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Ethnic and gendered vulnerability at the *fin de siècle*: Celtic and female sub/objects in some poetical works of Algernon Charles Swinburne, William Butler Yeats and Arthur Machen

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> I think being a woman is like being Irish… Everyone says you're important and nice, but you take second place all the same.
>
> (Murdoch 12)

Although Victorian women and Celtic immigrants are retrospectively perceived as collective forms of vulnerability, having fewer rights, Aesthetic and Decadent poetry deconstructed the correlation between non-English subjects and discrimination, and debunked the traditional equation between women and inferiority. The evolution of women's status in poetry and fiction was sustained, in reality, by the rise of the "New Woman," a phrase coined by Sarah Grand in 1894 to designate the smoking, sometimes provocative, suffragist woman. It was paradoxically within this context of empowerment that women's vulnerability appeared, as several painters and writers turned this female subject into an object, an object of caricature; women's vulnerability was masked by the post-Romantic artists who took on the legacy of John Keats (1795-1821) and modernized the *Belle Dame Sans Merci* figure. This inversion of gender roles–men becoming the weaker sex, and women the stronger sex (Palmer 127-156)—was paralleled by a similar phenomenon, this time linked to ethnicity, wherein vulnerableness was replaced by authority. During the Celtic revival, Welsh and Irish poets, notably Arthur Machen and William Butler Yeats, imposed their minor Celt cultures in England by deterritorializing the city of London and reconstructing a new Wales and a new Ireland. *Fin-de-siècle* poetry therefore highlighted the individual, and not collective, essence of vulnerability. These three apparently isolated groups (Decadent artists, women, and Celts) were united by editors like John Lane and Elkin Mathews and publishing houses like *Bodley Head*, where many Decadent and dissenting texts were made public. The role of such editors was major in the expression and association of dissimilar vulnerabilities (respectively linked to profession, gender and ethnicity) triggered by the same ethical judgements from the socio-medical discourses, the Church of England, and the religious and upper-class newspapers. Focusing on the discrepancy between fiction and reality, we shall determine whether such visions of powerful women and empowered immigrants were not mere illusory representations and defence mechanisms; whether the notion of vulnerability is ethnic and gendered, and therefore collective, or whether it be only inherent in the qualities of each individual, regardless of their sexes, classes and origins.

Decadence, which could not even be called a movement since it had no manifesto, was one of the most vulnerable literary currents. It was attacked by scientists and moralists, and finally disintegrated about ten years after its genesis. Vulnerableness was engraved in its very name, given by its opponents, decadence (from the Latin *cadere*, "to fall"), which implied ethical immorality and aesthetic scant. Arthur Symons ironically recalled its nicknames: "disease" and "maladie" (*Decadent* 136). Due to their hyperesthesia, decadent artists failed to adapt to the modern, urbanized setting of London—an environmental and geographic vulnerability in a post-Darwinian context. It is relevant to use the two Aristotelian categories of the potential and the actual to define vulnerability: actualized, vulnerability designates all the symptoms of the "disease" called decadence, i.e. agoraphobia, claustrophobia, panic attacks, or hallucinations. When it only indicates a potential wound (not wounded but susceptible to be), vulnerability reveals the editorial context of the *fin de siècle* and the issue of censorship. Let us examine three apparently isolated figures, which nevertheless shared hidden and subversive forms of vulnerability, weak in reality but strong in fiction. First, the decadent artist's poetics of vulnerability oscillates between camouflage and exposition as he shares both real and fake vulnerabilities. Second, through the perspective of male poets, *fin-de-siècle* women were both subjects of domination and objects of fantasy. Finally, the diverse *topoi* and motifs of an ethnic vulnerability, Celticism, range from loss and bereavement to nationalism and deterritorialisation.

The vulnerability of art as a profession at the fin de siècle and the decadent poetics of vulnerability

The ephemerality of decadence reveals how a simply editorial form of vulnerability can lead to social, economic and physical vulnerableness. The medical doctor Max Nordau (1849-1923) was one of many critics who condemned the turn-of-the-century culture and triggered the denial of decadence as an art:

> The physician, especially if he have devoted himself to the special study of nervous and mental maladies, recognizes at a glance, in the *fin-de-siècle* disposition, in the tendencies of contemporary art and poetry, in the life and conduct of men who write mystic, symbolic and "decadent" works and the attitude taken by their admirers in the tastes and aesthetic instincts of fashionable society, the confluence of two well-defined conditions of disease, with which the physician is quite familiar, *viz.* degeneration and hysteria, of which the minor stages are designated as neurasthenia. (Nordau 14)

Following such criticism, Oscar Wilde's trial for homoeroticism in 1895 marked the end of this transient current and highlighted the potential movement from individual to collective vulnerableness—the failure of one man, a spokesman, involving the vulnerability of a whole group of artists. Vulnerability supposes a flexible acception since Decadent writers were not exposed to the same level of criticism and condemnation. Unlike Swinburne's iconoclastic

and masochistic poems published in the 1860s and 1870s, Arthur Machen's less scandalous texts were denied publication for years and fell into oblivion: his novel *The Hill of Dreams* was published ten years after its composition (1895-1897) in 1907, and his prose-poem collection, *Ornaments in Jade*, twenty-seven years later (1897) in 1924. In addition to the post-Wilde editorial context, this was due to his Welsh origins, which made him use Celtic languages and imagery while developing atypical topics linked to paraphilias and oniric visions. Machen's socio-professional vulnerability was reinforced by the power of institutions such as the Church or the Press, notably the *Manchester Guardian*, where his reputation was disparaged: "This book [*The Great God Pan*] is, on the whole, the most acutely and intentionally disagreeable we have yet seen in English. We could say more, but refrain from doing so for fear of giving such a work advertisement."

Such aggressive exposure urged Machen to renounce the aesthetics of decadence and develop new canons for financial purposes. The precariousness of art as a profession is confirmed in an autobiographical passage of *The Hill of Dreams*: "[…] after many weeks of severe diet, his income […] amounted to sixty-five pounds a year, and he lived for weeks at a time on fifteen shillings a week. During these austere periods his only food was bread, at the rate of a loaf a day; but he drank huge draughts of green tea and smoked a black tobacco" (117).

While the amount of fifteen shillings a week equated that of a servant, the use of tea and tobacco as substitutes for real food shows that vulnerability often equates diversion and deviance. Lucian Taylor, the artist of Machen's novel, becomes a spectral entity or a skeleton: "he grew thinner and thinner everyday; the skin was stretched on the bones of his face, and the black eyes burnt in dark purple hollows" (*Hills* 134). The artist is misshapen by his vulnerability, which is real, and does not hide it.

The *fin-de-siècle* poetics of vulnerability is more complex as it also includes a game of camouflage on behalf of the artist who sometimes disguises his real wounds while exhibiting forged ones. As an illustration, Machen says nothing about the deaths of his father and his wife while conversely overdramatizing minute details such as the poor quality of sermons in English churches and the accent of Londoners; he sometimes devotes whole pages to these false vulnerabilities which constitute a theatrical tool. Taking vulnerability as a pose, the decadent artist plays with the notion of resilience, sometimes nesting in artificial vulnerable stances, sometimes ignoring his real suffering.

While composing *A Fragment of Life* (1898), that is, after the death of his wife, Amelia Hogg, Machen concealed his bereavement by imagining a fictitious and illusory ending where his experience of mourning is replaced by an eternal love story, as the ending lines of the novel

suggest: “and my love and I were united by the well” (122). Machen was not the only Decadent author hiding vulnerability. When Swinburne composed his *Poems and Ballads, Third Series* (1889), he was suffering from alcohol-related health issues and was growing deaf, yet most of his poems sound cheerful and are articulated around life and simple joys, contrary to his *First Series* (1866), for example, where nihilist thoughts and death prevail. The elegiac and epic overtones predominating in his first collection are replaced by lighter forms such as the nursery rhyme, despite his critical health. The poet devotes a series of poems to new-born babies and nativity wherein the feeling of merriness is expressed by a musicality that remains atypical and surprising for Swinburne’s readers:

> Baby-bird, baby-bird,
> Ne’er a song on earth
> May be heard, may be heard
> Rich as yours in mind. (*Third* 88)

Swinburne’s usually solemn and erudite lexicon, his rich metaphors and sacred symbolism to express sometimes artificial masochistic feelings (for instance, the end of “Anactoria,” with the figures of “Lotus and Lethe” and the “insuperable sea”)[1] give way to simple words, notably monosyllabics, and his iambic pentameters to a vivid alternation of trochaic tetrameters and trimeters. The bitterness and mourning that would be expected in the *Third Series* are replaced by a celebration of life. The two poems preceding “Baby-Bird” are based on the same aesthetics of simplicity and naiveness. In “A Rhyme,” the *persona* uses two- or three-word lines to conclude each stanza:

> Babe, if rhyme be none
> For that sweet small word
> Babe, the sweetest one
> Ever heard,
>
> Right it is and meet
> Rhyme should keep not true
> Time with such a sweet
> Thing as you. (*Third* 86)

One of the artificial vulnerabilities developed by Decadent artists dwells in the notion of masochism and in the empowerment of women that it involves, as the myth of the androgyne shows: many male characters took on the attributes of women, while women were bestowed male attributes.

[1] “Till fate undo the bondage of the gods, / And lay, to slake and satiate me all through, / Lotus and Lethe on my lips like dew, / And shed around and over and under me / Thick darkness and the insuperable sea.” Algernon Charles Swinburne, *Poems and Ballads, First Series*, p. 76.

Gender-based vulnerability

Although women still had very few rights in the *fin de siècle* (no suffrage rights, no right to sue and to own property), the over-representation of omnipotent and sadistic women as the embodiment of femininity is striking both in poetry and Pre-Raphaelite paintings. Lesbians and perverts are embodied by Sappho, notably in Félicien Rops's *Lesbos, known as Sappho* (1890); beheaders of men are represented by Salome, levitating like a ghost and necrophilic in Beardsley's 1893 illustration, since she is kissing the head of a corpse, and Judith, often depicted as a vertical, almost phallic entity; artists also rediscovered the figure of Lilith, cast away from Eden after refusing to obey Adam, and Pandora, who, according to a Greek legend, freed all the evils of the world. Machen's stories also depict vampiric creatures and half-animal, half-human women. In *The Great God Pan*, the criminal hybrid monster Helen Vaughan, born of the union between a woman and the god Pan, kills according to a sexual *modus operandi*, by inducing a lethal feeling of ecstasy. In his short story "The White People," likewise, a dark nymph portrayed with a Keatsian lexicon tranforms knights into dolls and plays with them. More than Keats's *Belle Dame*, she appears under the auspices of dance and music, two charms turning the bravest knights into submitted adorers: "she was the queen of the people who danced on the hill on summer nights, and [...] when she sang they all fell down on their faces and worshipped her" (*White* 122). By naming this nymph Avelin, the Norman equivalent of the Saxon *Evelyn*, Machen grounds his tale in the Arthurian folklore and suggests resonances with Tennyson's eponymous Lady of Shalott (1833; 1842). Half a century after Tennyson, however, Machen's lady shows the evolution of the *femme fatale* since she rejoices over the agony of her lovers: "'Sir John, return, and turn to clay, / In fire of fever you waste away' [...] And people said there was man screamed in the burning of flames" (*White* 143). The *fin-de-siècle* feminine ideal was not limited to medieval and traditional forms but also included a more modern representation of women as mechanical entities. Swinburne's Faustina,[2] foreshadowing Olympia, the mechanic doll of Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffman* (1881), illustrates this vision:

> You seem a thing that hinges hold,
> A love-machine
> With clockwork joints of supple gold —
> No more, Faustine. (*Third* 128)

The mechanical nature of the woman is expressed by a similarly mechanical rhythmical alternation between iambic tetrameters and bimeters. Instead of examining the misogynistic attacks and obvious onslaughts against women, it may thus be more relevant to focus on the more subtle perversion of their vulnerable identity, paradoxically found in their idealisation, a phenomenon sometimes called the "sacred feminine," or the "female sublime." In

[2] Faustina (c. 100 CE-140 CE) was a Roman empress known as an adultress.

Swinburne's same collection, *Poems and Ballads, First Series*, the figure of Venus in "Laus Veneris" epitomizes the poets' tendency to disguise women with provocative garments and cosmetics and dress them up as dolls. Venus is eroticized by the male poetic *persona*, who imagines her wearing apparels and jewelry ("Her girdles, and the chaplets of her head, / Her armlets and her anklets" [*First* 18]), heavy make-up andstrong perfume ("her beds are full of perfume and sad sounds" [*First* 18]), together with an artificial hairstyle ("Sudden serpents hiss across her hair" [*First* 18]). The close-up on Venus is turned into a self-portrait of the male *persona* who gradually reorientates the subject matter upon his own impressions: "The scent and shadow shed about me make / The very soul in all my senses ache" (*First* 18). The artificial image of Venus is both ideological and formal, as her weakness is concealed behind a euphoric and hybristic style composed of alliterative and assonantal doublets, in a flawless rhyme scheme reinforcing the tableau's artificiality. In this aesthetics women are often objects of talk rather than talking subjects—they are talked about but do not often talk, being frequently relegated to the status of offstage characters.

The power-of-woman *topos* and the male vulnerability that it involves may be perceived as a pretence for artistic creativity and self-victimisation on behalf of male artists. Even Yeats, though more moderately than Swinburne and Machen, reduced women's vulnerability by increasing men's weakness and sensitiveness, as can be shown in his poems' titles: "The Lover mourns for the Loss of Love", "The Lover pleads with his Friend for Old Friends", "The Poet pleads with the Elemental Powers", "The Lover asks forgiveness because of his Many Moods", "The Poet tells of the Rose in his Heart". He conversely depicted women through manly features, notably Witches and Mermaids:

> A mermaid found a swimming lad,
> Picked him for her own,
> Pressed her body to his body,
> Laughed; and plunging down
> Forgot in cruel happiness
> That even lovers drown. (Yeats 42)

In their glorification of women, William Butler Yeats and Arthur Machen dress female subjects with liturgical ornaments: the doll becomes a sacred doll, an idol whose vulnerability is even more concealed. Their poetic *personae* perform and act as worshippers and penitents. In the two following texts, the voices kneel and lie down on the ground, prostration being the most primitive form of vulnerability:

> O women, kneeling by your altar-rails long hence,
> When songs I wove for my beloved hide the prayer,
> And smoke from this dead heart drifts through the violet air
> And covers away the smoke of myrrh and frankincense;
> Bend down and pray for all that sin I wove in song,
> Till the Attorney for Lost Souls cry her sweet cry,

> And call to my beloved and me: "No longer fly
> Amid the hovering, piteous, penitential throng." (Yeats 32)

The pseudo *Fin'Amor* motif, the lexicon of supplication and the generalized statements ("O women") confirm the collective nature of gendered vulnerability. Even when women are highly vulnerable, the narrator of *The Hill of Dreams* claims that it makes them more powerful:

> And she had made herself defenseless before him, caressing and fondling the body that had been so despised. He exulted in the happy thought that he had knelt down on the ground before her, and had embraced her knees and worshipped. The woman's body had become his religion; he lay awake at night looking into the darkness with hungry eyes; wishing for a miracle, that the appearance of the so-desired form might be shaped before him. And when he was alone in quiet places in the wood, he fell down again on his knees, and even on his face. (*Hill* 98)

In such extracts, women are no longer prostitutes or evil spirits but embody another stereotype, the *Mater Dolorosa*, the Virgin Mary, a theme that Swinburne masters. His poem "Dolores" calls more for the reader's compassion towards the *persona*'s suffering than the selfless doxological discourse that would be expected from the reading of the subtitle ("Notre-Dame des Sept Douleurs"). The representation of the Madona is designed to satisfy the masochistic stance of the poetic voice and the play on colours and textures reveals the distorted portrait of the woman in the opening lines:

> Cold eyelids that hide like a jewel
> Hard eyes that grow soft for an hour;
> The heavy white limbs, and the cruel
> Red mouth like a venomous flower. (*Third* 178)

The poetic voice adds a paradoxical dimension to Dolores by suggesting a series of tensions through visual impressions and colours ("white"/"red") and tactile sensations ("hard"/"soft"). This attitude corresponds to the "maelstrom of subjectivity" mentioned by Jan B. Gordon (Fletcher 50), namely, a narcissistic stance wherein the woman is used as a vehicle for the artist's visions. By mythologizing the New Woman and feminine figures from the Celtic folklore, Yeats constructs an image of a woman ruling nations and men. While the figure of Crazy Jane represents masculinity through her flat breasts in "Crazy Jane talks to the Bishop" ("Those breasts are flat and fallen now" [Yeats 43]), the English-born Irish revolutionary suffragette and actress, Maud Gonne (1866-1953), is erected to the rank of Muse in "Aedh wishes for the Cloths of Heaven," being portrayed as a domineering force that the overpowered *persona* cannot regulate: "I have spread my dreams under your feet; / Tread softly because you tread on my dreams" (Yeats 76). The femininity of the male poetic voice appears in his suffering and lament and also through a form of horizontality, stressed by the

verbs “spread” and “tread,” whereas the lady’s masculinity is showed in her verticality—her height being evoked by the image of the feet tramping the *persona*’s dreams. Yeats’s unstable relationship with Maud Gonne accounts for the poet’s choice to make her an incarnation of the *Femme-fatale* type through unaccessible desire, notably in “No Second Troy:” “Why should I blame her that she fills my days / With misery” (Yeats 152).

Through their univocal identity, *i.e.* as beautiful subjects, women finally became economic objects. The alignment of advertising discourses, Pre-Raphaelite painters and decadent poets contributed to the rise of marketing, especially female cosmetics, fashion and clothing. Fob watches, brooches, and other carriable objects like Art-Nouveau cigarette cases with smoking women on it exemplify the idea that the New Woman was an object of the commodity culture. Some women were used as territorial representations, Dark Rosaleen, for example, embodying an obscure, more mysterious *alter ego* of England. During the Celtic Revival, like female voices, Welsh and Irish writers living in England united to defend the endangered culture of their nations.

Ethnic vulnerability: aesthetics of loss and bereavement

The vertical relationship between London, the imperial capital, and the peripheral areas, Wales and especially Ireland, where British rule prevailed and led to insurrections such as the Easter Rising, involves a whole aesthetics in *fin-de-siècle* Celtic texts. The fight for an independent Irish Republic was not only political but also cultural: taking part in the Celtic Revival, both Yeats and Machen chose to leave the principle of their literary group to defend a national group with new principles (“Art for Art’s sake” became Art for Ireland’s and Wales’ sake): from one vulnerable group to another. Exploring the pre-Saxon Celtic legacy, the Celtic Revival aimed at reinforcing the minor cultures of Wales and Ireland. Despite the vulnerability of their nations, Yeats and Machen’s nationalistic poems and narratives build the image of two strong nations, by using folk history, Celtic sports, hagiography (Welsh and Irish Saints), goldsmithery, Celtic magic (fairies and druids), religious festivals and traditions.

Although in many cases immigration was a choice, immigrants still perceived themselves as uprooted subjects and their feelings of exile and homesickness nourished an aesthetics of loss and bereavement: “Despair was heavy upon him, his heart fainted with a horrible dread. […] Deep, deep, the darkness closed upon him. […] every circle was an initiation, every initiation eternal loss” (*Hill* 102).

The panic attacks and claustrophobia experienced by Machen's autobiographical character are symptoms of an ethnic vulnerability. In this poetic passage which could almost be versified, the glottal sound /h/ (in "heavy", "heart" and "horrible") mimicks the hectic breath of the dying immigrant, while the spondaic rhythm reinforced by a ternary alliteration in /d/ ("Deep, deep, the darkness…") emulates his feeling of claustration. The fragmented syntax conveys the schizoid personality of the displaced subject. Machen's two-dimensional settings (reflecting the England/Wales dichotomy) create a cartography of vulnerability, wherein London becomes the kernel of horror, especially his Gothic texts: "London has been called the city of encounters; it is more than that, it is the city of Resurrections" (*Pan* 38). The vulnerable is attracted by the capital city and is more liable to observe its mystical phenomena—"the horror and wonder of London was at its height" (*Pan* 74). As possible responses to vulnerability, magic and occultism triggered the encounter of Yeats and Machen in the "Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn," an esoteric group founded by three Freemasons, W. H. Woodman (1828-1891), W. W. Westcott (1848-1925) and S. L. M. Mathers (1854-1918). Machen was only fascinated for a time by the theurgical practices of the secret society, which he rapidly left. Yeats's and Machen's dehumanized characters and voices, therefore, contrast with another approach: the literary and political struggle of their *personae*, who invoke the ancestral forces of Celtic mythological heroes to champion Ireland and Wales. As the herald of the Irish people, Yeats notably uses Druids and Cúchulainn (literally "dog of Culann"), whose martial magic confers to his poetry an epic and heroic register:

> Then Conchubar, the subtlest of all men,
> Ranking his Druids round him ten by ten,
> Spake thus: "Cuchulain will dwell there and brood
> For three days more in dreadful quietude,
> And then arise, and raving slay us all.
> Chaunt in his ear delusions magical,
> That he may fight the horses of the sea."
> The Druids took them to their mystery,
> And chaunted for three days. (Yeats 24)

The feeling of vulnerability is counterbalanced by the regular rhyme scheme and rhythmical pattern reflecting Cuchulain's steadiness. Magic and art become shields against British rule, symbolized, later in the poem, by "the invulnerable tide:"

> Cuchulain stirred,
> Stared on the horses of the sea, and heard
> The cars of battle and his own name cried;
> And fought with the invulnerable tide. (Yeats 24)

Made more solemn by the use of two rhyming couplets ("stirred/heard," "cried/tide"), Cuchulain's victory symbolizes the poet's successful struggle for his nation.

Machen's national vulnerability is followed by a regional one, as he equally uses Welsh legends to represent not only his country but a specific region in South Wales, Monmouthshire. Through the tale of *Eos Amherawdur* ("Emperor Nightingale," *Eos*: "nightingale," and *amherawdur*: "emperor") who "was grieved because mortal ears could not hear nor comprehend the enchantment of his song" (*Glory* 68), Machen embodies both the misunderstood artist and the rejected Celt:

> He remembered an old tale which his father was fond of telling him—the story of Eos Amherawdur (the Emperor Nightingale). [...] Eos had his court in a vast forest, called Wentwood, in the deepest depths of the green-wood between Caerwent and Caermaen, which is also called the City of the Legions; though some men say that we should rather name it the city of the Waterfloods. Here, then, was the Palace of Eos, built of the finest stones after the Roman manner, and within it were the most glorious chambers that eye has ever seen, and there was no end to the number of them, for they could not be counted. For the stones of the palace being immortal, they were at the pleasure of the Emperor. [...] Ambrose had heard the song from the faery regions. He had heard it in swift whispers at his ear, in sighs upon his breast, in the breath of kisses on his lips. Never was he numbered amongst the despisers of Eos. (*Glory* 76)

Machen uses the tradition of the tale and orality to recount the story of Eos, who becomes a new Albatros.

Yeats and Machen's approach equally includes a linguistic reflection, as they tried to make up for the vulnerability of Celtic languages: Irish, or Gaelic, and Welsh (a Brittonic language). Evans observed that between 1901 and 1911, Welsh speakers were less and less numerous, notably in the Rhondda Valley (Evans 54). First, the sounds of Gaelic were heard thanks to the foundation of the Abbey Theatre in December 1904, in Dublin, where Yeats, Lady Gregory, George Bernard Shaw, J. M. Synge, Seán O'Casey, among others, performed their plays. The intrusion of Welsh in Machen's works corresponds to a strategy of marginalization of non-Welsh readers. He notably uses this language in doxological formulae such as the *Gloria Patri* ("Gogoniant y Tâd ac y Mab ac yr Yspryd Glân" [Machen *Glory* 43]).[3] This language bestows on Machen's characters an ancestral force, notably transmitted by the blessings of Welsh Saints: Teilo, Dewi and Dyfrig are notably invoked for their miracles and spiritual strength. Celtic hagiography reduces the feeling of vulnerability on behalf of the Machen's autobiographic Welsh immigrants: "My father read out to me all the histories of Teilo, Dewi, and Iltyd, of their marvellous chalices and altars of Paradise from which they made the books of the Graal afterwards" (*Glory* 89).

[3] "Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit."

The immigrants' failure of adaptation involves not only nationalist views but an artificial recreation of their original countries. The protagonist of *The Hill of Dreams* rebuilds a new Wales in London by imagining a new cartography and new impressions: "in that distorting medium of the mist, changing all things, he imagined that he trod an infinite desolate plain, abandoned from ages, but circled and encircled with dolmen and menhir that loomed out at him, gigantic, terrible. All London was one grey temple of an awful rite, ring within ring of wizard stones circled about some central place" (*Hill* 135). This process of reconstruction, also called reterritorialization, accounts for the appearance of ancient Welsh tribes such as the Silurians, in the modern setting of London: "He was gradually leveling to the dust the squalid kraals of modern times, and rebuilding the splendid and golden city of Siluria" (*Hill* 122).

Lucian disguises the mediocrity of modern civilization by replacing them with a protohistorical tribe, the Silurians, Brittonic warriors from Monmouthshire, Machen's birthplace, who long resisted the domination of Romans. Post-structuralist philosophers such as Deleuze and Guattari examined the concept of vulnerability, in particular through their botanic metaphor of the "rhizome," an epistemological pattern to study the hybrid nature of uprooted subjects along with the multiplicity of an individual within a fluctuating environment. The migrant becomes, like rhizomes, between two cultures : "toujours au milieu, entre les choses, inter-être, intermezzo" (Deleuze & Guattari 8). Owing to their horizontality, rhizomes resist systems of domination. Deleuze and Guattari illustrate it with a cross-fertilization between a wasp and an orchid:

> Comment les mouvements de déterritorialisation et les procès de reterritorialisation ne seraient-ils pas relatifs, perpétuellement en branchement, pris les uns dans les autres ? L'orchidée se déterritorialise en formant une image, un calque de guêpe ; mais la guêpe se reterritorialise sur cette image. La guêpe se déterritorialise pourtant, devenant elle-même une pièce dans l'appareil de reproduction de l'orchidée ; mais elle reterritorialise l'orchidée, en en transportant le pollen. La guêpe et l'orchidée font rhizome, en tant qu'hétérogènes. (Deleuze & Guattari 9-10)

The expansive process of artistic creativity typical of Swinburne's flowing rhythm and accumulated enjambments responds to a ramification close to the rhizomatic process. The correlation between the blurred identity of the artist and the act of writing appears in several poems of his *First Series*, in particular "Hymn to Proserpine," where the polysyndeton best illustrates the horizontality of existence and temporality:

> With light of ruin, and sound of changes, and pulse of years:
> With travail of day after day, and with trouble of hour upon hour;
> And bitter as blood is the spray; and the crests are as fangs that devour:
> And its vapour and storm of its steam as the sighing of spirits to be;
> And its noise as the noise in a dream; and its depth as the roots of the sea (*First* 83)

Reinforced by alliterative connections and anaphoras, the accumulations, which lie on a cycle of repetitions introduced by cunjunctions ("with" and "and"), confer to the poem an effect of procrastinated ending, as the *persona* takes time to accept the fatality of time and death. Machen, who acknowledged the influence of Swinburne on his own poetic prose, equally develops this figure of speech in *The Hill of Dreams* to convey the waste-land motif experienced by the exiled artist:

> He looked out into the grey street, and it stood a symbol of his life, chill and dreary and grey and vexed with a horrible wind. And beyond, he knew, stretched the labyrinth of streets more or less squalid, but all grey and dull, and behind were the mud pits and the steaming heaps of yellowish bricks, and to the north was a great wide cold waste, treeless, desolate, swept by bitter wind. It was all like his own life, he said again to himself, a maze of unprofitable dreariness and desolation, and his mind grew as black and hopeless as the winter sky. (*Hill* 174)

By thus juxtaposing the elements of a deserted territory on a syntagmatic axis, the narrator gives an impression of horizontality and timelessness. If Arthur Machen endeavoured to fuse the culture of Wales with the culture of England, he also studied the limitations of this attempt. When a Welsh plant, *Arctic Pilulifera*, is uprooted and brought to England, it becomes vulnerable and dies, and foreshadows the plight of the character himself, who dies in London of an overdose of laudanum, an escapist outlet. Like immigrants and artists, this rare plant is quite sensitive and fragile and fails to resist its urban environment: "He put the specimen on his desk [...] but the maid swept it away, dry and withered, in a day or two" (*Hill* 107).

The Victorian *doxa*, which perceived femininity and social exogeneousness as vulnerabilities, was challenged by *fin-de-siècle* artists, whose various forms of vulnerableness led to a common marginality. Decadents, women and Celts were linked by a collective conception of gender roles and united by a common battleground: the *Bodley Head*, through whom the rise of the New Woman coincided with the portrait of ladies made by Decadent poets. John Lane and Elkin Mathews published not only the licencious Decadent volumes of *The Yellow Book* from 1894 to 1897 but also Machen's texts related to Celticism and the Feminist short stories of female writers like George Egerton (1859-1945), who portrayed women's sexuality, notably in *Keynotes* (1893). Despite the independent approach and goals of these different artists, the concomitant publication of their dissenting ideas made possible by this particular publishing house contributed to diffuse a coherent mindset wherein the concept of vulnerability resisted many stereotypes: late Victorian ethnic and gendered vulnerabilities were collective since the discrepancy between fictitious women and real women was important and undermined the fact that the New Woman was a minority and that she was human; and yet this collective vulnerability involved different responses on behalf of individuals and artists, who turned it into an instrument of power or an artistically creative tool. A minority of more realistic

portraits of women appeared in some poems of the period, especially in Yeats's; "Ephemera" offers a far more realistic image of women and gives voice to them through a sensible speech given by a sensitive and humane woman:

> Although our love is waning, let us stand
> By the lone border of the lake once more,
> Together in that hour of gentleness
> When the poor tired child, passion, falls asleep.
> How far away the stars seem, and how far
> Is our first kiss, and ah, how old my heart! (Yeats 17)

The legacy of the *fin de siècle* is vast, and the last two turns of the century, the end of the nineteenth and that of the twentieth centuries, share a common ecological issue about environmental vulnerability that both Yeats and Machen brought up—their works may be studied in the light of ecopoetics. As for the poets' tendency to disguise women as dolls, it has found a modernized equivalent with new technologies and photograph editing software erasing weak spots in top models' bodies, creating robotized beings for advertising purposes and even leading to pathologies such as anorexia.

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