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Care as Collateral: Maternal Inheritance and Organisational Violence in Arundhati Roy's *Mother Mary Comes to Me*

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Abstract

Arundhati Roy's Mother Mary Comes to Me (2025) has primarily been read as a memoir of maternal conflict and personal inheritance. This article proposes a different critical approach, reading the text as an analysis of care as an organisational regime in which love, discipline, and violence are structurally entangled. Rather than treating maternal harm as an aberration or trauma alone, the article situates it within overlapping institutions of family, faith, and feminism, demonstrating how care functions as a mechanism through which injury is normalised and responsibility redistributed. Through close textual analysis, the study examines the ethical limits of contextual explanation, particularly where genealogies of violence risk softening accountability. It further interrogates the memoir's tendency to narrativise injury as formative, attending to moments in which suffering is assimilated into narrative coherence and others in which it remains resistant to meaning. The article contends that Mother Mary Comes to Me performs its most critical work not by resolving these tensions but by staging their impasse, offering a rigorous account of inheritance, defiance, and the political organisation of care.

Keywords Care, Maternal Inheritance, Feminist Ethics, Violence and Accountability, Narrative Organisation, Arundhati Roy.

Introduction

Arundhati Roy's *Mother Mary Comes to Me* (2025) appears at a moment when memoir has become an increasingly prominent site for negotiating questions of inheritance, injury, and political formation. Across contemporary literary and cultural studies, life writing has been read as a form through which private experience is rendered intelligible within broader ethical, social, and historical frameworks, often mobilising the languages of trauma, healing, and reconciliation (see Gilmore, 2001; Smith & Watson, 2010). In this context, Roy's memoir has been widely received as a personal reckoning with maternal violence and familial legacy, a late-life attempt to revisit a formative relationship shaped by fear, devotion, and damage. Such readings register the text's affective intensity and its willingness to confront domestic harm. Nevertheless, they also risk narrowing the memoir's critical scope by approaching care primarily as a private or therapeutic relation, rather than as a political and organisational arrangement through which authority, obligation, and injury are distributed.

This article proposes a different critical orientation. Rather than treating *Mother Mary Comes to Me* as a narrative of personal recovery or psychological resolution, it reads the memoir as an analysis of care as an organisational regime, in which love, discipline, and violence are structurally entangled. In doing so, the article shifts attention away from individual pathology or familial dysfunction and toward the patterned ways in which harm is justified, normalised, and rendered intelligible within institutions that claim moral legitimacy. Care, in this reading, does not merely fail to prevent violence; it can function as the very mechanism through which violence is organised and sustained.

Importantly, Roy does not dismantle motherhood, sanctity, or reverence from the outside. Instead, she enters their moral grammar—sacrifice, protection, endurance—and allows their violences to surface from within. The memoir's title stages this movement with particular precision. "Mother" and "Mary" arrive laden with cultural authority, invoking shelter, purity, and unconditional care. The phrase "comes to me," however, unsettles these associations. The mother is not summoned, awaited, or obeyed; she arrives uninvited, interrupting rather than reassuring. What appears initially as intimacy is revealed as an encounter structured by force. This subtle grammatical disturbance signals a central concern of the memoir: the institutions that claim to shelter—family, faith, education, feminism, law—are often the same institutions through which harm is distributed and made ordinary.

To frame *Mother Mary Comes to Me* in these terms is to take seriously feminist arguments that care is not a purely affective or moral practice, but a political arrangement shaped by power, dependency, and inequality (Tronto, 1993; Kittay, 2019). Care operates through norms, expectations, and hierarchies; it assigns roles and allocates costs. When read through this lens, *Mother Mary Comes to Me* becomes less a story of an injured daughter confronting a difficult mother than an inquiry into how care itself is organised, justified, and weaponised. The memoir repeatedly returns to scenes in which protection and harm are inseparable, revealing how devotion can coexist with discipline and how shelter can become indistinguishable from control.

As both a novelist and a political essayist, Roy has long resisted narratives that convert suffering into moral clarity or political justification. Across her fiction and non-fiction, injury appears as a condition that circulates without guarantee of meaning or recompense. In *The God of Small Things* (1997) and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017), for instance, damage accumulates, fragments, and persists. Her political essays similarly insist on the opacity of pain, particularly in relation to state violence, caste hierarchy, and imperial war (Roy, 2004, 2014). Explanation, in her earlier works, is repeatedly treated with suspicion, especially when it risks consoling the reader or legitimising harm.

Read against this trajectory, *Mother Mary Comes to Me* occupies an uneasy and revealing position. Written after Mary's (her mother's) death and shaped by retrospection, the memoir revisits injury through the idiom of inheritance. Violence is traced across generations, institutions, and historical formations, producing a dense genealogy of harm. This contextualisation is necessary and often compelling. However, it also introduces narrative pressures that sit in tension with Roy's earlier insistence on leaving the issue of damage ethically unresolved. As explanation accumulates, violence risks becoming legible primarily as inheritance rather than as choice. The memoir gestures toward this tension without fully inhabiting it, revealing the difficulty of sustaining critique while preserving narrative coherence.

Central to Roy's account is her refusal to separate maternal devotion from maternal injury. Mary is presented simultaneously as defiant and destructive: a woman who challenged the Travancore Christian Succession Act of 1916 to secure inheritance rights for Syrian Christian women, founded a progressive school, and endured domestic violence, while also inflicting emotional and physical harm on her children (Roy, 2025, p. 46, 77, 25). Roy resists a familiar manoeuvre in feminist historiography: the preservation of emancipatory figures by relegating violence to the private sphere, where it can be acknowledged without consequence. Instead, political accomplishment and domestic injury are held in direct proximity. This insistence carries significant ethical and political weight, challenging narratives that protect feminist defiance by rendering harm incidental, regrettable, or analytically separable.

It is in this context that the memoir's invocation of *collateral* becomes especially significant. When Roy (2025, p. 76) describes herself as "collateral for a more important enterprise," referring to the school her mother founded, she names more than personal injury. She (2025) exposes an organisational logic through which harm is rendered acceptable in the service of larger moral or political projects such as education, reform, or emancipation. To describe injury as *collateral* is to situate it within a framework where damage is distributed and justified, rather than aberrant and accidental. This article takes *collateral* seriously, not merely as Roy's metaphor but as an analytic lens through which to examine how *care* can function as a mechanism for allocating violence while retaining moral legitimacy.

Such a reading draws attention to what may be described as organisational violence: forms of harm that are not excessive or exceptional but structurally produced and sustained through institutions

that claim to shelter and protect. Anthropological and sociological accounts of violence (Das, 2007) have shown how harm often becomes embedded in the ordinary, reproduced through everyday practices that render it livable and intelligible. In *Mother Mary Comes to Me*, organisational violence operates through family, education, religion, and feminist reform—sites that simultaneously nurture and injure. Violence, in this sense, does not negate care; it depends on it.

A further tension emerges in the memoir's treatment of *injury* as formative. Roy repeatedly frames pain as something she learned to map and sift through until it yielded knowledge. Suffering is not only endured but also becomes explanatory, occasionally slipping into a muted self-mythology in which survival appears to generate political clarity. I must acknowledge that this framing does not dominate the memoir, but it recurs often enough to warrant critical attention. Put alongside Roy's earlier fiction and essays, it suggests a subtle but consequential shift. Where earlier works refuse to convert damage into insight or legitimacy, *Mother Mary Comes to Me* more frequently organises injury into a narrative that must cohere.

This article contends that these tensions—between explanation and accountability, defiance and damage, care and violence—are not shortcomings to be resolved but central to the memoir's critical force. By reading *Mother Mary Comes to Me* through the lens of *care as collateral*, the article examines how maternal inheritance, feminist defiance, and organisational violence intersect to complicate familiar narratives of empowerment and/or survival. Rather than seeking resolution, the analysis attends to the impasse the memoir stages: an impasse between critique and attachment, and explanation and ethical responsibility.

The sections that follow elaborate on the conceptual framework guiding this analysis before turning to sustained close readings of the memoir's key scenes and narrative strategies. In foregrounding the organisation of care, the article positions *Mother Mary Comes to Me* as a demanding meditation on how harm becomes politically thinkable—and livable—within the very structures that promise protection.

Literature Review

Scholarly engagement with Roy's work has developed along two intersecting trajectories: literary analysis of her fiction and political readings of her essays and activist interventions. Since the publication of *The God of Small Things* (1997), Roy has been read as a writer centrally concerned with the regulation of intimacy, the violence of social hierarchies, and the persistence of historical injury within everyday life (Tickell, 2003; Bahri, 2003). Subsequent criticism has extended this focus to questions of caste, gender, nationalism, and postcolonial governance, frequently emphasising Roy's resistance to narrative closure and her scepticism toward liberal frameworks of reconciliation (see Nayar, 2008). Across this body of work, Roy is consistently positioned as a writer who refuses to convert suffering into moral clarity or ethical consolation.

Critical responses to *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) consolidate this positioning. Scholars have noted how the novel resists coherence by juxtaposing disparate sites of injury—Kashmir, caste violence, urban dispossession—without subordinating them to a unifying moral frame. This formal fragmentation has been read as an extension of Roy's political critique, mirroring her insistence that violence cannot be rendered legible through synthesis without risk of neutralisation (Chatterjee, 2019). Rather than resolving damage, Roy's fiction allows it to accumulate, insisting on its persistence within social and political structures.

Alongside her fiction, Roy's political essays have generated sustained scholarly discussion within postcolonial studies and cultural politics. Commentators (e.g. Nayar, 2009) have highlighted her critique of state violence, militarism, and neoliberal development, particularly her insistence on exposing the infrastructural and institutional conditions that render violence routine rather than exceptional (Roy, 2004; Roy, 2014). More recent scholarship (Kapur, 2020; Srivastava, 2021) situates Roy against humanitarian discourses that rely on empathy or moral sentiment as substitutes for structural critique, emphasising her refusal to instrumentalise suffering as political leverage. Across these readings, Roy's work is marked by a sustained suspicion of explanation when it risks consoling the reader or legitimising harm.

By contrast, *Mother Mary Comes to Me* has only begun to enter scholarly discussion. Existing responses are largely confined to journalistic reviews and short critical reflections, which tend to approach the memoir as an intimate account of maternal conflict and domestic violence. These readings often situate the text within feminist traditions of life writing, emphasising testimony, belated

articulation, and survival. While such approaches acknowledge the memoir's emotional candour, they frequently remain within a confessional or therapeutic register, treating harm as something to be revealed and processed rather than as a condition structured by institutions and moral frameworks.

More broadly, scholarship on memoir and life writing offers an important but partial context for reading Roy's text. Foundational studies (Gilmore, 2001; Smith & Watson, 2010) have framed memoir as a genre through which private experience is translated into public meaning, particularly in response to trauma, loss, or historical rupture. More recent work has complicated this framework by questioning the emphasis on healing and narrative coherence. Scholars (Couser, 2012; Eakin, 2004) have argued that memoir can also function as a site of ethical disturbance, resisting resolution and refusing to yield insight or closure.

Within feminist memoir studies, particular attention has been paid to narratives of inheritance and familial attachment. Recent scholarship (see Whitlock, 2015) has examined how maternal figures are often positioned within narrow affective registers, oscillating between idealisation and pathologisation, leaving limited analytic space for sustained engagement with maternal authority and violence. Even when harm is acknowledged, it is frequently subsumed under psychological explanations or structural genealogies, thereby allowing maternal care to remain ethically redeemable. These tendencies reveal the limits of reading maternal narratives primarily through affective and therapeutic lenses.

These limitations point toward the need for a framework that can address care as a structure of power rather than as an affective ideal. Feminist theories of care (Tronto, 1993; Kittay, 2019) have long challenged the assumption that care is inherently benevolent, emphasising its organisation instead through relations of dependency, obligation, and inequality. Subsequent work (Held, 2006; Sevenhuijsen, 2003) has extended this analysis to show how care operates as a mode of governance, particularly within institutions such as family, education, and welfare. More recent interventions have further complicated the field by examining how care legitimises control, sacrifice, and endurance, rather than merely responding to vulnerability (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). Roy's memoir invites such a reading precisely because it situates care within institutions rather than within private feeling alone.

Parallel developments in the study of violence further enrich this perspective. Anthropological and sociological accounts (Das, 2007; Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois, 2004) have demonstrated how harm is frequently embedded in ordinary social relations and sustained through institutions that render it livable rather than visible. The latest scholarship (Povinelli, 2016; Han, 2012) has emphasised how violence is normalised through kinship, education, and moral obligation, particularly within intimate and domestic contexts. However, to the best of my knowledge, these insights have rarely been brought into sustained dialogue with literary memoir, where violence is still often approached as exceptional trauma.

All in all, existing scholarship illuminates Roy's political commitments, memoir's ethical possibilities, and care's moral claims—but rarely their convergence. Roy's fiction and essays are widely recognised for their refusal of redemptive narratives, yet *Mother Mary Comes to Me* has not been fully examined as a text that situates care itself as a site of harm. Memoir studies offer tools for analysing testimony and inheritance, but often privilege narrative coherence and affective resolution. Care ethics foregrounds power and obligation but, to the best of my recollection, has been less attentive to the legitimisation of injury within maternal hierarchies. Studies of everyday violence expose the routinisation of harm yet rarely engage literary form as a mode of critical inquiry.

This article intervenes at this intersection. By bringing Roy's memoir into dialogue with contemporary memoir studies, feminist care ethics, and theories of everyday violence, it offers a framework for reading *Mother Mary Comes to Me* as a sustained inquiry into the organisation of care and the ethical limits of explanation. In doing so, it addresses a critical gap in existing scholarship and prepares the ground for a close analysis of how maternal inheritance, defiance, and organisational violence are narratively staged.

Theoretical Framework

Three interrelated conceptual lenses guide this article: care as collateral, maternal inheritance, and organisational violence. Rather than adopting a single theoretical model, it draws selectively on feminist ethics of care, memoir and life-writing studies, and anthropological accounts of everyday violence. Together, these bodies of work provide the conceptual grounding necessary to examine how

harm can be organised, normalised, and ethically justified within institutions that claim moral legitimacy, without presuming that care and violence operate as oppositional forces. Within this article, *care as collateral* and *organisational violence* function as heuristic constructs. While not formalised categories in care ethics, they are developed in dialogue with its central concern for the unequal allocation of responsibility, vulnerability, and moral worth. Feminist ethics of care has consistently challenged the assumption that care is inherently benevolent, private, or morally neutral. Joan Tronto's (1993) influential formulation reconceptualises care as a political practice structured by power, inequality, and social organisation rather than as an unproblematic moral disposition. Care, in this account, operates through norms of responsibility and obligation that are unevenly distributed, often obscuring the costs borne by those positioned as dependent or expendable. Eva Feder Kittay (2019) similarly foregrounds the asymmetries embedded in relations of dependency, demonstrating how care frequently demands sacrifice without reciprocal recognition. While care ethics emphasises relationality and responsibility, it also exposes how appeals to care can normalise endurance and render refusal ethically suspect, particularly within familial and gendered contexts.

Building on these interventions, this article conceptualises care as collateral, describing an organisational logic through which injury is rendered acceptable in the service of larger moral, political, or emancipatory projects. To name harm as collateral is to recognise it as anticipated, distributed, and rationalised. In this formulation, care functions not only as a moral value but as a justificatory framework that absorbs injury while maintaining institutional innocence. The concept does not presume malicious intent; rather, it highlights how structures of care can sustain harm precisely by framing it as necessary, unavoidable, or secondary to a greater good.

Sara Ahmed's work on institutional life further sharpens this perspective by demonstrating how care, love, and good intentions are mobilised to secure moral coherence. In her analyses of *happiness* and *complaint*, Ahmed (2010; 2021) shows how institutions protect their ethical self-image by reframing harm as incidental while casting critique as disruption or ingratitude. Within such arrangements, harm is rarely denied outright; it is managed through narratives of endurance and moral necessity. Ahmed's insights are central to understanding how care can operate as a mechanism that legitimises injury while deflecting accountability.

The concept of maternal inheritance is employed to move beyond readings of inheritance as psychological transmission or affective memory alone. In memoir studies, inheritance is often framed through registers of trauma, loss, and belated understanding (see Gilmore, 2001; Smith & Watson, 2010). While these approaches illuminate how injury is narrated, they can obscure the fact that inheritance also involves the transmission of authority, obligation, and ethical expectations. This article treats maternal inheritance as an organisational process through which norms of care, endurance, and legitimacy are reproduced across generations. Feminist scholarship on care has shown that family functions not only as a site of intimacy but also as a mode of governance, shaping moral expectations and disciplinary relations (see Held, 2006). Within this framework, harm is not merely remembered; it is inherited as a condition that structures what forms of attachment, resistance, and refusal become intelligible.

To account for the persistence and normalisation of harm within caring institutions, the article draws on anthropological accounts of violence embedded in everyday life. Veena Das's (2007) work on the *descent into the ordinary* demonstrates how violence is often woven into the routines of care, kinship, and social reproduction, losing its status as a rupture and becoming a condition of endurance. Harm, in this framework, is sustained not through spectacle but through repetition, justification, and adjustment. This understanding aligns with broader sociological accounts that locate violence within institutions that claim moral authority, including family, education, religion, and reformist projects (see Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois, 2004).

Organisational violence, as used in this article, refers to forms of injury that are structurally produced and sustained through such institutions, as distinct from episodic and/or spectacular violence. Often enacted under the sign of care, improvement, and protection, this form of violence becomes intelligible and livable. Violence does not negate care in this model; it is frequently mediated and legitimised by it. By framing violence as organisational, the framework avoids reducing harm to individual acts of cruelty or moral failure. Instead, it foregrounds how injury is normalised within systems that demand endurance while preserving ethical legitimacy.

Overall, these conceptual commitments provide a framework for analysing narratives in which care and harm are structurally entangled. The framework does not presume resolution and/or reconciliation. Instead, it enables an examination of how injury is rendered intelligible, acceptable, and enduring within institutional arrangements that claim ethical authority. The following section mobilises this framework through sustained close reading, demonstrating how these dynamics operate at the level of narrative form, metaphor, and scene.

Discussion and Analysis

Care That Anticipates Harm

Mother Mary Comes to Me resists the interpretive comfort of treating maternal violence as a rupture in care. Instead, Roy narrates harm as something that unfolds *within* care, anticipated and managed rather than denied. Her description of her mother as both "my shelter and my storm" (Roy, 2025, p. 8) does not invite reconciliation or moral sequencing. Shelter does not precede violence as justification, nor does violence negate care as failure. What the memoir foregrounds instead is a form of care that continues to operate even as it injures.

This dynamic becomes visible in Roy's description of being positioned as an emotional infrastructure for her mother. "My mother unloaded the burden of her quarrels and the daily dose of indignity that she had to endure onto my brother and me," she writes. "We were the only safe harbour she had" (Roy, 2025, p. 22). The phrase *safe harbour* is not a metaphor for protection but rather a description of its function. The child becomes the stabilising site upon which the mother's survival depends. Care here is not offered downward; it is extracted upward. Dependency is reversed, and with it, *responsibility*. As Kittay (2019) has argued, relations of care are always asymmetrical. However, Roy's memoir shows how such asymmetry can be organised so that the dependent party is also the one required to absorb *harm*.

Humiliation operates as a further technique through which care disciplines attachment. Roy recalls her mother mocking her speech in moments of anger, making her sound ridiculous to herself. "It felt as though she had cut me out—cut my shape out—of a picture book with a sharp pair of scissors and then torn me up" (Roy, 2025, p. 22). The injury here is formative. It teaches the child how to occupy space, speak, and disappear. This is why Roy's (2025, p. 25) later observation— "I learned early that the safest place can be the most dangerous"—functions as a diagnosis rather than a metaphor. Safety, in this account, is not the absence of threat but its management. Care becomes an apparatus that secures attachment by rendering its costs unavoidable. Tronto's (1993) insistence that care must be understood as a political practice structured by power rather than sentiment alone renders this dynamic legible.

Distributed Injury and Institutional Innocence

The memoir's most analytically charged scenes are those where domestic and institutional logics collapse into one another. Nowhere is this clearer than in Roy's account of being required to call her mother "Mrs Roy" in public, in order to prevent any perception of favouritism within the school her mother founded. "To ensure that the other children didn't feel that my brother and I were in any way more special than them," Roy (2025, pp. 32–33) writes, "we too had to call our mother Mrs Roy in public… sometimes she was Mrs Roy in private too." The loss here involves not just emotional closeness but also ontological acknowledgement. The child relinquishes the category of *mother* so that the institution can preserve its moral image.

This is organisational violence in its most ordinary form. Injury is redistributed, rendered acceptable as evidence of fairness. Institutional innocence is preserved precisely through the child's disposability. Ahmed's (2021) analysis of institutional virtue is instructive here: institutions often maintain ethical coherence not by preventing harm but by arranging it so that harm appears necessary, principled, and even admirable. *Mother Mary Comes to Me* exposes how equality can be staged through cruelty, and how care can be weaponised to prove its own impartiality.

The same logic governs one of the memoir's most humiliating scenes: the moment Roy is called a "bitch" by her mother in front of others (2025, p. 46). After Roy accidentally disconnects a telephone call, she (2025, p. 46) recalls, "Her eyes turned cold. 'You bitch,' she said. In front of everybody." This is a public performance of authority. Humiliation is administered in front of witnesses to secure discipline beyond the individual child. As Das (2007) argues, violence embedded in everyday institutions rarely announces itself as rupture; it descends into the ordinary, sustained through repetition and routinisation. Roy's memoir refuses to position care as the antithesis of such

violence, instead tracing how ethical languages of care participate in its normalisation. It is in this context that Roy's (2025, p. 76) description of herself as "collateral for a more important enterprise" acquires its full analytic force. *Collateral* is not a domestic term. It belongs to bureaucratic and military rationalities, in which harm that is foreseen, distributed, and ethically absorbed is named. To describe injury as collateral is to locate it within an organisational framework where damage is justified by scale and necessity. The school's feminist ambition remains morally intact because the cost is borne downward by those least able to refuse it.

Inheriting Endurance as Ethical Orientation

Inheritance in *Mother Mary Comes to Me* operates less through memory than through the transmission of ethical expectation. Roy repeatedly frames pain as something she learned to hold, study, and transform. "It was almost as though for her to shine her light on her students," she (2025, p. 53) writes, "we had to absorb her darkness. Today, though, I am grateful for that gift of darkness." Elsewhere, she (2025, p. 53) describes learning to "keep it close, to map it, to sift through its shades" until it yielded understanding. Suffering becomes pedagogical rather than merely endured.

This framing introduces a subtle narrative pressure toward coherence. Endurance begins to appear not only necessary but meaningful. Nevertheless, the memoir simultaneously acknowledges the contingencies that enabled survival. Roy (2025, p. 115) notes without illusion that "my education, the class I came from, and, above all, the fact that I spoke English protected me and gave me options that millions of others did not have." The tension between these registers—suffering as formative and privilege as protective—remains fluid. When pain is narrated as a "route to freedom" (p. 53), it risks appearing retroactively justified by what followed it.

Ahmed's (2010) critique of endurance as a moral demand clarifies what is at stake here. When survival becomes evidence of virtue, refusal is recoded as failure or ingratitude (Ahmed, 2010). In Roy's memoir, what is inherited is not only fear or attachment but an ethical orientation in which endurance becomes obligation. Explanation deepens, but accountability thins. Violence becomes intelligible, even inevitable. The risk is that the density of explanation narrows the space for ethical interruption.

When Pain Refuses Meaning

The memoir's most forceful moments occur where this explanatory logic falters. Certain scenes resist incorporation into narratives of inheritance and/or endurance. Roy's account of sexual predation at the home of a wealthy family is one such moment. The man whom others saw as "the kindly Kottayam Santa" becomes, in her perception, "a human-size pig with glasses" (Roy, 2025, p. 34–35). The violence here is not only the assault but the social misrecognition that protects the perpetrator. This scene does not yield insight or transformation. It exposes how violence persists through communal optics, through the ordinary.

Similarly, Roy's (2025, p. 135–136) account of an abortion performed without anaesthetic is narrated with stark restraint. There is no metaphor, no genealogical framing, no retrospective wisdom. Pain remains bodily and procedural. It does not educate. These moments interrupt the memoir's drive toward coherence. They expose the limits of explanation and the fragility of endurance as an ethical resource. As Eakin (2004) suggests, ethical life writing need not resolve suffering into meaning to remain legible. In these scenes, Roy allows pain to remain unredeemed. Care cannot justify itself here.

Feminist Defiance and the Problem of Disposability

The memoir's engagement with feminism sharpens its central ethical tension. Mary Roy's defiance—her legal challenge to inheritance law, her institution-building—is framed as historically necessary. Nevertheless, the costs of this defiance are unevenly distributed. Roy recalls how, "between her bouts of rage and increasing physical violence," her mother told her that she could be anything she wanted to be. "To her daughter, those words were a life raft" (Roy, 2025, p. 61–62). The promise of possibility coexists with injury. Care arrives as compensation for harm, not as an alternative to it.

The memoir refuses to separate feminist achievement from domestic violence, but it hesitates to interrogate whether emancipatory projects can rely on distributed injury without reproducing disposability. Feminism appears as both a necessity and a shield. Harm is named, yet its ethical status remains unresolved. This hesitation exposes a broader difficulty within narratives of progress that depend on sacrifice. The question the memoir raises—whether defiance can be inherited without inheriting harm—remains unanswered.

Staying With the Impasse

What eventually distinguishes *Mother Mary Comes to Me* is its refusal of closure. Love does not absolve harm, and explanation does not secure accountability. Care remains ethically compromised. Rather than offering reconciliation, the memoir closes around an unresolved tension between attachment and critique.

This refusal is not a narrative weakness but an ethical stance. By staying with the impasse, Roy resists the demand that care redeem itself. The memoir exposes how harm becomes morally intelligible within institutions that promise protection but offer no way out of that contradiction.

What remains unsettled is not the presence of harm, but the conditions under which harm continues to be narrated as ethically necessary. It is this unresolved question that the conclusion takes upto reflect on its political and critical stakes.

Conclusion

This article has read *Mother Mary Comes to Me* as a memoir, a sustained inquiry into how care becomes an organising condition of harm. By bringing Roy's narrative into dialogue with the feminist ethics of care, critiques of institutional virtue, and accounts of everyday violence, the analysis shows that the memoir does not simply recount maternal injury; it exposes the moral arrangements that render such injury intelligible, acceptable, and enduring. Care, in Roy's text, does not fail in the face of violence. It functions through it.

Across the memoir, harm is neither denied nor sensationalised. Instead, it is anticipated, distributed, and absorbed within institutions that claim ethical authority—family, education, feminism itself. By naming herself as *collateral* to a morally sanctioned project, Roy reveals an organisational logic in which injury is rendered acceptable by appeal to necessity and scale. This logic does not operate solely through cruelty but also through devotion, obligation, and the moral pressure to *endure*. The memoir thus complicates any reading of *care* as inherently protective, insisting instead on its capacity to discipline, justify, and normalise violence.

The article has further argued that maternal inheritance in *Mother Mary Comes to Me* functions less as affective memory than as ethical transmission. What is inherited is not only attachment and fear, but a moral orientation that frames endurance as virtue and refusal as betrayal. Through dense genealogical explanation, harm becomes intelligible—sometimes too intelligible—risking becoming inevitable. However, the memoir repeatedly interrupts this movement. In moments when pain refuses to be incorporated into narrative coherence, care's justificatory power falters. These interruptions are ethical refusals that expose the limits of explanation and the danger of converting suffering into a form of legitimacy.

Crucially, the memoir does not resolve these tensions. Feminist defiance is presented as historically necessary, yet its costs are unevenly borne. Harm is named, but its ethical status remains unresolved. Rather than offering closure, the text remains suspended between critique and attachment, and explanation and accountability. This suspension is not an evasion. It is the memoir's most consequential intervention. By refusing reconciliation, Roy resists the demand that care redeem itself and/or that injury justify its own endurance.

In tracing these dynamics, the article has demonstrated that *Mother Mary Comes to Me* fulfils its critical force not by resolving harm but by exposing the conditions under which harm becomes morally thinkable. The memoir compels readers to confront an unsettling question it refuses to answer: how might one inherit defiance without inheriting its collateral damage? That question exceeds the bounds of personal narrative. It speaks to the ethical limits of care itself and to the organisational structures through which harm continues to be sheltered, justified, and lived with.

What Roy ultimately offers is clarity without consolation. By staying with the impasse, *Mother Mary Comes to Me* insists that critique must sometimes forgo the comfort of answers to remain ethically honest. It is in this refusal to reconcile care with innocence, and suffering with meaning, that the memoir performs its most urgent political and critical work.

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