ABSTRACT. This paper asks the question; is a poetic response to law and suffering legitimate? It reflects upon Robert Duncan’s poem *Persephone* and imagines the (dis)connections between law, literature and poetry. It muses upon the “Trauma” of the poem and the “wound” considered in the context of both public and private law and considers the politics of sentimentalism, dominant within the political agenda of the 21st century. The article uses the poem as a lens which reveals that the law fails to address the question of suffering as the wound of the poem is used by the poet as a pedagogical argument to teach us about loss.

KEY WORDS: *Persephone*, politics of sentimentalism, Robert Duncan, suffering, wound

In the discourse of national sentimentalism, identification with pain, a universal true feeling, would thereby lead to structural social change. In exchange, populations emancipated from the pain of failed democracy would then reauthorize universalist notions of citizenship in the national utopia, which involves in believing in a redemptive notion of law as the guardian of public good. The object of the nation-state in this light is to eradicate systemic social pain, the absence of which becomes the definition of freedom.1

In an age that has been called the Information Age2 – another phrase for describing post-industrial capitalism3 – in an age whereby the horizon has been flattened out, where as Strathern reminds us, the metaphoric has been refigured as the literal,4 I find it difficult to write about poetry. The difficulty does not arise from a notion that might be urging me to bury poetry, to bury poetry because it might be seen to be unproductive, unable to engage with the social needs and demands of our contemporary society. The difficulty does not arise from any misconceived pragmatic or realist urge; or even an ignorance of poetry, but because I find it difficult not to literalise,
not to make the implicit explicit. Poetry as a pure art form transmits its ‘message’ through verses metaphors, metonyms, analogies, images, aphorisms. However, in my reading, through my receiver/transmitter, poetry eats out the metaphors, metonyms, analogies, aphorisms and spits them out as a well chewed ‘synthesis’ of partial connections.

These connections of implicit words that make explicit how I understand literally, the social and social relations are the partial connections of the implicit words. I think it is important here to give an example of what I mean by the term literality. I will use an example from Strathern: She writes,

It is an anthropological axiom that however discrete they appear to be, entities are the product of relations; nothing is not embedded in some context or worldview that gives it its special shape.

She continues her analysis of this anthropological principle by proposing

... to take the axiom literally, as though what applies to discrete concepts also applies to individual persons and that by relations we may also understand the ‘relations’ (one’s relatives) of English Kinship.

Taking something literally means simply making explicit the multiplicity of perspectives through which a connection is made. Thus, a concept such as ‘relation’ is transmitted through various perspectives, but, at the same time, is not reducible to any of these perspectives. So rather than closing my eyes and refusing to read a poem, I will instead read a poem literally, or more precisely read parts of a poem literally. This reading I hope will allow both an approach to the traditional concerns of poetry, its contents, tropes, cultural reflections, or biographical elements but, more importantly, allow me to talk literally about relationships that I see emerging from the poem I was given to read. I want to focus on the relationship between Trauma, Citizenship and Nation.

Persephone, a poem written by Robert Duncan, a poet whom my literary (un) trained mind does not recognise, was given to me to think about and... to... imagine. To think... and... imagine; the (dis)connections between law, literature, poetry. A lot of ink has been spent in making these connections by authors more skilful and more eloquent than I. I will not engage with these particular (dis)connections, but I will offer some of these as references in footnote and make explicit in this way their on going significance in legal pedagogy/academy. In place of explication of law and

5 Supra n. 4 at 7.
6 Supra n. 4 at 12.
7 Supra n. 4 at 12.
8 M. Aristodemou, Law & Literature: Journeys from Her to Eternity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); A. Gearey, “Finnegans Wake and the Law of Love; the Aporia of