

**Unstated Rage and Undefined Identity in Anna Burns' *Milkman*:
A Feminist Post-Structuralist Reading**

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Northern Irish author, Anna Burns' Man Booker Prize (2018) winning novel *Milkman* presents a narrative textured with multifarious considerations ranging from subjectivity, gender, politics, power, language, and religion to anything a reader may logically connect it with. One of its most noticeable features is the narrator's not explicitly stating the unspeakable rage searing herself and the society as a whole, which is obvious in the syntactic, lexical, intonational and tonal treatments, and her not clearly revealing the identities of the characters. Researcher regard these aspects of the narrative open to myriad interpretations of which I would like to use the feminist post-structuralist view to fathom the novel in its profoundness. I intend to unravel the stereotyped gender and subjectivity features of feminist poststructuralism in the novel, which hinge upon the social mechanism, lived experiences, and language and power relations both directly and indirectly portrayed in the narrative.

INTRODUCTION

The prevalent discourse in any social or demographic setting, or discourse, by default, does not incorporate reality, rather it permeates and is permeated by it;

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each renders a line of meanings into the other. Thereby, aspects both palpable and esoteric, like environmental issues, social upbringing, phenomenological details, unconscious intents, and power dynamics all find their accommodations in the communicative practices (Grossberg, 1982). Considerations hailing from such multilayered semantic paradigms of any literary entity have inspired me to, thus decipher *Milkman* (2018), Northern Irish author Anna Burns' Booker Prize (2018) winning novel, which tells the story of an eighteen-year-old anonymous woman, albeit named 'the middle sister', all-through the narrative, struggling to subsist the communal subjugation, and physical and emotional tortures during the 1970s' Troubles in Northern Ireland (Danaci, 2020; Deiana, 2022). A woman of her own, the protagonist, 'the middle sister' nurtures as well as performs life in ways unlike those permitted by her society, i.e., reading-while-walking, not-marrying, and such, which is why, she is stigmatized and regarded as threatening for the community. She has to devise paths for respite, and a normal survival day-in and day-out as a Republican paramilitary bereft of any traditional human name, called Milkman stalks and sexually harasses her recurrently (Morales-Ladrón, 2019; Danaci, 2020; Deiana, 2022).

The political intensity the middle sister's community goes through places on each and every one of its inhabitants' dire psychological trauma and coercion, which altogether results in unnatural secrecy, covert and deliberate suppression, macabre rumors, augmented gender stereotyping, trespassing gossips, and frightening musings in scores of shapes and forms (Hutton, 2019; Danaci, 2020; Farrell, 2020). Giordano et al. (2021) argue that power lies at the center of all sorts of feminist discourses that dichotomize between gender sides, relationship dimensions, and partners, orienting the comparatively vulnerable one, if not mechanically stigmatizing the less loud one as vulnerable, at the weaker corner to be dominated and to be a master of. The middle sister narrates her lived experiences through an unusual blend of lexicon discernibly suggesting her temperament, caution, and revenge against the entire social abnormalities (Hutton, 2019). She evades one's real name and calls one 'maybe-boyfriend', 'renouncer' or 'McSomebody'; terms relations or phenomena differently, like 'stalktalk', 'wee

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sister’, and ‘beyond the pal’; and uses petrifying phrases, like ‘antipersonnel devices’, ‘military intelligence’, and ‘plainclothes people’ (Hutton, 2019). Eigearthaigh (2020) calls the society the middle sister lives in a totalitarian one unleashing disorders, untried killings, rampant restrictions, intriguing manipulations, voice silencing, and gender benefitting. *Milkman*’s protagonist, constantly suffering both physical and psychological intrusions wielded by both the perturbing administration and the disheveled community, resorts to carefully-devised manners and treatments so as to express the taboo but remain unretaliated against (Eigearthaigh, 2020; Deiana, 2022). That being the case, this appraisal inspects the narrative through feminist post-structuralism, for it brings to demonstration the unconventional features of feminism, which are worth unearthing in academic pursuits (Nicola, 1989; St. Pierre, 2000; Ropers-Huilman, 2001; Weitz, 2015).

Shehzad and Parveen (2021) contend that the female counterpart of human civilization has always been down-pressed, silenced, disadvantaged, and dehumanized, more or less, across the world throughout ages in almost all societies, and on this note, the researchers found it logical to anatomize *Milkman* from the feminist perspective. Inspecting thoroughly the phenomenological details of Anna Burns’ protagonist, Shehzad and Parveen (2021) conclude that injustice and inhumanities do not just get exercised on Asian women, rather, even on the so-called sophisticated European nations are those base attributes wielded upon. The stalker, milkman, himself acts as an emissary of male domination, the patriarchal power prototype of the state the middle sister has grown up in and is now passing her days in constant insecurities and carnal harassment (Hutton, 2019; Deiana, 2022). The novel, *Milkman*, begins in a retrospective manner as the 18-year-old anonymous narrator and protagonist, mentioned as “middle sister” or “middle daughter” in some places, recollects her disquieting experience that occurred almost a score of years ago when rumor and gossip harassed her physical and mental existence to a traumatic level (Morales-Ladrón, 2019). While unearthing sexual injustices, the narrative exposes layers of subtle procedures of sociopolitical manipulation and surveillance in addition to showcasing how power is assumed and

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executed to suppress people through tailored socio-and-psycho-linguistic devices, doctored truths, and diabolical actions (Morales-Ladrón, 2019).

Anna Burns' *Milkman* set in Northern Ireland obviously deals with the Northern Ireland conflict known as *The Troubles* that lasted about three decades from late 1960s to the late 1990s though Burns has never mentioned the name of her hometown in the narrative (Drong, 2019). The author breaks the silence about the life women lived during *The Troubles* in Northern Ireland where culture of violence constantly used to exercise pernicious effects on each and every individual (Piatek, 2020). Political trepidation as well as gender scrutiny exacerbates the ups and downs of adolescence, which has pertinently been portrayed in *Milkman* as it elaborates the forms of an overwhelming sort of authoritarian manipulation on people's minds and outward exposures (Miller, 2018). The war-like conflict depicted in the novel appears apparent and pressing more between the girl's psyche and her community than the warring parts of Ireland (Miller, 2018; Drong, 2019). Burns' narrator, the middle sister, lives in incessant scrutiny which is imposed on women in general and on young women in particular (Miller, 2018). The entire society she lives in is subject to minute social mechanism normally targeted to teenage girls, and utter plots to smother any spark of individualistic temperament; what matters is not who a girl or woman is, rather how she appears in her gestures, postures and movements, and any trifling infringement may result in fatal consequence (Miller, 2018).

Milkman like a number of other recent works of fiction set in Northern Ireland portrays the country's internal political conflict, *The Troubles* (Drong, 2019). The novel contributes to a redefinition of cultural memory both in Northern Ireland and other post-tribal settings, wherever it is needed to question nationalist or racial narratives (Drong, 2019). Characters in recent literary fictions, frequently in their day-to-day life, encounter frontiers, obstacles, limits, partitions, dichotomies and scrutinizing circumstances mostly due to the historical and political upheavals in the British Isles, that have shaped lives and mentalities there in the last few decades (Drong, 2019). The narrative points to the link of memory

and divisions, thereby re-demarcating the cultural history and shift both in Northern Ireland and other post-ethnic societies (Drong, 2019). The account is revealing in nature and is written in the past tense recalling individual memory that is subsequently implicated in the collective memory of the narrator's community (Drong, 2019).

The stance of the protagonist, itself, inspires me to attempt to deconstruct the novel with feminist poststructuralism since it, unlike the age-old feminist viewpoint, offers powerful tools to demystify the socially and psychologically nurtured stereotypes regarding man and woman, boy and girl, and such gender bipolar dichotomies, and thus prove that women perform as decisive agents to regulate the game and structure their own identity (Linstead & Thomas, 2002; Azzarito et al., 2006). Burns' narrator and main character in *Milkman*, a young woman addressed in the novel as 'middle-sister' participates skillfully in the entangling game involving gender generalization, collective and individual identity, popular psyche, social habitus, political violence, men-women relationship, and practiced nuisances, and stands out as a vehement critic proclaiming loudly her distinctiveness. This construction of individuality irrespective of the gendered psychology ever-nurtured both explicitly and in a nuanced manner in the overall semblance of the community is the essence of poststructuralist feminism. I will deliberate, throughout the rest of this write up, with a perusing traverse in *Milkman*, its female protagonist's unique strategies of merging with the prevailing structure, and adroitly forming as well as demonstrating her distinct self.

Post-Structuralism

Weiner (1994) considers that post-structuralism emerged as an outcome of the intellectual disenchantment with scientific illustrations and major political doctrines in the era of super powers and nuclear wars. Klopper (2007), contradicting the frequent criticism targeted against contemporary literary theory that it disdains and diminishes the literary text, argues that post-structuralism can attainably be employed in perusing any literary text absolutely retaining the enjoyment deserved from it. The term post-structuralism denotes the varied collection of theory that has

trailed in the aftermath of structuralism, but that nonetheless adheres largely to the idea of the indeterminateness of the text (Klopper, 2007). The term basically and elaborately comprises Jacques Derrida's Deconstruction, Jacques Lacan's Psychoanalytic theory, and Ronald Barthes', Michel Foucault's and Paul de Man's theories of discourse and/or rhetoric developed (Klopper, 2007). Marta (1987) regards Jacques Lacan (1901 – 981), the French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist, as a post-structuralist theoretician par excellence, for no one but Lacan better exemplifies the cult of the intellectual hero, articulately represents the intellectual scrutiny from a different academic specialty having remarkable impact on both that branch of knowledge and critical literary theory. Post-structuralism unravels before us, in multifarious ways, the riddles and mysteries through which traditional as well as dominant discourses bound us in prescribed meanings and styles of existence (Barrett, 2005).

Poststructuralism paves the ways for our comprehension beneath and beyond the surface of our culturally reciprocated meaning making, and takes us somewhere new and full of possible perspectives (Gavey, 2011). It just does not open the pathways for multifaceted interpretations to texts in relation to crucial issues like gender and all, rather it is extended to feminist post-structuralism which brings to analysis an affirmative indecision focusing gender-based complexity and diversity (Jones, 1993). Jackson (2004) informs that, in the literary studies of Thailand, many-fold poststructuralism has come into existence as the most dominant form of critical analysis although he thinks that the post-structuralists should determine epistemological aspects about the rationality of using theory borrowed from the Western cultural and intellectual institution in analyzing a South East Asian context. It can also be construed as a switch to the endeavors of self-transformation which works through metaphysics, and can be elaborated through hermeneutics (Hunter, 2012). However, Finlayson & Valentine (2003) argue that post-structuralism, due to its proponents' and interpreters' want of uniformity and stability in terms of the self-evidence of the theory, many a time fails to uphold its coherence and suitability in popular enigmas both political and social ones while Paipais (2015) alleges that poststructuralists, very often, act in the ways of the

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fundamentalists since they attack other thoughts and convictions if they fail to concur with and/or live up to the demarking frontiers of post-structuralism.

Feminist Post-Structuralism/Post-Structuralist Feminism

Feminist post-structuralism presents itself as an approach that is both complementary to and disheartening to other approaches (Baxter, 2008). This notion regarding feminist post-structuralism, according to Baxter (2008), has come into existence from Bakhtin's (1981) formalism, Derrida's (1987) post-structuralism, and Foucault's (1980) idea of power, knowledge, and discourses. Feminist poststructuralism disrupts myriad traditional concepts, and its researches, although do not necessarily produce better knowledge, bring into discourse ideas different from those offered by positivist, interpretivist or critical approaches. Connecting theoretical discussion with on-the-ground examples, feminist post-structuralist views help to analyze subjectivity, agency, and the fundamental characteristics of discourse. (Barrett, 2005). Feminist poststructuralism can be of remarkable significance to feminist psychologists looking for more fitting manners of illustrating subjectivity and gender, which is socially engendered and intrinsically unstable, and deals with language and discourse prevalent in society (Nicola, 1989; St. Pierre, 2000; Weitz, 2015).

Ropers-Huilman (2001) sees feminist post-structuralism as a combination of a couple of forces which include the multimodal demonstrations as well as underpinnings of power and resistance in human affairs. The archetype of post-structural feminism avows that women have overcome the age-old and ever-flowing divisions and discriminations imposed on them, and that they are now independent and possess inexhaustible choices (Fairchild, 2015). Ironically, this, sometimes, acts against feminists' own interests and mottos as still in societies and countries, women are abused and marketized, which gets termed as an individual issue, not a social one (Fairchild, 2015). The feminism-poststructuralism coalescence has provided both the theories deeper outlines encompassing deconstructive perspectives and multimodal discourses that question and re-define stereotypical notions of identity and gender (Wooldridge, M. (2015).

METHOD

The researcher applied the qualitative content analysis method which included a reading-between-the-lines study of the text in consideration, prior as well as current critical readings of it from multifarious perspectives, and a significant share of the accessible resources with regard to the selected hybrid notional context, viz. feminist poststructuralism. The qualitative content analysis smooths the systematic deconstruction and reasonable simplification of qualitative data involving themes, motifs, ideas, and discourses to reach scholastically agreeable findings (Zhang & Wildemuth, n.d.; Haggarty, 1996; Bengtsson, 2016). I also personalized some synchronized senses of grounded theory as well as thematic analysis as means for the inductive discernment of the affiliation between the designated fiction and its portrait of post-structural feminist attributes through recognizing and critiquing the recurrent outlines in the account (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Skeat & Perry, 2008).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

At the core of the novel lies the stalking of the unnamed female protagonist, introduced in coined phrases like ‘middle sister’, ‘middle daughter’, and ‘maybe-girlfriend’; perpetrated by another anonymous but male entity; and contemporaneously prevails the vilification towards her, battered by the society as a whole during the 1970’s Ireland due to unmitigated communal hatred (Hutton, 2019; Mc2, 2019). Burns’ fictional outlines in *Milkman* illuminate certain shrouded structure of (post)-Troubles Northern Ireland, and her own realization of the social temperament of the (post-)sectarian violence (Bartnik, 2021). Her depiction, through her protagonist, the middle sister; of the starkly untrue, vehemently fabricated musings and slandering nurtured and pelted, almost in a wholesale manner, by war-torn people speaks of the common experience of anyone bearing the memories of a mega-scaled violence, and living in its post-period (Mc2, 2019; Bartnik, 2021).

The narrator puts on display an over exposure to her narrative demonstrating strong and loud, deliberately critical and punchy, and thought-provoking and

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penetrating lexical expressions, phrases, made-up phrases and clauses she can think of regarding any certain phenomenon of her day-to-day dealings with any of the things, issues or persons of her community. Connected as well as separated by commas, hyphens and other punctuation marks, the narrator goes on to place a lengthy number of alternatives for any message she intends to deliver about anything or anybody. Burns' narrative panache in *Milkman* vividly touches upon the psychological phenomenological and traumatic cognition of the protagonist, and, thereby, reflects and ostensibly imposes on the reader an all-engrossing apprehension (Mc2, 2019). Her paragraphs are lengthy, so are her sentences, with so many built-up phrases speaking loudly of her cerebral responses triggered by coercing and injustice wielded upon her by the ongoing abnormalities both from communal and individual levels; and likewise, the narrator sounds as if she were derailed into a conundrum instantly pushing her forward while, immediately, taking her back to the past, all of which tell meaningfully the upsetting ambience of the total package of the narrative (Mc2, 2019).

As for what her mother blabbers about the depression her father used to have while alive, she writes,

“She meant depressions, for da had had them: big, massive, scudding, hopping, black-cloud, infectious, crow, raven, jackdaw, coffin-upon-coffin, catacomb-upon-catacomb, skeletons-upon-skulls-upon-bones crawling along the ground to the grave type of depressions” (Burns, 2018, p. 85).

Relentless talking along with bringing of discussions on and references to the same old topics was a normal everyday custom that left a lasting traumatic effect on the psyche of the narrator, which is why, when she tells her story she does not seem to be short of words or phrases in relation to anything. Every time the narrator's mother starts talking, she brings up her dead father and his being depressed all the time, watching certain kind of demoralizing things on TV, lying abed, not doing good, cheerful things, not taking life as it is and so on and so forth. While reading the novel, a reader will easily and clearly read the psychic formation

that has been molded as such by the lingering and exhausting practices of the community she lives in.

Emotional attachment was considered a weakness abominable and avoidable, which sat tightly in the psyche of the community, more acutely among the people with power and those hankering after power. None of them could endure being liked, let alone loved, by any human or animal. Even if a dog liked them, they would literally kill it, which the paramilitaries did do.

They killed it because it liked them, because they couldn't cope with being liked, couldn't cope with innocence, frankness, openness, with a defenselessness and an affection and purity so pure, so affectionate, that the dog and its qualities had to be done away with. (Burns, 2018, p. 89)

Inner contraries dominated and propelled the narrator to hesitate among decisions. There were things to be done and, simultaneously, not to be done. "Impossible then, with all these irreconcilables, to account, not just politically correctly, but even sensibly for oneself" (p. 113). Incredible at first reading, the account of the socio-political existence of the narrator's state or country brands every human or non-human entity as a foe to one another.

..... the government here was the enemy, and the police here was the enemy, and the government 'over there' was the enemy, and the soldiers from 'over there' were the enemy, and where we were viewed in our turn by our enemies as the enemy.... (p. 114)

The middle-sister's community was dilapidated with nuisances, bullies, trespassing, line-crossing, and nose poking. "In those days, in that place, violence was everybody's main gauge for judging those around them....." (p. 02). "Intense nosiness about everybody had always existed in the area. Gossip washed in, washed out, came, went, moved on to the next target" (p. 05). This helped prevail a general mindset of taking matters lightly, or of no substantial consideration, which was why she "didn't pay attention to this love affair with the milkman" (p. 05). Nevertheless,

none of these annoyances was considered an offense or crime, for the society defined a gesture or an action as a crime or offense in a totally out-worldly manner.

...having been brought up in a hair-trigger society where the ground rules were – if no physically violent touch was laid upon you, and no outright verbal insults were being leveled at you, and no taunting looks in the vicinity either, then nothing was happening. (p. 06).

Therefore, the narrator, a girl of eighteen years, albeit being frequently encroached upon by a much older stranger, could in no way understand what encroachment was made of and as such prove that she was under unwanted sexual approach or attack. Not even could she feel that repugnance counted in such a violence-prone society where she did not know if she had any right not to like or endure something or somebody uncalled for. Rather one being accosted had to let it happen spontaneously on himself/herself or leave the spot politely and quickly.

Deep in the language and tone of the narrator cum protagonist of *Milkman* are devastating fury and bursting indignation, for she is one of the constant sufferers of the political, social, gender-related anomalies prevailing in her society, and for long from the past, now and in the days to come, she never was, is and will be able to express her repugnance to the bizarre and non-human like practices as well as interferences, let alone seek justice. Her narrative style, syntactic patterns and tailored phrases speak loudly and emphatically of the ingrained anger and suppressed protest against the abnormal and unacceptable social setting and circumstances she has been made habituated to. She can give vent to the naked truth neither in her family nor in the community the way she has expressed herself, her long suppressed exasperation in the narrative of the novel. Her linguistic exposure speaks of her inner outrage, frustration and, for not being able to starkly fight against abnormalities, sarcasm as an alternative expressive attack. The milkman, the self-declared suitor or boyfriend or simply a stranger to the narrator treats the latter in such a husband-like manner that she cannot help thinking herself owned by him.

Ever since he'd started in on this role of getting me ready, of putting me into confusion, edging me to the brink where, defeated, I'd surrender and step voluntarily as his woman into his vehicles, I wasn't sure anymore what was plausible, what was exaggeration, what might be reality or delusion or paranoia. (Burns, 2018, p. 169)

Every little sentence of the narrative contributes to telling a story of long suppressed and withheld cry of frustration constructed by social anomalies and interruption of individuality. The narrator herself is bereft of any normal name, but alternately known as “middle sister”, “maybe-girlfriend”, “the girl who walks” and “longest friend” (Schwartz, 2019). Like a Greek epic poem or a code-name dossier, the names of the characters in *Milkman* are unlike the real ones, but codified as “third-brother-in-law”, “nuclear boy”, “Somebody McSomebody”, “wee sister” etc. (Schwartz, 2019). The “middle sister” resorts to ignorance and avoidance as the strategies to cope with the enervating gossips and rumors about herself in the community (Schwartz, 2019), which she admits,

I minimalized, withheld, subverted thinking, dropped all interactions surplus to requirement which meant they got no public content, symbolic content, no full-bodiedness, no bloodedness, no passion of the moment, no turn of plot, no sad shade, no angry shade, no panicked shade, no location of anything.....just me, devoid. (Burns, 2018, pp. 174-175)

In Burns' language, “These were knife-edge times, primal times with everybody suspicious of everybody” (p. 27).

It was that people were quick to point fingers, to judge, to add even in peaceful times, so it would be hard to fathom fingers not getting pointed and words not being added, also being judged in these turbulent times, resulting too, not in having your feelings hurt upon discovering others were talking about you. (p. 28)

Linguistic units, diction as a whole, manifest the author's or character's psychological reality, and lexical information reveals if the tone of the speaker is affective (Bestgen, 1994). Patke (2010) seeks aftermaths of the Irish Troubles on

poetry and history, and unearths that lengthened cultural shock created by the partition resulting from the conflict propels poetry towards some sort of dichotomy, namely agnostic and ameliorative. Post-trouble poets from Northern Ireland are found, in most cases, to experience a sense of alienation from their divided society, culture, community and nation (Patke, 2010). Bell (1998) wrote that even while the new millennium, the year 2000, was approaching, the Irish Troubles appeared all too likely to remain a constant. Although for a generation, everyone had hankered after and pleaded for peace, there prevailed persistent violence, rationalization following atrocity, reasoned explanation following coercion, and denial following terror (Bell, 1998). The novelist applies and exploits the myth of the unspeakable through the demonstration of a disjointed mode that enlivens a moral trauma narrative (Malone, 2021). In *Milkman*, the author refutes an ‘event-based’ perusal of trauma and portrays the hardship of finding diction that might enable traumatic experience to be vivid and intelligible (Malone, 2021). Northern Ireland, due to the effects of over 30 years of civil conflict, displays a case of trauma-reality on which an extensive body of literature has come into existence depicting the enervating phenomena experienced during the political unrest (Ferry et al, 2010).

A great many studies have been conducted on the psychological impact of Northern Ireland’s “Troubles-related” trauma on the common people, on specific communities and on minor groups (Ferry et al, 2010). The unique nature of the conflict in Burns’ country entertained harrowing violence including murder, assassination, assault, ethnic intimidation, bombing and explosion in public gatherings, and street brawls, which obviously engendered some degree of uncanny discomfort and risk for almost everyone living then and there (Ferry et al, 2010).

The middle sister’s community would question her offensively, not straightforwardly, but in a not-to-touch-the-water-but-catch-the-fish way, to incite her to open her mouth and let herself be carried away to take the bait and lose temper or “give some juicy, easily to be expanded upon response” (Burns, 2018, p. 174). She should strategically dissemble herself in such a way as to get her “reaction off the ground as swiftly and unsuspectingly as possible (p. 174). She would feign

ignorance of her community's intention and would give them a continuous "I don't know" to "every probing query they put out" (p. 75). The narrator did not feel any pangs of conscience for not giving her community people the truth, for she justly felt that "in life some people did not deserve the truth. They weren't good enough for the truth" (p. 75). By the paramilitary milkman, the middle sister was stalked, but she could not define it to the community or elsewhere, for things like stalking or worse than that happened in the neighborhood in many forms hard to give a name to. The narrator enlightens, "That was the way it worked. Hard to define, this stalking, this predation, because it was piecemeal. A bit here, a bit there, may be, may be not, perhaps don't know. It was constant hints, symbolisms, representations, metaphors" (p. 181). For anything bad or any cry-for-help issue, if the middle sister appealed to the community or even her own family, she knew it for sure, she would be provided with bitter questions, grilling counter queries, penetrating reprimands let alone help or sympathy.

If I'd said, 'He offered me a lift as I was walking along the interface road reading *Ivanhoe*', it would have been 'Why were you walking along that dangerous interface road and why were you reading *Ivanhoe*?' If I'd said, 'I was running in the parks & reservoirs and he appeared also running in the parks & reservoirs', it would have been, 'What were you doing, running in such a dangerous, questionable place and what were you doing, choosing to run?' (p. 181)

And this list is inexhaustible as Burns puts it in the narrative. To the legal law enforcers, the narrator's community was a rogue community which would, no matter whatever the case might be, not count for any protective response from them. "It was we who were the enemy, we who were the terrorists, the civilian terrorists, the associates of terrorists or simply individuals suspected of being but not yet discovered to be terrorists" (p. 182) was the mutual understanding regarding each other between Burns' community and the police there. "That being the case, and understood by both the parties to be the case" (p. 182), the only time one would call the police in Burns' area would be if one was going to shoot them, "and naturally they would know this and so wouldn't come" (p. 182).

The trauma as to the milkman and its related taunting feedback from her mother as well as other family members, and her society as a whole would not let the narrator sleep a sound sleep, rather would make the abundant arrangement to waken her up in the middle of the night. It is as if all the materials and furniture of the house where the narrator lives in would act as some sort of agent employed by the milkman to preoccupy her mind and surroundings with the thought and indications of the milkman, but about which she lacks in the term for an expression. For instance, she says, “Raps, noises, movements, agitations of the air, displacement of objects. It was banging and retorting and causing discordance – all to berate me, to warn me, to call attention to the threat that already I knew was surrounding me” (p. 184).

The character, milkman is a ubiquitous one who represents all the male counterparts in the society who act on the ever-established male-means-strong, female-means-weak, and men-can-do-anything-to-women stereotypes, for which he emerges abruptly from nowhere and starts talking to the protagonist as if he has been having a talking and intimating relationship with her, as if he does not care for what say she might have regarding such uncalled for and accosting trespassing (Resek, 2020; Reynolds, 2021). Anything which does not conform to the age-old roles and liabilities of women, if done by anyone from the female counterpart just as a plea of personal indulgences or pastime, is considered a crime or a threat to the community, not that the task can really pose any mishap, rather on the sheer consideration that a woman is doing this (Resek, 2020). Thence, the protagonist’s innocuous reading-while-walking is tagged as a culpable crime for which, since she does not shun the habit for any threatening or stigmatization she encounters, she is regarded as an outcast although the reason for such an ethnocentric branding has, nowhere, been delineated (Resek, 2020). The storytelling in *Milkman* is bumpy, making the readers question the intention of the narrator, the middle sister, for she seems to deliberately placing a convoluted narrative bereft of a linear gait, and knotted with abrupt subtractions and unexpected inclusions, which hinges upon the psychic tortuosity of the protagonist (Reynolds, 2021).

What entices the middle sister to not protest her being stalked by Milkman, stigmatized by the community, gossiped about in the neighborhood, threatened by Somebody McSomebody, sexually abused by the random male counterparts, and traumatized by the entirety of the state conflict is the magnitude of irritation and desperation she suffers inside (Farrell, 2020; Reynolds, 2021). Silence functions to vocalize expression and can turn itself into an operative device that can regulate the essence of authority and obedience. It, once placed as a tool of dominance, works as an ironclad apparatus to control the society, posing as an indispensable instrument for existence as well as denial (Morales-Ladrón, 2019). As the narrator's eldest sister conveys to her, in a manner designed and meant to burn her inwardly, the news of the milkman being shot dead, the protagonist feels like slapping her for the former's socially-driven misconception and deliberately misdirected musings regarding a woman. It is perfectly all right for the milkman or anybody, male, in the middle sisters' community to go around with *Semtex* (a bomb) whereas it is not okay for her to read *Jane Eyre* in public (Burns, 2018).

Brigida and Pinho (2021) find Burns' narrator and protagonist of *Milkman* to fight shy of the reality of violence by "reading while walking" among other strategies to evade troubles. She never spells out the names of the city, the district she lives in, the time the events mentioned in the narrative took place, or the neighboring countries she calls "the country over the waters", "the country over the border" (Brigida & Pinho, 2021; Reynolds, 2021). The narrative of *Milkman*, as it appears, is set in Northern Ireland during the Troubles (from the late 1960s to 1998), but the identity of the setting is never mentioned, just connotated with tailored phrases like "the great Seventies hatred", "renouncer-of-the-state", "the country over the water", and the like (Mc2, 2019; Reynolds, 2021). Likewise, the usual names of the characters of the novel, throughout the narrative, are kept unmentioned; rather they are expressed in some sort of patched-up phrases: the narrator is called, "middle sister", her siblings "wee sisters" and "first sister", her boyfriend "maybe-boyfriend" etc. (Mc2, 2019). To Hutton (2019), such un-naming as "Somebody McSomebody" (Burns, 2028, p. 1) has more metacognitive reasoning than any surface one.

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As a matter of fact, the narrator's society barely minds an individual or an individual's discrepancy whereas the whole system is like-minded nourishing violence, hatred, trespassing, treading human rights, gender-stereotyping, and munching on each and every inhuman practice as though they were fishing perpetually in a murky waterbody (Hutton, 2019). Both cognitive and metacognitive health, processing, and articulation help people model their responses to external as well as nuanced stimuli, which they have to carefully architect and utilize so as to survive in perturbed as well as straining circumstances (Farsi, 2020). This befittingly explicates why the middle sister in *Milkman* engineers such an other-worldly naming approach to the people around her, and such a seemingly-inoffensive narration as to them although she is wronged and watches wrongs being perpetrated by people irrespectively both unrelated and related to her (Farsi, 2020).

CONCLUSIONS

Feminist poststructuralism reasons against the leading discourses centering on gender issues by showcasing women as active agents who shape their own decisions and participate in constructing their identities (Azzarito et al., 2006). This theory dismisses the stereotypical notion that women are passive, weak, dependent, and 'problems' to be exploited and oppressed, and respects as well as promotes the idea that women are self-motivated subjects in determining power dynamics and social relations which are the constituting elements in contemporary culture and accumulated history (Azzarito et al., 2006). The middle sister's refraining from naming herself and all the other characters of the narrative aptly executes her vengeance and retaliation to the orthodox gender-perpetrating practices of her community both during the violent time and the normal one. She does not voice her repercussion to the anomalies hurled at her by society as a whole, the milkman as a representative of the holistic male counterpart, and even the members of her own family as the blind cohorts of the collective consciousness, but she utilizes her language to evade the typical elements antagonistic to the women folk, and thereby, vibrantly establishes her selfhood deputy to her kind in totality.

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