

The Beast in the Closet: Interrogating the Trauma of Sibling Incest in Emma Donoghue's Neo-Victorian Novel *The Wonder*

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Abstract

Emma Donoghue's neo-Victorian novel *The Wonder* (2016) is a remarkable exploration of the Victorian era's indifference towards the issues of woman and child safety against the heinous crimes of sexual abuse. The horror of sibling incest, which eventually develops the sense of guilt within the protagonist and gradually isolates her from the entire extrinsic world, has been taken into consideration for the analysis of the unusual narratives of tremendous shock and trauma that the novel enterprises. The paper examines incest as a trope for inflicting everlasting trauma and seeks to locate if amelioration is at all achievable for the abused 'body'. The intended study further interrogates the placid indifference of the contemporaneous behavioural patterns of the societal institutional bodies of family, religion, and law, while encountering the forever forbidden taboo of incest.

Keywords: dysfunctional family, fasting body, incest trauma, neo-Victorian fiction, sibling incest.

Defining herself as an Irish lesbian voice, Emma Donoghue set her historical fiction *The Wonder* (2016) in Ireland. Positing the novel right after the Irish famine and in middle of nineteenth century the novelist inculcated within the story an array of myriad interpretations. The trauma regarding the Great Irish Famine is lingering in the narrative as an aftermath of the tragedy but without any direct reference to the past events. The famine is muted. By silencing the trauma oozing out of the socio-economic catastrophe due to the famine, as if, the intention was to expose and thereby emphasise the inconceivable horrors of domestic life. Within this socio-cultural rupture, the novelist involves sibling incest as a trope for irreducible traumatic experiences. The text which is taken into consideration for the discussion about this "open secret" (Sacco, 2009, p. 2) divulges the shocking narration of sibling incest. Emma Donoghue's revisionism is an attempt to extend beyond the horizontals of the preconceived limitations about aesthetics in connection to incest.ⁱ The novel claims in its own right to enterprise a plethora of "important questions about ethical, philosophical and psychological matters" (Donoghue qtd. in Ue, 2012, p. 102), without any prominent answers. The sequential analysis in this article is concentrated upon the rewriting of the past with an intension to unveil the trauma, hitherto unspoken. Further, the occurrence of incestuous relationship is examined as the source of inflicting inscrutable pain to the participants

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involved, as the survivor struggles alone amidst a fiasco of social structure which cannot ensure rehabilitation of an abused 'body'. Instead, the society propagates the physical decay as a mechanism for attaining 'sainthood'. Thus, the eternal 'silence' of the spectators is put into question in the course of the study.

1. Look Back in Apprehension

A landmark work in philosophy, Paul Ricoeur's *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004) interrogates the correlation between remembering and forgetting. The imperative influence of historical instances upon the fictional narrative is suggestive as the narrative function, which is occupied with the past events, finds its elements of representation in the social deep structures of contemporaneous world. Ricoeur (2004) emphasised this phenomenon of reconstruction of the surface effects of narrative on the "basis of its deep structures" (p. 241). The narration of a particular historical event or the past memory is quite extensively represented by the writers who are concerned about the contexts of history in the postmodern times. Donoghue is best known for her cultivation of reality by negotiating with the past. In an interview she acknowledged: "I am primarily a historical fiction novelist" (Donoghue qtd. in O' Neill, 2019, p. 127). The construction of her historical fictions is profoundly rooted into the 'deep structures' of the past events. As O'Neill (2019) observes, it is the author's "sense of duty to the past" (p. 126) that motivates her to write about the past. As a Neo-Victorian writer, Donoghue's oeuvre in general and the novel, *The Wonder*, in particular evolve as the prime locus for interrogating the traumatic incidents – those incidents which were muted during the contemporaneous times but re-emerged within the historical conceptualisation of the exclusive study of nineteenth century literature in postmodern milieu.

Incest was a heated debate in the Victorian era and at the very beginning of twentieth century. Mark Llewellyn (2010) pointed out that, "the period between 1835 and 1908, from the Deceased Wife's Sister Act through to the Punishment of Incest Act, can be divided into four decades where incest was a question of ethics, morality and issues of legal (mis)conduct" (p. 135). Neo-Victorian entanglement with these repressed sexual stories is a counter attack by writing back the untold stories of Victorian era. The lesser representation of sexual traumas in Victorian works certainly does not indicate the lesser sexual violation in this age; rather it reveals, quite contradictorily, the Victorian sense of orthodoxy in maintaining an all pervading silence and concealment of the private life of its people. With a sarcastic tone Foucault dismantles this hypocrisy of the Victorians at the onset of his study of the *History of the Sexuality* (1998): "For a long time, the story goes, we supported a Victorian regime, and we continue to be dominated by it even today. Thus, the image of the imperial pride is emblazoned on our restrained, mute, and hypocritical sexuality" (p. 3). The desire to ignore and the fear to interpret the incestuous sexuality can be questioned from a perspective in which "emotional blindness" (Rachman and Klett, 2015, p. 1) functions as a catalyst in such exceptional cases. The manifestation of the neo-Victorian authors through their revision of the nineteenth century is to disclose this 'blindness' towards the cultural traumas that have their footprints in the Victorian age. Extending this, Donoghue's engagement with the trope of incest in her delineation about Victorian contemporaneity in this

novel can be taken as a contesting argument against the Victorian insouciance towards this serious issue. In this way, the reinterpretation of the incest trauma is, then, a negotiation with the collective trauma rather than an individual's trauma.

2. The Abused as a Living Spectral

Maisch (1972) has remarked that incest is not a reason for the disorientation in the family structure rather an effect of "disturbed family structure" (p. 145) that already persists. In neo-Victorian fictions, the house resembles the mirror which reflects the inner conflicts of its residents. Heilmann and Llewellyn (2010) examine that the protagonist of the Neo-Victorian narratives of trauma are typically the "abandoned children" who are the consequence of such dysfunctional families: "whose lives are profoundly affected by dysfunctional parental and sibling ties, and who must negotiate a precarious sense of self against the backdrop of past and present family trauma played out over their bodies" (p. 41). Anna, the distressed child, is undeniably vulnerable in relationships which are abusive in nature as the child is less powerful in comparison to the adult members of the family. This unequal distribution of power within the construction of the family isolates the child to the extent that even the verbal record of the incestuous act seems impossible to attain. Family being the smallest unit of the larger social order practices the prevailing ideas of the macroscopic world. Similarly, not only within the suffocating familial structure that Anna finds no solace to her perennial trauma, the extrinsic world provokes her to remain struck eternally in her sufferings.

The story is posited during the nineteenth century Ireland while the contestation between the Religion and Reason was rampant. The fasting girl story which is at the rubric of the novel oscillates between the extremes of religion and reason, sin and penance, and saintly and ordinary. Within this social fiasco, O' Neill (2019) observes that "Lib seems to stand as a proxy for English ideologies on Famine-era Ireland and she is resentful of the traditional way of life that she rejects as a modern and scientific rational medical professional" (p. 135). In this scenario of utmost unrest former Nightingale Nurse Lib exemplifies the modern perspective that challenges every possible superstition with her poignant sense of scientific approach. Elizabeth Wright, also known as Lib, possesses one great advantage over most of her fellow nurses that she is "bereft and free of ties" (Donoghue, 2016, p. 76). This facilitates her as the most preferable nurse to be appointed as a vigilant and later transported to Ireland to inspect the strange case of Anna O'Donnell who reportedly had been surviving without food since last four months. Apart from Lib's estrangement from her familial entanglements, her sheer sense of professionalism towards her responsibility enables her to investigate the curious case of Anna. She is appointed to watch over the authenticity of the fasting child whose 'body' becomes a "metaphorical text" (Lai, 2019, p. 59) against which the age is reflected with its own rotten ideas.

This sensitive case captures further attention as to the horror of spectacle both the family of the child and the Catholic community encourage the daughter's continuation with the fasting regime that caters the visits of multitude of tourists to witness this "little girl of modern day miracle" (Donoghue, 2016, p. 96). Mrs. Wright was appointed by a concerned committee to

investigate the case of this 'wonder' child and reach a conclusion to the prolonged tussle between the miraculous incarnation of a fasting body and an artificially modified bluff for capturing the public eyes. The strict surveillance by the appointed nurse, Lib and the nun, Sister Michael, accelerates the situation to a claustrophobic circumstance. However, ignoring this astute inspection the girl is constantly encouraged by the family and the church personnel to continue with her delirium of sainthood. The religious ambiguity influencing the entire plotline is scathingly attacked by the novelist. The rhetorical question alludes to this critical experience: "Was it Anna who was suffering from religious mania or her whole nation?" (p. 176). Lib is in dilemma to choose her righteous act. The novelist denotes: "She has been hired to supervise rather than truly treat. And even when she tries to help the child she doesn't really know how. There are moments where she tries to overrule her, moments where she tries to strengthen her. It's all about parenting really" (Donoghue qtd. in O'Neill, 2019, p. 137). However, it was the nurse who could ultimately solve the mystery puzzle of such a strange rejection of food and the unusual behavioural pattern of this little girl.

Contrary to the contemporary perception about human life that was coloured with the bleak superstitious beliefs, Elizabeth Wright represents the late-Victorian idea of 'New Woman' by marking her sense of pragmatic beliefs. Her reward of this entire vocation would be to substantiate "sense [. . .] over nonsense" (Donoghue, 2016, p. 35) and to unsettle the "morbid nonsense for true religion" (p. 268). It was this dire sense of responsibility that urges Lib to take the necessary actions in order to cure the little child from this unusual suicidal tendency. The nurse's poignant engagement with the little girl by luring her with diverse riddles and prayers is Lib's conscious attempt to dislocate the actual crux of the living riddle of Anna's constant fasting. Lib's practical judgement soon induces her with the more reasonable outcome of such incomprehensible issue that the little girl possibly is a "self-starving hysteric" (p. 137), with the ailment of "an obsession, a mania" (p. 138). Whatever the probable reason is, it is promptly comprehended by Lib that "something [is] very different about – very wrong with – Anna O'Donnell" (p. 139; improvisation mine). As trauma is an ineradicable disabling rupture in "psychological-cum-bodily integrity" (Kohlke and Gutleben, 2010, p. 5), Freudian explanation of the hysteria is recurrently helpful in the quest of the ontological cartography of the abused. In the essay of "Heredity and the Aetiology of the Neuroses" (1962) Freud explained sexual repression in the past as the source of trauma in the present:

The subject has retained an unconscious memory of a precocious experience of sexual relations with actual excitement of the genitals, resulting from sexual abuse committed by another person; and the period of life at which this fatal event takes place is earliest youth—the years up to the age of eight to ten, before the child has reached sexual maturity. (p. 154)

What was championed by Freud was later vehemently rejected by the psychoanalyst himself. The abandonment of the Seduction Theory was primarily based on Freud's difficulty in coming up with successful therapeutic conclusion and his conservative approach in which he had difficulty in accepting the fathers as abusers. Sándor Ferenczi's "confusion of tongues theory" (Rachman and Klett, 2015, p. 47) refuted Freud's sole authority in conceptualising the children's psychodynamics. ⁱⁱIn a sharp contrast to later observation of Freud, Ferenczi argued on the basis

of his clinically and intellectually courageous efforts that, "neurosis, as well as the more severe psychological disorders, arose from actual, not fantasized [as elaborated by Freud], sexual experiences in childhood" (p. 39; improvisation mine). The ideas of Ferenczi were the first of its kind to demonstrate emphatically the psychologically affected emotional trauma of children after encountering the abusive elders of the family. The theory by Ferenczi highlighted, for the very first time, the role of trauma, "incest trauma as well as for emotional, physical, and interpersonal traumas" (p. 313), as crucial factors in psychological disorder. This psychological suppression as well as physical violation cause for a variation of immediate and everlasting complications that Anna faces at her tender age, such as: trauma, memory loss, chronic depression, destructive desires, schizophrenia, multiple personality disorder, eating disorder, dissociation from the entire extrinsic world, internal injury, and innumerable of other significant changes.

3. Incest Taboo and Traumatized Self

The inauguration of psychoanalysis studies by the primary intervention of Freudian theories regarding the primordial desires, narcissism, and the Oedipal struggle established concurrently what Freud's *Three Essays on the Theories of Sexuality* (1905) had by now already crystallised the conceptualisation of consanguinity and incest taboo. Incest has always been categorised in most of the modern societies as a taboo with few exceptional societal structures. Incest has been an unsolvable riddle in sociological studies, feminist enquiries, and as well as in the context of law and legality. But the question raised by Bell (1993) in her seminal work *Interrogating Incest* is still very relevant, and therefore must be referred here: is "'incest' the same at each of these sites?" (p. 1). The conceptual triangulation of ethics, aesthetics, and psychoanalysis is prevalent in the diagnosis of incest motif. The contemporary re-working of incest theme is the representative of these basic confusions, and the present text for discussion bears the testimony of this ingrained confusion. The confession of Anna to her "Dear Mrs. Lib" (Donoghue, 2016, p. 306) about the incestuous relationship with her brother directs the novel to the point where religious, social, political, familial, and moreover the sexual motives crisscross. The novel eventually unfolds the corporeal complexities overshadowing the religious angle that sets the tone of the novel. We are faced with an unexpected disclosure from Anna in her feeble utterances: "'He married me in the night' . . . 'I was his sister and his bride too,' the girl whispered. 'Double'" (p. 304). Further she ensures that this continued till her brother was dead. She believes his death was a punishment for committing incest that she later realises as a "mortal sin" (p. 305):

When brothers and sisters marry, it's a holy mystery. A secret between us and heaven, Pat told me. But then he died," said Anna, voice cracking like a shell, eyes fixed on Lib. "I wondered if maybe he'd been wrong." Lib nodded. "Maybe God took Pat because of what we'd done. 'Tisn't fair, then, Mrs. Lib, because Pat's bearing all the punishment. (p. 305)

Bagley and King in their book, *Child Sexual Abuse* (2004), described the immense impact of incest trauma in arousing a sense of guilt within the victim. It is often found that the child is very likely to be immersed within the sense of guilt with the eventual understanding about the act

and the consequent taboo associated with it. Unfortunately, the ultimate disclosure of the incestuous act affects the child in earlier or later years of life by accelerating the sense of guilt of the act that was not initiated by the abused at all. Bagley and King (2004) stress in this aspect that the child should be supported in such vulnerability as, "It is important to convey to the child that he or she was not responsible for the initiation of the abuse" (p. 137). Being all alone Anna had none who could deliver to her this simple assertion. Thus the rigorous fasting was to "make amends" (Donoghue, 2016, p. 277). By rejecting food, eleven years Anna wishes to purify the corporeal impurities. Anna believes that her soul needs purification as the body commits unforgivable sin. This conscience of guilt builds up from a socially accepted moral perspective of determining the incestuous act as wrong and immoral that eventually motivates the act of incest to be "prevented" (Shepher, 1983, p. 34) and "prohibited" (p. 34) by what Freud explained as the "collective mind" (p. 136) with a deliberation for preventing the collective guilt.

The novel is set around the year 1859 when incest was not illegal rather was forbidden on the ground of immorality. It is only after the passing of The Punishment of Incest Act in 1908 that incestuous relationships were referred as illegal. Until this time, incest prohibition was understood by common consensus as a 'sin', very similar to that of witchcrafts, black magic, and adultery, performed against the religious beliefs; therefore, incest, then, was considered as the ecclesiastical concern (Twitchell, 1987, p. 128). In this circumference, the novel highlights a contemporaneous societal disorder when the protection of the child and women from sexual abuse and particularly incestuous abuse was not under any consideration of legal affair; thus, the plight of the abused remained in a state of vulnerability for a long span of time. Extending this observation, Anna's further refusal of accusing his elder brother and ultimately the acceptance of herself as guilty of the act is the ramification of what Bagley and King (2004) referred as the "traumatic bonding" (p. 109) in victimology. The connection between the abuser and the abused often grows into a "strong emotional attachment under conditions of intermittent maltreatment" (p. 110) that influences the victims to the extent that they refuse to accept the dishonour happened to them, or deny the abuser's guilt. Anna's excessive obsession with purity and her reluctance to blame her elder brother is cultivated from this intuitive compulsiveness of maintaining the morality of the conduct and the purity of the body. Any digression from this status, according to the little girl, had to be established with an act of severe punishment. This impasse is what Ricoeur (2004) mentioned in his analysis as the "inseparability of the act and the agent" (p. 490). Therefore, the prolonged starvation of the agent, that is Anna, is a form of repentance for her guilt-ridden soul, a kind of continuous sacrifice for their incestuous liaison.

It is noteworthy that the 1960s and 1970s were the decades of radical feminist's movements in the continent as well as in the United States. The observation by Florence Rush is immensely important in this aspect. In her presentation, "The Sexual Abuse of Children", that later was published under the same name in the book, *Rape: A Sourcebook for Woman*, she claimed: "[T]he sexual abuse of children, who are overwhelmingly female, by sexual offenders who are overwhelmingly male adults, is part and parcel of the male dominated society which overtly and covertly subjugates women" (qtd. in Whittier, 2009, p. 23). Within this framework it is to be interpreted with minute observation that the body that fasts as well as becomes the victim of oppressive regime by the dominant religious, socio-political, or familial institutions is a female

body. The juvenile female body represents the least powerful individual in the construction of social order. During any social or natural calamity it is the body of the female that unfolds itself as the site of the worst horrors and becomes a site of identity struggle and a space where the "politics of hunger" (Lai, 2019, p. 61) is constituted. Be it the oppressed daughter Kajoli in Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers!* (1947) or the little Anna in *The Wonder*, the oppression is boundless upon the female body.ⁱⁱⁱ However, the silence in Victorian times regarding the children's sexuality or the child exploitation was apparently to create a "sexless phase" (Dever, 2005, p. 176). This tendency of avoidance was manoeuvred with an intension to pretend and celebrate the duality of life that Victorians were infamous for. Dever (2005) explained in the article "Everywhere and Nowhere": "Thus to read Victorian novels for their sexual content is to read them, by necessity, between the lines, not for what they say but for what they show; not for what they represent but for those significant silences that speak volumes. Sexuality in the Victorian novel is at once everywhere and nowhere (p. 157).

It is, then, to be understood that sexuality with child is not an aspect of loving gesture, but a form of aggression of and violation by the elders. Although the confessional revelation of Anna establishes that the sexual experience was consensual; but it cannot be neglected that children presumably lack the full knowledge about sexual activities and its consequences. Rachman and Klett in their classic study about incest, *Analysis of the Incest Trauma* (2015), underlined an interesting point about the incest behaviour that, "Because the child partner is extremely vulnerable, in a position of unequal power, status, and control, the adult seducer does not have to cope with the difficulties of an adult relationship. He/she literally seduces an innocent" (p. 129). Hence, Anna's consent to sexual intimacy with her adult brother should be analysed by the aforementioned quoted statement. As it is easily discernible from the text that it was the brother who misdirected the younger sister in their initiation of sexuality, it is the brother who is responsible for the act and the obligatory consequences. Sandra Butler's observation regarding the plausibility of child sexual abuse in *Conspiracy of Silence* (1985) noted that child sexual abuse is "any sexual activity or experience imposed on a child which results in emotional, physical, or sexual trauma" (p. 5). In this way, Anna suffers eternally from "chronic depression" (Bagley and King, 2004, p. 138) that is often associated with post-sexual assault trauma.

4. The Perpetual Silence

The silent endurance of the incest motif can be explicated as an integral part of the complicated dynamic of trauma. Margaret Kelleher (1997) in *The Feminization of Famine* points out that "such a silence [. . .] may denote depths of pain, of shame and of guilt on the part of those who survived" (p. 4). The brooding silence is the metaphor for the 'unspeakable' tendency or the 'inexpressible' (as Kelleher defined in the subtitle of the book) aspect of the incestuous relationships. Lib could only successfully enter to the dungeon of this all engulfing silence, while the other listeners to the child's confession, her mother at the first place and later the priest, maintained their silence to this scandalous incident. Anna was in dire need of a listener to her silent endurance. Rachman and Klett underscored the importance of a sensible listener who can enact as a true embodiment of confidante. They affirmed this by stating that, "When you *listen* to the analysand *rather than*

defend yourself, and not rush to interpret, you learn a great deal about the individual and the subjective experience of the analysand" (Rachman and Klett, 2015, p. 156; emphasis original). Gradually, Lib transcends herself as the potential confidante of this little soul because she had "watched a child die . . . [and] can't do it again" (Donoghue, 2016, p. 311; improvisation mine). On the contrary, the silence of the mother and the priest emphasises that the 'taboo' should always remain in the closet – the beast should never come out from the closet. The silencing of the famine is not merely intended rather is condensed with the silence of the family and thereby the church in order to disregard the issues of child abuse, sexual exploitation, and mostly the incest. This collective indifferent outlook towards a matter as sensible as this promulgates the sheer sense of callousness for the afflicted with such unusual trauma. Marie Keenan observed this apathy ingrained in the Irish culture of twentieth century:

Much has been written about the failure of the Catholic Church in Ireland to adequately respond to the sexual abuse of children, and in particular its failure to report abuse allegations to the police, at least until the 1990s. Much less analysis has focused on the Irish state's response to the abuse of children, or comparing Church and state responses across time [. . .] it may well be the case that cover-up has been levelled at the Catholic Church, it may well be the case that cover-up was a feature of how Irish people and the Irish state responded to the abuse of children from the 1920s until the 1990s and that the neglect of the children's plight was not a feature of the Catholic Church alone. (Keenan qtd. in Pettersson, 2017, p. 5)

Children who are abused within family, generally, encounter the following levels of betrayal: by their biological/step-father from whose clasps there is no escape, by their mother who often fails to insulate the child within the environment of the home, and by institutions (law, religion, or family) which punish and discipline instead of protect the abused (Bagley and King, 2004, pp. 126-127). For Anna, the surrogate father figure, that is the elder brother, becomes the molester; the mother does not pay attention to the plight of her daughter; and lastly it is the religion, the church specifically, as an institution of governing the social normative disciplinary regimes punishes further the victim rather than protecting her from her distress. The mother figure is a central character in trauma narratives, even if she is not physically present. The mother in the novel is far more concerned about the maintenance of her familial decorum rather than worrying for her daughter's ailment. The maternal absence, in this case the psychological deprivation of a supportive mother, affects the girl child's development at a large extent. Herman in the study, *Father-Daughter Incest* (2000), especially emphasised the need of the strong and protective mother figure in a daughter's life: "As for the question of the mother's responsibility, maternal absence, literal or psychological, does seem to be a reality in many families where incest develops" (p. 49). Although the mother was feeding her child secretly until the nurse arrives and rigorous surveillance begins, her utter negligence towards her daughter's plight is unforgivable. The sudden disclosure of the secrecy associated to this "holy kiss" (Donoghue, 2016, p. 262), clarifies that Anna was actually not fasting rather she was surviving on the mother's trick of passing 'manna', in this case food, to her.

By disavowing trauma of the child through an unbreakable silence, the family, the Church, and all the concerned individuals enact another form of abuse upon the girl as they fail to protect

the child: firstly, from the physical abuse in her own house and finally, to address the issue sensitively in an effort of providing Anna the desired comfort of mind and as well as the comfort of the body. Kohlke and Gutleben (2010) affirm that to reject the representations of trauma metaphorically designates the "silencing [of] trauma" (p. 17; improvisation mine). To remain passive is no less than a crime. The novelist balances the "unforgivable sin" (Donoghue, 2016, p. 303) of the children to the inactivity of the family members: "*To do nothing was the deadliest sin*" (Donoghue 2016: 281; emphasis original). Lib surprisingly realises that Anna's acknowledgement of her "shameful story" (p. 309) to her mother had been labelled as a lie. The mother distrust her daughter: "That's the same filthy falsehood Anna came out with after Pat's funeral [. . .] and I told her not to be slandering her poor brother" (p. 308). Not only the mother but the priest of the local church, Mr. Thaddeus, to whom Anna had confessed equally believed in keeping such calamities as secret (p. 316). He further added that her "sins were forgiven" (p. 317). This concealment was too much for Mrs. Lib who takes pain of this discrepancy ingrained in the religious system that only permits to draw veil on such calamities without thinking much of the trauma and inscrutable pain the sufferers bear. Therefore, Lib promptly decides to be the rescuer of this tormented child who earlier murmurs in her prayers: "*Deliver me out of the hands of my enemies*" (p. 299; emphasis original).

5. Conclusion: Healing Is Not a Distant Dream

Resilience to the childhood exploitation is an important postmodern phenomenon. The implication is to unbind the agent from the act in the long run to rescue the individual from the guilt. Ricoeur (2004) explained: "This unbinding would mark the inscription, in the field of the horizontal disparity between power and act, of the vertical disparity between the great height of forgiveness and the abyss of guilt. The guilty person, rendered capable of beginning again: this would be the figure of unbinding that commands all the others" (p. 490). Through her utter conviction in resilience, Donoghue manifests the scope of amelioration for the abused which is usually rare for traumatised individuals. Though inspired by true stories, Donoghue made the ending less grim by 'unbinding' the abused from a sheer sense of guilt-ridden tormented past. The nurse unearths that every disease has an underlying story only to be disclosed by rational thinking and sensible approach. With her greater prowess of persuasion, Lib could finally drive the little girl away from the cage she was imprisoned in by leaving her scarred body as of dropping it like a torn piece of cloth: "To shed her creased skin, her name, her broken history; to be done with it all" (Donoghue, 2016, p. 309).

It is, therefore, the stigmatisation of the taboo that incepts a vacuum in the common discourse; ultimately, resulting in a linguistic absence. It is this renegotiating with the tormented past that is capable of acknowledging the "past *injustices*" (Kohelke and Gutleben, 2010, p. 20; emphasis original). Therefore, by conceding and eventually confronting the abuses confounded upon the body we can come in terms with the trauma. It may sometimes occur as a regression to mingle with the past events, with the time that is beyond the living memory; but to address to these traumatic experiences is a responsibility to awaken the future generations about the ghastly facades of such abuses. For a promising future, the monster in the closet should be encountered

with courageous interventions and contested by writing counter narratives to the irreducible traumatic past. Within this framework, Donoghue scrutinised the fasting body as a metaphor to locate the incest trauma and to chronicle what Judith Butler (2004) observed as the “nonnarratable” (p. 156). *The Wonder* manifests the implacable advance to unleash the “veil of denial” (Rachman and Klett, 2015, p. 40) of the conformist social order by remarkably positing the context of incest trauma at the rubric of this unusual story and finally, accentuates the responsibility of ensuring the prospect of amelioration for the survivors within the social construction.

Notes

ⁱ From here on, I refer to the author as Donoghue.

ⁱⁱ Sándor Ferenczi, the contemporary psychoanalyst of Freud’s era in the early twentieth century, exclusively dedicated his analysis in the direction of refuting Freud’s claim of child’s false memory. He discussed the negative dynamic of accusing the child in incestuous relationships. Ferenczi’s ideas were rejected by Freud and his conservative followers. For further reading in this connection, see Rachman and Klett 2015.

ⁱⁱⁱ The eminent Indian English novelist Bhabani Bhattacharya’s *So Many Hungers!* (1943) is a similar dreadful revelation about the Bengal Famine during 1940s and the wretched condition of the female protagonist Kajoli.

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