a Cixousian perspective, these aspects of the *Gaeltacht* can be aligned with the fear of difference manifest in the oppression of others within and outside the self, and in a shame-ridden relationship to pleasure. In '*Manach / Monk*', Ní Dhomhnaill's imagery connects the repressive aspects of Irish Catholicism with phobic reactions to femininity. The poetic voice addresses a monk vowed to celibacy and self-denial:

*Mise Temptation,
aithníonn tú mé
Uaireanta is Éabha,
uaireanta is nathair nimhe mé.*

I am Temptation.
You know me.
Sometimes I'm Eve,
sometimes the snake.⁶⁴

Like Cixous, Ní Dhomhnaill draws on the Genesis myth. When the monk recognises Temptation both as femininity (*Éabha / Eve*) and as death (*nathair nimhe / poisonous snake*), his recognition depends on the naming of Temptation in English, the language of the coloniser. In this way, the monk's attempts to quell his desire for what is other than his own solitary masculinity become associated with the fear of difference that, for Ní Dhomhnaill, drove the English colonisation of Ireland, the oppression of the indigenous people, and the outlawing of their mother tongue.

The image of the serpent, frequently characterised by gleaming green eyes, glides through Ní Dhomhnaill's corpus, often lending itself to Cixousian readings of her imagery. In the Celtic tradition, the colour green was linked to the underworld and connoted death and misfortune; yet these connotations appear positive in light of Ní Dhomhnaill's celebration of *an saol eile* and its role in *Gaeltacht* folklore. In English medieval texts, green is often associated with the devil; but a more benign pagan tradition links the colour to nature and fertility, influencing an alternative medieval use of green to represent sexual desire. It would seem that Ní Dhomhnaill uses the serpent's eyes to signify simultaneously desire for the other, and the fear of such desires produced by the phallogocentric mindset.

The serpent reappears in '*Kundalini*', which reads as an ironic warning against exploring the desiring self tempted in '*Manach*'. This self is represented by the heart, the locus of feminine feeling:

*Ná bain an leac ded chroí,
thíos faoi tá nathair nimhe
ina luí i lúba.*

*Éinne a thaighdean an poll,
geobhaidh sé ina codladh ann*

⁶³ See Ní Dhomhnaill, '*Cé Leis Tú?*', 126.

⁶⁴ Ní Dhomhnaill, '*Manach / Monk*', *Rogha Dánta*, trans. Michael Hartnett, 5th ed/n (Dublin: New Island Books, 2004) 56-57.

an ollphiast ghránna.

Don't unblock your heart –
in there a serpent
lies in loops.

Who explores this cave
will find asleep
a grim Medusa.⁶⁵

In Hartnett's revealing translation, the Irish '*ollphiast ghránna*' is interpreted as a Medusa. An '*ollphiast*' is a serpent; the adjective '*ghránna*' connotes 'vile', 'terrible', or 'morally offensive'. Hartnett's translation recalls Cixous's '*Rire de la Méduse*', but this is a 'grim' Medusa, not a laughing one. The *spéirbhean* is dormant, for the Cixousian elements of Ní Dhomhnaill's poetic voice are bound to the postcolonial Irish context. If the '*ollphiast ghránna*' figures the repressed feminine, it seems significant that Ní Dhomhnaill's Irish-language text functions both to allude to the possibility of its awakening and to caution against it. This Medusa is alert to the pitfalls of patriarchal language. Addressing an Irish saint, '*Naomh Cúán*', the poetic voice warns:

*Is ní féidir leat dallamullóg
a chur uirthi seo mar a dhein is fadó
le cleasaíocht focal .*

And you cannot blind her eyes
as once before you did,
with punning sentences.⁶⁶

As in Cixous, masculine power is underpinned by language that obfuscates the mechanisms of patriarchal control and defines the rebellious feminine as serpent or monster.

In '*An tEach Uisce / The Water Horse*', the green eyes belong to a sea-creature of Celtic mythology which appeared in various manifestations to 'deceive and torment mortals'.⁶⁷ The Irish *each uisce* commonly appears as a 'sleek and handsome steed', but Ní Dhomhnaill also draws on myths of the Scottish *each uisge*, which takes the form of a handsome man.⁶⁸ According to legend, the water horse lures the unsuspecting mortal with his seductive guise, then drags her into the water and devours her. In Ní Dhomhnaill's version, the water horse first comes to a young woman in her dreams, so that her psyche is implicated in its ostensibly supernatural appearance. Water imagery conveys the growing sensuality of their relationship:

*Ansan tháinig lá
gur chuir sé a cheann ina hucht
Bhí na míolta móra ag búirthíl thíos fúthu faoi loch
Is na muca mara ina dtáinte gléigeala mórthimpeall*

⁶⁵ Ní Dhomhnaill, '*Kundalini / Kundalini*', *Rogha Dánta*, 76-77.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ James MacKillop, *Dictionary of Celtic Mythology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 164.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Then came the day
He laid his head on her breast.
The sea-creatures were hooting below them on the water
And the porpoises in shining troops around them.⁶⁹

When the woman realises the identity of the water horse, she lulls him to sleep and flees. Her family agree:

*bhí sí ite aige,
scun scan, beo beathúch, cnámha agus uile*

he'd have swallowed her,
Right down, live and kicking, blood and bones.⁷⁰

Significantly, though, the nature of the threat posed by the water horse is called into question by the woman's memory of his desire for her:

*is í ag cuimhneamh ar loinnir uaithne
na súl bhfiarsceabhach aige a d'fhéach uirthi le fonn
a bhí chomh simplísan is chomh glan, folláin,
ina shlí féin le hampla ocrais;*

And she thought about the green gleam
In the strange eyes that had looked at her with desire,
That was as simple, clean, clear
In its own way as a hearty hunger;⁷¹

The comparison between the water horse's desire and a healthy appetite is, of course, ironic insofar as the woman's family believe that he was planning literally to devour her. But her subsequent sense of longing suggests an encounter with a genuine sexual charge. From this perspective, the comparison works to remove sexual desire from the realm of guilt and supernatural punishment, and to align it with hunger, a less stigmatised human desire. The water horse speaks in a 'foreign tongue [*dteanga éigin*]'.⁷² Significantly, although the woman is unable to distinguish his words, she somehow understands him. In this way, his language recalls the Cixousian Imaginary, as it appears to elude or exceed the Symbolic but, like *écriture féminine*, speaks to a part of the psyche in touch with desire and the body.

The woman fantasises about:

*a choirp a bhí chomh haiclí
is chomh teann le bogha i bhfearas*

the muscular
Weave of his body that was tense

⁶⁹ Ní Dhomhnaill, 'An tEach Uisce / The Water Horse', trans. Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, *The Water Horse*, trans. Medbh McGuckian and Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin (Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 1999) 26-33 (26-27).

⁷⁰ Ibid, 30-31.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid, 28-29.

And light as a tightened bow.⁷³

The ensuing lines could be read as continuing this metaphorical description of the muscular male body:

*An teannas
a bhí ann, mar a bheadh sprionga tochraiste
a bheadh ar tinneall is gcónaí
is réidh faoi bhráid a athscaoilte.*

The spring
Wound up, alert, constantly
Ready to be released again.⁷⁴

In these lines, the '*sprionga* [spring]' is not explicitly connected with the male body. The '*teannas* [tension]' might therefore refer to the woman's psychological, emotional, or libidinal state. Having once experienced pleasure in desire, she is '*faoi bhráid a athscaoilte* [Ready to be released again]', presumably from the repressive aspects of her culture. By extending the metaphor to incorporate both the masculine body and the feminine psyche or libido, Ní Dhomhnaill depicts the water horse, not as a supernatural entity, but as the woman's desiring self, subdued but not eradicated by her cultural context.

Conclusion

Although Cixous's *autre bisexualité* is born of Derridean *différance*, her poetics evoke the plenitude of the Imaginary. She thereby risks a certain complicity with patriarchal myths of femininity; but by locating her feminine archetypes in multilingual cultural contexts, she creates a neologistic and semantically unstable *écriture féminine* that disrupts any sense of fixed archetypal meanings. Similarly, Ní Dhomhnaill yokes biblical and Irish mythological archetypes to the cultural realities of postcolonial Ireland. Drawing on Cixous, she links the Irish language and culture to the rehabilitation of a feminine part of the psyche; but she also depicts Irish as an inimitable signifier of cultural authenticity. This latter move undermines any sense of easy allegiance between Cixousian femininity and indigenous Irish culture. For Ní Dhomhnaill, who invests in the ideal of a linguistic and cultural homeland, the non-place of Cixousian femininity is a dystopia, one that denies our 'heartfelt need for both mythology and a homeland'.⁷⁵ At the same time, she acknowledges that, if Irish offers an alternative Logos, it comes with phallogocentric preoccupations of its own. By translating Cixous's *autre bisexualité* into her poetry, she subverts the patriarchal authoritarianism of earlier advocates of the Irish language. Bringing Irish mythology into conversation with *écriture féminine*, she evokes a postcolonial *Gaeltacht* poised to look beyond archetypes of the Eternal Feminine and towards 'the conscious reality of the Goddess, as *spéirbhean*'.⁷⁶

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⁷³ Ibid, 32-33.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ní Dhomhnaill, '*Dinnsheanchas: The Naming of High and Holy Places*', 40.

⁷⁶ Ní Dhomhnaill, '*Mis and Dubh Ruis*', 87.

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