Introduction

Texting the self: Weaving a way into the self & into society¹

Hedwig Schwall

'All this time,' he said, 'you've not told me what you intend to do with her.'
*'Do with her? You talk as if she were a yard of calico. I shall do absolutely nothing with her, and she herself will do everything she chooses. She gave me notice of that.'*²

This issue of *RISE* focuses on tissue in text(ile)s. It is the result of a workshop on text(ile)s we held in the Leuven Centre of Irish Studies (LCIS) on 9 - 10 December 2016 where we discussed the links between the weaving and wearing of textile, and the representation of these in art and anthropology, in archeology and history, but mainly in literary texts, more specifically poetry. As this symposium was organized by the LCIS it was conceived as an interdisciplinary research exercise, starting off with the bigger European picture, then moving to Ireland, the laboratory where theories are tested on Irish history, Irish art, Irish literature. As many contributions focus on the way in which the textile motif can highlight how the material and the immaterial can be interwoven (Enright, Carson, Clutterbuck, Paterson, Coughlan, Karhio, Armstrong, Richardson) while others link textile with politics (Bryan, Duffy, Collins, Armstrong, Paterson) this introduction will contextualize these two aspects of textile here.

More specifically I will look at very specific examples in which forms of textile inspired concepts, social relations and psychological theory. This will provide some background to the contributions to this issue of *RISE* which are truly multidisciplinary, ranging from discussions of textile in art (Baert, Duffy, Schwall); life (Enright, Carson, Richardson) and politics (Bryan) to analyses of Irish poetry ranging from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century.

Textile metamorphosing the mind: myth, praxis, theory

Old Hebrew literature shows us how textile is a basic metaphor for life. Job asks God: 'Did you not clothe me with skin and flesh / and knit me together with bones and sinews?'³ The psalms, too, describe the human being at the very initial biological level as being woven by God: 'For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb'.⁴ But most interesting is the story of human creation in Genesis 1-3: apart from speaking, cloth-making is the very first cultural act in the Bible, and the first thing Adam and Eve do together.

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good to eat, and that it was pleasing to the eye and tempting to contemplate, she took some and ate it. She also gave her husband some and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they discovered that they were naked; so they stitched fig-leaves together and made themselves loincloths.⁵

These two sentences specify the (in)famous fruit not by saying they were apples (green, orange, golden or any other type), it is only the prohibition on the one hand and the attraction

¹ As Catriona Clutterbuck observes, the ampersand looks like a looped thread or elaborate stitch. Another similarity between text and textile production is noted by Jindani who sees a parallel between quotation marks and stitches.

² Ralph Touchett to his mother, *Portrait of a Lady*, Chapter V.

³ Job, 10:11, *The New English Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press & Cambridge University Press, 1970).

⁴ 139:13, *The New English Bible*.

⁵ Genesis 3, 6-7, *The New English Bible*.

on the other that are relevant. The interesting thing is that the fruit appeals because it is haptic (it looks both touchable and tasty) but 'God has forbidden us either to eat or to touch the fruit of that'.⁶ Clearly it is the proximal senses which are forbidden (taste, touch) whereas the distal senses (optical, acoustic), are allowed; the synaesthetic use of the senses is discouraged. But once Adam and Eve did taste and touch, they made loincloths for themselves. Why? Did the fruit-eating give them a creative impulse? Did they make clothes to hide the sexual difference, to protect them from difficult questions? Or did they make them to *augment* touch, which they were now accustomed to? That clothes will both protect from and invite more sensation is something we will look at later. The one sure thing is that after the touch and taste the seeing is richer, and moral perception is more complicated too, as God observes: 'The man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil'.⁷ The story implies that human perception went from bland, passive and mimetic⁸ to haptic, active and emulating behaviour: once it is deepened (good and evil) and differentiated (self and other) it means that the first people also want to differentiate their skin, as they want (vegetal) covering. But when God expels them from Paradise 'The Lord God made tunics of skins for Adam and his wife and clothed them'.⁹ God gives man even more layers; he is not only a clay-maker but also a tailor, one who wants to accommodate differences – complicating them.

Another puzzling thing in this key story is that the narrative is built on a number of inversions of normal human practices. First, God speaks things into being whereas man usually reflects on them and represents them. Second, God makes man according to his own image, whereas all humans can do is make an image of God according to their human wits. Third, woman is born from man, whereas usually it is the other way round (even Shakespeare's Macduff could not manage a valid alternative). Fourth, the human beings in this story move from seeing to touch and taste, whereas in a foetus' and baby's life the development goes the opposite way. And fifth, the human couple go from being hairless to being hairy, whereas evolutionary theories illustrate the inverse. In part three of this introduction we will revert some of the inversions, starting from women, things, touch and taste, to see how textile may help to feel our way back to haptic perception and to self-articulation in different forms of language, involving layers of skin, textile, movement and the imagery they produce.

When we look at a Greek story about the beginning of civilisation, Eve's role is played by Prometheus: he too steals something from the gods to start human culture – fire, which, like cloth-making, is an agent of metamorphosis. In this context the clothing business may be interpreted as a 'felix culpa': it helps to filter the intake of the senses, it protects, enables, adorns. But textile can also be sheer expression, or political art, as we see in the tale of Arachne which gets pride of place in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. She is another female Prometheus, only here it is a contest between women, and it is about textile. Like Eve, Arachne has often been held up as an example of *hubris*, but Ovid's text actually highlights the girl's courage and skill. First we learn that Arachne's fame is based on merit only, and it increases daily. The patron of weaving, Pallas Athena /Minerva, feels threatened in her reputation and visits Arachne to start a competition with her. In her cloth, Athena represents a power contest among the gods which she won; she herself gets pride of place, and the margins of her pictures

⁶ Genesis 3, 3, *The New English Bible*.

⁷ Genesis 3, 22, *The New English Bible*.

⁸ When Adam saw Eve for the first time all he noticed was the similarity: 'bone from my bones, flesh from my flesh!' (Gen.2,23); now (sexual) difference makes life a question of choosing and taking responsibility.

⁹ Genesis 3, 21, *The New English Bible*.

are filled with humans who have been punished and humiliated by the gods. Arachne appears as a forerunner of the #metoo movement, weaving a huge number of stories of women who have been abused by the gods, especially by Jupiter who morphed into any shape he deemed useful to get his way with the women he wanted. She does not depict herself at all, and her margins are filled with natural motifs, flowers and plants. Thereon Minerva, in fiery jealousy, rips Arachne's artwork and nearly kills the girl with her weaving needle.¹⁰ Only when Arachne then wants to hang herself by her threads Minerva stops her and changes her into a spider. This story opposes two worldviews: that of an oppressive, fixating hierarchy ruled by divine jealousy and the girl's woven pamphlet for respect for women, merit and equality. In Homer the most famous weaver is of course Penelope. Curiously, this central metaphor in Homer's art remains blank, as the figures in the cloth she weaves and unweaves are never specified: they have to be imagined by the reader. As I hope to show in part three, this may mean she is an Everywoman and we are all Penelopes: we all weave plans by day and our unconscious unravels them by night.

Metamorphosis seems a central feature to the phenomenon of textile, and this is also the case when we look at *practical aspects* of textile making. Vegetal fibres like flax, cotton, jute, hemp, nettle, bamboo or pineapple are turned into bedsheets, dresses, bags, mats, towels, gowns and shirts; metal is cut into suits; animal matter such as bone, horn, stone, leather, feather, shell or pearl end up in buttons, shoes, glass frames, hats and bags. Human and animal skin mix in many ways: people can have leopard skin patterns tattooed on them, or have them imprinted on the textile they wear, or wear the leopard skins themselves; they can choose these tattoos to protect themselves (like Parker in Flannery O'Connor's marvelous short story 'Parker's Back') or to seduce men (like Ferdinand Khnopff's symbolist sphinx-like women).

Irish clothing also allowed for some forms of metamorphosis. According to Annie Dibble¹¹ the Irish 'cloak' had many names and uses: in Irish there are at least sixty-three words to describe the 'shag rug'. 'The mantle serves unto the Irish as a hedgehog his skin, or a snail her shell, for a garment by day and a house by night ...it makes them ... able to lie about in bogs and woods, where their mantles serve them for a mattress, and a bush for a bedstead, and they thereby are less addicted to a dutiful and civil life'.¹² Apparently, skirts too often had several uses. Pictures of nineteenth- and twenty-century families on the Aran islands and Mayo show women who wore garments of red flannel which was worn either on top or under clothes; in both cases it insulated, and in the latter case the rough surface would 'titillate' the skin, 'massaging' it and so keeping the blood flow and thereby the body heat. Some of the skirts which were extra thick, were also worn as capes over the head and shoulders in cold weather. There were not only worn by women and girls but also by young boys.

¹⁰ The text says explicitly that neither Pallas nor Envy itself could find fault with Arachne's work. The golden-haired goddess was indignant at her success, and rent the embroidered web with its heavenly crimes: 'Non illud Pallas, non illud carpere Livor possit opus: doluit successu flava virago et rupit pictas, caelestia crimina.' (*Metamorphoses Book VI* v.129-131).

¹¹ Annie Dibble is an Irish weaver and textile archeologist who gave a fascinating presentation on the history of Irish clothing opening the workshops on textile in Leuven. She also introduced us to the film made by Pat Murphy, *Tana Bana* (warp and woof) for which she had done the research. Tana Bana documents the fact that together Muslim and Hindu communities form the warp and woof of the weaving industry in Varanasi. Instead of an article she sent me her presentation which she kindly let me use for insertion.

¹² Letter from Sir William Herbert to Lord Burghley, dated 25.5.1589, qt. by Annie Dibble.

The processing of these textiles was often a matter of hard work, especially with linen. The flax had to soften in special ponds (which stank so much that they were often used as hiding places); the linen was then boiled in lye made from burnt seaweed and then spread on the grass field to let sun, air and rain work on it for six months. Finally the linen was steeped in buttermilk, washed in pure water and finished up. Beside buttermilk honey too was used in clothes making, more specifically to curl the tassels of wool. But fibres also needed to be spun, dyed, sometimes boiled, kneaded, woven, sewn, or stitched; material would be quilted or embroidered, wool would be knotted, knitted or crocheted.

Finally, as Annie Dibble pointed out, Ireland is literally a land of textiles: up to this day archeologists make surprising finds in the bogs. The earliest known Irish woven cloth dates from 750 BCE, consisting of two strips of wool stitched together in the late Bronze Age. As wool is a protein fibre, it is preserved by tannic acid in the bog water, whereas linen is destroyed by it. So the midlands peat bog further yielded bodies wearing woollen clothing reminiscent of sixteenth-century Flemish courtiers, perfectly preserved by the acidic water; another sadly surprising find was the Shinrone Gown, a marvellously rich red woollen dress with a circumference at the hem of six meters and a half; next to the woman's clothed body was a newborn baby.

Textile may be changed and conserved by nature, but it is metamorphosed into art as well. After metal, mineral, vegetal and animal matter are turned into textile these forms can be translated back into wood, as in the flowing movements of Tilman Riemenschneider, the metal constructions of Andrew Rogers, the stone folds of Hermengilde's dress in the elaborate funeral monument in Bamberg Cathedral, and of course there are the numberless instances of painting where haptophilic masters like Van Eyck paint carpets you want to feel under your soles, dresses for Mary and the bishops in adoration of her which are stiff with brocade and awe; there are the silks and velvets of Reynolds and Copley which mellow our senses and melt our eyes. In some contemporary installations we find yet another move, such as Jan Fabre's installation of the monk's habit with mock lace. Reminding us of the elaborate lace altar attendants wear over their altar robes (which Muldoon will call 'glad rags'), a closer look shows us that Fabre's textile is covered with thin slices of bone which look like lace. Thus he turns the idea of the human being inside out; or, in terms of Genesis 3, he makes bone and fig leaf switch sides.¹³

¹³ Fifteen years after having been conceived the work was re-exhibited in Venice where it caused great controversy concerning whether the work contained human bones, and, if so, where they came from. Damien Hirst also uses human bone, Gunther von Hagen's *Body worlds (Körperwelten)* plastinates actual human tissue.

But tissue and textiles not only strike artists as a vital metaphor to think about the human; the image of the woven being is omnipresent in the *sciences* and in all aspects of our much-wired contemporary life.

When biologists look more closely at what Job called 'skin and flesh', 'bones and sinews' they complicate things further into ecto-, endo- and mesodermal tissues. Epithelial tissues cover the exterior part of our body and its organs, endothelial ones the inside. There are also connective tissues, like cartilage and bone, and many more.¹⁴ Materials scientists are intrigued by the ability to knot things. David Leigh and his team at Manchester University see themselves as the proud successors of the Stone Age people who made nets and clothes; recently they managed to make the tightest knot ever of 192 atoms in 8 loops, which will allow for even suppler and stronger kinds of fabric, like bullet proof silken shirts.¹⁵ Mathematicians too admire complicated knot-concepts; in physics, string theory has been fashionable, leading to poetic assumptions of enormous landscapes of possible universes.

In this issue we will limit our definition of textile to fibres which were spun, knotted, knitted or woven, so broadly connected to the Latin verb *texere*, to weave. In that sense not only 'my inmost being' is woven, as the psalm says, but we also can have, or lack, 'moral fibre'.

¹⁴ Some biologists have not forgotten their mythical origins: as my colleague Liesbet Geris, professor at the division of Skeletal Tissue Engineering at KU Leuven, pointed out, their project lab is called Prometheus.

¹⁵ Braiding a molecular knot with eight crossings. Jonathan J. Danon, Anneke Krüger, David A. Leigh et al, *Science* 355.6321 (2017), 159-162.

Memory studies too call for more nuance when they want to replace Pierre Nora's '*lieux de mémoire*' by *Noeuds de mémoire*, knots of memory (which I discuss further in my analysis of Rita Duffy's work). And like Arachne we live in a world wide web, except it is not of our own making and so should be closely monitored lest it constricts us rather than constructs a better social tissue.

Social functions of (Irish) textile

In what follows we briefly look at how textile functions (1) in sedentary and nomadic cultures; (2) in politics and art (3) in work and leisure (4) in natural and social transitions, seasons and rituals, and finally (5) as an expression of the life and death drives.

Sedentary cultures, according to Gottfried Semper's (controversial) idea, were built on the act of weaving:

the threading, twisting and knotting of fibres were among the most ancient of human arts, from which all else was derived, including both building and textiles ... humans were weaving enclosures – fences and pens – from sticks and branches ; and even before they were weaving cloth they were sewing and stitching nets and corselets. ... Elizabeth Barber ... goes so far as to call it the "String Revolution".¹⁶

Indeed one function of early weavings was to ensure protection: fibres were woven against the cold, houses were woven with twigs and covered with mud. Another function was to attack: nets helped hunters catch animals, mammals or fish, baskets helped gatherers to contain berries. A third function was fulfilled by the sieve, a useful woven tool that helped to distinguish edible and non-edible parts – a function Barbara Baert develops in magnificent ways in her contribution on the sieve.

As nomadic societies focus on transport their containers will be more varied in their forms. On a microlevel containers made from reeds, jute, bark, leather, wool, ... are adapted to the content: woollen scarves are used to wrap and carry babies in, jute for heavy goods, leather for important documents; for precious items, like jewellery, silk may be used. For macro transport ropes and pulleys are needed (to load heavier goods) and vessels are decked out with big canvas sails to catch the wind, enabling them to exchange goods throughout the world.

Second textile can serve *politics and art*. In general one might think that both users of textile will have opposite rhetorics: while political textile wants to convince, art wants to question. Or the former may tend to be declarative while the latter would rather aim at polyinterpretability.¹⁷

But people's expressions always vary in subtlety and so textile can be political in a blatant, subtle or paradoxical way. First the choice of fabric can be political, as Lucy Collins'

¹⁶ Gottfried Semper quoted in Tim Ingold, *Lines. A Brief History* (London/New York: Routledge Classics, 2016), 43.

¹⁷ The red carpet is an example of a textile sign the meaning of which has changed. As the American historian Amy Henderson indicates, the red carpet originated in literature. In his *Oresteia*, Aeschylus makes Clytemnestra roll out a marvelously embroidered red carpet for her husband who comes home after having won the war but lost his family. It looks like a sign of honour, but is a mark of his wife's anger and a prefiguration of his impending death. http://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20180305_03391153.

contribution shows when (women) patriots in seventeenth- or eighteenth-century Ireland wore linen rather than silk to protest against British protectionism in the textile trade. The Yeats sisters too were political with textile, as Adrian Paterson points out, working exclusively with Irish linen and Irish wool for their tapestries and embroidery in the Dun Emer Co-operative. Colours too can be political, as the black-, blue- and brown-shirts proved; green can be terrible, as Yeats observed in the 'Terrible beauty' born in his 'Easter 1916'. Colour can also merely indicate hierarchy, as purple did in imperial Roman culture, and, in its wake, the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁸ It can characterize a person, as in Heather Richardson's commemoration project, *A Dress for Kathleen*. While Richardson makes a linen dress for the girl who died on her way home from the linen factory, she uses khaki thread for embroidered lines referring to her grandfather as he served in the army; maroon for the grandmother to reflect her sadness at the death of two young children, and linen flower blue for the girl. In early Irish society, so Francis Byrne tells us, rank was also indicated by the amount of clothes one owns. A *bóaire* or higher grade of freeman was defined by a list of things, among which the requirement that he and his wife must have four sets of clothes.¹⁹ While material and colour of textile may express one's place in life, embroidery is another. At the more discrete end of the spectrum the number of gold stripes on a pilot's jacket indicates his place in that hierarchy, at the other end a work of embroidery like the Bayeux tapestry illustrates a family's importance in a literally long narrative. Heather Richardson's project is more modest, but also a tribute to a hardworking family. Flags are of course the most obvious kind of political textile language, but as Dominic Bryan indicates in his contribution about contemporary flag language in Northern Ireland this may contain a few paradoxes. The more recognizable the form of a flag (like the three combined crosses in the Union Jack) the more one can vary the colours and add symbolic details, but this can lead to fragmentation in convictions and a splitting of ranks. Another paradox is that while, during the marching season, more flags are flown than ever, they are treated with less respect: after the season they are not taken down. A lower price apparently makes for less care, which results in a landscape of dirty, tattered flags. This contrasts all the more with Anne Enright's admiration for the tattered flags from World War One in St Patrick's Cathedral: being beautiful and vulnerable like the soldiers they represented, extreme care for them has made them outlast the brave men by a century, but as textile monuments are destroyed by light, they will move from material into verbal memory.

In art, textile becomes more and more prominent in twenty-first century installations. Alice Maher's bee dress, mentioned by Pat Coughlan, is one example of it in Irish art. Adrian Paterson mentioned Loïe Fuller who inspired Yeats, and, in the context of this issue's preoccupation with the material-immaterial link this will prove interesting as it shows how textile art can help people change their body image. Fuller, who meticulously perfected her dance to become a textile derwish, propelled Yeats into reflections about that artist's 'shining web, a floating ribbon of cloth' which 'seemed that a dragon of air / had fallen among dancers' whirling them in and out of civilizations.²⁰ While Fuller's textiles magnified the fluidity of the body, enlarging the visibility of transport itself, her body tried to objectify the phenomenon of metamorphosis itself, whether from one civilization to another, or, on a more modest scale,

¹⁸ As Annie Dibble pointed out, the tiny island of Inishkea, an Atlantic outpost off the coast of Co. Mayo, hosted a seventh-century dye factory, run by monks who extracted a royal purple from the shells of dog whelks to dye exclusive cloth for dignitaries, later used for cardinals.

¹⁹ By early Irish Byrne means first to ninth century, 51.

²⁰ W.B. Yeats, 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen', *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats* (London/Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1981), 234.

from one idea of self to another. Yeats too tried out his own version of a cloth dance which steered people's attention. At the beginning and end of his Noh plays the musician had to fold and unfold a purple cloth to mark the beginning and ending of story space, signalling when the magic started and ended.

Some textile practices combine art with politics. Two examples – each had the objective to connect. First there is the breathtaking balancing act Philippe Petit performed in 1974 on the tightrope which connected the as yet unfinished twin towers in New York. This was life-endangering art; but being performed in those circumstances it gave the silhouette of the walker a larger than life dimension which appealed so much to Colm McCann that it made him write a 'healing' pre-9/11 novel, *Let the Great World Spin*.²¹ In the novel the tightrope walker's performance brought together different traumatized people who literally looked up to the figure in a fascination that connected them with each other, further leading to many healing acts of solidarity. Another installation closer to home is Rita Duffy's *Laundry Day in Derry* (2013) in which her many-coloured shirts were flapping in the wind, pegged to lines that reach over from one street side to the other in a wide embrace of the community. Their wild variety in colours broke any predictable set of tricolour schemes; and like the tightrope walker's act and McCann's protagonist, the installation invited people to look up from the smallness of their worlds and start anew.

Third we see how textile helps to, on the one hand, protect, on the other to accept more sensations in contexts of *work and leisure*. There are many kinds of specialized textiles conceived for many different kinds of work. Nurses need bandages, gloves and aprons; surgeons too, as well as needle and thread. Beekeepers need gear gauzy masks to protect their body from the bees, deep-sea divers are wrapped in a suit which can withstand high water pressure, workers in nuclear plants have textiles which protect them from radiation. The case of sailors is more complicated: apart from needing protection against wind and rain, they also get a kind of autobiographical clothing which allows their family to recognize them in case they drown. Thus we read about a community of Norfolk fisher folk:

The women knitted thin strands of unwashed and oily wool into the tight sweaters known as ganseys which would identify a dead body as one of their own, washed ashore far from home. Every town and village had developed a particular pattern: rings and furrows on the waistband or the neck showed how many children and grandchildren a man had, anchors were for the hope that he might return safely after each trip and zigzag lines were perhaps something to do with lightning not striking the boat, or the confusions of married life. The running chain stitch represented the herring, the fish that had kept them going for so many centuries.²²

Textile, knitting, also makes for a *dénouement* in Synge's *Riders to the Sea*. While the youngest brother has just left to go to sea in stormy weather the family gets word that the second to last son is missing. A packet of clothes has been delivered to the man's sisters, Cathleen and Nora, to identify them. At first, they find some shirts which are not exclusive: 'It's the same stuff, Nora; but if it is itself aren't there great rolls of it in the shops of Galway, and isn't it many another man may have his shirt of it as well as Michael himself?' Next Nora scrutinizes a sock, of which Cathleen observes that 'It's a plain stocking' but Nora knows it's

²¹ Colm McCann, *Let the Great World Spin* (London/Berlin/New York: Bloomsbury, 2009), 351.

²² Julia Blackburn. *Threads. The Delicate Life of John Craske* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2015), 41.

not: 'It's the second one of the third pair I knitted, and I put up three score stitches, and I dropped four of them'.²³

While textiles for work are usually protective, textiles made for leisure tend to heighten the receptiveness of the senses. Constantly new materials are devised in which the fibres are so woven that they both propel and protect: biking gear can minimize friction with the air while pads protect extremities in case of a fall; fabrics are made for hiking which regulate the economics of air, keeping wind out but letting the body breathe out. Textile can itself be part of the game, as in billiard table cloth which should allow for a perfect roll and absolute precision. In the making and folding of parachutes even more precision is demanded, lest (fatal) accidents happen. But the most important textile-related game to us is the baby's play with a bobbin which Freud, observing it in his grandchild, called the *Fort-Da* game. Here, the bobbin appears as the very first tool in the life-long exercise of finding the right distance to people. In Freud's interpretation the bobbin represented the mother; the thread was the means to call her back: '*fort*'/gone stood for absence, *da* /there for presence. Thanks to this play the child could come to terms with his lack of understanding of and control over the mother's absences: the simulation gave him a space and time of his own where he could practise a basic task of life, to conceive of a dynamic subject-object distance.

Looking, fourth, at textiles in their *natural and social functions* we see again that in the human relation to the seasons both the protective and enabling functions are realized: cashmere wool will easily ward off the cold and see-through silk will caress the skin along with sun and light breezes. Clothes can definitely be functional, in the sense that they can be season- or weather-related, but our focus is more on the language of clothes. This is most interesting in times of transition, the big rituals of life, which can be challenging times. The following example will highlight how ritual textile language is often closely linked with the maternal caregivers.

A first example comes from the London Foundling Hospital, where, between 1741 and 1760, mothers left tokens [like a small square of embroidered linen] or the local administrator would cut a scrap of fabric from the mother's cloth on arrival at the Hospital; this could later 'act ... as important identifiers in case mothers were later in a position to reclaim their infants'.²⁴ A second 'transition dress' is the christening gown, made to mark the ritual through which a physical body becomes a social and spiritual body, a member of a Christian community. Unlike the fragment of cloth left at the foundling hospital, this launching into society is often invested with much elaborate lace and embroidery work as an impressive imprint of care – an imprint carried through the generations, as many families hand down a christening dress through several generations. The next mark in Catholic (Irish) society is First Communion for seven-year-olds, then Confirmation for twelve-year-olds, marking their transition into adolescence. Brendan Behan's short story 'The Confirmation Suit' wonderfully highlights how confirmation is a social event in which the about to be initiated have to jump two hurdles: the older boys scare them with the vision of being outcasts if they fail in their spiritual 'examination' by the Bishop; and they are scared by the women who, complaining about the prices of the outfits, may turn them into sartorial outcasts, marked by poverty by

²³ John Millington Synge, *Riders to the Sea. Modern and Contemporary Irish Drama*, ed. John P. Harrington (New York/London: Norton Critical Edition, 2009. Second Edition), 58-67, 63.

²⁴ Alice Dolan and Sally Holloway, 'Emotional Textiles: An Introduction', *Textile. Journal on Cloth and Culture* 14.2 (2016): n.p.

their outfit which is 'a jersey and pants', as opposed to 'a new suit, kid gloves and tan shoes and a sciol cap'. However, the boy's eventual outfit becomes as complicated as his maternal situation. His favourite mother figures are his grandmother and her ally, Miss McCann, who constantly get into strife with Aunt Jack who is more straight-laced. For the confirmation suit Aunt Jack and Miss McCann work together which results in a reasonable job except for the coat's 'big buttons and little lapels'. Keeping these hidden for his peers he feels saved but is chided by his mother for being ungrateful to those he really loves. However, when a few months later Miss McCann dies the boy decides to stand up for her and though he is soaked by the rain he stands at her grave in the suit as a tribute to the maker: 'People said I would get my end, but I went on till we reached the graveside, and I stood in my Confirmation suit drenched to the skin. I thought this was the least I could do'. So the confirmation of the boy's maturity was only possible when the direct peer pressure had eased off. Then the boy could live up to his sense of duty, illustrating how the confirmation suit is doubly non-functional, but therefore all the more expressive: not only does the suit not protect the boy against the rain, it also affirms the boy in his belated 'confirmation' of his love for Miss McCann, his replacement mother. It is a gem of a short story in that the 'agon', the fight of the ego with himself and the microcosm of his society is condensed in an even smaller microcosm, namely in the relation between the boy's sensitivity and his suit.²⁵

While the previous ritual dresses may be particular to Catholicism, wedding dresses are important in all cultures²⁶; Rita Duffy used her own wedding dress in an installation. Finally there is the shroud, a solemn thing in John Donne's final posing but a joke in Behan's story, where Miss McCann is a professional shroud maker: 'people were dying to get into her creations, her handiwork was to be found in all the best cemeteries'. But the main shroud in this volume is of course that which is sown by Cuchulainn in Yeats's poem as it is discussed by Catriona Clutterbuck, Adrian Paterson and Shirin Jindani.

A fifth and last set of oppositions which determines textual interactions in society is the effect of the *life and the death drives* on sartorial language. The unconscious, as I argue in my article on Rita Duffy's work, is a combination of the entwinement of life and death drives. While the first seeks challenges that will help fulfil one's desire, the second tends to self-inhibition and self-destruction.

Eros drives are omnipresent in sartorial language. A clear example would be the Wife of Bath, who needed to give these expansive tendencies an outlet and did so in the pounds of expensive red cloth she showcased on her head.²⁷ Later, in the Renaissance, middle and upper-class women sported their eros drives in colourful dresses which were only reined in by the 'sumptuary laws' which tried to forestall that rich merchants would outshine court people. If they dressed above their station, they had to pay heavy taxes. Still, the Chaplain of the

²⁵ Didier Anzieu would call the protagonist's skin his 'Ego Skin' or his 'psychical wrapping'.

²⁶ In 1947 a pilot from World War Two who was saved by his parachute proposed to his friend, offering the material for a gown. It is unknown which impact the rescuing parachute had on the marriage but it is striking that both children and in-laws from the union married in it as well.
<https://newsdesk.si.edu/snapshot/parachute-wedding-dress>. Of course the Smithsonian museum is a trove of stories.

²⁷ Hir coverchiefs ful fine were of ground - / I dorste swere they weyeden ten pound / That on a Sondag weren upon hir heed. / Hir hosen weren of fin scarlet reed, / Ful straite yteyd, and shoes ful moiste and newe.' (v. 455- 459, Chaucer, 254)

Venetian Embassy was so charmed by the theatregoers' outfits that he forgot to mention the play he had come to see. He saw one woman

... repeatedly taking off not fewer than three gloves, which were worn one over the other; bodice of embroidered satin, petticoat of gold tissue with stripes, robe of red velvet, lined with yellow muslin with broad stripes of pure gold.. apron of point lace and perfumed head-attire.²⁸

In her picture of eighteenth-century Ireland Lucy Collins too shows how the expansion of markets and credit given by cloth sellers and tailors meant that many people could dress up to climb up in society, yet at some point the function of sumptuary laws was taken over by the free market which, along with quickly changing fashions, set such high prices that only the richest could regularly buy the kind of opulent new clothes prescribed by the latest fashion. This leads to situations as in Emma O'Donoghue's *Slammerkin* where the protagonist simply cannot express her eros drives as she lacks the clothes that go with it – a complicated business we will come back to. Yet other socialites may need some paraphernalia to camouflage their shyness by enhancing their gestural language. Twirling a cane or a moustache can support the dandy in his pose, having to readjust a shawl can keep one safely occupied, as can the handling of parasols, fans, a glove, a kerchief Smoking helps too. When Lady Bracknell learns from her potential son-in-law, Jack/Earnest, that he smokes she is 'glad to hear it. A man should always have an occupation of some kind.'²⁹ Rosamond in *Middlemarch* is elegant and etiquette-trained enough not to need paraphernalia, but the riding whip comes in handy.³⁰

But the death drives too lurk everywhere. Though these self-destructive tendencies manifest themselves either by inertia or by mania, it seems that in relation to textile the examples of mania dominate by far. On an industrial scale there is the environmental damage done to nature, as in Paterson's example of pollution in nineteenth-century Leeds where rivers were poisoned by the heavy black used for silks. But today's pollution of the ocean by nets which have been left behind is destructive on a much more massive scale.³¹

²⁸ Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 6.

²⁹ Oscar Wilde, 'The Importance of Being Earnest', *The Norton Anthology of English Literature. The Victorian Age*, Volume E, Ninth Edition, ed Stephen Greenblatt (New York/London: 2012. 1733-1777), 1743.

³⁰ In this passage of an early meeting between Rosamond and Dr. Lydgate both are at their most alert so that the riding whip works as a lightning rod: '(Every nerve and muscle in Rosamond was adjusted to the consciousness that she was being looked at. She was by nature an actress of parts that entered into her physique: she even acted her own character, and so well, that she did not know it to be precisely her own.) "Middlemarch has not a very high standard, uncle," said Rosamond, with a pretty lightness, going towards her whip, which lay at a distance.

Lydgate was quick in anticipating her. He reached the whip before she did, and turned to present it to her. She bowed and looked at him: he of course was looking at her, and their eyes met with that peculiar meeting which is never arrived at by effort, but seems like a sudden divine clearance of haze. I think Lydgate turned a little paler than usual, but Rosamond blushed deeply and felt a certain astonishment. After that, she was really anxious to go, and did not know what sort of stupidity her uncle was talking of when she went to shake hands with him.' (Book I, Ch XII)

³¹ This is clearly shown in striking ways in documentaries such as David Attenborough's *Blue Planet II* or in exhibitions like the Erub Arts Collaborative Project 'Ghost Nets of the Ocean'.
<http://www.asiaone.com/multimedia/gallery/ghost-nets-ocean-asian-civilisations-museum>.

On a more individual basis the death drives were recognized by the psychiatrist Gaëtan Gatian de Clérambault (1872-1934) in the so-called *Stoffleidenschaft*, the passion for textile. He came across a pathology in his women patients he called 'silk mania' and termed it *cri de soie*, making a French pun on 'cry of silk' (*soie*) and 'cry from the self' (*cri de soi*). His contemporary, Flaubert, who was an acquaintance of de Clérambault even wrote his main novel about such a person, *Madame Bovary*. Another famous literary protagonist who expressed her mania through clothes was Medea who killed her rival by offering her a poisoned dress which burns her and her whole household.

Picture taken by the author of the art installation *Ghost Nets of the Ocean* at Asian Civilisation Museum, Singapore (June – August 2017); this is a detail of eighty marine sculptures shapes made in 2016 from reclaimed fishing net and rope by Erub artists from Darnley Island in the Torres Strait in Australia.

But the effect of the death drive, whether in its manic or its inert manifestation, can also be healed by creating textile. There are many workshops and commemorative projects in which quilts are involved; often traumatized women get together and the common work in peaceful rhythms on a shared pattern can prove beneficial. This also goes for men prisoners: participants of the Fine Cell Work, an initiative which introduces the prisoners to embroidery, said it soothed their minds and encouraged them to develop patterns. Being creative on a very small scale gave them peace and confidence: being a job involving selection (of colour) and repetition (of pattern) this combination sometimes 'pulls them through'.³² Individual needlework can be healing too, as in the case of John Craske, a fisherman from the North Norfolk Coast who was disabled by unidentified causes (probably a psychotic structure). Mostly bedridden, the man found a kind of mental balance by embroidering ships battling with the sea. Starting in 1929 he developed his own style which was very unorthodox but therefore expressive, with taut threads in the places where a boat was labouring in a storm.

A final example of stopping the death drive is nicely illustrated in Grimm's fairy tale of 'Rumpelstiltskin'. In this tale a miller boasts to the king that his daughter can spin straw into gold.³³ The king locks the girl up in a room full of straw: if she does not deliver, she will die. A little manikin turns up at night and, in exchange for a gift, spins the room full of gold. Next the king wants a second, bigger room, and again the girl exchanges a gift for the mannikin's services. A third time the king wants a yet bigger room and as the girl has no more valuables the manikin will help her if she will give him her first son. She promises, the room fills up, the king marries the girl and they get a son. The manikin comes to get his due but the mother is so disturbed she gets one chance to escape her fate: if she can name the ugly little devil she

³² Both examples are taken from Julia Blackburn's book, *Threads*, The Delicate Life of John Craske.

³³ The fact that spinning and alchemy are almost synonymous underscores the affinity between textile and fire, as we saw in the juxtaposition of Eve and Prometheus. Fairy tales can be interpreted in many ways; if one focused on the social aspect the miller's daughter who is 'sold' by her father would be a victim from the start.

will be released from her promise. One servant who ventures to the outer realms of the king's reign (the back of beyond) he sees the creature dancing round a fire, yelling his own name. When the next day the Queen pronounces it he splits in two and runs off howling, so the Queen can keep her baby. This seems all pretty straightforward: the manikin belonging to the back of the beyond is the unconscious; he is ugly because he represents a negative drive, more specifically the mania for gold which held the miller, his daughter and the king in its grip. But though the story seemed to indicate a case of like father like daughter (she agreed to sacrifice her son as her father had done with her) after a year she is converted to the life drives, thanks to her attachment to her son, and can break the spell by naming the drive, which is as strange as the behaviour of unconscious drives: Rumpelstiltskin. In what follows I hope to show that articulation is key to realizing one's own unique life, but to explain that we have to look at the different systems of articulation we have.

Textile as a performer: unconscious layers at play

In 'Emotional Textiles: An Introduction' to a 2016 issue of *Textile. Journal on Cloth and Culture* Alice Dolan and Sally Holloway call up their readers to contribute to the discussion about how we can reach a deeper kind of analysis of the relation between cloth and emotions. Didier Anzieu's concept of the Skin-Ego will be very useful there. He calls it 'a vast metaphor', one which 'will inspire psychoanalysts to think more freely and will enrich their spectrum of responses to their patients'.³⁴ In what follows I will use some of Anzieu's insights but my approach will be slightly different as my focus is more on the friction between skin and textile and the expressions that generates. Instead of deriving everything from early skin impressions I will highlight the importance of objects; whereas he focuses on the skin and the tactile I believe we must also see shape and the haptic; and while his examples most often derive from his psychoanalytic praxis mine come from Irish literature. In what follows I want to map human perception as a weaving of which the warp is formed by skin, textile, mental projection, gestural and verbal expression; the woof consists of phantasms, transitional objects and transitional actions. These concepts will be illustrated with three Irish texts, a play, a poem and a novel: Yeats's 'The Player Queen', Meehan's 'The Pattern' and Donoghue's *Slammerkin*.

A warp in five communication channels

Communication, whether in giving or receiving, works via a very layered system and in what follows we will call every new strand in the warp a kind of language.³⁵ Skin is the origin of and hence the metonymy which denotes dermaterial language: this comes into being in the interaction between the foetus' *derma* (Greek for skin) and his *mater* (Latin for mother). As a new-born, the baby cannot clearly distinguish the mother's body from his own. The maternal communication, which happens with the whole body, is felt as an environment, an airy uterus which wraps the baby in touch, taste, smells – all the proximal senses the Jewish creation story did not deem suitable for the human being. And just as the difference between the self and the other is not clear, the one between inside and outside worlds also is not, so when dermaterial language works on the baby's physical skin this leaves a palimpsest of unconscious

³⁴ Dolan and Holloway 6.

³⁵ I call it a language for simplicity's sake but it is really a communication channel, as it always works interactionally. Language has connotations of being only verbal and unidirectional, whereas the five channels marked out here do not only convey messages but they are also organs of perception.

impressions which Anzieu will call the Ego's 'psychological wrapping': the 'mothering environment' 'becomes the inner world of thoughts, images and affects'.³⁶

The next layer to the skin is textile, which is a metonymy of sartorial language. Children may not have much of a say in this in their early years: again, those who clothe us thereby give us the first objects we relate to, which have their imprint on our emotionality. This is not just formed by touch but also by smell and gaze, and by the mother's talk. Some fibres and weaves are loose and so function like a honeycomb, in which strong olfactory messages may be lodged. In these early stages the baby's day clothes and bed clothes function as a kind of mental wrapping embroidered with sensual, gestural and verbal comments, and though they seem part of himself, they are supple and can be played with. At this point, the baby is animated but not articulate, strongly wired with an 'internal vascular and nervous systems' and 'can be understood as complexly connected bundles of threads'.³⁷ As he is educated into different sartorial systems he may lose much of his original tactile riches; maybe the fine-tuned alertness of skin we call *Fingerspitzengefühl* is a faculty that in the early stages was not just lodged in the finger tips but spread over all pores, whorls and openings, but as our perception was channelled by culture it may have ebbed and retreated to our finger tips. Yet in her 'postcard story' in this issue Jan Carson reminisces about how one may remember one's grandmother's knitting, and how a prime carer can convey a tactile perception of time via jumpers as she 'knit you itchy ones for school and Girls' Brigade, a softer yellow number for your fifth birthday. It had a horse on the front with loose strands of brown wool, knotted into a mane. It stretched with you, all the way up to Primary Six'.³⁸ Rita Duffy too is keen on the ways in which sartorial languages can develop: her paintings offer a kind of diary of her developments from school uniform to political relics which she de-fetishizes. Yet she is aware of the fact that clothes too write their palimpsests on the dermaterial channel, and so she represents her school uniform later as a fort and a watchtower, but pitches against those aggressive undertones of clothing the feminine movements of a young woman who will not simply fly by the nets of her culture.

As dermaterial and sartorial languages interact they may build up affects so a child may be pushed to translate this energy into the emotional forms of clothes, and he may refuse the choices foisted upon him by the parent (usually the mother) as we see in 'The Confirmation Suit'. Usually such refusal is experienced by the caregiver as a separation; in Behan's story the protagonist had to stand up not to one but to three women. Little wonder that the boy is not very articulate about it; his annoyance seems to pick out two details, the size of the lapels and the buttons, but that selection cannot be further explained. Sartorial forms are often educational: new fashions give the body and the skin a new language, new attitudes, and so they help to redistribute the energies of the drives. A suit or a dress can be seen as a sieve

³⁶ Didier Anzieu, *The Skin-Ego. A New Translation by Naomi Segal. The History of Psychoanalysis Series* (London: Karnac, 2016), 68.

³⁷ Ingold 42.

³⁸ In *Knitting yarns* Joyce Maynard tells about her mother who, though getting a PhD, was not given an academic job in the 1950s because she was a woman. So instead of letting that disappointment inform domestic life she kept focusing on 'gracious living' and did so by, among other things, knitting 'a pair of mittens one time – one a pig, the other a raccoon – that functioned like puppets' (185), thus literally giving the children a space to play via her sartorial language. This same mother was described in fairy tale terms, as she surprised her daughter, who had asked her to make a sweater for her one-inch-tall teddy bear by providing it: knitted on toothpicks, with button holes and seeds for buttons (193).

which filters out certain ways of bearing oneself. It imposes a certain grid of psychic energy on the wearer as its form may call for a certain carriage which can turn into an attitude, a pose which may lead to a position. We saw at the start that clothes are the agents of metamorphosis: if a person chooses to wear a track- or a sleeping suit for the evening he will move in easier or 'sloppier' ways than the wearer of 'The Skirt' in Ní Chuilleanáin's poem, where the wearer of an opulent formal gown in shining black silk has to negotiate the steps of a grand stairway, learning about the discreet hand(i)work needed to smooth the unruly herd of silk, packed in the skirt, down the steps. It works: she rises to the occasion, even becoming a star in 'dress[ing] a stairway'. Sartorial codes can also function like verbal registers, channelling the wearer into a higher or lower social level, a professional or a relaxed one, or into a religious one. One may wear a religious uniform or, on a more intimate level, 'prayer items', like rosaries or praying beads or a cap embroidered with Qor'an verses underneath the top headgear. Blaise Pascal, the famous mystic-mathematician who had an epiphany about God's presence, combined verbal and vestmental wrapping as he wrote down the central words of his epiphany – *Feu* (fire) and had them sewn into his coat, to have them on him always.

A third communication channel we use to develop our self is the pellicular language. Its name refers simultaneously back to skin language and forward to a film version of a potential self (*pelle en pellicola* meaning respectively skin and film in Italian). This is a kind of inside film of mental images produced by the body image which changes as the other 'languages' gradually educate the personality and metamorphose it into a new stage. The energies this produces must be managed: 'The psychical apparatus has an original pictogrammatic mode of functioning which is more archaic than the primary and secondary modes'.³⁹ 'An imaginary space develops on the basis of the mutual inclusion of the bodies of the mother and the child, through a dual process of sensory and phantasmatic projection'.⁴⁰ Here the term 'body image'⁴¹ comes in handy, it is 'the symbolic process of representing a boundary that functions as a "stabilising image" and protective wrapping'.⁴² It functions like subtitles at the bottom of the film image, except it is an ongoing kind of animated film to one's life. Paradoxically, a 'body image' is simultaneously an image and an 'action', hence it exists in the 'pellicular mode', it is an image in process. The 'mood' of these pictures depends on the cathexis, the kind of positive energy that is in the system. Because of space constraints we will, in what follows, only look at positive images, which will form a phantasm. This as we will see, is a 'film' image which is cathected, coated, with a vital kind of confidence, and is felt to be unique to the self:

This cathexis captures an object that is not interchangeable, ...and must at all costs be kept intact. The function of borders is connected to the imperative of maintaining integrity. The body image belongs to the order of phantasy and secondary elaboration; it is a representation that acts upon the body.⁴³

In my own mapping I situate the pellicular language here not because there would be a strict logical order but because it is that part of the body which allows for the proprioceptive

³⁹ Castoriadis-Aulagnier quoted in Anzieu 41.

⁴⁰ Sami-Ali qt. in Anzieu 41.

⁴¹ The term was launched by Paul Schilder and used by Didier Anzieu, but needs further development.

⁴² René Angelergues qt. in Anzieu 35.

⁴³ René Angelergues qt. in Anzieu 35.

function of the skin-clothes dialogue, for which it provides 'a mental image'.⁴⁴ As the dermaterial stage is mainly tactile and the sartorial mainly haptic (tactile with developing optical faculties) the pellicular channel is the one which starts to articulate the previous (and following) language developments in images. By analogy with biology we might say that the dermaterial and sartorial are epithelial layers while the pellicular is endothelial.⁴⁵ Another question remains as to whether we could call the body images on this inner film mental or 'emotional' images, by which I mean that our mental processes are shot through with emotions just as our skin is wired with them. In art we find many examples of mental images which feed that pellicular layer. One is frequently found all over Europe, that of Mary, mother of God, wearing a wide mantle with which she protects a crowd of people. Such images will chime in with those who have been so fortunate as to having had an early youth with a 'good enough mother' and may call up new hope for people who lacked such a figure. As such a 'wrapping image' will consolidate vague desires from a dermaterial past in images which can hearten the self. Pellicular language is very personal, but can be extended in groups of great coherence. To stay in the field of our example: nuns in some German monasteries had the common mental image that their prayers would form stitches of a coat which would protect the region from evils, so over a certain period they all prayed for the same purpose. In this shared phantasy, the community of nuns would engage in a kind of mental quilting.

Mary protecting the Fuggerei in Augsburg: her mantle covers all the people living in the enclosure provided for them, which was a mediaeval kind of social housing. Photo by the author.

⁴⁴ Anzieu 42.

⁴⁵ It is informed by what Lacan would call the Imaginary dimension of perception, but this brief presentation does not allow us to go into detail here.

⁴⁶ One could see an analogy here between the epithelial and the endothelial tissues mentioned in part one.

⁴⁷ Anzieu 16.

⁴⁸ Anzieu 60.

trained heart; compassion is a muscle for him; he inclines his head when you speak'.⁴⁹ Every person weaves her own aura of gestures, which is like the shadow form of one's temperament. Like a shadow, it is unique to a person in a unique situation, except it is not thrown by exterior light but by interior rhythms. This vibrant silhouette is a person's signature: if one recognizes familiar contours in the distance but without its usual gestural shape we remain unsure as to whom we perceive. The gestural envelope is beautifully pictured by Jan Carson when she describes these 'emotional contours' of her fictive grandmother Gladys, whose 'Fingers do the looking for her' and who are still knitting the hospital air shortly before she dies. But not only people can have a specific gestural profile, places too exude a character. Kevin Barry is very good at catching this layer of communication. So he introduces space in the opening sentence of the short story 'Last days of the Buffalo': 'An indisputable fact: our town are sexed. ... Foley's town, for example, is most certainly a woman – just take in the salt of her estuarine air – but she's not a notably well-mannered or delicate woman. She is in fact a belligerent old bitch'.⁵⁰ Or he has a gang leader, himself a fashionista, sum up the vibes of the City of Bohane: 'He knew the fibres of the place, he knew every last twist and lilt of it'.⁵¹

About the fifth language, *verbal* expression, we will remain very brief as this is not at the centre of our discussion. As it is the most articulated of our communication channels it can be very helpful to remediate a fixation in the other channels. While Anzieu talks about speech as the thing which 'gains its effect by bringing two borders of the Ego into a certain relation' I would rather say it interacts with our five languages thus 'creat[ing] ... modifications in the libidinal economy' so that "'mobile" instinctual cathexes can replace 'static" ones'.⁵² Indeed, the tale of 'Rumpelstiltskin' showed that naming the blockage could solve it and create a healthy family dynamic.

In a well-integrated person all five languages, the dermatorial, sartorial, pellicular, gestural and verbal, interact. Early on in life dermatorial and sartorial sharpen each other's perception, while the pellicular and gestural interact intensely. The relation with the verbal is the most problematic, as this is honed by history more by looking at others than at the self. So even though the human being has, on this map, quite a few instruments to help him on his own personal path, it is always hard to avoid following the sirens of mimesis. Joyce's artist says as much, casting his predicament in terms of textile: 'When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets'.⁵³ Homer's Penelope is a net maker herself, but one who alternates between weaving and undoing, planning consciously during the day and letting the unconscious analyze her night (the Greek *analuein* means to undo, loosen up, unravel). In this sense she is an every(wo)man whose unconscious rearranges what the consciousness planned; like us when we interiorize objects, unravel them into associations and rewind them in our own emotional mechanisms.

⁴⁹ Anne, Enright, *The Gathering* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007), 195.

⁵⁰ Kevin Barry, 'The Last Days of Buffalo', *The Stinging Fly* 5.2 (Winter 2006-2007), 52.

⁵¹ Kevin Barry, *City of Bohane* (London: Vintage, 2012), 4.

⁵² Anzieu 97.

⁵³ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. Seamus Deane (London: Penguin, 1992), 220.

A woof in three moves: phantasms, transitional objects and transitional actions

The one big goal in life, most psychoanalysts will say, is to realize your own, unique destiny. Being able to do that is a combination of luck and being on the alert to one's own signposts in life. The luck consists first and foremost in the kind of prime caregiver one gets. This is usually the mother, or a maternal figure. She is the most fundamental influence, as she imprints the baby with her skin language, her clothes and those she wraps the baby in, night and day; her gestural language and her gaze which are steered by her body image⁵⁴; and of course all this is embroidered by her tone and hummings, her comments and verbal addresses. But then she suddenly disappears for an indeterminate time: a baby has no concept of his context nor of time, so he has to deal with his separation anxiety. This is life in a nutshell: to find the right distance between connection and separation, first to the mother, then to everybody else. In order to find this 'right distance', which the Germans sometimes call '*der Sitz im Leben*', one's 'seat in life', he needs to have the interior objects which can support him at any time. Lacan calls these early objects 'maternal imagoes', because they come into being in the action radius of the mother.⁵⁵ They can be anything which corresponds to the impressions which coagulate in the baby and form affects. Affects, being formless, attach themselves to something to spin them out, to be articulated: a word, a tune, a colour, an image or an object can become a mental beacon. It seems that all day, during sleep, daydream and waking time, the baby is processing impressions, and does so by unravelling objects into associations which weave themselves into inner networks. In this way, we all follow the model of Arachne, as we spin the world into an inner world of our own which becomes our mental 'seat in life'. While the baby's DNA was 'knit together' in his mother's womb he now has to 'knit' or weave an emotional life with the fibres he gets in his domestic realm:

We may extend the domain of the free associative to the world of actual objects, where the way we use them – and how they process us – is another form of the associative. There are many different ways to think; one way we think ourselves is through our engagement with, and use of, evocative objects.⁵⁶

Some of these evocative objects return later in variations, and if they prove 'lasting' we call them phantasms. As we will see W.B. Yeats regularly mentions such evocative objects in his *Autobiographies*, like when he says 'I had as many ideas as I have now, only I did not know how to *choose* from among them those that *belonged* to my life'.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ As Christopher Bollas puts it, the mother's gestural language conveys patterns which are deeply embedded in the child's psyche: 'when the mother communicates complex messages to the infant through forms of behaviour – recurring patterns – assimilated by the infant as inner forms for processing lived experience' (The Evocative Object World 14).

⁵⁵ I explain this in more detail in 'Towards a new grammar of interiority: James Ramsay's circuitous way To the Lighthouse'. Grammar, usage and discourse, by Vandelanotte, Lieven, Wout Van Praet and Lieselotte Brems (eds.) *English Text Construction* 10:2 (2017), 323-344.h

⁵⁶ Christopher Bollas, *The Evocative Object World* (London: Routledge, 2009), 2.

⁵⁷ W.B. Yeats, 'Reveries XXII', *Autobiographies* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1980), 83, my emphasis.

Before we go into the examples it may be noted that phantasms can be further distinguished in three kinds. Each highlights a different way to find the 'seat in life' and each time the psychoanalyst who suggested the term presented it via a textile metaphor.

The first one is Donald Winnicott's '*transitional object*'. This can be anything, but most often it is a blanket or a piece of cloth, as this is the most obvious metonymy and metaphor: it is to be found next to the skin and it resembles and re-members the mother's softness, her skin and fabrics. So a blanket, a piece of fabric, a fluffy toy... can become the stand-in for the mother, helping the child to cope with her absence; exile from bliss seems best overcome with textile. A second way of dealing with separation anxiety is not an object but a play, namely the *Fort-Da* game, where the child uses a bobbin to simulate the mother being Gone/Present. Here we speak of a '*transitional action*', in which the child learns to simulate in order to assimilate, to 'master' emotions so he can contain them. A third basic textile-inspired image to map the workings of psychic life is that of Lacan's 'quilting point' and of his 'Borromean knot'. Some phantasms are stronger than others if they have more integrative power – they manage to stitch, or knot together, all three bandwidths of Lacanian perception, viz. the faculties of inarticulate feeling, conscious seeing and socialized hearing. As these strong phantasms harmonize affects, emotions and evaluations they bring a profound feeling of well-being which one might call an epiphany. The epiphanic phantasm is literally 'fascinating', like the Latin *fascēs*, things bound tightly together. Finally, we add a fourth kind of weaving, picked up from Agamben, but it is not basic, only illustrative of the fact that phantasms can be found in culture, which in turn feed phantasms. So he sees that 'European culture' formed its own identity 'through the dense textual *entrebescamen* (interlacing, interweaving) of phantasm, desire, and word, poetry'.⁵⁸ Celia de Fréine's poem 'Grafting', quoted by Luz Mar Gonzalez-Arias, uses a more domestic register to link literature and knitting when she considers that 'writing of poems' is like 'knitting socks—'round and round / on four needles'; she follows a pattern to produce 'that perfect seam / with no beginning and no end'.⁵⁹

Before we move to Irish literature to check the use of these concepts I want to illustrate them with a fairy tale which is completely focused on textile: Grimm's version of *All-Kinds-of-Fur*, the tale of the princess who, in order to find the right distance to her father, has to live the hard way before she finds that her phantasms really work, and that she can realize them. The story starts off with the death of the protagonist's mother, and a father who threatens her with incest. Finding the right way to hold off the father takes a while: the princess repeatedly asks the fairy godmother for advice, and after having collected three dresses which represent the universe in gradual stages (a dress like the moon, one like the sun, the final one like the stars) she is told to ask her father for a mantle which contains a bit of the skin of all animals in the kingdom. In other words, the princess does not know herself yet, so she wants a bit of everything. Clad in the All-kinds-of-fur, with the three dresses and with three golden objects (a ring, a little spinning wheel and a little golden reel) the girl sets off to find her destiny. That phantasms are not intentional but originate from the unconscious is nicely illustrated here as the idea of the dresses is not invented by the girl but dictated by the fairy

⁵⁸ Giorgio Agamben. *Stanza. Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*. trans. Ronald L. Martinez, *Theory and History of Literature*, Volume 69 (Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) (1977), xviii.

⁵⁹ Celia de Fréine quoted in Luz Mar González-Arias, 'Penelope in Three Movements: A Reading of Dorothy Molloy's "Waiting for Julio"', *Review of Irish Studies in Europe* 2.1 (2018): 225-240, 234.

godmother; also the fact that all dresses fit into one nutshell (in Grimm's version, metaphor for the back of her head?) or will follow the girl underground in a trunk wherever she goes (the Perrault version), stresses that phantasms belong to a deeper imaginative layer than that of the consciousness. Once the girl arrives in the next country she works as a scullery maid until the crown prince gives a ball. At this occasion she makes soup for the king and drops her gold ring in it, then appears at the ball and outshines everybody in her moonlight dress before she disappears again. At the third ball, the protagonist-as-cook is called to be asked about the third portion of soup with the third golden reel in it while she has not had time to take off the starry dress, so when the prince throws off the coat in all-kinds-of-fur he finds out about the princess' true nature and they marry. This story illustrates how phantasms form: one image fits the other and they form a cluster (the dresses on the one hand, the golden objects on the other); these help the princess to take heart and escape her home, so they become transitional objects; but it takes her a good while to see how the phantasms fit in real life: with each ball the transitional objects are turned into transitional actions as the princess' personality makes the prince dance with her and eat her soup. This leads to the epiphanic phantasm where all objects converge and the vague personality symbolized by 'all-kinds-of-fur' can be thrown off as the princess comes into her own and becomes the queen of another kingdom than her father's.

Mothers' weavings: The Player Queen, The Pattern, *Slammerkin*

Disdressing the Queen

Among Irish writers maybe Yeats is the one who was most preoccupied with realizing his own self – apart from Joyce and, as Anne Fogarty remarks, maybe Heaney. But when Yeats describes his 'mask theory' it echoes an individual's gradual awareness of his phantasms as he tries to 'choose from among [his ideas] ... those that belonged to my life'. Elsewhere he specifies how he wants to realize those ideas:

Among subjective men (in all those, that is, who *must spin a web out of their own bowels*) the victory is an *intellectual daily recreation of all that exterior fate snatches away*, and so that fate's antithesis ... We begin to live when we have conceived life as tragedy.⁶⁰

So the poet indicates that the body images, which course in the pellicular channel, have to be 'spun out of his bowels' to be embodied in real life. Even though conditions in the exterior world are tough, the mental images, in 'daily recreation', have to be realized so that the poet can fulfill his destiny, even in the face of fate (which was sometimes unfriendly, yet unrequited love and 'mad Ireland' could spur him into song).

This is also the case with the protagonist of Yeats's *The Player Queen*. It is about an actress, Decima, who is fascinated by a song invented by her husband who is the acting troupe's playwright. The text is about a mother who sang some lullaby to her baby about 'a flake of yellow foam / That dropped upon my thigh'; 'How therefore could she help but braid / The gold upon my hair,/ And dream that I should carry / The golden top of care?'.⁶¹ The song even goes on to say the mother was so convinced of her daughter's destination that 'all the while her needle pulled / The gold and silver thread. / She pulled the thread and bit the thread

⁶⁰ Yeats, *Autobiographies* 189, my emphasis.

⁶¹ Yeats, *The Player Queen* in *The Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1977), (407-408).

/ And made a golden gown, / She wept because she dreamt that I / was born to wear a crown'.⁶² The 'yellow foam' is a typical phantasm in that it is picked up from a seemingly odd random song. Yet it has a special appeal for Decima; she is said to have been a foundling, so the fact that the song is about a mother who has a great wish for her child appeals to her. Moreover, the phantasm changes constantly as the 'yellow foam' changes into 'golden thread', a 'golden gown' and 'the golden top of care'. Especially the variations on gold strike Decima as she is the lead actress of the group and feels like a prima donna; the step to being a first lady plays on her mind. However, 'exterior fate', as Yeats calls it, stipulates that Decima has been hired to play Noah's subdued wife. Sticking to her phantasms, Decima refuses to do so and hides until the real Queen enters, totally distressed at the prospect of having to officiate as Queen. Decima is happy to take over so the Queen passes Decima her golden coronation dress which fits Decima perfectly. Supported by this token of authority, Decima manages to perfectly dress the distortion of reality. Replacing the queen in sartorial and gestural terms she proves she is so successful in this 'transitional acting' that the people acknowledge her as their new Queen. It is a hilarious play but interesting, illustrating how phantasms (the song about the golden objects) can become epiphanic (Decima feels so wrapped in the idea of a queenly role that she refuses the sad reality of having to play a subservient role), further turning into transitional objects (the coronation dress) which lead to transitional acting in the 'coronation scene'. It also shows how, if phantasms are well developed on the 'pellicular' layer, the sartorial tokens (the heavily brocaded coronation dress) sit well on the skin and attune the person to a new gestural language which befits the new station. At the end the golden dress functions again as an epiphanic phantasm as it combines Decima's deepest wishes, her body image and the symbolic order into which she stepped.⁶³

Paula Meehan's shared patterns

The second text to illustrate the above is, chronologically speaking, Paula Meehan's 'The Pattern'. First I was surprised that no one in the workshop had selected it, but it turned out that everybody thought another participant would pick the poem. As we cannot leave this out I will analyze it here. Like Yeats and his Player Queen, Meehan's speaker notices a few things in her direct reality that she hates: 'the sting of her hand' and a dress, worn by her own mother, now recycled: 'To me it spelt poverty, /the stigma of the second hand'. But while I fully agree with Anne Fogarty's observation that 'The Pattern' 'explored her vexed relationship with her mother', I do not think that the 'break with the maternal has not been possible yet, preventing her from moving on to the next step in the construction of the self. The perpetuation of gender roles proves all too powerful and paralyzes the young protagonist [who is not able to break] ... through received notions of femininity and their association with space consignments', as Gonzalez-Arias put it.⁶⁴ On the contrary: though the mother did not have much leeway, neither financially nor psychologically (she had no time for narcissistic questions about how she felt), she did break the dictator-like culture she herself experienced

⁶² Yeats, *The Player Queen* 407.

⁶³ It is interesting to note that Yeats could only write this play after he had given up on it: it had been his intention to make it a tragedy but the story itself (the writer's unconscious) took over and turned it into a comedy. Considering the topic – how phantasms work – knowing that the developments in this play were unintended by the author adds to the authenticity to the play.

⁶⁴ Gonzalez-Arias 41.

from her father, and, much more importantly, had a deeply positive attitude inbuilt in her 'system', which she conveyed in all five of her communication channels.

First of all the mother is not just aiming at functionality, she always makes space for play, for a break, for things to happen in the margin. Even though she is merely scrubbing 'the floor with Sunlight soap, / An armreach at a time' she is not a maniac at her cleaning, but would 'break for a cup of tea, then start again / ... with lavender polish'. And again, life may not have quite a gold rim but a lavender one. This flower brings in the connotations of a whole purple world, later extended to a playful kind of universe as the children can join in the mother's occupations, but only to rim her hard work with play: 'She'd call us in and let us skate around / in our socks. We'd grow solemn as planets / in an intricate orbit about her.' The orbit is indeed intricate: while the interaction between daughters and mothers is always strewn with elements both negative and positive, here even the negative ones, summed up in the second hand dress, turn out to have a positive lining. First, because the dress turns out to be a transitional object: together with the 'three new copybooks' 'and a bright /bronze nib' these things allow the speaker to go to school which again offers the chance to emulate the mother: she will not just move within the domestic world, 'An armreach at a time', but will be 'sizing / up the world beyond our flat patch by patch / daily after school'. Thanks to the sense of outreach the mother's mere gestural language implanted in the daughter's imagination, the daughter feels confident enough to explore 'city street to city square to diamond' and further dream about being carried 'to Zanzibar, Bombay, the Land of the Ethiops'. But the mother does not only provide clothes as a transitional object, 'a bright /bronze nib, St. Christopher strung on a silver wire' is equally important, and is actually a transitional object par excellence, he being the patron of travellers. So again the mother does not only provide material means to support the child but also images to help her outgrow the dress, so the sartorial form is lined with impulses, so that the eldest daughter can be helped – in many enjambements – to 'pass // [the dress]...on ... to the next in line' and face the 'uncharted realms'.

Actually I think that 'The Pattern' is to Meehan what 'Digging' is to Heaney. While the Northern Irish poet referred to his father's activity, the Southern one refers to her mother's; the 'spade' is replaced by 'a sewing machine' and 'steel needles'. One difference is maybe that Meehan's poem is permeated with indications that the mother herself has her own 'uncharted realms', she is a (sartorial) artist in her own right. The poem is strewn with indications to her ability to metamorphose things. Like Heaney's smith in 'The Forge', and the divine smith who must have made Blake's Tyger, Meehan's mother figure is connected to fire and darkness, albeit a domestic one: 'She must have stayed up half the night / to finish the dress. I found it airing at the fire' Or she works in 'Late summer, cold enough for a fire, / she works by fading light / to remake an old dress for me'. Like 'the short-pitched ring' of the smith, this mother's 'needles sparked and clacked, / the only other sound a settling coal or her sporadic mutter / at a hard part in the pattern.' This mother is an inverted Penelope, one who does not even allow herself to sleep, rest and dream, to unravel herself: instead, she wants to knit and sew decent clothes for her children, textile ways which will lead them over her own horizon which is hemmed in by pregnancies, labour (in all senses of the word) and the occasional rest among the roses in the park. But she passes her unconscious, uncharted realms on to her children: in her capacity as a shape-changer of clothes, closely connected to fire, the mother does not only provide material care but also the immaterial patterns and habits of accuracy that will turn out to be vital to the poetic speaker. Like the mother in Rita Duffy's works, Meehan's mother figure reminds the child that imagination needs discipline. This becomes most clear when

mother and daughter are involved in the preparation of a new knitting project of the mother's. Here we get an insight straight into the 'inside film' of the speaker:

Sometimes I'd have to kneel / An hour before her by the fire, / A skein around my outstretched hands, / While she rolled wool into balls. / If I swam like a kite too high / Amongst the shadows on the ceiling / Or flew like a fish in the pools / Of pulsing light, she'd reel me firmly / Home, she'd land me at her knees. // Tongues of flame in her dark eyes, / She'd say, 'One of these days I must / Teach you to follow a pattern.'⁶⁵

The pattern the mother has been teaching the daughter throughout the poem is an encouragement to be better, to emulate rather than to imitate. Like Heaney's male ancestors, Meehan's foremother(s) were not emancipated practically, but they had their own dignity. And so the poets want to emulate them, Heaney turning the literal digging into a metaphorical job while Meehan will extend her research of life in a more horizontal imagery, travelling mentally into 'uncharted realms'. And again the atmosphere of 'The Forge' is realized here as the 'kneeling' speaker senses a sacred moment, as is often the case with an epiphanic phantasm (like the burning bush to Moses). Only this time there is neither altar nor a priest, no hierarchy, just a 'secular sacredness' which reconciles mother and daughter into the right distance, a harmonious connection on the level of the unconscious – which is what the word religion originally meant: *religare*, to connect. Like in 'The Player Queen' the epiphanic phantasm combines images, here fibre with fire, and they set the girl's imagination somersaulting so that she 'swam like a kite' 'Or flew like a fish'. The confusion, which reminds of Bottom's confounded speech just after he wakes up from his *Midsummernight's Dream* is cleared by the mother who reels her dreamy daughter 'firmly / Home'.⁶⁶ The fact that the 'reeling home' is paused by an enjambement indicates that there is some leeway between the two: they each have their uncharted realms, but are – here – connected in an intimate way. That the mother too has unfathomed depths is shown in the fact that the intent to 'teach you to follow a pattern' comes from a deep need, shown by 'Tongues of flame in her dark eyes'. This is an image directly borrowed from the language of revelation, of epiphany itself; yet the mother balances her Pentecostal fire with discipline and suggests the daughter will need to find her own balance.

One of the charms of this poem is that it not only presents us with a beautiful epiphanic phantasm but also with the way mother and daughter came to it. Where the dermaterial and the sartorial layers were still filled with annoyance (the 'sting of her hand/across my face' is almost tattooed into the skin memory) the mechanism of the pellicular layer brings relief: 'A skein around my outstretched hands, / While she rolled wool into balls'. This winding-unwinding movement echoes that which Yeats invokes when he wants to be taken up into the communion of the 'sages standing in God's holy fire/ As in the gold mosaic of a wall' asking them to 'Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre, / And be the singing-masters of my soul'.⁶⁷ This is exactly what the mother does: she communes with her daughter, and becomes the

⁶⁵ Paula Meehan, 'The Pattern', *The Man Who Was Marked By Winter* (Washington: Eastern Washington University Press, 1994), 22.

⁶⁶ When Bottom awakens after his 'Midsummer Night' in the woods he is so dazzled by the experience that his senses are mixed up: 'man is but a patched fool if he will offer to say what methought I had. The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was.' (907)

⁶⁷ Yeats, *Collected Poems* 217.

stitching mistress of her works. This interaction leads to the so-called transitional action where the speaker-poet realizes her vocation, translating her mother's work from sartorial into verbal: 'I dreamt a robe of colour / So pure it became a word'. In this sense I agree with Fogarty's remark that an 'elegy for family members' in Meehan's hands becomes something 'peculiar' in 'the sense that for Meehan poetry participates in a continuous and ever-shifting dialogue with the dead'.⁶⁸ In this text the poet cleverly inserts the mother's communication of 'complex messages to the infant through forms of behaviour – recurring patterns – assimilated by the infant as inner forms for processing lived experience'.⁶⁹ Her 'inner forms' ('dreamt robes') will be a model to Meehan who will be good at recycling old poetry forms (like villanelles) to new use. These will benefit many, even though they always spring from the singular source of her self. As Jody Allen-Randolph puts it, 'In ... poems as ... "The Pattern", we see [how] ... The possibility that the communal and creative can coexist, with neither limiting the other ... Yet her voice remains, for all its communality, a solitary one'.⁷⁰ And Boland, who observes that 'Kavanagh's poem to his mother holds a mirror up to "The Pattern"' states that 'Both commend the idea that ties of community can be inventories of the imagination'.⁷¹ Inventories indeed, which have come into being thanks to the poet's exploration of her mother's mothering, an exploration in terms of textile.

Worlds hinging on a slammerkin

In Emma Donoghue's *Slammerkin* there is not one but three mother-daughter relationships which are mediated by textile. As the title of this historical novel indicates, the slammerkin is important – it will turn out to be a hinging phantasm, connecting inner and outer worlds, past and future, Eros and Thanatos; one connected to red things and prostitution, one to white things and upper class life (the first to 'cullies, the second to 'members' of Parliament), showing the ambiguities of the mid-eighteenth-century mentality. Mary Saunders is the daughter of a revolutionary father and a subservient mother, and this split, along with her living on the eve of the enlightenment's turn into romanticism, forms Mary's perception.⁷² Curiously we never get a full-fledged portrait of her biological mother, Susan; the main glimpse we get is Mary's description of her mother's eyes being red-rimmed from too much needlework in a dark damp room. Sue encourages her daughter to remain a humble girl, glad with her dun school uniform and glad with her fate to become no more than a lowly seamstress. But the object(ive)s Sue offers her daughter only evoke an aversion in Mary and a wish for a different life, one which is summed up in her image of a 'red ribbon'. Like the Player Queen she picked up this phantasm from an odd, fleeting perception: Mary noticed it in a harlot's hair and is 'taken' by it. The more her mother presses her fate upon her the more Mary's imagination veers towards another destiny: 'I have a wish to be something better than a seamstress or a maid'.⁷³ The move from the dermaterial image of Susan's red-rimmed eyes to the sartorial phantasm of the red ribbon is further endorsed by gestural language when

⁶⁸ Anne Fogarty, "'Hear Me and Have Pity": Rewriting Elegy in the Poetry of Paula Meehan', *An Sionnach* 5.1-2 (Spring/Fall 2009): 213-25, 224.

⁶⁹ Bollas 14.

⁷⁰ Jody Allen-Randolph, 'Text and Context: Paula Meehan', *An Sionnach* 5.1-2 (Spring/Fall 2009): 5-16, 13.

⁷¹ Eavan Boland, 'Unfinished Business: The Communal Art of Paula Meehan' *An Sionnach* 5.1-2 (Spring & Fall 2009): 17-24, 23.

⁷² The materials and textiles in this novel also figure as codes for queer female relations but this remains beyond the scope of our focus on the mother-child relations in this triad of texts.

⁷³ Donoghue 24.

Mary finds how the red ribbon's attraction is so strong it makes her cross the boundary of her old self. Meeting a peddler who offers her a ribbon for a kiss, 'the girl Mary Saunders had never known herself to be took a step closer'.⁷⁴ The ribbon will be such a strong phantasm that it will cause transitional action when the mother notices the pregnancy; when offered the excuse to say the rape happened under knife threat she does not take the opportunity to be excused but fully confesses, articulating her phantasm verbally: 'He had a red ribbon ... and I had a wish for it.'⁷⁵ Thereon Susan casts Mary out, which may well be interpreted, as Marisol Morales-Ladron observes, as an instance of 'matrophobia':

Matrophobia can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mother's bondage. [...] Our personalities seem to blur and overlap dangerously with our mothers; and, in a desperate attempt to know where mother ends and daughter begins, we perform radical surgery.⁷⁶

Throughout the rest of the story the phantasm of the red ribbon will accompany Mary: once cast out by her mother she is rescued by the very harlot whose red ribbon she so admired and who becomes a second mother, or tutelage figure; she uses the ribbon's dye to rouge her lips, they mention it in songs, and when Mary, after a short spell in a Magdalene institution, finds Doll dead she takes her red ribbon and uses it as an umbilical connection, on her way to her third mother figure, Mrs Jones who lives in Monmouth. Mrs Jones turns out to be as subservient as Mary's mother and a seamstress as well, but her daily work involves her in top textile work, the highest registers in sartorial language: Mrs Jones is into the technicalities of the contemporary 'haute couture'. This new stage is marked by a new phantasm Mary finds upon her arrival, and this time it is a white slammerkin. It has all the features of an epiphanic phantasm, as all communication channels seem to converge. The slammerkin is connected to a new dermaterial experience, as her new boss and mother introduces the girl to a much more comfortable home where food is regular, warmth is provided and fabric is omnipresent; she gives Mary the feel of a new sartorial skin, much richer in feel than all the previous ones she was familiar with: 'Looking up into the silvery folds, Mary promised herself something: she would learn to make clothes like these. And what's more, someday she'd wear them. Her fingers closed on the ice-white hem; the pile felt as deep as fur'.⁷⁷ The white slammerkin also brings a new haptic quality to Mary's perception. When Mrs Jones introduces her to the garment 'This is Mrs. Morgan's slammerkin, ... a loose sort of morning gown' the feel immediately connects to a vision of the human shape that would support it: "'Is she beautiful?" she asked, on impulse'.⁷⁸ On the gestural level too, Mary is taking steps forward. Mary noticed this first when she learned sewing at the Magdalen institution: 'She never anticipated that halfway through the morning, as she watched her needle duck in and out of the cloth like an otter in a stream, she would feel pleasure like heat in her fingers'.⁷⁹ That this newly layered identity is permeating most of Mary's channels is confirmed by Mrs Jones when she observes that Mary is a fine embroiderer: 'it's in your bones.'⁸⁰ One channel feeds into the

⁷⁴ Emma Donoghue, *Slammerkin* (New York/London: Harcourt, 2000), 25.

⁷⁵ Donoghue 29.

⁷⁶ Adrienne Rich quoted in Morales Ladron, 'The Representation of Motherhood in Emma Donoghue's *Slammerkin*', *Irish University Review: A Journal of Irish Studies* 39.1 (2009): 107-121, 117.

⁷⁷ Donoghue 165.

⁷⁸ Donoghue 165.

⁷⁹ Donoghue 93.

⁸⁰ Donoghue 195.

other, and the pellicular level adapts. Between the Magdalen institution and her arrival at Monmouth, Mary has a dream, 'the best dream she'd ever had. She was on horseback... plaited in its mane were ruby ribbons. ... her cheeks were untouched snow. The white velvet of her riding-habit flared'.⁸¹ Not only will this dream image materialize upon her arrival, but she is also introduced to a wholly new set of images when her boss sets her to embroider the white slammerkin with apples and snakes. When curious about this paradise-like imagery she learns that it is Mrs Jones herself who devised the pattern which Mary will execute in the following months. Like in Meehan's case this third mother figure helps Mary to further discipline her imagination: leaving the era of her gaudy London clothes behind, Mary now understands that 'Fine cloth, that was what mattered ... And the very best dresses ... were the ones that contained months of hard labour: edges stiff with handsewn lace or knobbed with heading. There was no way to cheat or skimp on it: beauty was work made flesh'.⁸²

But though Mary works hard at the configuration of her new self, following the red ribbon phantasm which leads her away from her first mother's lifestyle (building up strength of will and of financial resources), this determination gets into knots with the world building up around the white slammerkin's phantasm, and instead of an epiphany the clash will lead to catastrophe. Repeating the clash between Arachne and Athena, Mary proves her worth as a 'motherless' but able girl in a humble town. Not only can she appreciate good fabrics, 'be true to them' and enhance them, sewing and embroidering them, but she also knows which gestural language they demand:

Something else Mary was learning: what mattered just as much as what someone wore was how they carried it off. The best silk sack gown could be ruined on a stooping, countryish customer. It was all in the gaze, the stance, the set of the shoulders. Mary set herself to learning how to move as if the body – in all its damp indignity – was a sleek and upright as the dress'.⁸³

The white slammerkin she embroiders by day and dreams of by night becomes not an epiphanic phantasm but one which fixates her. Her rival here is not a Greek goddess but the time's mentality, embodied by Mrs Jones, her ugly old clients and society at large which is hypocritical in not allowing equal chances to both poor and rich. Not merit is important, but hierarchy. On top of this major disadvantage comes the fact that, in the few years of her life, Mary Saunders has suffered too many traumas: the cut from the mother, the misfortunes that led to her existence as a prostitute in London, and the frustration of having to work on a hand-held dream she cannot realize for herself.

The drive ... irrupts repeatedly into the psychical wrapping during both sleeping and waking hours, causing micro-traumas whose qualitative variation and quantitative accumulation, once they exceed a certain threshold, constitute what Masud Khan (1983) has called a cumulative trauma. This means that the psychical apparatus must find a way, on the one hand, to discharge the overload and on the other to restore the integrity of the psychical wrapping.⁸⁴

The ensuing murder scene is neatly prepared in the description of Mary's communication channels. On the one hand there is the fitting of the white slammerkin at which the rich client

⁸¹ Donoghue 113.

⁸² Donoghue 191.

⁸³ Donoghue 191.

⁸⁴ Anzieu 240.

fails to 'carry it off'; this makes Mary identify all the more with the form she made for herself. On the other hand, Mrs Jones tells her that she dispensed with Mary's savings so that half her life's work is gone. So she steps into the other half, fits the slammerkin and, like in a fairy tale, it fits. At that moment all her channels of perception (skin, textile, embroidered and inner images, gestural self, verbal expression) coagulate in a horrible fixation:

Her skin soured, leaking poison through every pore, contaminating every stitch of the silver embroidery. The velvet hung on her like a snakeskin. She couldn't peel it off now; there'd be nothing left of her. Unable to speak, she shook her head'.⁸⁵

As both gestural and verbal expression fails her, skin and dress are stuck to her personality and in this paralysis of the mind the murder happens, a *passage à l'acte* brought about by the unconscious:

'Now Mary had come into her own. Now she was the Queen. ... the first blow was so easy. It happened before Mary knew it – *as if the cleaver had taken its own simple revenge on behalf of the dress*. Mary didn't know what had happened until she saw blood make a fine spray across her milky-white bodice'.⁸⁶

While Mary is frozen in the ice-white cloth, symbolizing the strictness and deep impact of the times' cultural codes, the red ribbon winds and twines itself in Mary's actions as she murders her mistress, and the blood sprays on the body. It is not that Mary did not love Mrs Jones: it is society which blocks her. This has been happening all along, as the lower orders were not expected to have emotions: 'The Widow tanner was of the opinion that it didn't befit a servant girl to be sensitive, who would have to make her way in the world'.⁸⁷ Athena wins: the upper classes will destroy her, and, even like Arachne, let her hang in the end. And like the Greek girl, Mary Saunders wins too: throughout her time in prison and till her ultimate moment she literally sticks to the phantasm of the red ribbon which enables her to keep all the different dimensions of herself together. As in the moment before she will be hanged 'Halfway down her stays, Mary's bound hands found the ribbon ... Doll's red ribbon. She wound it round her numb fingers, tight enough to hurt. ... *Chin high, me old muck-mate*'.⁸⁸ In the end, Mary dies in character, jumping to her death. With Doll's ribbon closely around her skin, words echoing Doll's proud attitude and her mistress's love, Mary, in the nick of death, combines skin, textile, attitude and active language in a final 'upbeat' end.

Ranging from considerations on textile as an instigator or conceptual, social and psychic interaction this introduction hopes to have introduced the reader to the contributions which, in good *RISE* tradition, approach the phenomenon of textiles in texts from many different angles. The issue opens with a writer and an artist, an art historian and an anthropologist who discuss several aspects of textile. While Anne Enright looks back in an interview on what accoutrements meant to her in her youth, Jan Carson's newly developing genre of postcard fiction goes farther back to depict the textile aspect in the lives of two Protestant grandmothers in Northern Ireland, one working-class, one middle-class, both steeped in the creation of textiles. Next, Rita Duffy combines her grandparents' past, her

⁸⁵ Donoghue 348

⁸⁶ Donoghue 349, my emphasis.

⁸⁷ Donoghue 197.

⁸⁸ Donoghue 383.

mother's and her own developments in an overview of her work in which textile in paintings and installations from 2003 till 2017 figure in many different ways.

The next section combines three reflections of an interdisciplinary kind. First Barbara Baert uses several portraits of Elizabeth I to illustrate how a sieve can function as a strong political symbol; this picture later widens into more philosophical dimensions in which the sieve turns out to offer a paradigm for a special kind of interactional, Deleuzian thinking. As the sieve is an object formed by an arch-form of weaving, it puts women's practices in the foreground and does so in an anti-dualist way. Next Dominic Bryan looks at 'The Material Value of Flags: Politics and Space in Northern Ireland', where he reveals a curious discrepancy between the attention given to ideology by certain groups and the lack of care the same groups show in the treatment of their flags. In a third contribution, Hedwig Schwall discusses Rita Duffy's work, highlighting the importance of images of passage, considering her omnipresent white handkerchief as a 'transitional object' in a rich panoply of variations.

The volume's third and fourth sections follow images and techniques of textile throughout Irish poetry, whereby the third group looks at eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century poets while the last group is firmly situated in contemporary work and its runners-up. Lucy Collins' "'What's far fetch'd, and dearly bought": The Politics of Clothing in Poetry from Eighteenth-Century Ireland' gives us a colourful picture, based on Protestant poetry and pamphlets and other historical sources, of the effects of 'enlightened' times on fashion in the middle and upper classes in that century. Her account even shows that that century had its own Marilyn Monroe, a 'nymph' who disports the 'beauties too of limbs below' which show when the 'indulgent gale blows high'. Moving from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, Charles Armstrong's 'Poetic Industry: the Modernity of the Rhyming Weavers' focuses on three figures who combine work in the textile industry with writing in Ulster Scots. Sadly, all three poets – James Orr, Thomas Beggs and David Herbison – lose their job with the mechanization of the textile industry, thus prefiguring the end of Belfast as 'Linenopolis' and the laying off of workers in Derry's textile factories, events that Rita Duffy commemorates in her installation. (The later redundancy wave is due to global capitalism rather than mechanization; in future we may get a combination of these.) Yet for each poet their loss of work has one positive aspect: to Orr it means that he can move from local to transnational and trans-era space as he participates in the Great Dialogue of world literature. Thomas Beggs' 'wife's lament' deplores the move from domestic to industrial production, curiously cherishing her old spinning wheel more than the memory of her late husband; and when David Herbison lost his job as representative for a Belfast-based firm of linen-merchants, he started writing poetry in the vein of the Scribe and his cat. Only here the writer complains that a mouse nibbles at his web of poetry, stealing some of its lines, while he himself steals from Robert Burns: thus in this 'curse poem' the robber is robbed. With Adrian Paterson's "'Stitching and Unstitching": Yeats material and immaterial' we move to the grand old man, and the reader immediately finds himself in a Morris-made interior of purple tapestries where Rosicrucians dream up an extensive rooms of purple webs. The article moves to Yeats's sisters as they are worked by 'the Gorgon May Morris' but then, at the time of 'Adam's Curse', set up their own 'labour of stitching and beautiful old books' in the Dun Emer industries, a co-operative that marries handicraft with Irishness using 'Irish paper, Irish linen and Irish wool for the tapestry and carpets'. Cotton, being symbolic of the British Empire, is deselected. Highlighting the connection between the rhapsode's work being a matter of 'stitched verse', and a woman's job (with Florence Farr, Lady Gregory and others performing) the article shows

how feminine values grow in importance in Yeats's work, culminating in 'Veronica's Napkin' and in 'Cuchulain Comforted', which Paterson interprets as 'Morris's socialist collective of makers ... in ... heavenly version' where 'stitchers and singers' combine.

Catriona Clutterbuck's "A Thread to the Afterlife" – Textiles and the Otherworld in Irish Poetry: Yeats, Boland, Heaney and Meehan' further explores the links between material and immaterial networks which refer, link, knot or contain. As she looks at the complicated bargains Yeats makes via hair, a red-rose bordered hem, 'A Coat' and many other instances of cloths (of heaven and earth) her search homes in on 'Veronica's Napkin': again it is the feminine models who may lead out of old labyrinths to start afresh from nothing. Indeed 'loose thread' and 'coagulate of stuff' bring Yeats to an alternative model of the afterlife in 'Cuchulainn Comforted', where the 'lowly work' on his shroud 'facilitates much deeper depersonalization' than in the embroidered 'Coat' he swished away like a torero in the 1910s. Like Paterson who saw Yeats moving towards feminine values, Clutterbuck notices how Heaney in 'Hermit Songs' replaces gun and spade with crewel needles, and in 'The Suit' smiles at 'Cuchulainn Comforted', welcoming clothes 'going for a song'. In 'The Butts' Heaney echoes Rita Duffy's purely sartorial portraits, 'clearly affirm[ing] ... clothing's presence-cum-absence' – except of course poetry enables synaesthesia, while painting would not allow the spectator to sniff 'tonic unfreshness'. Further Boland and Meehan prove to be brilliant foremothers, agile with text(ile)s, weaving seams into everyday matter to keep sacred secrets of a feminine past, to knot memories into tapestries, to weave the dead back into the textures of daily life. Anne Karhio's focus on Peter Sirr's 'A Journal' also deals mainly with 'the fabric of loss'. Once more femininity seems to prevail as the Irish poet tries to morph his melancholy into mourning while singing in the style of his lost Finnish beloved. The best way for the love-lorn poet to take agency again is to use her tradition, so when Sirr sings about 'These shirts I borrow from the Finnish' he uses motifs, moods and grammar from the *Kanteletar*, the 'feminine companion to the masculine *Kalevala*'. So this scriptotherapy in which he is 'stitching a shirt for the loss of you' is a truly transcultural exercise in poetry. His clothes are rimmed with emotion as in 'full of hems/ and rustlings, sleeved with promise / that fell to lace, eloquence, nothing.' But while Sirr's singer hopes that 'the sheets will serve us, / the linen will unite us' this is harder for Luz Mar Gonzalez-Arias' Penelopes. Giving many interesting side-glances at Penelopes throughout Irish literature, such as Marina Carr's the Mai and the beautiful poems by Anne Hartigan and Angela Bourke, Gonzalez-Arias focuses on Dorothy Molloy's long poem 'Waiting for Julio'. But unlike the Greek heroine who kept on the path of sanity thanks to her weaving, the waiting period of the newly married Maria can only be bridged by 'embroidering his name // in the linen' and by the frantic rhythms of her laundering the household linen. Yet when her husband comes home he turns out to be an inverted Odysseus in the sense that he is the one who does not recognize his family rather than the other way round: he is a victim of PTSD. Pat Coughlan's 'So am I detached / From the fabric which claims me' looks at six poems which illustrate women's vital, intimate relations to fabric while offering a panoramic overview from poetry by Boland (1980s), McGuckian (1990s) and Ní Chuillenáin (2010s). Each of the close readings shows how women, because of their close relationship with the magical action of spinning (and sometimes, if gender roles allow, weaving), are feared in many different civilizations: indeed the Fates, Clotho, Lachesis and Atropos who represent respectively childbirth, life-span and death, as well as their mother Anangkè, are key figures of Greek mythology. Coughlan deftly picks thumbnail scenes which summarize women's 'unlived' lives, going from a rural past in America which remain enclosed in the 'embroidery

hoop', 'in the shiver of silk and dimity', to McGuckian's 'The Cloth Mother' which chimes in with psychoanalytic findings of Ettinger and Winnicott. Women stand up, like 'Clotho' who combines the Greek goddess Fate and the Christian figure of Mary in the woman who 'becomes her own "distaff" and whirls the spindle of herself to unwind the thread of herself. Coughlan's gallery also offers pictures of historical figures like Ní Chuilleanáin's sister who, in 'The Skirt', learns to smooth the unruly herd of her silken fabrics on her way to the underworld; a second voice, imitating the shuttling and stretching movements involved in weaving, knitting and treating wool, shuttles between the poor, Maria Edgeworth and relief helpers in the US, giving us a long-overdue redeeming picture of the care Edgeworth gave the people she 'mothered'. Shirin Jindani's essay rounds off the collection, referring to two of Muldoon's central motifs, of poetry being a kind of weaving and of the politics and poetics of flax and linen. Jindani shows how syntax and alliteration belong to the woof of the text or the horizontal axis, while vocabulary, stanza form and rhyme structure are situated on the warp or vertical axis. Inspired by Sappho and Pindar, she further equates lyre and loom which form webs of song, then moves closer to home observing with Jonathan Swift how 'Wit and weaving had the same beginning'. Jindani then proceeds to show the looming influences in Muldoon's work, paying special attention to the 'patterned weave of "misreadings"' he uses in the poem 'Errata'. Finally, 'Glad Rags' represents 'the fabric of society' in Muldoon's own family history, where the 'Murder Triangle' and 'Linen Triangle' overlapped, showing the sad connections between textile symbols and terrorism.

In the making of this issue of *RISE* the women weavers have been a vast majority. Of the fourteen contributors eleven are women, and the topics were often women writers, women weavers or women wearers, all leading to new concepts inspired by feminine aesthetics, which tend to foreground the complex realities of textiled bodies, woven senses and colourful, intricate interactions. Also, the big technical support behind this publication is a young woman, Rebecca Jackson, who did a superb job stitching the whole thing together and hitching it neatly on its digital pegs. Also KU Leuven in the form of Fred Truyen, is instrumental in the upkeep of the *RISE* platform, as well as EFACIS.

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