

Katarzyna Poloczek

University of Łódź

Women's Power To Be Loud:
The Authority of the Discourse and
Authority of the Text in Mary Dorcey's
Irish Lesbian Poetic Manifesto "Come
Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear"

ABSTRACT

The following article aims to examine Mary Dorcey's poem "Come Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear," included in the 1991 volume *Moving into the Space Cleared by Our Mothers*. Apart from being a well-known and critically acclaimed Irish poet and fiction writer, the author of the poem has been, from its beginnings, actively involved in lesbian rights movement. Dorcey's poem "Come Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear" is to be construed from a perspective of lesbian and feminist discourse, as well as a cultural, sociological and political context in which it was created. While analyzing the poem, the emphasis is being paid to the intertwining of various ideological and subversive assumptions (dominant and the implied ones), their competing for importance and asserting authority over one another, in line with, and sometimes, against the grain of the textual framework. In other words, Dorcey's poem introduces a multilayered framework that draws heavily on various sources: the popular culture idiom, religious discourse (the references to the Virgin Mary and the biblical annunciation imagery), the text even employs, in some parts, crime and legal jargon, but, above all, it relies upon sensuous lesbian experience where desire and respect for the other woman opens the emancipating space allowing for redefining of one's personal and textual location. As a result of such a multifarious interaction, unrepresented and unacknowledged Irish women's standpoints may come to the surface and become articulated, disrupting their enforced muteness that the controlling heteronormative discourse has attempted to ensure. In Dorcey's poem, the operating metaphor of women's silence

(or rather—silencing women), conceived of, at first, as the need to conceal one's sexual (lesbian) identity in fear of social ostracism and contempt of the "neighbours," is further equated with the noiseless, solitary and violent death of the anonymous woman, the finding of whose body was reported on the news. In both cases, the unwanted Irish women's voices of either agony, during the unregistered by anybody misogynist bloodshed that took place inside the flat, or the forbidden sounds of lesbian sexual excitement, need to be (self) censored and stifled, not to disrupt an idealized image of the well-established family and heteronormative patterns. In the light of the aforementioned parallel, empowered by the shared bodily and emotional closeness with her female lover, and already bitterly aware that silence in discourse is synonymous with textual, or even, actual death, the speaker in "Come Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear" comes to claim her own agency and makes her voice heard by others and taken into account.

ABSTRACT

Though, unlike male homosexuality,¹ not legally criminalized in Ireland, in the second half of the twentieth century lesbianism was thought of as a socially contemptible and unmentionable practice that needs not to be legally regulated, but approached on a level of the disapproving community (Connolly and O'Toole 171–95, Moane 431–46). As a logical extension of that widespread opinion,² lesbian sexuality was conceived of as a "disorder," as Moane puts it (442), according to the 1992 Catholic Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (Moane 442) and attributed only to a sexually deviant minority, whose existence should not be discussed in public. The exclusion of female homosexuality from the penalizing Irish legislation³ does not indicate, however, that in Ireland in the early 1970s and 1980s there was any kind of social allowance for lesbian practices. On the contrary, drawing upon the Irish lesbian activists from the period, Linda Connolly and Tina O'Toole in

¹ The Irish law stopped criminalization of male homosexuality in 1993 (Moane 441).

² During the period analyzed, as most critics maintain, the commonplace clichés and stereotypical views concerning lesbians would portray homosexual women as "gone astray" heterosexuals, disappointed with, or rejected by men, or in a patronizing fashion: having to look for tenderness in their sexual relations with other women, not being able to find it elsewhere.

³ The legislation goes back to the British-modelled 1861 Offences Against the Person Act (Moane 441).

their highly informative and comprehensive study, *Documenting Irish Feminisms* (2005), remind that Irish women open about their homosexuality then were threatened with physical and sexual attacks, or even death (173, 186; see also Moane 433, 438). To make matters even worse, around thirty/forty years ago, Irish women's movements had little awareness or deeper understanding of their lesbian sisters' situation (Smyth 261, Connolly and O'Toole 174). Chrystel Hug, in her book *The Politics of Sexual Morality in Ireland* (1999), captures the essence of this attitude: "Irish lesbians commanded less of our attention since no laws and no papal pronouncements have attacked them" (qtd. in Connolly and O'Toole 173). Mary Dorcey recalling those times admits that: "I went to the Women's Movement (then in its second year). I met wonderful women. I was enchanted by the exhilaration, the self-confidence, energy, wit, anger, vision, but, to my surprise, no one declaring themselves lesbians or speaking about it" (qtd. in Connolly and O'Toole 174). Following this way of argument, Ailbhe Smyth in *Irish Women's Studies Reader* published in 1993 acknowledges that lesbianism in the period referred to above was, even for the Irish feminist agenda, one of the issues "noticeable by their absence" (261). That is why Mary Dorcey, a poet, an acknowledged fiction writer, a feminist and Irish lesbian activist started advocating provocatively in a celebratory way (Moane 439) at the public meetings "if feminism is the theory, lesbianism is the practice" (qtd. in Connolly and O'Toole 186). It was around this time when the very word "lesbian" was rendered with an affirmative "the woman-identified woman" label (Connolly and O'Toole 187). Accordingly, drawing upon the conference posters of the 1978 first lesbian conference that took place in Ireland (Dublin), Connolly and O'Toole argue that its participants campaigned to "break down the barriers of silence and ignorance surrounding lesbian sexuality" (179).⁴

Very much in the same vein, Dorcey's poem "Come Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear"⁵ expresses an Irish lesbian's creative voice that demands its right to be articulated and heard. In the poem, the titled verb "come," apart from its sexual climactic connotations, refers as well to Althusser's constituting the female subject through an interpellation, hence,

⁴ Geraldine Moane in her article "Lesbian Politics and Community" enumerates some positive examples of the research on that matter that came out in Ireland in the mid-1990s, i.e. the 1995 publication by the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (Moane 435) and Cathy Corcoran study of the Dublin Lesbian Line, comprising the period 1984–93 (Moane 436) or the Combat Poverty Agency report of 1995 (Moane 437).

⁵ Dorcey's poem could have been inspired by MacNeice's "Autobiography." For a detailed analysis of MacNeice's poem, see Renata Senktas's "Come Back Early, If Only in the Refrain: Louis MacNeice's 'Autobiography' and The Poetics of Recovery" included in *The Playful Air of Light(ness) in Irish Literature and Culture*. Ed. Marta Goszczyńska and Katarzyna Poloczek. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2011.

“come” makes an invitation to participate, join and share. Unlike sense or state verbs, “come” means an active involvement, when you come, you make things change and happen; in other words your action produces meaningful changes. “Coming together” would render the idea of women’s solidarity and giving one another support, either as a part of the political activist platform or as a social movement (Connolly and O’Toole 185). What is more, the verb “come” also signifies “coming out” as a lesbian. The first television interview in Ireland with a lesbian woman was broadcast no sooner than in 1980, in *The Late Late Show* (Connolly and O’Toole 186). Joni Crone, the interviewed woman, relates this experience as follows: “‘coming out’ as an Irish lesbian involves undoing much of our conditioning. It means recognizing the external and internal barriers which prevent us taking charge of our lives, and resolving to become autonomous human beings” (qtd. in Connolly and O’Toole 186). With that in mind, the qualifying second part of the conditional utterance “or the Neighbours Will Hear” sounds like a threat setting the rigorous socially approved terms with which the lesbian speaker is expected to comply.

In other words, one has to admit that Dorsey’s poem is composed with a clear line of argument, but this premise, although ready-made and assumed in advance, does not predetermine or infringe upon the authority of the text itself. Boland (236) in her canonical book *The Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time* (1995) would argue rightly “ideology is unambiguous; poetry is not” and Dorsey’s text constitutes a logical extension of her claim. It is thought-stimulating to trace how the text releases itself from its ideological tenets and works its own subversive meaning quite independently. On the one hand, the reader has an explicit thesis statement: the poem meditates upon the consequences of silencing lesbian and other women’s voices in the Irish society at a certain period. On the other hand, the poem discloses its own textual energy that reveals the mechanisms of generating this silence. The question arises whether, and when, the speaking subject in Dorsey’s poem “Come Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear” crosses the magical disciplinarian silent border to be confronted with an alternative option of making her voice heard. As a matter of fact, at first, the female voice seems to provide numerous reasons why she ought not to do it, but, at the same time, by “not doing it,” she actually undermines the authority of the subsequent discourses; of the community and neighbours, the church and the media. From a perspective of a contemporary feminist, one may get an impression that some of these above-mentioned social or religious restrictions might even function as her own self-censorship. Nonetheless, one needs to take into account what Dorsey herself admitted in 1995: “The Ireland I live in now is so far removed from the Ireland of twenty years ago it might be a different country. And the Ireland of my childhood remembered from this perspec-

tive seems like another planet" (qtd. in Connolly and O'Toole 170). One might wonder what she would say about the Ireland of 2010. A lot has changed in Ireland since then but as Moane reminds

. . . rapid social change does not necessarily imply marked psychological change. In the case of homosexuality, for example, it is apparent that fear and prejudice is alive and well in Irish psyches and society, despite important legislative changes, unprecedented inclusion of lesbians and gay men in progressive social agendas, and increasing depiction of lesbians and gay men in art and culture. (431)

Nonetheless, Dorsey's "Come Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear" shows how much the female voice in the poem, and Irish lesbian women of the late 1970s and 1980s, needed not only the aforementioned changes but also their own personal defiance and loud coming (out). The opening of the poem establishes a relation where the reader is being asked to engage in the debate and identify with the speaking voice. The fact that the lovemaking act occurs with a switched on television set, to distract the neighbours' attention from the sounds of lesbian lover's ecstasy, undermines its intimacy. In such a context, a mindful and caring concentration on the other woman's pleasure and shared sexual satisfaction is interfered with by the disturbing accidental broadcast noise. The television babble trivializes the sensuous union between lovers and turns their passion into a nearly mechanical and paltry activity. What the need for resorting to such desperate measures implies is that sex is perceived as shameful and filthy, hence, people involved in this contemptible act should conceal their "joy undisguised" from the world to "spare it the embarrassment." Any act of joyful, especially homosexual, lovemaking is a supposedly potential challenge to the reproductive ideology of the established heterosexual model, and, as such, it could cause social turmoil. The other part of alliterated expression "lord" ("landlady lord") evokes religious connotations and restrictions put on unmarried and same sex lovers. It is, however, from the first stanza the issue of credibility of the speaker appears: does one believe that keeping quiet is being done really in a merciful act of avoiding other's discomfort or rather that of securing one's own textual position? Even at this point the reader might be tempted to infer that the latter seems much more feasible. The ferment that might result from the aforementioned facts coming to light could be more damaging for the lesbian speaker than for the prejudiced community. One might, then, presume with a certain degree of likelihood that the speaking voice tries to rationalize her own quietness and ascribe a higher socially acceptable meaning to it.

Have you ever made love
with the t.v. on

—to spare the neighbours
 landlady lord—
 the embarrassment;
 the joy undisguised
 of two people;
 especially women
 (imagine the uproar!)
 coming together? (Dorcey 64)

158

The subsequent part pursues ever further that issue: the speaker is depicted as agitated and sore: something upsetting must have happened during this “aching winter,” “the worst of all.” Consequently, in-between the lines the reader might sense the female voice’s increasing irritation with trying to conform to the constricting social norms (“narrow beds” and “small minds”). What is more, the female speaker feels exasperated by the casual and temporary arrangement of her own life (alliterated “rented rooms”). Furthermore, what seems to trouble her is the real, or imagined by her, exclusion from the society. Being situated beyond “walled . . . other people’s / decencies” ostracizes and pushes the female speaker to the marginalized position. On the account of that assumption, the speaker gives vent to her own hostility, and assumes the “morally superior” position, looking down on the community’s heteronormative “decencies” on show. Accordingly, she mocks their daily routines in an alliterated “broadcast at breakfast,” indicating ironically how useful television might be, not only in silencing lesbian sexual ecstasy, but also in disclosing the emptiness of the ordinary daily schedule of the righteous citizens. The phrase “the daily ration / of obscenity” might on a literal level refer to pornographic television contents, but obscenity could also signify the falsity of one’s hypocritical existence: hiding one’s sexual needs and fantasies. Ironically enough, the speaker fails (or refuses) to acknowledge that it is precisely the two-facedness that both the neighbours (pretending not to know) and lesbian lovers (claiming to spare others’ embarrassment) share. Apparently, they both have more in common than they are willing to accept.

Come quietly
 or the neighbours will hear.

That year was the worst
 an aching winter of it—
 small minds and towns
 rented rooms and narrow beds,
 walled in by other people’s
 decencies

and at every sitting down
to table,
broadcast at breakfast
dinner and tea
the daily ration
of obscenity.
Have you ever
made love with the t.v. on?

Come quietly
or the neighbours will hear. (Dorcey 64–65)

In the fragment below, the clock seems to go back: after “an aching winter,” instead of invigorating spring, the speaker recedes (maybe rapidly progresses into?) to a fire-lit, intimately cosy and warm autumn (“leaves falling,” “autumn cloths spread for tea”) ambience. The phrase: “leaves falling” appears to be followed by the pause, only later, one is allowed a further insight into Dorcey’s version of the paradise lost, though this time it is rather the paradise regained. The setting of the scene in Eden “wet gardens” quite plainly refers to female bodily fluids:

On a dark evening
autumn cloths spread for tea,
fires lit.
In the wet gardens
leaves falling (Dorcey 65)

Unlike Winterson, Dorcey does not coin her own discourse “written on the body,” her imagery and idiom might seem quite straightforward and, thus, be perceived, euphemistically, as not too challenging. Mary Dorcey is a fiction writer and one recognizes immediately this sparsely adjectival and verb-based, sometimes nearly prose-idiom in her poetry. As a poet, Dorcey paints the scene visually but her ostentatious linguistic economy might be deceptively misleading, although definitely the sound-oriented audience with a good ear will be more satisfied with Dorcey’s poetic style. It results from the fact that Dorcey, in a clear way, draws here upon the Irish oral tradition of bardic poetry composed to be recited aloud in a community and not to be read alone silently (sic!). The more “Come Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear” relies upon various sound and onomatopoeic effects the more the text’s own authority to break the silence and be heard aloud is asserted. That is why, as stated before, Dorcey tends to focus on the tone and resonance of poetic words, operating on alliteration (“fell the long fall”), phrase repetitions and reverberation of the similar phrases:

“wanting and waiting.” Not that frequently, Dorcey does play with words though, as in the phrase “fallen to grace.” In the aforementioned expression, rudimentary idiom is employed to render the subtle textual rebelliousness: despite the biblical connotations and gravity laws, the speaker does not fall “from” grace but “towards” it.

on a dark evening
at last alone
a space, hungry with wanting
waiting, a fire catching
we fell—
skin in firelight burning
fell the long fall
to grace, to the floor.
On a dark evening
night coming softly in the wet gardens.

Come quietly
or the neighbours will hear. (Dorcey 65)

The following scene takes place inside the flat, when the idyllic wet gardens are juxtaposed with the broadcast television din. This time, the noise arises on another level of the textual puzzle: in the background, the speaker records the Angelus prayer (which enables the reader to specify the timing).

Mouth at my breast
hands ringing in my flesh
when the Angelus rang
from the t.v. screen.
The angel of the lord
declared unto Mary
and she conceived of the Holy Ghost
the earth, the sun and the seas. (Dorcey 65)

The church televised message introduces a new dimension to the argument: that of religious discourse. With the television prayer, the annunciation scene enters the sensuous lesbian narrative as if through the back-door. It chimes with the speaker being fisted (“hands ringing in my flesh”) and coincides with her nipples being caressed (“mouth at my breast”). The words of the prayer enter her body in an almost tangible way. Bearing that in mind, it might be plausible to decode the meaning/s of the word “ring,” repeated both in the context of being touched and the bells summoning for the prayer. The phrase “the angel of the lord / declared unto

Mary" underlines that the annunciation was a bodily intervention act, not "declaring **to**" but "declaring **unto**," almost being penetrated with words, or the Word. The ambiguous phrase "she conceived **of** the Holy Ghost" requires a deeper consideration: one might even interpret it as giving birth to the Holy Ghost, however, "conceive" decoded as "becoming pregnant" is not followed by any preposition, unlike "conceive of," construed as thinking, contemplating or having an idea, imagining; only then, the bodily act of conception is turned into a mental and imaginary one. Kristeva comments upon the idea of the corporeality of the Virgin Mary in philosophical and church discourse:

We are entitled only to the ear of the virginal body, the tears, and the breast. With the female sexual organ changed into an innocent shell, holder of sound, there arises a possible tendency to eroticize hearing, voice, or even understanding. By the same token, however, sexuality is brought down to the level of innuendo. Feminine sexual experience is thus rooted in the universality of the sound . . . A woman will only have the choice to live her life either *hyperabstractly* ("immediate universal," Hegel said) in order thus to earn divine grace and homologation with symbolic order; or merely *different*, other, fallen ("immediately particular," Hegel said) . . . not be able to accede to the complexity of . . . heterogeneity . . . ("never singular," Hegel said). (320; original emphasis)

However in Dorsey's poem, Mary, impregnated by the Holy Ghost, gives birth to "the earth, the sun and the seas." The act of giving birth becomes equated with the creation of the world, it gains a cosmic and global importance. That is why drawing upon Gabriel's greeting, the speaker honours the Virgin Mary's female creative power with the words of respect. The female voice identifies with her, assuming the position of the welcoming and obedient receiver, who seems to yield to other's desiring authority, declaring "be it done unto me according / to thy word."

Hail Mary Holy Mary.
Be it done unto me according
to thy word (Dorsey 66)

What follows from the acceptance of this bodily entry is the language imitating orgasm, indicative of increasing sexual (and textual) *jouissance*. The speaker ecstatically restates the paraphrased words:

Hail Mary, and oh—
the sweetness of your breath—
the breath of your sweetness.

Come quietly
or the neighbours will hear. (Dorcey 66)

Drawing upon the biblical discourse, the female voice takes into herself the incarnated word. Thus, sensuality becomes an essential component of the spiritual act: the bedrock, or the foundation of the body/flesh and its “hands skin mouth thighs.” Alliterated “fields flooded” evoke the connotations of bodily fluids, though not blood (“blood uncoursed”). The enraptured speaker quotes in exaltation the angel’s greeting words: “Blessed art thou / and blessed is the fruit of thy womb” as the blessing of female corporeality and women’s sexuality; the word “fruit” in relation to the fecundity symbolizes the palatable taste of the forbidden lesbian passion. When women’s bodies open, “earth opens stars collide.”

162

And the word was made flesh
and dwelt amongst us.
Hands skin mouth thighs
in the bedrock of flesh
sounding,
fields flooded
blood uncoursed.
Blessed art thou
and blessed is the fruit
of thy womb.
Bitter and sweet
earth opens stars collide. (Dorcey 66)

The following fragment might point to the sweet fruit of Mary’s womb as being conceived entirely without men’s participation, it was a procreation without sexual intercourse and without any men—but not without pleasure. To some extent, in “the necessary, / daily litany,” the aforementioned act seems reminiscent of lesbian lovemaking.

Blessed and sweet,
the fruit
among women
Hail Mary Holy Mary

Come quietly
or the neighbours will hear. (Dorcey 66)

It is however, worth emphasizing that the symbolism of the Virgin Mary is the one that “defies death” (Kristeva 324). Consequently, Kristeva argues that “the fulfillment, under the name of Mary, of a totality made of woman

and God is finally accomplished through the avoidance of death. The Virgin Mary . . . has no tomb, she doesn't die and hence has no need to rise from the dead" (315). Furthermore, in the narrative, the television news items mark the passage of time and respond, as Kristeva points out, to the masculine fascination with death cult. Hence the phrase: "the deadly tide" seems to relate to the anonymous woman's tragedy mentioned in the further passage.

When the six o'clock news
struck.
Into the fissures
of mind and bone
the deadly tide
seeping.
The necessary,
daily litany.
Come quietly or the neighbours
will hear. (Dorcey 67)

A different level of the narrative would come into view with the item overheard in the evening news, reporting the tragic account of the girl's dead body being found. Connolly and O'Toole remind that in the 1970s the rate of violence against women in Ireland was extremely high. Drawing upon the research published in 1993 *Bringing it Out in the Open: Domestic Violence in Northern Ireland*, Connolly and O'Toole claim that the level of violence against women in the examined areas of Ireland (the north) at that period could oscillate between 10% up to 25% (98). Connolly and O'Toole (102) give an invaluable insight into the mass scale of that problem in Ireland, arguing that:

Up till the early 1970s the family law statutes in Ireland dated from the Victorian period, when women were afforded little legal recognition within marriage in general. Domestic violence was a completely hidden crime—few spoke about it, from the women who experienced it, to the public and to political representatives. If a woman was subjected to domestic violence, in effect there was nowhere to go and no laws to protect her.

In Dorcey's poem, no longer hidden, the battered woman's corpse was brought into public view, and discarded, as if on purpose, in a public place. Joan McKiernan and Monica McWilliams warn that "by seeing such abuse as 'private' we affirm it as a problem that is individual, that involves only a particular male-female relationship, and for which there is no social responsibility to remedy" (327). Following that line of thinking, although the setting for women-targeted violence could be either a domestic place or an outer (public) location (as in the poem: "dancehall schoolyard bed-

room **bar**”), nonetheless, the problem of violence against women should be always regarded as a “public issue,” not a private matter (McKiernan and McWilliams 327). As if addressing that claim, the female speaker enlists the real or potential body’s locations: “park **bench** **backstreet** **barn**” in an act of cataloguing them, the particular stops being the specified and becomes the general. In most names from that list, the plosive “b” sound occurs, even in the words “**stab**” and “**abdomen**.” The recurrent phrase “come quietly or the neighbours will hear,” is unfinished, as if interrupted, because of the lack of breath.

She was found
on a park bench backstreet barn
dancehall schoolyard bedroom bar—
found with multiple stab wounds to
thighs breast and abdomen.
Come quietly come quietly
or the neighbours . . .
hands tied behind her back,
no sign of
(mouth bound)
no sign of
sexual assault.

Come softly
or the neighbours will hear. (Dorcey 67)

The passage below reintroduces the lovemaking scene but, to establish the relation with a previous part, it commences as well with alliterated plosives “your **breasts** and **belly**,” a sound imitating the woman’s body opening and closing, the letters’ roundness reminds of the curves of the female body. However, the prevalence of plosives in the narrative has also a more profound and metaphoric dimension, in linguistic discourse, the other designation for “plosive” is “mute.” The lesbian sexual act proceeds with tactile closeness and consenting, mutually desired and approved by both women, bonding in “**your** thighs, **your** hands behind my back.” Two female bodies mingle in one organism: “my breath in **yours**.” Two levels of narrative intertwine as well: the dead girl’s textual presence materializes in an almost discernible way between the lovemaking couple. The silence that the women attempted to evoke overwhelms them with reproach. Their silence becomes synonymous with the silence of the murdered girl: like the quiet lesbian lovers, the murdered girl also did not want to disturb her neighbours’ peace. In that fragment, the phrase: “come quietly or the neighbours” is shortened to a half-line.

Your breasts and belly,
your thighs,
your hands behind my back
my breath in yours.
No one heard her scream.
Your eyes wide.
Come quietly or the neighbours . . .
She was found
at the dockside riverbank,
in the upstairs flat
his flat
wearing a loose . . .
Your mouth at my ear. (Dorcey 68)

The nameless victim in Dorcey's poem was killed in her apartment. "*His flat*" marks another potential whereabouts the girl's body might have been found, but she was murdered, like most women, in her own home. Joan McKiernan and Monica McWilliams further elaborate that view arguing that "abuse which occurs in the context of people's own homes is deeply threatening. It challenges our most fundamental assumptions about the nature of intimate relations and the safety" (327). Connolly and O'Toole explain though "the reasons why violence in the home occurs are always complex. Feminist theory and activism challenged the dominant explanations for the high incidence of violence in the home in the 1970s and created an additional perspective based on an understanding of gender inequality" (101). Drawing upon the recent studies conducted in the US, Elizabeth Kandel Englander (2007) gives an alarming number of approximately 30% of American women being subjected to "sexual coercion," and 25%–35% to "a completed or attempted rape" (34). She further argues that only 14% of US murders examined in between 1976 and 2002 were committed by people whom the victims did not know, but even this small rate would refer rather to men being killed in most cases by strangers, as females (according to 2002 statistics in America) "were more likely to be killed by an intimate" (22).⁶ The above-mentioned numbers indicate clearly that the feminist assumptions from as early as the 1970s and 1980s about the gender dimension of violence have proved to be more than accurate.

hands tied behind her back,
no sign of
(mouth bound)

⁶ In her research, Kandel Englander indicates that American men "were 10 times more likely to commit homicide, relative to females" (22).

no sign of
sexual assault. (Dorcey 67)

The police report-like statement: “no sign of sexual assault” does not mean that violence was not motivated by it, just that no evidence of semen was found. In this case, the authority of the text challenges the authority of the dominant discourse: the speaker reveals the subsequent details that suggest that the murdered woman, though she may not have been raped, was attacked in an intimate context: “wearing a loose...,” “a loose negligée / in her own flat, / stripped to the waist.” Finally the female voice questions the official narrative by qualifying the phrases in the brackets. In this ultimately abusive act, sexual enslaving of the woman (“hands tied behind her back”) was applied to assert male domination and arouse the man’s excitement through the girl’s pain and humiliation and finally her death. The girl’s silence in the discourse was rendered through the symbolic expression “(mouth bound).”

Come quietly
or the neighbours will hear.
Blood on the walls
and sheets,
a loose negligée
in her own flat,
stripped to the waist.
Come quietly, come quietly.
No one heard her scream—
come softly or the neighbours . . . (Dorcey 68)

Throughout the poem, the motif of silence emerges like remorse: nobody heard the girl’s screams and moans; neighbours with their television on did not pay any attention to what might be going on behind the wall of silence. As a result, the anonymous quiet girl died quietly, sadly enough she truly succeeded in sparing others embarrassment while hearing her loud screams of agony and violent dying. Looked at from that perspective, death, like sex, becomes a shameful experience, isolating one from the rest of the society. “Blood on our thighs” might refer to the menstruation or the blood of the female sufferer. “My hands behind your back” echoes the previous line in the act of sexual reciprocity so sadly contrasted with the loneliness of the dying girl. “Come quietly, come,” shortened breath and shortened phrase.

Did you ever make love
with the t.v. on?

—the neighbours heard nothing—
she was always—
no one would have thought—
always a quiet girl.
Stripped to the bone
blood on our thighs
my hands behind your back
come quietly, come,
legs tangled with the sheet
mouth to mouth
voices flung. (Dorcey 68–69)

The end of the poem completes the circular composition of the narrative: with only a small change of qualifier: “come softly,” with the word for word echoed phrase: “landlady lord.” Nonetheless, something did change, the dead girl’s presence was intertwined into the text to compensate for the life being taken away from her so abruptly and violently. The speaker assumes her part of the responsibility for that tragedy: “**her** cries in **our** ears,” “**her** blood on **our** hands.” One might wonder why the female voice experiences pangs of conscience, feels as if being an accomplice, at least an enabler to the oppressor. The conclusive couplet leaves no doubt about it: by giving the silent consent to “come quietly,” one contributes indirectly to silencing the truth about women’s experience. What ought to be articulated loud, gets suppressed and hushed.

Come softly
or the neighbours will hear.

Did you ever make love
with the t.v. on?
to spare the neighbours
landlady lord
her cries in our ears
we came . . .
no one heard her scream
her blood on our hands.
Yes—
coming, (Dorcey 69)

The final fragment rejects the philosophy of “or the neighbours will hear.” The speaker makes her decision about “not quietly— / **beyond bearing**,” followed by parallel patterns: “in the face of the living / in the teeth of the dying.” The phrase “forgetting the uproar” shows the speaker’s change in the way of thinking: not allowing other people’s beliefs to constrain her

own life any more. But the last act of anarchic liberation is . . . switching off the television set. One does not need to isolate behind the broadcast noise and hide from the community because sometimes the emotional, and maybe even physical survival might depend upon others' reaction, or its lack.

Not quietly—
beyond bearing;
in the face of the living
in the teeth of the dying
forgetting the uproar
the outrage—
(imagine—
the joy
undisguised
of two women
—especially
women—)
two women
together—
at last alone
night falling in the wet gardens
on a dark evening
with the t.v.
off. (Dorcey 69–70)

Coming (out) loud, both women realize that they are “autonomous human beings, independent persons with a right to life, a right to love, a right to control our own bodies, a right to live free from harassment in our work and our homes, a right to choose who we love, how we love” (qtd. in Connolly and O’Toole 186). The vision of “**wet** gardens” as the fluid, sexual Paradise replaces the alienating confinement of the austere rented room. The Irish lesbian women have made their voice heard, as silence equals death, both in the discourse and in life, in terms of the textual exclusion or the signifying erasure and/or the lack of satisfying and dignified existence.

Die quietly—
die quietly—
or the neighbours will hear. (Dorcey 70)

WORKS CITED

Boland, Evan. *The Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time*. New York: Norton, 1995. London: Vintage, 1996.

Byrne, Anne, and Madeline Leonard, eds. *Women and Irish Society: A Sociological Reader*. Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 1997.

Connolly, Linda, and Tina O'Toole. *Documenting Irish Feminisms: The Second Wave*. Dublin: Woodfield, 2005.

Dorcey, Mary. "Come Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear." *Moving into the Space Cleared by Our Mothers*. 1991. Galway: Salmon, 1995. 64–70.

Kandel Englander, Elizabeth. *Understanding Violence*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007.

Kristeva, Julia. "Stabat Mater." *The Portable Kristeva*. Ed. Kelly Oliver. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. 308–31.

McKiernan, Joan, and Monica McWilliams. "Women, Religion and Violence in the Family." *Women and Irish Society: A Sociological Reader*. Ed. Anne Byrne and Madeline Leonard. Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 1997. 327–41.

---. *Bringing It Out in the Open: Domestic Violence in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: HMSO, 1993.

Moane, Geraldine. "Lesbian Politics and Community." *Women and Irish Society: A Sociological Reader*. Ed. Anne Byrne and Madeline Leonard. Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 1997. 431–46.

Smyth, Ailbhe, ed. *Irish Women's Studies Reader*. Dublin: Attic, 1993.

---. "The Women's Movement in the Republic of Ireland 1970–1990." *Irish Women's Studies Reader*. Ed. Ailbhe Smyth. Dublin: Attic, 1993. 245–69.