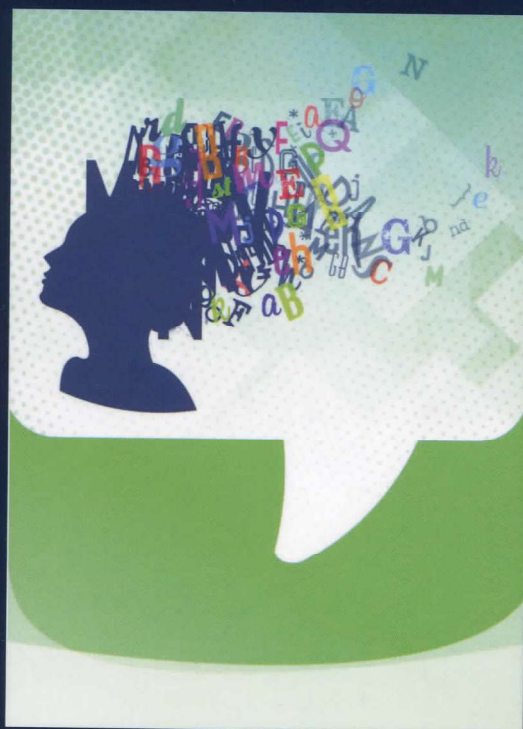


YOLANDA ROMANO MARTÍN
SARA VELÁZQUEZ GARCÍA (Coords.)

LAS INÉDITAS: VOCES FEMENINAS MÁS ALLÁ DEL SILENCIO



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INCEST, GENDER AND ABJECTION IN *IN NIGHT'S CITY AND ANOTHER ALICE*¹

INCESTO, GÉNERO Y ABYECCIÓN EN *IN NIGHT'S CITY Y ANOTHER ALICE*

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Universidad de Almería

Resumen: Este artículo estudia la incidencia del fenómeno del incesto en el desarrollo de la identidad de género en dos novelas irlandesas – inéditas en castellano – publicadas en las últimas décadas del siglo XX: *In Night's City* (1982) de Dorothy Nelson y *Another Alice* (1996) de Lia Mills, cuyas protagonistas son jóvenes que intentan superar un pasado traumático marcado por episodios abominables de abuso sexual. Especial atención se concede al mensaje que subyace en estas obras, a saber, que el incesto padre-hija es una manifestación del patriarcado y que las niñas que son víctimas de abusos sexuales sufren traumas que obstaculizan el desarrollo de su identidad de género de manera satisfactoria. Al objeto de llevar a efecto el presente análisis, se emplean las teorías de lo abyecto y de la subjetividad derivadas de trabajos seminales escritos por Judith Butler, Julia Kristeva y Luce Irigaray.

Palabras clave: incesto, abuso sexual, identidad de género, abyección y trama.

Abstract: This article considers the impact of incest in the development of gender identity by analysing two Irish novels – not translated into Spanish yet – published in the late 20th century: *In Night's City* (1982) by Dorothy Nelson and *Another Alice* (1996) by Lia Mills. The protagonists of these novels are young women who, in order to cope with life, try to come to terms with a painful past marked by abominable episodes of

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sexual abuse. Focus is placed upon Dorothy Nelson's and Lia Mills's implication that father-daughter incest is a manifestation of patriarchalism and that sexually abused girls suffer from traumas that prevent them from developing satisfying gender identities. Theories of abjection and subjectivity deriving from works by Judith Butler, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray are employed to approach the topic.

Key words: incest, sexual abuse, gender identity, abjection and trauma.

1. INCEST AS A TABOO

Dorothy Nelson in *In Night's City* and Lia Mills in *Another Alice* make "visible the situation of thousands of girls who are sexually abused by men close to them and then forced to remain silent regarding the source of their traumatic grief" (Jaime de Pablos, 2015: 53) as incest, often called "the ultimate taboo" or the "universal taboo" is regarded as the gravest violation of the rules of human society (Finkelhor, 1981: 85). However, as Judith Butler indicates though its prohibition exists in no way suggests that it works, "its existence appears to suggest that desires, actions, indeed, pervasive social practices of incest are generated precisely in virtue of the eroticization of that taboo. That incestuous desires are phantasmatic in no way implies that they are not also "social facts" (Butler, 1999: 54).

That these "social facts" have frequently taken place in Ireland can be deduced from a press release issued in 1993 by Monica Prendiville, president of the Irish Countrywomen's Association, where she openly discusses the prevalence of incest in Irish society: "Our estimate is that at least one third for Irish women have been subjected to sexual abuse and if this is so, many thousands of Irish girls and women are victims of incest" (Prendiville, 2002: 281). According to her, the background of the problem lies "in family conflict, parental neglect and physical abuse that may go back generations" (2002: 281). She adds that "most abusers are men" and that there exists some evidence that "they are men with psychological problems" (281).

This information invalidates the view generally assumed in Ireland that incest is an extremely rare phenomenon, only limited to extraordinarily dysfunctional families. In the 1990s women like Prendiville and women's organisations made incest an issue, and as media coverage of this topic exploded, it entered the nation's discourse, and as a consequence, the number of victims who gathered strength and confidence to report it increased.

Father-daughter incest, a taboo topic rarely discussed in Ireland before –as it had been contained “within the private sphere, the space of male privilege” (Conrad, 2004: 82)–, became the “focus of an increasingly body of sociological, psychoanalytic, [...] clinical discourse; [and] the subject of modern novels” (Ford, 1998: 1), among these Dorothy Nelson's *In Night's City* (1982) and Lia Mill's *Another Alice* (1995).²

Both novels, using Caitrina Moloney words, examine “the relationship between a damaged daughter, an abusing father, and an apparently cold, complicitous, and uncaring mother” (2003: 181). This way, both Dorothy Nelson and Lia Mills take part in the public debate on father-daughter incest causes and consequences and denounce certain complacency in relation to it. Their engaged writing has a purpose, i.e. to indicate that this practice “can be named, explored, criminalized, and so, perhaps controlled” (St Peter, 2000:131).

2. MONSTROUS FATHERS

Dorothy Nelson and Lia Mills show the horror father-daughter incest involves by describing the life long devastating physical and psychical effects it provokes on its victims. Sara Kavanagh in *In Night's City* and Alice Morrissey in *Another Alice* are young women deeply damaged by sexual abuse suffered in childhood. Although their fathers have died even before the narration of their

² To enlarge the number of incest narratives produced in the late 20th century, we could add two more novels: Jennifer Johnston's *The Invisible Worm* (1991) and Edna O'Brien's *Down by the River* (1996), and two short stories: Lela Bardwell's “The Dove of Peace” in the collection *Different Kinds of Love* (1987) and Mary Dorsey's “A Noise from the Woodshed” in the collection *A Noise from the Woodshed: Short Stories* (1989).

plight takes places, recurrent memories of their brutal acts still haunt Sara and Alice to make them relive a very painful past.

Through these memories, the Irish authors depict the setting and atmosphere in which the protagonists are molested, focusing on the girls' atrocious experience of sexual abuse: their terror and impotence, their excruciating physical pain and psychological commotion, their sense of fragmentation, their conviction of loosing something irretrievable in this brutal act (love, trust, integrity, ...), their sensation of becoming hollow, their shame for not observing, though involuntarily, a sacred taboo, their perception of becoming objects wildly destroyed by male monsters, their self-abjection, their wish to vanish and eventually die, etc.

The following excerpt from *Another Alice* by Lia Mills may serve to illustrate the above assertion. In it, Alice remembers one of the episodes of incest she was forced to experience when she was only seven years old:

Then he starts. He takes my right hand and begins to squeeze it, crushing it. The pain is excruciating and, as I try to pull away, it rises up my arm. When I stop fighting, he stops moving and, if the pain doesn't go away, at least it doesn't grow... but it's still there, and it's bad, and after a while I can't stand the tension any more, knowing what comes next. I deliberately move my legs away from him so he will come to it straight away. If it has to happen, just do it, I want it to be over. So I move my legs and he pushes his way inside me and oh, Jesus, the pain is searing and splitting me, it's going to split me in two, my whole body is going to split up the middle like a wishbone when you pull it apart, how can anything be so big and be inside me? [...] I'm bleeding, but I don't have to do anything about it, because if I don't my whole body will bleed away to nothing and then it will be over, I'll belong to him. (Mills, 1996: 316)

Alice belongs to Michael Morrisey, because in a patriarchal society the paterfamilias "owns" his wife and children in the same way he owns a house, a car or a dog: "He was my father, he owned me" (Mills, 1996: 78), confesses Alice to her psychotherapist. Taking advantage of this male prerogative,

Michael feels entitled to impose his will and his emotional demands on his daughter, he becomes the “slavemaster” (Mills, 1996: 79) or, else, “the Tyrant”, a man who imposes his authority through abuse and marks his territory with “scum” (Mills, 1996: 346), that is, with sweat, blood and sperm: “She recognised the marks of the Tyrant, it was his cruel talons that had ripped her flesh. He had marked her now, he would find her wherever she went. He would never rest until he had her in his fiery clutches, she was doomed...” (Mills, 1996: 41). “Likewise, Sara Kavanagh states that her father was “The boss in the house” (Nelson, 2006: 46) and “The Big man in the dark” (Nelson, 2006: 31).

In the hands of the perpetrators, the girls’ bodies, “passive surfaces” (Butler, 2004: 155), turn into “puppet[s]”, “rag dolls with floppy limbs and empty head[s]” (Mills, 1996: 220),³ or employing Luce Irigaray’s expression, “commodities”, i.e., utilitarian objects without any possible identity or communicable value ready to be used, abused, or even annihilated (Irigaray, 1985: 188). The cruelty displayed by perpetrators in both narrations does not only derive from their need to affirm male superiority in a deeply patriarchal society where women are only “natural bodies”, but also from their psychopathic natures. Michael Morrissey, for instance, according to his psychiatrist, suffers from schizophrenia, alcoholism (Mills, 1996: 288), depression, extreme mood swings, and paranoid tendencies among many other pathologies (Mills, 1996: 291). This way the idea that he is the element making the Morrissey family dysfunctional is more clearly portrayed.

Due to their perverse natures, neither Joseph Kavanagh in *In Night's City* nor Michael Morrissey in *Another Alice* can empathize with their victimized daughters. Without empathy, they lack “a major internal barrier to abusive action” (Herman, 1981: 56), which, in their case, involves not only physical ill-treatment and exploitation, but also emotional abuse in the form of hate speech. Alice, for example, recalls the way her father used to insult her while raping her: “He tells me what I

³ In this very same vein, Sarah-Anne Buckley adds that “for victims of incest in Ireland resistance was more a rarity than an actuality” (168).

am, *dirty, filthy, slut, evil*, and what to do, *turn over, open your legs, lie still, stop whining*. I can feel his weight and his darkness and the breath from his mouth, his teeth, his sounds grunting, his rubbing against me, and the slime that smears me, covers me, fills me, the slime I am” (Mills, 1996: 347).

Hate speech is thus used by the perpetrators of incest to transmit to their victims their misogynist views: as women are inferior, they must be submissive; as women are sinful, they must be punished. Following this line of thought Joseph informs Alice: “[...] he [the perpetrator] wants to hurt you and punish you because you’re bad and dirty” (Mills, 1996: 343). This way the perpetrators try to convince their victims that they deserve the harm inflicted upon them when sexually abused, which is not a manifestation of savage cruelty, but a tool to control their natural deviations.

Hate speech against Sara and Alice has, according to Judith Butler’s theories, effective power, on the one hand, it puzzles and injures them; on the other, it “constitutes [them...] at the moment of its utterance” (Butler, 1997a: 18) by fixing for ever their identities in derogatory terms. Butler calls it “identity through injury” (1997b: 105) and explains the way it works: “Called by an injurious name, I come into social being, and because I have a certain inevitable attachment to my existence, because a certain narcissism takes hold of any term that confers existence, I am led to embrace the terms that injure me because they constitute me socially” (1997b: 104). Therefore, we could state that Sara and Alice come into social being by being called “bad”, “evil”, “dirty”, “slut”, or “mad” –among many other offensive terms– precisely by those they are supposed to love, trust and obey, their male progenitors. This contributes to enhance their sense of self-abjection.

3. GENDER INSCRIPTION: “THE LAW OF THE FATHER”

Not only sexual offence, but also beatings and threats are employed by Joseph Kavanagh and Michael Morrissey to inscribe “The Law of the Father” in the bodies and minds of their wives and daughters, a Law that according to Judith Butler

“dictates the “being” and “having” positions” within the symbolic order (1993: 139), a Law:

that produces the trembling of the body prepared for its inscription, a law that marks it again with the symbolic stamp of sex. To assume the law, to accede to the law is to produce an imaginary alignment with the sexual position marked out by the symbolic, but also always to fail to approximate that position, and to feel the distance between that imaginary identification and the symbolic as the threat of punishment, the failure to conform, the spectre of abjection. (1993: 101)

Sara and Alice are expected to cope with the abuses, beatings and threats meant to mark their female bodies with “the symbolic stamp of sex” both passively and silently from an early stage in life. Soon, they learn to submit themselves to the demands of their patriarchal fathers, their “sworn enem[ies]” (Mills, 1996: 39), and become docile and complacent slaves: “I have to be careful not to make him angry. So I act as if I see nothing, hear nothing, say nothing. I do what he tells me to do. I lie as I am told to lie. I shut my eyes. I shut my eyes” (Mills, 1996: 347), says Alice. Likewise, Sara thinks: “You lie down and close your eyes an’ it’ll be all right” (Nelson, 2006: 55). To truly understand Sara’s and Alice’s passivity, the reader needs to imagine the situation as it is perceived through the eyes of little girls, girls who have “been taught to obey her father in all situations, [and] to anticipate punishment for any show of defiance (Meiselman, 1978: 159).

They will eventually complete the process of female socialization when, like their mothers, they are able to put up with gender violence on a regular basis. Being compliant and submissive is essential to this process: “I have found out that the thinking of something being terrible is what makes it terrible. But if you live with it a long time you find it’s the same as eating and drinking. Not terrible at all, but a part of the everyday living you have to put up with” (Nelson, 2006: 91), concludes Elaine Kavanagh. Silence is also a fundamentally feminine trait, as Irigaray states: “[girls/women] commodities should never speak” (1985: 158). The priest in *In Night’s City* points out the

relevance of these feminine features when rebuking Sara for both being unhappy with her situation at home, and complaining about it to him: “Try to pull yourself out of these depressions. Try to grow up. You’re very immature. Stop looking for attention all the time” (Nelson, 2006: 83).

4. FROM OBJECTS TO ABJECTS

The girls’ impression of being used like sexual objects and of being defiled because of that is clear when Alice says her father used her “as a toilet” (Mills, 1996: 381). After sexual assaults, the victims’ bodies are covered with defilement: sweat, blood, sperm... body fluids that are disgusting for the little girls, but with which they tend to associate in an obsessive way, they stain not only their bodies but also their psyches: “The filth of me. My skin crusted with it, with the dirt he has brought to me, covered me with, tries to smother me in. (Mills, 1996: 346). This defilement, according to Julia Kristeva, represents the “objective evil undergone by the subject,” (1982: 69) or else “the objective frailty of symbolic order” (70):

Let us posit that defilement is an objective evil undergone by the subject. Or, to put it another way, the danger of filth represents for the subject the risk to which the very symbolic order is permanently exposed, to the extent that it is a device of discriminations, of differences. But from where and from what does the threat issue? From nothing else but an equally objective reason, even if individuals can contribute to it, and which would be, in a way, the frailty of the symbolic order itself. (69)

The incest victims’ sense of being dirty is so strong that both Sara and Alice resort to steaming water to get rid of it. Water, fire and pain are combined to purify their small bodies, now regarded as abject by the girls themselves. Alice remembers “[...] the old steam pipe in the bathroom. The one she used to hold herself against, raising red weals on her legs. Furious that she couldn’t stay there long enough to scorch and sear

something slimy and horrible from her skin..." (Mills, 1996: 270).

The girls feel the need to attack and eventually destroy their bodies, which, owned, controlled, and marked with defilement by the perpetrators, become also enemies. Self-hate is translated into self-destructive behaviour which involves eating disorders⁴, addictions to drugs and alcohol, self-inflicted pain,⁵ self-mutilation and suicidal thoughts. Alice's case is extreme, she bites herself and draws blood, bruises herself, scratches herself, makes marks on her arms and legs (Mills, 1996: 269), she becomes "A secret cannibal, self-devouring" (Mills, 1996: 271).

Body and mind split. The psychic and somatic unity fragments. The girls' minds can no longer be linked to the bodies they despise. These invaded, defiled, injured and alienated bodies are no longer, in Gustav Bovensiepen terms, the symbolic containers of their souls (1995: 125), but this fragmentation also involves the "Unconscious/Conscious division" and the "Signifier/Signified division", which imply "the dissolution of the subject as signifying subject" (Kristeva, 1998: 134). A sense of emptiness and frustration accompanies their experiencing of disintegration, which can "be interpreted as the ultimate imprint of the death drive" (1989: 27). Dorothy Nelson describes Sara's process of binary splitting –dissociation of mind and body– and the deriving death drive in the following way: "the Dark is over me with the snake. An' all the colours come down on top of me but they aren't mindin' me. They are eatin' me up. The colours are eatin' me up. And then I'm not me anymore. I'm Maggie. The colours are eatin' Maggie up. So it is all right. It is all right" (Nelson, 2006: 58).

Sara's body and mind are two different entities, therefore they have two different names. Sara, conscious part of the protagonist, addresses her body, now her other self, as Maggie. Maggie is not only the barrier protecting Sara from psychological collapse, but also her confident in a wild world where everyone seems or wants to take no notice of her plight.

⁴ Sara falls prey of both anorexia and bulimia, Sara, only of anorexia.

⁵ "Pain is what I need", says Alice (Mills, 1996: 345).

Sara and Maggie explicitly represent the protagonist's schizophrenia and provide with two different views of the same phenomenon: detached from her own body, Sara can look upon Joseph Kavanagh as a father, whereas Maggie, body, can only gaze at him as "a man" turned into beast (Nelson, 2006: 102): "I wouldn't forgive Sara for still loving him after what he'd done to me" (Nelson, 2006: 103-104).⁶ Maggie, passive, silent and suffering body, acquires voice and agency in the last chapter of *In Night's City*. She rebels not only against Joseph and Esther, but also against Sara, who has not only used her as a shield, but has also ignored her needs all through the years.

Alice, however, experiences what is termed a "parcellary splitting" (Klein in Kristeva, 1989: 18), since her very self is divided into many replicas. She very often seems to see children, also victims of incest, confined in a dark space. She will eventually discover that each of them is a replica of herself, that every single time she was molested by her father, a fragment of her own "flesh and blood" (Nelson, 2006: 81) came off to become a new entity, though also weak, enslaved and doomed: "They were all me. One for every filthy time he touched me. Some of them even liking it, [...] until he hurt them. Us. Me." (Mills, 1996: 383). She hates them all because, unlike her, while being abused, "they cry and beg and plead for release, they haven't learnt yet" to be silent and passive (Mills, 1996: 348). They are all "Babies, crying for a mummy who never comes" (Mills, 1996: 348).

5. THE BURDEN OF FEMALE MELANCHOLIA: INSENSITIVE AND NEGLECTFUL MOTHERS

Sara and Alice feel ignored by their apathetic mothers, Esther Kavanagh and Elaine Morrissey respectively, who seem to be deaf and blind in relation to the incestuous abuses taking place at home. These mothers show further neglect by withholding love, attention, support and sympathy. Elaine, for instance, does not devote any time nor shows any affection to her daughter.

⁶ Similarly, Sara regards Esther Kavanagh as a mother and Maggie considers Esther as "an old woman" obsessed with cleaning (Nelson, 2006: 102).

She spends most of her energy on doing housekeeping, working for an insurance company and dealing with a violent, schizophrenic, alcoholic husband. Alice has the conviction that Elaine both lacks sensitivity towards her: “She is as cold and smooth as glass” (Mills, 1996: 263) and is rarely available for her: “She is always leaving, on her way out, turning away. [...] Never towards, always away from, me. I watch her go, numb. Through the window she doesn’t hear what I try to tell her, already she’s too far away. She doesn’t look back” (Mills, 1996: 263). According to Lia Mills, Elaine is “a frightened woman”, who, in her situation, is not as powerful as Alice imagines her to be (Mills in Moloney, 2003: 186).

Sarah’s mother attitude is even worse. Esther Kavanagh knows her daughter is a victim of incest because it happens in her presence and does nothing to prevent it. Ill-treated by an extremely aggressive husband who regularly beats her nearly to death, and part of a dysfunctional family where members relate to each other in a non-protective and non-affective way, Esther keeps quiet and silent when her daughter is molested. Sara’s sense of panic and frustration is increased not only by her mother not interfering to put an end to her sexual abuse⁷, but also by her mother’s refusal to acknowledge it:

He was looking down on me and then he pulled the blankets off me an’ touched me funny. Mammy came in a’ I thought “It’ll be all right now. It’ll be all right.” It was dark but she didn’t turn de light on. She stood beside my pillow an’ looked at him doin’ the funny things. Her eyes were sort of glintin’ and she looked real cold. I went to say “Mammy stop him hurtin’ me,” but she wasn’t mindin’ me. She was in the faraway place watchin’ him doin’ the funny things so I pretended I wasn’t there. Then he went downstairs and she went into the toilet. When she came back she switched the light on an’ I started to cry. “look,” I said. “Look is that red blood on the sheets? Is it

⁷ In Judith Herman’s expression, due to the “enormous power imbalance between the father[s] and mother[s]” in patriarchal families, the latter “are terrified of any assertion of power” (in Caruth 2014: 133).⁸ Photographs can be read as a creative response to abuse and incest, but also as a means to make damaged individuals visible. Thus she is able to speak the abject.

Mammy?” She came over and pulled the covers up and told me to lie down. “Go to sleep now,” she said. “You had a bad dream.” “It wasn’t a dream, Mammy,” I said. “It was real.” She bent down over me. “It was a dream. Now go to sleep.” “It wasn’t Mammy”, I cried. “Say it wasn’t. Look.” I pushed the covers down and showed her the red blood. “Look at that,” I said. “It was a dream,” she said. (Nelson, 2006: 8)

Both mothers, Esther and Elaine, try to silence what is happening at home to avoid neighbours’ criticism. Certain painful matters, like those involving abusive behaviour, cannot be talked about either within nor outside the family. Their attitude is representative of the silence that surrounds the Irish family, even in late 20th century, and the importance of preserving its unity and respectability. Alice remembers “her mother’s insistence on loyalty, on keeping up the family name” (Mills, 1996: 291).

In due course, Sara reproaches Esther having neglected her in such a way and having pretended that everything was alright at home: “All you cared about was keeping the house clean and lyin’ to the neighbours” (Nelson, 2006: 25). This act of rebellion against parental authority, this open talking about family trouble, that Esther believes is fruit of her daughter’s corrupted nature is punished with rejection: Sara is told to leave the house. Thus Esther narrates: “She’d never be purified now. So I told her to get out” (Nelson, 2006: 29).

Likewise, Elaine Morrissey, also convinced that her daughter is a sinful creature because she takes the pill, compels her daughter to abandon the family house: “Diseased. I don’t want to be contaminated by you. I want you out of here. Pack your bag and go, [...] I don’t care what happens to you! You’re a monster! You’re going straight to hell!” (Mills, 1996: 145-6). Being driven away from their homes by their mothers, when their fathers no longer exist, implies breaking the mother-daughter bond. This is perceived by both Sara and Alice, in Heather Ingman’s words interpreting Kristeva’s theory of maternal abjection, “not a source of strength but as a source of anguish and disempowerment” (2007: 69). Once the bond is

broken, the girls start “their search for a strong and secure female identity” (69).

6. TRAUMATIC GENDER IDENTITIES: “TROUBLE WITH SEX”

Sara’s and Alice’s bodies do not seem to matter at all. It seems their reason for existing is to be sexually exploited by men, often those close to them. In the particular case of Alice, she is not only raped by her father, but also by a young man she happens to meet at a party, besides, the father of one of her best friends also attempts at abusing her on several occasions. As a consequence, Alice ends up generating a traumatic gender identity which derives into “trouble with sex” (Mills, 1996: 142).

As an archetypically feminine woman within a patriarchal order, she offers herself as a giving, self-sacrificing and complacent sexual object since she thinks that that is what men expect from her. At the early age of sixteen, she has developed a tendency towards promiscuity, manifested through a habit: “going out with anyone who asked”, which is explained this way: “They bought me drinks and dinner and I went to bed with them. It seemed a fair enough exchange. But I hated it” (Mills, 1996: 156). Liebman Jacobs explains this abnormal sexual behaviour by stating that:

For the sexually abused child, the cultural portrayal of female objectification and degradations merge with internal representations of the self that have been shaped by the experience of traumatic sexualisation. As the shame of her private humiliation is mirrored in the social construction of women as body, the abused child’s sense of self becomes tied to her identity as sexual object. (1994: 119)

As the consequence of one of these sexual relationships, Alice becomes pregnant and Holly is born. Motherhood provides her with some new sensations: among them those of strength, self-confidence, pride and some bodily integrity. Now, she looks at her body through a different light, she can perceive it as hers, and in positive terms. For the first time in her life, she feels:

“something like tenderness and respect for her body” (Mills, 1996: 170). However Alice’s euphoria does not last. The ghosts of the past, old memories of sexual abuse, reappear bringing with them: shame, fear, pain, paralysis and personality disorders. To put an end to all this and eventually heal, she resorts to a psychotherapist, Ruth, who will help her to survive incest.

7. SURVIVING INCEST: FROM OBJECTS TO SUBJECTS IN PROCESS

Thanks to Ruth, Alice is able to articulate the unspeakable about incest and discover that incest was not her fault, that she did nothing wrong, that she was not dirty, but “hurt” (Mills, 1996: 350-351); thanks to Ruth, she learns to recognise, accept and respect the parts of herself that she had lost after being abused; and thanks to Ruth, she can forgive herself in order to be able to love herself: “Something warm stirred inside her. She was shocked to realise that what she felt was love. As she recognised it, it grew. Love for herself, both then and now. Love and a fierce kind of pride” (Mills, 1996: 350). This way Alice becomes a survivor of incest: “*This is who I am. I survived all that*” (Mills, 1996: 350).

Alice becomes an incest survivor when she arrives at a sense of herself and self-definition, when she “learns to tell her own story, not to accept what other people say about her” (Mills in Moloney, 2003: 184), when she moves from nothingness to being, from kristevan object/object to subject in process, this defined as the subject who has succeeded:

in remodelling the historically accepted and defined *chora* of *significance*, through the proposition of the representation of a different relation to natural objects, to social apparatuses, and to the body itself. A subject of this type crosses through the linguistic network and makes use of it to indicate, as if via anaphora or hieroglyphs, that he or she is not representing a reality posed in advance and for ever detached from the pulsional process, but that he or she is experimenting or using the objective process through immersion in it and re-emerging from it via the drives. (Kristeva, 1998: 142)

Having gained strength through healing, she feels fully empowered: “I survived all that. A current of power surged through her. There is nothing, she thought, that I can’t do” (Mills, 1996: 360). The protagonist’s new zest for life helps her overcome the previous state of melancholia. She is no longer a victim, she is no longer haunted by the past, she is a real survivor: “It’s like, I’m not a victim any more. [...] what matters is that I survived him... in more ways than one. I’m going to make the most of it” (Mills, 1996: 388), because, as her psychotherapist affirms: “Living well is the best revenge” (Mills, 1996: 388).

At the end of the novel, Alice plans “to live well”. She feels satisfied with herself, with her successful career as a photographer of survivors like herself⁸, and with her role as a mother. No longer hollow, fragmented, silent, depressed or isolated, Alice is now ready to make deep and lasting changes in her life, to explore new places, and enjoy fresh experiences in the company of the person she most loves, Holly, her daughter:

An ache of love caught in her chest. The whole country seemed to stretch out in front of them. Limitless” [...] She and Holly sang along together, loud. “Take these sunken eyes and learn to see...” They smiled widely at each other in the mirror, still singing. Alice looked at the road ahead. She felt the pressure of happiness build in her until she was sure she would burst, lift from the ground and soar. Nothing, not even the gravity, was strong enough to hold her down. The sky bent over her in a wide blue curve and she flew to meet it. Strong. Forgiven. (Mills, 1996: 392)

Hope is also there for Sara at the end of *In Night’s City*, however, her hope does not derive from a healing process, but from repressing the unconscious memories of abuse. Sara has no therapist, relative or friend helping her to overcome her sexually traumatic history and emerge as a person. Unlike Alice at the end of *Another Alice*, she has not been taught how to deal with and understand the past in order to confront the horror of the abject,

⁸ Photographs can be read as a creative response to abuse and incest, but also as a means to make damaged individuals visible. Thus she is able to speak the abject.

therefore, she cannot come to terms and cope with it. Still a split subject, Sara, conscious part of the character, prefers, like her mother, to fake reality: to pretend she lived, lives and will live an ideal existence within the framework of a patriarchal family; to believe that marriage and motherhood are women's destiny; to accept that parents physically and emotionally abuse their children for their own good: "My Ma was a good woman. Da beat us sometimes but that's because we were bad. He loved us all the same. And my Ma loved me. My Ma LOVED ME. Someday I'll get married and have children just like she did. Everything will be all right then. I don't hate being a woman. I don't. I don't" (Nelson, 2006: 113-14).

We see that Sara has not learned the right lesson to become a subject, to acquire voice and agency, to achieve psychic and somatic unity, or to make an "entrance into the universe of signs and creation" (Kristeva, 1989: 23) as a fully independent, self-confident, free from prejudice, happy woman. She simply denies the severity of her family's dysfunctionality and reproduces the patriarchal logic in a naïve way. As a true Catholic Irish girl of the time, she aims at marriage and motherhood with the expectation that her new home will provide her with the safety and wellbeing Irish homes are traditionally associated with.

Sara and Alice represent the difference between being a victim of incest and being a survivor of incest. Following Rosaria Champagne's classification, Sara remains a victim of incest because she becomes "complicit with abuse and honour injunctions posed by [the] perpetrator [in order] to dismiss the abuse's import or impact" (1996: 2), whereas Alice becomes a real survivor because she moves to a place where she rejects the demand to remain silent, because she remembers, she speaks up, she aims at "denaturalizing" abuse and disabling its aftereffects "transforming memory from the register of current phobias to the record of past events" (2).

Giving focal attention, speaking up, and denaturalizing father-daughter incest are precisely Dorothy Nelson's and Lia Mills' goals when writing the novels here dealt with. By contributing to the acknowledgment of this hidden reality of Irish family life, by uncovering its patriarchal roots, by exposing

its dreadful consequences for girls and women both physically and psychically, they are also collaborating with its eradication.

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