

This is an accepted manuscript of a chapter published by Routledge in *Trauma, Memory and Silence of the Irish Woman in Contemporary Literature*, edited by Madalina Armie and Veronica Membrive, available online: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003355571>

1. Trauma, Reproduction and Breeding in Catherine Brophy's *Dark Paradise*

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Abstract

In the 20th century—an era evidently saturated with unprecedented wounding events—, trauma studies reached its climax and there appeared a considerable number of critical works tackling the effects of trauma and its representation in literature. However, it was not until the last decades that trauma studies started to be seriously deconstructed and that gender issues were incorporated into the debate. Currently, we can find a great number of Irish contemporary literary works inclined to the exploration of Ireland's violent history and memories, as well as of its episodes of trauma. Especially in the last three decades, several prominent dystopias written by Irish women and dealing with female oppression have been published (Elices 73). Nevertheless, the genres of science fiction and dystopia have received little critical attention; and, as this publication seeks to examine, it seems that the oppression exerted by Irish patriarchy has not been fully tackled by the academia. Therefore, and given the fact that female oppression is still a reality in many different and varied fields, feminist perspectives on trauma representations reveal themselves as essential to deeply understand contemporary Irish trauma fiction.

As an example of a literary work exploring trauma from a female perspective, we find Catherine Brophy's dystopic science fiction novel *Dark Paradise*, a remarkable example of Irish trauma fiction dealing with the repression and the negation of some historical (traumatic) events by official censorship and control. Additionally, beyond the representations of communal trauma, Brophy's uniqueness relies in the deep feminist concern in its exploration of different aspects of human reproduction and breeding, as represented in the extraterrestrial futuristic world of Zintilla. As my analysis will show, Brophy's novel explores crucial issues such as the trauma resulting of the forced sterilization of the population and infertility trauma; the (unhuman) process of artificial reproduction and communal ectogenesis; the long-term effects of cloning and genetic recession; the imposition of one-child policy; or the consequences of state-controlled breeding and detached parenting. All these controversial topics are of great interest in present-day times, and Brophy's approach serves to reclaim women's voice and space, both in the contemporary Irish literary sphere, as well as in general historic and political context of post-Celtic Tiger years.

Keywords: breeding; cloning; dystopic literature; ectogenesis; feminist sci-fi; sterilization; trauma studies.

1. TRAUMA STUDIES, IRISH LITERATURE AND FEMINIST DYSTOPIA

In the 20th century—an era evidently saturated with unprecedented wounding events—, trauma studies reached its climax and a considerable number of critical works tackling the effects of trauma and its representation in literature appeared. However, it was not until the last decades that trauma studies started to be seriously deconstructed and that gender issues were incorporated into the debate, “focusing on the articulation of traumas resulting from the inequalities and abuses connected with identity and gender” (Herrero and Baelo-Allué 15).

Currently, we can find a great number of Irish contemporary literary works inclined to the examination of Ireland’s violent history and memories, as well as of its episodes of trauma. This exploration has been done in various ways, both thematically as well as structurally. Robert Garratt distinguishes between “novels about trauma” and “trauma narratives” (2011). In most novels dealing with trauma, “conventional narrative strategies, points of view, and linear story lines” are employed (5). In contrast, “[a] trauma novel [...] employs a narrative strategy in which a reconstruction of events through memories, flashbacks, dreams, and hauntings is as important as the events themselves” (5).

One of the literary subgenres that has been recently dealing with trauma is open or critical dystopia, which seemed to resonate with Irish readers during the years of economic revival (Fennell 382). The population’s generalised discontent and post-Celtic Tiger uncertainties “might be some of the factors that could explain why dystopia is starting to have a real impact on the Irish literary arena” (Elices 75). More specifically, open or critical dystopias “allow readers [...] to hope by resisting closure [and] maintain the utopian impulse within the work” (Baccolini and Moyan 7). In contrast to ‘classical dystopias’—in which there is little space for optimistic outcomes—, in this new variation of the subgenre in which patriarchal and colonial societies are thoroughly scrutinised, works “can aid readers in moving towards change” (Stankow-Mercer 91). Analogously, 21st-century Irish trauma literature is characterised by going beyond trauma “exploring and representing the process of healing and recovery” (Costello-Sullivan 3). This shift is often manifest structurally—either by inscribing trauma into the narrative or by writing it into characters’ embodied selves (3). Several milestones achieved at the turn of the millennium—such as the Peace Process; the exposure and the confrontation of the history of sexual abuse in the Irish Catholic Church; the Celtic Tiger economy; and the social shifts in the post-Celtic Tiger period (26–27)— enabled “a movement from the literary representation of despair to the representation of hope” (25).

Nonetheless, one might ask if these necessary and positive movements have also reached women and women’s causes sufficiently as to stimulate a women’s literature of healing and recovery. Or perhaps, contemporary feminist literature still feels the urge to represent and reveal wounds that cannot be healed until patriarchal violence stops.

Particularly, the subgenre of “feminist dystopia” usually warns against the harmful consequences of patriarchy, and questions its political and/or moral theory by depicting a future in which this ideology grounds the systemic oppression of the female sex by the male sex (Little 16). This is the reason why many feminist dystopic novels specifically and also explicitly deal with sexual violence, forced reproduction, pregnancy, abortion, ectogenesis, reproductive

control, state-controlled breeding and gender roles from different feminist perspectives (Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2020a, n.p.).

Especially in the last three decades, several prominent dystopias written by Irish women and dealing with female oppression—and women’s traumata—have been published (Elices 73). Many feminist scholars are exploring feminist dystopia and the topics it often deals with, “such as the control exercised by the male authority, the violation of women’s own private self or how women have been deprived of their own voice and space” (75). Nevertheless, science-fiction trauma narratives with dystopic tones have still received little critical attention; and, as this publication seeks to examine, the oppression exerted by Irish patriarchy has not been fully tackled by the academia. Therefore, and given the fact that female subjugation is still a reality in many different and varied fields, feminist perspectives on trauma representations reveal themselves as essential in order to deeply understand contemporary Irish trauma fiction.

Women’s traumata can only be recognised and worked through in a feminist and antipatriarchal framework, and it is also a necessary task of present-day feminisms to unveil those silenced wounds, as well as the past and the still-existing systemic abuses. In this line of thought, female trauma is seen both as a symptom and as a tool of patriarchy’s violent dominance. Following this idea, the analysis of Catherine Brophy’s *Dark Paradise* will focus on multiple ways of violence exerted against women, such as forced sterilisation and state-controlled breeding from a feminist perspective.

2. CATHERINE BROPHY’S SCIENCE FICTION NOVEL *DARK PARADISE*: A TRAUMA NARRATIVE

Catherine Brophy’s *Dark Paradise*—whose ambiguous title alludes to the in-utero experience, as well as to the ambivalent or even dystopic nature of an apparently ideal and evolved civilization—is a remarkable example of Irish trauma fiction written by a woman and dealing with the repression and the negation of some historical (traumatic) events by official censorship and control. Additionally, beyond the representations of communal trauma, Brophy’s uniqueness relies in the deep feminist concern in its exploration of different aspects of human reproduction and breeding—something quite uncommon in the genre of SF, which has been traditionally quite more male oriented or even misogynistic.¹

Dark Paradise is set on planet Zintilla, ruled by the Assembly of Kristeran, where under-evolved natural humans living in the wilderness coexist with ‘Crystal Beings’, who have altered their bodies “though genetic engineering and eugenics” (Fennell 383). Deep repression of feelings has become the norm for Crystal Beings, who only believe in the rational mind and the rules established by their leaders. Among them, reproduction is carefully engineered by means of cloning, as they lack reproductive organs. Infants being created by couples “through union of the reproductive organs” is considered “bizarre and repulsive” in this futuristic world (Brophy 45). Moreover, in utero gestation is also contemplated as something revolting, as the womb has become an “atavistic female organ” (45). As we shall see in the next section, there is a strong feminist preoccupation related to several aspects related to reproduction and breeding in the novel.

Following Garratt's distinction between "novels about trauma" and "trauma narratives" (2011), it is my hypothesis that Brophy's novel not only deals thematically with certain potentially traumatic events, but it also represents their effects by means of its narrative strategies. Therefore, the analysis will focus on both the novel's form and meaning, as structure and content are profoundly interconnected.

Traditionally, trauma has been considered to be unspeakable, unrepresentable (Balaev 3 and 5). However, writers have found many and various ways to try to represent particular traumata, thus rejecting the definition of trauma as being universal and unrepresentable.² In fact, trauma can adopt many forms and expression, and thus it is crucial to analyse the form of a given 'trauma novel' in order to unravel its traumatic story/ies.

Trauma narratives have been said to often try represent trauma by means of their form, which can include many different experimental techniques: fragmentation; multiple perspectives or narratives; the presence of analepsis and prolepsis—which might attempt to mimic the "belated" nature of a traumatic experience—; repetition—suggesting a certain compulsion—; aporia—due to the impossibility for the subject to conceive trauma's totality (Onega and Ganteau 19), or to a focaliser's amnesia—; distortions; a certain fluidity between reality and unreality, or the presence of oneiric passages; hybridity; or even failure of language (Hartman 258). Many of these narratives need to make use of experimental devices to reflect the unsettling experience of trauma (Whitehead 6–7), and by so doing they underline the chaotic aspects of trauma (Herrero and Baelo-Allué 15).

The narration of the perception of a traumatised character, "who may suffer from gaps in memory, repetition compulsions, sense of fragmentation of the self, and other PTSD symptoms, requires a further exploring of narrative techniques by the writer" (Aliaga-Lavrijssen and Bick 4). Stylistically, trauma narratives display textual gaps, repetitions, shifting viewpoints to convey the disorienting positions experienced by traumatised characters "through shifts in time, memory, affects and, consciousness" (Vickroy 28). This is definitely the case of Brophy's *Dark Paradise*.

The story is presented by a heterodiegetic narrator, and multiple internal focalisations, which include Fendan's, who opens the novel when he recovers consciousness, quite disoriented: "He could not think. He could not act. He lost consciousness again" (Brophy 12). As the narrator further states: "There were no thoughts. No images. Nothing to hear. Nothing to see. No questions. Nothing" (23). And then... "explosion... death..." (23). His amnesia already hints at the very beginning of the novel that he might have experienced a possible traumatic event.

Following Freud, Cathy Caruth argues that inscribed in the traumatic experience is the shocking juxtaposition between 'knowing' and 'not knowing' (1996, 4). Trauma victims have to struggle between "the urge to know and the need to deny" (Herrero and Baelo 2011, 14). Following this juxtaposition, in *Dark Paradise* we find that the repression or erasure of old memories and the creation of new reminiscences, death and life, are also indistinguishable at some points. As the narrative advances, readers start to get the impression that Fendan's confused state is very similar to what an in-utero experience must be for a foetus. This impression is reinforced throughout the novel, and it is also linked to his impossibility to remember: "The new rhythm interrupted Fendan's memories. He listened carefully. The old internal one was still there, simple, unchanging, *ba-dum, ba-dum, ba-dum, ba-dum*" (Brophy

96). The above passage clearly suggests the experience a fetus might have in the mother's womb, as these sounds he hears are repeated several times in the novel, always associated to in-utero life: "he curled up, thumb in mouth, listening" (122).

And to start afresh, it seems that Fendan has to forget, but also to remember:

He knew that the old life which had been Fendan's was over and a new one was taking root. [...] But one task remained. He must remember and forget. Remember his past so that somewhere, deep in the cells of his new being, it would be embedded, a hidden history informing the present. And forget, to be free to start afresh. [...] Remember to forget. (24)

Also related to Fendan's possible 'traumatic memory'—which has been said to "involve distortion, disguise, and other permutations relating to . . . narrative shaping" (LaCapra 88–89)—is the narration of some intrusive images: Suddenly a "blurred image jerked into vivid focus" (Brophy 1991, 36). A female among a ragged crowd, "held a dead child in her arms" (36). Some other people "coughing up blood [...] erupted in a roar of anger" (36). This terrible image is too strong for Fendan, who tries to wrestle "with the images of illness and death and disorder" (36). He retries to repress them; however, "he must remember..." too (37). And this need to remember is repeated several times throughout the novel, chanted sometimes "over and over and over" by a crowd: "Remember, remember, remember. We remember!" (42). Then, Fendan seems to remember too: sick children, "lifeless, limbs splayed, across the females' arms. The mothers screamed to the crowd" (42).

In this passage, some readers might start assuming that the mother's terrible experience expresses an individual as well as a collective traumatic event emerging from Fendan's individual consciousness, which becomes "the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess" (Caruth 1995, 5). Quite commonly, an overwhelming event cannot be fully experienced at the time of its occurrence and manifests itself later "through intrusive thoughts, flashbacks or nightmares" (Davis and Meretoja 4). Thus, unclear elements from the past keep returning to his consciousness as if they were memories of others.

Some images, or perhaps analeptic remembrances, keep assaulting Fendan's consciousness: "... There was a long line of people, some cut and bleeding, dressed in rags" (Brophy 25). He does not recognise them as something he has experienced himself and wonders where "had that image come from?" (25). Through this narration in free indirect style, readers learn that "[i]t wasn't the histories. Fendan struggled to forget the rags, the blood, the sullen shuffle, shuffle, shuffle..." (25). It is an event that has been left out of the official history that is being kept and transmitted by the rulers of Zintilla; something that has been left out of "the official histories" (25), "the true histories, those guarded and verified by Kristeran over centuries" (28), and that only remains there as a nightmare, as an atemporal and chaotic forgotten-yet-remembered scene. Only that which is verified by Kristeran stays as the truth. Accordingly, we could argue that there exists a systemic violence exercised by the rulers that represses and denies the terrible events related to hunger and slavery undergone by the population long time ago. The memory of these events has been completely erased, but the symptoms have not disappeared, as Fendan's intrusive images prove.

As commented above, *Dark Paradise* shows several (historical) traumatic events, and perhaps the most innovative are related to reproduction and breeding, which are approached from a strong feminist perspective.

3. A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE ON TRAUMA, REPRODUCTION AND SYSTEMIC VIOLENCE IN *DARK PARADISE*

As the heterodiegetic narratorial voice explains, Bewal of Xemplox —also called “Mother of Beings” (44)—, was the developer of the “Pool of Life” (27). As it further narrates, before her invention, natural methods of reproduction were a “major concern” (45), as:

Females complained that reproduction took their time and energy from work and studies, and as a result they did not reach the highest positions of influence. Males complained that the females had total power over reproduction levels and the earliest education of infants. Everyone agreed that the imbalance should be corrected. (45).

Gender inequality was a more urgent matter than space research, defended young Bewal, who had been working on the “Space Travel Programme” for many years, before she decided to focus her efforts on fertilization and reproduction research (45). “[F]emales are tyrannized by biology”, she concludes (46).

This fallacious argument³ will remind some readers familiar with Shulamith Firestone’s classic feminist manifesto *The Dialectics of Sex*—in which she takes technological maternity as a symbol of female rebellion based on the idea that gender inequality had a purely biological source (Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2021b, n.p.). In her view, women are subjected to their own biological role as life conceivers, being this physical fact one of the main reasons for gender inequalities (Firestone 1970). Bewal “wished to free herself and all women with her from the tyranny of the womb” (Brophy 130).

In this line of thought, ectogenesis⁴ appears as a technological liberating tool that would free “women from the tyranny of their reproductive biology” (Firestone 206), and they would finally reach equality with men (235). However, ectogenesis and cloning might not be as liberating for individuals as one might think in the first place. Furthermore, those considered unfit and chaotic by the Assembly of Kristeran, or the dissenters who live in the Outlands, do not have access to the Pool of Life and thus “they had no children and died out within a generation” (Brophy 27). It could be argued that this measure of reproductive control resembles the ideology held by the Eugenics movement at the beginning of the twentieth century. It is the State, or in this case the Assembly, who possesses all the power over its citizens, even before their birth.

a. Forced Sterilisation and Ectogenesis

In the novel it is hinted that infertility has increased among couples (45–46), and one of the ways the scientific community and the fertilization laboratories dealt with the couples’ sadness or even traumatic experiences of infertility was to make them repress or “control [their] chaotic feelings” (47). This tendency led Bewal to direct her research towards “producing infants by artificial means” (47).

As explained in several official documents included in the novel, such as “THE GOALS OF BEWAL’S RESEARCH” (47): among the main objectives of this program were the study of “criminals and social deviants” and “genetic material from the deceased” for fertility experiments (47); the “[d]evelopment of the artificial womb” (47); an “[i]n depth study of laboratory infants” (47); and the “[d]evelopment of a[...] sterilization agent” (47). “By the year 211 B. Co the sterilization of all citizens had been completed and the Pool of Life was in full operation” (50). The population had also “lost all interest in sex” (51). As Testal, one of the Outlanders, narrates in the first person, before this, many travellers and dissenters, who still believed in natural reproduction, tried to continue with their old-fashioned lifestyle. However, “the Law forbade” it (130): “a great flood of refugees [came]. They said that Bewal had poisoned the water in the cities and made everybody sterile” (130).

Forced sterilisation left an indelible mark their psyches, as is suggested by the fact that “[t]hese scenes would continue to interrupt his [Fendan’s] recall” (50). The sterilised community experienced these events as something traumatic—“Infertility causes increase in chaotic feelings” (46)—that has been erased from the official records, and Fendan struggles to remember the traumatic experiences of his community.

It must be explained that forced sterilisation appears thus not to be echoing a particular traumatic event in Irish history, but it reflects the more general patriarchal domination and exclusion of women and the control of their reproductive processes. In a sense, it could be argued that it reflects a structural trauma, provoked by a patriarchal system based on the systemic violence against women and their repression. Moreover, there is also a delusional and misogynistic desire among rulers to annihilate the influence of the gestating body, which is considered negative for the baby—“mothers could communicate their own chaos to the foetus” predisposing the child to chaos (48)⁵—. So, Bewal comes to the conclusion that “all children should be gestated in a large neutral womb” (48). However, this neutrality is not something desired by the community, as it is considered something unnatural and negative.

Gestating bodies and caregivers are erased by this new ectogenesis technology, and the population rebelled at it, yelling defiantly and throwing missiles (49):

“Can it [the Pool of Life] sing a lullaby? [...]

“No,” the crowd roared back.

“Can it cradle, feed and love?”

“No, no, no, no.” (48)

However, within a few years, Bewal’s plans become the rule, a law in which couples adopted “an infant from the Pool of Life” (49), and unfit or “chaotic mothers don’t get babies” (51).

b. State-controlled Breeding and Early Childhood Neglect

For Bewal, not only gestating—or the “tyranny of the womb” (130), as she put it—was considered to be the source of gender inequalities and female oppression, but she found “motherhood restrictive” too (130). Therefore, it makes sense that she extended the desire to delegate the task of breeding to the State too. The option of choosing when to have a child or

how many is also prevented, as the “Law of Life” established by the Assembly states that you could not “have two children at the same time” (67).

Children are created or engineered and then, if the parents are considered fit, they are allowed to adopt a chosen child and to become “educators for the Child of [their] Life” (30). Nevertheless, children belong to the Assembly, which breeds them following a standardised system: “Bewal and her team designed the education Laws to ensure their proper education” (52). Once the babies are born, biological processes such as body feeding are inexistent too, and babies are fed by the nipple of a feeder (59). When children cry, they are put in a dark “Anacoeic Chamber” where “all noise was absorbed, thus they were deprived of the stimulus of hearing their own cries” (61). They are left there until they stop crying, a practice that nowadays we know can be extremely damaging for an infant’s brain, as current research⁶ has shown that if babies’ needs are neglected, their neural, physical and emotional development will be deeply affected.⁷ In a sense, it could be argued that this emotional neglect—also called “early childhood neglect”—⁸ produces what has been termed “complex trauma”—which “describes both children’s exposure to multiple traumatic events [...] and the wide-ranging, long-term effects of this exposure. These events are severe and pervasive, such as abuse or profound neglect” (NCTSN n.p.).

However, in this totalitarian dystopic world, education is designed to be as unemotional and detached as possible, and children’s chaos has to be severely restrained (Brophy 64). Only intellect seems to be appreciated in this society. The worth of individuals is put exclusively on their intelligence and capacity to behave adequately, that is, rationally and suppressing their feelings. This aim at the selection of the fittest and the standardisation of human beings is reminiscent of the origins of eugenics. Furthermore, the “developments resulting from the work of Bewal” include, among others, the standardisation of child education, “[a]s all children were now the property of the laboratories” (52). Here Bewal’s ‘paradise’ shows its most dystopic and darkest nature, as readers cannot help but see this as the terrible product of a totalitarian, sexist and racist government.

4. WHEN WILL RECOVERY FOR IRISH WOMEN BE POSSIBLE?

As the analysis of Catherine Brophy’s critical dystopia *Dark Paradise* has shown, the trauma resulting of the forced sterilisation; the systemic violence underlying processes of artificial reproduction and ectogenesis, as well as of state-controlled breeding and detached parenting, reveal the mantle of systemic violence often underlying reproduction issues and female bodies. It cannot be denied that these measures—set in the future of planet Zintilla but which have been also a reality in Ireland at some point—are considered a human rights violation and that they can constitute an act of genocide, gender-based violence, discrimination, and torture (WHO 1–2).

All these controversial topics regarding reproduction and breeding are of great interest in present-day times,⁹ and Brophy’s approach serves to reclaim women’s voice and space, both in the contemporary Irish literary sphere, as well as in general historic and political context of post-Celtic Tiger years. As the novel’s ending might suggest, when Fendan is born again, there might be a slight feeling of hope and recovery in the novel after all.

Nonetheless, one might ask if the necessary and positive movements achieved at the turn of the millennium and that made a more positive and optimistic outlook possible mentioned by Costello-Sullivan—such as the Peace Process; the exposure of the scandals of the Irish Catholic Church; the Celtic Tiger economy as well as and the social shifts in the post–Celtic Tiger Ireland (2627)—have also reached women and women’s causes sufficiently as to stimulate a women’s literature of healing and recovery. Perhaps, as my article intends to suggest, Irish women writers such as Catherine Brophy still have specific feminist issues to tackle before narratives of recovery really start to flourish. As the growing popularity of feminist critical dystopia shows, the amount of works of this type published and read nowadays might be an indicator of the fact that contemporary feminist literature still feels the urge to represent and reveal specific wounds and traumata, which cannot be healed until patriarchal injustices stop occurring. And for this to take place, firstly, female trauma must be represented and dealt with from an open and critical perspective; and, secondly, ideological and social changes must continue happening.

FUNDING

The research carried out for the writing of this article is part of the projects FFI2017-84258-P and PID2021-124841NB-I00, both financed by the Spanish Ministry of Economy, Industry and Competitiveness (MINECO) in collaboration with the European Regional Development Fund (DGI/ERDF). The author is also thankful for the support of the Government of Aragón and the European Social Fund (ESF) (code H03_17R).

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¹ For more on this, see Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2020a.

² The universalization of trauma makes the traumatic ubiquitous, which inevitably implies a trivialization of the concept (Aliaga-Lavrijsen and Bick 5)

³ This assumption that the basis of patriarchy is distinctively biological might be deceptive. As radical feminists such as Mary O'Brian (1981) or Mary Daly (1978) have argued, biology is not to blame for women's oppression, but patriarchy is. It must not be forgotten that in talking of the reproducing material body as if it were an extant

thing implies a re-essentializing of womanhood, as Deirdre M. Condit contends (2010, 182). Science does not exist independently or as pure objectivity, and it is deeply embedded into what feminist scholar Donna Haraway refers to as “the union of the political and physiological” (1991, 7).

⁴ For more on ectogenesis and feminist Science Fiction, see Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2021b.

⁵ For more about the symbiotic relationship between mother and foetus see: Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2020b, 2021a and 2021b.

⁶ For more on this, see Perry 2004.

⁷ Repeated exposure to traumatic events early in development changes the neural system to appear like one that is always anticipating or responding to trauma. “In this way, complex trauma translates into a range of social, emotional, behavioural and interpersonal difficulties that can be life-long” (McAloon 2014).

⁸ Which refers to any act by a parent or other caregiver that deprives a child of their basic needs, including their emotional needs, resulting in physical or psychological harm.

⁹ It is worth remembering that cases of forced sterilisation, such as the non-consensual hysterectomies recently performed on detainees at the Irwin County Detention Center, are still on the news nowadays.