

## **‘Living So Far from Words’: Intertextuality, Trauma and the Post-Shoah World in Medbh McGuckian’s *Blaris Moor***

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In *Unoriginal Genius*, Marjorie Perloff argues that ‘*citatorship*, with its dialectic of removal and graft, disjunction and conjunction, its interpenetration of origin and destruction, is central to twenty-first century poetics’.<sup>1</sup> The ‘unoriginal genius’ is both the maker and unmaker of texts: while s/he participates in the active critique, revision, subversion and/or appropriation of past works, such a de-creative praxis is balanced and motivated by the desire to create new forms. Thus, the adoption of the quoting text as a model of cultural production is now not confined to a Dadaist abjuration of the representational possibilities of art, nor is it simply the attempted embodiment of the chaos of modernity within a non-signifying practice; rather, it is also an attempt to be original. But Perloff’s provocative title reminds us that, within poststructuralist thinking, it is acutely difficult to attribute ‘originality’ to any author since their cultural products are, by definition, intertextual: they are ‘woven entirely with citations, references, echoes, cultural languages [...] antecedent or contemporary, which cut across it through and through in a vast stereophony’.<sup>2</sup> Roland Barthes argues, for instance, that all words accrue meanings and connotations, and that a text is merely ‘a fabrication of quotations, resulting from a thousand sources of culture’.<sup>3</sup> Yet the ‘unoriginal genius’ is not cabined and confined to some inhibitive prison-house of language: intertextuality, for them, is not just the inherent condition of writing; rather, it is also a fully embraced practice. They both forage and forge: while the former suggests both ‘search’ and ‘plunder’, the latter, lexically, combines ‘original invention’ with ‘fraudulent imitation’ and ‘fresh exploration’. Hence, although for Perloff ‘*[i]nventio* is giving way to appropriation’, what emerges is ‘a poetic turn [...] to dialogue – a dialogue with earlier texts or texts in other media, with “writings through” or *ekphrases* that permit the poet to participate in a larger, more public discourse’.<sup>4</sup>

Such an appropriative practice is central to the work of Medbh McGuckian, a contemporary Northern Irish poet whose entire oeuvre comprises skilfully woven poetic *centos*: her propensity to forge a poem by selecting, modifying and juxtaposing unacknowledged quotations marks her out as, in Perloff’s terms, an ‘unoriginal genius’. In *Blaris Moor*,<sup>5</sup> her latest, critically acclaimed collection, which was shortlisted for the *Poetry Now* award (2016), she includes a poem entitled ‘Attempt at a Room’ (*BM* 53-4) which is predominantly composed of quotations from *Letters, Summer 1926*,<sup>6</sup> an edited collection of the four-month epistolary correspondence between Rainer Maria Rilke, Marina Tsvetayeva and Boris Pasternak, and which not only broaches the intertwined issues of

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<sup>1</sup> Marjorie Perloff, *Unoriginal Genius: Poetry by Other Means in the New Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 17.

<sup>2</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘From Work to Text’, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Hill and Wang, 1977), 160.

<sup>3</sup> Barthes, ‘Death of the Author’, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987), 53.

<sup>4</sup> Perloff 11.

<sup>5</sup> Medbh McGuckian, *Blaris Moor* (Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 2015). Hereafter referred to in text as *BM*.

<sup>6</sup> Boris Pasternak, Marina Tsvetayeva and Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters, Summer 1926*, Yvgeny Pasternak et al. (eds.), trans. Margaret Wettlin and Walter Arendt (London: Jonathan Cape 1985). Referred to hereafter as *L*.

originality and influence, but registers the perceived dangers of handing over *auctoritas* to a precursor:

His gait ringing on the steps. His bestowed weight —  
despite his unerring ear all has been taken in advance,  
he breathes on me the bitter cold of a possessor,  
of whose possessions I am knowingly a part. (*BM* 53)

‘[H]e breathes on me’ invokes a classical conception of the source of poetry (divine inspiration): stemming from the Latin *inspiratio*, *inspirare* literally means ‘to breathe upon or into’ and constitutes ‘a divine influence directly exerted upon the individual’;<sup>7</sup> as Tobin Hart argues, in ‘ancient inspired creativity the Muses are described as whispering, breathing, or singing into the recipient, providing the source for music, poetry, and so forth’.<sup>8</sup> Yet in McGuckian’s poem the breath comes from a more earthly, time-bound muse: Rilke. The Prague-born poet has been one of the most pervasive influences on her poetry;<sup>9</sup> quotations from Rilke (or critical commentaries centred on his work) can be found in at least twelve poems, from ‘Girls in the Plural’ in *On Ballycastle Beach* (1988) to ‘Black Stone Mantlepiece with Chimney Clock’ (*BM* 79-80) in her latest collection. The above stanza cites from Tsvetayeva’s letter to Pasternak on 22 May in which she describes Rilke’s overwhelming influence on her:

*He breathes upon me the bitter cold of the possessor, of whose possessions I am knowingly and by predestination a part. I have nothing to give him, all has been taken in advance. Yes, yes, despite the fervor of his letters, his unerring ear, and the purity of his listening — he does not need me, or you. He has grown out of having friends. For me this encounter is a great wound, a blow to my heart, yes, just that, the more so since he is right: in my best, highest, strongest, most self-sacrificing moments, I am as he is [...]* (*L* 109, my italics)

Inspiration here is conceived both as a form of ‘possession’ and a de-creation of the self: wholly subsumed by Rilke’s influence, she envisages herself as objectified and stripped of subjectivity, agency and volition. Running through her early letters to the older poet is not only a sense of deep (and perhaps hopelessly starstruck) adoration, if not love, but an acutely disabling anxiety of influence: ‘What is left for a poet to do after you?’ (*L* 82), she asks, in a letter dated 9 May; for her, Rilke constituted such ‘an impossible task for future poets’ that the poet ‘who comes after you must be *you*, i.e., you must be born again’ (*L* 82). Rilke was alive to the dangers, and sought to encourage and nurture her considerable talent by writing on 17 May to assuage her negative self-judgement and growing feelings of inferiority. He states that, when writing in the German language, she does not ‘stumble’: ‘What strength is in you, poet, to achieve your intent even in this language, and be accurate and yourself. *Your* gait ringing on the steps, your tone, *you*. Your lightness, your controlled, bestowed weight’ (*L* 99, original italics). Yet in McGuckian’s poem, ‘the gait ringing on the steps’ and the ‘bestowed weight’ are attributed to the male figure: he, unequivocally, is the proprietorial literary exemplar who has the power and mastery while

<sup>7</sup> A. Pablo Iannone, *Dictionary of World Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2001), 436.

<sup>8</sup> Tobin Hart, ‘Inspiration as Transpersonal Knowing’, *Transpersonal Knowing: Exploring the Horizon of Consciousness*, eds. Tobin Hart et al (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 32.

<sup>9</sup> See Sarah Broom, ‘McGuckian’s Conversations with Rilke in *Marconi’s Cottage*’, *Irish University Review* 28.1 (Spring-Summer, 1998): 133-50.

McGuckian/Tsvetayeva, through complicit acceptance, is one of his possessions in a double sense (dominated or controlled by a presiding spirit; subjected to ownership and control by an external agent).

This curious stance of passive compliance — knowingly and wilfully accepting possession — can also be seen in a stanza from an earlier version of the poem which was read at a book launch at Queen’s University, Belfast, on 12 October 2007:

<p>‘Into a dream hand take / Another hand’s dream’ (L, 29); Letting in the ‘other’, living by him and for him, instantly (L, 98); adding nothing to his world, always sailing in his waters (L 5).</p>	<p>Take into your dream hand another hand’s dream, Letting in the other, living by him and for him Instantly, always sailing in his waters, adding nothing to his world.<sup>10</sup></p>
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Here, ‘hands’ serve metatextually as a metonym for authorship. The key difference between the excised stanza and the start of the published poem is that the former places more emphasis on dialogue and reciprocity. In the opening two lines the quotation from Tsvetayeva’s ‘After Russia’ (a poem written in 1922) depicts the ‘world of genuine love – in which there was a union of souls, not of bodies’ and it is this which characterises ‘her dialogue with Rilke’: a ‘dialogue between lovers’ (L 5). The stanza’s final line, taken from a letter by Pasternak, affirms that Rilke’s influence was benign and empowering, that it did not compromise his own work and that he willingly drew on his influence: “‘I always believed that in my own efforts, in all of my work, I did nothing but translate or write variations on his themes, adding nothing to his world, always sailing in his waters’” (L, 5). The idea of an equal union between the three authors, one established by trust and the opening of oneself up to influence, is not emphasised in the first three stanzas of the later version.

However, reading the source material in conjunction with the remaining stanzas, the apparent power imbalance is rescinded by an emphatic (re)assertion of poetic authority and intentionality:

#### What is ours

remains ours, I called it happiness, let it be misery  
or the same aloneness. I had anticipated the entire  
echo, would there ever be one to help us to fullness  
again? (BM 53)

The first context for these lines comes from Pasternak’s letter to Tsvetayeva on 23 May. In it, he explains that he had been alarmed by the way that Tsvetayeva had come under the sway of Rilke, resulting in her seeming detachment from him: ‘you yourself have filled me with alarm. It concerns Rilke. That is where the breeze is coming from. I have a vague feeling that you are gently pushing me away from him. And since I see the three of us as a unity, held in a single embrace, that means you are pushing me away from you, too’ (L 110). ‘Breeze’ again connotes inspiration, but it results in her removal from Pasternak’s ambit; she

<sup>10</sup> McGuckian, poetry reading recording, <http://digitalcollections.qub.ac.uk/poetry/recordings/details/107099>, accessed 27 January 2016.

was ‘sailing in’ Rilke’s waters, and not his. However, he contends that he is prepared to accept the situation — “I am ready to suffer this. What is ours remains ours. I called it happiness. Let it be misery’ (L 110) — because ‘ours is the same aloneness, the same searchings and solutions, the same love for the labyrinths of literature and history’ (L 111). Temporary separation is accepted because, ultimately, they are ‘the same’. The second context is Rilke’s ‘Elegy for Marina’ sent to Tsvetayeva on 8 June, the concluding lines of which read as follows: “Would there be ever one to help us to fullness again / Save for our own lone walk over the sleepless land” (L 131). In reply, on 14 June, the Russian poet reveals that, in the past, poets had not written poems for her because, in her own work, she ‘gave too much, drowned out the possible response’: ‘The response took fright. I had anticipated the entire echo’ (L 143). Now, however, there was dialogue and she finds this empowering. She states — again using the metaphor for inspiration — that she ‘took all the wind — no, all of the north in my arms’ and that it was ‘You’.<sup>11</sup> Yet this time her identity is not subsumed; instead, she does not ‘take it home with me’: ‘it stayed on the threshold. It didn’t go into the house, but it took me along to the sea as soon as I went to sleep’ (L 143). In other words, she maintains a room of her one whilst ‘sailing in his waters’.

In ‘Attempt at a Room’, McGuckian plays out (and examines) her own insecurities regarding the influence of others by dramatizing the ways in which literary exemplars have faced similar dilemmas in the past. For a writer to quote from or about precursors in her text can have the consequence of relinquishing ‘temporarily [her] mastery over [her] own discourse and to subordinate [herself] to a more authoritative writer who has expressed what [she] wants to say in a way [she] cannot even attempt to equal’.<sup>12</sup> (Indeed, that is what I have just done in the previous sentence.) McGuckian’s bricolages, however, are not slavish *verbatim* quotations: cutting and splicing together source fragments, she makes poetry from prose fragments. The ‘I’ is, and is not, McGuckian: what the reader is presented with are dramatic monologues, or masquerades, in which the poetic self is brought into the world whilst simultaneously withdrawing from the public gaze. As Glennis Byron contends, ‘the speaker of a dramatic monologue is never the homogeneous poetic self of the pure lyric’; the form, she states, ‘is now considered to allow for various positionings of the speaking subject with respect to the writing poet’.<sup>13</sup> The speaking subject has an expressive function, but it is, equally, an explorative construct: the speaking subject does not just vocalise a writer’s inner thoughts; rather, that speaking subject becomes the object of the writer’s gaze. As Isobel Armstrong argues, utterance in a dramatic monologue is ‘both subject and object’, making it possible for the poet to explore expressive psychological forms simultaneously as psychological conditions *and* as constructs’.<sup>14</sup> The author is able to play out positions and dispositions in a psycho-drama — here to do with the anxiety of influence — and, weaving together quotations from source texts, she can explore and re-live (or at least situate herself in) the lives of literary icons and use them as exemplars for her own work.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Her Dislove of Love’ (BM 55), the poem which follows ‘Attempt at a Room’ in *Blaris Moor*, cites this line in its conclusion. The poem is made up of quotations from *Letters, Summer 1926* and again addresses the influence of Rilke.

<sup>12</sup> Claudette Sartillot, *Citation and Modernity: Derrida, Joyce, and Brecht* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 4-5.

<sup>13</sup> Glennis Byron, *Dramatic Monologue* (London: Routledge, 2003), 19.

<sup>14</sup> Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics, and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1993), 12.

Just as she is (and is not) Tsvetayeva and Pasternak under Rilke's influence in 'Attempt at a Room', she is (and is not) Pasternak in 'Verses Unpublished in the Poet's Lifetime' (BM 47-52), a series of twenty-two five-line vignettes composed of fragments taken from the first volume of Christopher Barnes's *Pasternak: A Literary Biography*.<sup>15</sup> The title of the seventh section, 'Sympathy for the Twilight' (BM 48), presents one of Pasternak's fundamental artistic credos: "What is creativity if not a sympathy for the twilight?" Pasternak asks in one of his prose fragments; "[t]he artist is there to provide a new outline for objects which by twilight have lost their contours" (BP 116). The role of the author, in other words, is to be original and to find expression for objects (and by extension experiences) in an ever-changing world. In the vignette itself, we find an example of an artist who, like McGuckian, engages in a literary masquerade:

His alter ego, You Will Remain,  
hid behind the claret-coloured walls of the cool  
and clean museum. Farewell to loving  
anything. I carried him away with me  
from the boulevard into my life. (BM 48)

Rather than present a first-person narrative in his early prose, Pasternak objectifies his personality 'as a figure who "began waving in my direction as to some stranger"'; that figure bore the name "Reliquimini (or Relinquimini, the more correct Latin version meaning 'you will remain')'" (BP 116). Taking an objective distance in his work, he finds that he had become consumed by the influence of his contemporary, Vladimir Mayakovsky: "I carried him away with me from the boulevard and into my life", wrote Pasternak as he entered a period of fascination with Mayakovsky which for some time obscured all awareness of his own worth and originality' (BP 171). That obscuring of the self is reversed in a later vignette, 'October's Man of the Moment' (BP 51):

Your book sounds its mating call, turns it ten  
windmills in a huge wave of love. Splinters  
of its lines fly apart and become caught  
in ordinary drops – your voice is more mine  
than yours, more aspen than birch. (BM 51)

The lines are self-reflexively about the power and potential of art: the opening lines cite Pasternak's contention that "[a] book is like a capercaillie sounding its mating call. The book hears nothing and no one, deafened and enraptured by its own music" (BP 287). At the same time that a text is, to use Seamus Heaney's terms, 'credited with an authority of its own', and is characterised 'by the self-validating operations of what we call inspiration',<sup>16</sup> the vignette also presents verse as having the ability to move an audience and initiate change: poetry, writes Pasternak, has the capacity to "disturb us like the sinister turnings of ten windmills by the edge of some bare field in a black and hungry year" (BP 287). Here, the poet is fully empowered and his influence can be seen in two instances cited by McGuckian. The first centres on Rita Rait-Kovalyova, a writer and literary translator, who found herself

<sup>15</sup> Christopher Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography*, Volume 1: 1890-1928 (Cambridge: CUP, 1989). Referred to in text as *BP*.

<sup>16</sup> Seamus Heaney, *The Government of the Tongue* (London: Faber, 1989), 92.

entranced by Pasternak's work: 'That period, she recalled, "passed for me under the sign of Pasternak. I was stuffed to overflowing with his verse. Splinters of his lines flew apart and even became caught in the most ordinary speech"' (BP 283). The second instance recalls how Evgeniya Vladimirovna Lurye, an artist who later became Pasternak's wife, found herself subsumed by Pasternak's influence: writing to her on 22 December 1921, he states that "[y]our voice, left behind in the corners of this silence, is more mine than yours" (BP 299).

Reading the poems in light of the source texts allows the reader a glimpse behind the mask: one can see how the poet tries out different scenarios in which her persona is either disempowered or empowered. *Blaris Moor*, as shown by the intertexts cited, is often self-reflexively about her status as an 'unoriginal' artist. However, an intertextual approach to her writing like the one adopted here is not without its critics. Leontia Flynn, for one, seems to regard source hunting as a complete waste of time:

The 'sources' with which McGuckian makes her poems continuous form an apologia for poetry as *inherently* unoriginal, intertextual and dialogic – an act of simultaneous translation. Since the texts to which she refers (fleetingly and invisibly) echo back the mysterious, vatic and sibylline figure of McGuckian herself, rather than touching discursively on their subjects, there is also more than a whiff of the wild goose chase about the whole thing.<sup>17</sup>

Flynn, a fine poet and academic who has a longstanding interest in McGuckian's work, remains suspicious both of McGuckian's use of sources and the intertextual approach to her work; the poems, she states, are 'barely footnotes to the sources which inform them'.<sup>18</sup> While I wholly disagree with her contention that McGuckian does not 'discursively' touch on the subjects raised by the sources, and with the (rather reductive) assertion that the poems are merely 'footnotes to the sources', I can sympathise with her frustration at the method I have adopted to read the poems. After all, the previous pages, while perhaps informative (at best), certainly do not capture the spirit of the work or convey the inventiveness of its poetic form. Yet if we look more closely at the dominant subject matter of *Blaris Moor*, we can see how intertextuality is integral both to its content and form. Reviewing the collection for the *Irish Times*, John McAuliffe characterised the work as 'a historical echo chamber' in which the poet never '[shies] away from historical agonies to which her poems bear witness'.<sup>19</sup> To tackle traumatic historical events, and to convey the radically destabilising effects of trauma, intertextuality can be seen to be a key (and necessary) literary device.

In her seminal account of the workings of trauma, Cathy Caruth argues that it 'describes an overwhelming experience of sudden, or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of

<sup>17</sup> Leontia Flynn, "No Misprints in This Work": The Poetic "Translations" of Medbh McGuckian and Frank Kuppner', *Modern Irish and Scottish Poetry*, eds. Peter MacKay, Edna Longley and Fran Brearton (Cambridge: CUP, 2011), 280.

<sup>18</sup> Flynn, *Reading Medbh McGuckian* (Co. Kildare: Irish Academic Press, 2014), 173.

<sup>19</sup> John McAuliffe, review, *Irish Times*, 31 October 2015, <http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/little-witness-by-connie-roberts-and-blaris-moor-by-medbh-mcguckian-1.2411435>, accessed 2 December 2015.

hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena'.<sup>20</sup> The trauma victim is prone to a debilitating form of involuntary recall: as Caruth explains, the traumatic event returns because the initial experience has not been 'fully assimilated as it occurs'.<sup>21</sup> As such, trauma constitutes, in the words of Ulrich Baer, 'an aberration of memory that leaves a body without a context';<sup>22</sup> it is 'something not assimilated, an experience not integrated into the psychic economy of the subject'.<sup>23</sup> Hence, the traumatised individual 'is left to perpetually relive the event as an unresolved present',<sup>24</sup> and s/he experiences the repeated occurrence of the past as a form of endless haunting. Indeed, in her account of the traumatic experience, Anne Whitehead describes it as 'an embodiment of the disjunction of temporality, the surfacing of the past in the present' and as 'a haunting or possessive influence which not only insistently and intrusively returns but is, moreover, experienced for the first time only in its belated repetition'.<sup>25</sup> The haunting is all the worse because it is unsayable:

No experience is more one's own than harm to one's own skin, but none is more locked within that skin, played out within it in actions other than words, in patterns of consciousness below the everyday and the constructions of language. Trapped there, the violation seems to continue in a reverberating present that belies the supposed linearity of time and the possibility of endings.<sup>26</sup>

Since the memory has not been integrated into the victim's system, s/he cannot give it narrative structure. In effect, trauma involves 'the breakdown of symbolic resources, narrative, and imagery',<sup>27</sup> and so the victim must 'live with the paradox of silence and the present but unreachable force of memory, and a concomitant need to tell what seems untellable'.<sup>28</sup>

Any writer who attempts to construct a narrative which bears witness to a traumatic event must wrestle with a frustrating paradox: while art may give voice to the voiceless and fulfil an ethical role to 'tell' as 'a means of fighting against the erosion of traces',<sup>29</sup> it can also 'neutralise' and 'gentrify' the experience by giving it narrative shape.<sup>30</sup> To write about trauma one must find, as Joshua Hirsch explains, 'a kind of textual compromise between the senselessness of the initial traumatic encounter and the sense-making apparatus of a fully integrated historical narrative'.<sup>31</sup> To be successful, the trauma narrative must 'internalize the

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<sup>20</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 11.

<sup>21</sup> Caruth 5

<sup>22</sup> Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 18.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Elsaesser, 'Postmodernism as Mourning Work', *Screen* 42.2 (Summer, 2001): 196.

<sup>24</sup> Jessica Catherine Lieberman, 'Traumatic Images', *Photographies* 1.1 (2008): 88.

<sup>25</sup> Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 6, 5.

<sup>26</sup> Roberta Cullbertson, 'Embodied Memory, Transcendence, and Telling: Recounting Trauma, Re-Establishing the Self', *Literary History* 26.1 (Winter, 1995): 170.

<sup>27</sup> E. Ann Kaplan and Bang Wang, 'From Traumatic Paralysis to the Force Field of Modernity', *Trauma and Cinema: Cross-Cultural Explorations*, eds. Kaplan and Wang (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 17.

<sup>28</sup> Cullbertson 170.

<sup>29</sup> Paul Ricoeur, 'Memory and Forgetting', *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Philosophy*, eds. Richard Kearney and Mark Dooley (London: Routledge, 1999), 10.

<sup>30</sup> See Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), 15.

<sup>31</sup> Joshua Hirsch, 'Post-traumatic Cinema and the Holocaust Documentary', *Trauma and Cinema: Cross-Cultural Explorations*, eds. E. Ann Kaplan and Bang Wang (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 101.

rhythms, processes, and uncertainties of traumatic experience within their underlying sensibilities and structures'.<sup>32</sup> Thus, as Anne Whitehead has argued, 'the impact of trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterised by repetition and indirection'.<sup>33</sup>

In their introduction to *Rewriting/Reprising in Literature* the editors state that trauma is 'a sudden intrusion of the shapeless and the nameless which tears the fabric open, whether it be in the narrative of our lives or in the stories which try to give shape to such disruptive events'.<sup>34</sup> When attempting to represent trauma which not only evades narrative structure but also actively de-scribes it, a writer may cite from pre-existing texts in order to gain a sense of authority; thus, they may draw on the work of those who have better knowledge, or direct experience, of the events themselves. Equally, they may delve into an existing word-hoard when faced with the silencing propensity of trauma and, to paraphrase Eliot, use the fragments to shore against the ruins.<sup>35</sup> To do so is to highlight an alternative meaning of *reprise*, namely the darning of a fabric/text (*textus*): 'rewriting/reprising may be understood as an endless attempt to heal [...] breaches loaded with silent affects'.<sup>36</sup> While McGuckian certainly uses the pre-existing texts for thematic purposes (and thus can draw on the expertise of existing critics and writers), her emphasis is not on healing or on the construction of coherent narratives; rather, as one reviewer put it (in a different context), McGuckian 'is not sewing things up, but taking them apart, and the finery in which she decks out her poems initially disguises the real point of her needlework – which is to unstitch, expose, impale'.<sup>37</sup> Her use of quotations is disruptive and serves to mimic the symptoms of traumatic recall. Like trauma, intertextuality has, by definition, 'a ghost effect':<sup>38</sup> it is a form of haunting since the very presence of a quotation constitutes (and marks) the irruption of the past into the present. That return of the past, in turn, initiates a form of transversal reading: the reader is forced to pause and read *across* texts, from the quoting to the quoted, and thus the author can disrupt linearity, thereby mimicking one of the prominent effects of trauma.

One example of her attempt to represent traumatic experience can be found in 'The Stone-word' (*BM* 14), a poem which is constructed from two intertexts — Ash Amin's *Cities: Reimagining the Urban* and Gary D. Mole's *Beyond the Limit-Experience*, a monograph on French poetry written in the concentration camps.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Laurie Vickroy, *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 3.

<sup>33</sup> Whitehead 3.

<sup>34</sup> Claude Maisonnat, Josiane Pacaud-Huguet and Annie Ramel, 'Introduction', *Rewriting/Reprising in Literature: The Paradoxes of Intertextuality* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2010), xii.

<sup>35</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'The Waste Land', *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (repr. 1990; London: Faber, 1921), 41.

<sup>36</sup> Claude Maisonnat, Josiane Pacaud-Huguet and Annie Ramel, *Rewriting/Reprising in Literature*, xiii.

<sup>37</sup> Christopher Hope, 'Meaty Flavours', *London Magazine* 22.9-10 (December 1982-January 1983), 107.

<sup>38</sup> Jay Clayton, 'The Alphabet of Suffering: Effie Deans, Tess Durbeyfield, Martha Ray, and Hetty Sorrel', *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History*, eds. Clayton and Eric Rothstein (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 54.

<sup>39</sup> Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift, eds., *Cities: Reimagining the Urban* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), referred to as *C*; Gary D. Mole, *Beyond the Limit-Experience: French Poetry of the Deportation, 1940-1945* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), referred to as *M*.

a finer-grained time (C 96); time lies thicker on the ground (C 94); take out the warm lining of overcoats and replace one sleeve with the sleeve of a different color (M 95); beyond the slower times (C 83); the city dreams of itself (C 122); the city's dreams of itself (C 106); 'Alarm all night' (M 81); a kind of weather (C 83);

'Nothing to read [...] There was a walk but not for me' (M 81); 'sick without books' (M 43); 'sad day [...] I wasted you' (M 95); I wasted you (M 95); the sun 'young, strong, demanding' (M 106); 'useless in the shadow of the sheds' (M 106); 'a small abandoned notebook' (M 48); doubts concerning words (M 54); 'two heart fingers' (M 170); the sight at the end of the platform (M 90); 'A very long perfume' (M 161); ease of gathering (C 120); 'ceiling is blue like an eyelid' (M 175).

A finer-grained time lies thicker on the ground.  
We take out the warm lining of overcoats,  
replace one sleeve with a sleeve of a different colour.

Beyond the slower times the city dreams itself,  
dreams of itself, its footprints, the nightwalk,  
alarm all night becomes a kind of weather.

There was no walk, not for me, nothing to read,  
sick without books, day, I wasted you,  
the young, strong demanding sun, the unwounded leaves.

Useless in the shadows of the sheds, I invented  
a small abandoned notebook of doubts concerning  
words, held it between my two heart fingers.

And the sight of the end of the platform  
loosened a very long perfume that had ease  
of gathering into my ceiling blue as an eyelid. (BM 14)

The comma splice in the second line due to the lack of a conjunction suggests that connectivity and the ability to piece things together have broken down, an impression which is confirmed by the chaotic, run-on sentences in stanzas two and three. The lines are characterised by ungrammaticalities and imprecise punctuation suggestive of an unstable speaking subject. The poem's opening, taken from *Cities: Reimagining the Urban*, refers to the ways in which we experience and represent time: the invention of the watch meant that human beings could 'construct finer grained time', and the multiplicity of times and spaces depicted in the city meant that in the urban space what we term 'everyday life' becomes increasingly more complex ('time lies thicker on the ground'). Yet while *Cities* contends that we can readily conceptualize our experience of time, the poem presents a context which challenges that assumption. The image of someone taking out 'the warm lining of overcoats' and replacing 'one sleeve with a sleeve of a different colour' metonymically represents the stripping bare of what we call 'everyday life': here 'alarm' becomes the new 'weather'; daily life becomes characterized by loss and deprivation ('There was no walk, not for me, nothing to read'). The subject is out of her element: anthropomorphizing nature, the sun becomes 'strong, demanding' and while the leaves are 'unwounded', it is assumed that the speaker has been less fortunate. While the past tense in the final three stanzas intimates the recollection of past experience through voluntary recall, the use of the present tense in the opening stanzas suggests the re-experiencing of the past in the present. For the traumatized subject, the past is poised around her. Indeed, as Kai Erickson notes, the traumatized mind 'holds on to that moment, preventing it from slipping back into its proper chronological place in the past, and relives it over and over again [...]. The moment becomes a season, the event becomes a condition'.<sup>40</sup>

For the poem's speaker, literature is not only presented as an absent panacea, it is the condition on which the speaker's survival depends ('sick without books'). That the poem is constructing an argument about the value of literature in a time of violence is hinted at by its title which alludes to Pierre Macaire's *Je suis parti comme on s'endort*, a text in which the speaker's thoughts become contaminated by 'stone-words':

<sup>40</sup> Kai Erikson, 'Notes on Trauma and Community', *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 185.

I flow silently  
 My thoughts are circles  
 Born and expanding  
 To my surface  
 They come from the bank  
 Of the words of others who are on it  
 And who throw at me  
 Stones which are words. (M 53)

While the poem is written ‘as an antidote to this violence’, Mole argues that the poetic word is penetrated by the ‘stone-word’ (M 53) and confirms the author’s linguistic doubts and hesitations. McGuckian’s speaker states that ‘I invented / A small abandoned notebook of doubts concerning / Words’, implying here that the act of writing is coterminous with, yet produced despite, her own misgivings about aesthetic representation. ‘Invented’ may suggest a pose, indicating that such ‘doubts’ are not sincerely felt, yet it also affirms *poëisis* (the making of poetry) as an antidote to feeling ‘Useless in the shadows of the sheds’. McGuckian’s text is here juxtaposing two contrasting poetic responses to the Shoah: the first is André Ullmann’s ‘*Pont au change*’ in which the speaker, finding himself ‘alone amid the corpses of words’ (M 55), is “trampling intertwined images / Useless in the shadow of the sheds” (M 55); the second quotation asserts the contrary impulse, that of Yves Eyot, writing from Dachau, whose “main occupation was to write in this notebook” (M 48). The juxtaposition neatly condenses the twin polarities of Mole’s study, which investigates the context in which the *resistance* to representation becomes the *subject* of representation; in the concentration camps, artistic representation meets ‘its most forceful challenge in a limit-experience that did indeed seem to *prevent* its own representation, one that had *blinded* its eyewitness, and beyond which art either could not or should not go’ (M 2).

Rather than be blinded, McGuckian suggests that the artist withdraws into the self, into dream, and can confront real life there while at the same time imagining alternative futures. The concluding image of her ‘ceiling blue as an eyelid’ is taken from Christian Pineau’s ‘*Les Éléments*’, a meditation on the omnipresence of death in the concentration camps and which shows how relief (however ‘fugitive’) can be achieved in dreams: ‘the withdrawal into the realm of sleep and dream is [...] suggested by the ceiling being blocked out by closing eyelids behind which prayers, thoughts, memories can circulate freely even as bodies are motionless and death continues to hag in the air’ (M 175). Dream time, with its ‘ease of gathering’, depicts a lyrical stasis. This ‘finer-grained time’ is not an escape from, but a resistance to atrocity. However, it is important to realize that to come to such a conclusion, the reader is forced to move between three different texts — McGuckian’s poem, Amin’s study, and Mole’s *Beyond the Limit-Experience*. While reading the sources serves to re-contextualize the quotations and to stitch them back together in order to make sense of them (thus enacting the function of *reprise* — ‘to heal [...] breaches loaded with silent affects’), the experience itself is still a disorientating one: we are not left to read the poetic text in a linear fashion, but are forced to move sideways, across texts. The poem mimics the temporal disjunction initiated by traumatic recall. Just as traumatised victims live ‘in durational rather than chronological time’ and so ‘continue to experience the horrors of the past through internal shifts back in time and space rather than experiencing the past as

differentiated from the present',<sup>41</sup> the reader of McGuckian's text is made to move between past (precursor texts) and present ('The Stone-word'). In doing so, we are also left with irresolvable questions, which equally mimic the victim's state of mind: as readers, we do not know whether '*the end of the platform*' refers to that which is temporal or that which is spatial; we cannot say for certain that '*ceiling blue*' intimates secure enclosure or unsafe imprisonment; and we cannot tell whether 'loosened' implies 'escape' or 'loss'.

A rather different strategy is employed by McGuckian to convey traumatic experience in 'So Warsaw's Coming to Wait on Us Now' (BM 58-9). In that poem, she co-opts, or appropriates, existing Shoah testimony, a manoeuvre which risks claiming the suffering of others as her own. To all appearances, the text is a lyric poem in the sense that it seems to give direct expression to a state of mind or a process of perception and feeling (the opening stanzas are on the right; the source text is on the left):

The war kept going on and on (G, 426)  
And we were rotting away (G, 426); Who would  
Have thought it would go on like this so  
long? (G, 415)  
I want to escape to the Old Town (G, 411)  
I felt as if I were in some strange German city,  
where I should feel afraid of the stones under my  
feet (G, 317)

The war kept brewing. On and on.  
We were rotting away. Who would  
Have thought it would so long?

I wanted to escape to the Old Town.  
I felt as if I were in some strange  
German city crippled by the stones  
Under my feet.

I just kept going in circles doing nothing (G, 428)  
'I have so much to say to you I prefer to keep  
silent' (G, 432); snared by words (G, 253)

I kept going in circles doing nothing.  
I had so much to say, I preferred  
Not to be snared by words. (BM 58)

For the reader who is unaware of McGuckian's practice of composing poetic centos and who does not realise that the poem is based on Michal Grynberg's *Words to Outlive Us*<sup>42</sup> — a collection of prose narratives centred around twenty-nine eyewitness testimonies from Jews who were either confined to the Warsaw Ghetto or hiding in other parts of the city — there is a risk of viewing the poem as, in M. H. Abrams's definition of the lyric poem, a 'fragment of reshaped autobiography'.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, there are two issues at stake here: firstly, the appropriation of eyewitness testimony for aesthetic purposes (six of the quotations come from Dawid Fogelman's narrative, with a single quotation taken from testimonies by Stefan Ernest and Franciszka Grünberg); secondly, the apparent ventriloquizing by the poet of another's suffering through the lyrical 'I'. However, recent critical and theoretical arguments have persuasively reminded the reader not to confuse the poet with the speaker when analysing a lyric poem,<sup>44</sup> and, in any case, it is perhaps best to regard this text as a dramatic monologue, one which plays out a psycho-drama not experienced by the poet herself. Still, how is one to answer the charge of impropriety regarding the use of the words of others? The answer lies in discerning the poem's thematic focus and purpose.

<sup>41</sup> Vickroy 5.

<sup>42</sup> Michal Grynberg (ed.), *Words to Outlive Us: Eyewitness Accounts from the Warsaw Ghetto*, trans. Philip Boehm (London: Granta, 2003). Cited in text as 'G'.

<sup>43</sup> M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1973), 123.

<sup>44</sup> See Scott Brewster, *Lyric* (London: Routledge, 2009), 2.

The text presents a retrospective narrative which holds in tension times past and present. The speaker reveals that her identity had unravelled due to enforced segregation within the Ghetto; what the speaker describes in the second stanza is a form of self-alienation (figured in the text as a misrecognition of place). The impulse to escape leads only to inaction and a circling back upon herself (spatially and mentally). For her, words were to be mistrusted and what resulted was silence: she ‘preferred not to be snared by words’. This scenario is presented in contrast with her present state since she now relates her history. In the opening tercet the speaker’s mind circles back to the past in order to describe a traumatic condition; however, the use of the past continuous tense for verbs which signify a cycle of generation and degeneration (‘brewing’; ‘rotting’) hints that the trauma has not been kept at bay. Indeed, ‘on and on’ signals continuing distress: the phrase not only repeats the semantic content of the opening sentence, thus disrupting the flow of the narrative and allowing it to circle back on itself, the narrative becomes fragmented since the sentence lacks grammatical structure. Language in the poem ceases to function properly. The question asked in the sentence that follows – ‘Who would have thought it would so long?’ – fails to provide resolution and it cannot be answered since it lacks the implied verb (‘last’). Thus, the speaker is seen to void her own discourse (consciously or unconsciously) of any sense of ending. McGuckian’s selection and juxtaposition of quotations does not seek to appropriate the eye witnesses’ suffering; rather, she fragments the oral testimony to convey a sense of ongoing suffering often missing from *Words to Outlive Us*. While the oral testimonies collected in Grynberg’s work are undoubtedly authoritative, moving and of real historical value, the majority of the narratives present a retrospective coherence. Trauma, however, affects the ability to place memories of events into a coherent and linear narrative: when trauma occurs ‘time cannot be made to tell a [...] story, cannot be restored to narrative coherence, because violence shatters time’.<sup>45</sup> Hence, McGuckian’s poem dislocates the narratives to recreate the traumatic condition so that the reader can better understand it.

As a poet who writes about, and in the shadow of, the Shoah, McGuckian must grapple with Theodor Adorno’s dictum (which was tantamount to an interdiction): ‘To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric’.<sup>46</sup> For Adorno, culture was implicated in the genocide and was, in some of his writing, summarily dismissed: ‘It [culture] abhors stench because it stinks – because, as Brecht put it in a magnificent line, its mansion is built of dogshit. Years after that line was written, Auschwitz demonstrated irrefutably that culture has failed. [...] All post-Auschwitz culture, including its urgent critique, is garbage’.<sup>47</sup> Art was said to give aesthetic shape to atrocity, and so had the potential to do an injustice to its own subject matter; indeed, as he argued, ‘[w]here the subject is utmost extremity and agonizing death, form is shameful’.<sup>48</sup> Yet he later refined his argument by contending, as the editors of *German and European Poetics after the Holocaust* note, that ‘art is to incorporate the crisis of annihilation, and refute it at the same time by giving it expression, form, and

<sup>45</sup> Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2001), 92.

<sup>46</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Cultural Criticism and Society’, *The Adorno Reader*, ed. Brian O’Connor (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 210.

<sup>47</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1973), 366-7.

<sup>48</sup> Adorno cited in Elaine Martin, ‘The Poetics of Silence: Nelly Sachs’, *German and European Poetics after the Holocaust: Crisis and Creativity*, eds. Gert Hofmann et al. (Rochester: Camden House, 2011), 25.

consequently meaning to the supposed reality of suffering'.<sup>49</sup> The problem facing the post-Shoah writer, then, was how to both return to the events and give voice to the suffering whilst simultaneously marking the very impossibility of doing so; such writing has to 'return, and defy oblivion, and yet it must perform this while resisting what Ernst Cassirer called the Enlightenment's *restitution in integrum*, too perfect a return'.<sup>50</sup> One solution, offered in Hofmann's edited collection on post-Shoah German poetics, is via intertextuality. Barry Murnane, in his essay, argues that '[w]riting is simultaneously a séance inasmuch as it employs intertexts as media (in the material and ghostly sense) that allow the past to reappear, and it is an exorcism inasmuch as the confrontations with ghostly traces make moving on from that past possible'.<sup>51</sup> The return to the subject matter of the Shoah by inserting quotations from writing on that subject may enact traumatic recall, but it does not have to involve the complete 'exorcism' of that past since intertextuality involves the activity of both stitching and unstitching. To perform this return in poetry is apt since the form itself can resist narrative closure: as Elaine Martin contends, '[b]ound neither to narrative structure, narrative or grammatical coherence, nor to expectations of narrative closure, poetry is in a position to bring the senselessness of the event to the fore without attributing a semblance of meaning – in aesthetic terms – to the slaughter'.<sup>52</sup>

A key example of this can be seen in 'After Afterlude' (*BM 77*), a text which uses Hofmann's collection of essays as a source.<sup>53</sup>

'on breathways [...] 'so it comes / flying' (*G 46*);  
'Nobody really dreams of the "blue flower" any  
more. Anyone who awakes these days [...]  
has overslept' (*G 110*); 'bread of the dream' (*G 62*);  
'the haste of dreams' (*G 77*);  
'Grass, written asunder' (*G 40*).

What do you mean, I am rapid,  
flying on breathways? No one  
really dreams any more, the bread  
of the dream, the haste of the dream,  
yet anyone who awakes has overslept  
the look of night, grass  
written asunder. (*BM 77*)

The poem's title is based on Ernst Meister's 'Après Aprèslude', a text which is said to '[point] at the limitations of comprehension and, with them, at the very sphere of death'. Meister's own poem is based on, and written in rejection of the synthetic formalism of Gottfried Benn's poetry and its title (and that of McGuckian's poem) 'plays on Benn's last collection of poems and addresses the essential question of what comes after the afterlude' (*G 128*). McGuckian's poem is self-consciously 'after' Meiseter's in two senses: temporally and as a version. The stanza cited above is made up of quotations from writers on the Shoah such as Paul Celan, Walter Benjamin, Rose Ausländer and Robert Villain. While the reader can go to the sources and try to connect them semantically, they resist that impulse. What *does* connect them is the spirit and form of their respective works, and McGuckian's own verse embodies in its form their 'radical denial of the synthesizing implications of art as an ideological force in history' (*G 5*). Grammatically and syntactically, the stanza lacks form. Indeed, the enjambment in the penultimate line is crucial as it enacts a rejection of rhyme, metre, narrative closure and the rules of conventional poetry (*G 36*): 'written asunder' is

<sup>49</sup> Gert Hofmann et al., 'Introduction', *German and European Poetics after the Holocaust*, 5.

<sup>50</sup> Hofmann et al., 'Introduction', *German and European Poetics after the Holocaust*, 2.

<sup>51</sup> Barry Murnane, 'Let's Begin, Again: History, Intertext, and Rupture in Heiner Müller's *Germania Cycle*', *German and European Poetics after the Holocaust*, 190.

<sup>52</sup> Elaine Martin, 'The Poetics of Silence: Nelly Sachs', *German and European Poetics after the Holocaust*, 26.

<sup>53</sup> The collection is referred to as *G* in text.

that which is ‘written into a position apart or separate’. In many respects the poet is ‘flying on breathways’ here, as she is taking inspiration from her precursors. She is also invoking one of Celan’s key concepts, that of the *Atemwende* (Breath Turn), which ‘refers to [the] change of breath necessary for new poetry’ (G 36-7).

That McGuckian is presenting herself within this tradition of ‘new poetry’ can be seen in ‘Note for Blind Therapists’ (BM 42-3), a poem situated at the very centre of the collection and which essentially constitutes a poetic manifesto. It borrows from Sinéad Mooney’s study of Samuel Beckett, a work which presents him as ‘a self-estranged subject assailed by a stubbornly material and opaque language which comes unsettlingly close to mere noise’.<sup>54</sup> It is appropriate for McGuckian to take Beckett as an exemplar since her oeuvre, like his own, is ‘traversed with alien voices, splittings, hauntings, and simulacra’ (SM 7):

<p>‘to describble paper’ (SM 58); ‘blacken paper’ (SM 58); a smooth domesticated tissue of images (SM 63); ‘the desire to please a shadow’ (SM 76); to ‘saddle [...] with meaning’ the traumas of war (SM 84); an ‘occasion of wordshed’ (SM 65)</p>	<p>I describble and I blacken paper with my smooth domesticated tissue of images desiring to please a shadow, to saddle with meanings the traumas of war by an occasion of wordshed. (BM 43)</p>
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The opening of this stanza refers to Beckett’s attempt to simulate the state of madness achieved by the Surrealists through automatic writing: like Breton, Beckett wanted to write ‘without rational self-censorship, to “describble paper, feeling praiseworthy contempt for whatever the literary results might turn out to be”’ (SM 58), in a manner akin to ‘those later writer-figures of Beckett’s trilogy who “blacken paper” with little opinion of their own productions’ (SM 58). That form of writing is said to involve a ‘dizzying *mise-en-abîme* of displaced notions of authorship and the speaking “I”’ (SM 58), something which is achieved here given that the ‘I’ is dispersed between Mooney, McGuckian and Beckett. The stanza’s speaker is someone for whom the ‘chasm between word and world is a matter of an inherent expressive failure of language’ (SM 4), and the specific context for this is the impact that the atrocities of the Second World War had on Beckett. In her study, Mooney argues that his distrust of language’s signifying capability stems, in part, from ‘the spectres of war’ (SM 88); writing about the radical change in Beckett’s writing style which is found in *Watt*, she argues that it is ‘a narrative of panic-stricken displacement, whose prominently foregrounded aporias are testament to the semi-concealed pressures of French stressing its curiously contorted English, and to its absurdist attempts to “saddle [...] with meaning” the traumas of war’ (SM 84). His dislocations of form and voice respond to and mimic the inexpressibility of such traumas. Similarly, in McGuckian’s poem we witness a speaker for whom language is in pieces due to an unspecified traumatic event. The traumatised subject is someone whose identity, expressive powers and sense of time have each been put under severe pressure. As Gabriele Schwab argues, ‘[w]riting from within the core of trauma is a constant struggle between the colonizing power of words and the revolt of what is being rejected, silenced. [...] Trauma as a mode of being halts the flow of time, fractures the self, and punctures memory and language’.<sup>55</sup> As such, the trauma cannot be contained within a

<sup>54</sup> Sinéad Mooney, *A Tongue Not Mine: Beckett and Translation* (Oxford: OUP 2011), 3. References to Mooney’s text are cited above as SM.

<sup>55</sup> Gabriele Schwab, *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 41.

fully comprehensible narrative because, in Blanchot's terms, 'the disaster de-scribes':<sup>56</sup> all McGuckian's speaker can do is 'bescribble' and 'blacken' her paper. 'Blackening' the paper is both an affirmative and despairing gesture: it connotes the attempt to write, the impossibility of doing so and the consequentially unreadable end product. It embodies the desperately heroic spirit of Beckett's simultaneously triumphant and impotent conclusion to *L'Innommable* — '*il faut continuer, je ne peux pas continuer, je vais continuer*' — and it is a performative gesture akin to that found in *Tristram Shandy*, where there is a black page due to an overflow of ink marking the death of Parson Yorick, intimating both the dearth of words occasioned by traumatic grief as well as the inexpressibility of death. It also recalls the progressively blackened pages of *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* in which a grieving narrator produces a self-cancelling epistolary text that registers the desire to tell his story, as well as the impossibility of doing so.<sup>57</sup>

However, in the face of the traumas of war, McGuckian's poetry is not 'an occasion of wordshed' in the sense of a steadily progressive lapse into silence; rather, it mimics such traumas through the dispersal of the self. In the second stanza the speaker states that she has been 'lending my voice to others' words / like Ovid's Echo, who can repeat, / but not originate, speech' (*BM* 42). Here she is referring to the tragic figure from *Metamorphoses* with whom Beckett had 'a recurrent fascination': for Mooney, she is 'a figure of translation in that she can repeat, but not originate, speech' (*SM* 2). This is perhaps the clearest articulation of McGuckian's conception of herself as a poet: she is a translator and medium for other people's voices. This position as an 'unoriginal genius' is highlighted by the way in which, like Beckett's narrator in *L'Innommable*, the speakers in McGuckian's poems disrupt 'the traditional functions of the first-person pronoun as a mark of the source of utterance' to 'highlight the role of the speaker or narrative source as citing and repeating, translator-like, rather than expressing' (*SM* 144). For example, in the third stanza the speaker openly declares:

I had been living so far from words  
in my former wordlessness that to speak  
often seems a kind of police work,  
ventriloquizing the words of another. (*BM* 42)

The stanza cites Mooney's contention that '[t]o speak, in Beckett often appears to be the same as ventriloquizing the words of another' (*SM* 2), and it provides a key example from her analysis to back this up: Molloy's 'period of former wordlessness — "I had been living so far from words for so long [...] even my sense of identity was wrapped in a namelessness often hard to penetrate"' (*SM* 3). 'Unoriginality' is not borne out of a dearth of ideas or inspiration; rather, like Beckett, the projection of 'an image of authorial impoverishment, indigence, and impotence, a diminished authority' (*SM* 1) stems from a distrust of words and of the very concept of the omniscient, controlling author. This is why Flynn is incorrect to think that McGuckian does not touch discursively: throughout *Blaris Moor* she attempts

<sup>56</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. A. Smock (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 7.

<sup>57</sup> See Samuel Beckett, *L'Innommable* (Paris: Minuit, 1953), 211, Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* Vol. I. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1760), 73, and Jonathan Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2005), 281-84.

to depict trauma (and its effects) by mimicking the dislocation of the self and the recurrence of the past in the present through quotations, and the sources themselves are about this very process. Just as Beckett's 'baffling encounter with the foreign language' became 'a muted metaphor of war's inexpressibility' (*SM* 89), so too does McGuckian's channelling of others' voices. She is writing in the shadow of writers and theorists who have a profound distrust of the originality and yet, like the examples that Perloff provides of 'réécriture' or 'writings through'<sup>58</sup> in *Unoriginal Genius*, her recontextualization of citations in her poetic bricolages manages to make them new again.

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