

## 'The Famine of the 90s':<sup>1</sup> Female Starvation and Religious Thought in Leanne O'Sullivan's *Waiting for My Clothes*

By Luz Mar González-Arias  
Universidad de Oviedo (Spain)

---

Copyright (c) 2005 by Luz Mar González-Arias. This text may be archived and redistributed in electronic form, provided that the author and journal are properly cited and no fee is charged for access. Archiving, redistribution, or republication of this text on other terms, in any medium, requires the notification of the journal and consent of the author.

---

**Abstract:** This paper offers a critical analysis of Leanne O'Sullivan's debut collection *Waiting for My Clothes*, in particular focusing on its recurrent themes of anorexia and bulimia. Leanne O'Sullivan is part of a new generation of Irish poets, located at the crossroads of tradition and modernity. In its critique of the so-called beauty myth, *Waiting for My Clothes* takes the reader to a New Ireland where the anxiety for national definitions has lost part of its force in favour of the progressive internalisation of Irish life. However, this paper will concentrate on O'Sullivan's examination of the religious dimension of anorexic patterns, an aspect that presents her as heiress of the influence exerted by Catholicism in the conceptualisations of femininity in Ireland.

**Key Words:** New Irish poets; Anorexia/Bulimia; Holy anorexia; Female corporeality

Al dolor hay que encebarlo bien, y luego lanzarlo lejos y esperar a que suceda algo en la inmensidad del mar, que el hilo avise, que la caña se mueva, y que el dolor te traiga la cena de esa noche.

Luisa Castro, *Viajes con mi padre*

Trying to pull things out of affliction into the light of day and let them have their own space. Recovering things from your own past, or from a collective past, is to achieve freedom by the act of recovery.

Paula Meehan

In her introduction to *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, Elaine Scarry argues that pain occurring in people's bodies goes unnoticed by anyone except the sufferer. According to Scarry, physical pain brings about a radical split between one's own reality and the realities experienced by the rest of the world. While for the people in pain their physical distress may become *the* experience that underpins all the activities of their daily lives, other individuals would be unable to catch hold of this dimension of bodily reality. Therefore, the theorist continues, pain is at the same time "that which cannot be denied" —since it is absolutely central to the sufferer's existence— and "that which cannot be confirmed" —by anyone else, regardless of the physical or emotional distance that separates the self in pain from other members of his/her community (1985: 4). At the core of Scarry's argument lies

the belief that pain's strength —this utter separation of self and others— results from its capacity to shatter linguistic articulation or, in other words, from its resistance to language, an aspect that ensures its unshareability.

In their desire to awaken the reader's empathy, medical language, the publications of Amnesty International and artistic discourses could be considered valuable exceptions to this lack of verbal articulation. However, it is worth noting that even though world literature of all epochs is flooded with emotional pain of one kind or another, what happens in the physical dimension of distress is not so frequently recorded. It seems as if pain would be too extreme or too private an experience to ever be put into words, to ever be exposed.

Leanne O'Sullivan's debut collection of poetry, *Waiting for My Clothes* (2004), can be described as an artistic utterance of exactly what it feels like to inhabit an emaciated body

constantly put under the pressure of starvation, purging and self-abuse. Most of the fifty-three poems that make up the volume take the reader to the darkest realms of adolescence —mainly the experiences of extreme anorexia and bulimia— as well as to the onset of recovery and healing. Far from sticking to the medical or confessional modes usually associated with eating disorders, these poems present O’Sullivan as one of the emerging talents of Ireland, one that does not hesitate to inscribe into the literary text a bodily experience that had been kept silenced or marginalised in representation, both in Ireland and elsewhere.

In spite of her youth (born in Cork in 1983), Leanne O’Sullivan has already won most of Ireland’s main poetry awards and her work has appeared in a number of magazines and anthologies,<sup>2</sup> among them *The New Irish Poets*, edited by Selina Guinness (2004b), O’Sullivan being the youngest poet included. Although *Waiting for My Clothes* is a collection primarily concerned with the experience of female fasting, none of the poems selected in Guinness’ anthology and none of the ones which won the literary awards focus directly on this topic, maybe, as Scarry suggests in her excellent treatise, due to the general reluctance to share physical pain publicly.

The medical term “anorexia nervosa” is of relatively recent creation, but female starvation can be traced back to the onsets of civilisation. In first-century Rome, Metrodora records several instances of young women who rejected food as their only means to escape from the roles of mothers and wives imposed by a patriarchal establishment.<sup>3</sup> Particularly interesting for our purposes are the Middle Ages, abundant as they are in female saints who displayed signs of acute self-starvation. Until the seventeenth century, religion provided the main interpretative framework for the (female) body in the Christian West. The body/soul split that has traditionally characterised our religious and cultural discourses tended to associate women with the less favoured side of the dichotomy —due to Eve’s “transgression” in the Garden of Eden— and instead identified the male with a supposedly superior ascetic existence. As Mary Condren explains, Christian myths have had a deep impact on the treatment of women in society: “To reach full sanctity [...] women have to renounce their sexuality, symbol of

their role as temptresses and the means by which they drag men from their lofty heights” (1989: 5). This conceptualisation of female corporeality is at the base of the anorexic behaviour exhibited by a great number of medieval nuns and saints. In *Holy Anorexia* (1985) Rudolph Bell expands on this issue and investigates the lives of religious women like Catherine of Siena or Clare of Assisi, obsessed by the kind of spiritual purity that could only be achieved through the utter rejection of bodily needs. Examples of voluntary emaciation recur in early Christian texts. Metaphors of the “male woman”, i.e., a woman metamorphosing herself into a man by losing her female forms, clearly reflect the hierarchy of values implicit in religious binary thought. Conversely, the figure of the male metamorphosed into a woman stood for the spiritual degeneration of those who succumbed to the desires of the “sinful” flesh.<sup>4</sup>

In spite of the process of secularisation witnessed by Irish society over the last decades, religion has not lost all of its power as an interpretative framework for the sexes and the dichotomous models of Eve and the Virgin Mary still abound in the cultural imagery of the island. This is only to be expected in a country where Catholicism and Nationalism formed a strong nexus to counteract the lasting effects of colonisation. Some of the poems in *Waiting for My Clothes* trace this religious dimension of anorexia and can be related to earlier accounts of the eating disorder by the previous generation of Irish women poets. This culturally-specific approach alternates in the collection with poems that account for the anorectic’s struggle against the imperatives of beauty, offering the reader a more secular, more international interpretation of starvation. Ultimately, the texts we will analyse in this paper show the influence religious mythology still exerts on the perception of female flesh and indicate that the Catholic inheritance is an operative force in the creation of meaning that reaches even the youngest generations of Irish society.

“Bulimic” (O’Sullivan 2004: 18-19) is one of a series of such poems. In the text, a female narrator goes through one of the episodes of purging that accompany bulimic patterns.<sup>5</sup> The action takes place in the bathroom, a domestic space that guarantees the privacy of what is going to happen. The first lines of the poem describe the immediate physical consequences

of the purge, sparing none of the details: “Blood dries on the bathroom floor / beside my head as I lie curled in / a foetal ball watching dripping pipes”. The woman seeks protection in the foetal image but cannot be saved from the shock of “pale shores of arms and neck and face, / made paler still by moonlight and stars”. O’Sullivan’s protagonist perceives herself as divided into two distinct parts impossible to reconcile: her body and her soul. As if she were one of Bell’s medieval nuns, she identifies with her non-corporeal side, which she defines as a “saint”, and refers to her own physicality with the distance proffered by the third person pronouns “she” and “her”. The young woman confesses that she knelt before the toilet hours before, when she felt

... a skinny saint rave within me —  
 “Empty, empty her and she’ll be thin!”  
 I clung to the covenant like clingfilm  
 over a rib and heaved her hungers.

Drunk on her breath and bowed  
 to a cistern I emptied, emptied,  
 emptied her,

burned her weeds and wiles  
 I trespassed into the body’s chambers  
 and raped it with two blistering fingers.

Her body, prey to “the caustic passion of juices from the gut”, “weeps, reluctant” to go on with the purge. But the skinny saint eventually manages to control the fleshy body: “She erupts maniacally / until blood makes her holy, barren, empty”. Apart from the fact that the narrator considers the vomiting a “ceremony”, the religious dimension of the action is evident in the choice of words taken from the Catholic phraseology —covenant, rib, holy, saint. Particularly remarkable is the equation she establishes for the terms holiness, barrenness and emptiness. One of the first physical consequences of starvation is the lack of menstruation and, hence, of the procreative possibilities of female biology. For the narrator, an absence of menses is part of her long journey towards a “purer” dimension. Without flesh, without menstrual blood, the punishments inflicted on Eve after the Fall will also disappear gradually.

In the meantime, her corporeality is burnt —as witches were— in an aggressive ritual of purification described in terms of penetration and rape. The body’s reaction to these attacks is to weep “maniacally”. This is not the only occasion in *Waiting for My Clothes* where the

anorexic narrator identifies her corporeal side with a demented woman. The term hysteria — form the Greek *hysterion*, womb— was conceived by Freudian psychoanalysis as a female malady, as a uterus wandering in search of identity. Lacan, in his turn, developed the idea that hysteria stemmed from the patient’s doubts about his/her sexual identity and his/her desire for the Other. Whereas for Lacan both males and females could suffer from this malady, he reaffirmed the theory that most hysterics were indeed women (Evans 1996: 78-79). Read under this light, what O’Sullivan’s narrator perceives as the “maniac” reaction of her fleshy side is in fact a response to the constant crisis of identity she is put under by patriarchal stereotypes of femininity. Her desire to become the Other, the saint, results in a kind of behaviour traditionally associated with mental malfunctions.

The phallic image of fingers “trespassing” and “raping” the body’s chambers offer another interesting layer of analysis for the poem. Canonical psychoanalysis —among other epistemologies— contributed to the conceptualisation of female corporeality as lack, in contrast to the normative body of the male. Feminist theory soon reacted against this conceptual framework by underlining the biological, erotic and symbolic possibilities of women’s biology. Accordingly, sexual penetration has been used in some trends of feminist thought as a metaphor of the virulence with which phallogocratic discourses have invaded the female universe. In “Bulimic”, the incursion of unwelcome fingers into the narrator’s body seems to suggest such a critique. An excessive internalisation of religious prejudices against the corporeal triggers the “violation” perpetrated on the narrator’s physicality by the “skinny saint” within her. However, all attempts to transgress received models of behaviour vanish in the final lines of the text, where the violence inflicted during the ritual of purging —“blood trickling from the nose. / Now curled beside dripping pipes, / weighing the head’s load, in black clothes / framing the arms, the neck, the face”— is connoted in positive terms: the tiles may offer no warmth, but the protagonist has successfully silenced her corporeal self and realises that “[w]e move like spirits”.

The binary opposites body/soul, witch/saint reappear in “Hangover of Years” (35), “My Father Asks Me Why” (22), and “When We

Were Good” (13). In these poems the first terms of the dichotomies acquire, once more, positive connotations and can be held responsible for the dual personality the narrators endure. “Hangover of Years” describes a new episode of vomiting. All through the lines there is a strict separation between the body and the mind, a split loaded with the religious echoes of “Bulimic”. Purging herself becomes a source of sanctity and even pleasure for the protagonist, who declares: “My body fed on pain, the breast of dawn / and holy nights of punishment. / As I shackled myself / to these muses I used to smile”. By means of a gradual disappearance from the physical level, she enjoys the knowledge that her body is shrinking, while her holy side is allowed to develop: “I thought / I was spoiling her with my act of shrinking, / as if she would grow instead of me”.

Similarly, in “My Father Asks Me Why” the narrator explains to her father the reasons for her voluntary starvation. Once more, the body/soul split presides over the lines, with the “skinny saint” taking the lead: “And when I nearly passed out / the skinny saint chanted / and numbers lay across the plate / of my mind. She never let me / rest”. The young woman admits that all the time she thought her holy side would win the battle, so that she could become something ‘nearly perfect’. Similar dichotomous thought is found in “When We Were Good”, a poem that can be read as the individualised history of the narrator, but also as the supposedly collective destiny of female biology. The narrator addresses a girl twelve years her junior — probably her younger self— to warn her against the future that is necessarily awaiting her. A clear-cut division between goodness and badness is established from the onset of the text. Once more, the favoured side of the dualism is associated with “the beginning / of the world / when everything was small / and so far away; / and she was all goodness”. Only in the stage prior to socialisation can the young girl have a positive and reassuring image of her own identity. The parallels with Eve before the Fall are again quite explicit.

The relationship between religion and female fasting had already been examined by the previous generation of Irish women poets. In 1980, Eavan Boland published *In Her Own Image*, a volume primarily concerned with the specificities of inhabiting a female body.

“Anorexic” (1995:<sup>6</sup> 58-60) recreates the story of an anorexic Eve who, believing her body is heretic, strives to disappear from the physical level altogether. By means of obsessive fasting, the mythical figure will be able to get back into Adam’s rib again, “as if I had never been away”. This rejection of food relates Eve to the long list of medieval saints enumerated by Rudolph Bell in *Holy Anorexia* and ultimately allows her to bypass women’s supposedly sinful nature. As in O’Sullivan’s “Bulimic”, the narrator also sees herself divided into two mutually exclusive terms and resorts to the image of witch-burning to illustrate her preference for the spiritual side of her split identity:

I vomited  
her hungers.  
Now the bitch is burning.  
...  
Only a little more,  
only a few more days  
sinless, foodless  
...  
I will grow  
angular and holy

In “Féar Suaithinseach / Marvellous Grass”, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill (1993: 74-75, trans. Michael Hartnett) also explored the issue of female thinness from a religious perspective. In the Irish original Ní Dhomhnaill, who systematically uses Gaelic as a creative medium, included the subtitle “Fianaise an chailín i ngreim ‘Anorexia’” (“Testimony of a girl in the grip of anorexia”). This poem was later translated by Seamus Heaney as “Amazing Grass”<sup>7</sup> but in neither of the two English versions were the subtitles included, since, for Ní Dhomhnaill, the reader should “encounter the poem on its own rather than be pointed towards a reading of it” (Bourke 1993: 25). Although the poem is related to a contemporary preoccupation with female fatness, Ní Dhomhnaill’s words avoid any reading of the text under the exclusive light of beauty stereotypes. The main thematic weight of the poem falls in fact on the mythical relationship that exists between women and food and its consequences for women’s physicality. “Marvellous Grass” is the story of a woman who lies in bed, unable to eat or speak, after the priest who was about to give her the Sacred Host failed to do so upon seeing her face. In order for the anorexic woman to get rid of her affliction the Host will have to be

found again, among a patch of marvellous grass, and be introduced into her mouth: “Let the priest come and with his fingers / take dexterously the sacred host. / And it’s given to me: on my tongue / it will melt and I will sit up in bed / as healthy as I was when young”. This poem is rich in Celtic references, so common in Ní Dhomhnaill’s poetry,<sup>8</sup> but it is not difficult to see in the failed communion a metaphor for the rejection of female sexuality that pervades Christian literatures of all epochs. The process of emaciation initiated by the protagonist after the shameful episode symbolises a search for purity that can only be attained by a gradual loss of weight. The facts that the woman is cured only after she has gone through a purgative phase and that the healing powers come from a priest suggest that religious conceptualisations of the corporeal exerted the strongest of powers in the narrator’s community.

In all the poems analysed so far the anorexics had internalised cultural constructions of the body and had chosen to identify with a supposedly superior spiritual existence. Although these texts displayed the binary opposites that regulated the lives of the narrators, they did not offer alternatives that could put an end to their voluntary starvation. However, *Waiting for My Clothes* also includes a number of texts in which the protagonists denounce the dangers implicit in processes of self-emaciation by explicitly dismantling dual thought. Rejection of food may be indicative of women’s refusal to fit into the gender roles of chastity, motherhood and domesticity they have been socialised to fulfil. Under this light, anorexic behaviour patterns would present the starved body as a site of power and resistance. But the narrators of the poems that follow realise that, by starving themselves, they can get trapped in the very cultural establishments they are trying to bypass. In these are poems that show the healing of the anorexics, the two sides of their dual personalities have lost all their power and instead are perceived as cultural constructions that have to be dispensed with.

In “Mirror” (O’Sullivan 2004: 16) Leanne O’Sullivan describes the reaction of an anorectic when she is confronted with the reflection of her own body in a mirror. The poem becomes a clear illustration of anorexia’s deep distortion of the patient’s self-perception. Western philosophical thought has been

characterised by what Martin Jay calls “the hypertrophy of the visual” (1994: 498). The major thematic engagement of theorists and philosophers with what can be seen is the result of the metaphysics of presence that has pervaded Western modes of understanding the world. In the first half of the twentieth century phenomenologists and structuralists still relied upon the same-self identity of the here and now. In its turn, psychoanalysis also contributed to the preference of the visual over other modes of perception. In Lacanian theory, the mirror stage (*stade du miroir*) is considered a necessary step in the construction of subjectivity (Evans 1996: 114-116). The mirror would produce in the subject the effect of total control over the image he/she is seeing and with which he/she identifies. Thus, ego-formation is dependent on this process of identification with a specular, i.e., unreal, image. However, during the second half of the twentieth century theorists like Jacques Derrida denounced the limitations of visual perception by exposing its relationship with language. From this perspective, what we see is a form of discourse, a kind of text deprived of objectivity. Feminist thinkers, particularly the French philosopher Luce Irigaray, found in Derrida’s ground-breaking ideas a stimulus in their critique of the male gaze that reified women’s bodies. From then on, the denigration of vision has dominated international debates on perception.

“Mirror” is a perfect illustration of all the above. When the narrator sees her reflection in the mirror, she declares: “I saw I existed”. Her eating disorder has generated a deep crisis of identity and the image seems to offer comfort and control, something comparable to Lacan’s mirror stage and the construction of subjectivity. However, this certainty about her existence soon vanishes and her visual perception is instead depicted as an unreliable text loaded with subjective meanings:

I saw two where there should  
have only been one.  
Divided, the image  
climbed into my head  
and that foetus flooded  
my guilt, until nothing explained  
my life better than these  
clothes falling to the floor.

As in the previous poem, the anorectic witnesses her split self —“I was caught in her eye, / caught red-handed. / I called her the

skinny saint. / I called her the beautiful bitch”— but now she identifies with none of the two specular images. In this instance, the narrator makes use of the third person pronouns to refer to both the bitch and the saint within her head. As opposed to the previous examples, she is no longer ready to feel attached to the supposedly holy side. The skinny saint and the beautiful bitch are still kept at a dichotomous distance, but the woman has finally found out they are nothing but cultural constructions. In the second part of the text, the narrator describes the pain inherent in the creation of female images by traditional discourses. These unreal icons, previously taken for “the truth”, succeeded in transforming her corporeality until she could fit patriarchal models at the expense of destroying her original personality: “Then she took my real eyes / and made them hers. / I could barely name myself. / I wear black, because black / is what she wants to see”. The anorectic no longer senses the mirror as a reliable reflection of herself. Her contempt towards the visual is particularly poignant in the final line of the poem: “*Woman, I know you not*”.

“What Doesn’t Kill Us” (O’Sullivan 2004: 36) also points towards the healing of the self-starved protagonist. The poem recreates dinner time in the hospital room where she is left “facing that bowl of lumpy soup, / one slice of bread, leaving me there / to live and kill”. Her identity is split, as in the previous examples, into two different parts: “we fed / on each other, like plants and animals, / the breath we inspire”. In this case, however, the narrative voice feels identified with her corporeal self and shows detachment from the “she” that resounds in her head “with her denials”. Since the two cannot live at the same time, the woman plans the murder that will free her from death. Food will be the most powerful weapon against the skinny saint: “It was the perfect crime, / the scoop, the curve, the kill and return. / I sat in front of that bowl like it was / a mound of leeches that drank / the pulse of her, spoonful / by spoonful, so I would not die”. In the last lines of the poem the image of a mad woman reappears, though this time connoted with the positive power of nourishment and life. As if she were a woman-warrior at the end of a battle, this woman is excited by the final triumph of life over death:

Wild and starved I drained it  
until I could stand above her  
and I heard her fall, the old black heart  
growing thin and dead as meat.  
I would murder, or she would thrive  
on any terms including my life

The survival instinct of the anorectic acquires an even stronger voice in “Honour” (O’Sullivan 2004: 47), where the patient asks her mother for food after what we sense has been a long period of anorexic behaviour. Her mother, moved by the request, provides her daughter with nourishment: “Mother, standing by the grill / seasoning toast the colour / of your hair, your / face glows with the pride / of a praised child”. By supplying nourishment, the maternal figure actively contributes to the healing process of her offspring. In the last lines of the poem, O’Sullivan establishes once more a close connection between food, religion and womanhood. This time, however, the rituals of the First Holy Communion and Christening are deprived of previous patriarchal tones and reflect instead the life-giving powers of female biology. The narrator thanks her mother for nurturing her since birth and her words inscribe women’s presence into religious practises. Corporeality, Catholic traditions and the intake of food are finally reconciled:

And I take the bread we  
took together at my christening,  
at my first communion,

as if I could honour  
your giving my life  
by nourishing it with you.

## Conclusions

Over the last ten years, both Northern Ireland and the Republic have undergone profound economic, political and social changes. The issues that traditionally pervaded artistic discourses, such as nationalism and The Troubles, are now complemented by the topics of immigration, globalisation or the marginalisation of ethnic communities. The (post)nationalist agenda of (post)Celtic-Tiger Ireland is witnessed by a new generation of artists who try to come to terms with new definitions of Irishness in their work. In an interview for *The Poet’s Letter*, Selina Guinness stated that one of the defining characteristics of all the poets who began publishing around 1993<sup>9</sup> in Ireland is that their

work offers an up-to-date view of the island, something that the Irish classics —exported internationally and part of university syllabuses all over the world— cannot possibly do. For Guinness,

[t]he excitement ... in reading the new Irish poets is the extent to which those myths and that sense of long history is regarded less piously now. That's not to say it's rejected outright —but there is a broader understanding of politics in this generation as being determined by forces way beyond the national. (Guinness 2004a)

Statements like this resist the homogenising power of labels such as “Irish women poets”, so commonly used in critical studies to refer to the production of Irish writers eternally linked by a common, unchangeable and monolithic desire to deconstruct the patriarchal bias of traditional definitions of femininity. However, as Guinness intimates, the passage from one Ireland to another can never be so abrupt as to omit the influence of previous historical and/or artistic milieus. In spite of the gradual secularisation of Irish life, Catholic imagery and teachings are still part of the collective psyche of the country and the trace of canonical cultural discourses proves to be too strong an energy to be easily dispensed with. O’Sullivan’s inscription of anorexic experiences into the Irish text is at times a critique of the oppressive beauty myth that imprisons Western women. However, whether consciously or unconsciously, many of the poems in *Waiting for My Clothes* take us back to the Christian dimension of female fasting

and connect Leanne O’Sullivan —one of the youngest published poets in Ireland— with earlier poetic accounts of the disease. O’Sullivan’s poetry becomes, in this way, a palimpsest where tradition and modernity intermingle, suggesting different layers of analysis from which to approach the work of a young 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Irish woman poet.

This plurality of perspectives is particularly relevant in accounting for the experience of self-starvation, since it helps to reflect the variety of components that may eventually trigger the disorder. While we cannot deny that anorexia nervosa is primarily a malady suffered by young women who starve themselves in their obsession to achieve the physical models sanctioned by contemporary societies, a historical approach to the disease will lead to a better understanding of it as well as to the avoidance of generalisations about its cause and treatment. *Waiting for My Clothes* fulfils this purpose by presenting the female body as a plural signifier that resists monolithic definitions. At the end of the book, the young narrator has grown healthier by recovering traumatic experiences from her past and by turning them into something creative. The poems in this collection spell a message of hope for those experiencing severe anorexic processes. O’Sullivan’s poetic voice survives at the end of the book with the energy of the young girl who ran and ran through the corridors of a hospital ward in “I Live” (O’Sullivan 2004: 39), saying “If it was to be life, it would be passion”.

## NOTES

1. Taken from the poem “Famine” (O’Sullivan 2004: 14).
2. Her poem “Crescendo” won the Seacat National Poetry Competition in 2001, “The Cord” was awarded the RTE Rattlebag Poetry Slam (2003), and “The Prayer” won the Daovren Hanna Award for Young Emerging Irish Poet (2003). Poems from *Waiting for My Clothes* have appeared in many Irish poetry magazines, among them *Cork Literary Review*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *The Stinging Fly*, *The Shop* and *Wildeside Literary Magazine*. Leanne O’Sullivan’s poems have been anthologised in *Poetry 180*, edited by Billy Collins (2003. Random House), *The Backyards of Heaven: Contemporary Poetry from Ireland. Newfoundland & Labrador*, edited by Stephanie KcKenzie and John Ennis (2003. WIT/Scop), and *The New Irish Poets*, edited by Selina Guinness (2004. Bloodaxe Books). Her poems have also been broadcast on RTE radio.
3. For a comprehensive socio-biological history of anorexia, see Gómez 2001.
4. An interesting analysis of this phenomenon appears in Vogt 1985. For an in-depth study of the relationship between the body and religion, see Miles, Margaret. 1992 (1989). *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West*. Kent: Burns & Oats.
5. I will refer to the poetic voice in the texts with the term “narrator”, since all the poems in the collection are interconnected to “narrate” the personal history of their anorexic protagonist.
6. I will refer to the version included in Boland’s *Collected Poems*. For a more detailed study of this particular poem, see González Arias 1996.

7. Ní Dhomhnaill, Nuala. 1997 (1990). *Pharaoh's Daughter*, trans. C. Carson, M. Coady, P. Fallon, M. Hartnett, S. Heaney, M. Longley, M. McGuckian, T. Mac Intyre, D. Mahon, J. Montague, P. Muldoon, E. Ní Chuilleanáin and G. O'Brien. Meath: The Gallery Press. 32-35.
8. For an excellent analysis of the poem, see Bourke 1993.
9. 1993 marks the beginning of the economic recovery of the so-called "Celtic Tiger".

## REFERENCES:

- Bell, Rudolph M. 1985. *Holy Anorexia*. Chicago: U. of Chicago P.
- Boland, Eavan. 1995. *Collected Poems*. Manchester: Carcanet.
- Bourke, Angela. 1993. "Fairies and Anorexia: Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill's 'Amazing Grass'". *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, vol. XIII. 25-38.
- Condren, Mary. 1989. *The Serpent and the Goddess: Women, Religion and Power in Celtic Ireland*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.
- Evans, Dylan. 1996. *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*. New York: Routledge.
- Gómez, Paloma. 2001. "Anorexia nerviosa: Una aproximación feminista". *Piel que habla: Viaje a través de los cuerpos*. Eds. M. Azpeitia, M.J. Barral, L.E. Díaz, T. González Cortés, E. Moreno Cortés and T. Yago. Barcelona: Icaria. 77-110.
- González Arias, Luz Mar. 1996. "Foodless, Curveless, Sinless: Reading the Female Body in Eavan Boland's 'Anorexic'". *Outskirts*, 2. 10-12.
- Guinness, Selina. 2004a. "Interview with Selina Guinness: Editor of *The New Irish Poets*". *The Poet's Letter*, vol. 1, no. 9. November 2004. London. <http://www.munayemmayenin.com/Novinterview.htm> (28/02/2005).
- \_\_\_\_\_. Ed. 2004b. *The New Irish Poets*. Tarsset: Bloodaxe Books.
- Jay, Martin. 1994 (1993). *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*. Berkeley: U. of California P.
- Ní Dhomhnaill, Nuala. 1993 (1988). *Selected Poems: Rogha Dánta*, trans. M. Hartnett and N. Ní Dhomhnaill. Dublin: Raven Arts P.
- O'Sullivan, Leanne. 2004. *Waiting for My Clothes*. Tarsset: Bloodaxe Books.
- Scarry, Elaine. 1985. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. New York: Oxford UP.
- Vogt, Karen. 1985. "Divenire maschio. Aspetti di un' antropologia cristiana primitiva". *Concilium*, 21. 868-883.