



FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA

**“Protectress of the land”: An Ecocritical Approach to
Dairena Ní Chinnéide’s Poetry**

“Protectora da terra”: Unha aproximación ecocrítica á poesía de Dairena Ní Chinnéide

“Protectora de la tierra”: Una aproximación ecocrítica a la poesía de
Dairena Ní Chinnéide

Alicia Asensio Bande

Titora: Manuela Palacios González

Grao en Lingua e Literatura Inglesas

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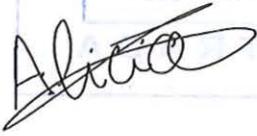

Resumo [na lingua en que se vai redacta-lo TFG; entre 1000 e 2000 caracteres]:

Dairena Ní Chinnéide is an Irish bilingual poet from County Kerry, namely from Corca Dhuibhne. The natural world, especially that of her homeland, is central to her poetry. The aim of this TFG is thereby to analyse the connections between nature and her Irish, female and poetic identity. More specifically, the aspects to be explored are the following: the connection of nature with the history, culture and everyday practices of Ireland; the connection of nature with femininity; and finally, the poetic voice’s conception of the poetic creation. To this end, a selection of poems from Ní Chinnéide’s literary works will be examined, specifically from *The Warrior and Other Poems* (2006), *The Raven’s Mother* (2008), *Spellbound* (2016) and *Deleted* (2019), as well as from the multi-lingual poetry collection *With Foxgloves on our Fingers* (2023) and the British-Irish Council’s poetic anthology *Now the Sun Breaks Through* (2023).

Ecocritical approaches to nature, poetry and identity will provide the theoretical framework to this TFG. Iovino and Oppermann’s book entitled *Material Ecocriticism* will serve to define the conception of the natural world that will be taken into consideration. Furthermore, references such as Eóin Flannery’s book *Ireland and Ecocriticism*, Kate Rigby’s article “Ecocriticism” or Estévez-Saá and Lorenzo-Modia’s article “The Ethics and Aesthetics of Eco-Caring: Contemporary Debates on Ecofeminism(s)” will provide the conceptual perspectives on ecopoetry, postcolonialism, ecofeminism and posthuman identities that will guide the analysis.

Santiago de Compostela, 3 de Abril de 2024.

SRA. PRESIDENTA DA COMISIÓN DO TRABALLO DE FIN DE GRAO

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Declaración de orixinalidade do traballo:

Eu, Alicia Asensio Bande, con DNI 35591794F, declaro que este TFG é un traballo orixinal realizado por min baixo a supervisión de Manuela Palacios. Os contidos, as análises e as conclusións presentadas ó longo do TFG son resultado da miña investigación en fontes académicas e do meu traballo persoal. As referencias bibliográficas consultadas están debidamente citadas e identificadas.

Mediante esta declaración, asumo a responsabilidade total polo contido e orixinalidade deste traballo, sendo consciente das penalizacións aplicables no caso de plaxio.

Alicia Asensio Bande 10/06/2024

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Introduction

The aim of this dissertation is to explore the intersections of nature and identity in the work of the Irish poet Dairena Ní Chinnéide. Throughout her literary production, the poet reflects upon the imbrication of her life in the natural world. She does not simply provide a description of an unspoilt natural setting in which human life evolves, but an account of an alternative way of living in which both the material and the human realms interact. Therefore, this dissertation will not limit itself to a mere acknowledgement of the natural elements present in Ní Chinnéide's poetry. The inextricable interrelations among nature, the history and culture of Ireland, the author herself and her conception of the writing process will be examined.

Dairena Ní Chinnéide is an Irish bilingual poet from County Kerry, namely from Corca Dhuibhne, where she currently lives and works. She writes in both Irish and English and also translates her own work. She has received several awards for her poetry, including Irish Language Literature Bursaries from the Arts Council of Ireland, Ealaín na Gaeltacht, Patrick and Katherine Kavanagh Fellowship, and Munster Literary Centre Covid Bursary (Ní Chinnéide "Irish Bilingual Poet"). She is a former broadcaster and journalist, television producer and simultaneous interpreter (Ní Chinnéide "Irish Bilingual Poet"). Nonetheless, as she explained in an interview for *The Irish Times* in 2006, she decided to conclude her career in journalism in order to boldly become a full-time poet: "I just threw caution to the wind and, for some reason, anytime I need something, it just falls into my lap" (qtd. in Foley). Writing poetry for a living allows her to engage in a profound exploration of her identity and core concerns. Furthermore, she has participated in literary festivals and events performing her poetry in Ireland, Europe and the United States of America (Uí Mhaicín).

Moreover, Dairena Ní Chinnéide was nominated Poet Laureate for Listowel as part of the Poetry Ireland *Poetrytown* project in 2021 (Ní Chinnéide "Irish Bilingual Poet"). This initiative encourages local communities to commemorate poetry in their everyday lives and surroundings

to celebrate the pride, strength and diversity of their town (Poetry Ireland). In September 2023, Ní Chinnéide participated in a literary exchange between Galicia and Ireland. She was selected to spend one month in Residencia Literaria 1863 in A Coruña, which provided her the opportunity to work on her poetry, while bringing Irish and Galician culture together (Cultura de Galicia). Currently, she is Writer-in-Residence for the language and culture organization Oidhreacht Chorca Dhuibhne with Ealaín na Gaeltachta (Ní Chinnéide “Irish Bilingual Poet”). This organization has as its objective the improvement of the economic, social, community and cultural life of the Irish Language speaking areas of Corca Dhuibhne with the realization of several projects, activities and publications (Oidhreacht Chorca Dhuibhne). Although this dissertation analyses the English version of Ní Chinnéide’s poems, she first produces most of her work in Irish. Both language versions reveal her profound connection and care for Ireland’s natural landscape and culture.

She has published eleven poetry collections in both Irish and English. Among the bilingual collections, poems from *The Warrior and Other Poems* (2006), *The Raven’s Mother* (2008) and *Spellbound* (2016) will be examined. In 2019, *Deleted*, her first book entirely in English, was released. Subsequently, in 2023, the collection *With Foxgloves on our Fingers* was published, comprising a selection of her poems in Irish, English, Galician and Spanish. Finally, in 2023, the British-Irish Council published a poetic anthology entitled *Now the Sun Breaks Through*, which included a poem by Dairena Ní Chinnéide. The publication was intended to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement.

Ní Chinnéide’s poems, through the portrayal of a profound attachment to the natural space, recognize nature’s agency. She reconciles the traditional dichotomies that separate the human and the material realms. In addition, instead of perpetuating the opposition between nature and reason-centred culture, she employs the poetic form to highlight the interactions between both worlds. Auge and O’Brien highlight Timothy Morton’s assertion about the ecological value of

poetry: “to write poetry is to perform a nonviolent political act, to coexist with other beings... a poem forces us to acknowledge that we coexist with uncanny beings in a groundless yet vivid reality” (7-8).

Ní Chinnéide uses her cultural production to display the interconnections of the land of Ireland and its people. The Irish natural world has frequently been “defined and romanticized from the outside” (Conan and Coulouma 10), resulting in simplistic and idealized representations that have distorted the relationship between the human dimension and the surrounding environment. In contrast with this, Ní Chinnéide presents a personal perspective that recognizes nature’s embeddedness in cultural and historical events which are key to conforming Irish identity. Through her poems, we can better understand the relationship between Irish people, their culture, specific places and the non-human world.

Dairena Ní Chinnéide writes a very personal poetry in which she displays her main concerns as a woman, proving that female experiences and voices deserve a valuable place within cultural productions. The traditional dichotomy between nature and culture has often converged with the confrontation between women and men, thereby associating women with nature and justifying their domination (Estévez-Saá and Lorenzo-Modia 129). Nonetheless, Ní Chinnéide subverts this dualism to convey a global ethic of care in which the feminization of the natural world serves to illustrate a progressive dimension in which frequently othered realities, including women and nature, are equitably regarded. She challenges the androcentric notions of culture and life that have been shaped by patriarchal and rationalist conceptions. Furthermore, her identity as an Irish woman and a poet cannot be conceived as something separate from the surrounding natural world. She represents herself as an autonomous subject but inextricably entangled in the natural realm, recognizing the implications of the non-human entities for the formation of dynamic concepts of bodies, genders and identities.

This dissertation is structured in two chapters. The initial one is devoted to the exploration of ecocritical approaches to nature, poetry and identity, introducing the theoretical framework that will guide the subsequent analysis of Ní Chinnéide's poems. More specifically, this first chapter delves into the conception of the non-human realm proposed by material ecocriticism, a selection of theoretical notions about ecopoetry and poetic language, and the correlation of nature and postcolonial studies. Some of the chief tenets of ecofeminism and posthumanism will be examined as well. The second chapter encompasses a comprehensive analysis of a selection of poems from Ní Chinnéide's major literary works that deftly allow to explore the intersections of nature with her conception of poetic creation, Irish history and culture, and femininity.

1. Ecocritical Perspectives on Nature, Poetry and Identity.

1.1 Material ecocriticism

The natural world has been depicted in literature for years. Nevertheless, it is frequently portrayed as a mere backdrop to individual life, without any instance of agency. As a result, culture and human beings' modes of living have habitually been separated and differentiated from nature, often leading to a degradation of the environmental world. Yet, as Lawrence Buell states, "the task of the ecocritic is both to unravel and critique the conceptualisations that have been so damaging" (qtd. in Marland 847), in order to change the anthropocentric relation that human beings have with nature and culture. Therefore, in this chapter I will present the theoretical framework that will be used to subsequently analyse a selection of poems by Dairena Ní Chinnéide. In this first section, I will address the approach to nature proposed by material ecocriticism.

Since its beginnings, the ecocritical movement has been evolving and changing. Its development can be classified into waves. The first wave was mainly focused on finding ethical

representations of nature in specific literary texts, and then, the second wave appeared when the necessity of correlating ecocriticism and other social movements became apparent (Marland 848-851). Later, the third wave furthered the previous developments by taking into consideration ethnic and local particularities but also transcended the borders so as to enhance the connectedness beyond nations in the world (Marland 854). Nevertheless, the opposition between nature and culture prevailed. The materialist approach will be encouraged by the need to overcome this opposition, while promoting an ethical relationship with the environment.

Later, by linking some fields of scientific research with humanities studies, the so-called “material turn” became relevant to approach the natural world in a different way. It involved focusing on the relevance of recognizing agency in non-human entities (Iovino and Opperman 2). Within ecocritical studies, Iovino and Opperman claim that the new material approach offers “possible ways to analyze language and reality, human and non-human life, mind and matter, without falling into dichotomous patterns of thinking” (2). It thus opens the way for non-anthropocentric perspectives that confront those dualisms while conferring to both the human and material realm a rightful place within the discipline.

The study of a no longer inert non-human world becomes meaningful for a better understanding of the complexities of human beings. Agency is not the exclusive property of individuals. All entities are capable of producing and communicating meaning in various forms. The interaction among all elements, and their outcomes are indispensable to better comprehend both human and non-human nature since human beings are intertwined in this dimension of agentive entities as well. Therefore, Iovino and Oppermann define material ecocriticism as follows:

Material ecocriticism, in this broad framework, is the study of the new material forms_bodies, things, elements, toxic substances, chemicals, organic and inorganic matter, landscapes, and

biological entities_intra-act with each other and with the human dimension, producing configurations of meanings and discourses that we can interpret as stories. (7)

The new materialists define matter as “unpredictable, self-creative, generative, active, and expressive” (Oppermann “From Ecological Postmodernism” 25). Nature exhibits an agency with signs and meanings, designated “storied matter” by Oppermann, that intersects with the human beings’ world and literature. For this reason, “we can read the world as matter endowed with stories” (Oppermann “From Ecological Postmodernism” 21), thus confronting the anthropocentric view that separates our notion of culture from nature. The boundaries between human semiotic processes, knowledge, practices, and the very material world itself are blurred (Oppermann “From Ecological Postmodernism” 28), and we must become aware of this inextricable connection, which does not reduce culture into nature and vice versa.

Nevertheless, the fact that the natural world has agency has been regarded as a threat that limits human beings’ control of the world. The term ecophobia features how human beings “respond emotionally and cognitively to what we perceive as environmental threats and as a menacing alienness” (Estok 131). It seems that the loss of human autonomy and superiority over the natural dimension can trigger contempt and the destruction of the environment. To put an end to this, human beings need to accept these limits of control and respect the autonomy of the material world (Bergthaller 49). Ní Chinnéide’s poetry perfectly embraces the natural world’s agency that is enmeshed in the individuals’ daily lives and the history of her nation.

1.2 Cultural ecology, Ecopoetry and Poetic Language

Following the conceptions of nature and culture proposed by material ecocriticism, literature can be examined as a cultural ecology. Zapf argues that literature employs language, imagination and critique to challenge and transform cultural narratives of humanity’s relationship to nature (130). Many literary manifestations explore humanity’s connection to nature, as they present “human experience as part of a shared world of bodily natures and embodied minds” (Zapf 141). Literature therefore constitutes a means through which a more ethical and non-dualistic relationship with the environment can be portrayed. It represents a

cultural ecology both in terms of content and “in the forms and functions of aesthetic communication” (Zapf 142), as well as by giving voice to frequently alien realities. With the aforementioned feature of literature in mind, this section will cover a discussion of the notion of ecopoetry, poetic language and, ultimately, the pastoral tradition.

Ecopoetry explores the connection between the human and the non-human worlds. Dairena Ní Chinnéide’s poems present this mutual interdependence and involvement between nature and human beings, questioning the dualism that separates the two realms. Ecopoetry’s portrayal of the material world allows us to question traditional anthropocentric views in which landscapes were merely a setting to human activities. This conception can eventually lead to the destruction of these spaces. Therefore, according to Borthwick:

The central concern of ecopoetry is recognition of human entanglement in the world. It explores the relationship that humans have with a shared world, at once connected to it, but also increasingly estranged from it. Ecopoetry seeks to question and renegotiate the human position in respect of the environment in which we are enmeshed. Its ethic is to oppose the violent assumption that the world around us exists merely as a set of resources which can be readily and unethically exploited and degraded for economic gain. (qtd. in Flannery 56)

Ecopoetry does not only seek for a more ethical consideration of the natural world in order to put an end to the exploitation of resources as a consequence of human practices. It is not simply a description of nature to raise awareness. References to nature aim at installing a reflection on the coexistence of multiple temporalities and agencies in the world (Yee 3). It also aims to visualize the interconnectedness of the human and non-human world which stands as a network of agencies so as to achieve an ethical relationship with the environment that currently does not seem to proliferate in culture.

Furthermore, some considerations on language are worth regarding. It is through our language that we shape our conception of nature, which habitually leads to the portrayal of the material world as inert, without agency and detached from the human realm. Nevertheless, the

view that nature is silent might well say more about our refusal to hear than about nature's inability to communicate (Rigby 164). Material elements are also capable of performing acts of communication. Besides, human languages and cultures themselves are conditioned by the natural environment in which they evolved (Rigby 154). The interconnection and mutual dependence of both dimensions is thereby reinforced, since the natural world also shapes our language.

In poetry, the language employed becomes very relevant since it provides a distinctive access to the natural world. In a poem, "language and thought become defamiliarized precisely as they move towards experiences beyond the human scales and norms, they usually express" (Clarke qtd. in Yee 3). It is beyond the ordinary use of the language and through the use of metaphors and symbols that the poetic language expresses the intricate interactions between humanity and nature. Moreover, according to Bate, poetry incorporates formal features, such as the musicality of the lines, that recreate the sounds of the earth, conferring to this genre the role of connecting our home and our creative practices with the natural world and reinforcing the mutual interdependency:

Ecopoetics asks in what respects a poem may be a making (Greek *poiesis*) of the dwelling place_the from Greek *oikos* "the home or place of dwelling". According to this definition, poetry will not be necessarily synonymous with verse: the poeming of dwelling is not inherently dependent on metrical form. However, the rhythmic, syntactic and linguistic intensifications that are characteristic of verse-writing frequently give peculiar force to *poiesis*: it could be that *poiesis* in this sense of verse-making is language's most direct path to return to the *oikos*, the place of dwelling, because metre itself_a quiet but persistent music, a recurring cycle, a heartbeat_is an answering to nature's own rhythms, an echoing of the song of earth herself. (qtd. in Flannery 57)

However, poetic language is not always exempt from expressing a representation distanced from the original experience. As Rigby states, literary language is not always free from instrumentalizing tendencies, especially if it is orientated towards the elevation of the human

soul (Rigby 165). The portrayal of nature in a poem through poetic language may not be sufficient to convey a non-hierarchical relationship with the material world. Still, with regard to the representation of the natural world featured in Ní Chinnéide's poems, it is worth addressing the concepts of pastoral and post-pastoral.

Generally speaking, pastoral poetry seeks to “depict the human relation to the natural world, emphasizing the harmony between nature and human nature, the contrast between city and country, and the underlying tension between civilization and nature” (Potts 2). Pastoralism can be a means of expressing Irish identity since nature holds a core role within Irish culture. Nonetheless, drawing such distinctions that separate civilization and daily lives in urban areas from the natural world provokes the consideration of nature and culture as two completely detached worlds, while presenting an anthropocentric approach to nature.

In addition, the pastoral mode can be related to colonialism. As Potts argues, “pastoral constructions of Ireland provided the means for justifying its colonization but also a critique by the Irish themselves not only of British colonialism but also its inevitable companions: modernization and industrialization” (3). Pastoral poetry frequently presents an idealistic essentialist version of the rural environment. It conveys bourgeois ideology while highlighting an unreal harmony of classes in which the relationship among social classes is portrayed as a peaceful arrangement between the rich and the poor (Huggan and Tiffin 99). Nonetheless, it is necessary to note that pastoralism also presents a critique of the forms of development and progress that have been so detrimental to the natural space (Huggan and Tiffin 100).

Therefore, with the aforementioned considerations about pastoralism in mind, it is worth introducing the so-called “post-pastoral” tradition. Gifford uses this term to refer to the works in which the retreat to nature may move the reader to assume responsibility and action towards the environment. “Post-pastoral” moves away from the anthropocentric viewpoint of pastoral

by conveying “a deep sense of immanence in all natural things” and recognizing that our “inner human natures can be understood in relation to external nature” (Gifford qtd. in Potts X). Post-pastoralism stresses humans’ intricate connection with the environment, as Ní Chinnéide’s poems attest.

1.3 Ecocriticism and Postcolonial Studies

Following on from the treatment of nature and its relationship with the process of colonization in the pastoral tradition, a correlation between the exploitation of Ireland with that of the natural world can be established. Postcolonial ecocriticism identifies the link between the hierarchy and oppression experienced, in this case, by Ireland, its inhabitants and its vernacular culture and the exploitation of the environment. Nature intersects with cultural, historical and political aspects. Specific traits, social constructs and the colonial past are fundamental to the current situation, the view of nature and the way of thinking of the Irish people, which is reflected in their culture.

As Gilano and Deloughrey explain, the need to bring postcolonial and ecological issues together lies in the aim to challenge the continuing imperialist modes of social and environment dominance, while overcoming dualistic conceptions that prioritize a reason-centred culture whose only desire is the establishment of one’s own interests over an inert nature and an othered majority:

What the postcolonial/ecocritical alliance brings out, above all, is the need for a broadly materialist understanding of the changing relationship between people, animals and environment—one that requires attention, in turn, to the cultural politics of representation as well as to those more specific “processes of mediation [...] that can be recuperated for anti-colonial critique. (qtd. in Huggan and Tiffin 12)

The natural world represents an important element of Irish culture and identity. Their embeddedness in nature dates back to a pre-Christian era, when humans and nature coexisted

in a state of almost perfect harmony (Mc Elroy 55). However, due to the colonization process, native people started to be portrayed as uncivilized and savage. From that moment, the Anglo-Irish “controlled [...] how nature narratives were constructed, construed, and constrained outside the demesnes” (Mc Elroy 56); and the natives, with their mainly oral culture and traditions, were seen as savages.

The concept of wilderness represents a social construction by the ruling elite, which establishes itself as superior to the wild, native people and their environment. The Irish language and their views of nature are relegated to a subordinate status while Anglo-Irish categorizations define what is in fact real culture (Mc Elroy 56). Besides, Irish people are showcased as “as a species type in need of someone to better explain_translate_what their savage ways might mean for, or to, civilized man” (Mc Elroy 56), thus justifying the process of domination.

Furthermore, the colonial construction of the concept of wilderness brings into focus some commonalities between ecocritical and postcolonial studies. In Western cultures, the relationship between human beings and the material world is most frequently seen as a dichotomy which regards progress as something reason-centred whose main objective is economic development. The wild natural world is not important for progress and culture thereby leads to its degradation. Plumwood argues as follows:

Western culture has treated the human/nature relation as a dualism. [...] The concept of reason unifying and defining contrast for the concept of nature, much as the concept of husband does for that of wife, as master for slave. [...] The continual and cumulative overcoming of the domain of nature by reason engenders the western concept of progress and development. (qtd. in Flannery 59)

Braidotti also affirms that the domination of women, natives and nature is a manifestation of patriarchal power, and more specifically, of its idea of progress and modernization (qtd. in Flannery 59). There seems to be no place for a notion of development that embraces equity and

the exaltation of nature. Although the material world has habitually been portrayed as detached from culture, it plays a relevant role in the human dimension.

The natural world is not simply something that individuals observe or a setting to their activities. As Rigby points out, “the natural world is no longer a passive recipient of human interventions and projections, but an active participant in the formation and transformation of human culture and society” (157). Nature is intertwined with Irish history. As some of the selected poems for chapter two illustrate, historical events, culture and daily practices are frequently embedded with elements from the natural world. Many poets have portrayed the Irish relationship with nature as deeper than that with urban areas, showing the true intersection between the Irish Psyche and nature (Fitzgerald 62). The natural dimension is indispensable to sustaining their lives.

In Ní Chinnéide’s poetry, place names are also relevant to reflect the individual’s relationship with the surrounding environment. Specific names of places represent a way of reaffirming the Irish identity and culture as well as a means of appreciating local particularities. In addition, places encompass the history and memories of their inhabitants. With natural spaces something similar happens since “beneath the stunning landscapes [...] lies a deeper, often forgotten history of power and powerlessness: emigration, eviction, dispossession, inequality, injustice” (De Mórdha 55-56). Even so, the intrinsic connection between human beings and their culture with the material world is reasserted.

1.4 Ecofeminism

Ní Chinnéide’s work is also worth exploring in the light of ecofeminist theories inasmuch as one of the aspects I will delve into in the chapter devoted to the analysis of her poems is the connection of the natural world with the poetic voice and with femininity. Broadly speaking, ecofeminism “establishes a correlation between the oppression of women and the exploitation

of natural environments” (Murphy 1), as well as intersections with other social justice movements. Ecofeminism questions traditional binary oppositions and structures of power in which women and nature are subject to men’s will. Ecofeminism therefore seeks to foster a morally grounded bond between the human self and the natural world, advocating for gender equity without compromising the interconnectedness between human and non-human nature (Estévez-Saá and Lorenzo-Modia 124), since the dualism that confronts nature and culture converges with the opposition between man and woman.

Traditionally, women have been associated with the qualities of being emotional, irrational or passive. Men have been attributed reason and power. Tofantsuk has highlighted Plumwood’s conviction that “in the reason/nature dualism of traditional western thought, women have been linked with nature because emotional, not reasonable” (69). Women are thus relegated to a position of inferiority, which convenes with the domination of nature and native people. All of them have been oppressed by the chiefly rationalistic and anthropocentric, more specifically androcentric, conceptions of life and culture that still pervade modern societies. Degrading and violent attitudes towards the natural world converge with the superior and dominant, and sometimes even violent, attitudes of men towards women.

Furthermore, women are historically relegated to the private sphere while men tend to be placed in the public domain. Thus, “traditional women’s tasks of home labor are not recognized as important but rendered as background to real work and achievement” (Plumwood qtd. in Tofantsuk 69). Progress, growth and development are measured in terms of men’s rational and superior conceptions, as well as primarily capitalistic aims, confining both women and nature to the background. Home labour and care work are frequently associated with an exclusively female task that is not comparable to the work outside the home performed by men. Furthermore, dependence on the natural world and its agency are seen as a threat to human life that needs to be overcome in terms of rational and technological solutions.

Nonetheless, the aforementioned discriminatory attitude towards women can serve to enhance a deeper connection with the natural world and thereby a more open attitude towards caring for the environment. Kordecki argues that the “devaluing attitude of backgrounding can be turned into attributing a positive value to the connection of women and nature” (qtd. in Tofantsuk 70), promoting an ethic of care for the natural home in opposition to the dominant patriarchal attitudes and desires. Ireland has been frequently depicted in feminine terms, in relation to the strong, superior, rational, masculinized colonizing country (Palacios). Although it was a means of rendering Ireland inferior and dependent on someone else, the conception can be subverted. In some of the selected poems for the analysis, Ní Chinnéide portrays the natural world in feminine terms. As Patrice Boyle Haberstroh argues, since 1980 there has been a growing awareness of the importance of the self in Irish women’s poetry (qtd. in Wall 77-78). Through a female poetic voice or female personae, the value of women’s experiences, interests and concerns can be conveyed (qtd. in Wall 78).

However, when analysing ecofeminism and these traditional associations of women with nature it is pertinent not to fall into essentialist conceptions. Reductionist views of women conceive them in terms of their reproductive, nurturing, and caring abilities and therefore naturally connected to Mother Earth (Estévez-Saá and Lorenzo-Modia 128). Greta Gaard sustains that “celebrations of *the feminine role, the feminine principle, or the feminine values* or goddess spirituality homogenize and essentialize women, equating sex and gender while erasing critical differences like race and class” (36). At the same time that feminism intersects with ecocritical approaches or animal studies, issues of class and race also have a role within the feminist movement, corroborating that not all women and their experiences in the world are identical.

Material feminism challenges the anthropocentric conceptions and highlights nature’s agency. It accounts for the interactions of the non-human world with human notions of sex,

gender and body, while not neglecting the intersections of race and class. Material feminism endorses humans' involvement in the planet's ecological totality. Still, Oppermann argues as follows:

The new ecofeminist settlement can be read as an emergent configuration that debunks the objectification of the natural world, women, matter, bodily natures, and non-human species, and opens new eco-vistas into exploring the dynamic co-extensivity and permeability of human and non-human bodies and natures. ("Feminist Ecocriticism" 68)

Within this paradigm, gendered bodies are not considered as "purely cultural or discursive constructs, but as differentially constituted material-discursive subjects, enmeshed in the material world" (Oppermann "Feminist Ecocriticism" 75). Not only are the identities and experiences of human beings the product of social and linguistic constructs, but they are also influenced by the surrounding material conditions. Women's bodies thereby represent material sites which are filtered through non-human material agencies, as well as sites in which forms of ideological, ecological and discursive power dynamics interact (Oppermann "Feminist Ecocriticism" 77). Such interactions allow us to reflect upon how those implications shape our conceptions of bodies and gender. It is imperative that new feminist models include biodiverse approaches alongside their gender vindications.

1.5 Posthumanism

Finally, I will discuss some posthumanist ideas related to the conception of the human self. Through Posthumanism, the dualistic conception that separates human subjects and culture from the natural world can be subverted. It allows for a more ethical relationship with the environment. It also confronts anthropocentric approaches that do not admit the intrinsic interaction between culture and nature, while intersecting with postcolonial and feminist discourses. Even so, in this section, I will discuss several posthumanist approaches to identity:

the expanded relational self, the notion of transcorporeality, and, eventually, the concept of the cyborg.

Posthumanism encourages a reevaluation of traditional humanist ideas that place human subjects at the centre of the world. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of human and non-human entities rather than focusing solely on human beings, key to achieve a more ethical relationship with all oppressed realities. It is through a relational ontology that those mutual connections can be portrayed:

The posthuman approach recasts ethical, ontological, and epistemological concerns over interconnections between both realms (human and more-than-human), as well as interchanges between them, to make a central place for a new relational ontology. It reviews what it means to be a human in a world still immersed in all forms of oppression, radical inequality, binary thinking and environmental degradation [...] Posthumanist thought, therefore, entails what Serenella Iovino has called a project of “non-anthropocentric humanism” with a broader system of interconnections which include the non-human world. (Oppermann qtd. in Flannery 61)

A “non-anthropocentric humanism” embraces thereby a network of interactions that expands beyond the human sphere to encompass the non-human realm as well. So as to enhance the idea of self-in-relationship, Plumwood proposes the notion of the “expanded relational self” (Estévez-Saá and Lorenzo-Modia 129). Without losing the independence and autonomy of the self, Plumwood uses this concept to underline the inevitable interaction of the individual with the valuable material world. The hierarchical dichotomies that separated the two dimensions are thus dismantled.

A similar notion worth examining that subverts the anthropocentric binarism that separates the human, and the non-human dimension is Alaimo’s transcorporeality. It questions the dualisms produced as a result of patriarchal and rationalistic politics. Transcorporeality represents the recognition of the substantial interconnections between human corporeality and the more-than-human world:

The apparent emphasis on corporeality brings such ecofeminist discourse into conversation with the body politics of earlier feminist interventions, and specifically, this is evidenced in Alaimo's notion of transcorporeality. Alaimo explicitly sites her ecocritical ethic within the lineage of feminist body politics, while intersecting with both Oppermann's and Iovino's posthumanist position. For Alaimo, part of the ecofeminist project is a readiness to accept a diminution in humanity's agency, as she implicitly alludes to the delusional and destructive politics of a hubristic patriarchal system. (qtd. in Flannery 62)

According to Alaimo, by embracing transcorporeality, human beings are able to recognize the entanglements between their bodies and the natural world. In addition, it also represents a critique of the patriarchal power structures that have sought to dominate human bodies and the environment. It aims at fostering both a feminist and an environmental ethic.

Alaimo's concept thereby exalts the transgression of the traditional boundaries associated with human subjects, since bodies are prone to interact with the surroundings. Through the prefix "trans", corporeal bodies become a place that "acknowledges the often unpredictable and unwanted actions of human bodies, non-human creatures, ecological systems, chemical agents, and other actors" (Alaimo 2).

When analysing notions of identity within posthumanist studies, Haraway's concept of cyborg is worth regarding. Following this paradigm, the boundaries that separate the material world from human beings, which promote oppressive hierarchies, can be confronted. The "cyborg" represents a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature that lives both in an artificial and a natural world (Haraway 434). It is necessary to transgress the limits that separate humans from the non-human, machines and organisms. Even so, traditional dualisms, such as those that opposed men and women and culture from nature need to be surpassed. The cyborg is a creature of a post-generic world, *id est*, a figure in a world that has gone beyond gender, beyond traditional identities and is subject to constant change (Haraway 435). There are not stable or unitary identities and natural and material entities shape them.

Haraway's cyborg was represented as something that embodied a way of thinking and being in the world that transgressed patriarchal boundaries between the discursive and the material, the imagination and the material reality (Huang 128). By adopting the cyborg's dynamic identity, individuals can subvert dominant power structures and imagine alternative forms of identity and community. While accepting material agency, difference and otherness should be embraced so as to overcome oppressive relationships.

At the time that Haraway proposed the idea of the cyborg, there existed a notable resistance and anxiety towards the growing influence of new technologies (Huang 130). There was a certain rejection of the impact of this digitalization on human beings' lives. Women have been traditionally associated with the environment, and thereby considered inferior in the same way as the dichotomy that separates nature from culture. In this sense, women share similarities with both the natural world and the cyborg in terms of being stigmatized for impurity, hybridity or baseness (Huang 130). All of them have been attributed the status of second-class subject (Huang 130). This illustrates the relevance of the notion of the cyborg for feminist discourses as well as for ethical approaches to nature and the acceptance of diversity.

Posthumanist perspectives essentially provide a framework for reevaluating human interactions with the material realm. They also emphasize the importance of embracing difference and otherness in order to reach more ethical relationships in the future. In Ní Chinnéide's poems, the natural world cannot be conceived as something detached from individuals and their daily lives. Therefore, in the following chapter, I will analyse a selection of poems reflecting upon the intersections of nature with her Irish, female and poetic identity. It is through the creation of the poems that the author invites us to connect with her and her main concerns.

2. The Natural World in Verse: Analysis of Dairena Ní Chinnéide's Poetry

2.1 Nature and Poetic Creation

Dairena Ní Chinnéide presents through her poetry a reflection on her creative process, which is totally immersed in the natural world from the initial moments of inspiration. Ireland's nature, especially that of Corca Dhuibhne, is both her homeland and the land of many of her poems. She portrays nature's active involvement in many of her personal experiences as an Irish woman. Historical events from the past, her way of living and approaching people and material things, specific places of her land, Irish subjectivity, contradictions, vulnerability, motherhood or her deep connection with nature are some of the aspects Ní Chinnéide explores in her poetic compositions. This chapter will therefore analyse a selection of poems in which she encourages readers to get to know her as an Irish woman and a poet.

This first section will cover the discussion of four poems in which the inextricable connection of nature with Ní Chinnéide's poetic creation is revealed. Nature is the force that enables her to write poetry and express her main concerns, shaping her into the poet she is today. Her poems interconnect culture with nature and illustrate a way of being in the world in which the natural realm is not merely a backdrop to human life, embodying Borthwick's definition of ecopoetry that promotes the recognition of the mutual entanglement and respect between both agentive realms. By means of the poetic language and form, Dairena Ní Chinnéide binds her poems, her concerns and herself to the land, establishing nature as her home.

In *Spellbound* (2016), Ní Chinnéide includes a poem entitled "The Poet Writes". This composition explores the process of writing a poem, from the initial moment of pondering over scattered ideas to its completion, a process in which the natural world is always present. The poem's opening line "consider yourself" (128) addresses all readers, including herself, urging

them to regain creativity and reconnect with nature in moments of writer's block or detachment from their natural home. The different phases of the creation process are mirrored by natural elements. The first stanza simply presents the setting and the initial steps of the process, when the poet sits properly to write and ink her pen. In the next stanza, this position is compared to "a shipwreck / swaying in the sea" (128), suggesting the initial uncontrolled situation when many unconnected thoughts and words come to the poet's mind as she tries to express her inner concerns. The third stanza underlines this chaotic nature of beginnings of writing through the alliteration of the phoneme /s/: "scoured against the stream / where the sun sets / with a sonorous sound" (128). The loud avalanche of words does not yet have the proper musicality for a poem.

In the following stanza, the poet is now writing. Her mind is characterized as a "black market" (128), suggesting that it is a place where various ideas, even forbidden ones, fluctuate, and finally, only those suitable for the composition are selected. Moreover, the presence of the music from a piano contrasts with the "sonorous sound" (128), reflecting that the initial chaos has been overcome. This music is described as being played by birds, connecting the intrinsic musicality of a poem with the natural sound of these creatures. The alliteration between "flock" (128) and "fledging" (128) emphasizes the intricate connection between the poet, her creation and nature.

Furthermore, the poem is compared to a "changeling" (128), a creature from Irish mythology. Due to the colonial past, Irish culture and people have frequently been attributed with the status of uncivilized others and negatively associated with the natural world, in opposition to the superior and more valuable cultures and modes of living (Mc Elroy 55). However, Ní Chinnéide creates a space in which nature, culture and folklore intertwine to achieve the final version of the poetic creation. The legend of the changelings, rather sinister fairy beings who had been left in the place of a beautiful human child after being stolen by the

fairies, was widely spread among communities in the rural areas of Ireland (The Irish Post). At this stage of the creative process, the poem is not yet a proper poetic composition to be enjoyed by the world, it must undergo several changes until the functional, final result is unveiled. This transformation occurs in the next stanza, where “a symphony of creativity” (128) pervades the atmosphere. Nonetheless, in the subsequent stanza, “a civilized / silence falls upon the concert” (128), indicating that the poem is now complete, and everything is under control. Finally, the connection between nature and poetic creation is once again illustrated by the succeeding lines: “the sea calms / the hump recoils” (128). The poet has successfully completed her task and the natural elements surrounding her reflect this state of calmness as well. The presence of natural elements in ecopoetry functions as a reminder that nature should be respected and as a recognition of the existence of multiple agencies and temporalities in a rather anthropocentric world (Yee 3), as all the references to nature display in this poem. The last stanza concludes with the poet reading the poem and ready to share it with others.

Dairena Ní Chinnéide revisits the writing process in “The Net of Poetry”, published in *The Raven’s Mother* (2008). The poetic creation is compared to the act of fishing with a net that is mended at the end, portraying the power of poetry to provide order to the initial chaos. Unlike the poem previously discussed, this one uses a first-person poetic voice, allowing the readers to get closer to the conception of poetry. The poem begins by likening the way ideas and thoughts come into the poetic voice’s mind to casting a rod into the sea to start fishing. Initially, a boot is captured instead of a fish, suggesting that the first attempts to write a poem are most often unsuccessful while at the same time, subtly denouncing the pollution of the sea. Furthermore, the alliteration of the phonemes /b/ in “black under a blue sky” (163), highlighting the difference in colour, together with saying that her thoughts are “gently rocking [...] / on dry land” (163), emphasize the idea that the poem is brewing in the mind.

Subsequently, these thoughts transform into words that start to fill the net, but they are not yet structured in a coherent way, representing one of the first phases of the writing process.

In the following stanza, the net begins to capture “internal images” (163). The words have evolved into emotions, experiences, concrete moments, short phrases the poetic voice wants to convey through the composition. However, the net has holes that need to be repaired. The poem is not yet fully organized and requires further elaboration before being written on a blank page. Additionally, the image of the waterfall, which represents the moment when the writer feels overwhelmed by the enormous amount of rambling sentences, depicts a necessary phase in the creative process. In order not to drown completely, the poetic voice needs to breathe to remain safe: “one shot of understanding” (163), providing the clarity and means required to finish the poem whose form can echo the sound and rhythm of the water falling. The poetic voice is also entangled in the musicality of nature and the wandering sentences, as she goes “dreaming / with the rhythms” (163), aligning the poem with Bate’s conviction on the role of poetry in connecting our homes and practices to the land through its intrinsic musicality which resonates nature’s sounds.

In the final stanza, the poetic voice realizes that it is necessary to wake up so as to complete the poem. Poetry makes sense of the world; everything seems better once the initial chaotic concerns have been written in the form of a poem. Both the language employed, and the final state of the composition are conditioned by the natural environment. Rigby underlines Bate’s firmness in addressing the ecological value of poetry since it “does not name things in order to make them available for use, but rather in order to disclose their beings in language” (165). Ní Chinnéide, through the image of the waterfall and water-related imagery, entangles her writing and inner reflections in the surrounding land, recognizing the value and agency of these natural elements in the resulting poem.

The intersections of nature and poetic creation can also be appreciated in the poem “West Kerry Morning”, published in *Deleted* (2019). Here, Ní Chinnéide steers us closer to her homeland. The poem is set in West Kerry, where the author recounts her morning routine. Writing a poem is part of this habit and, through specific references to her own practices and familiar spaces, we acquire further insights into her way of creating poetry. The land of the West of Ireland has frequently been depicted in literature following essentialist tropes that render it a shelter of peace, authenticity and wilderness, detached from human civilizations and cultures (Conan and Coulouma 8). However, Dairena Ní Chinnéide feels at home in the natural landscape of Kerry, profoundly embedded in its nature and culture, where the only sounds come from natural elements. Through her poetry, she conveys the respect and attachment to these spaces that have always represented an important aspect in her personal life:

“The respect for nature and the lived and natural environment is something that was handed down to me, and my poetry is often site-specific, and I am just lucky to have landed in and be raised in and live in one of the most beautiful places on earth and continue and never tire of observing it and writing how that engagement begins”. (Personal Interview)

“West Kerry Morning” begins by portraying the moment of awakening of the first-person poetic voice. Everything is permeated by the morning light, shining and illuminating the surroundings. Both the poetic voice, who feels “electrified” (25), and the fields are illuminated by this radiant glow. The “neon cliffs” (25) are also imbued with this pure light. The morning routine is utterly integrated in the natural world, the poetic voice is “brewing coffee” (25), such a quotidian action, while the cliffs, wonderful yet imposing as the first thing to see in the morning, announce the beginning of the day. The music from the daily actions as well as that from the natural elements which surround the home allow the poetic voice to completely awaken.

In addition, more elements of the surrounding environment become visible. Firstly, the starlings, whose flying and natural sounds contribute to the tranquility of this place. Then, the fact that the poetic voice becomes aware of the “ancient towers” (25), illustrates the importance of the historical past both for poetry itself and for everyday life. The peaks are said to be singing, highlighting nature’s inextricable musicality, which can be echoed by the lines of the poem, while emphasizing the peaceful sensations felt in this environment. The third stanza anticipates something recurrent in Ní Chinnéide’s poetry: the correlations of femininity and nature. In this case, the view the poetic voice perceives from home is compared to a womb, suggesting that it also carries within growing natural elements that will eventually become appreciated by the inhabitants of the place, as if the view were a mother. Instead of devaluing the association of women and nature, this comparison, bearing in mind Kordecki’s assertion, extols nature’s value and its entanglement in human lives, particularly in the process of creating a poem from within oneself, as the last stanzas depict.

In the final two stanzas of the poem, the focus shifts to the poetic creation itself. Firstly, the high tide correlates with the moment of conceiving the poem in the poet’s mind, without a clear structure yet. A womb is attributed to the sea in order to explain the movement of the tide as originating within it. By doing so, a correlation can be established between the sea’s movements and the poetic creation, since the ideas and words for a poem must emerge from inside the poet’s mind. Besides, this stanza is linked by the conjunction “and” to the next one, in which the tide is low, thus reflecting the wavy movement of the sea in the form and musicality of the poem. The low tide allows the poetic voice to walk on the sand of a beach in West Kerry, while also illustrating that the poem is now completed. Eventually, through the image of the “frothy waves” (25), the poem is depicted as perfectly finished, connecting the beauty and power of the crashing waves to the poem itself. When creating this poem, the boundaries between the cultural and the natural dimensions are overcome. Connecting with

Haraway's notion of cyborg, the poetic voice transgresses traditional dichotomies to inhabit both worlds while recognizing the inevitable interaction of the surrounding natural conditions in shaping herself and the poem.

Finally, I will analyse the poem "Ritual", which also belongs to *Deleted* (2019). The first-person poetic voice narrates a ritual, which is integrated into the morning routine but also transcends the physical reality of the place. In this poem, Ní Chinnéide brings readers closer to her conception of the poetic creation, showcasing her source of creativity, where her concerns and ideas originate before becoming abstract words and thoughts. The opening lines describe the wind and its movement: "wintry wind / reefs through leaves of grass" (58). The alliterations of both the phonemes /w/ and /z/ represent the movement of the wind in the poetic form, establishing the central place that natural elements will occupy in this poem. Everything participates in the movement of the wind, other natural elements, the poetic voice and the poem itself.

In the subsequent stanza, the poetic voice perceives "the sit waiting stones" (58) through the window of the house. The alliteration of the phoneme /t/ highlights their condition of strong and firm entities that have been there for centuries, witnessing the passage of time. This circle of stones becomes the leading character in the third stanza, directing the ritual that creates a sacred aura in this space. They wait for the "knowing souls" (58), people who can grasp the power of such a place as this.

The ritual concludes in the last stanza. The stones are described as both "fresh" (58) and "ancient" (58) beings since they facilitate the connection of the present moment with the past and with a more spiritual dimension. It is a place like this one which interrelates natural elements, history, spirituality and the poetic voice that allows for the development of creativity, the essence of poetic creation. The last two lines, "of substance and soul / in this sacred space

I now call home” (58), which have assonant rhyme, underline the importance of the sacred place in which the ritual happened while steering our attention to the word “home” (58). Ending the poem with this word represents the conception of this place in West Kerry as a home that encompasses nature and culture at the same level, bringing her reflections close to Oppermann and Iovino’s definition of material ecocriticism that blurs the boundaries between human practices and culture, and the material world.

The exploration of these poems reveals an intimate and profound connection between the author’s creative process and the natural world. For Ní Chinnéide, nature is an engaged participant in the poetic creation. Both the human and non-human realms are in constant contact and exchange. The analysed poems represent a cultural ecology inasmuch as they challenge anthropocentric dichotomies that confront nature and culture to incarnate the interconnections between both worlds. Besides, some of them anticipate the intertwining of nature with the specific places of her land, her activities and the historical past, which becomes something essential in depicting her identity as an Irish woman throughout her poetry.

2.2 The Intertwining of Nature and Irish Identity

Dairena Ní Chinnéide explores in some of her poems the involvement of nature in historical, political and even personal events. Contrary to portraying an idealized version of the relations between humans and the natural realm, she promotes the need for an ethical engagement between the two intricately connected worlds. In this section, I will analyse a selection of five poems in which Ní Chinnéide gives us an insight into Irish identity and culture in general, but also into her own concerns and experiences, since she writes more personal poems in which the land of County Kerry becomes the protagonist.

The poem “Good Friday Moon”, published in the anthology *Now the Sun Breaks Through* (2023), perfectly portrays the intersections of nature and Irish culture. Ní Chinnéide narrates

the effects of the Good Friday Agreement on the Irish people through comparisons to the surrounding natural elements, thus aligning nature and historical events. The political conflict of The Troubles entailed a period of extreme violence and division in the island. The confrontations occupied a central place on TV, radio broadcasts and newspaper headlines in both the north and the south during this time, and they even divided trade unions branches, county council meetings, sporting events and religious congregations, resulting in enduring rifts among the population (Hanley 2). The Troubles were also a common source of conversation, exasperation and sadness in the Republic, and many people took part in mobilizations and marches during this period of uncertainty and upheavals (Hanley 2). The conflict eventually came to an end in 1998 with the Good Friday Agreement.

In this poem, the author depicts the end of this conflict through the personification of the moon, which is referred to as “Selene of the Greek myth” (8) and “Luna” (8), while Ireland is called “ancient island” (8). In doing so, Ní Chinnéide underlines that her country has a unique history, culture and identity as Greece and Rome do. Due to its power to bestow peace on the divided people during this period, the “full bright moon” (8) is described as a “magic jewel” (8) that illuminates the darkness. Furthermore, by employing the personification “the sun is asleep” (8), the absence of the sun is highlighted. The moon, with its light unlike the sun’s familiar brightness, will bring hope and peace, creating a new reality that embraces everyone.

In the third stanza, the peace process is portrayed through comparisons with natural elements. The long process evolves naturally, constantly changing rather than following a linear path. It rises and falls like the waves of the surrounding seas, until the solution is eventually achieved:

Rising and waning
Constantly changing
As nature rises and falls

Like the seas around us
With the solutions of discord. (8)

The subsequent stanzas assert that by means of this Agreement, the wounds from the historical past have been healed. The roots of the divided society that provoked the Troubles date back to the times of colonization, a period in which the natives of Éire were regarded as inferior and in need of an external power to guide them. After the Agreement, the same moon will shine over the whole island fostering respect and love for everyone, but also for the natural world, making all people proud of their Irish identity and their values. It is worth mentioning that this new era is compared to “the white chariot with ploughs” (8), suggesting that the Agreement is the result of a long process, like cultivating the land, so tradition, culture and nature bind to provide a feasible solution. Political and social progress is thus possible by embracing the role of the material world in the human dimension, coming close to Plumwood’s conviction that denounces imperialistic ideas of development that frequently lead to environmental and human degradation. Finally, in the last stanza, Ní Chinnéide switches to a first-person poetic voice, thus depicting the effects of this Agreement on the individual life. The moon that illuminates every corner of the island does not only bestow the peace that ends the political conflict, but also the inner peace for individuals to develop their lives and relationships with others.

On the other hand, in the book *Spellbound* (2016), Dairena Ní Chinnéide publishes a poem entitled “Quaking Grass”, in which further insights into the construction of the Irish identity are displayed. As the title anticipates, the quaking grass, a natural element that is everywhere, represents a symbol of fragility. New beginnings involve vulnerability and uncertainty, especially after periods of domination, violence or social conflicts. However, in order to build the identity of a country and its people, the challenging moments from the past need to be embraced. As stated by Ní Chinnéide, this poem was the result of her stay in *Cill Rialaig*, an artists’ retreat in the south of Kerry consisting of cottages built on the ruins of a famine village

(Personal Interview). Her retreat to this place moved her to write a poem that explains human nature and history in relation to the external material world. By adopting a non-anthropocentric perspective that emphasizes the mutual connection between human lives and the land, she situates her work within the paradigm of post-pastoralism. She opposes the idealization and objectification of nature.

Moreover, the poem employs religious imagery to emphasize the feelings of fragility. The Mass and the sermon, which are depicted in the poem as embedded in nature thus suggesting that they are constantly interacting with human life, may cause personal insecurity since they impose one view of the truth and may conceal other aspects, while judging and admonishing what deviates from their aims. Besides, through the personification “the day confesses the sins of history” (78), it seems that sins or even secrets are relinquished once you confess them. However, the past with all its vicissitudes cannot be forgotten since it allows for a new start accepting the vulnerability and contradictions that permeate all cultures.

Finally, regarding the form, each of the four stanzas ends with a similar sentence in which the haze is said to rise or fall from different natural elements: the sea, the land, the sun, and eventually, the moon. The haze, literally, blurs the clear distinction of other elements of the land. Metaphorically, it can be applied to the feelings of vulnerability, fragility and contradiction since most things have an ebb and flow, and the distinction may not always be clear. In addition, the last line of the poem “as a night haze rises from a crescent moon” (78), by mentioning a moon that is growing, suggests hope for this new beginning where embracing the past is indispensable to build the future of the nation.

The intersections of nature and culture can also be appreciated in “Trip to Clare’92”, published in *The Raven’s Mother* (2008). In this poem, Ní Chinnéide brings us closer to her homeland as this composition is set in County Clare, near Corca Dhuibhne, and to her concerns

for the preservation of history and the natural world. A first-person poetic voice narrates a trip to Clare, illustrating an ethical relationship with the nature and the specific sites of the land. At the same time, the poem conveys a critique of the rise of the capitalist touristic practices that are destroying local areas.

The poem opens by describing the setting of the trip. The poetic voice is travelling with a companion through the Boreens of County Clare. First, they pass by Dunguaire castle in Kinvara. King Guaire, who inhabited this place, was very much celebrated as a nonpareil of hospitality and generosity during his reign in Connacht until the year 663 (Mackillop 160). The poetic voice states that: “his kingdom / gave us rest / peace and happiness” (115), illustrating the importance of specific sites like this one through which the nation’s historical past can be encountered. Later, the trip continues with a stop at the beach. In this place, the poetic voice feels utterly at peace. Through the oxymoron “silently speaking” (115), the intimate connection between both travellers is portrayed, while emphasizing their entanglement in the natural space, the historical sites and the sounds that surround them.

The next stop on their trip is Lady Gregory’s site. She was a prolific playwright, folklorist and theatre manager who co-founded the Abbey Theatre with Yeats, and a pioneer in introducing local dialects of Irish into her plays (“Queen of Coole”). After her husband’s death, Lady Gregory devoted herself to the preservation of Coole Park, making this natural environment a central space for her, as well as transforming it into the cultural centre of the Irish Literary Revival, hosting numerous gatherings of writers (“Queen of Coole”). Besides, after several trips to the Aran Islands and other local places in the area, she wrote a collection compiling Irish myths from the Western Region (“Queen of Coole”). The poetic voice also mentions “Celtic Twilight”, Yeats’s book on the folklore of the area, written mainly as the result of a trip with Lady Gregory “seeking out the exotic customs and remotes ways of isolated folk culture” (Hirsch 7). He tried to capture it as closely as possible to the natural, oral style of

folktales through its written form (Hirsch 4). With these references, the relevance of Irish culture and literary production is presented as something to be conscious of. Both the poetic voice and the companion visit the various sites in County Clare fully aware of their history and their relevance to the present.

Nonetheless, their trip is interrupted by other tourists who have a different way of interacting with these spaces and historical references. They simply stay “on the poetic threshold” (117), they remain on the surface rather than delving into the culture of the place. They are only interested in buying a “plastic leprechaun” (117) or a “*báiníns*” (117) as a souvenir because that is all they know about County Clare. The role of the state in promoting this kind of superficial tourism is criticized through the lines: the State celebrating history / with audiovisual aids (117). Rather than focusing on the economic benefits of historical sites such as Yeats’s tower, one of the most important public buildings in Ireland, purchased by Yeats and a centre for literary and cultural gatherings at his time that has now been converted into a multimedia visitor centre (Yeats Thoor Ballylee Society), an alternative way of interacting with the natural and historical sites should be promoted, encouraging an ecotourism.

Finally, in the last stanza, the focus shifts to the protagonists and the ethics of their trip. The poet tries to convey some sort of learning to the readers through the way the protagonists travel and interrelate with the places and nature along the way. The recognition of the substantial influence of the material realm in shaping human lives can promote alternative relations towards the environment and local cultures. Their minds and bodies have been interacting with the surroundings, and by the end of the day, the travellers feel happy and at peace embedded in the waves of the sea of County Clare:

We moved along
A day’s end
On an empty beach

The waves went with us
In the water
Happy with delight. (117)

Similarly to the poem discussed above, the relevance of local culture, specific places and nature can be appreciated in “Corca Dhuibhne”, published in *The Warrior and Other Poems* (2006). This poem, however, is set in Ní Chinnéide ‘s homeland, the Dingle Peninsula in West Kerry. Through a first-person poetic voice, the author invites the readers to gain further insights into her identity in which the nature, the specific sites and the people from her land become an integral part. In the first stanza, the poetic voice describes a Sunday on Clochar Beach, where children are playing in the water. The sound of their voices, instead of disturbing the peace of the place, seems to be part of the sea: “ebbed tide, drowned by the / sounds of little children” (43). Through the personification “watched by the green fields flowing down the cliffside” (43), the beach is described as being protected by the fields, which act as paragons of an ethics of care for the surrounding natural elements.

The second stanza introduces other places of Corca Dhuibhne: Clasach, The Parish of the Moor, Márthain, Ventry and Dún Chaoin. This emphasizes the specific space in which the poem and the events it recounts occurred, while providing an explicit link between nature and culture (Stalmaszczyk 93), and in this case, the poetic voice and this physical landscape. Topographical names also work as means of expressing the writer’s local loyalty and of performing an invocative function (Stalmaszczyk 94), providing access to memories, history and knowledge of the places and their inhabitants, while acting as bearers of the Irish language and culture. Additionally, the poetic voice appeals to the readers through the line: “stop and inhale the view” (43). In today’s hectic lives, time spent in nature and the everyday environment often go unnoticed. Then, the poetic voice exclaims: “how beautiful it is!” (43) to

underline the emotions aroused by these specific places in which quietness and natural sounds prevail.

Finally, in the last stanza, the poetic voice experiences a memory: “my father is at every turn / on the mountain’s top / at the mouth of every bay” (43). It is this interaction with nature in this specific physical place that makes the recollection possible. Moreover, the synaesthesia “sweet sound” (43), suggests that the language of the father, probably Irish, represents an important part of this memory that connects with the core of this land and its people. The ancestors, the language, the placenames, and the nature of Corca Dhuibhne represent the essence of this land in which the poetic voice feels completely immersed. Considering Plumwood’s notion of the expanded relational self, the dichotomies that separate the material and human dimensions are transgressed, highlighting the inevitable interaction of the poetic voice and her experiences with the surroundings and local places, which become a fundamental part of her identity. The poem’s last line “that I may talk to the silence” (43) emphasizes the profound connection between the poetic voice, the father and the land. No words are needed, only the sounds and rhythms of nature.

Finally, I will discuss the poem “Unplugged on the Great Blasket”, included in *Deleted* (2019). Here, Ní Chinnéide leads the readers to an even more specific place of Corca Dhuibhne, the Great Blasket Island, a space to which she feels profoundly attached since a part of her family ties is rooted there (Personal Interview). Nonetheless, the island was evacuated in 1953 (Langan). As Sheeran notes, the use of placenames represents a way of memorializing a lost world and maintaining some sort of identity (191). For the poet, nature and this island trigger a sense of belonging. Inhabiting this place is no longer possible, yet she dwells here, since “dwelling means to be at peace in a protected place” (Sheeran 197). Throughout the poem, she employs a first-person poetic voice to convey her appreciation and attachment for the island, its nature and its culture beneath the physical space. From the opening lines, the intrinsic

connection among nature, this place and history is described. Like the movement of the waves on the sand of An Tráigh Bhán, history is described as something that is constantly evolving. Through the comparison “particles of social history / float like phantoms” (9), history is presented as an entity that pervades everything, beneath the landscape and place names of the island, even if it is not visible at first sight.

In the second stanza, as the title anticipates, the poetic voice feels unplugged on the island. Time is roughly measured by the tide, which “[...] bursts / in rhythmic roars / on this craggy shore” (9). Timelessness and feeling unplugged from mainland, as the following stanza depicts, ebb and flow. On the one hand, “being off the grid” (9) evokes anxiety, a sense of being lost, socially disconnected, and lacking in material luxuries such as the technological gadgets that provide the comforts of the *plugged-in* life. On the other hand, this absence brings with it another kind of luxury which the following comparison illustrates: “wraps around us / like a selkie’s cloak” (9). By introducing the selkie, a mythological half-seal, half-human figure in the Irish folklore, the poem emphasizes that being on the island provides a deeper connection with the culture and nature of the place, which should be regarded as a luxury. Subsequently, in the fourth stanza, the contrast between the island and the *plugged-in* peninsula is reiterated. Nonetheless, through the personification “sunset sweeps the horizon” (9), along with the rising tide, the space separating the two places becomes blurred, suggesting that the poetic voice now fully embraces the life and luxuries of the island.

The last stanza revisits the connection between history and the natural world on the island. By concluding the poem with this moving and appealing stanza, Ní Chinnéide highlights the importance of the folklore and the history of the island and its people as something that everyone must know, be thankful for and cautiously respect as part of their Irish psyche:

We are but the flotsam
in the ancient folklore

of this island's people
we tread with care
we give thanks for it. (9)

Dairena Ní Chinnéide offers insights into the intricacies of Irish identity and culture as well as her personal experiences in constant interaction with nature. Nevertheless, instead of portraying an idealistic natural setting, the poet promotes a non-anthropocentric culture that explains human nature as intertwined with the external natural world, situating her poetic production closer to post-pastoralism. Through the poems, she connects us with the complexities of her own identity, making her sheltered land of Kerry a carrier of her experiences, history and memories. Her poems represent the possibility of an alternative mode of living in which neither the land, its inhabitants nor women suffer the damaging effects of traditional patriarchal systems.

2.3 Intersections of Nature and Femininity

Many of Ní Chinnéide's poems discuss the interconnections of the natural world with femininity and the poetic voice. Rather than adhering to the traditional binary distinction that rendered nature and women inferior in contrast to men and culture, she foregrounds femininity, nature and women's experiences. Furthermore, the conventional association can be subverted so as to enhance a more profound and ethical relation with nature, particularly with regard to the Irish landscape, while also recognizing the human dependence on the natural realm. Therefore, in this section, I will analyse five poems in which femininity, the poetic voice, bodies and experiences are enmeshed in the surrounding environment.

In the poem "The Goddess of Mount Brandon", published in *With Foxgloves on our Fingers* (2023), the author describes the land of Corca Dhuibhne, focusing on Mount Brandon. As the title suggests, and according to Celtic mythology, natural elements represent manifestations of divinity. The poem opens by highlighting two natural elements: a "fairy stone" (44), immersed

in the divinity of the landscape; and the mountain, which is described as the “protectress of the land” (44) and its people, announcing her feminine nature. This femininity is directly addressed in the antepenultimate stanza. Throughout the poem, Mount Brandon is referred to by the pronouns she/her and I will maintain this in my analysis.

In the second stanza, Mount Brandon is convened with motherhood, depicted as symbolically giving birth to both human beings whose footfalls mark her and to other natural elements, such as the “breeze” (44). This emphasizes the mountain’s significance for human beings, both as a natural element to care for but also as a manifestation of Irish folklore and culture. Besides, the poem portrays the mountain’s majestic and divine nature, characterizing her as “queen” (44) with “nobility in her poise” (44). This anthropomorphic characterization acknowledges her agency through the poetic voice. Subsequently, the third stanza explicitly identifies the mountain with femininity: “she is femininity itself” (44), while highlighting the presence of the Celtic goddess Dhuibhne, who blesses and protects this land and its tribe, in line with the pre-Christian belief that the earth was feminine and was from there where humans drew their substance (Titley 81). Finally, in the closing stanza, the juxtaposition “we walk by her, unaware” (44) signals the frequently unnoticed presence of the mountain. Mount Brandon is completely entangled in the poetic voice’s life, which explains why it may be disregarded. However, the juxtaposition also suggests a lack of awareness of the past, the folklore and the goddesses that protect the people of Dhuibhne.

Moreover, the word “land” is repeated in the first three stanzas, referring to the Dingle Peninsula. This reiteration can be connected to the last lines of the poem: “her womb as heavy / as the soul of the mountain” (44). The traditional association of women and nature as emotional and nurturing beings is subverted so as to suggest that, in this land, the mountain can give birth and create a new life in which different relationships with the landscape are possible.

The mountain, through her physical presence, the divinity within her soul, the history of the place and her feminine attributes, interrelate with human lives.

Ní Chinnéide also explores the intricacies of femininity and the natural world in the poem “Three friends”, published in *Deleted* (2019). Through a third-person poetic voice, the author narrates the story of three women who encounter a fairy mound which enables them to create a sacred aura to profoundly connect both with the natural space and with each other. By having these female protagonists exhibiting such a care for the natural space, the affinity of women with nature enhances a respectful interaction with the non-human realm. Rather than merely celebrating women’s traditional values and qualities that allow them to convene with nature, the poem foregrounds their experiences and interests emphasizing their intimate friendship and their recognition of nature’s agency and folklore of the place.

The opening stanza establishes the connection in the first two lines: “three women found / a fairy mound” (72). The rhyme draws attention to the place where the linkage occurs. The women are advised by the “good people” (72), those who grasp the significance of a place like this and respect the land and the folklore, to take “their shoes off” (72). This action suggests a deep integration with the place. In addition, the final line of the stanza, which is longer than the rest, underlines the divine essence of this location: “after all this was sacred ground” (72). By removing their shoes, the women demonstrate respect for the land.

In the following stanza, the sacred atmosphere of the fairy mound is accentuated by the “fading light” (72), situating the poem at sunset. This light, combined with the specific place and the three women, creates an aura that allows them to have a very intimate conversation. The interconnectedness between the women and this natural environment, provides them with the strength to share confidences about challenging moments from their past life: “illuminated bits / of something broken” (72). With Haraway’s concept of cyborg in mind, alternative forms

of identity and community that oppose the prevailing dominant structures of power can be developed. In this poem, while recognizing the inevitable interaction of themselves and their bodies with the surrounding material conditions, the three women construct a space in which ethical relations among human beings and the environment is possible, overcoming traditional discriminations of frequently othered realities.

Finally, the last stanza emphasizes again that being in this particular place allows the friends to transcend their previously broken *bits*:

But they were strong
weaving their lives
into something deeper
like the landscape
of the fairy mound. (72)

The comparison in the preceding lines portrays how the intimate connection among the women echoes with their connection with the fairy mound. Additionally, the hyperbole of the closing lines “pouring their hearts out / to the fairy folk for hearing” (72) depicts the fact that the women are expressing their inner, real emotions to the land for all to become integrated. By employing “fairy folk” (72), a markedly familiar form of address, the poem showcases the profound connection to this natural space. It is this specific place that unites the women with the folklore that makes the community and the understanding among them possible

In the poem entitled “The Witch’s Tit”, which belongs to *The Raven’s Mother* (2008), Dairena Ní Chinnéide uses a first-person poetic voice to recount the intersections of femininity and nature in Corca Dhuibhne. As the title anticipates, the summit of Cruach Mhárthain becomes relevant in order to describe the association of the female body with nature. At the same time, the poem reveals to the readers an insight into the poetic voice’s day in this place.

The poem begins with very short lines that narrate the poetic's voice return to Corca Dhuibhne, contrasting with the longer line: "that there was no place on earth / like West Kerry" (195). In this way, the poem conveys a sense of rapid movement until the destination is reached, a place that provides the poetic voice with a sense of well-being that cannot be equated by any other place. Once there, contemplating Cruach Mhárthain directly involves the human body, namely the heart: "I got my first glimpse / of the top of Cruach Mhárthain / and my heart soared" (195). The connection between the poetic voice and the mountain goes beyond a contemplation since it evokes strong, inner emotions.

A very quotidian scene is then recounted, a barbecue in the garden, which occurs at twilight, surrounded by mist. This nocturnal setting allows the Raven to appear. This animal's name is written in capital letters and the poetic voice addresses her by the pronouns she/her, illustrating a profound, egalitarian relation and care for this animal. Then, the barbecue is again connected with the natural world: "eat my meal / nature's taste on the meat" (195). Nature provides food both literally and metaphorically since it allows life to develop. This situation represents a scene of inner peace for the poetic voice as it unites nature, personal life and the land of Corca Dhuibhne on the same level.

The following lines introduce the figure of the "warrior". The use of this term, which recurs in Ní Chinnéide's poetry, represents a reference to a woman, not a specific one, but an "alter-ego of every woman who dares stand her ground" (Ní Dhomhnaill qtd. in Ní Chinnéide *The Warrior*), fighting to assert her voice and individuality. Although the "warriors" (195) had to arrive at strange countries and perform a feast without cutlery, "the fortress strengthened / and peace reigns" (197). These lines suggest a different way of developing things. Contrary to the traditional beliefs, which often lead to the subordination of women and nature, the figure of the strong warrior illustrates an approach to life in which an ethical relation between oppressed

groups is possible and will bring peace to everyone. This new approach, fostered by women, moves the poetic voice profoundly: “this extra engine / working in the mind” (197).

Furthermore, the poetic voice asserts through very simple and direct parallel sentences the essential interrelation between women and their bodies and nature, conveying a global ethics of protection:

We are indeed fairer among women.
We are the trace of the land
We are the feminine shape
We are the shape of the body
Embracing us
From every side. (197)

This global ethics of care resonates with Oppermann’s definition of Material Feminism. While overcoming anthropocentric and androcentric objectifications of matter, women and other oppressed realities, this ecofeminist perspective recognizes the entanglement of human beings and their notions of gender and body in the material dimension (Oppermann “Feminist Ecocriticism” 68).

In the closing lines, the peak of Cruach Mhárthain, also called “The Witch’s Tit” (197), becomes a “suckling breast” (197) to the poetic voice. This poem, bearing in mind Alaimo’s notion of transcorporeality, recognizes the interconnections between human corporeality and the more-than-human world, in this instance, the poetic voice’s body and the land of Kerry and Cruach Mhárthain. Rather than presenting an idealized representation of the female body, the poet explicitly introduces the comparison of a common experience that converges with her relation towards the mountain: breastfeeding. By correlating motherhood and the natural world, the idea of nature as a source of life for human beings is presented. Nature acts as a guide for everyone, like a mother to a child. Finally, the alliteration of the phoneme /m/ in mountain,

femininity and me, in the last three lines, reaffirms the main theme of the poem: the creation of a space in which the poetic voice, women in general and nature take advantage of the correlation among them to develop a peaceful position that promotes a fair way of living and interacting.

The figure of the warrior also appears in the poem “The Warrior Mother as Muse”, published in *Deleted* (2019). Through a series of couplets, motherhood is compared to a journey in a vessel across the ocean. The poetic voice describes the upheavals of motherhood: “your hands burned / by the heat of motherhood” (39). It is a process in which women, as in other aspects of their lives, should be in control. However, the world frequently intends to intervene. The poem’s message aligns with Alaimo’s posthumanist critique of patriarchal powers that intend to dominate human bodies and the environment. The poetic voice addresses all women by referring to them as the “sisterhood of fairies” (39). The poem praises friendships and mutual support. Women must believe in themselves and follow their intuitions despite society’s expectations of their gender; they must become the commanders of their own vessels in the ocean:

It is your lifeline
your masculine and feminine

as commander and friend
you sit on a tall ocean reef

in the middle of the sea
with no lifeline except your self belief. (39)

In the final couplets, the poetic voice encourages women to become their own muses. First, in terms of literary creativity: “flowing in a stream of words” (40), in order to give voice to the rambling words and concerns of their mind. Then, in motherhood: “with the rising sun and

school sandwiches” (40), if they have decided to become a mother. Finally, the poetic voice empowers women to become their own muses in their personal lives through a natural metaphor: “nurturing your own seed” (40). The seed is something very small that will grow and become fully developed. Women are thereby encouraged to believe in themselves and follow their natural intuitions, preparing themselves to resist the patriarchal “conception of woman as an inferior *other* to man” (Soper qtd. in Mc Elroy 62) and the pressures and pretensions of the rest of the world.

Eventually, to conclude this chapter, I will discuss the poem “Mother Earth”, published in *With Foxgloves on our Fingers* (2023). The poetry of ecology reflects on the abuses of nature and the essential importance of the nonhuman to the human dimension (Holdridge 95), and in this poem, Ní Chinnéide appeals directly to the readers to stop the ongoing destruction of their planet. The earth is addressed using the pronouns she/her. Although there is not a division into stanzas and the lines seem to flow freely, the poem can be divided into two parts. The first part recounts the current situation of the earth through a third-person poetic voice, and it portrays the many problems faced by the planet and the various natural elements that conform her. Moreover, the succeeding lines: “the earth is ripped / beneath our feet” (37), emphasize that this destruction is occurring because of the human agency and that it will eventually affect us. Through the personification “the universe grieves / her case / long litanies / of doom” (37); the earth’s suffering is emphasized while the religious language stresses the fatality of an adverse fate awaiting the planet. Her destruction involves more than the damaging of the physical space, it is also about losing the history, local values and memories underneath (Randolph 57-65).

In the second part, the earth becomes the speaker of the poem, making the once-distant problems seem closer now. The earth demands direct action to stop the devastating acts performed by human beings which are destroying her: “fill me whole / do not burn my trees /

nor lay my soul in the ground” (37). She is more than a backdrop to human life, she is inextricably connected to us, and we depend on her for the development of our lives as she depends on us for her protection. Her agency is not presented as a threat to the human world, but rather as an inherent element for the future of human lives. Furthermore, the earth demands more than a simple action, she demands a radical shift: “breed a brood of goodness / the gift of femininity / mother of moon (37). As an ecofeminist poet, Ní Chinnéide employs the association of women with nature and care to encourage the raising of a future generation with a new ethical way of living and interacting with the natural realm that could preserve the health of the planet.

Finally, the poem introduces a series of imperatives: “rise up / against a lack of will / scream / and shout” (38). These commands represent direct and even violent invocations to action, since such short lines suggest immediacy and urgency. This contrasts with the very last lines of the poem, in which the uncorrupted, pure natural elements come into scene to highlight: “the sweet sound of rebirth” (38). The alliteration of the phoneme /s/ underlines this contrast while suggesting the idea of this new life in which relations between both worlds would be different. This new era is likened to a stream, something small and quiet, but leading a path that will eventually produce changes; to a sprouting seed, since this element allows new life to grow; and to the turning of the tide, to emphasize that the radical shift will be generated from love. The change will be different from the traditional patriarchal notions of both nature and women, but it will be highly effective.

All in all, Ní Chinnéide invites readers to reevaluate their relationship with nature and femininity, offering a perspective that emphasizes interconnectedness, empowerment, and ethical relations. Through the correlation of women and nature, she portrays the need to transgress the patriarchal and rational conceptions that perpetuate oppressive relations by reaffirming the traditional dualisms. By presenting poetry, historical events, human

interactions, femininity and personal experiences immersed in the natural realm, she advocates for the recognition of the intrinsic role of the surrounding material conditions in shaping human's identities and lives. As the literary analysis illustrates, Ní Chinnéide's identity as an Irish woman and a poet cannot be understood as something detached from the natural and local particularities of her land.

Conclusion

The objective of this dissertation was to explore, from an ecocritical point of view, the interrelations of nature with Dairena Ní Chinnéide's reflections upon the creative process, the history and culture of Ireland, and femininity. Through the analysed poems, the poet successfully conveys a profound attachment to the natural world of her homeland, which becomes an integral part of her personal life. Her poetry depicts thereby her identity as an Irish woman and a poet, interweaving nature, the valuable culture of her country, herself and her own poetic compositions. As an ecofeminist poet, she recognizes material agency and its mutual entanglement with the human world, while overcoming the traditional conceptions that lead women, natives and the environment to discriminatory attitudes.

This research clearly illustrates Ní Chinnéide's portrayal of a de-objectified nature immersed in her life. As an Irish woman, she draws on the material conditions of her land to present herself to the readers, while simultaneously extolling Irish values in opposition to colonial depictions. In "Good Friday Moon" and "Quaking Grass", the intersections of nature with historical aspects illustrate the inherent value of the natural world for the past and present of Irish culture. Conversely, the poems "Corca Dhuibhne" and "Unplugged on the Great Blasket", more personal in terms of content, focus on the relevance of specific places in Kerry. The Dingle Peninsula and the Great Blasket Island, with their nature, folklore and history become essential to her identity. These places directly impact her emotions, way of thinking,

recollections and sense of belonging. “West Kerry Morning” reflects upon the intertwining of Kerry’s nature, with its light, hills, sounds or beaches, with her everyday life and poetry. “The Goddess of Mount Brandon” also conveys the relevance of the folklore and pagan beliefs associated with this natural site for the people of Dhuibhne and the poet herself.

Furthermore, the analysis also raises the question of the significance of female subjectivity in poetry. As a female contemporary poet, she challenges traditional conceptions of life and culture. In poems such as “The Poet Writes” and “The Net of Poetry”, Ní Chinnéide presents her creative process directly involving natural elements, binding culture and nature on the same level. “Ritual” also engages in similar reflections, but with a focus on the familiar space of her homeland that represents such an important aspect for her identity as a poet. Alternatively, “The Warrior Mother as Muse” explicitly defies traditional androcentric expectations for women. Motherhood, self-belief, the female body and sorority are presented as some of her main concerns and experiences that deserve a place in her poetic compositions. Moreover, poems such as “The Witch’s Tit” or “Three friends” also contribute to the understanding of her concerns as a woman and a poet, creating a terrain for alternative relations regarding both nature and women, while avoiding idealistic representations of Irish values and the natural landscape.

Finally, as an ecopoet, Dairena Ní Chinnéide addresses the ongoing situation of the environment. The poem “Mother Earth” makes a direct appeal to readers to drastically change the damaging practices on the planet, which will also affect their human life and consciousness. On the other hand, “Trip to Clare’92”, revolves around the effects of capitalist practices in the local area of County Clare. She articulates the relationship she has with the surrounding natural world, which may diverge from mainstream conceptions of nature. In poems such as these ones, she overtly demands a radical change of attitudes to stop the planet’s deterioration.

Dairena Ní Chinnéide's poetic creation essentially encompasses the inextricable intertwining of human beings in the natural world as a means of unravelling the intricacies of her personal identity and reflections. Ní Chinnéide becomes the "protectress of the land" (*With Foxgloves on our Fingers* 44), conveying respect and protection for the environment, particularly that of her homeland in Corca Dhuibhne, and all the personal recollections, historical and cultural aspects, and sources of creativity that lie underneath. An understanding of the human dependence on the material world may engender a different attitude towards the environment, since it becomes apparent that we are self-destructing our own home and life. The ethical discourses than can be extracted from her poems, which aim to create a space that embraces traditionally othered realities as well as highlighting the role of the material world in shaping her identity as an Irish woman and a poet, demonstrate the pertinence of interrelating ecocritical approaches with her literary production while inviting reflection on the discourses conveyed by contemporary female poets. The growing ecological awareness in contemporary society also corroborates the relevance of an ecocritical analysis of poetry. I hope this approach will serve as a starting point for further examination of Ní Chinnéide's extensive poetic creation under similar apparatus.

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Appendix

Interview with Dairena Ní Chinnéide

• One of the aspects that caught my attention while analysing your poems was the significant role that Kerry's nature played in the everyday life of the poetic voice, particularly in the poem entitled "West Kerry Morning". I especially liked this poem since it portrays the poetic creation as a continuum of the natural landscape: "and when the tide lies low / I'll walk the wet sand of my poem". So, I would be interested in learning about your ponderings around the connections of nature and poetry.

"Growing up in such a powerful landscape rubs off. I was encouraged by my father Caoimhín Ó Cinnéide (1922-1985) - poet and primary school headmaster - to seek and absorb and be informed about nature. The parish I was raised in *Paróiste Múrach* - The Parish of the Moors on the northerly tip of the peninsula is protected by *Cnoc Bréanainn* or Mount Brandon standing at 3,123ft and hills and cliffs and sea envelop you like a womb, reaching out to the Blasket Islands off the coast of Dunquin where my great grandfather, Mícheál Mhuiris Ó Catháin was born and lived. I was taught by Caoimhín to check the high tide line every morning, to be able to read clouds, know the stars. How to handle yourself in a fishing boat, how to swim safely and know the beaches with currents and reefs. Where to walk and what to be aware of. It gets embedded in you, part of your "dúchas" or heritage and the wealth of folklore and mythology associated with much of the landscape of the peninsula, the ancient standing stones, the wraths or fairy forts dot the horizon. The poem 'Dúchas' in the *Deleted* English collection is all about what that connection means. 'West Kerry Morning' was written one morning when the sun reflected off the cliffs of *Ceann Sibéal* (where Star Wars was filmed) and the light was almost electric, the landscape is, as I say, like a womb, the high tide observed the rituals of living in this beautiful environment checked and done in an intimate and innate sort of way. Poetry grows in this womb. The poems come from some ancient inclination

inspired by a field full of sheep on the cliffs, the sea pink flowering on those same cliffs in May and June, the small fishing boats going about their business of checking and hauling lobster and crab pots for the busy restaurants. I watch them going from mark to mark and know the work associated with hauling pot and handling lobsters. I loved nothing more than going on a “spin” in the 18ft boat and fishing and exploring and learning the placenames and the associated folklore that seems to be attached to everything. He was the one who inspired me to explore writing, which I did from an early age. The respect for nature and the lived and natural environment is something that was handed down to me, and my poetry is often site-specific, and I am just lucky to have landed in and be raised in and live in one of the most beautiful places on earth and continue and never tire of observing it and writing how that engagement begins”.

• I have interpreted the poem entitled “Quaking Grass” as if it were conveying a sense of vulnerability and uncertainty in terms of embracing all phases of the historical past. I would like to know a bit more about your choice of natural elements, such as the grass and the haze, as well as the religious imagery, to portray this necessary feeling of fragility, both for a nation and for individuals.

“The ‘quaking grass’ of this poem refers to the place it was written. I have the good fortune to spend time in an Artists Retreat called *Cill Rialaig* near Ballinskelligs on the Iveragh Peninsula in South Kerry and it consists of 8 artists cottages built on the ruins of a famine village, renovated and dedicated to artists. The translation from Irish is ‘quaking grass’ but in Irish it is *Féar Gortach* which resonates barren, hungry land and that during the Great Famine (*An Gorta Mór*) 1845 – 1852 where one million people died and roughly another million left Ireland on “coffin ships”. This has a huge impact on the Irish psyche and is still not something even vaguely forgotten in the minds of the Irish people. The ruin I wrote the poem in was once an extended family home and now it was grass laden, weed ridden stone and that evening there

was a steady sea mist coming in, enveloping the Cottage I was staying in. The poem was led by the beautiful variations of vocabulary for mist and sea faring occurrences in Irish and I repeated the different forms in each verse. It was a Sunday morning and that was an oblique reference to the Catholic religious practice of going to Mass on Sunday morning. In the third line I say ‘*cosnocht*’ or barefoot, repeated in the second verse as bare naked, in the third, naked and alive, and in the last verse it means naked or exposed more to the point secret of something unspoken like the Famine. The mood in the original text is a dark brooding contemplation of who lived and died of hunger in the original building I was sleeping in”.

• When reading the poem “Good Friday Moon”, I encountered it engaging that you have selected the moon as the main character to recount such an important historical event, both for Ireland in general and for individuals. Are there any reasons for choosing the moon specifically?

“I was a news journalist/broadcaster at the time and was working the late shift in the radio station where I worked in West Kerry and it was the time of the Good Friday Agreement and either I wrote the early draft of this poem that night or soon after because I remember a huge yellow moon rising above the mountain called *Cnoc na Cathrach* from the window of the radio station, illuminating the landscape. Years later, when I was commissioned to write the poem to celebrate the anniversary of the signing of this agreement, I picked up on the original thread and went with the moon as symbolic of the celebration, the achievement of peace in Northern Ireland. The moon as representative of the rise and wane of events and contexts of people’s lives, and in the original Irish the last line is ‘*ré na síochána*’ which translates as both, the era of peace and the moon itself. *Ré* being another word for moon in Irish”.

• I would also like to ask you about “The Witch’s Tit”. I am curious about the discourses behind this poem from a gender perspective, since I believe that the correlation between

women and the land holds a central place here that may resonate with other poems from your works.

“I have over the years always associated the landscape of the Dingle Peninsula with the feminine. *Cruach Mhárthain* is the mountain stack on the more westerly edge of the peninsula which to the eye resembles a woman’s breast – hence some few referring to it as The Witch’s Tit in English. I do however have a number of Irish poems engaging with gender of Mount Brandon as masculine to me and the rest of the mountains and hills and cliffs and peaks as feminine. The feminine goddess is a palpable energy here. There is a headland I see every day and it is called *An Triúr Deirféir* or The Three Sisters. There is a deep gurgling sea cave where my father told me babies came from – years later I wrote a poem tapping into the fear and obvious contraceptive repercussions of being scared out of your wits by ‘where babies came from’. It is called ‘*Poll na mBabies*’ or ‘The Babies Cave’ and I often wondered about the function of these mythological deterrents and ancient information and wanted to write about how that inspired me and had a powerful effect upon me. The poem was never translated. There is a lot of mythology about the selkies, mermaids, half seal, half human, that is embedded in the folklore of the Irish language, these references inspire me to write poems from the female perspective as heralded by mythology. ‘Mermaid in the Lake’ is one such poem. My mother taught me the attention one ought to pay to wild flowers. Gathering them, knowing the English and Irish and sometimes Latin names. Where they grew and when. It was part of both boys' and girls' primary education. I had a beautifully illustrated book called *The Flower Fairies* and I would delight in coming across the first wild orchid in the field near my house and seeing what fairy had been attributed to this or that particular flower. She encouraged flower pressing and many other creative things. Above all it was the lifelong fascination with fairy folk that inspired much of the strong female, powerful archetypes to admire and respect. There were two fairy forts in the village I was raised in, and we were taught to pay respect to the wraths and

not to disturb the fairies which would be very bad luck. I was lucky enough to be raised among very strong independent women and that was always a source of inspiration. That you could do just as well if not better than a man!”.

• As poems such as “Trip to Clare ’92” and “Mother Earth” depict, are the effects of the growing tourism and current damaging practices towards the environment, particularly in local areas of Ireland, something that significantly preoccupies you? Do you conceive poetry as a means of activism in addressing the impending environmental crisis?

“‘Mother Earth’ and ‘Refaire le Monde’ are two poems addressing the urgent environmental crisis this planet faces. They were commissions from the Franco-Irish Literary Festival the year they had ‘Refaire le Monde’ as a theme for the festival. ‘The Trip to Clare’92’ and several other poems are a bit more tongue and cheek about the sometimes-excessive tourism that takes over the area in the high season. One wonders what is left of the original to explore when it is viewed from a bus or daytrip to death? However, it is one of the only industries the area has, and one is inclined to be reluctant to push the issue that fuels the local economy. Care is advised and as a wise person once said: you can’t eat the scenery. Activism begins at home and a poem may be a small thing, but it is a weapon for thought and goodness if shared”.

• I would also be interested in knowing a bit more about “The Warrior Mother as Muse”, since I believe that it covers really important issues for contemporary society, and in particular for women, such as the importance of self-belief, sorority and defying societal expectations. What are your views regarding these aspects?

“I raised my child alone. I had to become a warrior to feed my thoughts, to cope with the pressure of young motherhood, working and childminding and very little income. The muse rose with my mothering. The writing is what kept me alive all through those challenging early childhood raising years. I had to be everything and the only thing that was important was love. I would love to have had the power or the confidence to have insisted on a natural birth for

example, my female friends had very empowering experiences with home birth but I for various reasons unrelated to pregnancy had to be in hospital, had no choice but to be induced, had a pretty tough time in hospital and suffered severe post-partum depression afterwards. It was because I was alone, I didn't feel the strength to ask what I wanted, what my body wanted. It takes one to succeed and raise a child but not entirely alone for I had a tribe of some family and lots of friends who helped and joined in along the way. I wouldn't have it any other way! The Warrior character is the alter ego I drew to explore the power of female independence and ability, to talk about our complex bodies and say it like it is. To have a context to explore sexuality and joy, trauma and depression. I am Bipolar so I know the backroads of the mind and the challenging mood swings associated with the illness if one chooses to identify with the label or regard it as an illness. I also know that we are responsible for our own mental health, to reach out if we need support, not to be ashamed to be who we are, to enjoy the depth and breadth of emotion of being bipolar. Society isn't prepared enough to embrace all these complexities. I'm doing it poem by poem".

• In some of the poems, especially in “Corca Dhuibhne” and “Unplugged on the Great Blasket”, I noticed a profound connection between the poetic voice and the specific places and placenames of the land, where memories, culture, history and personal experiences intertwine. What role do these local sites play in your everyday life and sense of place?

“As I stated earlier, my great grandfather was a Blasket Islander. The island was evacuated in 1953 and the remaining inhabitants were moved to the mainland. Mícheál Mhuiris was a fisherman and a strong swimmer but drowned whilst fishing in 1899 off *Cuas a' Bhodaigh* or Brandon Creek near where I was born. You don't forget where you came from and the connection with the Blaskets ran right through my upbringing. I love to go into the Great Blasket to spend a day or two during the summer when the ferry runs and stay overnight and write by candlelight. I am more at peace there than any other place on earth. ‘Corca Dhuibhne’

the poem - was written by me when I was 17 years of age. Two years after my father died. It is an ode, or a journey through West Kerry with my father as personified by all the placenames and the landscapes he shared with me. He died when I was 15 and he was a huge influence on my choice or determination to be a poet, live like a poet and love like a poet! It was a long time before I considered publishing it, maybe thirty years or so later. It is deeply personal to me, and it lifts my spirit to live in the landscape I was raised in and that he was raised in and that connection deep into heritage and a sense of community is very important to me. I come from a tribe that has a very strong sense of place and identity and language. That too has influenced my work”.