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**Cultural Constructs:
The Representation of Femininity in the Novels of
Emma Tennant, Margaret Elphinstone, and Janice Galloway**

Lisa Suzanne Babinec

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Abstract

This thesis proffers a detailed study, not an overview or a survey, of three contemporary Scottish women writers and six novels; moreover, the thesis attempts to decentre the Anglocentric British literary establishment. The primary theoretical approach drawn on in the analysis is feminism; the tenets of postcolonialism, poststructuralism, postmodernism, and the avant-garde are also integrated. Original and unpublished comments taken from personal interviews conducted with Tennant, Elphinstone, and Galloway are interwoven with textual interpretation throughout the thesis; this detailed new information confirms the critical conclusions drawn in all six novels.¹

Chapter One reviews the field of Scottish literature and identifies a variety of critical approaches to the study of Scottish literature. At the same time, the review of literature defines a gap in the current field of research in Scottish literature and, in particular, Scottish women's writing. The chapter offers alternate critical approaches to Scottish literature and concludes with a brief overview of the six novels which make-up the thesis.

Chapters Two, Three, and Four offer in-depth examinations of Emma Tennant's novels *The Bad Sister*, *Sisters and Strangers: A Moral Tale*, and *Faustine*. The analysis explores how Tennant exposes the ways in which ideology and cultural institutions condition and limit women's access to positive female roles and self-hood. The discussion reveals how social discourses and the media construct women as powerless subjects who are often compelled to collude with their 'oppression'. An investigation into narrative techniques like orality and intertextuality discloses how Tennant calls into question the very nature of literature and how her writing offers a feminist postmodern challenge to conventional representations of womanhood and femininity in literature.

Chapter Five analyses two novels by Margaret Elphinstone, *The Incomer* and *A Sparrow's Flight*. In the first part of the chapter, science fiction and fantasy genre conventions are discussed; additionally, the thematic dimensions of each novel including ideas connected to a non-hierarchical community, female subjectivity, and female community, among others, are

¹See Appendix, pp. 320-44 for the transcripts of these interviews.

also explored. The second part of the chapter examines Elphinstone's narrative techniques; these include inner tales, dream sequences, a preoccupation with landscape, and physical, emotional, and geographic border crossings to name a few. The chapter concludes by suggesting that Elphinstone's thematic structure and narrative form assert multiple meanings and pluralism which foster a reconstruction of the female identity in an alternate fictional world.

Chapter Six examines the representation of femininity and female 'madness' in Janice Galloway's novel *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*. The analysis interrogates the social and medical discourses which encode the female protagonist as an inferior and unstable subject. An examination of the fractured narrative form reveals that narrative techniques such as theatrical dialogues, word-displacement, and lists, among others, mirror the protagonist's fractured identity and mind. A discussion of wit and humour shows that Galloway launches an inquiry into the nature of 'acceptable' humour and also provides comic relief to an otherwise dark and serious novel. The chapter ends with a brief analysis of the novel's ambiguous conclusion.

Chapter Seven summarizes the main points of the entire thesis and asserts that these three novelists represent a collective avant-garde who challenge the existing ideological structures which confine women as passive and dependent subjects. The chapter also acknowledges several other contemporary Scottish women writers who also pose a challenge to the dominant cultural order. The chapter ends with some suggestions for further research beyond the scope of the present thesis.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to two individuals:

For Mrs Sally Joranko, Mrs J: I always said I would dedicate my first book to you. I only hope that someday I can inspire students as you always do.

For M., I never could have finished this thesis without you, your belief in me, and your unfailing love and support.

Chapter One *Introduction*

Edinburgh is the place that I, a constitutional exile, am essentially exiled from. I spent the first 18 years of my life, during the 1920s and 1930s there. It was Edinburgh that bred within me the conditions of exile; and what have I been doing since then but moving from exile into exile? It has ceased to be a fate, it has become a calling.

--Muriel Spark

So much of Scottish literature exists in a ghostly limbo of non-discussion that we must surely consider ourselves to be ready to take the various risks associated with an overhaul.

--Edwin Morgan

We must not have a Scottish critical kailyard.

--Robert Crawford¹

Scottish literature has always suffered from a kind of 'exile'. While the word exile holds a number of different connotations, in reference to Scottish literature, exile might mean ignorance or indifference. While many critics and scholars outside Scotland tend to lump Scottish literature under the general heading of English or British literature, the very notion that Scottish literature does not maintain autonomy from English literature angers and incites numerous Scottish writers and literary critics. As Edwin Morgan puts it, 'I prefer being called a Scottish poet, do not mind being called a Glasgow poet, find being called a British poet faintly absurd but acceptable, and become highly irritated if called an English poet'.² Even though Morgan articulates how many Scottish writers feel about their nationality and how they object to literary classifications, his views on the subject do not often cross the border into England.

Consequently, many Scottish writers, especially Scottish women writers, remain unrecognized inside and outside of their own country.

Some critics, however, deny that Scottish literature suffers marginalization. R.P.

Draper suggests:

¹'What Images Return', in *Memoirs of a Modern Scotland*, ed. by Karl Miller (London: Faber, 1970), pp. 151-53 (p. 151); *Crossing the Border: Essays in Scottish Literature* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1990), p. 12; 'Morgan's Critical Position', *Chapman*, 64 (Spring/Summer 1991), 32-7 (p. 34).

²'What it feels like to be a Scottish poet', in *Nothing Not But Giving Messages: Edwin Morgan*, ed. by Hamish Whyte (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1990), pp. 201-2 (p. 201). First published as a contribution to a symposium in *Aquarius II* (1979), pp. 72-3.

It is a frequent complaint -- perhaps, indeed, too much a cliché -- among Scots that Scotland (insisted upon as a nation, not simply a region) is 'marginalised' within the context of the UK, and that even its language is pushed aside and taken over by the 'colonising' power of Received Standard English [. . .] I can't help feeling that the news of the death of Scots is somewhat exaggerated. The language emphatically survives; [. . .] So does the literature, too, which likewise has its vigorous and effective advocates.³

Even though Draper contends that the death of the Scots language is greatly exaggerated and that the literature has 'vigorous and effective advocates', his apparent ignorance of the marginalized status of Scotland and Scottish literature further undermines those advocates of Scottish literature who are currently engaged in the attempt to bring the Scottish language and literature in from the margins.

Caroline Gonda, for example, defines the ignorance and indifference often associated with the study of Scottish literature because she believes that Scotland has long 'been locked into and locked out of the English political systems'.⁴ In the course of her opening remarks to the collection of essays *Tea and Leg-Irons: New Feminist Readings from Scotland*, she tells this anecdote:

An Oxford graduate in English shocked a friend of mine by asking, 'What Scottish literature *is* there, apart from Burns?' -- and was shocked in return when she reeled off a list including David Hume, James Boswell, Susan Ferrier, James Hogg, Thomas Carlyle, Robert Louis Stevenson, Margaret Oliphant, George MacDonald, J.M. Barrie, John Buchan, and Muriel Spark. It wasn't that he hadn't heard of them: he knew them all, admired many of them, was a passionate fan of Boswell; yet he had managed to blank out their Scottishness. Literature in English which gets taken seriously by the academy becomes 'English literature'; Scottishness becomes invisible when it suits English readers.⁵

Gonda's claim that over time the 'Scottishness' of Scottish writers is 'blanked' out to suit English readers comes as no surprise to those working within the Scottish literary establishment. Stories such as these are commonly heard among my colleagues who engage in the critical evaluation of Scottish literature; accordingly, Scottish literature in the minds of many academics suffers a marginal and often undervalued position in the literary canon and establishment.

³'Region Today: Some Reflections on Geoffrey Hill, D.H. Lawrence and Regional Tone,' in *The Literature of Place*, ed. by Norman Page and Peter Preston (Basingstoke/London: Macmillan, 1993), pp. 1-14 (pp. 5-6).

⁴*Tea and Leg-Irons: New Feminist Readings from Scotland* (London: Open Letters, 1992), p. 7.

⁵Ibid.

The undervalued position of Scottish writers can be seen in the opening comments of Spark, Morgan, and Crawford. Certain key words and phrases in their remarks immediately demand attention: Spark's calling to 'exile', Morgan's desire to 'risk' an 'overhaul', and Crawford's warning of the eminent danger of a Scottish 'critical' kailyard. In essence, Spark, Morgan, and Crawford all comment on the state of Scottish literature. Spark reaffirms how for one reason or another Scottish literature and Scottish writers often experience exile. Morgan asserts that the way to bring Scottish literature in from the critical margins means risking a radical revision of the Scottish literary field of study. Finally, Crawford suggests that scholars need to incorporate contemporary critical theory into the study of Scottish literature in order to foster new ways of seeing and reading Scottish literature in a context which denies accusations of 'kailyardism' and 'parochialism'.

A radical overhaul of Scottish literature would ideally invite a reassessment of both female and male writers; however, within the pages of this thesis, there is neither the time nor the space for such an enormous, yet necessary, review. Therefore, this thesis focuses on six novels by the contemporary Scottish women writers Emma Tennant, Margaret Elphinstone, and Janice Galloway. The analysis centers on the novel, rather than short fiction, because the novel genre permits these three writers to query conventional representations of female subjectivity in an extended narrative form. Tennant, Elphinstone, and Galloway are examined alongside one another because their fiction, especially the six novels in this study, asserts similar thematic interests and experimental narrative designs. To be specific, Tennant, Elphinstone, and Galloway interrogate the cultural, social, and ideological construction of femininity and womanhood; they use fantasy, the supernatural, the projection of doubles and alternate fictional worlds, and stated and unstated Scottish settings and landscapes which parallel features of the Scottish literary tradition. The aversion to traditional representations of femininity, the overt links with features of the Scottish literary tradition, and the experimental narrative forms signal a Scottish postmodern challenge to conventional literary codes and practices. Tennant, Elphinstone, and Galloway reveal the limitations and confines women typically experience in the struggle to define self-knowledge and, in the process, advance a collective Scottish women's writing avant-garde. Since facets of contemporary literary theory

inform the analysis, this thesis attempts to accord these contemporary Scottish women writers critical attention in a universal context.

Women's Writing In Scotland

In recent years, Scottish women writers have enjoyed wider access to publishing their poetry and prose.⁶ As a result, new opportunities have arisen for academics who wish to research and rediscover well-known and unknown Scottish women writers, as well as those Scottish women writers who have sunk from view. New research and wider recognition of Scottish women's writing has enabled many previously unknown or undervalued Scottish women writers to become part of the university, college, and school curricula. Even so, the status and critical reputation of women writers in Scotland still pales in comparison to male writers and women writers tend to be relegated to the edge of literary analysis and discussion. This fact is all the more surprising when one looks at the vital roles women have historically played in the creation of a vibrant literary tradition in Scotland.

Women, for instance, played an important role in the ballad tradition. The ballad exists in Scottish cultural history as the dominant oral mode of literature. The ballads in Scotland provided both entertainment and a fictionalization of historical events. David Buchan explores the strong ballad tradition in his book *The Ballad and the Folk*. He speculates that the ballad for folk in Aberdeenshire serves an entirely different function than entertainment or history. Buchan proposes that since the Northeastern Scots were not a 'demonstrative race', they :

found their aesthetic form in the ballad, where emotions were objectified in near-ritualized terms and subordinated to the dramatic recounting of factual event. In this society the ballads served a cathartic function, for they provided a dramatic yet disciplined outlet to the emotions denied regular expression by the dour, canny, undemonstrative, northeastern folk.⁷

Buchan's words suggest that historically, the northeastern Scots used the ballad as a form of catharsis; thus, in his mind, the ballads provide a dramatic yet disciplined outlet for emotional expression. Whatever their function, be it entertainment, historical disclosure -- although not

⁶For example, the collections of *Original Prints* published by Polygon as well as the increased number of female authors who appear in the *New Writing Scotland* anthologies confirm that Scottish women writers are enjoying wider access to publishing spheres.

⁷(London/Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 16.

historical 'truth' -- or emotional catharsis, ballads unquestionably were, and still are, the basis for a rich and imaginative Scottish literary tradition.

There are numerous writers and critics who discuss and pay homage to a rich oral tradition in Scottish literature, culture, and history.⁸ Even though ballad collections were usually compiled by men, many female critics and writers are coming to realize that women play, and have played, a strong role in transmitting the oral tradition in Scotland.⁹ Joy Hendry argues:

Scotland has one of the finest oral traditions in the world: look, for instance, at the richness of the Scottish ballads. This is a world of song and story, rhyme and riddle, legend and epic, a world which perpetuates itself not in print, but by word of mouth, passed from one generation to another by tradition bearers. A major role in oral literature has been played by women, as both creators and communicators of oral lore, of which little printed evidence remains.¹⁰

Catherine Kerrigan concurs with Hendry's insights into the major roles women play as creators and conveyors of oral literature. She suggests that while the ballad is undoubtedly a communal tradition handed down by men and women, 'when sources are examined, it emerges that women played such a significant role as tradition bearers and transmitters that it can be claimed that the ballad tradition is one of the most readily identifiable areas of literary performance by women'.¹¹ Kerrigan supports this claim by reviewing the major ballad collections. She talks about male writers like Stevenson who cite their 'mother, housekeeper or nurse [. . .] As their first teachers of old songs and stories' and concludes from this evidence that in Scotland, a 'very strong case can be made for saying that the ballad presents a vital and sustained women's tradition'.¹²

⁸See, for instance, Joy Hendry, 'A Double Knot on the Peeny', in *In Other Words: Writing as a Feminist*, ed. by Gail Chester and Sigrid Nielsen (London: Hutchinson Education, 1987), pp. 36-45; Catherine Kerrigan, ed., *An Anthology of Scottish Women Poets with Gaelic Translations by Meg Bateman* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991); and Willa Muir, *Living With Ballads* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1965).

⁹Refer to Sir Walter Scott, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (Edinburgh: A. and C. Black, 1807), and *The Greig-Duncan Folk Song Collection Volume I*, ed. by Patrick Shuldham-Shaw and Emily B. Lyle (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1981).

¹⁰'A Double Knot on the Peeny', p. 39.

¹¹*An Anthology of Scottish Women Poets*, p. 2. Kerrigan goes on to discuss this point by quoting George Lyman Kittredge's tracing of the history of ballads. She demonstrates how the ballads of Burns, Scott, Hogg, and Greig-Duncan all refer to women as a prime source of their material.

¹²*Ibid.*

Female critics are not alone in the determination that women preserve and pass on the oral tradition; Scottish women writers also confirm the influence of the ballad tradition on their work. Willa Muir's study of orality in Scotland entitled *Living With Ballads* clarifies what ballads mean to individuals as an expression of culture and details the large role women perform as transmitters of the ballad tradition. Muriel Spark relates that if 'I'm going to be called anything, I'd like to be called a Scottish writer. I was very much influenced by Walter Scott's "Border Ballads," which are very sweet, very harsh and very lyrical'.¹³ Kathleen Raine recounts that on her mother's side, 'I inherited Scotland's songs and ballads [. . .] Sung or recited by my mother, aunts and grandmother, who had learned them from *their* mothers and grandmothers before universal literacy destroyed an oral tradition and culture that scarcely any longer exists'.¹⁴ Finally, Margaret Elphinstone also pays a debt to the oral tradition; she says that *The Incomer* draws 'its imagery from the Galloway countryside and folk tradition', and claims that her first short story 'Spinning the Green' uses 'traditional tales in a response to a contemporary situation'.¹⁵

Muir's study on ballad culture, and the quotes by Spark, Raine, and Elphinstone reveal one striking characteristic of women's writing in Scotland: their interest in the ballad form. A great number of modern and contemporary Scottish women writers are aware of the significance of the rich ballad culture. Many modern and contemporary Scottish women writers turn to the ballad form for inspiration and imagination and like to experiment with themes related to balladry; namely, they refer to the supernatural, doubling, and the landscape, and often incorporate innovative stylistics, dialogue, and varying points of view into their prose texts. Critical evidence confirms the strong presence of women in Scottish literature and unveils how Scottish women writers preserve, participate in, and foster a commitment to the oral tradition. Even so, if one attempts even the most basic review of Scottish literature,

¹³Benjamin Ivry, 'Knowing at Second Hand: An Interview with Muriel Spark', *Newsweek*, 24 August 1992, p. 56.

¹⁴Jeni Couzyn, ed., *The Bloodaxe Book of Contemporary Women Poets: Eleven British Writers* (Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books, 1985), p. 57.

¹⁵'Contemporary Feminist Fantasy in the Scottish Literary Tradition', in *Tea and Leg-Irons*, pp. 45-59. (p. 45). One should note that folk tradition does not mean the same thing as folk literature; however, folk literature is part of the folk tradition that Elphinstone draws on. Therefore, I quote her views on this matter.

evidence shows that women writers have been systematically pushed into the margins of literary discourse.

A Review of Literature

One cannot attempt a review of literature in Scotland without simultaneously discussing national issues; in particular, one needs to consider the basis on which Scotland exists as an independent nation from England. Scotland, England, Wales, and Northern Ireland comprise Great Britain or the United Kingdom. These four countries are all ruled from London, the city which many English citizens consider to be the economic and cultural capital of Great Britain. Nevertheless, Scotland survives as an independent culture because it possesses independent systems. For instance, Scots law is based on Roman law, while English law derives from common law. Scotland maintains an entirely different educational system with Highers as opposed to A Levels, and has a four year university MA degree as opposed to the three year English university degree. Scotland and England hold different religious foundations: the Presbyterian Church of Scotland versus the Anglican Church of England. The dominant political party in Scotland remains the Labour party, and many Scottish people support the Scottish National Party, a political party devoted to establishing a Scottish parliament and Scottish 'home' rule. On the other hand, the Conservative party controls the British government and government policy from a strong English power base. There are variations between Scotland and England in terms of environment and the distribution and size of the population. Finally, major language differences exist between the two countries; Gaelic and Scots are still spoken in Scotland and can be distinguished from standardized 'Queen's' English taught in Scottish and English secondary schools.

These differences between Scottish and English ideological systems provide the framework for distinct cultural communities; as a result, Scotland and England may be viewed as separate nations which foster diverse cultural traditions and political, educational, legal, and economic programmes. One may conclude, then, that different cultural, social, and political systems such as these will stimulate the development of a distinct Scottish literary tradition

which can be stylistically and thematically differentiated from a dominant English literary tradition.

It has been well documented over the years that dominant English ideologies and discursive systems have systematically marginalized Scottish culture.¹⁶ William Findlay, for example, records one effect of marginalization of Scottish interests on the Scottish people:

That lack of ability on the part of the larger culture to understand the plight of the smaller one, in Scotland's case often leads to an aggressive defensiveness which tends to tip over into emotionalism because one feels so angry that one should have to justify one's interest in one's own literature and culture.¹⁷

While the anger and aggressive defensiveness impedes the development and acceptance of Scottish literature in general, as a whole, Scottish women writers receive less attention than their male counterparts. Reasons for women's marginalization in Scottish culture vary; however, Willa Muir offers some explanation for the limitations women often experience in her memoirs, *Belonging*:

Yet in Britain we should have to cope with a more or less unconscious inheritance of militant patriarchal feeling, not so aggressive or publicly acknowledged as in the nineteenth century, not so stark and arrogant as in the Middle East, and the Far East, but pervasive enough to raise in British boys and men the expectation and desire of becoming dominant males and a corollary to depress girls and women into being subservient females.¹⁸

Muir also describes the restraints women encounter specifically in Scotland:

As a schoolgirl I shrugged my shoulders at the gap between the self I knew and the female stereotyping expected of me, but when I moved to the university I began to find the discrepancy comic. There was no lack of discrepancies affecting all the women students, not merely myself; the arbitrary conventions made eccentrics of us all. The patriarchal Law rated us as second-class citizens (we could not vote) and the patriarchal Church assumed that we were second-class souls (being suspect daughters of that Original Sinner, Eve, we had to cover our heads in church and could not hold ecclesiastical office.) There was now no 'parity of esteem' as between male and female in patriarchal structures, whatever values they may have started with. And yet we females were strong natural forces deserving a status of our own as free citizens. The theory of female inferiority did not square with the actual strength and courage of women, and probably never had done so.¹⁹

¹⁶Refer to the literary histories of Scottish writing for documentation of this phenomenon.

¹⁷'Interview with Margaret Atwood', *Cencrastus*, 1 (Autumn 1979), 2-6 (pp. 5-6).

¹⁸(London: The Hogarth Press, 1968), p. 136.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 140-41.

Muir's insightful comments spell out the inbred attitudes in men and in society which limit feminine achievement in all walks of life. Her words also define the difficult struggle women face in the effort to achieve autonomy and self-hood while living under dominant male power structures in Scotland and in England.

Muir tells us that the majority of women in Great Britain at some time or another experience confines and restrictions. In Scotland, however, a land already delimited under a sovereign English ideology, women suffer twice. Since Scottish women live in a country governed from the geographically remote London, they suffer the burden of recognizing themselves as a marginalized nation and as a marginalized sex. Dual marginalization of womanhood and nationhood places Scottish women in a precarious position. Not only must Scottish women struggle to preserve a distinct Scottish identity, but they must also attempt to assert their femaleness. Joy Hendry places this dilemma at the forefront of her concern 'to engage in the feminist struggle within the Scottish context' because 'Scottish women have been silenced':²⁰

Scottish women are at one further remove from the seats of power by being first female and secondly Scottish. You can't deal with one without the other. Scottish culture as a whole is a neglected area, lacking in status and prestige. A Scottish woman writer shares that neglect with her male colleagues, as well as being overlooked and underestimated because she is a woman. Thus, the woman writer, rare enough anywhere, is even rarer in Scotland. The Scottish woman writer must overcome the inferiority feelings stemming from her femininity, and also those stemming from her Scottishness. It's the double knot on the peeny.²¹

Janice Galloway confirms Hendry's perception of women's dual marginalization. She believes:

Scottish women have their own particular complications with writing and definition, complications which derive from the general problems of being a colonised nation. Then, that wee touch extra. Their sex. There is coping with that guilt of taking time off the concerns of national politics to get concerned with the sexual sort: that creeping fear it's somehow self-indulgent to be more concerned for one's womanness instead of one's Scottishness, one's working class heritage or whatever. Guilt here comes strong from the notion we're not backing our menfolk

²⁰'A Double Knot on the Peeny', p. 37.

²¹Ibid, p. 38.

and their 'real' concerns. Female concerns, like meat on mother's plate, are extras after the man and the weans have been served.²²

For Hendry and Galloway, as for many women writers, scholars, career women, and artists, the Scottish national agenda subsumes any attempt to cultivate women's community, creativity, or achievement. Moreover, Scottish men add to the Scottish woman's struggle because in Galloway's mind, the men in Scotland replicate the canon of the general establishment:

Nurture or be deviant and sorry. Pursue your own goals only if you acknowledge it as selfishness. (Non-nurturers are sex-starved old women or morally reprehensible -- literal or metaphorical tarts.) So, on top of working out how to write (which is hard enough), on top of the need to reinvent the wheel, on top of finding time, there's the guilt, the guilt. Always the guilt.²³

Galloway's observations imply that women who attempt to liberate themselves from limiting social constructs experience guilt and are labelled as 'deviant'. Since the female desire to liberate herself from confining roles suggests feminism, it appears that the marriage of feminism and Scottishness does not fare well. Carol Anderson and Glenda Norquay point out that when men label feminism as 'an alternative and a threat to the national identity, men make Scottishness their province. Women are thus forced to choose'.²⁴ There is no easy answer to ending the struggle which forces women to choose feminism over nationalism, or nationalism over feminism. Beyond doubt, this double dilemma often compromises the Scottish woman writer's agenda.

Margaret Atwood, a Canadian woman writer, often finds herself in a similar situation to Scottish women writers. Called to define herself in relation to her nationalism, Atwood dismisses the emphasis that critics place on this aspect of her work:

If I were a Canadian architect, a socialist architect, a feminist architect, or a nationalist architect it wouldn't matter at all if I couldn't build a house that would keep out the water. When you're talking about writing, however, some of these people take offence if you say that the most important thing is to be a good writer first. They always want you to say that you're first of all a feminist, a Canadian, a nationalist or whatever, and a writer second. But if, in fact, you are a writer, that's nonsense. You have to be a good writer first.²⁵

²²*Meantime: Looking Forward to the Millennium* (Edinburgh: Polygon in association with Women 2000, 1991), pp. 5-6.

²³Ibid.

²⁴'Superiorism', *Cencrastus*, 15 (New Year 1984), 8-10 (p. 8).

²⁵Findlay, 'Interview with Margaret Atwood', p. 2.

While Atwood's call for an end to assigning labels to a writer and a type of writing might appear to reconcile nationalist and feminist issues in Canadian writing, the situation in Scotland is not quite so simple. Not only do Scottish women encounter hardship in finding publishers, but there is also a distinct lack of critical attention paid to their literary efforts.

Traditional literary histories of Scottish literature tend to overlook women's writing and few in-depth examinations of Scottish women's writing are undertaken in the critical texts. For example, *The Scottish Tradition in Literature* by Kurt Wittig offers a few sentences on Susan Ferrier and Naomi Mitchison.²⁶ Likewise, Maurice Lindsay's text *History of Scottish Literature* talks about Ferrier and Mary Brunton in the nineteenth century and includes a few paragraphs on Margaret Oliphant, Mitchison, and Muriel Spark.²⁷ In *The Scottish Novel: A Critical Survey*, Francis Russell Hart examines Ferrier, Oliphant, Sarah Tytler, Mitchison, Spark, and Jane Duncan.²⁸ *The Macmillan Companion to Scottish Literature* edited by Trevor Royle offers similar brief commentary on women writers; his guide to Scottish literature refers to Catherine Carswell, Mitchison, Spark, and Elspeth Davie.²⁹ Alan Bold's text *Modern Scottish Literature* only allocates three out of fifty-six chapters, seventeen out of three-hundred eighteen pages to Scottish women writers.³⁰ Roderick Watson's *The Literature of Scotland* discusses Mary MacLeod in the seventeenth century, Oliphant in the eighteenth century, and briefly mentions Naomi Mitchison, Spark, and Davie in the twentieth century.³¹ Finally, while the four volume *History of Scottish Literature* does take into account issues like race, class, and gender, there is still little representation of women among its pages.³² These 'popular' histories of Scottish literature not only reveal an alarming lack of in-depth critical commentary on Scottish women writers, but they also expose how the same few Scottish women writers --

²⁶(Edinburgh/London: Oliver and Boyd, 1958).

²⁷(London: Robert Hale, 1977).

²⁸(London: John Murray, 1978).

²⁹(London/Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1983).

³⁰(London/New York: Longman, 1983)

³¹(London/Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984).

³²*The History of Scottish Literature Volume I: Origins to 1660*, ed. by R.D.S. Jack (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988); *The History of Scottish Literature Volume II: 1660-1800*, ed. by Andrew Hook (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987); *The History of Scottish Literature Volume III: Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Douglas Gifford (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988); and *The History of Scottish Literature Volume IV: Twentieth Century*, ed. by Cairns Craig (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987).

Brunton, Ferrier, Oliphant, Carswell, Muir, Mitchison, Spark, and Davie -- seem to receive scholarly attention.³³

There is also a tendency in Scottish literary studies to focus on a small number of male authors: Robert Burns, Sir Walter Scott, Robert Louis Stevenson, Neil Gunn, and Lewis Grassie Gibbon are a few male writers who have enjoyed a reasonable amount of critical analysis.³⁴ Bold's observation represents this critical trend: 'Although a small country in terms of size and population Scotland has produced many writers internationally acknowledged as truly great; for example: David Hume, Adam Smith, Scott, Carlyle, Stevenson, and MacDiarmid'.³⁵ An approach such as this is dangerous because it effectively denies a female voice. Although there are several essays on fiction by Oliphant, Mitchison, and Spark, and a few lengthier studies on Oliphant and Spark, no other women writers in Scotland enjoy significant critical commentary. This is all the more disappointing because English women writers such as the Brontës, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Doris Lessing, Margaret Drabble, Fay Weldon, and Angela Carter enjoy a respected status in the critical literary establishment. Emma Tennant, Margaret Elphinstone, and Janice Galloway, like contemporary English writers, are women writers who also experiment with narrative structure, literary style, and endorse a feminist agenda, yet they remain Scottish authors who, unlike their English counterparts, fail to elicit similar levels of critical commentary. Since the majority of Scottish women writers exist outside this critical perception of Scottish literature, quite often Scottish literature appears to be a male tradition critically appraised by male scholars.

Another drawback that accompanies the 'popular' approach to Scottish literary criticism concerns how the criticism begins to perpetuate itself; scholars traditionally focus on the material which is readily available. This generally precludes a great deal of quality analysis on women writers, emerging writers, and those writers who have sunk from view. Manfred Malzahn exposes the pitfalls of relying on this kind of critical assessment. In his text *Aspects*

³³It is also interesting to note that female academics have yet to write or to edit a literary history of Scotland: does this also deny the female voice?

³⁴One need only stand in front of the shelves which hold part of the Scottish literature collection in the National Library of Scotland to encounter this phenomenon.

³⁵*Scotland: A Literary Guide* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. xi.

of Identity: The Contemporary Scottish Novel (1978-1981) As National Self-Expression,

Malzahn explains how he chooses the thirty-three texts in his analysis:

The choice of individual titles was based largely on the immediate critical reception, as expressed in the reviews of e.g. Douglas Gifford in *Books in Scotland*, or Allan Massie et. al. in *The Weekend Scotsman*, with a priority to the recent works of those authors who had already made a name for themselves on the Scottish literary scene either through artistic achievement or through attaining that kind of popularity which can be expressed in terms of sales figures.³⁶

To Malzahn's credit, he includes a number of women in his critical survey; nevertheless, since he only looks to favourable reviews from a limited number of male critics, Malzahn marginalizes those writers, both female and male, who fail to receive either immediate critical acclaim or high sales figures. One may conclude from this critical approach that scholars who focus on a small number of established Scottish writers for textual evaluation and re-evaluation often fail to advance or expand the critical perception of a Scottish literary tradition. Moreover, the traditional literary histories and 'popular' approach to the study of Scottish literature primarily center on textual interpretation; as a result, these literary analyses do not take into account advances in the field of contemporary critical theory which again hinders Scottish literature from achieving recognition in a universal literary context.

Scottish critics are not alone in the trend not to contextualize. For instance, in their book *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin argue that even though Ireland, Wales, and Scotland 'were the first victims of English expansion, their subsequent complicity in the British imperial enterprise makes it difficult for colonized peoples outside Britain to accept their identity as post-colonial'.³⁷ While Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin do make a good point, the fact remains that Scotland and Scottish interests still tend to be marginalized by Anglocentric culture; thus, Scottish, Irish, and Welsh literature should not perhaps be so lightly dismissed. Similarly, there are many collections of critical essays on women writers which do incorporate varying facets of feminism and contemporary critical theory; however, these same critical texts exclude

³⁶(Frankfurt Am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1984), p. 24.

³⁷(London/New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 33.

Scottish women writers or simply disregard the writer's Scottishness.³⁸ Likewise, while English, Canadian, Australian, and South African women writers tend to receive critical attention, Scottish women writers generally do not. For example, Robert L. Ross edits an essay collection entitled *International Literature in English: Essays on the Major Writers*.³⁹ Ross includes critical essays on the New Zealand writers Keri Hulme, Janet Frame, and Katherine Mansfield; on the Australian writers Shirley Hazzard, Christina Stead, and Judith Wright; and on Doris Lessing, Jean Rhys, and Elizabeth Jolley, three writers with mixed national backgrounds. Even though Ross includes essays on writers who live and have lived in what might be called marginalized or colonized nations, Ross does not incorporate essays on Scottish women writers, women who also write in a 'colonized' and marginalized country. There are no simple explanations for the absence of Scottish women writers from the critical canon. The only way for Scottish women writers, along with Scottish male writers, to enter critical literary discourse will be to overhaul the existing critical methodologies utilized in Scottish literary criticism.

Robert Crawford, for example, has astutely observed the 'isolation of Scottish criticism from internationally-recognised developments in critical theory. Certainly there seems a generally low level of theoretical awareness among the "ScotLit" community'.⁴⁰ He suggests 'it would be good to see more Scottish critics who were prepared to debate that awkwardness, and more creative writers whose knowledge and intellectual equipment were sufficient to engage with such questions in their reinvention of a postmodern Scotland'.⁴¹ Fortunately, in recent years there has been a move within the Scottish literary establishment to integrate aspects of contemporary critical theory into textual analysis.

Crawford's text, *Devolving English Literature*, is one recent example of a Scottish critic's move toward viewing Scottish literature in a wider context that applies theoretical

³⁸See, for example, Anne Cranny-Francis, *Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), Maggie Humm, *Border Traffic: Strategies of Contemporary Women Writers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), and Paulina Palmer, *Contemporary Women's Fiction: Narrative Practice and Feminist Theory* (Brighton: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989). Flora Alexander, Carol Anderson, Caroline Gonda, and Dorothy Porter McMillan are an exception because they consider the woman writer's Scottishness.

³⁹(New York/London: Garland Publishing, 1991).

⁴⁰'Morgan's Critical Position', p. 34.

⁴¹Ibid.

insights and ideas. In the first instance, Crawford's critical review clearly and concisely spells out how Anglocentrism defines the study of literature, especially 'minority' literatures like Scottish, Afro-Caribbean, and Australian literature. Crawford believes that the title of his book:

aims to suggest that, while for centuries the margins have been challenging, interrogating, and even structuring the supposed 'centre', the development of the subject 'English Literature' has constantly involved and reinforced an oppressive homage to centralism. As such, English Literature is a force which must be countered continually by a devolutionary momentum. Creative writers have been more alert to this need than have most critics.⁴²

Crawford goes on to say:

Scottish Literature has been hardly the most popular area for critical investigation; literary theorists have done little to change this. Indeed, though there are a few signs that questions of Scottish cultural identity may be received into more theoretically lively areas of criticism, there are also indications that this may be done in a crude way which demonstrates little or no attention to Scottish cultural difference, and that there remains a great need for empirically grounded work to help free Scottish writing from the Anglocentric tones of conventional literary history and of newer approaches (10).

In *Devolving English Literature*, Crawford defines the Anglocentrism of British literature and offers new decentred readings of Scottish literature with critical competence. Even so, Crawford's text, while arguably a superior evaluation of Scottish literary history and the development of Anglocentrism in English literature, has one flaw. He fails to include women in an otherwise timely and intelligent study of the Anglocentric state of British literature.

There would be no contextual problem with *Devolving English Literature* if Crawford stated at any point that he was only going to look to male writers; yet, he does not do so.

Instead, Crawford says:

I have chosen to concentrate particularly on Scottish culture and the strategies adopted by Scottish authors. These authors can be seen as contributing to an identifiably Scottish cultural heritage, but they are often either too smoothly assimilated into English Literature, or else (like Hugh MacDiarmid) awkwardly marginalized from considerations of work whose focus is not purely Scottish (7).

Excluding women from his devolution of English literature, Crawford consciously or unconsciously implies that there is no history of women writers in Scotland and that no women

⁴²(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 7. The next three references are from this edition.

are writing in Scotland today. Some academics will find the omission of women in *Devolving English Literature* ironic because Crawford's Introduction includes a paragraph on feminist literary studies which pays homage to Janet Todd's 'arguments in favour of the need for close, empirical re-examinations of writing produced by a marginalized group and tied to the circumstances of particular cultural struggles' (6). Again, Crawford's book claims to be a critical study about devolving English literature and the analysis focuses primarily on Scottish writers. Since Crawford does not focus on any women writers in detail, his study denies the existence of the female voice in Scottish literature.⁴³

Although Crawford's analysis implies that there are no women writing in Scotland, a number of Scottish academics are increasingly engaged in the process of integrating women's writing and contemporary critical theory into Scottish literary study. Anderson and Norquay's article 'Superiorism' is one example of a move towards questioning the position of women in Scottish culture. Anderson and Norquay wrote this incisive and sharp-witted article in response to Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull's essay 'Inferiorism'.⁴⁴ In 'Inferiorism', Beveridge and Turnbull lament postcolonial feelings and attitudes of inferiorization in Scottish culture; however, their essay does not include any references to women or to a female voice. Thus, Anderson and Norquay use 'Superiorism' to launch an inquiry into the position of women and women's creativity in Scottish culture.

The aforementioned essay collection *Tea and Leg-Irons: New Feminist Readings from Scotland* looks towards a reassessment of women's writing and many of the essays in this collection are informed by critical theory. For example, Dorothy Porter McMillan's article 'Heroines and Writers' details a history of women's literature in Scotland which begins with the aristocratic songwriter Lady Grisell Baillie, and ends with Willa Muir's early feminist tract

⁴³Crawford's sentiments are even more ironic in light of his review of *Scotland: A Concise Cultural History*, edited by Paul H Scott. In his review of Scott's book, Crawford notes: 'One woman (Sara Stevenson, the historian of photography) contributes to this book, along with 24 men. That tells you something about Scottish culture, and issues of gender should have been tackled directly. [. . .] Wide-ranging as it is, Scott's volume may have a tendency to define culture in ways that exclude spheres where women have dominated historically. So football is in, cooking is out. James Kelman is recognised as a contemporary Scottish icon, but Liz Lochhead is not', *The Sunday Times*, 12 December 1993, p. 8. Crawford's words are indeed ironic because in *Devolving English Literature*, he discusses James Kelman, but like Paul Scott, does not recognise Liz Lochhead as a contemporary Scottish writer.

⁴⁴*Cencrastus*, 8 (Spring 1982), 4-5.

Women: An Inquiry. Carol Anderson discusses the prose work of Violet Jacob in her essay 'The Debateable Land'. Finally, Margaret Elphinstone considers how many contemporary Scottish women writers are drawing on fantasy genre conventions and the supernatural in her article, 'Contemporary Feminist Fantasy and the Scottish Literary Tradition'.⁴⁵

Marilyn Reizbaum discusses the 'double exclusion' suffered by women writing in Scotland and Ireland, two marginalized cultures.⁴⁶ This article is a welcome contribution from across the Atlantic. However, Reizbaum appears blissfully unaware that her commentary provides no new insights into Scottish women's writing; instead, she simply repeats the hypothesis and theories of female critics like Hendry and Galloway who have gone before her.

Randall Stevenson also integrates critical theory with contemporary fiction in Britain. In an article which discusses postmodernism and British fiction, Stevenson traces experimental literary techniques and the move towards postmodern fiction in Britain.⁴⁷ Even though Stevenson only mentions Emma Tennant, Alasdair Gray, and Ron Butlin by name, the very fact that Stevenson investigates how Scottish, English, and Irish writers engage in postmodern experimentalism shows a move toward incorporating contemporary critical theory into Scottish literary analysis. Likewise, Stevenson and Gavin Wallace's collection *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies: New Visions, Old Dreams*, includes essays by a variety of Scottish academics which examine Scottish literature in a context that integrates contemporary women's writing with contemporary critical theory.⁴⁸ This type of critical approach must be developed if Scottish writers and critics wish to reach an audience outside the boundaries of Scotland.

Even though literary critics in Scotland are attempting to contextualize critical analysis of Scottish writers with cultural practices and contemporary critical theory, there still remains, in Crawford's words, 'a low level of theoretical awareness' in the Scottish literary community. The foregoing review of Scottish literature and the critical approaches connected to Scottish

⁴⁵McMillan, 'Heroines and Writers', pp. 17-30; Anderson, 'Debateable Land: The Prose Work of Violet Jacob', pp. 31-44; and Elphinstone, 'Contemporary Feminist Fantasy and the Scottish Literary Tradition', pp. 45-59.

⁴⁶'Canonical Double Cross: Scottish and Irish Women's Writing', in *Decolonizing Tradition: New Views of Twentieth-Century "British" Literary Canons*, ed. by Karen R. Lawrence (Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), pp. 165-90.

⁴⁷'Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction in Britain', in *Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction*, ed. by Edmund J. Smyth (London: B.T. Batsford, 1991), pp. 19-35.

⁴⁸(Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993).

literary criticism hopefully reveals that a 'gap' exists in the critical methodology of Scottish literature; namely, there needs to be detailed examinations of contemporary women's writing which draw on critical theory.

This thesis examines the prose writings of Emma Tennant, Margaret Elphinstone, and Janice Galloway. Because this analysis focuses on women's writing, it implies, in some sense, a political purpose. Rosalind Coward argues that novel writing is a political activity because:

all accounts of reality are versions of reality. As feminists we have to be constantly alerted to *what* reality is being constructed, and *how* representations are achieving this construction. In this respect, reading a novel can be a political activity, similar to activities which have always been important to feminist politics in general. This involves the contesting of natural attitudes, the challenging of agreed definitions -- definitions which feminists have long recognized to be an integral aspect of the oppression of women in this society. Thus even novels which have a surface commitment to feminism should be interrogated as to by what representations of sexuality, of maleness and femaleness, they achieve their version of reality.⁴⁹

In personal interviews, Tennant, Elphinstone, and Galloway all proclaim that they are feminists who challenge conventional representations of women, madness, and social reality in their writing.⁵⁰ These thematic concerns represent what may be seen as a commitment to feminism; therefore, the critical theory drawn on in this thesis will also hold political connotations. In particular, the theoretical approach to the analysis of Scottish women's writing will draw on feminism, postcolonialism, discourse theory, poststructuralism, and postmodernism. A number of different critical perspectives will be incorporated into the discussion in order to prevent a one-dimensional critical construct and to reveal that literary texts, like women, are not isolated from larger social and political structures. Thus, a discussion of the critical theories which inform this examination of contemporary Scottish women's writing may prove useful to those individuals unfamiliar with these theoretical formulations.

⁴⁹'Are Women's Novels Feminist Novels?', in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, ed. by Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), pp. 225-239 (pp. 227-28). First published 'This Novel Changes Women's Lives: Are Women's Novels Feminist Novels?', in *Feminist Review*, 5 (1980), pp. 53-64.

⁵⁰See the interviews I conducted with each writer in the Appendix of this thesis for comments on their feminism.

Contemporary Critical Theory

Feminism

Feminist theory comprises a rich variety of theoretical foundations and as such cannot be discussed in-depth in the thesis; suffice it to say, feminist theory will be the primary critical approach informing the study. Feminism works to disrupt traditional boundaries which subsist between art and life, between women and men, between the masculine and the feminine, between the dominant culture and the popular culture, and between those who exist in the margins.⁵¹ Feminism seeks to free women from repressive constructs and to enable women to make independent decisions about their lives and potential. Feminism confronts the social and cultural limitations women experience, and interrogates how women formulate their subjectivity.

Feminism looks at how women are often alienated from self-knowledge by the prevailing ideological and discursive institutions and can be linked with a number of definitions and formulations. Catharine R. Stimpson contends that feminist criticism employs a variety of feminist theoretical approaches:

Like air and language, women and representations of women and gender are everywhere. Necessarily, then, feminist criticism finds all of culture and literature interesting: single authors, periods, or genres; other critical methods; high, folk, mass, and popular culture. Given such scope, feminist criticism is less a single map of culture than a portfolio of maps.⁵²

Feminist criticism cannot be one single 'map', just as feminism cannot be one single 'ism'. Rather than privilege one single feminist theoretical approach, which would again deny a multi-faceted feminist insight, this thesis will disseminate a diverse range of feminist theories throughout the analysis. In this manner, one hopes to draw new readings from challenging novels that will contest prevailing notions of womanhood in Scotland and the world over.

One cannot talk about feminism without discussing the term 'feminist'. Nancy Miller defines a feminist as one who wishes 'to articulate a self-consciousness about women's

⁵¹The preceding sentence paraphrases ideas from Patricia Waugh, *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 6.

⁵²'Feminist Criticism', in *Redrawing the Boundaries*, pp. 251-270 (p. 251).

identity both as inherited cultural fact and as process of social construction'.⁵³ Since this thesis focuses on Scottish women's writing, it might be prudent to discuss what women's fiction and feminist fiction have in common. Maria Lauret insists that women's novels are not necessarily feminist novels.⁵⁴ Gayle Greene offers a similar observation:

Feminist fiction is not the same as 'women's fiction' or fiction by women. Not all women writers are women's writers and not all women's writers are feminist writers, since to write about 'women's issues' is not necessarily to address them from a feminist perspective. Nor are feminist writers necessarily so all the time -- Lessing is feminist in *The Golden Notebook* (1962) and is not in *The Diaries of Jane Somers* (1984); nor do they necessarily identify themselves as feminists. Yet whatever a writer's relation to the women's movement, a novel may be termed 'feminist' for its analysis of gender as socially constructed and capable of being reconstructed and for its enlistment of narrative in the process of change.⁵⁵

Greene acknowledges three key concepts in women's writing: first, that feminist fiction differs from women's fiction; second, that women writers and feminist writers are not necessarily womanists or feminists all the time; third, and most important, the writer's relationship to the women's movement does not necessarily imply feminism. In Rita Felski's words, novels are 'feminist' because they 'reveal a critical awareness of women's subordinate position and of gender as a problematic category, however this is expressed'.⁵⁶

Tennant, Elphinstone, and Galloway openly address women's issues and subjectivity; this qualifies their fiction as feminist. While the label feminist may appear to isolate their writing from a male or non-feminist audience, this does not necessarily happen. Dina Sherzer postulates that the message of women writers does not simply concern women:

It addresses itself to individuals in general and teaches them to deconstruct their mentality, their ways of thinking and of being, that is, it teaches them to question what they have always accepted, to look for the underpinnings and assumptions they live by.⁵⁷

Tennant's, Elphinstone's, and Galloway's novels use fantasy and 'hyper-reality' to pose alternative fictional worlds where female protagonists mediate between male dominance and

⁵³Qtd. in Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989), p. 18. First published (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988).

⁵⁴'Seizing Time and Making New: Feminist Criticism, Politics, and Contemporary Feminist Fiction', *Feminist Review*, 31 (Spring 1989), 94-106 (p. 95).

⁵⁵Gayle Greene, 'Feminist Fiction and the Uses of Memory', *Signs*, 16 (Winter 1991), 290-321 (p. 291).

⁵⁶*Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989), p. 14.

⁵⁷'Postmodernism and Feminisms', in *Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction*, pp. 156-68 (p. 160).

female community, and struggle to come to terms with the social and ideological forces that attempt to construct women as passive subjects.⁵⁸ Tennant, Elphinstone, and Galloway represent their female characters with plural selves; in doing so, these three writers subvert the traditional pictures of women as one-dimensional individuals who simply cater to male needs. Tennant, Elphinstone, and Galloway challenge conventional representations of femininity in their fiction. They ask readers to query the everyday ideological assumptions individuals live by in order to come to a deeper understanding of the way women are persuaded to defer to the dominant cultural order.

Even though the label feminist helps to identify a novel's thematic intent, it can present certain problems. For instance, Evelyne Keital believes the 'one striking feature that all feminist texts have in common' is 'their claim to authenticity'.⁵⁹ She also contends that 'feminist texts are read in compliance with their claim to authenticity. Even competent readers, readers of literary proficiency, approach these texts as if they were factual reports; they consciously ignore their "literariness" and instead make them the occasion of heated discussions'.⁶⁰ While Keital does not claim to have personal knowledge of every feminist text ever written, her contentions are arguable because she makes general assumptions about feminist literature. Her sentiments reveal how the links between reading a fiction and accepting fiction as reality become confused. Fiction, unless stated otherwise, does not attempt to offer or detail 'truth' or authenticity; it does, however, stand as an imaginary account from which some type of 'truth' may be discerned. Rather than approach a feminist text as an authentic description of a historical event, it seems better to approach feminist novels as a fictional account of women's experiences from which a greater understanding about women's position in society can be drawn.

Before introducing the other theoretical approaches used in literary analysis, it might prove useful to think about two issues that Mary Eagleton raises:

⁵⁸I take the term 'hyper-reality' from Janice Galloway. She uses this term to describe how Alasdair Gray often veers off into fantasy and 'hyper-reality' in his fiction. See the Appendix p. 339 for her comments on this subject.

⁵⁹*Reading Psychosis: Readers, Texts and Psychoanalysis*, trans. by Anthea Bell (Oxford/New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 22. First published *Psychopathographien* (Carl Winter, Universitätsverlang, 1986).

⁶⁰*Ibid.*

A suspicion of theory is widespread throughout feminism. Faced as we are with a long history of patriarchal theory which claims to have proved decisively the inferiority of women, this caution is hardly surprising. Many feminists see theory as, if not innately male -- women are capable of doing it -- then certainly male-dominated in its practice and masculinist in its methods.⁶¹

She goes on to question how feminists may use theory effectively without joining an elitist male establishment: 'Theory holds a privileged location within an elitist institution, the academy; its female practitioners share in that status. How, then, certain feminists ask, can it ever give expression to the mass of women or facilitate a change in their circumstances?'.⁶² Eagleton's thoughts pose daunting questions for feminist theorists. To be sure, feminist scholars appropriate the traditional male domain of theory; at the same time, however, feminists actively voice discontent at the way in which male critics have erased women from writing and literary analysis. Feminist literary theory releases women from utilizing male critical techniques; as a result, feminism and feminists may facilitate change by looking to women and woman-identified theoretical constructs which will dislocate a privileged location within an elitist academic institution. Since women are usually denied access to male methodology and the establishment, feminist theory offers a viable means of reconstructing women's position in literature, society, and history in an anti-elitist manner.

Postcolonialism

Postcolonialism and postcolonial theory as a discourse emerged in the 1970s, although it did not really gain wide recognition until the mid-1980s. Postcolonialism and postcolonial theory highlight how dominant cultures often colonize smaller nations and the literatures within these colonized nations. Since postcolonial studies are still developing, some scholars and critics might argue that postcolonial theory cannot be applied to Scottish literature because Scotland is not a Third World or a colonized nation; however, as a marginalized country that still suffers cultural oppression from England, some aspects of postcolonial theory are arguably relevant to the study of Scottish literature and provide a basis for a reading position that merits comment.

⁶¹*Feminist Literary Criticism* (Essex: Longman, 1991), p. 5.

⁶²*Ibid*, p. 6.

Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin bandy about the term 'postcolonialism' in their intriguing text *The Empire Writes Back*. As they define it, the term 'post-colonial' covers 'all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day'.⁶³ Alan Riach believes that the 'Scottish condition is paradigmatically colonial':

What the Scots write is not what they read. Everything is dispersed; there is no ready-made tradition. As Peter McCarey has said, few Scottish writers hit the ground running and many just hit the ground. The winners make literature and the rest make history, leaf-mould for later growth. Each writer has to find his or her own traditions -- in history, in oral tradition or elsewhere.⁶⁴

On the face of it, Scotland exists independently of England because it has different legal, educational, and religious systems; still, as Hendry puts it: 'My culture is under threat of extinction: both the Scots language and Gaelic hang on by the merest thread; Scottish culture has been and still is being eroded, diluted, Anglicized'.⁶⁵ In light of Riach's and Hendry's astute observations, one can see that Scotland suffers alienation and separation from an Anglocentric British culture which ultimately affects the cultural production of Scottish literature.

Homi K. Bhabha, another postcolonial theorist, believes that postcolonialism departs from the tradition of a 'dependency' theory. Instead, Bhabha claims that as an analytic mode, postcolonialism:

attempts to revise those nationalist or 'nativist' pedagogies that set up the relation of Third World and First World in a binary structure of opposition. The postcolonial perspective resists the attempt at holistic forms of social explanation. It forces a recognition of the more complex cultural and political boundaries that exist on the cusp of these often opposed political spheres.⁶⁶

Postcolonialism, in Bhabha's mind, attempts to revise the binary structures of opposition that set up contradictions/disputes between the Third World and the First World. As such, postcolonial theory poses a challenge to the dominance of imperial boundaries and exposes cultural trends which endure on the outskirts of opposing political spheres. An understanding

⁶³p. 2.

⁶⁴'Tradition and the New Alliance: Scotland and the Caribbean', in *Gairfish: The McAvantgarde*, ed. by W.N. Herbert and Richard Price (Dundee: Gairfish, 1992), pp. 135-45 (p. 140).

⁶⁵'A Double Knot on the Peeny', p. 37.

⁶⁶'Postcolonial Criticism', in *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1992), pp. 437-65 (p. 439).

of postcolonialism in the analysis of Scottish literature is useful because Scottish culture often exists in binary opposition to English culture; thus, when one reads Scottish literature in the context of postcolonial theory, one recognizes that complex cultural and political divisions exist between Scotland and England.

To return to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, they believe that one of the major features of postcolonial literatures is a concern with 'place' and 'displacement':

It is here that the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being; the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place. [. . .] A valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by *dislocation*, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation, or 'voluntary' removal for indentured labour. Or it may have been developed by *cultural denigration*, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model. The dialectic of place and displacement is always a feature of post-colonial societies whether these have been created by a process of settlement, intervention, or a mixture of the two. Beyond their historical and cultural differences, place, displacement, and a pervasive concern with the myths of identity and authenticity are a feature common to all post-colonial literatures in English.⁶⁷

Scottish literature, especially Scottish women's literature, is a literature of displacement which openly interrogates the myth of identity. Constantly pushed to the margins of literary discourse, Scottish literature often plays with ideas of 'place' and 'displacement' because the tradition remains in the creatively demanding position of attempting to make a space for itself within the dominant male Scottish culture and within the English literary canon. This marginalization of Scottish literature is indeed ironic because Riach attests, 'English literature itself was an eighteenth-century Scottish invention and that its earliest moments are the record of a remarkable instance of colonialist subjugation'.⁶⁸

Since Scottish people suffer cultural oppression from England and do not write what they read, Scottish literature stems from a decisive colonial position. Scottish women writers, possibly in response to what Riach calls 'a remarkable instance of colonialist subjugation', engage in postmodern experimental literary techniques which challenge the limitations imposed by the prevailing commitment to realism and class structure in English literature. They explore

⁶⁷*The Empire Writes Back*, pp. 8-9.

⁶⁸'Tradition and the New Alliance', p. 139. See Robert Crawford, Chapter 1 of *Devolving English Literature* for a full discussion of this argument.

issues linked to the fantastic and to the supernatural which displaces conventional literary boundaries from a postcolonial perspective. As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin argue, postmodernist writers and poststructuralist critics aim 'to dismantle assumptions about language and textuality and to stress the importance of ideological construction in social-textual relations finds echoes in post-colonial texts'.⁶⁹ Tennant, Elphinstone, and Galloway write novels that attempt to dismantle common assumptions about women and women's roles in society. Since these Scottish women writers suffer a dual marginalization, one might say that their novels develop within a postcolonial reading and writing position. It will prove useful, then, to enter into a discussion of subjectivity, ideology, discourse, poststructuralism, and intertextuality in order to understand more fully how Scottish women writers query received ideas about the cultural construction of femininity in imaginative and provocative fictional forms.

Subjectivity -- Ideology -- Discourse

Ideology and discourse are inextricably linked to subjectivity. Subjectivity cannot be disassociated from ideology or discourse because as Marxist scholars show us, ideology and discourse unconsciously condition women and men as subjects. Louis Althusser explains that ideology does not represent the 'system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live':⁷⁰

Ideology is both a real and an imaginary relation to the world -- real in that it is the way in which people really live their relationship to the social relations which govern their conditions of existence, but imaginary in that it discourages a full understanding of these conditions of existence and the ways in which people are socially constituted within them (593-94).

Belsey concurs with Althusser's definition. She concludes that ideology does not represent whole truths:

It is a set of omissions, gaps rather than lies, smoothing over contradictions, appearing to provide answers to questions which in reality it evades, and

⁶⁹*The Empire Writes Back*, p. 165.

⁷⁰Qtd. in Catherine Belsey, 'Constructing the Subject: Deconstructing the Text', in *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Criticism and Theory*, ed. by Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), pp. 593-609 (p. 593). The next two references are from this edition.

masquerading as coherence in the interests of the social relations generated by and necessary to the reproduction of the existing mode of production (594).

Although ideologies differ according to individual cultures, ideology intentionally misrepresents the 'truths' of society and works to construct individuals as subjects. Ideology also efficiently and persuasively creates indistinct identities; it preserves the existing social formations which favour male domination and female subordination. As a result, some women and men may unwittingly accept unsatisfying roles, behaviours, careers, and gender limitations because ideology masks alternatives to inferior and inadequate subject positions.

Discourses and discursive institutions are at the heart of ideology; discourse, like food, maintains the ideological machine. In conjunction with ideology, discourses and discursive institutions wish to secure the cooperation of women. Weedon argues that the most powerful discourses 'in our society have firm institutional bases, in the law, for example, or in medicine, social welfare, education and in the organization of the family and work'.⁷¹ While this may indicate an insurmountable dilemma, Weedon asserts that these large institutions are also sites of 'contest' and come under constant scrutiny and challenge:

The lack of discursive unity and uniformity [. . .] Means that the individuals whom social welfare policies seek to govern have available to them, at least potentially, the discursive means to resist the implications of existing social policies. Moreover, particular discourses themselves offer more than one subject position. While a discourse will offer a preferred form of subjectivity, its very organization will imply other subject positions and the possibility of reversal (109).

Discourse and ideology affect how an individual constructs subjectivity; however, as Weedon attests, the lack of unity within discourse and ideology offers a means of resistance and change. Writing is one method of challenging existing social and cultural institutions; thus, theoretical methods which show the ways in which women are conditioned to be passive subjects actively dismantle imbalanced institutional practices and structures.

⁷¹*Feminist Practice and Post-Structuralist Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), p. 109. The next two references are from this edition.

Poststructuralism

Poststructuralist theory contests the ways in which ideology and discourse shape individuals as subjects because it intrinsically challenges Western culture's liberal-humanist version of a 'unified' and 'stable' subject. Weedon describes how liberal humanism:

assumes the unitary nature of the subject and conscious subjectivity. It insists on establishing the appearance of unity from moments of subjectivity which are often contradictory. To be inconsistent in our society is to be unstable. Yet the appearance of the unitary subject, based as it is on primary structures of misrecognition of the self as authorial source of meaning, is precarious, easily disrupted and open to change (112).

Frederic Jameson posits an argument similar to Weedon's. He suggests that in the wake of poststructuralist theory, the notion of a 'unified' and 'stable' individual requires revision:

Not only is the bourgeois individual subject a thing of the past, it is also a myth; it never really existed in the first place; there have never been autonomous subjects of that type. Rather, this construct is merely a philosophical and cultural mystification which sought to persuade people that they 'had' individual subjects and possessed this unique personal identity.⁷²

Jameson proposes that there have never been any 'bourgeois individual subjects'; instead, the individual subject is a cultural and philosophical mystification that persuades people that they hold 'individual' and 'unique' identities. Poststructural theory, then, endeavours to provide the individual with insight into the cultural construction of gendered identities and, as a result, the individual may attempt to experience herself/himself as an subject in-process.

Poststructuralism refutes the notion that the subject will ever be unified and unchanging because this position denies any potential for a reversal of the dominant order. It shifts emphasis:

from any single meaning or theory towards an unbound movement through time and space, suggesting that there will never be, and can never be, any definitive 'theory of post-structuralism': Instead, it consists of a perpetual detour towards a 'truth' that has lost any status or finality'.⁷³

Poststructuralism decentres the stable subject of the text or individual in society. It asks readers and subjects to question the underlying functions of ideological and discursive practices

⁷²'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. by Hal Foster (London: Pluto Press, 1985), pp. 111-25 (p. 115). First published *The Anti-Aesthetic* (Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1983).

⁷³Robert Young, *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader* (London/Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 6.

in which they live; this allows women and men to challenge stereotypical roles, behaviours and well-established gender norms. Young hypothesizes that poststructuralism involves a shift in meaning from the signified to the signifier; he argues that poststructuralism ‘fractures the serene unity of the stable sign and the unified subject’.⁷⁴ In Young’s mind, one must subvert existing definitions of self-knowledge, discourse, and ideology in order to speculate on the nature of things in society as fixed and true.

Some critics argue that poststructuralism denies the ‘authenticity of individual experience by decentring the rational unitary, autonomous subject of liberal humanism, or the essential female nature at the centre of much radical feminism’.⁷⁵ Even so, poststructuralism and discourse theory offer feminists a ‘contextualization of experience and an analysis of its constitution and ideological power’.⁷⁶ For example, feminist appropriation of poststructuralist theory has a number of benefits to literary and cultural analysis because it concerns itself with power; it looks to the ‘historically and socially specific discursive production of conflicting and competing meanings’, and also necessarily questions the ‘sovereignty of subjectivity as the guarantee of meaning’.⁷⁷ Feminist poststructuralism allows that different historical conditions and interpretations of gender norms are fixed within certain time periods; as such, meaning can be only fixed temporarily to subjectivity according to the historical and social conditions of the time. Constantly in motion, individual subjects are unified only in so far as women and men are socially constituted.

Feminist poststructuralism benefits any woman’s struggle to determine identity because it attempts to revise historical and current conceptions about female subjectivity. Feminist poststructuralism also contends that ‘the world is intelligible only through discourse: there is no unmediated experience, no access to the raw reality of self and others’.⁷⁸ This brief analysis of feminism, subjectivity, ideology, discourse, and poststructuralism suggests that there can be no neutral conventions or construction of identity in relation to dominant ideologies and

⁷⁴Ibid, p. 8.

⁷⁵Weedon, *Feminist Practice*, p. 125.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Weedon, *Feminist Practice*, p. 86.

⁷⁸Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice*, (London/New York: Methuen, 1986), p. 61. First published (London/New York: Methuen, 1980).

discourses. Female subjects are, and have been, constructed to a great degree by historical and social assumptions about women's roles, behaviours, and physical appearances, and can therefore know themselves only in relation to the discourses available to them during specific historical periods. Since history and the nature of ideology are continually in-process, female subjectivity will also be continually in-process.

Intertextuality

Although intertextuality is not a critical approach to the study of literature, it is a fictional construct which the writers in this study employ and consequently requires some discussion. The novels in this study derive power from constant references to literary predecessors. Some critics call this narrative practice 'intertextuality'. However, as Leon S. Roudiez tells us, since the term intertextuality was introduced in the 1960s by Julia Kristeva, 'it has since been much used and abused on both sides of the Atlantic'.⁷⁹ Roudiez believes that the concept of intertextuality has been generally 'misunderstood':

It has nothing to do with matters of influence by one writer upon another, or with the sources of a literary work; it does, on the other hand, involve the components of a *textual system* such as the novel, for instance. It is defined in *La Revolution du langage poetique* as the transposition of one or more *systems* of signs into another, accompanied by a new articulation of the enunciative and denotative position. Any SIGNIFYING PRACTICE (*q.v.*) is a field (in the sense of space traversed by lines of force) in which various signifying systems undergo such a transposition.⁸⁰

Even though this definition of intertextuality outlines the terms of its original theoretical impetus, Kristeva's definition essentially excludes wider usage. Intertextuality as a workable literary term functions better when it is defined along more flexible lines.

Intertextuality refers, in Walter J. Ong's words, 'to a literary and psychological commonplace: a text cannot be created simply out of lived experience. A novelist writes a novel because he or she is familiar with this kind of textual organization of experience'.⁸¹

Likewise, Michael Worton and Judith Still introduce the idea that the writer 'is a reader of texts (in the broadest sense) before s/he is a creator of texts, and therefore the work of art is

⁷⁹Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), p. 15.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹*Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London/New York: Methuen, 1982), p. 133.

inevitably shot through with references, quotations and influences of every kind'.⁸² Jonathan Culler goes beyond Worton and Still's open-ended interpretation of intertextuality by quoting Roland Barthes' hypothesis that 'the text is not a line of words releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of an Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash'.⁸³ Writers cannot exist in a vacuum and consciously, as in Tennant's, Elphinstone's, and Galloway's writing, or unconsciously, in other authors' writing, often allude to other works of literature or art. Since writers, like most individuals, read and study literature at some point in their lives, a text cannot help but exist as a multi-dimensional space where a variety of writings, some of which *must* be original, blend and clash. This suggests what Derrida calls 'pluridimensionality', which is 'precisely the irreducible multiplicity we find in experimental writing'.⁸⁴

Intertextuality in the novels of Tennant, Elphinstone, and Galloway is important because it highlights how Scottish women writers are re-visioning earlier texts and, at the same time, referring to other representations of women in history and culture. What's more, when Scottish women writers allude to other Scottish writers like Hogg, Spark, and Kelman, they consciously make a link with the Scottish literary tradition. Intertextuality asks readers to engage with a number of different texts; thus, the reader might see the intertextuality in the fiction of Tennant, Elphinstone, and Galloway as a subtext or intertext of women's experience in the larger world.⁸⁵

According to Mary Kelly, 'there's no single theoretical discourse which is going to offer an explanation for all forms of social relations or for every mode of political practice'.⁸⁶ The foregoing discussion of the various critical methodologies which will be drawn on in this thesis hopefully provides new approaches to the study of Scottish literature. Ideas developed

⁸²*Intertextuality: Theories and Practices* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 1.

⁸³*On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), pp. 32-3.

⁸⁴Marianne DeKoven, *A Different Language: Gertrude Stein's Experimental Writing* (Madison/London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), p. 18.

⁸⁵Intertextuality is important in the analysis of Scottish literature because previous critics and scholars of Scottish literature have not looked at this aspect of Scottish writing; therefore, intertextuality and the analysis of intertextuality adds another dimension to the study of Scottish literature.

⁸⁶Qtd in Craig Owens, 'The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism', in *Postmodern Culture*, pp. 57-82 (p. 64).

from feminism, postcolonialism, discourse theory, poststructuralism, and intertextuality are all relevant to the critical analysis of Scottish women's writing because contemporary theory, like contemporary fiction, advances pluralism, interrogation, borders, and the multiplicity of hidden meaning. For Scottish women writers, critical approaches which complement experimental writing, border crossings, interrogative texts, and in-process subjects appear to be a positive theoretical framework which liberates scholars and readers from limiting critical constructs and static methods of textual interpretation.

Postmodernism

While feminism, postcolonialism, and poststructuralism refer to specific critical approaches, postmodernism is a term that refers to cultural and literary production. Postmodernism, in conjunction with feminist theory and poststructuralism, offers both author and audience an avenue for denaturalizing existing cultural codes. While postmodernism was originally associated with architecture, over the years the terms 'postmodern' and 'postmodernism' have increasingly been allied with film, literature, and art among other subjects. As a result, no firm definitions of postmodernism have emerged, and general attributes of postmodernism have come to dominate contemporary cultural analysis.

As Linda Hutcheon puts it, postmodernism 'manifests itself in many fields of cultural endeavour' and takes:

the form of self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement. It is rather like saying something whilst at the same time putting inverted commas around what is being said. The effect is to highlight, or 'highlight,' and to subvert, or 'subvert,' and the mode is therefore a 'knowing' and an ironic -- or even 'ironic' -- one. Postmodernism's distinctive character lies in this kind of wholesale 'nudging' commitment to doubleness, or duplicity. In many ways it is an even-handed process because postmodernism ultimately manages to install and reinforce as much as undermine and subvert the conventions and presuppositions it appears to challenge. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to say that the postmodern's initial concern is to de-naturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entities that we unthinkingly experience as 'natural' (they might even include capitalism, patriarchy, liberal humanism) are in fact 'cultural'; made by us, not given to us. Even nature, postmodernism might point out, doesn't grow on trees.⁸⁷

⁸⁷*The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 1-2.

Postmodernism contests the commanding force of modernism by disputing an individual's ideas of the real and the natural; in literary terms, postmodernism differs from 'modernist aesthetics principally in its abandonment of subjectivity' because the 'representation of consciousness is alleged to have been forsaken with the emphasis on the fragmentation of the subject. That the self can no longer be considered a unified and stable entity has become axiomatic in the light of poststructuralism'.⁸⁸

Postmodernism has a tendency to break down barriers, expose hierarchies, and denaturalize the existing order of 'things'; it dismantles ideological systems and closes the gaps between the centre and the margins. Parody, pastiche, self-reflexivity, and self-consciousness characterize postmodernism and place emphasis on cultural representations. This literary and cultural practice subverts conventional depictions of reality, including female realities, and highlights the need for a reassessment of patriarchal power structures.

Postmodernism as a cultural debate also challenges the fixed absolutes which dominate canonical forms and encourages plural or pluralistic readings of both literature and society. In Randall Stevenson's words, postmodernism 'not only radicalizes forms, but also satirizes them, exposing their inability to connect with reality and the possibilities for distortion which result'.⁸⁹ Postmodernism in literature primarily functions, like poststructuralist theory, to decentre and disintegrate individual subjects and discursive systems so that 'even the seemingly most reliable and stable unities take on a shifting, disturbingly plural aspect'.⁹⁰ Lending individuals and ideological conventions a 'disturbingly plural' aspect does not necessitate that plurality means difference which in turn means 'other'; rather, as Hutcheon sees it, postmodernism contests authority 'by asserting the plurality of the "different" and rejecting the binary opposition of the "other"'.⁹¹ This postmodern pluralization of difference can be seen in Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, and Hélène Cixous' critical essays and fiction.

⁸⁸Smyth, *Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction*, p. 10.

⁸⁹'Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction in Britain', p. 25.

⁹⁰John Mepham, 'Narratives of Postmodernism', in *Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction*, pp. 135-55. (p. 145).

⁹¹'Discourse, Power, Ideology: Humanism and Postmodernism', in *Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction*, pp. 105-22 (p. 119).

If postmodernism offers the pluralism and difference which questions received ideas about the stability and unity promulgated by ideological systems and the cultural construction of individuals as subjects, Mepham suggests that one might call postmodernism the ‘*undecidability of meaning arising from the fragmentation or pluralization of contexts*’.⁹²

Looking at postmodernism as a means of querying absolute ‘truths’ produced for individuals in society, postmodern literature, like the six novels in this thesis, enables writers to experiment with content, character, and form; it also liberates authors from realistic and naturalistic constructs. When readers are offered experimental and often incoherent and non-linear texts, the plural readings which may be drawn from postmodern literature also release the audience from conventional methods of literary interpretation. In this sense, postmodernism creates writers and readers who are ‘pluralists’, those who:

seek not truth, not total coherence, not even correspondence to reality. For the traditional cognitive ends, [pluralists] substitute practical or rhetorical effects on readers and societies, ‘pedagogical communities’ or ‘negotiating’ communicants. What we are promised is liberation from an inhibiting bourgeois search for certainties: a new freedom, a new creativity.⁹³

Since postmodern literature often subverts ‘realistic’ literary texts, writers who choose to employ the devices of postmodernism and the devices of experiment consciously defy ‘acceptable’ discursive and literary formats. By heralding a new awareness of the ambiguous nature of ideological foundations, postmodern writers expose hierarchical systems and challenge fixed ideas about ‘truth’, subjectivity, and objectivity. Postmodern writers attempt to formulate new definitions of the literary canon by launching pluralistic freedoms and endless creativity.

Nevertheless, some critics believe that postmodernism denies the female voice. Sherzer claims, ‘to this date, postmodernism in literature has been associated with texts written by men, and texts written by feminist writers have been classified under feminism’.⁹⁴ Likewise, Craig Owens submits that the blind spot in the discourse of postmodernism is the failure to address the issue of sexual difference. He suggests that postmodernism neglects or represses the

⁹²‘Narratives of Postmodernism’, p. 147.

⁹³Wayne C. Booth, “‘Preserving the Exemplar’: or, How Not to Dig Our Own Graves’, *Critical Inquiry*, 3 (Spring 1977), 407-23 (p. 415).

⁹⁴‘Postmodernism and Feminisms’, p. 156.

feminist voice and proposes that postmodernism 'may be another masculine invention engineered to exclude women'.⁹⁵ Sherzer and Owens do raise an important point in the postmodern debate -- the exclusion of women and the female voice; however, that women are completely denied voice and have yet to find a place within the postmodern movement is arguable. To be sure, many critics like Edmund Smyth only refer to men in a discussion of postmodernism.⁹⁶ Even so, many women writers are involved in the production of postmodern experimental literature, Emma Tennant, Margaret Elphinstone, Janice Galloway, Angela Carter, and Fay Weldon among others. Simply put, lack of a female voice within postmodernism results from critics and theorists who consciously or unconsciously prevent women writers from being assessed as postmodern experimental writers.

Since postmodernism queries the very foundations on which society bases its cultural constitution and political designs, it often uncovers disturbing revelations about the lowly position of women and other marginal figures within a white phallographic order. Thus, postmodernism, like feminism, is indeed a political enterprise because 'its representations -- its images and stories -- are anything but neutral, however "aestheticized" they may appear to be in their parodic self-reflexivity'; above all, postmodernism wants 'to "de-doxify" our cultural representations and their undeniable political import'.⁹⁷ Attacking the male institutions and ideologies which confine women to roles that limit intellectual and creative endeavours and often lead to female alienation and fragmented subjectivity, women writers like Tennant, Elphinstone, and Galloway use postmodern experimental literary techniques to challenge passive representations of women in literature and to reconstruct and redefine women's position in the world. Postmodernism and feminism together encompass an agenda of resistance and change and represent a conscious determination to subvert and to undermine sovereign male rule.

In Scottish women's writing, the postmodern challenge lies in the use of the incoherent and non-linear narrative structures, character fragmentation, and the construction of

⁹⁵'The Discourse of Others', p. 61.

⁹⁶See, for example, Smyth's 'Introduction' to his edited collection *Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction* where he only cites male writers, directors, and producers -- Alasdair Gray among them -- as engaging in stylistic practices linked to the postmodern cultural movement.

⁹⁷Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 3.

fantastical or 'hyper-realistic' fictional worlds. In Scotland, many women writers utilize these methods in reaction to their marginalized position as Scottish women in an already marginalized Scottish culture. Openly defying male determinations of the literary canon, Scottish women writers, Tennant, Elphinstone, and Galloway among them, expose the fake levels of freedom women are conditioned by society to believe they possess. Since postmodern fiction by women denaturalizes prevailing cultural codes, it is generally open to criticism from the male critical literary establishment. Jill Dolan responds to negative male responses to the women's postmodernist enterprise:

Feminist postmodernism does not play indulgently with meaninglessness or plurality, charges that might be leveled against some postmodern performance auteurs. Feminist postmodernism is committed to meaning, to sifting through the referents of material reality and drawing blueprints of their construction that can be historically revised and changed.⁹⁸

Postmodern feminist literature opens the door for a reassessment of women's position in all cultures and in all worlds. Exposing the discursive forces which alienate women and induce mental fragmentation, postmodern experimental women's literature calls for a re-evaluation of existing hierarchical constructs in order to posit resistance and change to the dominant white male voice.

The Writers and the Novels

Emma Tennant, Margaret Elphinstone, and Janice Galloway are three writers who share a marginalized femininity, feminism, and nationality. It has been said that marginality confers an advantage because those who are marginalized are forced to reason through alienation and thus approach literature, culture, and society with a new, sharp, critical eyes.⁹⁹ When women are marginalized, their alienation often expresses itself in unique literary endeavours. Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin support these claims. They believe that women and colonized people share:

An intimate experience of the politics of oppression and repression, and like them they have been forced to articulate their experiences in the language of their oppressors. Women, like post-colonial peoples, have

⁹⁸'In Defense of Discourse: Materialist Feminism, Postmodernism, Poststructuralism . . . and Theory'. *Drama Review* 33 (Fall 1989), 58-71, (p. 69).

⁹⁹See for instance, Reizbaum, 'Canonical Double Cross', p. 177, and Judi Roller, *The Politics of the Feminist Novel* (Westport: Greenwood Press, Inc, 1986), pp. 1-3.

had to construct a language of their own when their only available 'tools' are those of the 'colonizer'.¹⁰⁰

Since Scottish women are representative of a post-colonial people's repression and oppression, they are forced to choose between their nationality and womanhood; thus, they often articulate this experience in writing.

The three Scottish women writers in this thesis write novels which represent fractured female subjects, a paramount feature of the colonized woman's position. The female characters within the six novels experience psychic fragmentation or embark on quests for individual reasons; still, the psychic fragmentation and the quest narratives usually result from the character's inability to reconcile herself to the one-dimensional and static female roles and stereotypes advocated by patriarchal power systems. As the new, unpublished interviews with Emma Tennant, Margaret Elphinstone, and Janice Galloway tell us, these writers are, like their characters, influenced by culture and discourse.¹⁰¹ The writers, like their female protagonists, are conditioned by society to respond to life in prescribed manners. Accordingly, Scottish women writers frequently challenge the norms promulgated in Western culture by writing texts in which women overtly contest traditional representations of womanhood and reality, even at the cost of psychic dissolution, marginalization, and alienation.

Tennant draws from her literary predecessor James Hogg and the Scottish literary tradition by exploring fantasy and the supernatural in *The Bad Sister*. She projects her female protagonist Jane Wild into psychic fantasies in which it is difficult for the character and reader to discern what is real from what is illusion; thus, the novel stretches all limits of realism. *The Bad Sister* focuses on the ambiguous nature of individuality and self-hood. The psychic dissolution of Jane Wild emphasizes the discrepancies that sometimes exist between the cultural constructions of personality and female subjectivity. Jane's fragmentation also reflects the confusions which abound between power and knowledge in the non-fictional world.

Sisters and Strangers: A Moral Tale also questions the nature of female subjectivity. In this novel, Tennant rewrites the story of Eve and Adam and the Fall from grace; however, she

¹⁰⁰*The Empire Writes Back*, pp. 174-5.

¹⁰¹See the Appendix for the transcripts of the interviews I conducted with each writer.

subverts the traditional creation story by placing Eve and Adam in contemporary society. Tennant interrogates conventional female roles by characterizing Eve in seven stereotypical versions of womanhood such as a Madonna, a whore, a harlot and a bluestocking to name a few. In doing so, Tennant's novel and female protagonist testify how stereotypical images of femininity limit and preclude women from attaining any ideas of self-hood. Tennant accomplishes the questioning of women's representations through the narrative which adopts an oral form. By presenting the novel as the story of Eve and Adam told by a grandmother to her granddaughter and her granddaughter's friend, Tennant pays homage to the oral tradition in folk literature that has flourished in Scotland for hundreds of years. The oral narrative unveils a fictional account of women's repression in order to facilitate female liberation from such confining roles.

Faustine queries the ways in which women are socially constructed to effect certain images of youth and beauty. In *Faustine*, Tennant retells the Faust myth from a female perspective. Her character Muriel, a middle-aged woman makes a pact with the Devil to regain her youth for twenty-four years. Once Muriel regains her youth, she also gains immediate 'star' status. Muriel's story is told by four different narrators who describe how Muriel's youth connotes beauty and wealth which automatically endows Muriel with power. In *Faustine*, Tennant again draws on the diabolic and supernatural to contest existing versions of female reality. She asks how the cultural order commonly fosters women's competition which ultimately alienates women from one another. Intertextuality permeates the novel and Tennant draws parallels between the exploitation of women in Western and in Third World nations. In this way, Tennant demonstrates that women's roles and inferior positions are not isolated incidents; rather, as the novel puts it, female roles extend from centuries of social conditioning which is often recounted in literary texts. *Faustine* represents, on one level, an intertext or a subtext of the female experience; moreover, the ambiguous oral narrative again questions the nature of literary realism and Tennant posits female plurality as an alternative to one-dimensional female roles.

Margaret Elphinstone's first two novels, *The Incomer* and *A Sparrow's Flight*, follow the journey of Naomi, a wandering musician, in a fictional world that is detached from the

present. The fictional world Elphinstone creates might be termed science fiction or fantasy because it moves away from what can be interpreted as real; the ambiguous setting interpellates the reader and tempts the reader to identify with Elphinstone's fantastical world and the practices of its inhabitants. Both novels are in some sense quest narratives in that Naomi embarks on two different journeys which help her to understand herself in relation to her world.

Like Tennant, Elphinstone also examines traditional features of Scottish society. Music and storytelling play a large role in community interaction; this permits the characters to explore creativity, imagination, and passion. At the same time, Elphinstone's characters encourage the acceptance of each individual's strengths and weaknesses; therefore, the villagers come to learn from each other, not from the conditioning apparatus of a central power structure. Both novels explore various aspects of female community; more positively, Elphinstone puts forward the concept of female love. Not only does she show women loving men, but also presents women loving each other; thus the novel reveals female characters gaining strength in their interactions with one another. *The Incomer* and *A Sparrow's Flight* challenge existing power relations between women and men by imagining women's strength and talent in a world devoid of hierarchy and male power.

Janice Galloway's novel *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* details one woman's struggle to come to terms with her lover's death. Galloway's novel is not fantastic because it takes place in contemporary society and realistically deals with social subject matter; however, her experimental literary techniques such as words slipping off the page and theatrical dialogues reveal the novel to be 'hyper-realistic'. Even though this practice does not directly affect the novel's text, the words in the margin disrupt a fluid reading of the novel, and disorient the reader from experiencing the text as a traditional example of literary realism.

Galloway's novel describes Joy's ongoing descent into the acceptable 'female' rebellion of depression and nervous breakdown. Galloway examines social and medical discourse and depicts her protagonist in society's terms as a 'sick' woman because she cannot live up to social expectations of coping with grief. Galloway interrogates female subjectivity and the cultural construction of femininity and juxtaposes 'acceptable' women's behaviour with

her rebellious female character's behaviour; hence, the author raises questions about what is 'normal'. Ultimately, Galloway queries existing paradigms of femaleness and the female self. She launches an inquiry into the nature of hierarchy and discourse and compels readers to come to terms with the fact that as much as one would like to deny it, all actions and thoughts are directly or indirectly influenced by the existing male dominant discourses and ideological structures.

Emma Tennant, Margaret Elphinstone, and Janice Galloway are all very different writers; however, all three women find an affinity in their use of experimental narrative forms. These three writers dispute conventional narrative techniques in the effort to explore the formation of a distinctly female subjectivity which, in many instances, men define and preserve to their advantage. One might conclude from Tennant's, Elphinstone's, and Galloway's postmodern novels that contemporary Scottish women writers do not, as Malzahn writes, look toward America for freedom of thought, or freedom of expression 'which still seems unthinkable in Scotswoman's writing'.¹⁰² Neither have contemporary Scottish women writers reverted, as Shepherd believes, to the conventions of women writers instilled more than fifty years ago which reflect kailyardism: 'sentimentality, retrospectiveness, parochialism, idealised romanticism, and a complete failure to come to terms with the reality of modern Scotland'.¹⁰³ Instead, contemporary Scottish women writers, particularly the three in this thesis, look to themselves and the formation of new imagination to question prevailing ideologies that construct individuals as subjects.

¹⁰²*Aspects of Identity*, p. 185.

¹⁰³'Scottish Women Novelists', *Chapman*, 27/28 (Summer 1980), 50-4 (p. 53).

Chapter Two
Emma Tennant: *The Bad Sister*

I have no patience with this dreadful idea that whatever you have in you has to come out, that you can't suppress true talent. People can be destroyed; they can be bent, distorted and completely crippled. . . . In spite of all the poetry, all the philosophy to the contrary, we are not really masters of our fate. We don't really direct our lives unaided and unobstructed. Our being is subject to all the chances in life.

--Katherine Anne Porter

A review of literature is always important because it defines a gap in the current research in any field of study. Chapter One defines a gap in Scottish literature; specifically, there appears to be a need for critical interpretations of Scottish women's writing integrating contemporary critical theory. While the entire scope of Scottish women's writing deserves scholarly attention, this thesis examines three contemporary Scottish women writers from a feminist perspective with additional critical support from postcolonialism, discourse theory, and poststructuralism.

Emma Tennant's novel *The Bad Sister* can be read in a distinctly Scottish context because its basic structure mimics James Hogg's masterpiece *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. Tennant updates Hogg's novel by replacing fanatical Calvinism with radical and fanatical feminism. Tennant's novel retains Hogg's ambiguity and asserts pluralism and the female double in order to show how the splintered feminine identity results from the social, cultural, and ideological discourses which encode women as inferior subjects. In *The Bad Sister*, Jane Wild, like Robert Wringhim, projects herself into supernatural fantasies; thus, Tennant, like Hogg, offers readers an ambiguous and divided vision of society and writing, but more importantly, an ambiguous and divided vision of Scottish women's writing.

Emma Tennant

Emma Tennant, one of Scotland's most prolific women writers, lives an interesting and varied life. Born in London in 1937 to Scottish parents, Tennant moved to Scotland during the Second World War at the age of two and returned to London when she was nine. She went to Paris at fifteen to study art history at the Ecole du Louvre, and came back to London two years later to be presented as a debutante at the court of Queen

Elizabeth II. Tennant has written articles for numerous magazines, been features editor at *Vogue*, reviewed extensively for periodicals and newspapers, and founded and edited *Bananas*, a literary journal which published experimental poetry and prose from new and established writers.

Tennant published her first novel *The Colour of Rain* under the pseudonym of Catherine Aydy in 1964; however, when Alberto Moravia denounced the novel as an example of British decadence while adjudicating for the Formentor Prize, she withdrew from the literary world for eight years. In 1973, Tennant met Michael Moorcock and J.G. Ballard who encouraged her to begin writing again; she restarted her literary career with a science fiction novel, *The Time of the Crack*. Since then, Tennant has published eighteen novels, written screenplays, and continued to contribute to magazines and newspapers by reviewing books and writing original articles.

Two issues that cannot be separated from Tennant's writing are her Scottishness and her womanhood. She continually talks about her Scottish upbringing in interviews and believes her childhood to have been idyllic:

extremely beautiful and isolated, and filled with the most extraordinary animals and companions, many of them provided by my father when he came back. He would take me for long walks and invent animals which lived in the roots of trees, without being a fanciful person at all.¹

Recounting that she 'used to do a lot of naughty things, which was very enjoyable' (283), Tennant expresses that her isolation from England during the war in a wild and beautiful Scottish landscape released her from living within the rigid social conventions that tend to restrict lively imaginations.

The end of the war and Tennant's subsequent return to London interrupted a wild and enjoyable childhood. Tennant reveals to John Haffenden that she will 'never forget the shock' of moving to London:

I had never before left this extraordinary fake castle surrounded by huge and very ancient hills, in a *cul de sac* you couldn't and had no wish to get out of. Just the other day, in fact, I found some diaries I'd kept at about the age of 9 in which I'd written, 'This can't be true . . . I've never been so unhappy in my life. I sit on the tops of buses and the old men's spit runs down the wooden runnels' (282).

¹John Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview* (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 281-304 (p. 282). The next three references are from this edition.

Tennant observed from a very early age a few distinctions between Scotland and England; thus, she freely compares the 'depression of the number 27 bus' (282) in London to the Scottish borders where Hogg's "most enchanted wood" was opposite my bedroom window. Where people were turned into threelegged stools and fairy rings'.² In essence, Tennant clarifies how the expansive landscape of the Scottish borders releases her active imagination, and how the dirty and crowded metropolis of London brings on a 'sadness' that confines her creativity.

Clear definitions of the differences between Scottish and English culture probably did not exist for Tennant as a child; in retrospect, having lived in London since the end of the war, Tennant finds herself able to analyze the ambivalent position she holds as a Scottish woman living in the political, social, and cultural 'capital' of Great Britain. Tennant perceives visible differences in language, education, politics, and culture which lead her to conclude that 'it's Scottish to be split, to talk in one way and have to go South to make your living'.³ Looking to language as the most obvious differentiation between Scotland and England, Tennant says 'I went to school in Scotland and spoke a broad Scottish dialect, and if you then come south there does exist a split as to whether you think you are Scottish or English'.⁴ Since language and use of dialect immediately define an individual's social standing, the Scots language as a mark of difference began, in Tennant's mind, to reinforce ideas of the double and split personality in Scotland and Scottish literature.

Tennant believes that the 'concept of the split personality is particularly appealing to Scottish writers because the doubleness of national identity has been there for so long'.⁵ She comments:

This feeling of a double in Scotland came from being a different person as a child, to what you had to be as a grown-up. [. . .] In general that's what does make Scottish people feel odd, that they then have to come to terms with the fact that they are really English, once they are grown-up, and are getting jobs.⁶

²Olga Kenyon, *Women Writers Talk* (Oxford: Lennard, 1989), p. 184.

³Ibid, p. 185.

⁴Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview*, p. 292.

⁵Ibid.

⁶'Women Talking About Women Writing', in *Women's Writing: A Challenge to Theory*, ed. by Moira Monteith (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1986), pp. 117-53 (pp. 126-27).

Language is not the only reason the double and the split personality take hold in Scottish literature; yet, language remains a symbol for Tennant and many other individuals of the crisis of Scottish subjectivity within a dominant English culture.

The concept of a split personality, the double, and the duality of national identity remain problematic for Tennant and Scottish people in general; however, Tennant's womanhood compounds the split she experiences as a Scot. Tennant continually asserts:

The fact that I am a woman is a very important element in my work. My books have run alongside the women's movement, so that if there hadn't been a women's movement (which now seems impossible to imagine), I don't know what kind of books -- if any -- I would have written.⁷

Tennant openly aligns herself with the women's movement and, as such, highlights the dual marginalization she suffers as a woman and as a Scot. Tennant encounters a split in the Scottish psyche which mirrors the split she experiences as a female subject; one might infer that she draws on the history of division in the Scottish literary tradition so as to expose the social construction of femininity.

The Scottish 'Split': Tennant's Fictional Oeuvre

Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull elaborate the idea of the dual nature of Scottish society in their discussion of how the double and the split personality pervade and personify Scottish culture. They consider how Scottish popular culture reinforces stereotypical images of Scotland and how Scottish culture can be 'exhaustively described in terms of drink, football, tartanry and religion'.⁸ Beveridge and Turnbull speculate that these false images foster an 'inferiorist discourse' (12) which bolsters notions that Scotland is a split and a backward nation. They go on to suggest that R. D. Laing, one of Scotland's most influential thinkers, essentially upholds:

a Scottish tradition of interest in divided or schizoid personalities, a concern which is taken to reflect the pervasiveness of a distinctly profound schism in both the Scottish psyche and Scottish society. Within this reading, Scottish culture is defined in an entirely negative way, identified as something freakish and pathological (106).

Beveridge and Turnbull hypothesize that Laing's idea of division defines Scottish culture in a negative way; however, they cite J. Richard Boston who offers an alternative reading

⁷'A Pandora's Box for Writing', in *Delighting the Heart: A Notebook by Women Writers*, ed. by Susan Sellers (London: The Women's Press, 1989), pp. 189-90 (p. 189).

⁸*The Eclipse of Scottish Culture: Inferiorism and the Intellectuals* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1989), p. 12. The next three references are from this edition.

of the split in Scottish society. Boston contradicts Laing and expresses the inherent division in Scottish culture in a more positive manner:

Clearly Dr Laing is himself somewhat divided, as are so many Scotsmen. Highlands and Lowlands, cold rationalists and Calvinist fanatics, Glasgow and Edinburgh, teetotallers and dram-drinkers. Perhaps *Divided Self* should be seen in a tradition that includes such other works by Scots as Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (106).

While Laing sustains a negative image of a split and divided Scottish nation, as Boston tells us, these divisions are not really divisions at all; rather, the idea of Highlands and Lowlands, cold rationalists and Calvinist fanatics, etc., suggests that Scottish culture might be characterized in terms of difference and different people, not simply divisions. Boston and Scottish literary history show us that Scottish writers past and present creatively use the idea of splitness, doubling, and difference to release themselves from literary constraints commonly associated with realism and naturalism.⁹ The duality in Scottish culture permits Scottish writers, especially the three women writers in this study, to contest the absolute 'truths' and reality of life for men and women initiated and upheld by a male dominant Anglocentric culture.

A brief discussion of Tennant's other fiction might illuminate her connections to her literary foremothers and forefathers as well as enhance the in-depth analysis of the three novels in this thesis.¹⁰ Tennant explores subjectivity, particularly female subjectivity, through diabolic possession, character fragmentation, psychic doubling, and supernatural occurrences. In addition to the supernatural, her remaining fiction may be roughly divided into general subject categories. For instance, Tennant interrogates class division and class structure in *The Colour of Rain*, *The Adventures of Robina By Herself: being the memoirs of a debutante at the court of Queen Elizabeth II*, *The House of Hospitalities*, *A Wedding of Cousins*, and *Woman Beware Woman*. *The Time of the Crack*, *The Last of the Country House Murders*, and *Hotel de Dream* use the science fiction genre to investigate the English imperial heritage. Tennant extols a fantastic poetic vision in *Wild Nights* and *Alice Fell*. *The Magic Drum* exposes murder and suicide at a creative writing workshop and *Black Marina* examines the dark world of the human

⁹Boston does not mention Tennant, Elphinstone, or Galloway; however, his ideas illustrate how the split in Scottish identity fosters creativity.

¹⁰Full publication details for Tennant's novels may be found in the Primary Bibliography.

psyche and political intrigue. Finally, Tennant's most recent novel *Pemberly* is a sequel to Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

Tennant's most effective fiction, however, appears to be feminist revisions of male texts: *Two Women of London: The Strange Case of Ms Jekyll and Mrs Hyde* appropriates Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*; Tennant substitutes a group of stranded girls in *Queen of Stones* for a group of stranded boys in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*; she models *Woman Beware Woman* on Prosper Mérimée's *Columba*; and *Tess* offers a female vision of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.

Tennant's prolific career began with the publication of *The Colour of Rain*. Stylized as a third-person narrative, the novel's action takes place almost entirely in dialogue. It characterizes the upper class English way of life as contrived and superficial; hence, one cannot feel much sympathy for any of the characters' plights. Tennant's achievement in this novel is identifying cyclical patterns of self-interest and self-deception which render her characters -- both female and male -- incapable of actualizing self-knowledge. Tennant goes on to develop the decadence of upper class people in *The Bad Sister*; she portrays Jane's father as a selfish laird who gambles his estate away and who maintains casual sexual liaisons with Jane's mother Mary before his marriage to Louise.

The Adventures of Robina: being the memoirs of a debutante presented at the court of Queen Elizabeth II again shows Tennant's interest in the aristocracy and the workings of a classed society. In this novel she poses Robina's inevitable floating from school, to finishing school, to Paris, and finally to her presentation at court, as meaningless rituals of upper class English society. By describing Robina's schooling and interactions with other classed young girls, Tennant parodies the assumptions and expectations that people with wealth, especially inherited wealth, have fashioned. Using an eighteenth-century pastiche style, Tennant endeavours to show that when one actually returns to these eighteenth-century values, there is still 'little regard for human decency' because people ultimately take their luck where they can find it.¹¹ Tennant builds on the superficiality and contrived nature of the upper class lifestyle in Jane Wild's fantasies in

¹¹ *Women Writers Talk* p. 178.

The Bad Sister. Jane's fantasies reveal an oppressive female employer who concerns herself more with Jane/Jeanne and Marie's punishment than with her own lavish meals.

The House of Hospitalities and *A Wedding of Cousins* are the first two novels in the 'Cycle of the Sun' trilogy. These novels explore the psyches of four girls growing up during the turbulent decades of the 60s, 70s and 80s. The social comedy which permeates the text and the roles that the children accept in both novels point forward to *Sisters and Strangers: A Moral Tale*. Tennant describes the adolescence and entrance into adulthood of Jenny, her aristocratic friend Amy, and their two friends Carmen and Candida. She also considers the social and historical issues which permeate these eras, a recurrent feature in her novel *Faustine*. At the end of *A Wedding of Cousins*, Tennant's critique of aristocratic society culminates when Jenny comes to understand that aristocratic wealth signifies self-interest and extravagant self-indulgence; thus, Jenny dismisses the ridiculous lifestyles of upper class life and comes to terms with her own self-worth.

Class division and class structure also enter three of Tennant's novels which deal with the fantasy of England's imperialistic heritage in a science fiction context. *The Time of the Crack* depicts the affluent southeast half of England in a literal decline and fall; a crack in the river Thames breaks London into two halves, one of which floats toward Europe. In the aftermath, thousands of Londoners fall into the crack, a band of women led by the women's liberation prophetess Medea struggles to reach the other side of the crack to form a new matriarchy, and capitalist property speculators are seen rushing to buy the leftover land in order to sell it to the northern survivors at a great profit. Tennant uses the science fiction genre to release herself from conventional literary norms; as a result, the literal break-up of London in *The Time of the Crack* symbolizes how the prevailing imperial heritage needs to be interrogated and ruptured and, at the same time, asserts how women might gain control of their lives should the impenetrable class divisions and structures which permeate Anglocentric culture disappear.

Tennant contends with a post-revolutionary society and satirizes the failings of an increasingly divided society in *The Last of the Country House Murders*. In this novel, the protagonist Jules Tanner survives as England's last aristocrat and the new dictatorship demands that he must arrange his own murder for Japanese tourists. Illusion and reality

are juxtaposed throughout the novel which culminates in Jules signalling the angry crowd to attack the government. Many people are trampled in the rush; yet, Jules ironically survives as the solitary remnant of aristocratic society. Larger social and national issues appear in conjunction with the satire and bizarre comedy in the structure of this novel and later novels like *Sisters and Strangers*; yet, since Jules outlives the revolution and subsequent slaughter, Tennant implies that the aristocracy will never die.

Hotel de Dream also imaginatively juxtaposes illusion with reality. Locating the drama in a seedy London hotel, Tennant blends together the inhabitants of the Westringham Hotel's hopes, fantasies, and dreams. In this imaginative manner, Tennant explores Jungian philosophy -- an idea she later takes up in *The Bad Sister* -- and, in particular, Jung's notion of the collective unconscious. Mr Poynter dreams he is king of an ideal city; Miss Scranton, a spinster schoolteacher, dreams she is leader of a group of Amazon women; and Miss Briggs, another spinster, dreams that the Queen of England leaves the country and asks her to assume the crown. As the dreams of the Westringham's residents become more intense, Miss Scranton and Miss Briggs enter Mr Poynter's city; consequently, their dreams can no longer be distinguished from one another. The agonized inner screaming of Tennant's characters exists as a modern parable of British society. The novel suggests the failure of the aristocracy to connect with the concerns of the modern world and signals the danger of fantasizing about a past and a future that can no longer exist. Furthermore, the female characters within the novel experiment with strong female roles in their subconscious which allows female readers to envision themselves in roles which accord power and control; these ideas later surface in *The Bad Sister* and *Sisters and Strangers*.

Tennant's most exciting and innovative novels concern women and women's roles in society. In *Two Women of London: The Strange Case of Ms Jekyll and Mrs Hyde*, Tennant replicates the structure of Stevenson's classic *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Tennant employs a playwright's structure: she gives a summation of the events of a man's murder, an editor's introduction complete with a 'cast list', she divides the novel into Parts One and Two, and the novel ends with an editor's postscript. Once again attentive to women's identity, Tennant shows Mrs Hyde struggling with the pressures of being a wife, a mother, and finally a divorcee who cannot work because she

needs to stay home with her young children. Mrs Hyde, like many women, cannot reconcile herself to these opposing roles and discovers that the myths she was raised on no longer hold true. Mrs Hyde responds in a typically female manner to her history of contradictions; she, like Janice Galloway's protagonist, Joy Stone, falls into depression and sees a doctor who prescribes tranquilizers. Since these pills only make her cry, she begins taking a hormone drug that allows her split into Eliza Jekyll, a career woman who successfully entices men. Later in the novel, Mrs Hyde loses the ability to discern between her opposing selves and murders a man who represents the male establishment. In this way, violence seems to offer Mrs Hyde, like Jane Wild, an active response to the dominant authority structures which systematically disregard women's needs.

Queen of Stones examines the female myths women often encounter early in life. Tennant again experiments with narrative structure by prefacing the novel with a 'newspaper' article about a group of girls who lose their way in the fog on a sponsored walk in Dorset and includes commentary on the girl's actions from several outside sources. Tennant uses this interactive framework to tackle the myths and fairy tales young girls are brought up on, for example, Cinderella, witches, queens, and princes. She places her characters in a situation of extreme pressure to see how and if they live up to their taught feminine ideals. As the reader might expect, violence enters the novel in the form of a violent physical assault. This novel mimics *Lord of the Flies* in so far as a few of the children murder another girl in an execution-style manner.¹² The editor later notes that the 'game' probably had no intention of ending in violence; instead, social conventions push Jane over the edge and she murders to formulate an identity. One reading of *Queen of Stones* might be that Tennant maintains that women, like men, are equally capable of enacting violence and murder; at the same time, violence and murder may encompass one radical method by which women exert some kind of self-hood. This novel points to *Sisters and Strangers* and *Faustine* which similarly examine the myths and lies on which women are raised.

Woman Beware Woman also explores female subjectivity and how a woman's mind modifies the shape of reality itself. Tennant constructs this novel as a revenge

¹²The child who carries out the murder in this novel is named Jane; this coincidence perhaps recalls how Jane kills her half-sister

tragedy. The novel's action focuses on Minnie, a woman called from exile to return to Ireland where she becomes involved in the aftermath of the murder of her ex-fiancee's father. Throughout the novel, different characters pull Minnie in many different emotional directions; hence, Minnie loses sight of reality and she becomes increasingly unreliable. As her dreams of thwarted love, resentment, suppressed passion, and underlying hatred for Hugo and his family intensify, Minnie fails to maintain knowledge of self, and unwittingly falls into the passive female tradition of madness.

Tennant continues her exploration of female mythology and confining roles in the poetic and childlike visionary novel *Wild Nights*. *Wild Nights*, like *The Bad Sister* and *Faustine*, interweaves illusion and reality so that it becomes difficult to distinguish between imagination and storytelling. Likewise, the supernatural elements and seasonal shifts present a childlike vision that sets up an opposition between imagination and reason. Tennant underlines the theme of female survival and updates the myth of Persephone in *Alice Fell*. *Black Marina* scrutinizes political intrigue, Third World politics, and the dark underworld of the human psyche, issues that she again takes up in *Faustine*. Tennant examines murder, suicide, and the female double in *The Magic Drum* and offers a new female vision of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urberville's* in *Tess*. Finally, she invents a sequel to Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* in *Pemberly*. This wide range of literary interest shows that Tennant, like Fay Weldon and Angela Carter, proves herself to be a versatile writer who interrogates the cultural construction of femininity by stretching the limits of literary realism.

Tennant's fictional oeuvre comprises nineteen novels, numerous short stories, and several children's books. Since this thesis aims to be a close examination of a small number of Scottish women's novels, as opposed to a general survey of Scottish women's writing, a difficult choice had to be made concerning which of Tennant's novels to include in the analysis. *The Bad Sister*, *Sisters and Strangers: A Moral Tale*, and *Faustine* are novels that revise powerful male texts and are about power. They explore how social discourse constitutes female subjectivity. Feminism and issues related to feminism permeate the novels. The texts appraise the roles traditionally assigned to women and contest dominant male institutions of authority; hence, these three novels reveal split and fragmented female subjects who mirror, at times, the inherent split in the

Scottish psyche. In short, *The Bad Sister*, *Sisters and Strangers*, and *Faustine* are three powerful feminist novels which interrogate the cultural construction of femininity in a distinctly Scottish context; as a result, these three texts find a place among the pages of this thesis.

The Bad Sister: A Postmodern Novel Which Asserts Mimetism and Pluralism

To turn to the novel at hand, *The Bad Sister* explores womanhood and the idea of a divided female psyche by articulating an idea of the female double. Drawing from the Scottish literary tradition, Tennant models her novel on Hogg's masterpiece *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. Mirroring Hogg's format, Tennant compiles an apparently objective 'Editor's Narrative' which chronicles the events leading up to the murder of her protagonist's father and half-sister. She follows the editor's comments with the 'Journal of Jane Wild' which subjectively details Jane's struggle with demonic possession and the emergence of the female double. The novel concludes with a tongue-in-cheek psychiatrist's report on Jane's mental state, and the editor's final summary of discovering Jane's body buried with a stake through her heart in the Scottish Borders.

Employing Hogg's structure, Tennant examines ideas of the supernatural, women's shadow selves, and the contradictory forces at work on women in society. In a revisionary manner, Tennant's answer to Hogg's classic is "mimetism," the role historically assigned to women -- that of reproduction, but deliberately assumed; an acting out or role playing within the text which allows the woman writer the better to know and hence to expose what it is she mimics'.¹³ In Irigaray's words, 'to play with mimesis, is, therefore, for a woman, to attempt to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without letting herself be simply reduced to it. It is to resubmit herself to "ideas," notably about her, elaborated in/by a masculine logic'.¹⁴

Although Hogg's novel does not explore the state of women, by using Hogg's structure, Tennant queries the ways in which ideology and discourse construct feminine identities. She takes an already subversive text and further disrupts it. Tennant's novel,

¹³Mary Jacobus, 'The Question of Language: Men of Maxims and *The Mill on the Floss*', in *Writing and Sexual Difference*, ed. by Elizabeth Abel (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), pp. 37-52 (p.40).

¹⁴-----

like Hogg's, interrogates notions of fixed 'truths' and implicitly criticizes those who claim certainty. Journalists, feminists, and psychiatrists who hold rigid ideas of what is 'right' are to be questioned just as much as extreme Calvinists or other social forces. Tennant's novel *The Bad Sister* re-visions Hogg's insight and makes her readers aware of the difficulties women face as they attempt to come to terms with identities that are often contrived by dominant social structures; moreover, she creates a new understanding of how women are often deprived of relationships with other women and themselves.

Tennant admits that *The Bad Sister* is 'a very complicated book to talk about, and I've noticed after finishing it that practically everything in it is a double'.¹⁵ Conceding the novel's ambiguity, Tennant associates herself with an imaginative literary and psychological movement that came into Scotland via Hoffmann and the German metaphysical writers. Like Hogg, MacDonald, Stevenson, and many other Scottish writers, Tennant believes the concept of a split personality particularly appeals to Scotland. She concludes:

The only thing which made it possible for me to write *The Bad Sister* was to use Hogg's structure in *Confessions*. I think that if someone is so leant on by the expectations of society and by a very frightening and rather occultish radical feminism it could only drive them to destroy themselves (292).

Tennant explicitly states that *The Bad Sister* is 'even more concerned with the idea of the female double than with feminism' (292). By replicating Hogg's structure, Tennant allows herself the opportunity to explore the various traditions and conventions which restrict a woman's ability to construct a positive self-image in contemporary society.

When Tennant examines and attacks the cultural codes which repress women as inferior subjects and imagines female doubles who exist in supernatural worlds, *The Bad Sister*, like *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, becomes so ambiguous as to be indefinable. Tennant's postmodern novel consciously exploits pluralism which opens the text to a variety of interpretations and multiple meanings. Booth argues that pluralism permeates every aspect of society: 'in fact there are always an unlimited number of differences, both about the meanings of *some* details and about the perceived significances of *all* meanings, depending on the readers' historical period, social class, age, sex, race, and what not'.¹⁶

¹⁵Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview*, p. 292. The next two references are from this edition.

¹⁶Booth, "The Exemplar," p. 413.

The ambiguity of character, content, and form which runs through Tennant's novels can do nothing but express plurality because as poststructuralist practice suggests:

Even race, class, and sexuality, as well as gender, are constructed within discursive fields and changeable within the flux of history. According to poststructuralism, subjectivity is never monolithic or fixed, but decentered, and constantly thrown into process by the very competing discourses through which identity might be claimed.¹⁷

Individuals are constructed by the various ideological and discursive foundations which exist in individual cultures. Drawing on the supernatural and positing alternate visions of women's reality, Tennant like her literary forebears and contemporaries also acknowledges shattered visions of Scottish self-hood. She challenges the fixed absolutes and concepts of the accessibility of a 'unified' and 'stable' identity by doubling her female characters, satirizing male voices, and parodying traditional literary figures such as Eve, Dracula, and the devil. In this manner, Tennant contests the modernist version of the real; her experimental novels advance pluralism and uphold the postmodern enterprise of denaturalizing existing cultural codes and structures which alienate women from their society.

The Social Construction of Femininity: Illegitimacy and Feminine Identity

In *The Bad Sister*, Tennant interrogates the social construction of illegitimacy alongside the nature of feminism and the phallogocratic representations of women's roles. She begins her novel like Hogg by taking up the topic of illegitimacy. Illegitimacy holds hierarchical implications because those who are 'illegitimate' -- that is, born without a father's name outside the socially sanctioned institution of marriage -- are usually marginalized by society. Illegitimate children are often marginalized because the parents may be two consenting adults who are frowned on by culture for engaging in acts contrary to 'acceptable' sexual norms, or the mother may be a victim of incest or rape which also intimates action outside sexual mores.

Jane's illegitimacy affects her position in the social hierarchy of the late 1960s and early 1970s because as an illegitimate child squatting on her father's land, she must watch Ishbel, her father's legitimate daughter, enjoying 'what I wanted. She had what

¹⁷Dolan, 'In Defense of Discourse', pp. 59-60.

should have belonged to me'.¹⁸ An observant child, Jane also comprehends that Dalzell looks at her furtively and eagerly, 'like the stare of a man searching for evidence of disease on his own body' (73). Realizing that her father stares at her in a distasteful manner, Jane recognizes that as an illegitimate child she lives in the cultural margins; Dalzell's indifference to Jane hints that the women and children of illegitimate unions are made fully responsible for men's deeds and suffer the social consequences erected by men to ease their own consciences.

Dalzell continually undermines Jane's self-image by refusing to acknowledge her or call her his own. One example of this comes every Christmas when Jane's father summons her to the 'big house' with all the other village children to patiently await her Christmas gift. However, as Jane grows older she comes to realize that Michael denies her a valid place in his society:

Where did I come 'alphabetically' in the list of names this time? Some years my father avoided the embarrassment of my namelessness by calling me last as if I were an afterthought, or a guest, or someone who had turned up at the party by mistake--sometimes he got it over by summoning me first, before the children had settled and taken in what was going on (175).

Refusing to call Jane by his name, Dalzell refuses to name her as his own. One may infer from his non-recognition that the dominant order accords women who are illegitimate or mothers of illegitimate children an almost invisible status. Tennant counters Jane's invisible status as an illegitimate child with her significant surname 'Wild'. Jane's surname not only hints at Dalzell's 'wild' and socially (un)acceptable liaison with her mother, but it also foreshadows Jane's 'wild' journeys into a 'wild' and unknown supernatural landscape.¹⁹

Jane's subordinate role as an unrecognized daughter fosters a 'wild' envy of her half-sister's privileged position in the world and sets up an opposition between women. Rather than despise her father for his lack of interest in her fate, Jane compensates for his neglect by conceiving of herself solely in relation to her half-sister Ishbel. Jane becomes 'completely and obsessively jealous of her. I was her shadow, and she mine' (74). The

¹⁸*The Bad Sister* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), p. 76. First published (London: Victor Gollancz, 1978). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

¹⁹Jane's surname 'Wild' conveys significance because all thirty women in the house at Notting Hill have the surname 'Wild'. The editor also remarks that it is strange that Stephen should befriend 'these Wild women' (30). In the context of the narrative, the surname 'Wild' suggests that single women who share a home are simply 'wild'; the narrative also suggests that the women are 'wild' in the sense that they might pose a threat to the cultural order.

fierce rivalry which Tennant develops between the characters emphasizes that while the social hierarchy marginalizes Jane's unfortunate and uncontrollable position as an illegitimate child, it simultaneously ignores Dalzell's responsibilities in parenthood which further disrupts her already fragmented psychic identity.

Whereas in *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* the rhetoric of the 'elect' in Calvinism makes up for Robert Wringhim's position as an illegitimate son, the rhetoric of the 'elect' of radical feminism makes up for Jane's illegitimate status. Jane accepts Meg's words that she, like Robert Wringhim:

can rest assured that society will thank you, will praise you for your bravery, [. . .] For, just as society is responsible for the creation of such monsters as Mrs Marten and Miranda, so, when it is purged of them and reconstituted, it will exonerate you of any blame for violent acts performed symbolically (172).

In Meg's mind, society will exonerate Jane from any act of murder because society creates 'monsters' like Mrs Marten and Miranda for Jane to purge. Since society in *The Bad Sister* takes the place of God in *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, in the context of Tennant's novel, society is God; therefore, society allows Jane to murder so that she may become one of society's 'elect'. While violence and murder are not what may be called justifiable or 'acceptable' means of dealing with social exclusion, as Hogg and Tennant's texts strongly imply, the illegitimate status that both characters hold, as well as each character's desire to achieve an 'acceptable' and valid position as a member of the 'elect', push Wringhim and Wild into actions beyond reasonable control.

Jane's illegitimacy denies her status as daughter and, as such, symbolizes a barrier that impedes her from attaining an idea of self-hood. Shoshana Felman writes, 'from her initial family upbringing throughout her subsequent development, the social role assigned to the woman is that of *servicing* an image, authoritative and central, of man: a woman is first and foremost a daughter/a mother/a wife'.²⁰ In normal circumstances a woman will fill one or all of these roles; yet, Jane exists as an illegitimate daughter unrecognized by her father and has still to become a mother or a wife. Since she defies representation within these categories, Tennant's protagonist is conceivably a non-entity whom society and her 'family' repudiate; therefore, the reader might infer that Jane turns to the radical

²⁰ 'Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy', in *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*, ed. by Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore (London: Macmillan Education, 1989), pp. 122-52 (p. 124). First published (London: Macmillan Education, 1989).

feminism and diabolic powers Meg offers in order to establish a measure of continuity and confidence in her life.

Although Jane's involvement in 'radical' feminism gives her insight into her womanhood and her inferior position in the world, at the same time, her feminism and diabolic dabbling limit her access to self-hood. When Jane unquestioningly follows someone else's orders and doctrines, she removes herself, like Robert Wringhim, from responsibility for her actions. Even so, Tennant's presentation of Jane's 'radical' feminism in relation to her illegitimacy offers her character a small sense of validity in a culture that oppresses and marginalizes those who fall outside socially determined norms.

Tennant compares Jane's marginalized position as an illegitimate daughter and a 'radical' feminist with several images of women who are also marginalized by the ruling male order. The novel offers the reader contrasting images of womanhood beginning with battered wives: 'the women who had the foolishness not to stop themselves from being beaten up, the great lakes of blue bruise on their faces and arms an unacceptable disfigurement' (51) whose 'options were closed. She had copulated with the wrong man. She had been sterilised now, as a punishment for her mistakes' (55).²¹ Tennant also identifies negative personifications of femininity in her depiction of homosexual love. She describes Paradise Island, the most popular lesbian nightclub in London, as a place where 'the men who pass smile and shift uncomfortably at the mixture of misfits' (51). The language Tennant employs shows illegitimate children, battered women, and lesbians to be misfits: women who are aberrant, atypical, and therefore exist outside what society deems 'acceptable'.

Tennant contests the social and linguistic definitions of these types of women with the picture of Jane gazing into the supermarket, an acceptable 'compound for the women who are neither battered nor dyke' (55). In the supermarket, an arena in which prevailing social 'norms' condition women to feel comfortable, Jane finds the 'cardboard women, shown to be beautiful for their sojourn there, [. . .] Locked in with the darkened goods. They can contemplate the shelves. They love the boxes, they gaze at them in total self-absorption' (56). The preceding sentences depict the women who cheerfully

²¹Looking at this quote, the reader might ask, whose mistakes? Why is the 'battered' wife punished for her illegitimacy and, therefore, her invalidity?

attend the duties of the supermarket as mere cut-out dolls for men to play with; thus, Tennant's portrayal of the battered women who find shelter with a 'kind woman with big brown eyes' (51) and 'women who want each other, whose breasts meet like soft pillows as they dance' (51), is far more attractive than the women who endure as cardboard cut-outs. Juxtaposing male violence and women's love with traditional women's serving roles, Tennant combats and condemns the social definitions of femininity which personify women who exist outside these roles as aberrant and invalid subjects.

Tennant also characterizes Jane in certain stereotypical female roles. In one of her fantasies, Jane simultaneously sees herself as a mermaid 'with the rime of green under my fingernails that tells how long I have been under the sea, hair growing upward, sucked by the bubbles, waving like weed in the cold green current' (58-9), and as a siren who frightens sailors with her 'cracked voice who lures them to the bottom of the sea, the forgotten woman and half-man who make up the Angel of Death' (59). Nina Auerbach believes that mermaids 'submerge themselves not to negate their power, but to conceal it', and that the mermaid 'is a creature of transformations and mysterious interrelations, able to kill and to regenerate but not to die'.²² If one accepts Auerbach's hypothesis, when Tennant presents Jane as a mermaid or a siren, she intimates that Jane, and women in general, may also transform themselves into 'creatures' who might appropriate the power to determine men's fate and the novel perhaps suggests that men fear female power.

Tennant contrasts these mythical and powerful feminine creatures with courtesans, seductresses, and beautiful ladies who fulfill male needs.²³ At the final party Jane attends, she finds it strange:

how the women are dressed: about half of them are witches and have black robes and pointed hats--some of them have even stuck on big, curved noses and their eyes are bright--and the others are courtesans, seductive and tempting, with beauty spots on their breasts and flounced, pretty skirts (201).

The contrasting fancy dress costumes reveal two opposing female roles: the witch who inherently threatens masculine autonomy and the courtesan and seductress who caters to

²²*Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 1982), p.7.

²³This theme of roles for women is taken up more fully in Chapter Three's discussion of *Sisters and Strangers: A Moral Tale*.

male needs. Even though Tennant's protagonist conceives of herself in terms of traditionally negative mythical figures -- that of a mermaid, siren, and angel of death -- she compares herself with the 'acceptable' portraits of women as seductresses and courtesans. Since Jane finds it difficult to reconcile herself to these confining roles, she contemplates 'what happened to women, that they were forced into these moulds?' (204). Although Jane cannot pin-point an answer to her rhetorical query, she concludes: 'At least there are no "wives" here, that would be too boring for a fancy dress ball' (204). Jane's sentiment that wives are too boring for a fancy dress ball conveys the knowledge that even though witches and courtesans extend unflattering images of femininity, wives unveil the confines and boredom attached to women's daily domestic experience.

Personifying women as both a powerful threat to the ruling male order and as complicit in their fate as passive objects of male desire, Tennant unwittingly endorses Nicholson and Fraser's hypothesis that 'social identities are complex and heterogeneous. They cannot be mapped onto one another nor onto the social totality'.²⁴ Tennant opposes strong and independent female characters like sirens and mermaids with 'normal' female characters like shoppers and wives; thus, she interrogates the cultural conventions which call for women to occupy an either/or totality. By representing numerous women in negative and opposing roles, Tennant challenges ideology's function to repress female subjects and calls for women to gain an awareness of how social traditions attempt to formulate women as powerless individuals.

The Bad Sister analyses how discourses like feminism, illegitimacy, and the social personifications of women influence female subjectivity; in doing so, Tennant illuminates the barriers and hierarchies that limit women's access to the individual choices which will allow women to assert themselves as creative and empowered subjects. Tennant deprives her protagonist of the social and cultural sanctions which will enable her to live within positive roles; as a result, Jane cannot identify herself in any role other than that of an oppressed individual. For instance, when Jane chooses to attend a film that she needs to review in lieu of preparing her boyfriend Tony's Sunday lunch, Jane takes on the guilt of centuries of women. She realizes there:

²⁴Nancy Fraser and Linda J. Nicholson, 'Social Criticism Without Philosophy: An Encounter Between Feminism and Postmodernism', in *Feminism/Postmodernism* ed. by Linda J. Nicholson (New York & London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 19-38, (p. 24).

was no way to present my physical departure acceptably. If I walked like a woman cowed by thousands of years behind the veil, eyes down, erect, shuffling gait, there was no reason for me to be allowed out at all and I would be unable to get as far as the main door of the building. If I went 'ordinarily', as Tony would go, simply walking out of the flat with a quick wave, it would be selfish, uncaring. If I were coming back for the meat, of course, I could make a quick apologetic dash of my departure for my job. But I wasn't. So I went with an energy that was clearly provocative (67).

Even though Jane knows that any walk or gait she assumes holds ulterior motivations, she decides to leave the flat for her career rather than submit to Tony's desire to be served a meal. Jane's provocative energy symbolizes her independence and commitment to the needs associated with an autonomous career.²⁵ However, Jane fails to escape her female conditioning because she ultimately returns and prepares Tony's dinner 'with the sense of being a victim' (88). Jane knows that she cooks 'dinner guiltily, I smiled at Tony too much and felt already that he had abandoned me, gone off--and rightly--to someone else. I was no longer the triumphant predator, I was persecuted and at fault' (88). The language Tennant uses in the above passage discloses common social assumptions about femininity. Words like 'guiltily', 'abandoned', 'predator', 'persecuted', and 'at fault' signify typical feminine responses to the social order which prescribes domestic servitude for woman at all costs.

Since Jane cannot escape the cultural conditioning which deprives her of any notion of self-worth save satisfying male desires, the novel appears to concede that the social discourses which formulate Jane's self-hood and self-esteem are so rigid that fragmentation and alienation from society seem to be her only method of coming to terms with her lowly position in Western culture. Thus, Jane turns to doubling and diabolic possession as a means of searching for the 'unified' identity which society conditions women and men to believe they may achieve.

²⁵At this point in the discussion, it seems prudent to point out that both Jane and Tony work in the film industry, an industry intrinsically connected with the media. One might infer from Jane's association with the media that she necessarily comes into contact with certain images of femininity promoted by media culture which leads to internal conflict. For further analysis of the media's role and function in Tennant's

Ambiguous Narrative Voices

Roger Fowler declares that ‘opposed to “clarity”, ambiguity would be considered a fault. Modern criticism has turned it into a virtue, equivalent roughly to “richness” or “wit”’.²⁶ While ambiguity in *The Bad Sister* cannot be related to ‘wit’, it may certainly be associated with ‘richness’. Belsey broadens the scope of Fowler’s comment; she contends that the object of the critic ‘is to seek not the unity of the work, but the multiplicity and diversity of its possible meanings, its incompleteness, the omissions which it displays but cannot describe, and above all its contradictions.’²⁷ Ambiguity undoubtedly lends itself to multiple hidden meanings; thus, when analyzing ambiguous novels like *The Bad Sister*, one of the literary critic’s objectives is to try to uncover on how many different levels the novel functions.

Exploring social issues like ‘radical’ feminism, illegitimacy, and the social personifications women endure throughout the ages, Tennant foregrounds the ambiguous nature of women’s cultural construction as subjects as well as women’s inferior position in the social strata. She confesses that:

The whole point of the novel, [. . .] Is its ambiguity. It’s about the two sides of everything. It’s about doubles, and I noticed when I was writing it that practically every image that comes into it has got its doubles. [. . .] You can never pinpoint in that book and in no way are you meant to. I think that although my book is obviously nothing compared to James Hogg’s masterpiece, it’s the same kind of thing where you can’t really pin all that much in *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, and you’re not meant to, which is why the novel holds a power that lasts.²⁸

Tennant confirms that *The Bad Sister* is ambiguous; yet her sentiment that the novel ‘is obviously nothing’ compared to Hogg’s masterpiece remains debatable because both novels examine equally contentious topics in different centuries. Marianne DeKoven hypothesizes that when reading novels which incorporate an ambiguous and experimental structure ‘we cannot impose such coherence or synthesis without negating, throwing out, failing to account for, the powerful impression of incoherence the writing initially gives’.²⁹ DeKoven rightly cautions any reader against imposing coherence because this will clearly detract from the overall ‘powerful impression’ that ambiguity and

²⁶*A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms, Revised and Enlarged Edition*, ed. by Roger Fowler (London/New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1990), p. 7. First published (London/New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973).

²⁷‘Constructing the Subject’, p. 604.

²⁸Lisa Suzanne Babinec (unpublished interview with Emma Tennant), 8 October 1991. Appendix, p. 319.

²⁹*A Different Language*, p. 6.

incoherence lend postmodern experimental literature. *The Bad Sister* holds lasting 'power' because the novel's ambiguous framework releases multiple meanings and forces the reader to seek out incompleteness, omission, and contradiction within the novel's thematic enterprise as Tennant makes the male dominated ideological and discursive structures within her novel available for powerful reappraisal.

The Bad Sister, like *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, immediately assumes ambiguous connotations because the narrative structure begins with an 'Editor's Narrative', is followed by 'The Journal of Jane Wild', and concludes with an 'Editor's Note'. This format instantly signals that some information within the text might be misleading because the novel's main text takes the form of a journal. Jane relates her own tale from her own perception; therefore, as a narrator of her own story, she delivers a one-sided and subjective filtered vision of diabolic possession, doubling, and murder.

Dennis A. Foster contends that this type of confessional narrative holds problems for readers because, 'obliged to understand, the listener abandons his position as one who knows and consents to listen, and thereby he enters the evasive discourse of the narrator, tracing a path that inevitably misses the encounter with truth'.³⁰ To be precise, the reader of a novel is not a 'listener'; yet, when reading a confessional narrative, one theoretically listens to a character's story. When the reader listens to Jane's tale, this same reader might wish to accept Jane's words as 'truth' because she tells her own story. However, since the reader only has access to Jane's version of events and the obvious knowledge that every individual sees things differently, there appears to be no method of determining whether or not Jane's narrative is full of 'truth'.

While Foster posits that confession denies readers a verifiable sense of 'truth', Belsey questions the whole notion of narrative reliability. Belsey maintains that when an individual attempts to distinguish between a reliable and unreliable first person narrator, the reader 'assumes a position of knowledge -- of a history, a "truth" of the story which may not be accessible to a dramatized narrator who, as a character in the text, is a subject of the *énoncé*'.³¹ Jane's ambiguous and personal narrative contains elements which may confuse many readers' sensibilities and dislocate a lucid, coherent, and chronological

³⁰*Confession and Complicity in Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 4.

³¹*Critical Reaction*, p. 78

rendering of textual events; still, Jane's confessional narrative discloses 'truths' about the social and cultural limitations women often encounter in the battle to assert independent self-hood. Even though the reader must in some sense query Jane's reliability as narrator, especially since the events she describes -- supernatural doubling and diabolic possession -- are contrary to literary realism and everyday commonsensical reality, as Belsey attests, this process can be illuminating because certain 'truths' about social realities may be gleaned from the struggle to determine a narrator's reliability.

Tennant complicates Jane's narrative conundrum by questioning the reliability of the peripheral male voices in the novel; in particular, Tennant contests the male characters' representation of feminism and their attitudes towards the women who live in the female 'commune'. Tennant, like Hogg, designs an apparently objective 'Editor' who tries to reconstruct the events leading up to the death of Jane's father and her half-sister. Even though the editor states that the murders have been the subject of many TV documentaries and journalistic 'reconstructions' (11), the editor claims that new evidence has come to light which enables him to 'present what I know, or have been told, and "Jane's journal" can supply the rest' (12).

Tennant records the editor's description of events with certain words and phrases which reveal his words and visions to be a sham of objectivity. For example, the editor refers to Meg as the 'ringleader [. . .] A fierce woman by the name of Margaret' (31), he desires to hear more of Meg's 'crazy theories' (41), and he silently reflects on the 'sad and messy lives of Jane and women like her' (43). All three short phrases hold negative connotations; his words imply that Meg's and Jane's feminism and their opposition to male cultural politics is abnormal, 'crazy', and makes women's lives 'sad and messy'. One may implicitly query the editor's comments and theories because he draws conclusions about the Meg and Jane without meeting them. The editor simply reads police documents and other media accounts of the murders and shows misogynistic tendencies by characterizing Meg and Jane and their feminist challenge to dominant ideological structures as evil. Tennant subverts the editor's objectivity by recording his ideas and conclusions about Jane's narrative and story as the novel's guiding voice. Tennant calls the editor's motivation for producing the definitive documentary on Jane's political murders into question because, as he puts it, the death of Dalzell and his

daughter 'are not, after all, isolated instances--murder by middle class female urban guerrillas is ever on the increase in the West' (12). When Tennant allows the editor to depict Meg and Jane in the derogatory and prejudicial terms of female urban guerrillas, she casts doubt on his ability to represent authenticity; therefore, the reader turns to Jane's own narrative in order to draw conclusions about the confines women experience in a phallographic culture.

Feminism in the novel also assumes ambiguous connotations because Tennant allows peripheral male voices to characterize Meg's feminism and the activities and appearance of the rest of the women in the female commune. The editor, Luke Saughton, and MacDonald the gamekeeper depict Meg, Jane, and the women associated with them in a stereotypical 'radical' manner. Again, the editor pieces together the fragments of Jane's past, and without meeting Meg describes her as a 'fierce-looking woman from the head of the valley' (20), who in summer 'walked barefoot and wore long skirts' (21). Saughton describes the women who begin to squat on Dalzell's land as 'a huddle of women,' who wear 'long hair and what looked like gypsy shawls and skirts' (17). MacDonald the gamekeeper recalls the women of the valley wearing 'long black skirts and with scarves tied around their heads' (22) and recounts how they follow Dalzell around 'like a row of corbies' (23). Images of women as fierce gypsies who follow Dalzell around like 'corbies' are negative and unflattering. The editor's, Saughton's, and MacDonald's impressions insinuate that the establishment often fears women whose dress allies them with unconventional and threatening politics.

Stephen also describes Meg and her influence on the women's community in a biased manner. As he puts it, Meg has 'eyes that were frightening' (33):

grey and prominent and when they were fixed on you you felt it was your duty to do exactly as she said. She told them some place they were all to go to the next day--I wasn't really listening but I do have a vague memory of Islington being mentioned, and then seeing in the papers the next evening there'd been a big bank hold-up there (33).

As Stephen tells it, when Meg enters the room, the women present turn 'to her automatically, as if waiting for orders: the strangest thing was the way they turned, though, like votaries in a temple, swinging round, eyes half-closed and then standing completely still, waiting for Meg to speak' (33). One reading of Stephen's description would be that Meg's followers are conditioned to respond to dominant voices; hence, the

women unquestionably respond to a command from the dominant voice whether it be female or male. When Tennant permits Stephen to characterize the women immediately conceding to Meg's orders, the scene establishes how women may collude to some extent in their inability to define themselves as unique, powerful, and autonomous subjects. Stephen's description conveys the notion that many women lack the power to establish identities free of conditioning from ideological institutions which teach women to react blindly to any command from a person who speaks from, or for, the dominant order.

Stephen also undermines feminist politics as he explains Meg's 'rhetoric' to the editor. Stephen recounts Meg's argument that women are 'defiled and degraded always, and particularly since the seventeenth century when they had been execrated as witches or elevated to virtuous wives' (40). He also repeats Meg's hypothesis that the 'power of the word would return through women, that it was when belief in the prophecies of witches and sybils ended that the word began to die' (41). With these phrases, Tennant articulates, in Stephen's voice, how women often occupy an either/or totality: either a woman threatens the established order and becomes a witch who must be burned or ostracized, or she submits to the ruling order and, complicit in male hierarchies, is unfairly elevated in society. In light of these two radically different characterizations, Tennant allows her male character to negate women as opposites; women in Stephen's mind are either good or bad or wicked or virtuous depending on how eagerly and quickly women acquiesce to commands.

One must remember that Tennant's depiction of Meg, Jane, and the other members of the female commune primarily emanates from four male voices; as a result, the knowledge and reliability of the four male characters may be questioned because the women threaten each man in a slightly different manner. Tennant envisions Stephen as a representative of religious institutions. He is an Anglican minister who believes Meg to be 'evil' (33) because her underlying association with the diabolic and nether regions, especially in light of her existence as a woman, contravenes and disturbs the very foundation of his theology and faith. Similarly, Luke Saughton's account remains dubious because he does not come forward until almost ten years after Dalzell's death. Saughton's position as a conservative and wealthy male friend of Michael also makes him more inclined to share Dalzell's belief in the women's evil nature. The gamekeeper

MacDonald also maintains a biased position because Dalzell acts as his economic benefactor; thus, MacDonald has no choice but to dislike the women and personify them as 'corbies' because they interfere with his work and his employer's reputation which naturally affects his own position on Dalzell's estate. Finally, the editor's account of events is disputable because he merely pieces together evidence from questionable male voices and, in doing so, simply repeats male prejudices.

Tennant strengthens the ambiguous description of Meg, Jane, and Meg's followers by introducing an psychiatrist who reads Jane's journal at the end of the editor's notes. After analyzing Jane's words, the psychiatrist decrees:

Jane is a schizophrenic with paranoid delusions. She is an example of the narrow border-line between depth psychology and occultism: in her case the alternation of the rational and the irrational is particularly stressed by the introduction of the supernatural. There are clearly acute problems of sexual identity, but we would suggest that there were never any such people as 'Meg' or 'K' 'Gil-martin', and that these are projections of the patient's lover Tony Marten and his mother Mrs Marten, who were unsatisfactory in their relationships with the patient, and therefore appeared to be threatening (215-16).

The psychiatrist's diagnosis is problematic because first, Jane was never his 'patient' and since he never meets her, the psychiatrist, like the editor, cannot make any informed conclusions about her character. Second, the psychiatrist speaks from the position of privileged discourse and makes general assumptions about Jane. The psychiatrist's diagnosis that Jane is an example of 'the narrow border-line between depth psychology and occultism' based on her 'acute problems of sexual identity' seems laughable because he simply repeats phallogocentric psychological theories on women promulgated by Freud and Jung. To be specific, Freud believed that women 'refuse to accept the fact of being castrated and have the hope of someday obtaining a penis in spite of everything'; similarly, Jung claimed that 'no one can evade the fact that in taking up a masculine calling, studying and working in a man's way, woman is doing something not wholly in agreement with, if not directly injurious to, her feminine nature'.³² Since phallogocentric

³²Freud's and Jung's comments are quoted by Phyllis Chesler in *Women and Madness* (London: Allen Unwin, 1974), pp. 72-3. She also quotes Eric Erikson who believes, 'much of a young woman's identity is already defined in her kind of attractiveness and in the selectivity of her search for the man (or men) by whom she wishes to be sought'; Bruno Bettelheim: 'As much as women want to be good scientists and engineers, they want, first and foremost, to be womanly companions of men and to be mothers'; and Joseph Reingold who suggests, 'when women grow up without dread of their biological functions and without subversion of feminist doctrines and therefore enter upon motherhood with a sense of fulfillment and altruistic sentiment we shall attain the goal of a good life and a secure world in which to live' (72-3).

psychological assumptions such as these have no relevance to Jane's womanhood, her femininity, or to her lowly position in culture, Tennant, like the French theorists Luce Irigaray and Hélenè Cixous, and the Scottish women writers Willa Muir, Naomi Mitchison, Margaret Elphinstone, and Janice Galloway, repeatedly queries, undermines, and revises outdated sentiments on women's emotional needs and psychological desires.

In Jane's case, the diagnosis that she 'is a paranoid schizophrenic' is too simple. Even though the American psychologist Gardner Murphy concludes that 'most cases of multiple personality appear essentially to represent the organism's efforts to live, at different times, in terms of different systems of values',³³ medical discourse does not fully explain the difficulties women experience as they try to define themselves according to dominant cultural authority. The novel implies that Jane's fragmented character results from her struggle to conform to societal demands while existing outside 'acceptable' social norms. When privileged male voices attempt to sum up and define Jane's state of mind in reaction to, or against, her incoherent and illuminating journal, Tennant refuses to privilege either discourse. This makes it more difficult for the reader to assemble a linear and unambiguous narrative reading.

Duality and Plurality: The Missing Male Principle and The Female Muse

Tennant's fractured female subject, Jane Wild, mirrors the ambiguity inherent in the fractured narrative structure. Unable to fill satisfactorily the roles allocated to her by society, Jane's character splits and she turns to doubling and diabolic powers to escape cultural marginalization. Karl Miller explains duality as a word which means 'that some one thing or person is to be perceived as two' (21). He goes on to say that such parts are partners or enemies, but whether in conflict or accord in most circumstances part and counterpart are both perceived to be true (21). Miller concludes that no short description of what doubles are exists, but they have often been about running away and revenge, and when these pursuits are left to the imagination, 'one self does what the other self can't. One self is meek while the other is fierce. One self stays while the other runs away' (416).

³³*Doubles: Studies in Literary History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 34. The next three

Jane's doubling and duality take place on two different levels. First, Tennant explores Jungian philosophy as Jane contends with the 'suppression of masculinity in women and of femininity in men' (40); second, Tennant examines the idea of a 'female muse'. Jung argues that one must possess both the animus and the anima to create a balanced and whole personality. Tennant appears to incorporate Jung's hypothesis into her novel because Meg continually espouses Jane's 'missing male principle' (43) and Gala suggests that Jane still needs to rid herself of her 'double female self' (156). Jane also recognizes that Gil-martin 'was extraordinarily like me. I felt that sense of recognition and disbelief which jars at the sight of an unexpected mirror: the thing before you that is too familiar and too strange. But I knew him' (124). When Tennant integrates facets of Jungian philosophy into her literary narrative, she seems to assert a move toward androgyny within her female protagonist. Yet, since Meg is the only character capable of allowing Jane to see her missing male principle in fantastical projections, Tennant invents an ambiguous setting in which the reader struggles to determine whether or not Jane comes into contact with a real Gil-martin, or if she simply meets her missing male principle on an unconscious level. Devising an ambivalent and existential backdrop to Jane's struggle to determine self-hood, Tennant subverts common assumptions about how individuals are constructed as subjects, especially those philosophical theories which promote feminine and masculine psychic components.

When Tennant interrogates Jungian philosophy in fictional form, she questions how relevant these theories are, especially on an unconscious level, to a woman's identity and her position in society. Do women need a male side to become whole? Is it possible in the wake of poststructuralism to even assume that wholeness may be attained now that many critics and scholars reiterate how ideology and discourse conspire to formulate individuals as fragmented and fractured subjects? It appears that when Tennant presents Jane's search for Gil-martin as the search for a missing male principle in a fantastical context, she hints that doubling:

embodies a response to demands made by the environment -- demands which are nevertheless equally intelligible as being of a kind to stigmatize duality as ominous and destructive, and to promote a belief in the biological necessity of the single self, of an experienced integrity.³⁴

³⁴ *Doubling*, p. 22. Please note Miller does not talk about Tennant's novel here but doubling in general.

Duality in and of itself does not necessarily indicate a destructive and ominous force.

Considering the nature of duality in light of discourse and poststructural theory, duality as plurality enables women to be positive and empowered female subjects. However, when men condition women to experience themselves as an either/or, good versus evil totality, duality, as Jane Wild shows us, also persuades women to be one-dimensional female powerless individuals.

If Jane's search for her creative and artistic counterpart, her missing male principle, leads to alienation and fragmentation, then her search for a female muse or what might be called her missing female principle proves equally difficult. Tennant explores the possibility of a female muse by creating Jane's female double. In a number of interviews, Tennant suggests that Jane's female double primarily exists as 'a bad double, a shadow, the side which will encourage her to kill or whatever'.³⁵ For Tennant, the female double represents:

the impossibility for women of being able to have any sort of a muse because the muse is female and therefore the woman has got to have another woman coming to visit her as the bad sister. I feel that the whole tradition for thousands and thousands of years of a male artist, writer, poet, and so on being visited by this female gift that is going to bring the poetry has never been considered possible for a woman. Again, this puts the balance out badly, so that when a woman doubles, she's not going to double well. I think a male writer doubles -- I mean the genius male writer -- doubles well because he simply has got the fascinating muse side which produces the masterpieces, then he turns back into himself and is no doubt horrible to his wife and children.³⁶

Tennant's words sum up one problem for women in the search for self: constantly informed by culture that women simply complement male creative ventures, when women refuse a male side and try to accept their female counterparts -- their female double -- then inevitably disaster strikes. As feminist revisions of culture show us, men have, at times, conditioned women to fear one another.³⁷ Thus, when Jane, or any other woman, seeks out or wishes to accept her mythical female muse, the only result can be an internal battle where 'a woman who thinks must live with a demented sister. Often the two women war, and kill each other' (96).

³⁵Babinec-Tennant, Appendix, p. 320.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷See for example, Carolyn Heilbrun, *Reinventing Womanhood* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1979); Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); and Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience & Institution* (New York/London: W.W. Norton, 1986). First published (New York/London: W.W. Norton, 1976).

Jane recognizes that her psyche splits because in creative and artistic terms the muse is female, so that when she thinks about 'the male Muse--or the male counterpart who is needed to make a woman complete in herself' (96), she realizes that 'he is yet to come' (96). Exploring the psychic nature of feminine and masculine counterparts, Tennant gives life to the notion that women in patriarchal societies have a shadowy self, indeed shadowy selves. Depicting Jane enmeshed in the struggle to assert a 'unified' identity, one which integrates a feminine and masculine nature, Tennant calls into question received key ideas about identity, especially feminine identity. Tennant portrays Jane aware that she cannot conform to the social and cultural norms which determine that she needs to find her missing male principle. Unable to come to terms with these constraints on her formulation of identity, Jane's psyche shatters and she sees herself as the 'bad throw of the dice. I am the double, now it's me who's become the shadow. Where I was haunted, now I will pursue' (148).

Tennant portrays Jane aware of her shadow and second self; in this manner, she alerts the reader to the problems women face as they try to develop a positive self-image and self-knowledge in a society designed to cater to male needs. Haunting Jane with a bad sister, Tennant reiterates that when women do not fit into the female roles typically promoted and assigned by the social order, for instance as a mother, a daughter, or a wife, women are often marginalized and, in consequence, fragment their psyches. Since it is impossible for Jane to rise to the norms advocated by socially sanctioned institutions, she discovers that she cannot 'save the world' (165) because 'I was no more than a fragment myself' (165).

As Tennant's novel presents it, Jane understands that she cannot define herself in relation to limiting social constructs and male-oriented philosophy. This leads Jane to conclude, 'I am alone. I am Jane, or what remains of her' (173). Jane's status as an illegitimate female child coupled with her failure to acquiesce to cultural standards of femininity and womanhood leave her with no option but to fragment into madness. Even though madness theoretically frees Jane to live and act outside conventional cultural norms, this freedom clearly does not grant her any sense of self because she fails to see a reflection of herself in a mirror and believes that her 'non-existence there is almost concrete' (208). Tennant denies her character a verifiable reflection in the mirror and

denies her protagonist's existence in society; the ambiguity surrounding Jane's existence makes it difficult, if not impossible, to say who or what Jane represents; hence, the reader might infer from Jane's ambiguous existence that many women face a similar battle in the struggle to define self-hood.

In the end, the editor questions Jane's motives for killing her father and half-sister, and rhetorically asks:

Is she a victim of the modern resurgence of the desire for the old magic of wholeness, for unified sensibilities? Is she really an example, as some women would have it now, of the inherent 'splitness' of women, a condition passed on from divided mother to divided daughter until such day as they regain their vanished power? (216).

The idea of female 'splitness' infiltrates the narrative drive of *The Bad Sister* at many angles and openings. Although Jung believes that every individual needs a masculine and feminine side, *The Bad Sister* queries this notion. When Jane kills her shadow, her female double, or what Tennant identifies as her female muse so as to encounter her missing male principle, she does not become 'whole'; rather, Jane's murder of her father and half-sister in exchange for her male side leads only to her own violent death. Accordingly, one might conclude that while Tennant considers Jung's suppositions on androgyny to be appealing, they ultimately fail to promote women's access to positive roles and choices that will foster a coherent subjectivity.

Meg: Leader, Dracula, Anti-Christ

If Tennant depicts Jane as an indefinable woman, she also portrays Meg in an equally ambiguous light. Even though Meg's name, 'Gil-martin' allies her with Gil-Martin, Robert Wringhim's diabolic shadow, Tennant's characterization of Meg cannot be so one-dimensional. Since Tennant presents Meg in a number of different characters, one may suggest that Tennant likens Meg's plural character to the plurality inherent in womanhood. Meg, like Jane, maintains several selves and represents how women cannot be defined as single or 'unified' individuals. While it is difficult to determine the number of selves released in Meg's character, three sides of her persona are: leader of a 'fanatical' female commune, a Dracula figure, and finally as a devil or anti-Christ.

It is difficult to assess Meg's position as leader of a 'fanatical' female commune because her theories are mainly relayed by Stephen, an unreliable character; nevertheless,

some of Jane's comments in her journal sum up the power Meg holds over her 'followers'. For instance, Meg plainly exerts control over Jane because when she catches Meg's eye at a party, Jane turns 'on my heel' and leaves 'the party as if I had immediately read her command' (49). Similarly Jane tells Stephen that 'Meg can control the lives and thoughts . . . and invisible movements, if you like . . . of a lot of people' (113). Finally, after visiting Meg on one occasion, Jane reports feeling 'a total guilt . . . the weight of the guilt was Meg . . . I could do no right, I was the eternal victim. I floated in the horror of the guilt . . . but she pinned me down there [. . .] She was completely accusing, and I completely guilty' (133-34).

Looking at the language in these sentences, words such as 'command', 'control', 'guilt', 'victim', 'she pinned me', and 'accusing' set up a frightening power relationship between women. Meg's feminist politics and hypnotic character appear to indicate that Meg, in a position of power, chooses to use this power to control and to victimize women. Rather than use feminism to break down the ideological structures which deny women's access to identity, in Jane's words, Meg uses her leadership to manipulate her followers into fulfilling her desires. Since Tennant depicts Meg acting in a subjugating manner, she insinuates that fanaticism simply reinforces women's lowly position in the world, and shows how feminism may also be used to trap rather than release women from male control.

Tennant builds upon the idea of women victimizing other women by portraying Meg as a Dracula figure. Key images characterize Meg as a vampire: Jane announces that Meg's 'teeth were as long and white and pointed as stalactites' (132); she reveals how 'Meg's white bosom lay over mine' (134); and Jane tells how the pain of Meg's bite nearly paralyzes her. Jane describes Meg after she 'drains' blood thus:

Her teeth were still extended: her canines, her eye teeth which took blood and gave sight, jutted over her lower lip--my blood was on her chin and on the quilt, where it ran down into the scarlet lozenges as if they had been sewn in there for that purpose. Her face looked smaller again, a normal size: as she drank, perhaps, she bloated, or she needed that vastness to stun her prey. Her hair, free from the blood, lay in damp coils over the side of the bed. She was like a woman has given birth, where there is exhaustion, and blood and sweat. Her breath was noisy, and fast (135).

Meg seemingly drains the life out of Jane, but for what purpose? This horrifying image can be read in two ways: first, as in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Meg's bite may symbolize

how women can victimize and oppress other women; second, the bite may represent a liberation of Jane's 'other' self which will enable her to embrace the world and escape from limiting cultural constructs.³⁸ While it is possible to see Meg's violence as a destructive form of lesbian vampirism, Tennant's ambiguous narrative shows that this reading may be too simple. Meg's vicious action does intimate feminine violence; at the same time, however, Jane also appears to benefit from her victimization. Although Jane knows she has to fulfill her side of the bargain, she believes that Meg gives 'me the means to do it! I would bring such power to Meg, that she would be like a great Buddha on my blood' (135). Words and phrases like 'means', 'I would bring such a power', and the reference to a 'great Buddha' convey enthrallment, enthusiasm, and insight; thus, Jane seemingly gains the power, albeit a violent one, to remove herself from her submissive and fractured feminine position.³⁹

Jane uses Meg's power to feed off another woman and her predatory vampirism which culminates in the murder of her half-sister Ishbel/Miranda almost certainly suggests irony because Jane's violence signals her own 'suicide'. Tennant's characterization of Jane and Meg as violent implies that like men, women are conditioned by social institutions and policies to prey upon one another; as the novel points out, women again silently, and perhaps unconsciously, collude in their own repression. Jane's ironic destruction shows us that when women act in a violent manner, they still fail to release themselves from passive social and cultural representations of femininity.

A third role which Tennant allocates Meg is that of the devil or anti-Christ. Even though Meg allows Jane the opportunity to explore the darker side of human nature, this power does not come free. As a diabolic figure who allows Jane to experience and assert powers as a double, Meg:

wanted to take, in return for this, everything I had: my salvation would be paid for in blood, but never hers: she was anti-Christ, she would take where he gave, the wooden cross on which he hung, a passive victim,

³⁸There are numerous readings of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Liz Lochhead's play, for example, suggests that a male 'dracula' figure victimizes and oppresses a female. An alternative reading recently seen in Francis Ford Coppola's film *Dracula* shows that the vampire's bite liberates a woman's sexuality; therefore, 'Dracula' frees his female victims from male repression.

³⁹In her article 'Listening to the Women Talk' in *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies*, pp. 170-86, Carol Anderson posits an equally interesting reading of Meg's behaviour. Anderson contends that Meg's character is related to the idea of imagination, creativity, and wildness, and that it is partly the social attempt to categorize and repress a woman that results in further disruptions and division. See in particular pp. 178-9 of this article.

she would plunge into the heart of her prey. That was the first time, as I stood swaying there on the tilting step between the two worlds, that I understood what she was and where I was going. I understood the meaning of the sacrifice, that I would be a living shadow, a walking living being without a shadow, a drinker of blood, a nightwalker in perpetual and thwarted search of day, a white skin without blood, a dark predator, a victim (120-121).

Even though Jane finally concludes that she will be 'a living shadow', 'a dark predator', and 'a victim', she readily gives her father, her half-sister, and herself to the anti-Christ. Meg is the only person, or force, who enables Jane to find liberation from traditional roles and who provides her with necessary freedoms to develop strength and assurance; therefore, Tennant's protagonist willingly sacrifices her own powerless existence for this short period of perceived power. Unfortunately, the power and confidence Jane receives in her pact with the devil only grants her the strength to take life and refuses any greater understanding of self-hood. Still, Meg offers Jane the only escape from passive female reductive roles and, at the very least, provides Jane with the illusion that she knows a semblance of individuality and identity.

Tennant tells Roe and Monteith that for many women conventional attributes of femininity carry a 'vast load of repressed power and evil'.⁴⁰ Jane Wild bears Tennant's contention out. Jane, through Meg, attempts to find visibility and validity in an environment that merely perpetuates women's repressed power and evil. With these three alternating characterizations of Meg's personality, Tennant heightens ambiguity and fractures a coherent textual reading. Allocating Meg several roles in the novel, it is impossible to say who she is or if she is an indisputably real person or force. The ambiguity inherent in Meg's characterization denies a unified reading, as well as a 'unified' image of femininity. The only clear idea which emanates from Meg's plurality is that Meg is many women as opposed to one woman. Tennant's textual plurality powerfully exposes how women who have the power to act violently -- even though patriarchal systems facilitate the violence -- at times merely participate in their own fragmentation as female subjects.

⁴⁰'Women Talking About Women Writing', p. 134.

Radical Feminism and the Pressure to Be 'Politically Correct'

Judi M. Roller argues that the 'central character or characters in a feminist novel must be female and must represent women generally as well as women specifically. In so drawing their characters, all the authors of feminist novels implicitly or explicitly portray women as a group oppressed'.⁴¹ Restrictive definitions for the feminist novel such as this commonly pose problems for feminist writers. What if the feminist author decides, like Tennant, to depict women engaged in violence and murder? Does this make a novel not feminist? Does the representation of women as anything but an oppressed group necessarily indict women as evil and bad? There are endless questions which may be drawn from exacting definitions imposed on the feminist novel. When critics try to assign feminism and feminist novels strict definitions, they undermine a woman writer's thematic enterprise and reproduce confining paradigms which encode women's writing and women's political activities as radical, rebellious, and threatening to the status quo.

Tennant's vision of radical feminism is disturbing and might distress those women who do not wish to see women portrayed in a negative light. For example, Stephen repeats that in Meg's mind, Jane's father represents 'a symbol of the father of all women' (40). For Meg, Dalzell's assassination 'was symbolic, [. . .] It was a ritual killing. The left hand performs the act figuratively, the right hand performs it literally. There is no difference between the two. He was the incarnation of capitalism. We have incarnated our disapproval of him' (40). Stephen's voice reinforces the power of Meg's fanaticism and the conviction that the death of paternalism will liberate women around the world, freeing women to define themselves in any manner they see fit. While there may be some truth to the assumption that incarnating a disapproval of 'paternalism' and 'capitalism' will break down the barriers which construct women as subordinate subjects, *The Bad Sister* reveals that assassinating one man does not advance freedom for women in any culture; instead, radical, fanatical stereotypes and ensuing violence against men merely creates an illusion of female power and strength. The novel suggests, then, that there are few strategies for women to release themselves from the rigidity and confines associated with the cultural construction of femininity.

⁴¹*The Politics of the Feminist Novel*, p. 5.

The voices which describe Meg's and Jane's feminism and violent actions in the novel are primarily male and, as already suggested, necessarily intimate some degree of unreliability. Even so, some critics fail to recognize that Tennant intentionally defines her women's community as fanatical and violent in order to demonstrate varying reasons why men fear women, and how fanatical rhetoric and action fails to engender positive change. Paulina Palmer criticizes Tennant's presentation of female community and female relations as 'destructive and transgressive':

They are depicted as constituting a kind of terrorist subculture which undermines and disrupts, often by violent means, the logocentric, rationalistic domain of patriarchal society. Her treatment of women's community and lesbian relations contains elements which are downright prejudiced and offensive. She sensationalizes them, identifying them with a lurid world of witchcraft, violence, drugs and sado-masochism. In this respect, she does contemporary feminism a disservice, reproducing the misogynistic stereotypes of femininity popularized by a phallographic culture.⁴²

Tennant does not sensationalize women's community with witchcraft and drugs; instead, the novel depicts in distinct male voices a female community that may be read as a 'terrorist subculture'. Even so, the novel's 'terrorist subculture' undermines and disrupts the power and confidence of any woman's ability to formulate an identity, not the 'rationalistic domain of patriarchal society'. Tennant's literary practice not only questions masculine and feminine reliability, but also reveals that any political or emotional practice taken to the limits of illegality is self-destructive and evil; hence, the novel can be viewed as a caution to the dangers of fanatical doctrine and the claim to certainty. One may conclude from the fanatical and unreliable text that Tennant does contemporary feminism and other movements a service, not a disservice, as Palmer so eagerly intimates.

Palmer also clearly misses Tennant's point that 'feminism works and has worked in a fantastic way, but [. . .] A young and innocent person surrounded by propaganda can be corrupted, wherever the forcing comes from'.⁴³ Rather than present women as entirely fault-free in the struggle to free themselves from male dominance, Tennant depicts Jane manipulated by feminist discourse. At the end of the novel, Tennant shows Meg's propaganda corrupting Jane. Meg tries to convince Jane to kill Mrs Marten by telling

⁴² *Contemporary Women's Fiction*, p. 143.

⁴³ *Contemporary Women's Fiction: A Critical Introduction*, p. 292.

her: 'She's Mrs Aldridge, Jane! Think of your and Marie's bravery last night! And think of the great deed that lies ahead. But first, Jane, before she destroys you . . . take her . . . with the knife!' (196). With this command, Meg attempts to link Jane's fantasy world with her present and past life; by connecting Mrs Marten to Jane's mother's former employer, and Jane with her more passive psychic counterpart Marie, Meg preys on Jane's psychological and emotional weaknesses. To be sure, Tennant reveals Meg and her 'radical' feminism as dangerous and self-destructive; however, Tennant's portrayal of Meg in this light discloses how any type of 'fanaticism' -- either Calvinist or feminist -- might easily corrupt vulnerable individuals and urge these weaker people to destroy human life.

Karl Miller acknowledges the presentation of Tennant's fanatical female community in his review of the novel. He suggests that Tennant 'has written a book which could be taken to be an attack on feminist infallibility' and that she 'may have to justify herself before a court-martial of wild sisters'.⁴⁴ In light of the violence within the novel, these statements are legitimate; even so, Miller, like Palmer, also does Tennant a disservice because he too perpetuates overdrawn and counterproductive stereotypes by depicting feminists who may oppose her controversial presentation of female community as 'wild sisters'. On the other hand, Miller's comment that *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* is directed against "the rage of fanaticism", but is kind to its fanatic, and is planned to show him as one of the many victims in the world',⁴⁵ might also shed light on Jane's characterization. Tennant is also kind to her protagonist and simply portrays her, like Robert Wringhim, as another victim of the dominant forces of cultural conditioning.

When Roller dogmatically defines the feminist novel, and when Palmer and Miller criticize Tennant's violent female community, they betray the pressures on writers from the feminist community and literary critics to be 'politically correct' -- whatever 'politically correct' may be.⁴⁶ Tennant herself confirms that she is not a feminist writer

⁴⁴*New York Review of Books*, 9 November 1978, p. 26.

⁴⁵*Doubles*, p. 19.

⁴⁶Janice Galloway told a tale at a conference on women's writing in Scotland about a short story of hers that was to be published in a collection by The Women's Press. She revealed that The Women's Press rejected her story on the basis that the male character had too prominent a role in the story; they would only accept the story for publication if she changed the male character to a female lead. Since Galloway refused to do so, The Women's Press refused to publish her story. Attitudes like the ones promoted by The Women's Press do not in any way encourage or support women's writing.

all the time; therefore, critics should not condemn her work as destructive and transgressive if her novels do not implicitly accuse all men of being evil, or depict women as all-knowing and all good.⁴⁷ When critics decide to judge a novel's overall effectiveness based on 'political correctness', these critics ultimately undermine any underlying feminist agenda of resistance and change. One may conclude from Tennant's display of feminine and masculine violence, and her ambiguous depiction of narrative reliability, that both men and women speak and act in ways that are open to question.

Fantasy and Ambiguity

In conjunction with the social discourses which work on women in society, Tennant's ambiguous narrative structure launches an inquiry into feminism, the female double, duality, and supernatural occurrences. Raising questions about the social construction of femininity through a postmodern literary enterprise, Tennant challenges the fixed absolutes within the literary canon and denaturalizes prevailing assumptions about self-hood, womanhood, and realism to name a few. More than this, though, *The Bad Sister* interrogates ideas of power: who has it, who suffers as a result of it, and what people will do to receive and maintain it.

Tennant scrutinizes a variety of stereotypes associated with women and the social and institutional conventions which validate women as suitable subjects, and reveals how the roles and positions offered to women are not always adequate to individual wants and needs. Representing Jane Wild as a fractured female subject, Tennant clarifies how cultural marginalization alienates her protagonist from the norms in society and leads her character to express 'madness' through a series of realistic fantasies. These fantasies occur throughout the novel and allow Jane to envision herself in either powerful or victimized roles; moreover, Jane's incoherent and ambiguous fantasies uncover how power functions to condition and control individuals, particularly women, in Western society.

Jane's first fantasy occurs after attending a party with Tony where Meg endows her with the power to travel in 'other' worlds. Walking home from the party, Jane appears truly feminine:

⁴⁷See Appendix, p. 324 for Tennant's comments on her feminism and writing.

My rump was soft and divided under my clinging silk dress as men photographers would have it divide: ripe, ready for a mouthful to be taken out. My legs were thin and perched in high-heeled sandals, the pale tights making them all the more ridiculous and vulnerable. My breasts, unshielded, nosed the air for potential attackers like glow-worms swimming always a few inches in front of me (47).

Jane's references to a soft rump, 'clinging silk dress', and 'photographers' shows that she recognizes herself as a woman who epitomizes male conceptions of 'femininity'. Even so, Jane declares her 'frenzy of impatience to become another person' (47). She begins her metamorphosis by 'hacking' off her hair, watching 'long pieces of blonde hair, highlighted every three months and slightly curled for the party' (49) fall onto her bed. After Jane cuts her hair, she immediately feels 'calmer and more peaceful' (49). Jane can, for the first time since childhood, 'see by looking straight ahead, instead of shaking my fringe to one side, a gesture which, over the years, had become apologetic and feminine, as if I had to admit it wasn't my right to contemplate the world' (50). When Jane cuts her hair, she attacks the social conventions which represent femininity and Tennant transforms her protagonist into a woman who liberates her inner self from the powerless position she holds as an individual who designs her hair and dress to satisfy male desires.

When Jane doubles, she transforms her weak and marginalized self into a woman who expresses autonomy and power. As Cixous believes, a woman 'surprises herself at seeing, being, pleasuring in her gift of changeability'.⁴⁸ One might conclude that when Jane declares 'I was in a frenzy of impatience to become another person' (47), she pleasures in her gift of changeability. In and of itself, Jane's doubling represents a liberation from feminine repression and announces an agenda of resistance and change. Thus, once Jane cuts her hair and her body translates itself into a new shape -- her breasts are 'tiny now, and the bra that had once contained them looked large and empty' (52) -- she decides that on her quest for identity, 'others are at risk, not me. I am looking for someone to kill' (56). Whereas inside the stereotypical norm of femininity Jane remains powerless to change her oppressive situation, outside conventional notions of femininity, she has the power to achieve certain goals.

⁴⁸Hélenè Cixous, 'Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways/Out/Forays', in *The Feminist Reader*, pp. 101-16 (p. 108). From *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. by Betsy Wing (Minneapolis/Manchester: The University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. 63-4, 83-8, 91-7. First published as *La Jeune née* (Paris, 1975). Even though Cixous does not refer to Jane Wild or Tennant in this essay, I believe her emphasis on the plurality and the multiplicity of the female subject does have relevance to Tennant's protagonist.

While it is difficult for the reader to ascertain whether the action in this fantasy takes place on the street or in Jane's mind, it is not difficult to comprehend that she exults in her newfound powers. Tennant shows Jane, like Robert Wringhim, carrying a gun and determined to use force:

I might fire a bullet at the perplexed, wrinkled brow of Burt Lancaster as he struggles on the poster level with my head. I might blacken the teeth of the housewife suspended in the vapours of her pie, her smile moistened in the wreaths of animal fat coming up at her like winter breath. Or I might shoot at the steeple of the church (57).

Although Jane knows that she can fire at posters and church steeples, she saves her fire because 'I may need it later on' (57). In other words, Jane recognizes that firing at Burt Lancaster, a housewife's teeth, and a church steeple will merely symbolically destroy traditional images of femininity to which society conditions women to aspire. Shooting Burt Lancaster will kill the common assumption that women, with a little work, can and will attain a 'sexy' media star as a lover or husband; blacking a housewives teeth will shatter contented and peaceful images of female domesticity; and firing at a church steeple actuates the death of the patriarchal church which reinforces women's domesticity and advocates submission to male desires and motherhood. Jane rightly decides to 'hold' her bullets and her 'power' so that she may 'find my real prey' (57): men who promote limited roles for women in the concerted effort to confine them as powerless and non-threatening subjects.

When Jane enters a bar and shoots the first sailor she sees, she feels disappointed because the 'shot was noiseless, and so was his death. It's not what I had hoped' (58). Even so, Jane's decision to enforce this high degree of power accords her immediate celebrity. Rather than attempt to chastise or capture Jane for her unmotivated murder, all the other sailors in the bar 'crowd round and beg me not to kill them. They clasp at my waist, and we dance without sound' (58). Jane asserts authority and self-hood when she kills the sailor; this action places her in a powerful position which confirms female dominance and control and contests the social and political institutions which forcefully encode women's subjectivity.

Jane's interesting movement toward the sea in this fantasy warrants discussion because literary critics have offered many hypotheses on why women move toward the sea in literature. In Stephen's mind, a woman's movement toward the sea signifies

'crime' and 'madness' because historically the 'mad were put out to sea and they wandered rudderless (115); accordingly, the sea for Stephen becomes 'mad and female, the criminal's punishment' (115). For women writers, however, the sea offers escape from the confining roles available to women by the cultural establishment. Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnick theorize that the sea in the work of Chopin, Woolf, and Rhys is an example:

of landscape used not just to give a sense of place but to suggest, sometimes with ambivalence, the possibilities for self that lie beyond society, outside patriarchy, and within the future. These possibilities, many of which are to do with rejecting the cultural construction of gender, must inevitably be connected with forces of wildness, fluidity and the unknown.⁴⁹

If the sea must be connected with wildness, fluidity, and the unknown, it may also be connected with death. As most readers will be aware, Edna Pontellier does not return from the sea because she chooses her actual death over the living 'death' of the restrictive cultural order. So too does Jane choose the sea; some of her last words are, 'the ship sails through the deep folds of the hills' (211). Jane's final words hint that she too cannot resign herself to living within roles which do not satisfy her creative wants and needs; Jane, like Edna Pontellier, finds 'madness', the sea, and death preferable to the marginalization she experiences from the larger culture.

Jane translates herself in her fantasies into a powerful woman who opposes anything that represents 'that vague thing, womanhood' (97):

a pact made with the eyes, signalled to men, that suggests women should pretend to enjoy a subservient position while ruling the men with 'an iron hand in a velvet glove'. Men like her because she is so finite. She never dreams, there is no static around her head (97).

Jane's inability to resign herself to one-dimensional female roles leads her to assert multiplicity of character in a fantastical world. While it is debatable whether or not the fantasies represent some kind of rationality or 'madness', the fantasies accord Jane the opportunity to explore roles outside restrictive feminine conventions and oppressive class structures. The fantasies allow Jane to envision herself breaking free from her lowly position in the social strata.

⁴⁹*Landscapes of Desire: Metaphors in Modern Women's Fiction* (New York/London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), p. 7

For instance, after Jane discovers that Tony might be seeing another woman, she feels vulnerable and so translates herself into a figure who embarks on another fantastical journey. Jane's fantasy begins when she projects herself into the role of Jeanne, a housemaid who perceives herself as a 'fat sow' with 'blubbery cheeks' (100). Tennant draws on the work of Jean Genet, an avant-garde writer interested in exploring and exploiting restrictive social conventions. She models Jane's fantasy on Genet's play *The Maids*, based on a historical event in 1920s France where two maids murder their employer. Tennant believes that the play represents 'the most extreme case of oppression of women in that they were servants, they couldn't get away, they were brutalized the whole time, and they clung to each other, not at all sado-masochistically, but because they had nowhere to turn'.⁵⁰ Tennant transposes the characters and action of Genet's play into her novel because they represent a historical incident which demonstrates how power can be used to deny women access to their own thoughts and actions. Using Genet's structure, Tennant reassesses women's position in the contemporary world and depicts Jane/Jeanne repressed and oppressed. In this manner, Tennant suggests that even though women have seemingly gained many rights such as the vote since the 1920s, in actual fact, cultural politics still deny women access to careers and choices that will provide a key to multiple hidden selves.

As Jane traverses her landscape, she leaves London and finds herself with grass at her feet, fields all around her, and surrounded by colourful flowers 'which also look more invented or remembered than real' (99). She feels that in this beautiful landscape she might be in a painting, or 'in a housewife's embroidered tea towel of the 'thirties, for a house with Jacobean chimneys, and a garden with dark red roses, and a reddish cow are all arranged straight on in my line of vision' (99). Jane believes the scene to be both peaceful and comforting, yet she still hates it and remains afraid. Fear translates itself into self-hatred and Jane becomes another woman Jeanne who contemplates what crime she has committed or is about to commit. Tennant portrays Jane in this scene despising her body: Jane/Jeanne knows that there 'is a great void in me, an O that drips and aches, a round sea with rancid tides that slap against me at the pull of the moon' (100). However, Tennant subtly undermines Jane/Jeanne's self-hatred within this beautiful place by

⁵⁰Babinec-Tennant, Appendix, p. 318.

forcing her female character to see strange things in the landscape. Jane/Jeanne realizes that although the landscape 'gives an impression of such opacity it is in fact threadbare in places: there are tiny suggestions, as if the tea towel had got wet, worn thin' (100). Juxtaposing the superficial image of peaceful countryside with threadbare images, Tennant implies that these contented visions of English countryside no longer exist; what's more, the scene suggests that these visions of peace and comfort are manufactured by certain social classes to exert control over the majority of the population.

Tennant replaces these counterfeit pictures of contented and rich English life with Jane/Jeanne and Marie, two sisters who are deprived housemaids on the English estate. For example, Mrs Aldridge's son Master George freely abuses the housemaids. He and his bachelor friends constantly try to 'stick themselves into my black swamp' (101-2), and he frequently finds pleasure in making 'a black pinch with finger and thumb on our legs' (103). Master George constantly laughs at and insults the young girls; hence, Tennant represents him using his privileged position as the son of a wealthy landowner to humiliate and abuse young women for his own pleasure. Likewise, Mrs Aldridge, the 'lady' of the manor also freely abuses her employees.⁵¹ Angry that her employee sits in the garden because in Jane/Jeanne's words, 'we would bring chaos, a bad smell in the place of the polite handkerchief smells this garden has been trained to produce' (102), Mrs Aldridge cannot be bothered to beat her; instead, Mrs Aldridge leans 'down with the scateurs and nipped my ear' (104). If this physical disfigurement were not enough, Mrs Aldridge also shouts at Marie to 'get off the [garden] path' (104). This scene itself vilifies power structures not only because it represents a tyrannical assertion of power, but it also might remind readers that in Cambridge, Virginia Woolf was asked to leave a

⁵¹Tennant names Mrs Aldridge as Jane/Jeanne's abusive employer; thus, the reader is reminded that Jane's real mother Mary was also employed by a Mrs Aldridge. This is a significant connection because Mrs Aldridge refused to allow Jane in her house because she represented loose morals. See p. 14, *The Bad Sister*. Master George could also be a play on George Colwan, the laird's 'legitimate' son in *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. Master George opposes Hogg's characterization of George Colwan as a 'generous and kind-hearted youth; always ready to oblige, and hardly ever dissatisfied with anybody'. See p. 18, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969). Tennant's reference to Master George humiliating Marie on the tennis court with his friends is also significant because in *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, George Colwan, when provoked by his brother Robert Wrensham, knocks him down and denies his legitimacy.

garden path because 'only the Fellows and Scholars are allowed here; the gravel is the place for me'.⁵²

Portraying Mrs Aldridge and Master George as tyrannical employers who abuse and insult Jane/Jeanne and Marie for no other reason than the fact they hold wealth and prestige in aristocratic English society, Tennant makes two strong statements about English life. First, Master George's behaviour suggests some men, especially wealthy men, are conditioned by the dominant order to trap women of any class, race, or creed into limiting, repressive, and always subordinate social structures. Second, when Mrs Aldridge physically disfigures Jane/Jeanne, the novel again insinuates that women are also conditioned by male institutions to collude in their own oppression by attacking and despising other women. This scene clearly emphasizes class divisions and raises questions about the deep-rooted class system in Britain; since Mrs Aldridge eagerly disfigures and chastises her powerless employee, Tennant conveys the knowledge that money may randomly endow individuals with unwarranted power and authority.⁵³

The fantasies in which Jane projects herself into Jeanne an abused housemaid confirm that wealth confers the authority to confine and limit women as submissive individuals. To counteract this negative portrait and to set up another divided image of femininity, Tennant strengthens Jane's ambiguous and confusing fantasy by presenting Jane/Jeanne and Marie:

in the one bed now, and our black dresses, which we never take off, even to sleep, are up around our waists. With our fingers we give each other comfort. We are kissing and biting. Her black hair is in my mouth. I will die, float, never let her out of my sight again (105).

While some readers and critics may object to this image of what may be incestuous lesbian relations, the scene represents comfort and love between women. Clearly, Jane/Jeanne and Marie are refused entry to benefits associated with 'acceptable' society; namely the love, money, friendship, and shelter which signify independence and existence. To compensate for their exclusion from culture, these two 'sisters' physically comfort one another; the women turn to each other to gain some kind of validity which

⁵²*A Room of One's Own* (London: Grafton Books, 1977), p. 10. First published (London: The Hogarth Press, 1929).

⁵³While class systems are relevant to women's position in society, *The Bad Sister* interrogates gender and power more than class division; therefore, I believe that a discussion of class structure seems to be outside

leads to the formation of identity and self-knowledge. Jane/Jeanne and Marie take refuge and strength in one another; accordingly, the two 'sisters' reveal that this type of love will enable Jane/Jeanne and Marie, and other women, to refute their employer's defeating oppression.

Jane's most violent and interesting fantasy occurs after her lunch with Tony, his mother, and her friend Gala at which Meg and Gil-martin, her missing male principle, sit beside them. At the lunch, Jane feels pressure to play out different roles with different people and concludes, 'between them, the Gil-martins and the Martens would crucify me, tear me from the material world into the outer regions, and back again' (188). Since Tennant chooses two similar surnames for her characters, Gil-martin and Marten, she hints at a shared power of repressed evil between Meg, Mrs Marten, Tony, and Gala. Since Jane's weakened condition prevents her from living up to either Meg's, Mrs Marten's, or Tony's representation of womanhood, Jane again splits her mind and sees herself as Jane and Jeanne, an abused housemaid.

In the final pages of Tennant's novel Jane continually oscillates between her reality as Jane Wild and the desire to capture Miranda, and her fantasy as the housemaid Jeanne; as a result, the narrative becomes so ambiguous and incoherent that it is difficult to draw conclusions about Jane and her position in her fictional world. Tennant portrays Jane in one paragraph as confident and in control of her actions as she goes 'to the house where Miranda lived, to reconnoitre, to plan for the next day' (189). Tennant contrasts this image in the next paragraph when Jane becomes Jeanne who, on hearing that her wages will be reduced because she drops an iron, tries 'to escape but, as always, we were driven back by cold and hunger and we had failed' (191). Representing Jane in two opposing subject positions, one passive and one aggressive, Tennant maintains that women's position in contemporary society is still ambiguous and unstable, and frequently leads to alienation and mental fragmentation.

Even though this fantasy depicts Jane/Jeanne living in a constant state of victimization from both men and women, this final fantasy, like her first, enables Jane to exert power. Jane/Jeanne's sister Marie reacts to their wage deduction by summoning up hatred and inner strength. When Mrs Aldridge searches for the sisters, 'keener on vengeance for the broken iron and our truancy than on their own rich food' (191),

Jane/Jeanne and Marie refuse to accept Mrs Aldridge's unfair punishment and conclude that 'if you don't retreat, you must either stand still or go forward' (192). Jane/Jeanne and Marie 'go forward' in this novel by violently attacking their employer:

my hands were on Mrs Aldridge's daughter's throat, twisting, unscrewing, squeezing the porcelain neck. Marie had pulled out her mistress's eyes! They lay on the landing, one on the rich Persian carpet and the other nearer the edge where the bare boards began. Louise! I saw her distracted gaze as I knelt on the hill with the sharp stone in my hand. My mother . . . my Marie . . . generations of cruel mothers in rich corridors fell under our blows. When they had gone we would be whole (192).

In this disturbing fantasy, Tennant juxtaposes Jane/Jeanne and Marie carrying out a violent physical revenge on Mrs Aldridge and her daughter with childhood images of Dalzell's wife and Ishbel's mother Louise. Jane/Jeanne believes that if she fells generations of cruel mothers with her blows, then she and her 'sister' will be 'whole'. However, as this fragmented and violent fantasy tells us, the violent divisions within Jane's psyche deny any stability or unity; the disquieting and shocking images of murder imply that oppressed women often lose sight of an inner balance or authentic and autonomous female voice. In other words, the social and cultural institutions which condition women to be submissive and passive subjects ultimately foster internal violence which advances psychic alienation and fragmentation.

Tennant's non-linear and incoherent narrative structure in the context of this fantasy undermines the very possibility of plot development. Evelyne Keital argues that in the novel *Der Hunger nach Wahnsinn*, the incoherent narrative structure prevents any reader:

from producing mental images of a certain kind. Instead of the idea of a time sequence, the illusion of a continuum of perception is contained in reading the narrative frame. The reader cannot bring his own projections to bear. Moreover, his attempts to build consistency -- which constitute one of his most important activities during processing a literary text -- become potentially an irritant.⁵⁴

Similar observations can be made about *The Bad Sister*. Tennant disrupts any clear notion of plot development and a coherent narrative by continually alternating Jane's reality of stalking Tony's ex-girlfriend Miranda, with her psychic counterpart Jeanne who responds to a long history of oppression by brutally assaulting her employer and her employer's daughter. Juxtaposing Jane's reality with her imagination, Tennant asserts

⁵⁴Reading *Psychosis* p. 37

Jane's doubleness in order to show her protagonist at the mercy of a society which demands she conform to 'acceptable' ideas of femininity. Elizabeth Dickson asserts that in *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, 'there is no balance between the claims of reason and imagination at all. The more Robert Wringhim seeks to guide himself by reason, the more Hogg shows him to be at the mercy of a treacherous and uncontrolled imagination'.⁵⁵ So too does Tennant represent Jane Wild seeking reason; yet, like Robert Wringhim, Jane also loses control of her imagination which ends in her death. Whereas Hogg shows Wringhim to be a victim of fanaticism associated with Calvinism in Scotland, *The Bad Sister* shows Jane Wild to be a victim of social 'norms' established for women by phallogocratic power structures. Tennant's ambiguous narrative and Jane/Jeanne's fantastical wanderings and psychic dissolution postulate that women's position in patriarchal culture is both tenuous and unstable; consequently, many women cannot help but fragment themselves as they attempt to adapt to cultural definitions of validity.

Jane Wild's Psychic Division and the Divided Vision of Scottish Women's Writing

Jane's psychic division in *The Bad Sister* functions to underline Tennant's general concern with the splintered human identity. If the reader recalls Tennant's claim that almost everything in the novel doubles, then one can easily see that she imposes disruption upon her characters and narrative structures in order to reinforce the idea that human identity, like Scottish identity, can be nothing but fractured. For example, the characters Jane/Jeanne and Marie represent two opposing versions of womanhood and femininity: passivity versus aggression, self-conscious versus self-confident, uncontrolled versus controlled. Jane's journeys also identify a split between the submission often demanded of women in the real world versus the self-assurance and independence guaranteed in supernatural 'other' fictional worlds. Issues like illegitimacy and legitimacy additionally imply divided hierarchies: legitimacy endows visibility and validity whereas illegitimacy connotes invisibility and invalidity.

⁵⁵ 'Division and Wholeness: The Scottish Novel 1896-1946' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Stirling, 1990), p. 2.

Tennant's fractured characters and fractured narrative structure reveal that social discourses and ideology which construct Western culture foster a split in feminine identity. *The Bad Sister* shows Jane necessarily embarking on a project of separation in the effort to define herself as a valid and independent female subject. Even though Jane ultimately fails in her quest to define self-knowledge, one may conclude that Tennant's novel exposes the difficulty, if not the impossibility, for women to encounter anything but a splintered human identity while living under existing patriarchal power structures.

Randall Stevenson comments that through 'Jane's schizophrenic response to this unfeeling society, and Tennant's mixture of fable, fantasy, and satire, *The Bad Sister* illuminates with particular clarity the divided vision which has become a frequent feature of women's writing'.⁵⁶ Why does the 'divided vision' seem to be a 'frequent feature' of women's writing? While one cannot give correct answers to this question, one can posit general ideas about division in postmodern experimental women's writing, particularly those women who utilize facets of this tradition in Scotland.

In *The Bad Sister*, Tennant's examination of social discourse, the ambiguous narrative structure, and Jane's doubling in fantastical visions conveys the idea that women are socially and culturally constructed as subjects by ideological and discursive structures; moreover, Tennant's narrative reveals that women are and have been stereotyped into certain roles by the dominant male establishment: lesbians, battered women, domestics, harpies, and sirens to name a few. Without a doubt, the one-dimensional roles that women are allocated by social institutions hold specific connotations, either good or evil, and work to restrict women's plural and multiple selves. When women fail to fit into these culturally determined categories of womanhood, in Tennant's novel, and frequently in Scottish women's fiction, the female characters tend to fragment and are translated into violent or victimized individuals. In this novel, Jane fragments because she exists unrecognized in the margins of society; therefore, Jane only seems to gain some idea of self-hood in violent fantasies where she employs violence to define a place for herself in the cultural order and to achieve some form of female power.

⁵⁶*The British Novel Since the Thirties: An Introduction* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1987), p. 160. First published (London: B.T. Batsford, 1986).

Tennant reiterates that it is difficult, if not impossible, for women to escape the cultural conditioning which dictates their existence as passive subjects over and over again in both novel and interviews. This leads Flora Alexander to conclude that Tennant 'is interested in pressures exerted on women's identity, and the damaging effects of the necessity to conform to social expectations, which creates a kind of wildness by standing in the way of self-expression'.⁵⁷ The division and fragmentation which Tennant's characters assert intimate that she recognizes that women cannot be whole or unified in a fractured society.

This analysis hopefully reveals that *The Bad Sister* is a novel concerned with power: who has it, what men and women will do to achieve it, and what men and women do with their power once they achieve it. Many women writers, especially Scottish women writers, interrogate the cultural and social constructs which marginalize and undermine women as autonomous, liberated subjects; however, the critical canon tends to ignore their literary achievements. DeKoven explains why women writers fail to achieve critical recognition:

Many women *are* writing experimentally but receiving little or no recognition for it; women writers who are successful and recognized write in traditional, conservative forms. Experimental writing by women, explicitly linking the feminine subversive cultural/literary Other, the maternal repressed of discourse, with the female gendered signature, is, I would argue simply too subversive to be supported or recognized by hegemonic institutions such as the academy or mainstream publishing.⁵⁸

Unquestionably, *The Bad Sister* identifies Emma Tennant as a Scottish postmodern experimental woman writer who disrupts and questions received ideas about womanhood, femininity, and female subjectivity. Tennant's novels are too subversive to be supported by hegemonic institutions because her writing attempts to release women from the confines of conventional narrative forms by expressing a new creativity which allows women to begin to see themselves in possession of unique identities and individuality.

⁵⁷ *Contemporary Women Novelists* (London: Edward Arnold, 1989), p. 77.

⁵⁸ 'Male Signature, Female Aesthetic: The Gender Politics of Experimental Writing', in *Breaking the Sequence: Women's Experimental Fiction*, ed. by Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 72-81, (p. 78).

Chapter Three
Emma Tennant: Sisters and Strangers: A Moral Tale

If the story of woman is the story of stories, then the greatest storyteller of all, potentially, would be woman herself, she who can both embody and engender the 'narratable' by telling her own tale.

--Susan Hardy Aiken

Chapter Two's discussion of *The Bad Sister* gives the reader insight into the ways culture and ideology attempt to limit women's access to self-definition. Tennant continues to interrogate male versions of female knowledge and analyses how women represent themselves as subjects in *Sisters and Strangers*. Like *The Bad Sister*, *Sisters and Strangers* also rewrites a powerful male text -- The Book of Genesis. *Sisters and Strangers*, like *The Bad Sister*, questions authority, particularly religious and cultural authority, and interrogates the myths which perpetuate women's inferiority and subsequent subordinate status in society. Tennant incorporates an innovative narrative structure into *Sisters and Strangers*; she transcribes oral tales into the written word. In this manner, Tennant creates a feminist fairy tale for her readers which comically, yet subversively, satirizes seven restrictive roles that women are conditioned to fill. Intertextuality and word play allude to numerous other literary texts; therefore, *Sisters and Strangers*, like *The Bad Sister*, asks the reader to engage actively with the novel. Drawing thin lines between reality and illusion, Tennant releases her readers from conventional reading practices and restraints. She encourages her audience to seek out hidden meanings within cultural and political institutions and to contest the ways in which individuals are constructed in society.

In the Beginning There Was Calvinism

In *Sisters and Strangers*, Tennant revises the Book of Genesis from a feminist perspective; accordingly, she calls into question commonly held assumptions about religious authority. Like nationalism, religion and religious issues can be contentious and often permeate Scottish culture. Orange parades, for example, are frequently seen on main Glasgow thoroughfares; likewise, fights often occur between the Catholic Celtic supporters and the Protestant Rangers

fans at Glasgow football matches. While it remains difficult to explain why religion holds such power in Scotland both past and present, Tom Nairn offers one possible reason for Scottish religious fervour. He speculates:

The strange, truncated condition of Scotland after 1707 made it natural to search for effective substitutes for the lost national identity. The Kirk was indeed such a substitute. But because of its unworldliness and its limitations of bigotry, inevitably an unsatisfactory one in the long run.¹

Even though Nairn argues that the Kirk after 1707 provided a poor substitute for the lost national identity in Scotland, there is no doubt that Christian doctrine, especially Calvinism, has heavily influenced social, cultural, and political institutions in Scotland. For, as Mary Daly argues, Christianity in general has consciously or unconsciously made women the world's 'primordial scapegoats'.²

History shows us that the religious dogma of Calvinism filters through to the Scottish psyche. Literature in Scotland sometimes unveils how Calvinism and religious fundamentalism often distorted and confined an individual's will to create and imagine. Many Scottish writers unveil and, at the same time, query the pervasive, detrimental influence of Calvinism in Scotland; for example, James Hogg, George Mackay Brown, Willa Muir, and Muriel Spark are critical of religious dogma.³ Hogg contests the fanaticism, predestination, and the doctrine of 'election' in *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*; Brown denounces Calvinism in his poem 'Prologue' by referring to Scotland as 'the Knox-ruined nation'; Muir decries the danger of Calvinist fundamentalism in *Mrs Ritchie*, a novel which follows the ill fortunes of Mrs Ritchie, a woman who fanatically believes in reinforcing the debilitating forces of Calvinism; finally, Spark raises questions about the repressive force of Calvinist doctrine in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* when Sandy comments that Miss Brodie thinks 'she is the God

¹'The Three Dreams of Scottish Nationalism', in *Memoirs of a Modern Scotland*, pp. 34-54, (p. 38).

²*Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (London: The Women's Press, 1986), p. 47. First published (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973).

³It should be noted that George Mackay Brown and Muriel Spark are converts to Catholicism who have a specific agenda and therefore maintain a non-neutral stance on Calvinism. However, Brown's and Spark's religious conversion does not make redundant valid criticisms of repressive Calvinist dogma. The reader should also be aware the Calvinism in Scotland did not solely oppress its followers; the church did institute education for women and men as well as girls and boys which in itself is suggestive of good practice.

of Calvin'.⁴ Since each writer criticizes Calvinism in fictional form, one might conclude that literature offers Scottish writers a means of contesting and rejecting the unrelenting dogma of Calvinism.

Emma Tennant interrogates the religious myths which formulate imbalanced politics and social structures in her fiction. She wholeheartedly believes that many of her books 'have actually been a blend of Calvinism and romanticism -- having to do with murder and morals', something that she does not 'really understand; it is what seems to have emerged'.⁵

Calvinism, in conjunction with other dogmatic forms of Christianity, undeniably perpetuates the myth of feminine evil with gigantic proportions. Patricia Duncker theorizes:

Religious myths are at the roots of our politics and social structures, the core of white western male philosophy, the source of many persistent ambiguities in our own thinking. Unless they are actively argued over, dismantled and re-shaped they can never be resisted and withstood.⁶

In Scotland, Calvinism has worked to restrain women's creative and intellectual achievements. Although *Sisters and Strangers* employs different effects and asserts alternative meanings, the novel, like MacDonald's *Lilith*, Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, Stevenson's 'The Beach of Falesa' and 'The Ebb-Tide', and Edwin Muir's poetry, challenges religious dogma by depicting negative views of Calvinism and Christian doctrine in order to resist and to dismantle repressive religious ideology and doctrine.

Tennant's tale, however, differs from MacDonald's, Hogg's, Stevenson's, and Muir's work in that she amends rigid Christian notions by revamping the myth of human creation and subsequent division in human labour from a feminist perspective. In this way, Tennant uniquely lays bare alarming inconsistencies between women's potential and women's actual lowly position in the dominant male order. Tennant resists and dismantles the strength of religious fundamentalism by depicting Eve's story as the story of all women. Taking issue with the ways women are stereotyped and personified by men throughout the ages in a fairy tale structure, Tennant reveals that these roles are not justified by God; instead, her innovative

⁴George Mackay Brown, *The Storm and Other Poems* (Kirkwall: The Orkney Press, 1954), p. 9; Muriel Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (Harmondsworth: The Penguin Press, 1986), p. 120. First published (London: Macmillan, 1961).

⁵Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview*, pp. 295-6.

⁶*Sisters and Strangers: An Introduction to Contemporary Feminist Fiction* (Oxford/Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), p. 147.

tale about Eve exposes how society and culture attempt to limit female power by restricting women's access to roles that will increase self-knowledge.

Oral Tradition, Fairy Tale, and the Creation Myth

One way to powerfully criticize and oppose the strictness of the kirk and stultifying religious dogma in Scotland may be seen in the wide range and permanence of the folk tale, the fairy tale, and the oral tradition. Scottish writers commonly launch a protest against fundamentalism by drawing on the oral tradition, toying with the supernatural, and creating fantastical fictional worlds in written literature. Tennant also engages with folk tradition and orality in *Sisters and Strangers* so as to dispute Christian traditions which revere scripture and consecrate Christian buildings 'to the belief that it was all Eve's fault'.⁷

In an interview with James Buxton as part of the 'Writers in Conversation' series, Emma Tennant wonders whether two types of storyteller exist: 'one a born oral storyteller and the other a born writer'.⁸ Although she cannot say to which category she belongs because she prefers writing down stories now, her literary beginnings are distinctly oral. Tennant reveals to John Haffenden that as a child:

My way of carrying on had been completely oral. From the age of 2 1/2 onwards I would unselfconsciously walk round and round the garden waving a twig or branch while stories poured out of my mouth, which my family used to refer to as my 'walking-about'. It came to an end when I was 15, because in wet weather I would walk about in my bedroom waving an old Penguin I'd split down the middle -- I split the spine so that I could wave it -- and one day some people listened outside my room while this was going on: it made me so self-conscious that I never did it again.⁹

When Tennant's oral tales were disturbed, she found herself without a storytelling medium and had to begin the difficult process of learning 'how to translate this activity into writing'.¹⁰

Tennant successfully overcame the difficulty she encountered in making the transition from oral storytelling to writing by drawing on elements within the oral tradition in her fiction. Since

⁷*Sisters and Strangers: A Moral Tale* (London: Grafton Books, 1990), p. 56. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

⁸'Emma Tennant with James Buxton', *Writers in Conversation*, ICA Video, 1987, 40 mins.

⁹*Novelists in Interview*, p. 284.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

Tennant draws on the oral tradition in written prose, it might be useful to see how oral literature explicitly affects a written narrative structure.

In her text *Women in the House of Fiction: Post-War Women Novelists*, Lorna Sage argues that when writers translate the oral tradition into prose literature, they offer readers dislocated narratives.¹¹ She suggests that during the 1970s Angela Carter:

got more explicitly and systematically interested in narrative models that pre-date the novel: fairy tales, folk tales, and other forms that develop by accretion and retelling, like medieval allegories of love. The flicker-book technique develops into a journey from one imaginary locale to another, her world becomes more spacious and multifarious without in the least surrendering its surreal quality. The effect of this carnival of re-writing is to shift the narrative focus onto transformations, metamorphoses and exchanges of identity.¹²

In the late 1970s, Tennant's fiction, like Carter's, also began to express a renewed interest in narrative forms which pre-date the novel. Drawing on her foremother's traditions, Tennant's novels also incorporate myth, fairy tale, and folk tales. *Sisters and Strangers* and *Faustine* are two novels that introduce narrative structures which mimic oral tales; as a result, the reader experiences an oral text in written form which shifts the narrative focus onto feminine transformations, metamorphoses, and exchanges of identity.

Tennant translates oral tales into written form; in this way she embraces the pluralistic postmodern literary enterprise which offers writers a limitless avenue for querying the constructs of contemporary social, political, and cultural values and structures. Entitling her novel *Sisters and Strangers: A Moral Tale*, Tennant imaginatively invokes notions of myth, fairy tale, and fantasy; she also disrupts any concrete definitions of, or ideas about, literature. To this end, the word 'tale' conjures up many images, but the one most relevant to this analysis is its relationship to fairy tale.

The term 'fairy tale' may provoke discussion if one attempts to fix an absolute definition to it; even so, general attributes of the fairy tale can be put forward. Angela Carter comments in the introduction to *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales*:

¹¹(London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 173. I use Lorna Sage's comment on Carter because as yet, no substantial criticism on Tennant's work exists. Since Carter and Tennant utilize similar literary forms to interrogate and expose male depictions of female mythology, I feel her comments on Carter's work are relevant to my argument.

¹²Ibid.

you will find very few actual fairies within the following pages. Talking beasts, yes; beings that are, to a greater or lesser extent, supernatural; and many sequences of events that bend, somewhat, the laws of physics. But fairies, as such, are thin on the ground, for the term 'fairy tale' is a figure of speech and we use it loosely, to describe the great mass of infinitely various narrative that was, once upon a time and still is, sometimes, passed on and disseminated through the world by word of mouth -- stories without known originators that can be remade again and again by every person who tells them.¹³

Loose definitions of such general terms as literature, novel, and fairy tale leave much scope for interpretation and development. Perhaps the best approach to fairy tales is to think about the fairy tale as any 'orally transmitted narrative with a relaxed attitude to the reality principle and plots constantly refurbished in the retelling'.¹⁴ If one accepts this open-ended premise, then fairy tales might be variously seen as a means of passing on traditional folklore and values; as an opportunity to work through what may be thought of as insurmountable dilemmas; and as a way to explore and understand restraints and constrictions of individuals in society without relying on literary conventions commonly associated with nineteenth-century realism.

For Tennant, a woman and a writer interested in challenging traditional literary borders and contesting realism with the supernatural and diabolic, the fairy tale offers an imaginative format for struggling with the inferior position of women in contemporary culture. Tennant employs the biblical story of Eve and Adam and the Fall of 'man' for the framework of *Sisters and Strangers* to scrutinize the naturalized subordinate condition of Eve. This structure inevitably brings in the idea of myth; to be precise, Tennant analyses the foundation of the creation myth.

Michael Hollington explains that myths 'are stories of unascertainable origin or authorship accompanying or helping to explain religious beliefs', and that 'myth' and 'mythical' 'have long been commonly used in contexts opposing them to "truth" or "reality"'.¹⁵ In the years before scientific discovery, the biblical version of the creation myth offered many individuals an explanation for the evolution of the universe, human beings, and death. Darwin's revolutionary text *The Origin of Species* invalidated the need for a creation myth for many individuals. Accordingly, many scholars, particularly female scholars, have

¹³(London: Virago Press, 1990), p. ix.

¹⁴Ibid, p. xvii.

¹⁵*A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*, p. 153.

come to challenge the myths about women that are perpetuated in the myth of creation; namely, that women are responsible for human mortality and pain in childbirth, and are consequently allocated, and deserve, a servile, guilt-ridden, and inferior status to men.¹⁶

Tennant's analysis of the creation myth is especially important for women because she fictionally illustrates, like many feminist biblical scholars, how the creation myth justifies victimization of women. When the voice of God becomes the voice of man, religion embodies the human beliefs, the attitudes, the morals, and social codes of the human beings who celebrate that religion; therefore, the religion attains some semblance of reality. In Judeo-Christian theology the full responsibility for the Fall rests on Eve's shoulders. This permits the dominant order -- past and present -- to dominate women more forcibly, and allows many men the opportunity to externalize all fears and weaknesses in themselves onto women; consequently, the man leaves himself strong, intact, and morally superior, and the woman becomes inferior.¹⁷ The Fall creates an imbalance between men and woman, and 'it becomes the religious duty of women to accept the burden of guilt, seeing the self with male chauvinist eyes'.¹⁸ Those conditioned to see themselves as bad become such, and are conditioned to live out the abject role assigned to the female sex; thus, women appear to deserve the contempt heaped upon them.¹⁹

Tennant contests the stereotypes and roles women have been allocated since the Fall by interpreting the meaning of myth in *Sisters and Strangers* in a loose way. Tennant uses myth in *The Bad Sister* and *Sisters and Strangers* to examine 'the meaning of femininity. Let us say the different definitions that society has for femininity which force Jane Wild to be a passive girlfriend and suppress a lot of her self'.²⁰ In this manner, Tennant questions why her

¹⁶There are a number of scholars who engage in biblical interpretation, but a few texts which deliver Judeo-Christian versions of creation are: Robert Graves and Raphael Patai, *Hebrew Myths: The Book of Genesis* (London: Cassell and Company, 1964), especially pp. 60-81; E.A. Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1964), pp. 14-29; Narum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), pp. 1-36. Feminist responses to the biblical version of creation and patriarchal religious institutions may be found in: Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*; Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*; and Eva Figs, *Patriarchal Attitudes: Women in Society* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970).

¹⁷This sentence paraphrases some ideas from Figs, *Patriarchal Attitudes*, pp. 41-42.

¹⁸Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, p. 49.

¹⁹Ibid. This sentence summarizes Daly's theory that women internalize the idea of bad and, as a result, deserve the contempt heaped upon them.

²⁰Babinec-Tennant, Appendix p. 324.

character Eve, as a symbol for all women in society, primarily exists in archetypal female roles: whore, Madonna, and witch among them. When Tennant imaginatively revises the creation myth into a modern fairy tale for and about woman, she disrupts notions of what constitutes literature and immerses herself in the fairy tale tradition which holds a relaxed attitude toward the reality principle. In other words, Tennant aligns herself with women experimentalist writers who:

declare themselves on the side of ruptured and unreliable narrative; for in the spaces created by the ruptures and the anxiety provoked by the unreliable, they continue the project of a feminine discourse that not only can beat the meanings unbearable in the priestly and narrow chambers of master narratives, but also provides a hopeful alternative [. . .] To the failed master narratives.²¹

In *Sisters and Strangers*, Tennant employs satire, irony, and parody to create an alternative to the 'failed master narratives'. Entertaining her audience with caricatures and sharp word play, she clearly defines the ways in which the social and cultural order impose certain stereotypes and roles onto women. In the process, Tennant criticizes the dominant male establishment, dismantles feminine mythology, and makes way for the creation of a new woman and a new Eve.

Narrative Structure: Orature, Audience, and Intertextuality

Tennant's narrative structure in *Sisters and Strangers* celebrates the oral tradition which commonly appears in Scottish folk literature. The novel's narrative is provocative and innovative because Tennant principally relays Eve's story/tale through Grandmother Dummer who tells her granddaughter Elsie and her friend the narrator a 'fairy story for grown-ups' (8). Tennant defies conventional literary formats by designing her narrative as an orally transmitted tale; it has circular narrative structures, omniscient commentary on the story's 'characters' and actions, and is often disrupted with questions from the young girls about Eve and women in general that the storyteller willingly answers. As such, Tennant's narrative functions as an oral tale which implicitly challenges the dogmatic versions of femininity.

²¹Friedman and Fuchs, *Breaking the Sequence*, p. 27.

Many critics and writers believe that the oral ballad tradition influences and has influenced Scottish literature. The characteristics of the ballad are inextricably linked to the oral tale: both rely on an omniscient singer or storyteller to engage with an audience; both rely on imagery and action to hold the audience's attention; both are orally transmitted (although in a different manner); and both forms work through dilemmas or attempt to explain the unexplainable. Carter concludes that the fairy tale:

was put together in the form we have it, more or less, out of all sorts of bits of other stories long ago and far away, and has been tinkered with, had bits added to it, lost other bits, got mixed up with other stories, until our informant herself has tailored the story personally, to suit an audience of, say, children, or drunks at a wedding, or bawdy old ladies, or mourners at a wake -- or, simply, to suit herself.²²

Like the ballad singer, the storyteller moulds her story to suit her audience; therefore, the fairy tale, like the ballad, can carry different messages at different times. When Tennant utilizes a fairy tale format to explore the condition of women's subjectivity in Western society, she engages in a female tradition, indeed, an oral Scottish female literary tradition, which nourishes an ongoing tradition of women's oral culture.

Carter claims that the translation of fairy tales into 'written forms will inevitably change the whole nature of that literature, because speaking is a public activity and reading is a private activity'.²³ If her theory is correct, how will this affect an audience's reception of *Sisters and Strangers*? Since speaking is a public act and reading is a private act, an entirely different reader's response might be engendered. However, when Tennant writes a fairy tale -- an originally orally transmitted narrative -- onto paper, she opens the nature of literature and fairy tale to question. As Derrida points out, 'writing not only supplements but also takes the place of speech, because speech is already written'.²⁴ One might infer, then, that Tennant's feminist fairy tale quite possibly heals the binary divide that exists between writing and speaking.²⁵

²²*The Virago Book of Fairy Tales*, p. x.

²³*Ibid*, p. ix.

²⁴Raman Selden, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, 2nd Edition (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p. 54.

²⁵Cixous writes in 'The Laugh of the Medusa': 'You Dora, you the indomitable, the poetic body, you are the true "mistress" of the Signifier. Before long your efficacy will be seen at work when your speech is no longer suppressed, its point turned in against your breast, but written out over against the other'. In *Feminisms*, pp. 334-49 (p. 343). One might conclude that Cixous posits how women have the power to heal the divisions that exist between oral speech and written prose.

One dominant feature of the oral narrative and the fairy tale is that of circularity.

Salman Rushdie, a postmodern writer, comments that the shapes of Indian oral narratives are not linear:

An oral narrative does not go from the beginning to the middle to the end of the story. It goes in great swoops, it goes in spirals or in loops, it every so often reiterates something that happened earlier to remind you, and then takes you off again, sometimes summarises itself, it frequently digresses off into something that the story teller appears just to have thought of, then it comes back to the main thrust of the narrative.²⁶

The narrative circularity which infiltrates the shape of Indian oral narrative emanates from the Vidushka, the traditional clown narrator in the ancient Indian performance art of Kuttiyattam:

The Vidushka can take all kinds of liberties; in fact he is expected to and encouraged to do so. He can indulge in any kind of extravagance, provided he can come back to the main thread of the narrative without getting lost in his own elaborations (184).

In *Sisters and Strangers*, Grandmother Dummer acts in some sense like the Vidushka. She takes extravagant liberties with Eve's story and yet continually returns to the main thread of her narrative which exposes the ways in which culture conditions women to enact identifiable stereotypical roles. In this respect, Tennant perhaps draws on the ancient oral ballad tradition in Scotland that also tends to exhibit circularity in form; additionally, the circular narrative calls to mind Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva and the practice of l'Écriture Féminine which poses a challenge to male-centered writing codes.

In fairy tales, much of the weight of the narrative depends on circularity, on referring back to original statements and ideas which may change according to the story's function. In several places throughout *Sisters and Strangers*, Grandmother Dummer circles back and forward to reinforce certain images or ideas about femininity. For example, as Grandmother Dummer details Eve's journey through motherhood, she refers in three different places to Eve's predicament. She begins by saying that when Eve decides to look for her children, Eve places an advertisement in the newspaper. This advertisement brings in 'over a thousand children' who are 'all ragged and filthy' (92). In Grandmother Dummer's words, the children are a 'mob of urchins -- because, really, they looked like something out of *Oliver Twist*' (92).

²⁶Qtd. in Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, pp. 183-4. The next three references are from this edition.

Grandmother Dummer goes on to describe how Adam re-enters Eve's life and several pages later, she returns to how 'Sally suddenly remembers that, ages ago, she booked the ad offering a reward for the finder of Eve's children' (100). After this announcement, Grandmother Dummer again digresses about the number of filthy children who arrive, and she describes Eden as a virtual squatter's slum. Grandmother Dummer indulges in a circular narrative structure which she embellishes with powerful words and images that reinforce a woman's role as a domestic and a mother. In so doing, she delays the story's climax which characterizes Eve as 'the Old Woman who lives in a Shoe' (119).

As Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin submit, the 'technique of circling back from the present to the past, of building tale within tale, and persistently delaying climaxes are all features of traditional narration and orature' (184). Tennant's narrative circles back from present to past and delays climax and powerfully avoids a linear plot development which in some critics' minds characterizes a Western male writing style (183). Charles Russell speculates that with postmodernism, readers encounter 'an art of shifting perspective, of double self-consciousness, of local and extended meaning'.²⁷ Tennant's circular orature illustrates the possibilities of decentring conventional narrative techniques in a postmodern feminist style; the circular oral structures self-consciously reiterate the subordinate role women are allocated and sometimes collude with in society and, at the same time, criticize the existing cultural, political, and social structures which encourage women to find fulfilment in serving and caretaking roles.

When Tennant translates features of the oral tale into the written word, readers ultimately gain the best of both types of narrative forms. The reader may follow the circular narrative structure and actively engage with the text. The reader, like the internal textual audience of the two young girls who listen to Grandmother Dummer's public story, may also draw private and individual conclusions about the nature of women's position in society and how women gain access to culture. Thus, the lively action and magic of an orally transmitted story is not entirely lost on a private reading audience and Tennant's use of the fairy tale form

²⁷'The Context of the Concept', in *Romanticism, Modernism, Postmodernism*, ed. by Harry R. Garvin (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1980), pp. 181-93 (p. 192).

and the circular oral narrative creates a narrative drive that makes a feminist message entertaining, accessible, and readable.

Grandmother Dummer embellishes her oral feminist fairy tale for the young children by filling it with numerous intertextual references. For instance, Grandmother Dummer comments that ‘Adam and Eve *are* the real marriage. Lilith can’t be counted either: she’s the mad woman in the attic and Eve is the lovely, submissive Jane Eyre’ (119). Grandmother Dummer’s allusion to Jane Eyre refers the reader to two fictional ‘mad’ women: the biblical figure Lilith and Mrs Rochester, the ‘mad’ woman in Rochester’s attic. This brings up a number of relevant points. First, Tennant calls to mind the biblical condemnation of Lilith, a woman who was banished from Eden for demanding equality with her husband. The allusion implies that women who desire equality and power threaten the dominant order; this usually results in their untimely removal. Second, the very idea of a ‘mad woman’ calls to mind Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s text *The Mad Woman in the Attic*, a feminist analysis of nineteenth-century British women’s writing.²⁸ This reference draws attention to a female writing tradition full of suppressed anger and frustration and also to the fact that women have been writing, although unrecognized, for centuries. Finally, Grandmother Dummer’s reference to a ‘mad woman’ and to *Jane Eyre* brings to mind two diametrically opposed forms of female ‘madness’. The first wife of Mr Rochester represents literal and pathological ‘madness’; as a result, Mrs Rochester remains hidden away from society.²⁹ In contrast, Jane Eyre symbolically succumbs to ‘madness’. Even though Jane Eyre initially defies submissive female roles, she ultimately submits to conventional social norms by marrying and serving a crippled Rochester; thus Jane Eyre validates her existence as a female in an ‘acceptable’ manner.

To any student of literature, these intertextual references assert false representations of femininity; they also identify areas where women fail to achieve independence and equality. Accordingly, Tennant’s intertextuality influences the reader’s interpretation of *Sisters and Strangers*. If the reader is aware of Lilith’s story, Gilbert and Gubar’s criticism, and Brontë’s

²⁸*The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

²⁹One might wish to question, of course, the depth of Mrs Rochester’s ‘madness’, or whether she is, in fact, ‘mad’ at all.

Jane Eyre, these references become a story within the story. The intertextuality, then, reveals that women do not exist in isolation from cultural and social politics, and that women do not exist in isolation from one another.

Tennant continues to make her readers aware of the history of women's oppression through Grandmother Dummer's ambitious collection of the hardships endured by female artists. In two pages, Tennant makes one intertextual reference after another and highlights how women's achievements are often overshadowed by the less talented male brother, lover, or husband. Grandmother Dummer asks Elsie and her friend to:

Just consider the great artists, like Rodin, with his beautifully expressive -- in bronze, of course, -- mistress Camille Claudel, who spends her last thirty years locked away in an asylum, 'mad', according to her relatives -- but mad in that very sensible American use of the word, just plain angry at the terrible way the great man treated her and the world treated her work.

Think of Alice James, sister of the prolific, long-winded, bearded Henry; the turn of the screw came for her with breast cancer and the possibility of using her own mind -- for she was formidably clever and imaginative -- taken from her by the women's disease.

We've been looking at those fairy-tale pictures by Kandinsky -- my dears, his wife was a superior painter by far: her name was Gabriella Munthe, and she forfeited her entire career for Vassily.

Tell me [. . .] Tell me if you think that the Surrealist painting you admire is by a woman or a man. Ha! -- as poor Elsie, who had thought it by a man, blushes and looks to me for reassurance -- I can tell you it is by a woman, Leonora Carrington; and that she, like the other women in the Surrealist movement who happened to be women, was considered a good subject, a perfect Muse for a male painter, but definitely not to be encouraged to daub herself.

Yes, we know different now, but we are only just beginning. How long did it take the wounded, extraordinary images of Frieda Kahlo to break loose from the prison of their creator's gender? While her lover Diego Rivera went on to become Mexico's -- and Latin America's -- most famous artist? Too long, children, too many years after her tortured death (175-6).

Although this quotation is extremely long, the effect of Grandmother Dummer's revelations on the children and reader are equally devastating. Why are these 'truths' about the women's suppressed talent and the failure to achieve notoriety over the lover, the brother, or the husband so surprising or devastating here? One reason might be that Tennant makes these modern social and cultural points within the context of a traditional literary form -- the fairy tale.

Tennant juxtaposes contemporary allusions and prose with traditional modes of communication; this narrative technique permits Tennant to assert startling feminist insights into the denigrated position of modern female artists. Tennant retrospectively exposes the thwarted 'genius' of a number of female artists; for instance, the line 'the turn of the screw came for Alice James' makes a pun on the title of one of Henry James's most popular novels, *The Turn of the Screw* and comically undermines one of the 'great' literary classics. Additionally, Tennant uses frank and candid language repeatedly to offer incisive and vitriolic commentary on how women are forced to deny their own talents for the 'powerful' and 'talented' men in their own lives. Like Liz Lochhead's collection of poetry *The Grimm Sisters*, which also comically undermines traditional representations of women in society by juxtaposing contemporary insight with traditional tales, Tennant shocks her audience with surprising contrasts between women's artistic talents and potential and their subjugated reality. Grandmother Dummer's tale casually exposes how female artists suffered at the hands of dominant male figures; this clash of the fairy tale form with twentieth-century feminist knowledge uncovers how women throughout the ages are isolated, alienated, and confined to inferior roles in art, life and in fiction. Tennant's intertextuality, then, employs what Brian McHale calls 'heteroglossia', the plurality of discourses.³⁰ McHale believes that an author employs heteroglossia in postmodern fiction as an 'opening wedge, a means of breaking up the unified projected world into a polyphony of worlds of discourse'.³¹ In light of McHale's observations, Tennant's intertextuality juxtaposes a variety of artists with cultural discourses and, as such, breaks up the unified projected world of high art.

Tennant incorporates the narrative features of the fairy tale into a constructive criticism of ideological and cultural politics. As a feminist writer who engages with intertextuality, she self-consciously uses 'narrative, even narratives, intersecting with an equally self-conscious use of other genre conventions to "make visible" the socially and politically conservative discourses coded into traditional genre conventions'.³² Linda Anderson writes:

³⁰*Postmodernist Fiction* (New York/London: Methuen, 1987), p. 166.

³¹*Ibid*, p. 167.

³²Cranny-Francis, *Feminist Fiction*, p. 19.

Women inherit stories, we could say, which are powerfully oppressive; part of that oppression lies in their unitary character, their repression of alternative stories, other possibilities, hidden or secret scripts. Juxtaposing stories with other stories or opening up the potentiality for multiple stories also frees the woman writer from the coercive fictions of her culture that pass as truth. If women's texts point to other texts it is frequently with a sense of an imagined elsewhere, unacknowledged alternatives, other stories waiting silently to be told.³³

When Tennant blends traditional narrative techniques with contemporary feminist hindsight into women's roles in the social order, she imaginatively interrogates female mythology and challenges stories traditionally told to women about women. Making literal allusions to other female artists, Tennant consciously places herself in a distinct female tradition which aims to fracture and to deny mythologies or histories which revere the dominant cultural and social order by denigrating women's creative achievements. In *Sisters and Strangers*, Tennant integrates multiple narratives and comedy to dislocate and to repudiate traditional representations of female artists who remained in their male counterparts' shadows; consequently, Tennant's subversive intertextuality undermines conventional depictions of women in literature and society.

Comedy: Irony, the Grotesque, Parody, and Word Play

The fairy tale form and intertextual narrative structure in *Sisters and Strangers* invites readers to interact with the novel's characters and the characters' dilemma. One feature of oral tales is that the storyteller adds descriptive commentary which changes the tone of the tale depending on the storyteller's audience.³⁴ While there are many instances of humour throughout the novel, Tennant mainly releases comedy and comic insight in the novel through Grandmother Dummer's ironic commentary, grotesque characterizations, parody of romantic love, and ingenious word play.

Since Tennant integrates oral culture into a written tale, she commonly generates irony through Grandmother Dummer's understatement, paradox, puns, and other forms of wit in

³³*Plotting the Change: Contemporary Women's Fiction* (London: Edward Arnold, 1990), pp. vii-viii.

³⁴Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin talk about this in *The Empire Writes Back*, pp. 183-5. One might recall Angela Carter comment that the storyteller, 'the informant herself has tailored the story personally, to suit an audience of, say, children, or drunks at a wedding, or bawdy old ladies, or mourners at a wake -- or, simply, to suit herself', *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales*, p. x.

expression. What is 'irony' and how does it function in literature? M.H. Abrams tells us that in Greek comedy, 'the character called "*eiron*" was a "dissembler" who characteristically spoke in understatement and deliberately pretended to be less intelligent than he was, yet triumphed over the *alazon* -- the self-deceiving and stupid braggart'.³⁵ Modern and contemporary usage of the term irony descends from this dramatic representation. Abrams contends that in most of the diverse uses of the term irony, 'there remains the root sense of dissembling, or of hiding what is actually the case; [. . .] To achieve special rhetorical or artistic effects'.³⁶

Brian C. Lee adds to Abrams's remarks. He believes that irony is basically 'a mode of discourse for conveying meanings different from -- and usually opposite to -- the professed or ostensible ones'.³⁷ While numerous types of irony exist, situational, verbal, structural, and romantic among them, verbal irony permeates *Sisters and Strangers*. Lee insightfully concludes that verbal irony operates by tone of voice and that verbal irony usually occurs in speech:

It is possible to indicate by tone of voice, that the word 'clever' in the sentence 'He's a clever chap' is to be understood to mean 'stupid', but as this cannot be said to be any of the meanings of the word 'clever', the writer has to convey his sense obliquely. Irony is thus an art of indirection and juxtaposition, relying for its success on such techniques as understatement, paradox, puns and other forms of wit in the expression of incongruities.³⁸

As the storyteller, Grandmother Dummer maintains a privileged status which allows her to design and control Eve's story as the story of all women. Within the context of her role as an omniscient storyteller, Grandmother Dummer subjectively describes the characters in the text and frequently discusses their actions. In this way, Grandmother Dummer moulds the tale's function and usually offers ironic commentary on the position of women and men in society.

Tennant habitually achieves wit in expression by ironically playing with cultural clichés. For instance, Grandmother Dummer portrays Adam and his new wife Brigid as a 'New' couple who pursue careers and domestic occupations contrary to social norms:

³⁵M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms, Sixth Edition* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1993) p. 97.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷*A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*, p. 128.

³⁸Ibid, pp. 128-29.

Brigid is the New Woman who pursues a career while bringing up an adorable pair of tow-headed, blue-eyed children, while Adam is the New Man, photographed with one hand on a diaper and holding in the other a petition from his constituency to re-route the Chunnel under Bradford (93).

Grandmother Dummer ironically disassembles the cultural concept of the 'New Man' and 'New Woman' by presenting Brigid as a career woman and a mother, and Adam as a diaper-changer and a government minister. Tennant, through Grandmother Dummer comically undermines these utopian images of 'New' femininity and masculinity and simultaneously comments on how the British government customarily favours the South of England while overlooking Scottish interests. Grandmother Dummer's ironic wit ostensibly condemns the idea of the 'New Man' and the 'New Woman' as unattainable and false and, at the same time, attacks the hypocrisy which accompanies mere postures often associated with politicians and big businesses.

Another example of verbal irony occurs when Eve first meets Lilith. As Grandmother Dummer tells it, Eve decides to give Lilith a scoop of her special tropical mango ice-cream because maybe 'the monster is simply lonely and starved of affection; and I have so much after all' (23). Grandmother Dummer portrays Eve viewing Lilith as a 'monster' who is lonely and starved of affection. The reader may laugh at this ironic sentiment owing to the paradox Eve creates when she characterizes Lilith as a 'monster' whose loneliness will disappear with a scoop of ice-cream; in other words, the fact that Eve thinks sensual ice-cream will cure a 'monster', an imaginary beast who traditionally scares and 'eats' children, reaffirms the fictionality of the fairy tale and concurrently pokes fun at the ways in which women sometimes turn to food to ease emotional turmoil.³⁹

On another level, this scene ironically exposes how much, or how little, Eve actually possesses. While Eve clearly has access to material wealth, she does not have friends or 'love'; instead, Eve lives in isolation behind windows that have slated blinds of steel which 'fit together so tight you'd think from the outside that all the gold of Fort Knox was stored inside' (19). Tennant's irony insinuates that Adam hides Eve away in his luxurious Eden and views

³⁹To make a broad generalization, many people, especially women, turn to food to appease emotional turmoil. One image that reinforces this generalization occurs in Galloway's *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*. Ellen, Marianne's mother, always offers Joy food because she thinks food is medicine. See p. 85 of the novel.

her as another object to display in his opulent collection; hence, readers come to understand that within the confines of Adam's home, Eve does not possess much independence, self-respect, self-knowledge, or freedom. Therefore, it appears that Eve, not Lilith the 'monster', is lonely and starved of affection and represents one type of woman who revels in material goods yet fails to find release from the confines of her passive existence.

Comedy also appears in *Sisters and Strangers* through Grandmother Dummer's grotesque characterizations. Michael Hollington explains that the grotesque 'usually makes us laugh. It does so by presenting the human figure in an exaggerated and distorted way'.⁴⁰ Eve, Adam, and Lilith all undergo exaggerated character distortions which reveal the stereotypes often associated with social and cultural visions of femininity and masculinity. Tennant grotesquely characterizes the three main characters in Grandmother Dummer's story, on one level, to represent comically the different cultural constructions of femininity and masculinity imposed by the dominant order.

Originally conceived as helper and associate to Adam, and as the mother of the human race, throughout the years Eve has come to symbolize many types of woman. Tennant takes up the various qualities associated with Eve and allows Grandmother Dummer to portray Eve as a mother who 'feels guilty all the time now she is Madonna. Simply by bringing the kids into the world she has crucified them, on the cross of her appalling desire to be a person in her own right' (109). This description of Eve begs discussion because it signals two key ideas connected to biblical imagery. Grandmother Dummer's portrayal of Eve crucifying her children reminds readers how God allowed his only son to be crucified; however, a significant difference exists between God's reasoning and Tennant's fictional motives. Whereas Christian views assert that God allows his son to be crucified in order to ensure the eternal salvation of humankind, Eve, according to dominant social codes and mores, simply crucifies her children in order to fulfil her desire for independence and self-hood; thus, the bible reveals God to have a self-less motive for crucifying Jesus while Eve betrays a selfish incentive for 'crucifying' her own children. Although Eve does not literally crucify her children, Grandmother Dummer's

⁴⁰A *Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*, p. 107.

sardonic description illustrates the bitter conflict between the socialized demands of motherhood and the female desire for freedom and self-knowledge.

Grandmother Dummer reflects on another of Eve's comic metamorphoses when Eve becomes a virginal nurse. As the perfect nurse, Eve 'glides' rather than walks into hospital theatres, and 'is virgin now, inviolable, in charge of the keys to life and death. Her smile is distant, merciful' (141). Certain observations can be made about Grandmother Dummer's language in these sentences. Grandmother Dummer characterizes Eve as an inviolable virgin with a distant and merciful smile; she also paints Eve as a pure, compassionate, virtuous woman who can do no wrong. These descriptions of Eve in the role of an attentive and kind manageress of life and death represent a woman who symbolizes the pure Christian ideal of femininity and who might be called a 'paid martyr'; therefore, Grandmother Dummer's portrayal of Eve as a virtuous nurse illuminates yet another false cultural construction of womanhood.

Depicting Eve as a guilty mother who crucifies her children because she yearns for independent self-hood, and as a virginal, compassionate, and powerful nurse, Tennant critically repeats and undermines Eve's traditional representation as a 'necessary evil' who is responsible for human mortality and pain in childbirth. Tennant's flowery language and ironic characterization of Eve as the guilty and murderous mother versus the virtuous and perfect nurse comically reappraises, with critical distance, how women are expected to fill both victimizing and virtuous roles which define visibility and validity in Western culture.

Tennant also grotesquely characterizes Lilith. Biblical scholars inform us that Lilith is Adam's first wife who was banished because she demanded equality with him. Gilbert and Gubar theorize that the legend of Lilith discloses how 'myths and fairy tales often both state and enforce culture's sentences with greater accuracy than more sophisticated literary texts'.⁴¹ George MacDonald's *Lilith*, for example, presents Lilith as a threatening force who obstinately refuses to submit to goodness. This is, in one sense, a valid representation of the legend of Lilith. On the other hand, Grandmother Dummer's fairy tale of Lilith opens to view another side of womanhood because she comically depicts Lilith, like Meg in *The Bad Sister*, as a wild

⁴¹ 'The Queen's Looking Glass', in *Don't Bet on the Prince*, pp 201-208 (p. 201).

and threatening woman. Lilith, like Meg, cannot reconcile herself to limiting and limited female roles. Since the roles available to Lilith and to other women promotes divisions and disruption between a woman's desires and 'acceptable' social norms, Lilith's mind, like Meg's, psychically erupts and she too wreaks havoc and devastation.

Eve conceives of Lilith as 'an impossible monster in a fairy tale book. Two burning dark eyes. And then a great big mouth like an ogre's, that wants to come in and eat her and her house all up' (20). Grandmother Dummer illustrates Lilith's monstrous power by telling the girls that when Lilith shows 'her contempt for Eve's lies she blows the top off the casino at Monte Carlo and scatters banknotes and gold plaques right into the streets and over the sea wall into the sea' (159). Although these two images clearly expose the fear that Lilith and other strong women conceivably instill into other women and men, Grandmother Dummer embellishes the descriptions of Lilith's anger and virtually creates Lilith as an evil monster. To be sure, Lilith's character represents how women threaten the male order; nonetheless, when Grandmother Dummer establishes Lilith as a monstrous entity who lightheartedly destroys houses, trains, and mountains, and brings about severe weather conditions in a flash, she reinforces how difficult it is for women to escape from stereotypes designed by and perpetuated by biblical ideology and discursive structures.

Even Adam does not escape a grotesque characterization. At the beginning of the novel, Grandmother Dummer depicts Adam as a vivacious, generous man who, when Eve sends Lilith on a holiday, gets 'immensely horny by the discovery of the charge on his credit card' (33). Believing Eve to have a lover, Adam whistles 'to himself in astonishment; and several times, when it was completely unnecessary, he had punched the siren that had been the property of Al Capone' (33). Shortly after Adam arrives home, he pins 'Eve to the floor of the barge with unaccustomed violence. It's rape, really. Not the kind of lovemaking to which Eve is accustomed' (34). Tennant personifies Adam as a virile man who consciously or unconsciously imitates Al Capone. Al Capone is a man who conjures up images of threat, murder, intrigue, and power; in brief, Capone represents the epitome of masculinity or manhood. Tennant alludes to Al Capone and shows Adam as both astonished and excited by Eve's apparent adultery; hence, Tennant contrasts two diametrically opposed masculine

responses to Eve's infidelity. On the one hand, Tennant depicts Adam superficially excited by Eve's unfaithfulness; yet, she also hints at a deeper violence within men which may easily erupt when one man tampers with another man's objects and possessions.

Tennant undermines this 'macho' masculine image by altering Adam's physique as the story progresses. When Eve appears to gain the upper hand over Adam, he seems to dwindle in her wake. For instance, while Eve carries out her duties as a Madonna, Adam shrinks in front of this all important role. Grandmother Dummer describes his loss of stature to the young girls saying, 'he's going down, like a cheese soufflé that just didn't quite rise when taken from the oven' (125). Tennant's amusing image of Adam falling like a cheese soufflé is significant. Cooking and meal preparation are usually seen as female occupations. Tennant, however, subverts these conventional female tasks by drawing on domestic imagery to describe Adam irreverently in women's terms.⁴² One reading of the image of Adam wilting like a cheese soufflé might suggest sexual threat; to be specific, Adam's wilting may imply a general male fear of sexual wilting and impotence. Tennant irreverently jokes about the loss of male potency and insinuates that male potency signifies and allocates male power. When a man loses his sexual potency and, therefore, his power, Tennant implies that women might gain some degree of control over their psyches and their lives and thus pose a threat to patriarchal power structures.

As the novel unfolds, Adam's stature continues to diminish; in consequence, Eve 'has to be especially protective of him when the boys play -- for fear Cain decides to play an Oedipus trick, or the others simply kick him too hard' (126). This humorous construction of Adam is also significant because it too relates to power. Tennant draws on imagery connected to 'weak' men when Grandmother Dummer tells the children that Adam is so small that his own sons might kick him and that Eve must protect him. The image of Adam being kicked in the sand and protected by Eve might remind readers of comic strips where weak men on a beach have their girlfriends 'stolen' by muscular men; it is also reminiscent of advertisements in magazines where smaller men might send away for muscle development formulas.

⁴²Domestic and cookery images permeate Tennant's writing. In *The Bad Sister*, Tony psychologically oppresses Jane until she prepares their Sunday lunch; in *Faustine*, Jasmine Barr relates Muriel's tale while assembling an enormous Christmas Dinner.

Although Adam does not lose Eve to a 'strong' man, or send away for strengthening formulas, these comical images associated with male weakness subvert the traditional biblical and cultural representations of Adam as a virile and strong man.

Even though these images of Adam's powerlessness undermine his opening portrayal as a successful man, Grandmother Dummer juxtaposes this presentation by saying that Adam, 'as a man, albeit a tiny one, he was able to sit in the kafeneion all day long, nursing a cup of Turkish coffee and smoking a Greek cigarette. In these countries all the heavy work is women's work' (129). This scene insinuates that even though a man's physical and sexual stature may be threatened, more often than not, it remains permissible for a man to sit casually by and watch women work; this image sobers a female audience because it articulates that even though women may appear to possess control, this control is often an illusion.

Linda Hutcheon suggests that 'through a double process of installing and ironizing, parody signals how present representations come from past ones and what ideological consequences derive from both continuity and difference'.⁴³ Although Tennant's use of the grotesque does not necessarily signify parody, her use of the grotesque installs and ironizes how the representations of women and men derive, in part, from the biblical story of creation; hence, the novel exposes the ideological consequences which evolve from restrictive typifications of women and men and attempts to revise one-dimensional and negative images of femininity and masculinity in the phallographic order. Since Grandmother Dummer grotesquely characterizes Eve, Lilith, and Adam, Tennant refuses to privilege a dominant male or female voice; instead, she subverts the cultural discourse of 'woman' by 'overtly contesting the male gaze'.⁴⁴

In addition to grotesque characterizations of Eve, Lilith, and Adam, Tennant employs parody to comment upon consumer culture and institutionalized notions of 'true love'. In Linda Hutcheon's mind, parody in art and literature 'is a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion, [. . .] Parody is, in another formulation, repetition with

⁴³*The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 93.

⁴⁴*Ibid*, p. 156.

critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity'.⁴⁵ She goes on to say that 'parody's "target text" is always another work of art or, more generally, another form of coded discourse'.⁴⁶ Likewise, Patricia Waugh notes that parody takes:

as its starting point a previous work or genre, it inserts a metaphoric version of this into the ongoing (metonymic) literary tradition. This dislocates both past and present texts: the rearrangement of the original text or genre reveals the potential rearrangements of the present one.⁴⁷

According to Waugh, parody 'as a literary strategy, deliberately sets itself up to break norms that have become conventionalized'.⁴⁸ Tennant uses parody, then, to undermine and repeat false images of femininity promoted by popular culture and, at the same time, to break up the conventional norms which advance romanticized and sentimental images of true love.

Throughout *Sisters and Strangers*, allusions are continually made to popular consumer culture. A particularly striking allusion to consumer culture is seen in Eve's daily beauty ritual:

She was careful of her beauty, too. Eve wore night creams of almonds and day creams of powdered rhinoceros horn and she rubbed the tails of embryo sea-horses on her eyebrows so they shone and bristled like a film-star's.

Eve cleaned her teeth with ground river pearls, gathered from freshwater mussels in the river at Beaulieu where it runs beneath the romantic island fortress of Eilean Aigus.

And she washed her hair with seaweed drawn from the ocean bed on the most westerly coast of Bequia, where the voodoo magic says that it must be gathered at the crowing of the white cock.

[. . .] Eve rubbed oils of Afghan pansies and unguents made from samphire buds found on the highest cliffs of County Kerry into her pale skin.

Her nails she painted with liquid silver dust, refined at the time of the new moon in her own enchanting garden (11).

References to 'night creams of almonds', 'day creams of powdered rhinoceros horns', and 'tails of embryo sea-horses' bring to mind to exotic ingredients often linked to aphrodisiacs. When Grandmother Dummer describes Eve rubbing the tails of embryo sea-horses onto her eyebrows so that they shine like a film star's, she implies that consumer culture decrees that this glamorous look is a desirable and attainable image of femininity which will in turn accord

⁴⁵*A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (New York/London: Methuen, 1985). p. 6.

⁴⁶*Ibid*, p. 16.

⁴⁷*Metafiction*, p. 69.

⁴⁸*Ibid*, p. 65.

Eve film-star status. Additionally, references to special processes like gathering pansies ‘at the crowing of the white cock’ and refining silver dust ‘at the time of the new moon’ suggest lavish and time-consuming concoctions. The flowery words and phrases Grandmother Dummer employs to describe Eve’s daily bathing ritual suggest romance and beauty and parodies the language of advertising and the media. Tennant’s parody of Eve’s beauty ritual and the products she uses cleverly discloses how consumer advertising asks women to aspire to certain types of beauty.

Moreover, Grandmother Dummer hints that Eve’s beauty products transform her into an ornamentalized object because she rubs oil from Afghan pansies and samphire buds into her eyes as she waits ‘for the key in the door, the moment of Adam’s return from another busy day as managing director of a multimedia corporation’ (11). Waugh contends that parody ‘fuses creation with critique to replace, as one observer has remarked, what had become “a matter of course” with what now becomes “a matter of discourse”’.⁴⁹ Through Grandmother Dummer’s comic description of Eve’s exotic and time-consuming beautification rite, Tennant parodies and critiques the aims of consumer culture. In Hutcheon’s words about postmodern literature in general, Tennant uses her doubly marginalized position as a Scottish woman ‘to critique the inside from both the outside and the inside’.⁵⁰

Tennant also parodies Western culture’s notion of ‘true’ love. Grandmother Dummer describes to the children Adam’s entrance to the party which celebrates the launch of Eve’s new book:

Anyone taking one look at Adam could tell he was just made for Eve.

Their eyes met -- and melted.

They kissed; and everyone at the party applauded, and bottles of strawberry-pink champagne from the cellars of Louis XVI at Fontainebleau were opened with a series of pops like fireworks going off.

From the roof of the Dorchester a splendid firework display did now take place. Holly’s body, splendidly adorned with rockets that shot from the tits and a Catherine wheel that kept the pelvis in constant motion, like a gorgeous belly-dancer of the galaxy, danced in the darkening skies for the benefit of Frank Blake Enterprises

⁴⁹Ibid, p. 68. Waugh quotes here from Susan Stewart, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folk Lore and Literature* (Baltimore/London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1979), p. 19.

⁵⁰A *Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York/London: Routledge, 1990), p. 69.

Georgian vodka, each priceless bottle with its blade of bison grass from the entrance to the cave where the centenarians guard their secret of eternal life, was cracked open with the blade of Pushkin's sword and drunk down by the excited guests (169).

This passage reveals Tennant's parody to be in the form of stylistic mimicry. In G.D. Kiremidjian's words, parody is 'a kind of literary mimicry which retains the form or stylistic character of the primary work [. . .] The parodist proceeds by imitating as closely as possible the formal conventions of the work being parodied in matters of style, diction, metre, rhythm, vocabulary'.⁵¹ Words and situations like 'their eyes met -- and melted', 'everyone applauded', 'an abundance of strawberry-pink champagne' from Louis XVI, 'fireworks', and bottles of priceless 'Georgian vodka' clearly mimic the style of romance novels produced by Mills and Boon, as well as the myths about love perpetuated in Western culture. Likening Eve and Adam to royalty, implying that there are no expenses spared in the face of love, the fact that others can see Eve and Adam are 'made' for each other, and calling to mind myths and secrets that surround eternal life, Tennant comically parodies and subverts these unattainable glorified images of love between women and men. In no uncertain terms, Tennant's amusing parody attacks the cultural artifices which promote false ideals connected to romantic love.

Tennant's parody of romantic melodrama intensifies when Grandmother Dummer describes how the fireworks are shot from Holly Spine's 'tits' and how Holly's pelvis constantly moves in a provocative motion. Arguably funny at first glance, one must query why this image might be amusing to both men and women. Frank Blake organizes the party; thus, he objectifies a woman's body and implies that Eve's fictional heroine's femininity, female knowledge, and self-image emanate from her 'tits' and 'pelvis'. Depicting Holly and, therefore, Eve as a gorgeous belly-dancer with a pelvis in constant motion and 'tits' that literally explode, Tennant seems to mimic the stylistics of fantasy columns in pornographic magazines. Tennant's parody of romantic love critically undermines the objectifying images of femininity promoted in 'male' magazines and also critically repeats how representations of women such as the above intrinsically damage a woman's representation of self-hood; thus, Tennant's parody of true love unequivocally calls for a re-evaluation of women's

⁵¹'The Aesthetics of Parody', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 28 (1969), pp. 231-42 (p. 232).

representation in a society interested in qualifying and validating women in roles which exploit their sexuality.

In *Sisters and Strangers*, comic word play continually permeates the narrative. Word play has no fixed definition; one can, however, assign certain attributes to the idea of word play. For example, word play can simply mean playing with words in order to impart an underlying message; it also might mean using words that sound similar and yet hold disparate meaning in order to convey multiple messages. For word play to be successful, however, a reader must recognize multiple meanings in a context where all meaning can be applied.

One instance of Tennant's comic yet meaningful word play occurs when Grandmother Dummer tells the children that when Adam and Eve lived in Eden, they made love in every position 'in the book -- the Kama Sutra, if you like, or Shere Hite's latest offering' (58). Referring to ancient and contemporary sexual practices, Grandmother Dummer implies a wild and free sexuality. Even so, she refuses to affirm this implication and goes on to say:

One thing they'd never done, though.

Eve lying on top.

It had always been the missionary position (if not some of the exotic variants) and now Eve felt she was the wiser and stronger of the two -- after all, she'd given birth to twins and she had to mend their clothes and try to cook on a shared stove in the fungus-ridden hallway of the tenement -- so it was time she was the missionary and Adam the ignorant heathen.

The more Adam resisted, the harder Eve tried.

She woke in the middle of the night and found herself half-astride Adam, who even in his sleep fought her off with all his might.

Adam might be weak now, you see, but even if he lived in a cardboard crate he'd make sure he was still in the dominating position with Eve. It was only natural, after all.

Natural since the Fall, that is (58).

On first reading or hearing this passage, the audience may feel inclined to laugh at Grandmother Dummer's sardonic portrayal of Adam and Eve's sexual relationship. The reader is likely to laugh at the mental image of Eve madly wrestling to get on 'top' of Adam, a weaker man desperately fighting her off. Nonetheless, on a deeper level, this situation is not in the least funny. Tennant's play on the words 'missionary' and 'heathen' presupposes that

traditionally men -- the missionaries -- must dominate and teach women -- the heathens -- how to survive in the world. Allying the words missionary and heathen with images of men and women, Tennant exposes the absurd notion that men are the knowledgeable leaders who must instruct women, their weak and helpless counterparts. Furthermore, the words missionary and heathen intimate that Adam attempts to convert Eve to his dominant-subordinate politics; similarly, Eve's decision to be the missionary suggests that she would like to convert Adam to believing in female power.

The words missionary and heathen also highlight Tennant's interest in the Third World. At a glance, the terms missionary and heathen might bring to mind religious missionaries who choose to travel to Third World countries in order to convert native peoples to Western Christianity. Two striking examples of Tennant's interest in Third World problems occur in *Sisters and Strangers*. For example, Grandmother Dummer tells the girls how 'even the proverbial pieces of string too short to be of any use were glued together by Filipino servants in the staff quarters that Eve was never allowed to visit' (23). Additionally, Eve lies to herself because even though she is 'green', 'her money went through the hands of her stockbrokers to the mines of South Africa, to the aluminium-dense water plants in countries excessively affected by drought; to research on poor and innocent animals for the sake of the development of a drug to save the only vile dweller on the planet, man' (170). Tennant parallels Eve's struggle for sexual dominance with Third World issues; as such, Tennant's word play likens the limitations Western women experience in a male dominated culture with the exploitation individuals suffer all over the world.

Grandmother Dummer succinctly concludes her exposition of Eve and Adam's sexual relations by saying that no matter how weak Adam gets, he will still remain dominant because this is 'natural'. In relation to the bible, the word 'natural' remains ambiguous because the creation story exists as a myth to help explain human existence and mortality. Tennant's use of the word 'natural' is clearly ambiguous in the wake of Marxism and poststructuralism because these theories reveal how social institutions and relations deny that anything is 'natural' in the cultural order. Therefore, when the storyteller comments that women's subordination is

'natural' as a result of a myth, Tennant linguistically attacks the biblical and Christian conventions that repress and confine women as subjects.

The name Eve allocates to her fictional heroine, Holly Spine, reflects word play because it carries dual meaning: first, the word Holly may signify the prickly and thorny 'holly' shrub; and second, Holly's last name 'spine' directly opposes the word spineless. When Tennant, through Eve, names the fictional heroine Holly Spine, she implies that Eve's literary creation is a woman full of independence and strength. Grandmother Dummer confirms Tennant's clever joke. She describes Holly Spine as a woman who single-handedly 'triumphs in the face of male resistance' (162) and who 'stumbles on a cache of gold from the Spanish Armada and has to fight off male predators from all over the world in order to claim her rightful treasure' (162).

Holly Spine's character seems to be cleverly embodied in her name because she asserts independence and self-confidence. Even so, Holly's character, like Eve, also falters. As Eve gets lonelier and lonelier and 'will do anything to get Adam back' (164), Eve's fictional heroine reflects her creator's unhappiness and state of mind. Like Eve, Holly Spine surrenders her independence and feminism and becomes a big 'anti-abortionist' (165). Holly Spine proclaims the 'happiness of Muslim women; and she exalts the virtues of arranged marriages in general, preferably with a birth-control-free litter of children. Informed that Islam will not take her because of her brazen past, Holly joins the Roman Catholic Church' (165). With this radical change in the politics Holly Spine verbalizes, Tennant reveals in no uncertain terms how cultural norms often force women to relinquish feminism for male companionship.

Tennant's word play continues to emerge in connection with Holly Spine. At the party Eve's publisher gives to celebrate her fictional heroine's new-found submission, waiters circulate around with 'caviar cakes made in the shape of Holly's pussy and stuffed with glacé cherries' (168). At first glance, the image of caviar cakes in the shape of a 'pussy' stuffed with 'cherries' may be amusing. However, looking beyond the words' immediate 'humour', Tennant comically plays on the words 'pussy' and 'cherry' in order to expose and to condemn masculine representations of women. When the waiters carry around edible representations of the female anatomy, Tennant calls into question the ways in which some individuals view

women's anatomy and, at the same time, rejects any language which defines women as valid because their genitalia make them viable sexual objects.

Another interesting example of Tennant's witty word play that infiltrates the novel occurs in Eve's romantic fiction. After publishing several best-selling romance novels, Eve encounters a writing block. Grandmother Dummer offers the young children one reason for Eve's creative failure:

Maybe it's the lord's habit of keeping a hooded falcon on his wrist just at the most intimate moments and removing the hood at the very instant when his hot, hard and passionate lips are about to meet Eve's, in a Georgian Temple of Love in the park by the ha-ha.

Eve has had many a bodice ripped by the talons of that vicious falcon (152).

Tennant's phrase 'at the very instant when his hot, hard and passionate lips are about to meet Eve's' and the 'Georgian Temple of Love in the park by the ha-ha' again stylistically mimic the language and setting of 'pulp' romance fiction. Tennant also plays on the slang term for romance fiction by alluding to a 'bodice ripper'; as such, she reminds readers of how male characters in romance fiction often prey upon and commit acts of violence against female characters. The black comedy in this scene heightens when the vicious falcon -- whose hood is lifted off at hot, hard moments of sexual intimacy -- rips Eve's bodice. Falcons are birds of prey which attack other animals not only for pleasure but for consumption; consequently, the reader may equate the vicious falcon with male violence and infer from Tennant's word play that at times men prey upon and consume women for their own designs. Finally, the fact that the Georgian Temple of Love sits in the park next to the 'ha-ha' overtly asks readers to laugh at her word play which explicitly subverts the messages of conventional romance novels.

Tennant's comedy in *Sisters and Strangers* will not titillate every reader; nevertheless, Grandmother Dummer's ironic commentary and parody of true love expose false personifications of women and men. Likewise, Tennant's grotesque caricatures of Eve, Adam, and Lilith, as well as her ingenious word play, reveal how women and men are often stereotyped into playing out certain roles and signals imbalances between the sexes. One might conclude that Tennant employs comedy in the narrative drive to reject openly the cultural construction of women as inferior and unimaginative subjects.

Satire and Morals

Grandmother Dummer's ironic commentary from her 'lived' experience, coupled with imaginative comedy, points to satire. *Sisters and Strangers: A Moral Tale* comes across as a satirical commentary on women's positions and roles in society. Brian Lee defines satire as a genre in which an author 'attacks some object, using as his means wit or humour that is either fantastic or absurd'.⁵² Since the satirist is always conscious of the difference between what things are and what they ought to be, strategies such as the fantastic, the absurd, irony, parody, and comedy permit authors to 'exploit more fully the differences between appearance and reality and especially to expose hypocrisy'.⁵³ When authors openly attack a 'target' -- in *Sisters and Strangers*, the restrictive roles the social order allocates women -- satire operates to 'hurt' and 'wound'; clearly, satire 'always has a victim, it always criticizes'.⁵⁴

Sisters and Strangers is first and foremost a story about Eve and the identities she assumes as a result of being held responsible for the expulsion from Eden. Since women have historically accepted, and still accept, responsibility for this mythical event, the balance of equality between the sexes is uneven. Women are either reduced to maintaining roles that relinquish all responsibilities and decisions to male authority, or they collude with phallographic structures in order to achieve even an illusion of authority and independence. When women let men assume control over them, they essentially neglect responsibility for self and their own actions and consequently lose the ability to maintain autonomous and free-thinking identities. Grandmother Dummer spells out the difficulties that ensue when women relinquish responsibility for self-determination. She grimly tells the children, 'when you let other people take over things for you, you aren't real any more, and people who aren't real can't tell the truth' (21). Whenever women lose their 'realness' and can no longer tell or distinguish the 'truth', men can assume the 'truth telling' for them; subsequently, men might easily perpetuate 'truths' about women which serve male needs. If, as Grandmother Dummer speculates, men create women as the 'other', then Tennant's novel perhaps hints that 'society as we know it has a perverse need to create "the Other" as object of condemnation so that those who condemn can

⁵²Fowler, *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*, p. 214.

⁵³Arthur Pollard, *Satire* (London: Methuen, 1976), p. 3. First published (London: Methuen, 1970).

⁵⁴*Ibid*, p. 73.

judge themselves to be good'.⁵⁵ Tennant's satirical message in *Sisters and Strangers* insists that certain men create, and some women comply with these seven stereotypical 'others' for women.

What, then, is the solution to the range of stereotypes culture allots women? Since Grandmother Dummer swims out to the sea at the end of the novel, Tennant perhaps intimates that the only way to challenge prevailing ideas about feminine identity constitutes changing the 'world of men' (184), and making 'a new Eve' (184). Grandmother Dummer, whom the young children realize is 'Eve', does not find solace or peace in the conventional roles associated with womanhood. Patricia Craig comments that *Sisters and Strangers* appears to imply that 'women, from Eve on, have persisted in bursting out of the categories to which they are relegated, sometimes causing havoc in the process'.⁵⁶ However, Grandmother Dummer swims out to the sea not to burst out of another category and wreak havoc, but to escape the limitations of womanhood in culture. The ending refers the reader back to Jane's escape into the 'sea' in *The Bad Sister*, and also reminds us again of Edna Pontellier in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, a character who chooses eternal death over her living death. Judith Fryer believes:

Edna chooses to die because it is the one, the ultimate act of free will open to her through which she can elude those who would drag her down. In becoming one with the sea she is free. She has achieved a kind of rebirth. Edna Pontellier is not a tragic heroine; she is not a fairy-tale princess. She is a woman, a real woman living in a world which has no place for her.⁵⁷

Grandmother Dummer/Eve, like Edna Pontellier, is not a tragic heroine nor a fairy tale princess: she is a 'real' woman who cannot live up to masculine expectations and restrictive domestic conventions and ultimately fails to develop any sense of female achievement. Even so, Grandmother Dummer enacts a powerful end to her own story. She determines her own fate and, like Edna Pontellier, chooses the sea as her escape from a world which has no place for her.

Unlike Kate Chopin, however, Tennant implies that Grandmother Dummer/Eve does not swim to her death; rather, when Grandmother Dummer turns and waves at the girls from

⁵⁵Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, p. 60.

⁵⁶'All About Eve', *Times Literary Supplement*, 4554, 13-19 July 1990, p. 746.

⁵⁷*The Faces of Eve: Women in the Nineteenth Century American Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 257-258.

'far out to sea' (184), the image of the mermaid arises. Grandmother Dummer appears to have transmuted herself anew into the mermaid 'of Zennor that had become a siren' (184). Again, Auerbach argues that the mermaid 'is a creature of transformations and mysterious interrelations, able to kill and to regenerate but not to die, unfurling in secret her powers of mysterious, pre-Christian, prehuman dispensation'.⁵⁸ Thus, the reader gathers that when Grandmother Dummer/Eve metamorphoses into a mermaid and a siren, she becomes an emancipated feminine figure of hidden strength, power, and immortality who defies Christian conventions. Allowing Grandmother Dummer/Eve to reveal herself as a mermaid figure, Tennant proposes the plausibility of transformations, regeneration, and immortal womanhood. However, as Grandmother Dummer/Eve calls out, the only way to effect this change entails refuting existing female stereotypes and creating new ideas of female power.

The satire in *Sisters and Strangers* announces a postmodern agenda because it draws attention to and, at the same time, challenges seven female roles designed to confine and constrict women's self-hood. In an essay which discusses postmodernism, Kristeva claims that 'postmodernism is that literature which writes itself with the more or less conscious intention of expanding the signifiable and thus human realm. With this in mind, I should call this practice of writing an "experience of limits"'.⁵⁹ Tennant's translation of the oral tale into written prose can be viewed as a postmodern literary experiment because her novel expands to the signifiable human realm of understanding and poses a challenge to an 'experience' of the limits women face in society. Subtling her novel 'A Moral Tale', Tennant alludes to two things: first, she reminds the reader of morals and morality which are concepts intrinsically connected to Christianity and, in particular, to the biblical story of creation and the Fall from 'grace'; second, the word moral in and of itself might be allied with 'morality' plays. Tennant's satirical message in *Sisters and Strangers* indirectly condemns religious institutions and doctrines which blame women for human failings and mortality. More than this, though, Tennant's novel functions like a morality play.

⁵⁸ *Woman and the Demon*, p. 7.

⁵⁹ 'Postmodernism?', in *Modernism/Postmodernism*, ed. by Peter Brooker (London/New York: Longman, 1992), pp. 197-203 (p. 199). First published in *Romanticism, Modernism, Postmodernism*, pp. 136-41.

Morality plays and the 'Everyman' character traditionally refer to the Bible for subject material and moral positions. In general, morality plays and the 'Everyman' character personify vices, virtues, and the seven deadly sins in order to teach an illiterate audience. Tennant uses the word 'moral' in her title; she also permits Grandmother Dummer to tell two young girls a story that personifies Eve in seven different roles that are full of virtue and vice. In effect, Tennant allows Grandmother Dummer to depict Eve as an 'Everywoman' character; thus, Grandmother Dummer's morality story about Eve/Everywoman operates to teach the young, naive children -- the illiterate audience -- how to escape the dominant male cultural, social, and ideological conditioning which denies women's access to individual choices and self-hood.

If the reader accepts that *Sisters and Strangers: A Moral Tale*, like a morality play, attempts to educate an ignorant and illiterate audience, then the reader may take into consideration the idea that Tennant places herself in the didactic literary tradition and thereby enters an older tradition in women's writing, that of 'teaching'. Jane Spencer outlines how 'it was as a teacher that the 'respectable' woman novelist found an acknowledged place in literary discourse. Ideally, from the moralist's point of view, the novel could serve as a kind of dramatized conduct book for young women'.⁶⁰ Scottish women writers like Susan Ferrier and Mary Brunton in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were under enormous pressure to write what might be termed 'moral' tales which taught women how to 'behave' properly in society.⁶¹ To be sure, *Sisters and Strangers* does not attempt to teach women social manners or how to behave in society; rather, Tennant uses the didactic tradition subversively to expose and to condemn how women have been taught to accept and to revere peripheral and menial positions in the social order.

Tennant's moral tale, indeed her morality tale, implicitly undermines and contests existing male mythologies which encode women as passive and unresisting subjects. Since

⁶⁰*The Rise of the Woman Novelist From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 142.

⁶¹For example, see Mary Brunton's *Self-Control: A Novel* (London: Pandora Press, 1986). First published (London, 1811) and Susan Ferrier's *Marriage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971). First published (London, 1819).

she subtitles her novel 'A Moral Tale', one might contemplate that the moral of Grandmother Dummer's tale is relatively simple. As Grandmother Dummer puts it:

There are seven ways, she said. And nothing's changed since the very first woman was plucked from Adam's rib-cage. Seven ways and seven women, and you'll be all of them in your time. But you'll never love each other, unless you learn to become one (8).

Playing on the word 'one', Tennant affirms that women will have to learn to love each other to become 'unified' with each other; furthermore, when Tennant plays on the word 'one', she also hints that an alternate way for women to achieve 'love' and success means searching for 'unity' within individual selves. Grandmother Dummer's ambiguous 'moral' implies that unless women rely on each other for support, or attempt to find inner strength and peace, then women will fail to release themselves from the limiting roles and the intellectual and creative restrictions imposed by the phallogocentric order.

Tennant's revisionary myth about Eve, like Dracula's myth, is 'far more disturbing in its countercultural thrust. It is not confined to *one* individual; it tries to replace cultural life with a total, absolute otherness, a completely alternative self-sustaining system'.⁶² Grandmother Dummer's legacy to the two young girls subverts 'ageist' and patronizing versions of the grandmother figure. Instead of being confined by culture, she tells her own story and defines her own end. Tennant also portrays Grandmother Dummer as very knowing and worldly in a way that seems (post)modern because she rejects cultural standards and tells Elsie and the narrator a story that 'wasn't suitable' (13) for children and swims off into the sunset, reminiscent of the way hero(ines) ride off into the sunset. Grandmother Dummer, as a powerful older woman, reveals Tennant's interest in the older woman as a wise transmitter of women and women's tradition.

Satirical Comedy and Audience

In an enlightening study of the comic, Christine Brooke-Rose argues that the 'comic spirit is perhaps the only successful weapon in any struggle for equality, far more efficient than

⁶²Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, p. 60. Please note that in this section of her book, Jackson talks about how fantastic myths like Frankenstein, Faust, and Dracula subvert 'reality'. She does not discuss Tennant; however her ideas about how myths contest 'reality' and posit 'otherness' as an alternative to the dominant discursive order are, I believe, relevant to my argument.

complaint, aggression or segregation, and one, moreover, that men are far more afraid of'.⁶³ She goes on to say that 'because humour is such an efficient weapon, and feared by men, [. . .] It had to be either evaded by women or used very covertly' (269). The comedy in *Sisters and Strangers* is neither evasive nor covert; rather, Tennant openly attacks the stereotypes, roles, and lowly positions women are allocated in culture. She exposes repression and shows how society often forces women to collude in their own oppression. Brooke-Rose also suggests that 'good humour is nearly always ill wit, at someone's expense even if it is one's own' (269). Tennant's satirical novel necessarily employs ill wit to attack phallogocentric structures; consequently, some individuals, particularly men in power, may see parts of themselves in the characters of the novel, and feel angry and alienated by Grandmother Dummer's comic female voice.

Tennant's title, *Sisters and Strangers: A Moral Tale*, also raises questions connected to audience; in other words, whose morality does Tennant target, and how effective is her moral tale in changing dominant attitudes? Pollard believes that the essence of a successful satire is 'to get your victims "hopping mad" and your audience "laughing their heads off"'.⁶⁴ While many women may find Tennant's tale hysterically funny, some men may take offence at the ways in which Tennant reveals the imbalances between the sexes.

Tennant does not play lightly with words or plot. Her grotesque and often comic seven representations of Eve, like the seven deadly sins, sharply criticizes the traditional roles and stereotypes available to women. The satirical tale openly condemns male dominance and 'authority' and overtly challenges social structures which limit female 'options'; in particular, Tennant undermines those institutions which deem that women 'have actually had to pretend they were stupid, to get by' (175). Eve struggles from one male defined stereotype in the tale to another, and cannot find satisfaction or achievement in any role assigned to her by men. As Grandmother Dummer tells it, Eve knows that 'if a woman isn't one type in the eyes of men, then she must be another' (183). Tennant does not disguise her target: she openly aims her satire at male dominated ideological and discursive institutions which work to confine women

⁶³*Stories, theories and things* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 268. The next two references are from this edition.

⁶⁴*Satire*, p. 12.

as one-dimensional, passive female subjects. Tennant acts as a moral guardian by writing a novel that caters to a female audience; her characters' attitudes and actions implicitly condemn the male constructs which encode women as inferior subjects. Brooke-Rose asserts that in 'audience reception, comic situations are sexually determined: women do not spontaneously laugh at jokes about women drivers or at sex-jokes except when trying to imitate and join males'.⁶⁵ Women laugh in response to Grandmother Dummer's story not to join in with males, but because the comic situation in *Sisters and Strangers* is sexually determined. Tennant's satire, parody, irony, and ingenious word play persuade women to laugh because she represents, in fictional form, the various ways women collude in their own oppression by attempting to please men alongside the efforts women will go to in order to escape from these confining stereotypes and roles.

One issue that arises in relation to Tennant's satire is the implicit anger which emerges from Grandmother Dummer's commentary within the text.⁶⁶ Virginia Woolf once criticized the conspicuous 'anger' evident in George Eliot's and Charlotte Brontë's writing:

In *Middlemarch* and in *Jane Eyre* we are conscious not merely of the writer's character, as we are conscious of the character of Charles Dickens, but we are conscious of a woman's presence -- of someone resenting the treatment of her sex and pleading for its rights. This brings into women's writing an element which is entirely absent from a man's, unless, indeed, he happens to be a working-man, a Negro, or one who for some other reason is conscious of disability. It introduces a distortion and is frequently the cause of weakness. The desire to plead some personal cause or to make a character the mouthpiece of some personal discontent or grievance always has a distressing effect.⁶⁷

Woolf also praises Jane Austen and Emily Brontë for 'their power to ignore such claims and solicitations and to hold on their way unperturbed by scorn or censure. But it needed a very serene or a very powerful mind to resist the temptation to anger'.⁶⁸ Woolf chastises Eliot and Charlotte Brontë for voicing their anger at women's abject status in Victorian society while celebrating Austen and Emily Brontë's power to withhold discontent. Do Woolf's sentiments have a place in contemporary society? Tennant's feminist revision of *The Book of Genesis* announces the postmodern literary enterprise. In Kristeva's words, 'postmodern writing

⁶⁵*Stories, theories, and things*, p. 269.

⁶⁶It is interesting to note that many of Tennant's novels assert implicit female anger, *The Bad Sister*, *Sisters and Strangers*, and *Faustine* among them.

⁶⁷*Women & Writing*, p. 47.

⁶⁸*Ibid*, p. 48.

rediscovers *lyricism* (an admission of the subject's ecstasy -- *jouissance*) as well as *epic breadth* (a rhetorical procedure of historic totalisation).⁶⁹ If, as Kristeva argues, postmodern writing rediscovers lyricism and epic breadth through ecstasy and historic totalisation, then it seems possible that Tennant consciously or unconsciously rediscovers the possibility for lyricism and ecstasy in implicit anger which sometimes emerges in her postmodern feminist novels. One might conclude that Tennant's implicit and explicit anger purposefully distorts and disrupts the existing position of women in culture, and that she incorporates anger into her writing in an attempt to liberate women from powerless positions in culture.

Tennant's satire also invites women to identify with Eve's predicament. She underlines this invitation by designing an 'internal' audience alongside an 'external' audience. Specifically, as the tale progresses, the two young girls reflect on Eve's tale and offer commentary on Eve's thoughts and exploits. More important, however, the internal audience's views about Eve and the state of women change as Grandmother Dummer embellishes her tale. This undoubtedly affects the external audience's reception of Eve's story because as the reader witnesses the young girls attitudes evolve, so too may the reader's own ideas about woman's status in culture also alter.

When Grandmother Dummer begins to tell her tale, the narrator and her friend Elsie dress up as princesses, and play with a frog in their 'palace and prayed for the morning when he would turn into a handsome young man' (7-8). The girls appear to 'buy into' the version of reality promulgated by fairy tales -- that women passively wait for, and are rescued by, handsome, wealthy young princes. The girls believe that Eve's story has no relevance to their own lives; they understand themselves to be autonomous individuals free from the chains which shackle Eve. The two young girls even decide 'never to let ourselves become like Eve. I knew Elsie wanted to be an airline pilot. And -- because I loved the sea -- I was going to be a deep-sea diver' (57). Elsie and the narrator obviously listen to Grandmother Dummer's tale and learn in some sense how women's career choices are habitually limited. When Elsie decides to become an airline pilot, she articulates a desire to enter a traditionally male domain which necessitates qualities that are customarily associated with men; that is, control,

⁶⁹'Postmodernism?', p. 202.

rationality, reason, intelligence, and the responsibility for others. Likewise, the narrator voices a desire to be a deep-sea diver. This occupation is also traditionally connected to adventure, danger, exploration, and excitement, qualities which are normally alien to female roles. Cixous points out that 'flying is woman's gesture [. . .] For centuries we've been able to possess anything only by flying; we've lived in flight, stealing away, finding, when desired, narrow passageways, hidden crossovers'.⁷⁰ Elsie and the narrator confidently establish career choices which deny any fear of flying/diving which gives them access to open realms which extol fluidity and intimate freedom from prevailing social and ideological norms.

Although the girls claim to live in isolation from cultural constructs, as Grandmother Dummer describes Eve's movement from one male dominant female role to another, the girls, along with the reader, clearly begin to understand that they are controlled by forces outside their own; that in fact, the girls, like Eve, only have access to roles which are defined for them by social and cultural constructs. However, the children, like readers, may also consciously decide to change their own fate by educating themselves and challenging patriarchal power institutions.

The motivation behind Tennant's and Grandmother Dummer's story is the notion that 'life's not all fairy stories' (8). Drawn into the oral and personal text, the reader easily identifies with the children's dream 'of being at one of the great universities, in our mortarboards and gowns; and discovering a new Shakespeare play or learning how to decipher the code of the meaning of the universe' (179). Grandmother Dummer's tale about Eve as the story of all women, teaches the internal audience to distance themselves from fairy tales and roles which deny feminine achievement or endorse female collusion with oppressive stereotypes and constructs. The effect on the external audience is similar: listening to/reading Grandmother Dummer's tale, one realizes that change and escape from conventional women's stories, women's lies, and women's roles is the only practical means to effect and to attain an emancipated and positive future.

⁷⁰'The Laugh of the Medusa', pp. 343-44.

Female Competition and 'Feminine Antifeminism'

One important issue that Tennant tackles alongside female stereotypes is the competition that frequently develops between women who comply with the roles and behaviours promulgated by the dominant male order. Grandmother Dummer begins Eve's story with the words:

There once was a woman who was so ridiculously happy that she hardly dared to go out into the world.

She had found love, you see.

And she knew that all the sad, bitter women out there would stab her with their glances of envy and reproach.

If she went to a supermarket, she would be handed an apple that was red one side and green the other, and as she bit into it she would die.

If she went to a party -- and she had to sometimes, because of her husband's work -- her dress would turn to tatters at midnight and the car on the way home would lose its wheels and roll as helpless as a pumpkin to certain death.

And if she had a best woman friend (God forbid!), that friend would seize a wand from the *batterie de cuisine* that Eve kept so gleaming in her brand-new kitchen and turn her into a little mouse or a shrew.

So Eve was very careful (10).

Tennant immediately sets the scene for jealousy and envy between women in this passage. She makes references to fairy tales like Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty which focus on the competition between women for beauty, handsome princes, and material wealth. The phrase, 'if she went to a party -- and she had to sometimes, because of her husband's work' intimates that Eve does not have female friends and that she does not go out alone; instead, Eve only enters mainstream society when her 'husband' needs a partner at a work party. Tennant's word choice ironically reveals how men encourage women to aspire to certain images of femininity and womanhood which at times lead women to envy each other's physical characteristics and to fear contact with one another. In this way, Tennant openly challenges the ways in which women are taught to hate and fear one another, and to compete for male attention.

Tennant exposes a different kind of competition between women after Eve leaves her role as a Harlot and has a coffee with Sally in a restaurant. Eve notices that she receives 'glances such as she had never in her life received before' (84), and that 'the other women

didn't like her -- or Sally -- one little bit' (85). Soon after Eve and Sally set themselves up in their own business, Eve finds herself 'having to clean up the flat and fix the meals and make the appointments for gentleman callers' (88), and is 'soon taken to be the maid by clients when they came' (89). Grandmother Dummer explains this imbalance to the girls thus: 'there is no such thing as a perfectly balanced partnership; and Sally is beginning to get the upper hand' (87). These scenes reveal that Tennant, like Fay Weldon, shows her female characters competing with and controlling one another which demonstrates how easily women reproduce dominant patterns.⁷¹ Having lived for centuries as subordinate individuals, women commonly internalize cyclical patterns of domination and subordination; in consequence, when some women begin to gain some type of power, they at times perpetuate inequality toward their 'sisters'. When the balance of equality in Eve's and Sally's relationship begins to change, each woman begins to fear the other's success.

Tennant continually alludes to this type of competition between women throughout the narrative. For instance, she shows Adam frequently leaving Eve to go off with other women who do not consider Eve's needs. She depicts Sally as a 'competitive type' (117) who angrily questions why Eve lands 'this husband and this home and be the proud mother of all these kids when all Sally has is the spare room that the central heating doesn't quite reach' (117). Sally also reacts in a traditional feminine manner; rather than be happy for Eve's love and companionship, she resents Eve's relationship and carries out her revenge on Eve by going off with Adam.

Mary Daly calls this side-effect of feminine complicity '*feminine antifeminism*'.⁷² She goes on to say that even though part of the antifeminist woman identifies with the power structure, feminine antifeminism rarely takes the form of physical violence; instead, the antifeminist woman looks down upon a woman who threatens that structure and perceives it as a threat to self. In other words, the antifeminist woman expresses disapproval and hostility towards women by discouraging other women from achievement in the male power structure

⁷¹See, for instance, Weldon's novel *The Life and Loves of a She Devil* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1983) and *Puffball* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1980).

⁷²Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, p. 52.

when she achieves success for herself.⁷³ For Grandmother Dummer, the 'only way of lessening the avid competition' (178) between women appears to be that women should marry one another instead of men. This marriage between women acts as a metaphor for love and friendship between women which originates in the beginning of the novel when Grandmother Dummer suggests to Elise and the narrator that they will never love one another unless they become 'one' (8). One might conclude, then, that Tennant proffers the marriage of women, femininity, and womanhood as the way to challenge and to refute the 'divide-and-rule policy which men have implemented so successfully down the centuries' (179).

Sisters and Strangers: A Fairy Tale Devoted to the 'Reality' Principle

Tennant's fairy tale about Eve and the female roles she adopts attempts to reconstruct traditional versions of tales where the heroine and hero live 'happily-ever-after'. Karen E. Rowe argues that fairy tales are innocuous fantasies. For Rowe, fairy tales:

symbolically portray basic human problems and appropriate social prescriptions. These tales which glorify passivity, dependency, and self-sacrifice as a heroine's cardinal virtues suggest that culture's very survival depends upon a woman's acceptance of roles which relegate her to motherhood and domesticity.⁷⁴

Tennant's tale tries to revise this precept. Grandmother Dummer portrays Eve struggling to reconcile herself to subservience and domesticity. In the end, the roles offered to Eve fail to endorse positivity and plurality; therefore, Grandmother Dummer/Eve swims away from inaccurate and unacceptable roles for women in society. In this sense, Eve represents a heroine who is an alternative in Lee R. Edwards' words:

to the more limited archetypes of angel, witch, hag, and madwoman [. . .] The hero provides a contrasting model: one that confronts and opposes institutions as they are and seeks to force society to honor this opposition, recognize its faults, and alter its structures. The hero is a figure who, at least *in potentia*, might oppose that most embracing of all cultural institutions, patriarchy itself.⁷⁵

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴'Feminism and Fairy Tales', in *Don't Bet on the Prince*, pp. 209-26 (p. 210).

⁷⁵*Psyche As Hero: Female Heroism and Fictional Form* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), p. 14. Edwards does not refer to Eve or to Tennant's novel, but her ideas on heroism shed light on my argument. Moreover, although Edwards uses the term 'hero' for men and women, I employ heroine because I find 'hero' too limiting a gender construction.

Since Grandmother Dummer powerfully transmutes herself into a mermaid who escapes patriarchy, she symbolizes Edwards' alternative to traditional female stereotypes. To this end, Tennant's radical appropriation of the fairy tale format, and her imaginative use of parody and satire exposes 'women's lies'. In particular, Tennant targets those lies which girls are brought up on, the ones which Grandmother Dummer claims 'will go on until the day you die, unless you really take care to identify a lie when you hear one' (134). Deconstructing and reconstructing conventional notions of femininity and femaleness, Grandmother Dummer refuses to allow the children to 'believe in the Cinderella story as if it were the gospel truth' (136). Her story and subsequent departure forces the girls to understand that 'there is such a thing as happiness, [. . .] But it never comes through lies' (137).

When Tennant, through Grandmother Dummer/Eve queries ideas of 'women's lies' she interrogates the very nature of 'truth'. In *Sisters and Strangers*, as in *The Bad Sister* and *Faustine*, Tennant asks whose 'truth' women believe in. This search for 'truth' seems to be a common theme in Tennant's writing; her novels often question existing definitions of 'truth' and asks whether or not general human 'truths' exist at all. In this manner, Tennant, like Hogg, queries how individuals can claim certainty. Even though general human 'truths' and certainty are often ambiguous or indefinable, Tennant, like Hogg, may comment upon issues connected to 'truth'. In other words, Tennant may stress that above all, women have 'in fact little choice when it comes to the category in which men place her' (139), because 'her circumstances dictate it -- or she's been told so many lies when she was a child that she can't tell the truth from fantasy; and she finds herself pigeon-holed once again' (139).

Sisters and Strangers: A Moral Tale satirically interrogates and revises the traditional ways men perpetuate romantic 'lies' for and about women. In a review of the novel, Douglas Gifford states:

Never has fairy-tale been so fiercely parodied; and to my mind successfully so, so that this is for me the finest modern statement of the marriage-love-freedom predicament I've read. If it fails, it's because Tennant is just too ambitious. She wants all varieties of love and marital situation to be enclosed by her fable, and all this simultaneously going with the fairy-tale/modernity interaction. To achieve this, the novel has to strain its reality

so that earlier modes of almost-realism give way to wild exaggeration and distortion, physical and moral.⁷⁶

Tennant's novel wants the world to be enclosed in her 'fable' and, therefore, necessarily strains 'reality'. Even though Gifford appears to criticize Tennant's 'wild exaggeration' and 'distortion', the fact remains that Tennant's text allies itself with fairy tale and parody; accordingly, the novel necessarily contests 'realism'. *Sisters and Strangers* is a fairy tale about women that openly traverses the boundaries of realism; in this way, Tennant offers women the means to recognize and to alter the confining roles and representations men promote which encode women as passive subjects.

Emma Tennant is not alone in this re-visioning enterprise. Angela Carter, among others, also shows interest in rediscovering, rewriting, and revising male dominated fairy tales for a female audience.⁷⁷ These contemporary women writers use the fairy tale format to unravel the dilemma associated with womanhood in a society devised and ruled by male structures; they create 'new' fairy tales which posit alternatives to submission and passivity. While there is some truth to Marcia Lieberman's belief that fairy tales 'serve to acculturate women to traditional social roles',⁷⁸ when women writers appropriate and revise fairy tales for the purpose of liberating women from limiting roles, this feminist enterprise exposes the falsity of female stereotypes and poses a strong resistance to the imbalances that exist within the cultural and literary order.

⁷⁶'Trapped Out of His Time', *Books in Scotland*, 36 (Winter 1991), pp. 6-13 (p.12).

⁷⁷See for example, Liz Lochhead's *The Grimm Sisters* and Angela Carter's *Black Venus* for interesting re-revisions of female mythology.

⁷⁸"'Some Day My Prince Will Come': Female Acculturation Through the Fairy Tale', in *Don't Bet on the Prince: Contemporary Feminist Fairy Tales in North America and England*, ed. by Jack Zipes (Aldershot: Gower Publishing Company, 1986), pp. 185-200, (p. 185).

Chapter Four *Emma Tennant: Faustine*

Re-vision -- the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction -- is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves.

--Adrienne Rich

Chapter Four, like Chapter Three, continues to examine Tennant's interest in revisioning male texts from a female perspective. This chapter concentrates on Tennant's commitment to challenging traditional narrative form in literature. *Faustine* also explores reasons why women have limited access to culture and society; however, whereas in *The Bad Sister* and *Sisters and Strangers* the female protagonists are confined by nature of their gender, in *Faustine*, the protagonist suffers dual marginalization as a result of her gender and her middle-age. Tennant explores the relationship between 'colonies'; one female character struggles with identity problems relating to growing up in Australia, a nation colonized by Britain. The colonial context adds to and perhaps parallels the identity problems often faced by women. Like *Sisters and Strangers*, orality and intertextuality permeate *Faustine*; as a result, the reader struggles to piece together four different and ambiguous versions of Faustine's tale while reading the novel as another intertext or subtext of women's experience in literature and the larger world.

Faust and Faustine: The Literary Connection

Tennant continues to redefine traditional male myths in *Faustine*. Like her revision of Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* in *The Bad Sister*, *The Book of Genesis* in *Sisters and Strangers: A Moral Tale*, Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* in *Two Women of London: The Strange Case of Ms Jekyll and Mrs Hyde*, Golding's *Lord of the Flies* in *Queen of Stones*, Tennant revamps the myth of Georg Johann Heinrich Faust in *Faustine*. Tennant's decision to retell the Faust myth from a female perspective is significant because the Faust myth originally existed in the shape of an oral tale as opposed to a written story.

J.W. Smeed comments on the oral nature of the Faust myth. He describes how the Faust myth began its life as an oral tale which warned individuals against dabbling with magic acquired through an association with the devil. Smeed goes on to argue that since the Faust myth/legend passed from mouth to mouth, the tale naturally changed in the process; in other words, rumour about Faust's life gradually overtook 'fact'.¹ Smeed also theorizes that during the oral transmission of the tale, the 'scraps of fact' about Faust's life were 'quickly hidden under a mass of legend':

The familiar in the guise of a dog, the magical banquets and flights through the air, the conjuration of Homeric characters for the benefit of students, the wine made to flow from holes in a table -- all these motifs became attached to the figure of Faust and were bandied about during the 1560s and 1570s. Even before his history came to be printed for the first time in 1587, Faust had become something resembling a character in fiction (2).

Smeed emphasizes the fictionality of the historical Faust while noting that different verbal renditions of the Faust myth appeared over time; moreover, as literary history tells us, written versions of Faust's life ultimately replaced the oral transference of the tale. It comes as no surprise, then, that literary versions of the tale continue to fictionalize and to mythologize Faust's alleged actions which further disengage the Faust myth from any semblance of reality.

Since the Faust myth directly descends from oral history and language, it retains features of the oral tradition. This includes oral transmission -- either from memory or imagination -- of the woes and the murder of Faust after s/he sells his soul to the devil for twenty-four years of unlimited and uninhibited exploration of knowledge. Tennant's version of the Faust myth also emphasizes orality; it reveals the oral dimension of the legend and highlights the myth-making process. The novel presents four different storytellers who tell four different stories about Muriel/Lisa Crane/Faustine; thus, each story teller delivers an oral rendition of Muriel's life.

Since oral tales commonly metamorphose and change each time the storyteller engages with a different audience, one might conclude that Tennant's tale about Faustine,

¹*Faust in Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 2. The next two references are from this edition.

like the numerous versions of Faust's life, might also appear to be hidden under legend. When Tennant transforms the conventional male Faust myth into *Faustine*, a myth about femininity and womanhood, she experiments with the oral tradition in prose form; in effect, Tennant again shows how written culture frequently feeds off oral culture and, at the same time, offers a new perspective on female subjectivity in Western culture.

In literature, the moral of Faust's fable implies that to negotiate with the devil brings death and damnation; however, as the years pass, to 'damn' Faust to 'hell' becomes less meaningful because fewer and fewer people believe in hell and damnation. Consequently, most nineteenth and twentieth-century literary works which despatch Faust to hell do not imply damnation in the literal sense; instead, authors use the Faust motif symbolically to suggest that Faust is in some way 'doomed' (10). The doom inherent in the myth encourages exploration of subjects related to the desire for knowledge; thus, in a highly original fashion, Tennant uses the Faust legend to investigate the social and cultural forces which both restrict and formulate women's subjectivity in society, as well as those cultural structures that place women in restrictive and repressive constructs.

Nancy Kaiser argues that in the Western world, the 'system of cultural meanings is directly implicated in the tangled history of subjectivity, in the constitution of a dominant masculine subject, with its claim to universality, and the subjugation of nature, of the feminine, and of women in the process'.² Accordingly, many women suffer as they attempt to come to terms with dominant social definitions of 'knowledge', 'power', 'youth', 'beauty', and 'wealth'. In the process of understanding this ambiguous and often inaccessible terminology there comes, as Belsey puts it, 'times of crisis in the social formation, when the mode of production is radically threatened, for instance, or in transition, confidence in the ideology of subjectivity is eroded'.³ Although the definition of crisis is open to discussion, one example of a 'crisis' in the social formation occurs when women question their position in the social strata. When women readily question their roles and position in society, male

²'Faust/Faustine in the 19th Century: Man's Myth, Women's Places', in *Our Faust? Roots and Ramifications of a Modern German Myth*, ed. by Reinhold Grimm and Jost Hermand (London/Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), pp. 65-81 (p. 65).

³*Critical Practice*, p. 86.

dominance of cultural institutions necessarily begins to be 'radically threatened'. In Belsey's words, social/cultural/political conflict is readily apparent in 'modern literature in some experimental forms';⁴ thus, literature becomes an arena for women to challenge imbalanced discursive and ideological institutions.

Tennant devises a predominately oral narrative to reconstruct the story of Muriel/Lisa Crane/Faustine, a middle-aged woman who in the late 1960s sells her soul to the devil in a TV shop so that she may regain twenty-four years of youth and unsurpassed beauty. This exchange inevitably lends Muriel/Lisa Crane/Faustine access to unlimited power and wealth in the dominant social order. Even though Kaiser concludes that 'there is a cultural injunction which discourages women's appropriation of Faust',⁵ Tennant defies this cultural injunction and takes advantage of the fact that the Faust myth has been subject to constant reappraisal and redefinition over time. The constant redefinition, both orally and in the written word, enables Tennant to play with form and meaning and in so doing, to examine the social construction of femininity.

As the novel/tale progresses, Tennant revises and remakes the Faust myth for and about women. She launches an inquiry into the nature of women in society and the consumer pressures on women to maintain youth, thus validity, at all costs. She looks at the roles women are allocated according to age and at the pressures consumer industries use to reinforce a woman's 'need' to remain young; this thematic enterprise brings her readers to a greater awareness of the larger issue of being a Western woman in the world. Tennant further explicates the differences existing between women suffering middle-age in the Western world as opposed to women suffering exploitation and early death in Third World nations. *Faustine*, like *The Bad Sister* and *Sisters and Strangers*, explodes traditional literary formats; Tennant again experiments with multiple narratives, dialogue, language, and textual ambiguity and she calls for a reassessment of conventional literary structures and meanings.

Tennant re-presents the Faust myth in a twentieth-century feminist context; in the process, her novel attempts to re-vision and 'to expose and dismantle an epistemology based

⁴Ibid.

⁵'Faust/Faustine', p. 65.

on the construction of a sovereign subject -- man'.⁶ Although *Faustine* has received favourable commentary in Great Britain, in the United States, the novel:

has been rejected by publishers for being politically incorrect. 'Many believe that no woman in America should do anything other than pursue the aim of being as youthful as possible at all times. It is shocking to suggest it might be a strain, that they might not want to'.⁷

Tennant shows a contradiction to exist between careers and domesticity for her characters in the early 1990s, as well as in the mid 1960s, and therefore imparts a powerful critique of dominant social policies that condemn career women who are interested in feminist politics in Western culture. Since the novel discloses that women must either remain passive and inarticulate subjects as wives and mothers it appears that in the United States, at least, those women writers like Tennant who challenge patriarchal power structures in literature still suffer the consequences of a silent literary voice.

Age, Sexuality, Female Roles, and the Collusion with Male Power

Throughout her entire fictional oeuvre, Tennant displays a keen interest in women's issues and concerns which include the 'accepted' roles women are allocated according to their age in society. Tennant's female protagonists are often represented in roles that are subject to exaggeration and caricature in literature. This mode of characterization serves to highlight how phallographic ideological structures limit women's access to careers and self-hood and discloses how women are culturally constructed and expected to fill certain roles. What's more, Tennant's female characters periodically reveal how some women respond to social pressures by colluding with male assigned roles. For example, Eve's daily beauty ritual and her subsequent emphasis on physical appearance in *Sisters and Strangers*, as well as Muriel's/Lisa Crane's status as a sex symbol, show that women are not wholly victims; instead, as Tennant sometimes puts forward, Western women often respond to the constraints

⁶Gayle Green and Coppelia Kahn, 'Feminist Scholarship and the Social Construction of Woman', in *Making A Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. by Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn (London/New York: Methuen, 1985), pp. 1-36 (p. 26). Please note Greene and Kahn do not mention Tennant; rather, they discuss how deconstruction functions to dismantle the dominant male order. However, I argue that Tennant's postmodern experimental literature also aims to dismantle the sovereign male subject; thus, I include Greene's and Kahn's comments here.

⁷Nicci Gerrard, 'Faustine sells her own soul', *Observer Sunday*, 23 February 1992, p. 60.

imposed on their intellect and creativity by fulfilling culturally idealized forms of femininity or by preying upon other women.

Age and sexuality can be contentious issues. Social and cultural debates sometimes rage on the moral and legal age for children and teenagers to engage in sexual activities; likewise, debates often take place on lawful ages for childbearing and marriage. While these debates on sexuality usually concern young adults, similar sanctions and taboos connected to age and sexuality exist for adults, but especially for older women.

Tennant explores the contradictions which exist in social attitudes towards age and 'acceptable' sexual behaviour through Anna and Muriel. After Muriel regains her youth, she proceeds to 'steal' Anna's lover Harry. Tennant creates a struggle between Anna and Muriel by portraying Anna not so much angry that Muriel seduces her lover; rather, Anna deeply resents her mother's recovered youth. Anna describes her trauma to Ella:

After the first shock of your grandmother's transformation -- into a woman, to put it brutally, with a future, when what was expected of her and her contemporaries was the acceptance that nothing lay ahead but memories of the past -- I argued with myself that she had every right to continue enjoying her life. Rather, she had every right to improve the quality of her life after middle age.

After all, women were programmed by nature to become grandmothers as soon as their own childbearing years were finished, and for many, after a life sacrificed to continual pregnancy, childbearing or miscarriage, this enforced old age came as a well-earned rest -- a relief after the struggles that had gone before.⁸

Anna's words repeat the rhetoric of popular culture. Her sentiments concerning women and childbirth expose how women are conditioned by society to expect invisibility and non-existence after a certain age. This scene suggests that cultural conditioning decrees that Muriel has had her youth and must move on to occupy the traditional female roles associated with caretaking and domesticity; as a result, Anna cannot conceive of her mother as warranting anything other than an obscure and dim future.

Anna not only resents her newly transformed mother's youthful age and visage, but she also finds it difficult to accept Muriel's 'retrieved sexuality'. In Jasmine's words:

⁸*Faustine* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 114. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

She told me, you know, years later, poor Anna, that she couldn't handle the fact of Muriel's retrieved sexuality at all, at the time. She knew how grateful she was to her mother for all the love and help she'd given her in the past -- with you, of course, too -- and yet as soon as 'Ma came back from that health farm', as she put it, she could only see her as a deadly rival. And that made Anna very upset, of course. It ruined all her theories of female solidarity, and sisterhood, and the like. Jealous of her own mother (98).

When Muriel regains her youth, she also regains a potent sexuality; this vibrant sexuality and sex symbol status, according to cultural conventions and sanctions, alienates her from her aging daughter Anna. In no uncertain terms, Muriel's return to youth creates a competition between women, between 'sisters' who should not be 'strangers'.⁹ Tennant shows how Muriel's age affects the social acceptance of her sexuality which subsequently discloses how culture commonly manipulates the cultural values and mores which prevent aging women from achieving employment, sexuality, and intimate relationships. Tennant's detailed descriptions of Muriel's decision to seduce her daughter's lover again exposes how some women collude with cultural constructs in order to attain a visible and valid position in society; even so, as Tennant's characterization also shows us, the feminine desire to gain social approval often results in competition and antagonism between women.

The fact that Anna resents Muriel's new-found youth calls to mind 'ageism'. Ageism appears to be reaching notoriety in the early 1990s. Geraldine Bedell comments in an article entitled 'Is it time for the cult of youth to grow up?' that at 'some point in your life you will find that people start to characterise you by one single dismissive criterion. Your age. Your abilities won't matter. Years of experience will count for nothing. Your achievements won't matter. Your personality won't matter'.¹⁰ Why does this marginalization of middle-aged individuals appear to be a Western phenomenon? As Peter Naylor sees it, 'age is a crap criterion to use' in limiting access to careers and offices of 'power' (7). He believes that 'our current obsession with [age] is a legacy of the Sixties' (7). Tennant unwittingly appears to concur with Naylor's hypothesis; she portrays Muriel facing ageism in the mid 1960s which

⁹*Sisters and Strangers*, p. 139. To those readers familiar with Tennant's writing, the implicit reference to *Sisters and Strangers* and the competition that sometimes arises between women on one level serves as an 'in-joke'.

¹⁰*Independent on Sunday*, 17 January 1993, p. 7. The next two references are from this article.

limits Muriel's access to goals and roles outside of those which society deems 'acceptable' for middle-aged women, such as a caretaker of children or a venerator of youth culture.

While it is true that ageism limits men and women in career structures, the dual marginalization of aging and being female makes it more difficult for women to remain visible in a cultural context. Since middle-age alienates Muriel from the renewed interest in feminist activities and the pursuit of a corporate identity, she only finds access to a career which venerates youth culture. Muriel works as a copy-writer on a woman's magazine writing 'sentences that describe the glossy models in the fashion pages, and their lovely clothes' (42) and concocts lies to 'persuade women to spend their money, and to lure men into buying clothes and jewels for the women' (42-3). While Muriel's ex-husband Bert stays young by 'hitching up with and dropping women as fast as he can' (46) in spite of his age, Muriel remains 'quite unnoticed' (136) at office parties, as the 'pretty models and the lascivious men helped each other to the cornucopia of exchanged favours on offer' (136). Similarly, while Anna and her lover Harry are free to go dancing and dining, they 'make a scapegoat of Muriel' (87), because in Jasmine's words, 'when she was there she was in the way, like mothers-in-law are conventionally meant to be. When she was out, she was no good to them because she wasn't there to look after you, so they could go out' (87). Moreover, Muriel carries on with 'the lion's share of the household chores' (67) because 'isn't that what mothers are for?' (67). Anna and Bert may engage in any activity that they wish; still, Muriel's sex and age define her in domestic roles. Presenting her characters in such opposing roles, Tennant decries the plight of women entering the 'no woman's land of old age' (99) and calls for a revision of the discursive institutions which advocate women's inferiority both in youth and in middle-age.

Jasmine's age, like Muriel's, also confines her to restrictive caretaking and domestic roles; to be specific, Jasmine prepares an elaborate dinner as she tells Ella Muriel's story. Judi M. Roller proposes that 'in the feminist novel generally, food and the preparation of meals are used to exemplify the servitude and drudgery of marriage'.¹¹ To be sure, in *Faustine* Jasmine is not married; nevertheless, even as an unmarried woman -- to some a

¹¹*The Politics of the Feminist Novel*, pp. 23-4.

lonely 'spinster' -- cultural conventions decree that Jasmine's role as a single older woman comprises cooking and preparing meals for others. In contrast, 'bachelors', i.e., single older men, escape such limiting occupations. Bachelors and bachelorhood are typically viewed in more positive terms; they are usually seen to be self-chosen and denote independence and freedom from social or familial responsibilities.¹² This representation confirms a cultural status which directly opposes that of spinsters and spinsterhood. Since bachelors do not necessarily live under the same expectations as spinsters, Tennant implies that the social order relies on Jasmine to fulfill domestic roles which impose creative confines and drudgery. On the other hand, Anna and Lisa Crane, by virtue of youth and beauty, avoid the limitations imposed by Muriel's and Jasmine's age and their subsequent confrontation with ageism.

Anna, as a younger woman, seems to escape the confines of female roles commonly associated with domestic servitude and drudgery. Tennant presents Anna to the reader as a single mother with career goals related to and part of her feminism. However, the reader never perceives Anna in a mothering role; for Anna, as for many people in society, there can be no connection between motherhood, feminism, and holding a successful career. Ella describes for the reader her reactions to her mother's choice to 'abandon' her to Australia. She understands that Anna 'couldn't manage on her own -- the mid-sixties was a time before the support of feminism, she had neither money nor proper training for a job after my father died' (14). Even though Ella recognizes that the social system denies Anna an avenue to be a mother who has a career and who independently supports a child, she simultaneously understands:

Anna worked for dear life. She worked to find herself, to create a career, to matter in the world. And I knew, as small children always do, that the person she loved wasn't me. It was something frightening and far away from me: it was theory, and endeavour, and, as I bitterly felt then (for with the cruelty of the very young I knew nothing of the meaning of ideals and wanted only love), she had learned to love herself.

To my mind, Anna loved anything that wasn't me (44).

Clearly, Anna's younger age endows her with the opportunity to come into contact with the renewed women's liberation movement and also encourages her to pursue a commitment to

¹²Babara Pym often takes up themes such as this in her writing; see especially *Quartet in Autumn* (London: Macmillan, 1977).

feminism and to a career that undermines the prevailing establishment values which encourage female domesticity and nurturing motherhood. Anna's youth, her feminism, and her publishing career promote freedom for women from restrictive and confining roles; however, Anna's personal and political interests concomitantly deprive her of an emotional relationship with her daughter. Although Anna does further the feminist cause, one might conclude from the contrasts between Anna's politics, work ethic, and motherhood that Tennant portrays Anna as a victim of social practices because her insistence on attaining success in the public sphere leaves her 'incapable of loving her child' (94).

Like Anna, Lisa Crane's youth, beauty, and role as a sex symbol allows her to escape the limiting confines of middle-age and essentially assures her status as a powerful woman. Anna insightfully sums up the phenomenon of Lisa Crane's role as an immediate social success to Ella:

I saw Marilyn Monroe and the millions of other women who had had to live on their sexuality alone, as victims of an oppressive, patriarchal society. Consumerism and advertising hype persuaded men to believe they were attracted more to a 'sexy' type of woman than another (119).

For Anna, and some readers, Marilyn Monroe epitomizes a certain type of sexuality. What's more, Anna's reference to Marilyn Monroe confirms how narcissistic culture worships surface appearances and discloses the ways in which Western culture accords particular 'types' of beauty to women; these types of 'beautiful' women then become objects, albeit powerful objects, for male consumption. If the basis for success lies in youth and beauty, as even Ella understands it, 'a face as the ultimate symbol' (25) merely becomes in the outside world 'a symbol of the meaninglessness and uniqueness of beauty, and of the potential for the endless duplication of that image, until the beauty was reduced to meaning nothing at all' (25). Juxtaposing 'natural' beauty with artificially produced consumerism and advertising hype, Tennant criticizes the media and social pressures which persuade men and women to respond to culturally conditioned images of beauty, wealth, and power in predictable and superficial manners.

Lisa Crane's roles as a sex symbol and superstar also seemingly provide her with opportunities that other women will never encounter. Jasmine offhandedly remarks to Ella:

Don't ask me if she had affairs with the powerful men she seduced. I wouldn't be surprised if the answer was no, anyway. Men just did what they were told when they met Lisa.

And I never knew she had a head for business. But before long she had started a chain of companies, and made a successful bid for *New Image* and all the affiliated companies, and had set herself up as a property millionaire as well (106).

At first glance it appears that Lisa Crane maintains a high level of power: not only does she seduce men and order them around, she starts companies, owns magazines (including the woman's magazine she previously writes copy for), and sets herself up in property as well. However, Tennant subtly illustrates the complexities of Lisa's/Faustine's business achievements in several ways. First, even though Lisa/Faustine now owns *New Image*, the magazine still perpetuates what can be termed 'women's lies'; therefore, Lisa/Faustine supports the objectification of women and potentially undercuts women's attempts at creativity and career achievements. Second, Tennant clearly identifies the devil, a male voice, as the source of Lisa Crane's youth and power which denies that women can achieve power in their own right. Third, in a traditional Faustian motif, the power of twenty-four years must be relinquished which again ultimately deprives Lisa Crane of lasting beauty or lasting power. As *Faustine* shows us, under the reigning discursive structures and cultural components like advertising which assert specific types of sexuality, women who fail to live up to beauty standards simply slip further into middle-aged invisibility and invalidity.

The opposing female roles which Tennant allocates Muriel and Jasmine, and Anna and Lisa Crane, highlight the restrictions and limitations women often face as they attempt to construct themselves as subjects and define new levels of feminine achievement. Lorna Sage theorizes that Angela Carter's early fictions are 'fables about fake freedom':

Wittily -- cruelly -- she held the mirror up to the 1960s narcissism, framing a culture that was in any case already obsessed with appearances. The effect is at once spell-binding and mocking. A bleak eroticism pervades the whole scene, people have a patina like objects, and indeed objects take on a covetable, collectable air. We are in the world of the second-hand trade, where the inherited stuff of the past -- clothes, furniture, imagery, ideas -- is reassembled in travesty. The thread of a *necessary* history seems to have run out. The present is all, and all performance; any utterance or gesture shades over into pastiche.¹³

¹³*Women in the House of Fiction*, p. 169. Again, although Sage's analysis does not extend to Tennant's work, I believe Tennant and Carter to be interested in the same literary enterprise: demythologizing women's social

Tennant's radical remake of Muriel's character from a dowdy and truly invisible middle-aged woman into a young sex symbol of extravagant proportions, like Angela Carter's fables, simply and clearly frames a culture obsessed with appearances and reveals the growing dangers of 'fake freedom'. By opposing Muriel and Jasmine with Anna and Lisa Crane, Tennant interrogates conventional female roles and lays bare the illusion of women's emancipation which permeates the historical record of the 1960s and continues to haunt women in the 1990s.¹⁴

Although Tennant's novels clearly assert that women are culturally conditioned to assume limiting roles, she does affirm that women are, at times, responsible for colluding with dominant patriarchal thought and structures. For example, in *The Bad Sister*, Jane wrestles with cooking a Sunday dinner for Tony or fulfilling the obligations of her career by reviewing a film; additionally, in one of Jane's fantasies, Mrs Aldridge keenly enacts revenge on her female employees. Likewise, Eve actively participates in a daily beautification ritual and women look askance at her when she appears to be a prostitute in *Sisters and Strangers*. In *Faustine*, Tennant again emphasizes how women can be instrumental in colluding with phallographic practices. Jasmine criticizes Anna's radical feminism and numerous allusions to women victimizing or preying upon one another permeate the novel.

Tennant emphasizes the threat feminism poses to existing social structures through Jasmine, an older, unmarried woman who grew up during the 1950s when 'homemaking' and catering to male needs was commonly viewed as a woman's role and function.¹⁵ Jasmine espouses the values of the male establishment and she typifies a woman who responds to the cultural pressure to be a homemaker by accepting caretaking roles. Consequently, Jasmine depicts Anna, a woman who theoretically threatens the ruling male order, as a 'radical'. For instance, Jasmine tells Ella how Harry 'even got Anna to go dancing! [. . .] And that meant,

constructs. As very little criticism exists on Tennant's novels, I feel that I must turn to criticism on women writers like Carter and Weldon who posit similar intents and interests.

¹⁴See Sheila Rowbotham, *Women, Resistance and Revolution* (London: Penguin Press, 1972), especially Chapter Eight for more information on how women fared during the 1960s cultural revolution.

¹⁵There are several media versions of women's roles in the home during the 1950s and 1960s. In the United States, for example, television programmes like *Leave It To Beaver* and *Father Knows Best* show women to be happy homemakers who cook, clean, and cater to children and husbands who sit on sofas and read newspapers. Television game shows during this period such as *The Price Is Right* and *Let's Make a Deal* recognize the strength of women as consumers and women's power to exert consumer pressures.

of course, getting out of those eternal jeans and wearing a dress from time to time' (64). Similarly, Jasmine portrays Anna's anger in aesthetic terms; she describes an angry Anna 'back in her denim boiler suit again [. . .] And she was all shiny in the face -- lately she'd been putting on a bit of powder and rouge' (97). Jasmine's words show Anna to be a stereotypical 'radical feminist' whose clothes and choice to ignore consumer pressures to be 'made-up' deny her approval in a Western cultural context.

One can posit two possible reasons for Jasmine's disapproving and negative characterization of Anna's feminism. First, because Jasmine accepts the caretaking roles promoted by the dominant social order, she is conditioned to look down upon those women who challenge passive female representations. Second, Jasmine's negative characterization of Anna may result from a sense of envy which results from missed opportunities; in other words, since Jasmine could not gain access to powerful publishing spheres -- she merely types manuscripts for other intellects -- then Anna should be similarly disbarred. To be sure, Jasmine's words are not flattering to Anna as a woman, mother, or a career-minded individual; yet, Jasmine's insipid representations do impart a powerful statement on the paradox of women's place in the social strata.

Jasmine also attempts to poison Ella's mind against her grandmother. As the devil tells it, Jasmine 'is a natural witch if ever I saw one. Envious, spiteful, gloating over the mishaps of others -- she brought Muriel to me without any trouble at all, and even sent for the granddaughter when the time had come' (138). Likewise, Anna's decision to become a writer and publisher instead of a mother alienates her daughter Ella. Years after Anna 'abandons' Ella, she 'shows as little emotion at seeing me as she had in the banished years of my youth, and every desire, as ever, to inform and instruct' (114). Finally, in Anna's words, Muriel responds to the cultural pressure for male companionship by attempting to overcome the exile 'to old age and redundancy just because the laws of the Victorian age laid it down' (114). This compels Muriel to make a pact with the devil which gives her the youth and the beauty necessary to seduce her daughter's lover. Tennant portrays Jasmine as a 'witch' eager to bring about her friend Muriel's downfall, Anna as a mother who selfishly abandons her daughter, and Muriel intent on living up to cultural standards of 'acceptability'. In this

manner, Tennant shows readers how different social pressures seek to quell feminine achievement and characterizes women in the novel as individuals who are willing to victimize each other; thus, the novel ironically reveals that women, at times, undercut themselves and each other.

The Media and Its Influence on Culture

One interesting issue that Tennant explores in *Faustine*, and which is echoed in *The Bad Sister* and *Sisters and Strangers*, is the postmodern fascination with the role of the media.¹⁶

Muriel makes her pact with the devil in a television shop; this image holds striking implications about how the media and communication networks have come to dominate contemporary life. John Fiske believes that television:

reproduces the dominant sense of reality. We can thus call television an essentially realistic medium because of its ability to carry a socially convincing sense of the real. Realism is not a matter of any fidelity to an empirical reality, but of the discursive conventions by which and for which a sense of reality is constructed.¹⁷

In Fiske's mind, television constructs a social sense of the 'real' without faithfulness to an empirical reality; in other words, television simply constructs a semblance of 'reality' for the viewer. Fiske goes on to say that television essentially presents itself as an 'unmediated picture of external reality':

This view of television realism is often expressed by the metaphors of transparency or reflection -- television is seen either as a transparent window on the world or as a mirror reflecting our own reality back to us. It is significant that both these metaphors invoke a sheet of glass as an impersonal, noncultural medium of reproduction -- the human or cultural agency in the process is masked: this means that the finished representation is naturalized, that it is made to appear the result of natural rather than cultural processes, it is taken away from the realm of history and culture and moved towards that of universal truth.¹⁸

As Fiske puts it, television fundamentally attempts to make media representations naturalized versions of reality as opposed to the end-product of cultural processes. Television constructs

¹⁶Hutcheon talks about the postmodern fascination with the media in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, pp. 3, 12, 53-6, 130, and 228-9.

¹⁷*Television Culture* (London/New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 21. First published (London: Methuen, 1987).

¹⁸*Ibid.*

representations which move away from 'history' and 'culture' and appear to construct images which act as 'universal truths'.

How do Fiske's observations relate to *Faustine*? Ella describes the television shop to the reader: in it, 'there were hundreds of TV sets, some small and some enormous, and all with the same cartoon playing' (72). However, when Muriel begins talking to the television salesman -- the devil -- the television sets 'flash' and 'on every screen in the shop Muriel's face looked out. But it was Muriel young and beautiful' (73). Keeping in mind Fiske's observation that television attempts to naturalize non-empirical realities, when the devil shows Muriel her former youthful visage, the devil, via the media, manipulates Muriel's consciousness and self-hood. When the devil, via television, offers Muriel a culturally 'acceptable' form of femininity and womanhood, his character influences social and cultural visions of female reality and visibility. Tennant sets the scene of Muriel's diabolic metamorphosis in a television shop; thus, she clearly articulates how the media of television and communication networks assert and cultivate socially acceptable forms of femininity and, therefore, social validity.¹⁹

The way Ella gains access to her grandmother's personality is another means by which Tennant interrogates the role of television and the media in popular culture. Ella has very few memories of her grandmother Muriel because she left England at a very young age; hence, Ella relies on her grandmother's friend Jasmine and on her mother to tell her Muriel's life story. When Jasmine reveals to Ella that Muriel is also Lisa Crane, Ella gains access to her grandmother in the form of television videos. While Ella waits to hear Jasmine continue Muriel's story, she sits in a room and watches a video which focuses on Muriel/Lisa Crane:

Lisa Crane is sitting at the head of a long table. Her blonde hair, in a Twiggy fringe, is crowned with diamonds, and there is more glitter at her neck and wrists. Her dress -- she rises from time to time and goes to the door to greet an especially famous or distinguished guest -- is short, so short it barely grazes her thighs. Like a snake's skin, riding loosely on the shoulders as if ready to be sloughed off at a casual twist of the limbs, a resigned shrug of slender shoulders, it too is blazing with sequins and artificial gems, so that Lisa, with her look of costly brevity, could be seen to epitomize the span of a butterfly, or an exotic moth. Her eyes, blue as the glinting stones set in her sheath, seem as carefully positioned as an

¹⁹For other examples of how the media influences individuals in *Faustine*, see pp. 76-7, 79, and 139.

insect's markings; they flicker as she looks to either side and down the length of the table, gauging success, and money, and deals (75).

This is only one of many scenes in the novel which show Ella coming to know her grandmother through television videos. Ella sees her grandmother coming into contact with 'especially famous or distinguished guests', and passively watches Muriel 'gauging success, and money, and deals'. Although Ella cannot truly come to understand her grandmother because the television videos simply reflect her grandmother's words and actions, the visual references to 'snake's skin', 'span of a butterfly', and 'exotic moth' imply that Muriel's/Lisa's success directly corresponds to 'costly brevity'. Even though television might be considered a passive medium because it is an object watched by an individual, one should recognize that television is about performers and performance. Lisa Crane knows someone films her actions; thus, she gives the video audience a performance.

Richard Kirkley comments on the complex relationship between performance and performer. As he sees it:

The actor on stage is a sentient being who not only gives life and shape to the imaginative world of the drama, but also perceives the effect his or her performance has on an audience. Television and film, on the other hand, are insentient: the images we perceive do not perceive us.²⁰

Kirkley also believes that film and television images are products of intense technological mediation. He argues that everything 'we see and hear has been predetermined and fixed by camera and microphone, editing and sound-mixing'; moreover, film and television images make the 'performance appear to be the reality of the fiction, rather than a reality in itself'.²¹ In Kirkley's words, television presents images that do not interact with audiences; instead, television viewers passively watch fixed images which attempt to make the created image a performance which 'is', rather than simulates, reality.

To be sure, Ella and Muriel are not actors on stage; however, Ella watches videos which 'star' Lisa Crane. Lisa Crane knows she is being filmed; thus, Lisa Crane controls and manipulates her own actions as well as the actions of her guests on the screen. As a result, Ella only has access to visions -- or versions -- of Muriel/Lisa Crane that are predetermined

²⁰'Image and Imagination: The Concept of Electronic Theatre', *Canadian Theatre Review*, 64 (Fall 1990), 4-18 (p. 5)

²¹*Ibid*, pp. 5-6.

and fixed by camera, microphone, and editing. This makes Lisa Crane's performance on the video an 'appearance' of reality as opposed to a reality in itself. Since Ella watches the videos, she constructs portraits of her grandmother which are, in fact, already glamorously constructed by Muriel/Lisa Crane for a wider audience. In consequence, Ella comes to ask about her grandmother, 'was this the real Lisa, then?' (57). References to media images like photographs and videos permeate the novel; hence, one might conclude that Tennant establishes this strong presence of communication networks to highlight and to criticize the ways in which the media attempts to influence, arrange, and promote desirable and 'acceptable' images of femininity and womanhood for the larger culture.

The Global Economy

In addition to her interest in how the media influences culture, Tennant's fiction examines what might be called the 'global economy'. Tennant does not limit her interrogation of the cultural construction of femininity to the Western world; rather, she also considers what significance aging holds for women outside the Western world. For instance, Muriel believes that Anna and her friends should not worry about their position in society because 'they have youth' (46). In response to the young feminists' crisis of subjectivity, Muriel makes:

a funny face; it had a sort of rueful acceptance in it, and a certain anger at our predicament, mixed in with a bit of self-disgust as well that growing old, which was probably the worst thing that could happen to a woman in a free, consumerist society, should even be considered an unpleasant fate, when compared with death and early senility in the poor countries of the world (46).

In short, Tennant, through Muriel, compares age and the aging process with 'early senility' and 'death'. As the novel presents it, aging is a luxury and perhaps not as limiting or restrictive as Western women and men may perceive it. In this way, Tennant shrewdly criticizes the ideological and discursive structures which construct age as a measure of an individual's value to and in society.

Tennant continually makes references to exploited nations and to the women within them to symbolize the exploitation of women around the world. For instance, the devil arrogantly claims responsibility for a 'round-up of prostitutes, [. . .] In some hell-hole like

Manila's red-light district. [. . .] A few cocaine shipments, a burnt rainforest, and slum kids, gaunt and raiding, pillaging on Crack' (139), as well as the 'blonde girls, dead-eyed, who bring in the crooks and villains, the murderers, robbers and rapists, who make up the Chaos that is my legacy' (140). Identifying a dominant male voice with the exploitation of women, Tennant suggests that the 'public and private are interdependent and defined in relation to each other and neither represents universal nor value-free conditions'.²² The public and private are linked in this novel by the fact that a male devil, the voice that speaks for the male establishment, eagerly announces his control and exploitation of women the world over. The devil's characterization, then, supports the idea that women are only useful to the patriarchal power structure when they exist either as objects for male consumption or as custodians who fill the roles which serve male needs.

Above all, Tennant's interrogation of women's aging process in the Western world, as well as her questioning of the values and mores attached to a consumer-oriented Western society, exposes the exploitation of women and men in countries all over the world. Even though Tennant primarily interrogates the Western woman's aging process and the values attached to a consumer-oriented Western world, she also unmask how women are devalued and exploited in every nation. In particular, she contests capitalism in *The Bad Sister*, prostitution and rainforest deforestation in *Sisters and Strangers*, and makes reference to a number of Third World social and political problems in *Faustine*. Tennant clearly reinforces how greed, capitalism, consumerism, and the exploitation of Third World nations and resources are equally important parallel concerns to the Western woman's aging process.

Ambiguous Narrative Voices, Narrative Time, and the Question of Identity

Tennant devises another experimental narrative form in *Faustine* by dividing the novel's structure into four different 'tales' which present four different versions or memories of Muriel's transformation: 'The Granddaughter's Tale', 'The Nurse's Tale', 'The Mother's Tale', and 'The Devil's Tale'. Tennant again allies herself with the oral tradition by calling

²²Nancy Isenberg, 'The Personal is Political: Gender, Feminism, and the Politics of Discourse Theory', *American Quarterly*, 44 (September 1992), 449-62 (p. 453). Isenberg does not refer to Tennant's fiction; however, I believe her ideas are relevant to my argument so I quote them here.

her sections 'tales' which emphasizes the fairy tale quality of the narrative. As Mepham puts it, the postmodern literary strategy 'of foregrounding and reframing and so on are calculated to engage the reader in a play of plural interpretations, so that the reader's sense of a stable, reliable (fictional) world is disturbed'.²³ Accordingly, as the characters tell each other Muriel's story, the reader participates in four conflicting versions of the 'truth' and receives what might be called plural 'truths' about each character's life. This naturally raises questions of whose 'truth' the characters represent, and whose memory is 'correct'.

Memory can be seen as an unexplainable and sporadic process. Individual memories are unique, and one's memories might change over time. Memories are often triggered off in a variety of ways, by sight, smell, sound, and so on. Oral tales are told from memory; consequently, the tale is likely to change over time as the story passes from storyteller to storyteller and each storyteller remembers the tale and transforms it in a unique manner. Walter J. Ong sheds light on the function of memory in the oral tradition. He contends that in the oral tradition, memory often has little to do with a strict linear presentation of events in a temporal sequence.²⁴ In other words, memories, like oral tales, are not linear; therefore, oral tales which emerge from memory cannot be linear. Since memory changes over time, linear memories are likely to be disrupted. How does the memory process affect a reader in the 1990s? As Ong sees it:

In our typographic and electronic culture, we find ourselves today delighted by exact correspondence between the linear order of elements in discourse and the referential order, the chronological order in the world to which the discourse refers. We like sequence in verbal reports to parallel exactly what we experience or can arrange to experience. When today narrative abandons or distorts this parallelism, [. . .] The effect is clearly self-conscious.²⁵

Tennant is a postmodern writer who self-consciously employs a subjective and distorted narrative technique in order to illustrate the splintered identity of her female characters.

The opening pages of the novel confirm how memory can be unexplainable and sporadic. The novel opens with Ella's words: 'I have been here before' (3). Since these

²³'Narratives of Postmodernism', p. 150. Please note that this sentence refers to postmodern fiction in general and not specifically to Tennant's novel; however, it seems to apply well to the framework of *Faustine* and the novel's thematic structure.

²⁴*Orality and Literacy*, p. 147.

²⁵*Ibid.*

words imply that Ella remembers the place she stands in, the opening lines of the novel immediately intimate the idea of memory. Likewise, the lines: 'and there's the yew hedge, as tall as once I knew it' (3); 'what I remember may be as invented or as real as a dream. Did I live in this place or that? Did I really see the trees in a park 12,000 miles away, straining in a great wind' (5); 'but I remember nothing now. The flash of memory has gone' (8); and, 'a women's press started up on the kitchen table of the flat that was so hazy a memory to me' (14) are sentences and phrases that incorporate language which highlight an interest in the misleading and often impenetrable maze and haze of memory. Tennant's repetition of the imprecise and often scintillating nature of memory and the memory process hints that the four characters' individual memories and interpretations of Muriel's diabolic transformation cannot be anything but ambiguous; thus, Tennant cleverly invites the reader to draw multiple meaning from the plural narratives.

Tennant's use of memory in the narrative conundrum raises questions about the nature of storytelling. Keeping in mind that *Faustine* focuses on Ella's search for her grandmother, as well as the dangers of acquiescing to the male demands which accord power, it is equally important that Ella's few childhood memories are the force that keeps her emotionally alive. Tennant sums up Ella's position nicely; she says at the 'heart of the book is memory and displacement', and even though 'Ella has hardly any memories of previous life, [. . .] They are still the strongest thing she owns, and they will dictate the rest of her life'.²⁶ When Ella embarks on a quest to 'reinvent my life all over again' (16), Tennant emphasizes her vague memories so that the reader may recognize how important her childhood memories are to her overall self-image and her ability to formulate some kind of self-knowledge.²⁷

Four different characters, Ella, Anna, Jasmine, and the devil, tell individual versions of Muriel's demise; accordingly, Tennant endows Muriel with four identities which are

²⁶Gerrard, 'Faustine sells her own soul', p. 60.

²⁷It is interesting to note that Tennant, Elphinstone, and Galloway all experiment with memory and the use of memory in their writing. While it is difficult to generalize about this phenomenon, one possible explanation could be that memory in their novels seems to be one way in which women come to terms with their past experiences which often leads to a fragmented and splintered present. By coming to terms with past experiences, the female protagonists in all six novels attempt to locate a more positive sense of self-hood and self-esteem.

based on four differing ideas of Muriel's 'truth'. Tennant's narrative structure again queries the nature of 'truth' and openly disrupts a coherent interpretation of the novel's past and present events. Constructing four varying interpretations of Muriel's malevolent association with the devil, Tennant's postmodern experimental narrative structure and writing exists as 'an alternative language, which requires a different kind of reading and which opposes itself to the dominant patriarchal culture in definable ways'.²⁸ Furthermore, when Tennant defines four variations of Muriel's tale, she prevents the reader from 'interpreting the writing to form coherent, single, whole, closed, ordered, finite, sensible meanings'.²⁹ Thus, Tennant opens the text to multiple signification and leaves the reader to unravel the social and ideological implications for a woman who chooses to relinquish middle-age and invisibility for a revered and respected youthful position -- albeit a temporal one -- in Western culture.

When Muriel makes a pact with the devil to transfigure herself from a middle-aged invisible copywriter to a young, beautiful sex symbol, her character clearly undergoes an exchange of identity.³⁰ Each storyteller views Muriel's metamorphosis uniquely and their reactions to Muriel following her return from the health farm exhibit radically different sentiments about femininity in Western culture:

Jasmine: I felt at a total loss. I was entering a world that was incomprehensible to me, the new world of the young. And I felt damned old too.

[. . .] I can't describe it -- she had this youthful kind of power, she seemed so happy and utterly self-confident (95).

Ella: She was dressed in white and she was made of frost and glass and snow. All the dripping icicles and snow ermines and frost sequins of the Snow Queen were on that lady at the foot of the bed. Yet somehow I knew that the Snow Queen was my grandmother, and I would never see her again (108).

Anna: I don't know how many times I suffered humiliation at the hands of my mother, she says, glancing at me quickly and catching, I'm sure, my own flash of response, as if the same feelings have to be passed down generations of

²⁸DeKoven, *A Different Language*, p. 5. Please note that DeKoven talks about experimental writing in general, not Tennant's work in particular.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰This reaffirms Sage's conclusion that Angela Carter shifts her narrative focus onto transformations, metamorphoses, and exchanges of identity.

women, and no mother can ever do right by the woman who is coming up to take her place (120).

Jasmine, Ella, and Anna engender different responses to Muriel's physical transformation. The descriptive language each character uses offers three distinct stories about themselves and about Muriel and their reactions to Muriel's newfound shape and age intimate specifically female responses to the lowly position of aging women in Western society.

Jasmine, for instance, appears overwhelmed by Muriel's miraculous transfiguration. Tennant depicts Jasmine 'at a total loss' because she enters the 'incomprehensible' and 'new world of the young'. Jasmine's words simply expose how middle-aged and aging women are marginalized from the dominant social order. Moreover, when Tennant characterizes Jasmine as feeling 'damned old', she articulates how aging women frequently cannot identify with values promoted by a youthful society which allows readers to recognize how aging individuals are often alienated by youth culture.

Ella, as a young child cannot intellectually respond to Muriel's metamorphosis; she can, however, describe Muriel in terms that a young child might understand. Ella sees her grandmother made of 'frost', 'glass', 'snow', 'dripping icicles', 'snow ermines', and 'frost sequins'. In Ella's mind, Muriel/Lisa Crane is the Snow Queen, a fairy tale wicked witch who bears no resemblance to her loving and caring grandmother.³¹ The language Tennant employs in this passage suggests ice, freezing, and intense cold. The references to frost, glass, and icicles might imply that Muriel/Lisa Crane remains emotionally and physically cold toward her granddaughter. At the same time, Ella's visual images of cold and ice articulate that Muriel's newfound status as a young and beautiful sex symbol, like cold spells and icicles, is brittle and will inevitably 'snap'.

Finally, Anna reacts to her mother's remarkable transformation with anger and frustration. Although Anna feels humiliated at the hands of her mother because Muriel 'steals' her daughter's lover, Anna's words still disclose the competition that sometimes

³¹This reference to the Snow Queen is an intriguing link to Nan Shepherd, a modern Scottish writer, who also depicts a female character in this manner. In *The Weatherhouse* (Edinburgh: Canongate Publishing, 1988), the young protagonist Lindsay Lorimer describes her Great Aunt Leeb thus: 'Oh, she's cruel! She's worse than they are. She's happy when she can say a thing that hurts. She's like the Snow Queen--she looks at you with those sharp eyes, and it's like splinters of ice that pierce you through' (163). First published (London: Constable & Co, 1930).

exists between women. Anna clarifies for herself and the reader that 'no mother can ever do right by the woman who is coming up to take her place'. These words confirm that mothers and daughters can be, for varying reasons, systematically conditioned by society to resent one another. Once women begin to age, their sex appeal deteriorates and they no longer compete for male attention; as such, middle-aged women are marginalized by society and removed from sexual and social competition. When Muriel transcends this barrier and Anna is 'taken for *her* mother' (120), daughter and mother become deadly rivals.³²

One interesting dimension of the individual versions of Muriel's downfall relates to 'truth'; namely, as the novel progresses, the reader may begin to doubt the individual character's versions of the events connected to Muriel's transfiguration. Jasmine, for instance, begins to undermine Ella's memories and self-image by suggesting that just as Muriel 'was beginning to be free again, [. . .] You came along' (68). Ella immediately questions the depth of Muriel's love; she thinks, 'I know Jasmine is just making trouble -- for me and for Muriel -- for if Muriel hadn't loved me with all her heart, why would she have dedicated herself to me in the way she did?' (68). Likewise, when Jasmine insinuates that Muriel did not like moving out of the big bedroom so Anna and her lover may share it, Ella again feels threatened and thinks:

I don't want to hear any of this. Muriel loved moving near to me -- she told me again and again. But already my heart is sinking. Was she simply repeating, as she did the meaningless copy she had to write on beauty and fashion, the same, unmeant words? (71).

Since Ella really holds no emotional ties, her memories are the most important feature of formulating self-hood. When Jasmine, for whatever reason, attempts to destroy her happy memories of love, she threatens the stable base upon which Ella builds her self-esteem and self-knowledge.

While it is impossible to discern Jasmine's motive for threatening Ella's fragile identity, it remains important that Jasmine's role as a storyteller is necessarily influenced by an individual version of a 'truth' which exists differently in her mind than in the mind of

³²See Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989) and Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother-Daughter Plot* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989) for some interesting insights into mother-daughter rivalry.

Anna or Ella. Since Jasmine's story about Muriel and about Ella's childhood will be filtered differently in Ella's mind than in Jasmine's mind, one might infer that Jasmine has no malice, but simply retells the tale from her own perspective. On the other hand, if the reader chooses to believe Ella's revelation that she needs to find Muriel 'before my mind is poisoned even further by her old friend' (71), the reader might conclude that Jasmine acts as the devil's 'handmaiden' (71) and therefore maliciously undermines Ella's happy memories. Even though the reader must draw a conclusion about Jasmine's story and her ability or actual desire to tell Ella the 'truth' about her grandmother, one cannot contest that as Jasmine begins to undermine Ella's memories and perception of her grandmother, she pulls a 'power trip'. When Jasmine attempts to dismantle Ella's memories and Muriel's story, Tennant again lays bare how women, at times, subjugate other women for personal benefit.

Tennant offers the reader another ambiguous version of Muriel's demise in the devil's narrative. The devil is a marginal, yet subjugating voice because his character only 'speaks' in the last five and a half pages in the novel. Even so, the devil maintains an ambiguous nature and personality by entering the text in different personae depending upon which female character he interacts with. The devil becomes a cool English gentleman with Ella, a Faustian figure with Muriel, a young lover to Anna, and he finally reveals himself to be a force of evil in the final pages of the novel when he claims that 'women of "a certain age" are -- well, it's too obvious, really -- they're easy prey' (135).

The devil's persona frequently changes throughout the novel. For example, Ella comes into contact with the devil in the television shop. When Muriel takes their broken television to be repaired, Ella plays quietly on the floor. As Muriel and the television salesman talk, Ella notices that the salesman does not wear shoes; instead, he wears:

only built-up little boots that gave him a funny, strutting air. Being on the floor, I know I saw what his legs were like, between the turn-up of his trouser and the top of his boots. And they were black and shiny, like the coat of a pony or a goat (73).

In contrast, the devil becomes Anna's supportive lover Harry. Jasmine tells Ella:

Harry was the kind of man who would put himself out for someone he loved -- and he didn't stop her embarking on her new career. He helped find good typesetters [. . .] And he helped her lay out a new magazine. When he wasn't giving a hand to her very special projects and ventures, all

of which he seemed to sympathize with and know something about, he was actually encouraging her to have fun and join in with all the fun that was going on just then -- pop concerts in the parks, dancing and listening to music all night long (69).

Later, Ella meets the devil at Lisa Crane's country estate. As she waits in her room for morning to come:

The door of the room opens and a man is standing there. He comes in, and I feel nothing but the faint breath of cool wind that seems to come in with him. I feel I have seen him somewhere before. I am too frightened to feel fear (32).

Finally, Tennant again transforms the devil into a literal consumer and controller. He chases Muriel across the 'tessellated marble floor of the magnificent building I erected for the interglobal communications network' (136) and claims to keep 'the cauldron of greed simmering -- the pot that keeps the world on the boil and lowers it every day nearer to those regions in which no one any longer believes (136).

These multiple characterizations imply that the devil can be viewed as a Mephistopheles, a supportive lover, an English gentleman, and as a predator. Tennant portrays the devil as an interchangeable character; in this manner, she consciously defines his nature to be a 'blank, a white space, but, of course, many writers and scholars have chosen to fill that space with words' (135). Tennant endows the devil with a plural character and consequently heightens the overall sense of ambiguity and confusion the satanic character lends to the narrative drive and division. When Tennant makes her readers aware of the cloudy demonic world, she insinuates that the construction of women as subjects is an insidious yet ambiguous process. The 'Gothic trappings' of Tennant's novels, like Fay Weldon's *Puffball* and *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*, 'give the underworld of women a fantasy dimension, and offer a further insult to the notion that living the way we do is natural'.³³ Muriel by-passes the invisibility of middle-age with a demonic pact and, as such, her action hints that women might also display shadowy and riddling characters 'in any case';³⁴ thus, Tennant, like Weldon, articulates that the way women are expected to look and behave in the social order is anything but natural.

³³Sage, *Women in the House of Fiction*, p. 157.

³⁴*Ibid.*

If the narrative structure in *Faustine* successfully details the other characters' responses to Muriel's transfiguration, it also reveals an alarming absence. Even though the novel focuses on Muriel's life and four characters give their own interpretation and memory of her demise, Muriel's voice does not enter the novel. To be sure, Tennant writes a story about Muriel; yet, Muriel cannot speak for herself in the context of the fiction. When Tennant consciously denies Muriel her voice in the oral rendition of a tale of mythic proportions, she raises certain questions about the nature of the Faust legend in general. For example, since Muriel never unveils her own version of the story, the reader may ask, is her character real? Is Muriel simply a myth or a dream in the other characters' imaginations? Does Muriel's character represent the idea that women cannot control the processes and expectations by which they are defined in society and culture? If so, do women truly lack the power to voice their own reality and achievements and therefore all too often remain silent? Perhaps none of these queries adequately explains the reason Muriel does not speak in the novel; instead, the absence of Muriel's own version of events may simply represent that many women cannot articulate their own story.

Tennant disrupts the story of Muriel's diabolic metamorphosis by revising the Faust myth in a written form which mimics the confessional mode of storytelling. She employs a confessional narrative structure which dislocates her readers from identifying the 'truth' of Muriel's tale because as Foster puts it, in the confessional mode, 'readers cannot pursue Truth directly because the path to truth depends on another who seems to represent it'.³⁵ If, as the confessional mode suggests, readers cannot pursue 'truth' directly because the path to 'truth' depends on someone else who represents it, *Faustine* implies that in life as in literature, women often cannot attain 'truth' because ideological structures construct women as subjects; hence, these institutions frequently prohibit women from gaining access to 'truths' about themselves and their world. Moreover, the four diverging versions of Muriel's life story challenges, like Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, Stevenson's *The Master of Ballantrae*, and Oliphant's short story 'The Open Door', the idea of a single unitary 'truth'

³⁵*Confession and Complicity in Narrative*, p. 12. Foster does not talk about Tennant's work; instead, he makes general comments about confession as a narrative mode. Since oral tales are connected in some ways to 'confession', I feel Foster's observations are relevant to this discussion.

and instead posits pluralism and multiple meaning connected to the postmodern literary enterprise.

If Tennant creates ambiguity in narrative voices, she also promotes a certain degree of ambiguity in respect to 'time' in the narrative. Ella begins her story in the 1990s. Yet, as the novel progresses, Jasmine, Anna, and the devil all recount speech and actions which occurred in the 1960s; as a result, there is an ever shifting movement of narrative time throughout the novel which disrupts a linear or chronological textual interpretation. Although it does not seem unusual that Tennant sets part of the novel in the 1990s because, after all, she is a contemporary writer interested in the representation of female subjectivity, her decision to also set the novel in the 1960s warrants some consideration.

After the mass industrialization during the 1950s resulted in economic abundance which no longer required many women to work, traditional homemaking and catering roles were reinforced for women in the 1950s and early 1960s. Disillusionment with these social values arrived in the 1960s; this resulted in the rejection of materialism which can be seen in the emergence of 'hippies' and communes. The 'pill' introduced a new age of sexual liberation (and sexual promiscuity) for women in addition to abetting the concept of 'free love'. 'Green' issues, world peace, and the renewed interest in women's liberation came to dominate individual consciousness.

In contrast to the rather sedate and conformist 1950s, counter-cultural movements such as drugs, fashion, music, and feminism symbolized social and political upheaval which often resulted in the demand for human rights and in civil disobedience.³⁶ However, youth culture and narcissism posed a direct contrast to the counter-cultural movements and political upheaval which challenged dominant social and ideological structures. Although the social and political conflict did promote greater intellectual and creative freedom for women and men, the narcissism and obsession with youth culture did present problems for women. As Jasmine tells Ella, the 1960s was a time where there 'was the great explosion of youth -- the music, the miniskirts [. . .] If one was older, with legs that didn't look so good when exposed

³⁶While this paragraph makes general statements about the 1950s and 1960s, all of these comments can be substantiated in the historical record.

right up to the thigh, well, you were really excluded from the world' (68). Confirmed in urban mythology and social history, the reader may consider Jasmine's words to reflect accurately the exclusion and marginalization felt by those who did not satisfy or conform to existing rigid determinations of popular culture. Tennant, through Jasmine, criticizes how narcissism and an obsession with youth in the 1960s, even with the existence of the women's movement, excluded and marginalized those women who failed to live up to social standards of 'acceptability'.³⁷

Tennant's amplifies her interest in the representation of femininity by emphasizing a concern with cultural history. After Muriel's diabolic transformation occurs, she begins to take part in 1960s pop culture. Muriel's/Lisa's bedroom displays 'an inflatable plastic chair with zebra stripes, there were Indian hangings everywhere, and wreaths of dried flowers, and incense burning, and posters, of course -- Janis Joplin [. . .] Screaming her throat out on that wall' (95). Muriel/Lisa Crane also receives 'letters from John Lennon; the coat, in violent colours, given to Lisa by Jimi Hendrix; the photos signed by Dylan' (26), and finds herself represented in 'decorative panels, [. . .] Giant portraits, grainy and fading now, by Bailey and Donovan [. . .] A marble table inlaid with the faces of the Beatles and Lisa, all Lorelei hair floating across her beautiful face' (30). Hutcheon claims:

The view that postmodernism relegates history to 'the dustbin of an obsolete episteme, arguing gleefully that history does not exist except as text' is simply wrong. History is not made obsolete: it is, however, being rethought -- as a human construct. [. . .] We cannot know the past except through its texts: its documents, its evidence, even its eye-witness accounts are *texts*. Even the institutions of the past, its social structures and practices, could be seen, in one sense, as social texts. And postmodern novels -- *The Scorched-Wood People*, *Flaubert's Parrot*, *Antichthon*, *The White Hotel* -- teach us about both this fact and its consequences.³⁸

Tennant incorporates multiple cultural references to the 1960s into *Faustine*, and alludes to Joplin, Lennon, Hendrix, Dylan, Bailey, and Donovan. The celebrity references disclose a distinct lack of female role models and feminine cultural authority: Joplin and Hendrix overdosed, Lennon was assassinated, and Dylan, Bailey, and Donovan all suffered from some

³⁷See Sheila Rowbotham, *Women, Resistance and Revolution* (London: Penguin Press, 1972), especially Chapter Eight for more information on how women fared during the 1960s cultural revolution.

³⁸*A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 16. Hutcheon disagrees here with Andreas Huyssen, 'The Search for Tradition: Avant-Garde and Postmodernism in the 1970s', *New German Critique*, 22 (1981), 23-40 (p. 35).

form of drug or alcohol abuse. The references play with history and reveal figures who meet tragic ends and consequences; thus, Tennant plays with historical and cultural references in order to rethink the past. Like the postmodern novels Hutcheon lists, *Faustine* teaches us about history by rethinking it in a feminist context. *Faustine*, as feminist recontextualization of the ancient Faust myth replete with historical and contemporary cultural references, results in a text which shocks readers. The jarring effect of mixing fairy tale with contemporary representations of women that begins in *Sisters and Strangers* continues in *Faustine*; this narrative technique clearly makes us examine ourselves in a deliberately provocative, postmodern, anarchic manner.

Tennant's ambiguous narrative voices and ambiguous time frame mirror and parallel Ella's struggle to come to terms with an ambiguous identity. Tennant's novels habitually play with the cultural construction of femininity which necessarily holds ties with identity. Tennant confirms in a conversation with Roe and Monteith:

Scotland is obviously colonised by England, and therefore breeds a totally different kind of literature, more romantic, more akin to European literature and European imagination than England ever has. I, of course, find all this very interesting and provocative as it's where I happen to come from and where my imagination -- it seems to me -- is so completely unlike a lot of English novelists.³⁹

What conclusions can be drawn from Tennant's words? Tennant understands that England colonizes Scotland and, as a Scottish woman -- an individual who suffers dual marginalization -- her self-proclaimed romantic imagination offers readers an agenda entirely different from many English novelists. Tennant clarifies that her nationality -- her place -- constructs an imagination which asserts a specific identity. For Tennant, place and identity are intrinsically connected; therefore, Tennant knows herself living, writing, and existing within a distinct Scottish context.

Although Tennant has firm ideas about the connection between place and identity, what happens when an individual cannot uncover these connections? In *Faustine*, Ella exists as a displaced female subject because her mother 'abandons' her to Australia at a very young age. Australia in itself is significant because the country began its life as an English penal

³⁹'Women Talking About Writing', p. 124.

colony -- a nation of displaced individuals, banished or abandoned from the homeland.⁴⁰ Tennant accentuates the postcolonial conflict between place and displacement with Chi-ren, a child from Penang for whom Ella cares. Even though Ella reads to Chi-ren the Beatrix Potter book 'Maureen always insisted on the children having read to them' (12), she wonders 'whether a child who had been on a Malaysian island for the first two years of his short life wouldn't have preferred a book with creatures and characters more recognizable to him' (12). Likewise, a similar connection to the relationship between identity, place, and culture is raised by the jigsaw puzzles in Maureen's nursery in Melbourne and the calendars and Fair Isle jumpers that adorn Maureen's wall. The jigsaws display 'pictures of a landscape none of the children has ever known; the half-ruined outhouses, dovecot and racket court, tiles russet with age, that are grouped around the lawn, stone walls overgrown with roses and ivy' (8) and the calendars in Maureen's house show 'scenes of sheep trials in northern glens on the walls and the line of hand-knitted Fair Isle jumpers hanging over the range seem to personify an idea of England -- even if it's a vanished one' (6). The expectations of 'Englishness' promoted by the calendars are interesting and provocative because they represent, as Ella knows, 'vanished' ideas about England and English life that individuals in Australia look up to and/or aspire to; thus, one might conclude that when Tennant places vanished images of English life in an Australian context, she further displaces any fixed notion of individual identity and cultural community.

The shifting movement between place and identity can also be seen in Tennant's textual strategy. The narrative has a fable-like quality and moves from setting to setting which often dislocates readers from the text. Elaine Millard believes that in Carter's *The Magic Toyshop*:

The reader is confronted by textuality that announces itself in terms of fable. Place is left undefined: an Edwardian house somewhere in the country gives place to a toyshop somewhere in the seedier parts of London, while time schemes are sketchy; things take place 'one night', time is marked out by the

⁴⁰At one point in the narrative, Ella feels that 'Jasmine made the country where I had grown up a penal colony still' (64-5).

changing of seasons and the bizarre cuckoo clock created by the puppet-master from a stuffed bird.⁴¹

Tennant also confronts her reader with textuality that announces itself in terms of fable. Settings continually change in the novel and it becomes difficult to establish the place that Ella and the other characters inhabit. Ella embarks on a journey to 'reinvent my life all over again' (16); yet she still feels that 'I am lost and I want to go home' (77). Tennant creates a contradiction between Ella's journey to 'reinvent' or identify herself and her desire to return to an undefined home. *Faustine* can thus be read as a crisis of the female subject not only because place is left ambiguous and undefined, but also because Ella makes a conscious decision to reinvent her already displaced identity.

Even though Ella travels to rediscover herself, she encounters three different versions of her grandmother's demise. She comes into contact with three versions of a memory and identity that she tries to reconstruct in a country she is displaced from and then returns to; as such, Ella's identity and self-knowledge appear to be doubly displaced. Ella's double displacement asserts the ambiguity of women's position in culture; the four versions of Muriel's transformation and Ella's reactions to these visions powerfully mimic how women generally experience several different roles and versions of femininity in the social order. Since Ella suffers double displacement and cannot understand her ambiguous place in the English cultural order, one might conclude that Tennant manipulates Ella's identity and displacement in order to underscore how national, social, and ideological institutions commonly foster the ambiguous position of women in the world as well as how colonialism is a parallel challenge to seeking 'identity'.

The ambiguity of characterization, time, place, and identity extends to the novel's conclusion; specifically, Chapters Seventeen and Eighteen are extremely ambiguous. In Chapter Seventeen, Ella describes in first person where she is and what she hears as she dresses for dinner and her hopeful reconciliation with Muriel. She carefully walks into the room where Muriel/Lisa Crane sleeps. Even though Ella makes 'no noise', Muriel/Lisa

⁴¹'French Feminisms', in *Feminist Readings/Feminists Reading*, ed. by Sara Mills and others (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), pp. 154-86 (p. 172). Carter's novel can be compared to Tennant's *Wild Nights* where time is also marked by the changing of seasons.

Crane 'wakes up and sees me' (129). Ella leaves the room and continues to walk down the stairs. On one level, this chapter subjectively details Ella's actions and feelings as she composes herself for dinner in a clear and concise manner; in effect, the text exhibits no ambiguity. Nevertheless, Tennant casts doubt on the reader's interpretation of the events in Chapter Seventeen. First, Tennant depicts Ella walking carefully in the dark as if she 'were going into a lifetime's confinement -- a dark place where I would be neither heard nor seen, the prison of old age' (128). Second, Ella reveals that the mirrors show Lisa Crane's face alongside hers 'like two halves of an apple, shivering in the looking-glass doors' (129). As a result, Ella understands why Mrs Neidpath, the estate's caretaker, 'thinks she has seen me here before' (129).⁴² Ella not only sees a physical resemblance between Muriel and herself, but she also identifies with Muriel's fear about the confines and marginalization associated with the Western woman's aging process. Tennant consciously characterizes Ella and Muriel sharing a similar appearance and similar fears about the aging; thus, she cleverly sets up concrete parallels between Ella and Muriel which foster ambiguity.

Tennant builds on the ambiguity in Chapter Seventeen by replacing Ella's voice with an omniscient narrator in Chapter Eighteen. The omniscient narrator does not allude to any character other than Anna and Jasmine by name; instead, the narrator refers to the remaining characters as 'a man' (130), 'a young woman' (130), 'the woman' (130), and an 'old woman' (131). This narrative technique denies any character identification; the 'generic' terminology affirms ambiguity and leaves the text and its characters open to question and interpretation. Since the narrator refuses to clearly identify the characters, the reader finds it difficult, if not impossible, to determine which 'young' woman walks down the stair to dinner arm and arm with the devil. Is it the diabolically transformed Muriel or young Ella? Who is the young couple who walk arm in arm up the drive? Is it Harry and Lisa, Harry and Muriel, the devil and Lisa, the devil and Muriel, or the devil with Ella? Does an 'old woman' actually run up the drive after a 'young' couple? Or is this vision merely an impression of an old woman drawn from the faint glow from the fires in the woods? Tennant's ambiguity repudiates any

⁴²Note that the references to the apple and the looking glass might be allusions to the fairy tale Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs as well as to Eve and the primordial apple.

lucid or coherent character definition. However, one might conclude from the textual ambiguity that if the young woman is Ella, then Tennant suggests her young protagonist, like many women in Western culture, will always fear the 'prisons of old age' (128).

Tennant heightens the ambiguous identity of the woman who walks with the gentleman up the drive by linking Ella with the devil. In two places in the novel, Ella describes how she falls in the park while Muriel talks with the devil: 'My head gets a cut and the man takes a white handkerchief from the breast pocket of his immaculate suit. He mops my head and the white lawn handkerchief is splodged with blood' (91); and 'my head gets a cut and the man takes a white handkerchief from the breast pocket of his immaculate dark suit. He mops my head and the white lawn handkerchief is splodged with blood. And still I scream' (100). These two passages are almost identical; what's more, they show a common action. When the devil wipes Ella's cut head, he carries out an action that leaves his handkerchief 'splodged' with blood. Unequivocally, Ella's blood on the devil's handkerchief affirms some kind of 'blood' connection and tie between the devil and Ella, between the human and the supernatural, and between man and woman.

DeKoven rightly reminds us that in experimental writing 'we cannot impose such coherence or synthesis without negating, throwing out, failing to account for, the powerful impression of incoherence the writing initially gives'.⁴³ When Tennant denies her female characters positive identification, she emphasizes the imprecise position women hold in a patriarchal environment. Textual ambiguity discourages synthesis; therefore, the ambiguous textual structure in *Faustine* parallels the ambiguous position of women in culture and also refutes any idealistic notions that every woman may exercise control over their lives and their roles in a male dominant society.

Narrative Style: Intertextuality, Language and Imagery, Dialogue Transcription

Feminist literary criticism and feminist political theory show us that 'women are deeply implicated in the existing structures of the social world as mothers, daughters, lovers and

⁴³A *Different Language*, p. 6.

wives'.⁴⁴ Tennant continues to explore this paradox in *Faustine* by continually referring to novels and texts which have come before in order to investigate how women have been implicated in the social structures. Julia Kristeva argues that a text 'cannot exist as a hermetic or self-sufficient whole, and so does not function as a closed system'.⁴⁵ Similarly, Mikhail Bakhtin writes that the 'text only lives by coming into contact with another text (with context). Only at the point of this contact between texts does a light flash, illuminating both the posterior and anterior, joining a given text to a dialogue'.⁴⁶ For Bakhtin, intertextuality as a literary phenomenon predicates the impossibility of the writer existing in isolation from her/his society or the literary world. When Tennant, through the devil, asks Freud's famous question, 'what the hell do women really want' (139), she presents her novel as an 'open system' and explicitly announces textual plurality.

Faustine exemplifies many facets of intertextuality because the text continually refers to other novels and literary forms. Some examples of Tennant's intertextuality appear in Muriel's "'Little Women'" (54) side; in Anna and Harry's relationship that is 'rational', because 'they were friends as well as lovers. In those days, you know, the model was Mary Wollstonecraft and her husband, Godwin, with their separate lives and their clearly defined freedoms' (94); in Ella's understanding of Muriel's pact with the devil, 'twenty-four years of unlimited power in return for the immortal soul: the pact made between Faust and Mephistopheles' (123); and finally, in the devil's reference to 'Lolita', who 'as we know, was the ultimate temptation for the diabolical lecher, jail-bait bargainer, harridan-hater, Humbert [. . .] The libertine teen-snatcher' (135). These sentences illustrate a few of Tennant's many references to other fiction which overtly refer to conventional representations of womanhood and femininity. These include traditional ideas which relate to women's domesticity and passivity, to women's attempt to gain freedom from male domination, to the dangers of diabolic interventions for material gain and, of course, to how men often displace responsibility for their own psychological and physical urges onto women.

⁴⁴Coral Ann Howells, *Private and Fictional Words: Canadian Women Novelists of the 1970s and 1980s* (London/New York: Methuen, 1987), p. 28.

⁴⁵Qtd. in Worton and Stills, *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices*, p. 1.

⁴⁶*Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. by Vern W. McGee, ed. by Carly Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), p. 162.

Tennant's intertextuality in *Faustine*, like her intertextuality in *Sisters and Strangers*, suggests that her novel is not simply one text, but is related to a number of other texts which also interrogate the ideological conditioning of women in the Western world. Hutcheon believes that postmodernism:

is a fundamentally contradictory enterprise: its art forms (and its theory) at once use and abuse, install and then destabilize convention in parodic ways, self-consciously pointing both to their own inherent paradoxes and provisionality and, of course, to their critical or ironic re-reading of the art of the past. In implicitly contesting in this way such concepts as aesthetic originality and textual closure, postmodernist art offers a new model for mapping the borderland between art and the world, a model that works from a position within both and yet not totally within either, a model that is profoundly implicated in, yet still capable of criticizing, that which it seeks to describe.⁴⁷

Tennant refers to other novels which similarly highlight the repression of women's subjectivity and achievement; thus she at once uses and abuses, installs, ironizes, and destabilizes traditional representations of women in culture. Her intertextuality self-consciously points to the inherent paradoxes and provisionality of existing social, cultural, and literary codes that promote 'acceptable' images of femininity. One might conclude that Tennant's aversion to textual closure offers a postmodern model for re-mapping the borders between high art and the world. Moreover, by alluding to literary images which precede her own text, Tennant shows how women have been represented by men in literature and in life; thus, she actively engages, like Wollstonecraft and many other women writers, in an act of female ideological emancipation.

Drawing on the exploitation of women in the Third World and referring to numerous other literary texts which reveal how women are encoded into limiting roles, Tennant destabilizes and decentres the monolithic hegemony of Western culture. Hutcheon claims that when one questions any totalizing or homogenizing system:

Historical and narrative continuity and closure are contested, but again, from within. The teleology of art forms -- from fiction to music -- is both suggested and transformed. The centre no longer completely holds. And, from the decentered perspective, the 'marginal' [. . .] (Be it in class, race, gender, sexual orientation, or ethnicity) take on new significance in the light of the implied recognition that our culture is not really the homogenous monolith

⁴⁷A *Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 23. The next two references are from this edition.

(that is middle-class, male, heterosexual, white, western) we might have assumed (12-13).

Faustine, as a postmodern intertext or subtext of women's experience in the world lends the marginal, namely women and Third World cultures, new significance. What's more, if the centre of culture 'is seen as a construct, a fiction, not a fixed and unchangeable reality, the "old either--or begins to break down," as Susan Griffin puts it and the new and--also of multiplicity and difference opens up new possibilities' (62). *Faustine* subverts the traditional representations of womanhood and femininity by asserting multiplicity, difference, and otherness; in this manner, Tennant offers women and those individuals who live in 'marginal' cultures a means of liberation and new possibilities.

The language Tennant employs in *Faustine*, like the intertextuality, frequently creates powerful images and lends insight into the ways in which individuals interact. For instance, Tennant's lush description of Jasmine's meal preparation serves to show women occupying a domestic role and reveals how women, for one reason or another, periodically undermine other women. In one of the first 'cooking' scenes of the novel, the reader finds Ella in the kitchen watching Jasmine blend 'sage and breadcrumbs and egg together in a Magimix and her hand goes deep into the bird, pushing in the glutinous stuff. Then two rashers of bacon go down over the back of the bird, and a blob of butter' (84). On one level, Tennant's words describe Jasmine mixing stuffing and filling a chicken; however, the words simultaneously conjure up violent images. A Magimix is a dangerous machine with sharp blades: it cuts, tears, dices, and grinds food into crumbs. When Jasmine vigorously cuts and blends dressing and proceeds to stuff the chicken, a similarly aggressive task, the images bring to mind the possibility that she cuts Ella's memories into pieces, as she stuffs the young woman full of lies about her grandmother and her idyllic childhood.

In a strikingly similar scene, Ella watches as Jasmine 'prods a meringue, the sharp, brittle exterior snapping under her thumb. Transformed from the billow of egg white that went into the fire, the thin shapes that float like swans on the tin surface of the cooking tray seem hard and unreal' (97). The language in this passage vividly links Ella with the meringue. In a very real sense, while Jasmine builds the meringue, she also rebuilds Ella's

memories about her grandmother. Like the meringue, Ella's memories and her identity are also fragile and delicate. As the novel progresses, Jasmine's story increasingly fills with malice; hence, one might conclude that when Jasmine prods the meringue and it snaps under her thumb, she symbolically snaps Ella's happy memories and, indeed, the very foundation of Ella's self-hood in the process. Tennant manipulates language, then, to unveil underlying emotional distress and to show how meal preparation signifies the catering roles which single, older women are expected to fill.

An innovative transcription of dialogue further strengthens the power of the narrative drive in *Faustine*. Tennant does not use quotation marks after the beginning section and there is no break between the voice of any character and the voice of the narrator; the authority in the text lies within the individual voices of each character.⁴⁸ Tennant's unmarked dialogue, like James Kelman's and Janice Galloway's dialogue, breaks down the barriers between characters and narrators and implicitly questions the authority of the narrator and the nature of authority in general. Tennant's experimental narrative form also allies the novel with oral tradition and concomitantly fosters textual ambiguity which encourages the reader to work hard to discover unity and meaning within the text.

A brief example of the dialogue transcription will prove useful in ascertaining Tennant's possible motive for experimenting with traditional narrative form. The second section of the novel, 'The Nurse's Tale', begins with the words, 'the first shock is over, of finding you here. And I will tell you, only be patient and I will tell you all I can' (39). The effect of this unquoted dialogue is twofold. First, the unnamed 'I' and 'you' in these sentences are ambiguous and therefore remain questioning. Since the 'I' and 'you' are presented without quotes, they mimic oral communication; in this way, Tennant implies that the narrator, 'I', will verbally transmit a tale to an audience, 'you', an audience of which the reader cannot help but be a member. Second, since the first lines of 'The Nurse's Tale' simulate conversation, the reader immediately interacts with, and becomes a part of, the textual design. Consequently, as the narrative without quotation marks develops and the

⁴⁸Margaret Elphinstone employs a similar narrative technique in both *The Incomer* and *A Sparrow's Flight*.

stories about Muriel evolve, the reader begins to accept or to reject the individual renditions of Muriel's tale.

One example of how the unmarked dialogue leads a reader to question the 'truth' and authority of a character's tale occurs when Jasmine talks about Ella's childhood illness and her stay in the hospital. Jasmine says, 'I was at the hospital, holding Anna's hand, and yours too, poor little baby, except you were much too ill to be conscious of anything' (107). However, Ella remembers the scene differently: 'No, Jasmine, you are wrong, I say, but to myself and not to her, for something in me causes me to trust her less and less' (107). Ella repeats her distrust of Jasmine's account to herself and to the reader; hence, the lack of quotation marks invites the reader to also query Jasmine's version of Muriel's demise.

Tennant's informal dialogue shatters any textual linearity and dislocates narrative form. Some individuals, however, seem to miss the point of the postmodern self-conscious manipulation of language and structure which ensures textual ambiguity. In her review of *Faustine*, Philippa Gregory complains:

There are infuriating eccentricities of style. Until page 36 the punctuation is normal. Thereafter there is not a quote mark in the book, except where double quotes are normally employed. Speech is indicated by a pretentious little dash which makes pretty patterns on the page, but does not enhance the clarity of the sentences.⁴⁹

Undoubtedly, Gregory misses Tennant's motive in experimenting with conventional techniques. Tennant's unique point of view, language and imagery, and experimental dialogue aim to deny 'clarity of the sentences'. What's more, Gregory seems to be completely unaware that the unmarked dialogues begin when Jasmine begins her oral transmission of Muriel's tale to Ella. The lack of quotes is significant at this juncture in the novel because when Tennant omits conventional literary quotes, she self-consciously devises a postmodern narrative style that translates the oral tradition into written prose. This style is not 'pretentious', nor about 'pretty patterns' on the page; instead, Tennant's narrative conundrum draws readers into the text and asks them to accept, or to reject, each woman's 'tale'. Tennant's multiple narratives, like Fay Weldon's multiple narratives, break 'up the

⁴⁹'The She-devil's work', *The Sunday Times*, 22 March 1992, p. 6.

sense of continuity, and deprives “backgrounds” of their moral authority’.⁵⁰ Tennant’s ambiguous narrative structure thus deprives traditional literary conventions of authority and allows a fragmented text to represent, in a very real sense, the fragmentation of women’s subjectivity in contemporary Western society.

Tennant and the Business of Demythologizing Women in Literature and in Life

Much can be said about Tennant’s innovative experimental literary style and the emancipatory effect this type of fiction holds for a female audience; at the same time, however, one cannot talk about these three novels without discussing how Tennant appropriates male texts for her own devices. Greene and Kahn tell us, ‘literature itself is a “discursive practice” whose conventions encode social conventions and are ideologically complicit’.⁵¹ One way to attack the cultural encoding of women as subjects consists of appropriating male texts and rewriting them from a female perspective. In her conversation with Roe and Monteith, Tennant admits that she rewrites male texts. Roe responds by saying, ‘re-writing is different from supplying another angle’; Tennant answer to Roe is, ‘there’s either supplying another angle, or being inspired by, as I felt I was with *The Bad Sister*’.⁵² Inspired by male novels to appropriate their texts and add the female voice, Tennant reconstructs existing ideas about and for women. She openly repudiates statements that this type of narrative drive and plot structure is ‘unoriginal’ with the strong conviction that ‘original’ as a term is ‘absolutely meaningless. It’s like saying somebody isn’t relevant’.⁵³

Reconstructing male texts in a unique manner, Tennant exposes how ideological systems confine and construct women as individuals in a dominant male order. In *Faustine*, Tennant, in an imaginative literary endeavour, interrogates the traditional processes of female cultural conditioning which limit a woman’s access to positive roles which in turn formulate

⁵⁰Sage, *Women in the House of Fiction*, p. 156. Sage comments on Weldon’s novels and not Tennant’s writing. Again, since the critical analysis of Tennant’s works is still few and far between I refer to critical articles on Weldon and Carter, two writers who utilize thematic and narrative structures which parallel Tennant’s own work.

⁵¹‘Feminist Scholarship and the Social Construction of Woman’, p. 4.

⁵²‘Women Talking About Writing’, p. 141.

⁵³Ibid.

positive impressions of female subjectivity and self-worth. Emma Tennant recognizes, in Angela Carter's words, 'how that social fiction of my "femininity" was created, by means outside my control, and palmed off on me as the real thing'.⁵⁴ Tennant also understands that 'in order to question the nature of reality one must move from a strongly grounded base in what constitutes material reality' (70). Reaching beyond realistic literary conventions and styles, Tennant's fiction undermines and subverts male depictions of women and women's capabilities. Like Angela Carter, Tennant is also in the 'demythologising business' (71), and strives, through literature, to educate and to liberate women around the world.

⁵⁴'Notes from the Front Line', in *On Gender and Writing*, ed. by Michelene Wandor (London: Pandora Press, 1983), pp. 69-77 (p. 70). The next two references are from this edition.

Chapter Five
Margaret Elphinstone: The Incomer and A Sparrow's Flight

She said stories helped you to understand the world.
 --Jeanette Winterson

Chapter Five introduces a new writer, Margaret Elphinstone to the thesis. Elphinstone's novels *The Incomer* and *A Sparrow's Flight* find an affinity with Tennant's three novels both in theme and content. Like *The Bad Sister*, *Sisters and Strangers*, and *Faustine*, *The Incomer* and *A Sparrow's Flight* explore elements of fantasy. Both novels are set in a non-hierarchical fictional world which resembles the historical past and recognizable future. Elphinstone, like Tennant, uses this fantastical and non-hierarchical community to explore female subjectivity; whereas Tennant reveals the ways in which women are confined as passive subjects, Elphinstone advances an alternative vision which shows women to be powerful and independent subjects when they are not limited by social and cultural policies that favour men. Like Tennant and Galloway, Elphinstone also initiates an innovative and challenging narrative form. Inner tales, dream sequences, shifting narrative, emotional, physical, and geographic borders permeate both novels and reinforce Elphinstone's preoccupation with plurality and feminine identity. *The Incomer* and *A Sparrow's Flight*, like Tennant's novels, proffer readers new versions of womanhood and femininity and, at the same time, new visions of Scottish women's writing.

Margaret Elphinstone

Although a relative newcomer to the field of Scottish women's literature, especially in novel writing, Margaret Elphinstone has published widely; a collection of poems, two books on organic gardening, numerous short stories in a variety of different journals, critical commentary on Scottish women's literature, and also edited a collection of garden verse. She currently teaches literature at Strathclyde University and has lived a wandering life; in addition to being involved in the women's movement at Greenham Common, she spent eight years in Shetland and time in the 'new-age' Findhorn community.

Elphinstone refers to the time she has spent living in these different places as a sixteen year 'Rip Van Winkle' departure from academia. She finds herself in the discomfiting position of working in an almost entirely 'male academic department where these men have worked for twenty-five years, all the time I was doing all those things, and I feel as though I'm pretending -- you know -- today I'm going to go out and pretend to be a university lecturer'.¹ Elphinstone also has mixed background. Although she grew up in England, her father's family is from Scotland, so that when she is in England she feels herself to be Scottish, but when she comes to Scotland, Elphinstone appears to be from the south of England. It seems, then, that Elphinstone is in a perfect position to understand the contradiction and confusion associated with a woman who exhibits many different female personae.

While Elphinstone is perfectly happy to be called a woman writer, even a feminist writer, she does feel slightly uncomfortable that her work is published by The Women's Press. In particular, Elphinstone does not want to:

ghettoize, and sometimes I would rather not be published by The Women's Press, because I think in practical terms there are a lot of men who don't pick up Women's Press books. [. . .] I don't want that initial barrier. I don't want men to think that 'this is not for me' or that I'm in a sort of women's world.²

For Elphinstone, in terms of her life and writing, 'feminism must come through the writing just like compost heaps do because it's part of what I think about'.³ Even though the books Elphinstone writes may focus more on women than on men, they are accessible and available to both sexes.

Elphinstone likes to include herself in the Scottish female literary tradition. She believes that much of Scottish women's writing has been about 'borderline situations, borderlines of madness, borderlines of reality. Well, look at Emma Tennant: it's this absolute on the edge feeling'.⁴ Recognizing that Scottish women suffer marginalization of their own reality in all areas of life, Elphinstone feels that this position gives Scottish women the freedom to explore female subjectivity in creative, dynamic, and exciting ways. Elphinstone comments

¹Lisa Suzanne Babinec, (unpublished interview with Margaret Elphinstone), 17 June 1992. Appendix, p. 327.

²Ibid, p. 326.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid, p. 325.

that some reviewers object to her portrayal of men or, more specifically, the fact that male characters are peripheral in the novels. Elphinstone openly responds to this criticism: 'I was trying to create a world in which women's networks predominate and the men are more peripheral. [. . .] You couldn't say there is a hierarchy and there's not meant to be; that's meant to be quite anarchic'⁵. *The Incomer* and *A Sparrow's Flight* are two novels about women's freedom and the strength women can achieve in an environment where no prevailing male ideologies dominate the social order. This does not necessarily signify a utopian science fiction or fantastical world; however, the themes and hierarchical constructs within the novel do intimate an interest in the conventions these types of genre fiction allow.

Elphinstone finds a place within the contemporary Scottish women's literary tradition because she shares similar preoccupations with Tennant and Galloway and also explores female subjectivity. By creating alternative worlds that are fantastical in structure, she allows the female characters in both novels to investigate ideas of self and self-hood without restraint. Elphinstone turns to the oral tradition and importance of music in a small community, and defies conventional narrative structure in an effort to question existing notions of 'what is real' and 'what is literature'; therefore, her novels illuminate threatening subversions of reality for the literary establishment as they interrogate the various roles and relationships women and men hold in the attempt to reconstruct women as independent and autonomous subjects. Before engaging in textual analysis, however, it will prove useful to explore science fiction and fantasy genre conventions.

Science Fiction and Fantasy Conventions

The Incomer and *A Sparrow's Flight* are two novels that escape a rigid literary categorization. As John Clute puts it, 'like so many tales of life long after the apocalypse, *A Sparrow's Flight* (a sequel to *The Incomer*, 1987), rewrites science-fictional premisses [sic] in the language of fantasy, a genre much in love with region (and with Scotland)'.⁶ While some features of the novels' society and description are familiar to the reader, the homes, the music, the festivals,

⁵Ibid, p. 329.

⁶'Back and Forward', *Times Literary Supplement*, 4534 (23 February-1 March 1990). 202.

the clothes the characters wear, the food they eat, and the geographical landscape, neither novel fully describes a naturalized reality. For example, in *A Sparrow's Flight*, Naomi, the female protagonist, enters a room in a house which conceals objects from the past. She does not recognize the piano or the clock; instead, she merely describes these objects and wonders what their functions are, or were, to the previous owners of the home. One could say that Naomi lives in a future, but not a future that many readers who are aware of traditional science fiction or fantasy techniques will be familiar with. While the terms 'science fiction' and 'fantasy' usually conjure up images of high technology, space marvels, aliens, and foreign worlds, Elphinstone subverts these presumptions by designing a future world where women and men live in an environment similar to our own, yet where conventional hierarchies and gender expectations are overturned.

Since Elphinstone examines the conflicting images of women's low level of achievement in contemporary society by juxtaposing women's subordinate status with fictional characters who are encouraged to seek out freedom and success, one might ask where Elphinstone's novels fall in terms of genre and tradition. Are they science fiction, fantasy, myth, or allegory? In the end, does a firm classification such as this actually matter? Is it imperative to define a novel's category or genre in order to understand how the author and her texts attempt to function? Since The Women's Press published *The Incomer* under their Science Fiction label, perhaps a few ideas on what science fiction 'is' will help determine a few answers to the above questions.

In an interesting study of science fiction and feminism, Sarah Lefanu quotes Peter Nicholls and John Clute from their text *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. According to Nicholls and Clute, science fiction 'is a label applied to a publishing category and its application is subject to the whims of editors and publishers'.⁷ Lefanu goes on to suggest that the application of the term is also subject to the whims of readers and writers who hold passionate views of what is or what is not science fiction irrespective of the label under which the work is published. Lefanu suggests that 'these views depend, naturally enough, on the

⁷*In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction* (London: The Women's Press, 1988), p. 21.

concerns of the interested party: science or society? Satire or speculation? Credibility or critique? It depends on what your priorities are'.⁸

In light of Nicholls's, Clute's and Lefanu's observations, it might be prudent to ask if unyielding definitions associated with science fiction are particularly useful to readers and writers. Elphinstone does not see the value in attaching labels to fiction. When The Women's Press placed *The Incomer* on their Science Fiction list Elphinstone was:

Flattered, but also puzzled, I considered the fact that, as far as I knew, I never read science fiction. I thought I had written a novel which drew its imagery from the Galloway countryside and folk tradition. I thought I was writing about where I lived. Certainly I had transposed my own village into another world, but it was not one that seemed alien to me.⁹

Even though Elphinstone clarifies that her novels draw their imagery from the Galloway countryside and folk tradition, several reviewers described *The Incomer* as taking place in a post-holocaust world. However, Elphinstone finds this description 'mildly irritating, because I wasn't really thinking of holocausts at all. Some said that the books should have explained more clearly what had happened. That wasn't what I was trying to do'.¹⁰ While some novels design what might be called non-realist motifs, these same novels, like Elphinstone's, clearly do not fit into the unilateral conventions often assigned to the genre of science fiction; consequently, it is better to ask what science fiction *grants* as a genre, rather than assign the term a rigid definition.

As Lefanu succinctly puts it, 'science fiction offers certain obvious freedoms: unconstrained by the parameters of the realist mode it allows a writer to imagine other worlds and other times, making space for visions of a better world -- in the Utopian tradition -- or, in the dystopian, a worse one'.¹¹ Science fiction does not simply create alternative worlds, it also 'offers the opportunity to reflect on and explore the questions of writing and reading as women, that is, the position of the gendered subject' (178). Lefanu argues that science fiction 'has from the beginnings been a literature of inquiry, allowing comment and critique through

⁸Ibid.

⁹'Contemporary Feminist Fantasy', pp. 45-46.

¹⁰Jennie Renton, 'Margaret Elphinstone Interviewed', *Scottish Book Collector*, 3 (Feb-March 1992), 2-3 (p. 2).

¹¹'Popular Writing and Feminist Intervention in Science Fiction', in *Gender, Genre and Narrative Pleasure*, ed. by Derek Longhurst (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp. 177-91, (pp. 177). The next two references are from this edition.

the processes of defamiliarization and estrangement, embracing other narrative forms such as satire, myth, legend, historical reconstruction and straight polemic' (179). Elphinstone integrates inner stories which offer an alternative version of ideology and discourse that reconstruct the hierarchies that exist in Western culture. Accordingly, Elphinstone defamiliarizes and therefore challenges the cultural and social codes which limit an individual's access to certain roles and behaviours. When Elphinstone draws on the literary conventions commonly associated with science fiction, she interrogates and defamiliarizes the naturalized versions of womanhood and femininity promoted by male-oriented culture.

Cranny-Francis adds to Lefanu's theories on science fiction. Cranny-Francis claims that science fiction is a literature of estrangement: it is a 'literature concerned primarily with the alienation experienced by individual subjects, realized textually by a setting displaced in time and/or space'.¹² Science fiction repeatedly estranges readers because the term usually connotes alien worlds with foreign inhabitants; thus, science fiction frequently metaphorically represents an individual's experience of alienation. By displacing a novel's setting in time and/or space, authors release readers from the everyday world of experiential reality. This narrative practice allows writers to present women in new roles liberated from the sexism endemic to society.

Science fiction imaginatively projects different societies; this imaginative visualization becomes in Cranny-Francis' mind 'a key element in the perception of the mechanisms of patriarchal ideology, the breakdown of its naturalization'.¹³ Elphinstone effectively manages this breakdown of naturalized relations between the sexes and dominant discursive institutions by displacing the time and place of her fictional world. She introduces festivals, fairs, and dragons, as well as kettles, books, and ceilidhs into both *The Incomer* and *A Sparrow's Flight*; these images are reminiscent of both medieval and modern life.¹⁴ When Elphinstone juxtaposes past and present versions of reality, she disconnects the reader from experiencing a cohesive or realistic text. When the novels estrange readers from interpreting reality, they

¹²*Feminist Fiction*, p. 26.

¹³*Ibid*, p. 43.

¹⁴For specific textual examples, please refer to pp. 20-1, 98-9, 104-5 in *The Incomer*; pp. 58-70, 85, 242-3, 245 in *A Sparrow's Flight*.

invite us to think more poetically about how women are typically estranged from cultural codes and practices.

The word 'fantasy', in common with the term science fiction, also confers on readers certain expectations. For the most part, fantasy conveys images like J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth characters in *The Lord of the Rings*, or talking beasts and mythical figures like satyrs and giants which proliferate C.S. Lewis's *Narnia*. Fantasy, however, does not simply offer readers talking beasts or underground worlds. As Jackson sees it:

Fantasy is not to do with inventing another non-human world: it is not transcendental. It has to do with inverting elements of this world, recombining its constitutive features in new relations to produce something strange, unfamiliar and *apparently* 'new', absolutely 'other' and different.¹⁵

Jackson also suggests that 'the fantastic exists in the hinterland between "real" and "imaginary", shifting the relations between them through its indeterminacy'.¹⁶ Elphinstone continually plays with borders, borderlines, and border crossings in her writing; thus, she continually shifts and queries received ideas about reality and imagination. Elphinstone invents and recombines elements of the contemporary world in her novels in order to produce new and 'other' versions of human relationships and female reality. Since Elphinstone uses science fiction and fantasy conventions to invert conventional hierarchies of power, her novels proffer readers new visions of egalitarian alliances between women and men.

Postmodernism, in conjunction with science fiction and fantasy genre conventions, critically and creatively sheds light on how prevailing ideologies and discursive institutions construct individuals, particularly women, as subjects. Waugh, for example, asserts that the reconstruction and the production of alternative modes and models of subjectivity is more politically effective than deconstructing subjects.¹⁷ When writers and critics provide women with alternative models or pictures of subjectivity and self-hood, women can begin to experience themselves as subjects; as a result, women may interrogate how they feel and how they present themselves to women, men, and the world at large. Once this process of self-

¹⁵*Fantasy, The Literature of Subversion*, p. 8.

¹⁶*Ibid*, p. 35.

¹⁷*Feminine Fictions*, p. 20.

analysis commences, women can attempt to readjust the imbalances they perceive in themselves in a manner that establishes positive, not negative, personal growth. Elphinstone's fantastical fictional world presents her readers with subversive pictures of female characters who maintain control over their sexual choices and their lives; thus, she attempts to reformulate naturalized ideas about women's roles and status in society which are sanctioned and consecrated by cultural discourses and institutions.

Elphinstone's subversive use of science fiction and fantasy genre conventions, coupled with an experimental narrative form, signals a postmodern literary enterprise. Waugh concludes that a close relationship exists between feminism and postmodernism:

Both are concerned to disrupt traditional boundaries: between 'art' and 'life', masculine and feminine, high and popular culture, the dominant and the marginal. Both examine the cultural consequences of the decline of a consensus aesthetics, of an effective 'literary' voice, or the absence of a strong sense of stable subjectivity. Each expresses concern about the extension of relationships of alienation within a consumer society and the expansion of technological and scientific modes of knowledge which cannot be contained within traditional moral paradigms. In each case, too, there is a close relationship between theory and practice leading to an unprecedented aesthetic self-consciousness and awareness of the problematic situation of the contemporary writer in relation to historical actuality and fictional tradition.¹⁸

Elphinstone's novels self-consciously interrogate ideas connected to alienation and self-knowledge; thus, her writing disrupts and inverts the hierarchies that traditionally separate women from men. As a Scottish writer who participates in feminism and women's liberation, Elphinstone engages with dominant and marginal constructs and positions; thus, her novels embrace a postmodern feminist agenda of denaturalizing existing cultural codes and social practices which alienate and oppress female subjects.

Whether or not Elphinstone's novels *The Incomer* and *A Sparrow's Flight* fall into the category of science fiction or fantasy remains to be seen. What is important, though, is that the novels employ science fiction and fantasy genre conventions which release Elphinstone from engaging with the hierarchical constraints of contemporary society. Elphinstone's literary endeavour is in and of itself anarchic because she scrutinizes the ideological construction of

¹⁸Ibid, p. 6.

femininity and womanhood in a fictional form that announces possibility and potential for egalitarian communities which do not restrain women or men.

Elphinstone's novels take place in a world where no male hierarchy exists; she examines women's community, thoughts, actions, and strength in a setting free from male domination. The characters in both novels make it very clear that some unspeakable harm has been done to the land and, as a result, life is hard and based only on taking food from the earth and making clothing and homes that accommodate survival. Time and place cannot be firmly established in *The Incomer* or *A Sparrow's Flight* and the culture that Elphinstone invents in these novels is non-materialistic and steeped in folk tradition: music, tales, and dance permeate the characters' culture. Women, rather than men, are in control of households and carry responsibility for maintaining a spiritual connection with the land. Since Elphinstone designs a fictional world where conventional and contemporary power structures are inverted and women are allowed and encouraged to develop their potential in a landscape that the reader may be familiar with, she asks readers to question individual perceptions of reality and illusion.

Although Elphinstone, Tennant, and Galloway interrogate female subjectivity, Elphinstone presents femininity and womanhood in *The Incomer* and *A Sparrow's Flight* in a more positive manner than Tennant does in *The Bad Sister, Sisters and Strangers*, and *Faustine*, or Galloway does in *The Trick is To Keep Breathing*. Since male ideologies and institutions do not shape or construct the women in Elphinstone's novels, she represents her female characters as capable of understanding themselves as individuals who fill vital roles essential to community survival instead of in roles that simply serve male needs. While Tennant's and Galloway's novels are not in any sense politically less correct, all three authors tackle the same issue in different manners: Elphinstone imagines an egalitarian community free from gender stereotypes, while Tennant and Galloway show women restrained by rigid male hierarchies and structures.

Even though *The Incomer* and *A Sparrow's Flight* introduce different characters and involve separate communities, both novels present Naomi as the main protagonist. Since both novels interrogate similar subjects such as female roles and the respect for the land, and engage

with postmodern literary techniques, the novels will be discussed together, rather than in separate chapters.

The Scottish Dimension: Music, Dance, Geography

In his book *The Invention of Scotland: The Stuart Myth and the Scottish Identity, 1638--Present*, Murray G.H. Pittock reports that as 'Tom Crawford has pointed out, every revival of Scottish literature has gone hand in hand with a revival of the traditions of the past'.¹⁹ It is arguable whether or not Scottish literature is currently enjoying a 'revival' or simply gaining wider recognition in the literary world. However, one can say that Scottish folk traditions such as music, dance, storytelling, and the supernatural, provocatively filter through Scottish women's writing. Elphinstone fervently believes that the 'ballads and folk tradition have survived in literature, against all competition from other sources and other media. [. . .] This particular strand of Scottish literature has weathered sentimentality, and is still available to contemporary writers'.²⁰ Like Tennant and Galloway, Elphinstone's novels interrogate the cultural construction of femininity and female subjectivity from a feminist perspective; unlike Tennant and Galloway, Elphinstone incorporates Scottish folk traditions into her writing and locates her novels within a distinctly Scottish context.

Music is an integral element of the characters' culture in both *The Incomer* and *A Sparrow's Flight*. As a result of their society's past 'evil', the inhabitants of Elphinstone's fictional world have reverted from industrialization to simple agricultural lifestyles. No technology or mass communication networks enter into either novel; thus, music, storytelling, and dance are cultural traditions which serve to entertain, to teach, and to bring folk together. Buchan remarks, 'taletelling once occupied in Scottish life a position whose prominence may be difficult to comprehend in times when many media compete to provide entertainment and stimulation. It influenced both community life and family life'.²¹ Music, like the inner stories, permeates the fictional culture and also influences community and family life.

¹⁹(London/New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 154.

²⁰'Contemporary Feminist Fantasy', p. 47.

²¹*Scottish Tradition: A Collection of Scottish Folk Literature* (London/Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 15.

When Naomi enters Clachanpluck, she tells Alan that she is a musician. He responds, “are you?” he said eagerly. “And that then? In the box? Is that what you play?”²² Alan’s interest exposes the eagerness and importance which accompanies music and instruments in a culture with little entertainment. The characters in Elphinstone’s fictional world revere music because music is seen as a treasure to pass on. Naomi brings new and old music to Clachanpluck ‘and the old tunes were welcomed as well-known friends, and the new were taken in and carefully remembered, to enrich the only treasure that these people were able to hoard or to pass on’ (30). Music in Elphinstone’s writing also frequently stands for the characters’ internal and external lives. When Naomi attempts to uncover the meaning of the music in the dance of Thomas’s people, she realizes that the music becomes interesting as the dance progresses. The music ‘goes deeper. The first [part] is merely a dance tune, a celebration of the world in which we find ourselves. Whereas the second [. . .] Is almost the same tune, but turned inwards, the world that we hold inside ourselves’.²³ Music in Clachanpluck and Thomas’s valley plays similar roles: it entertains and brings folk together, it is a treasure which may be passed on from generation to generation, it acts as an informal historical record, and it celebrates the characters’ life and world while reflecting the internal and external emotions of the individuals in culture. Music in the context of Elphinstone’s writing remains an essential feature of folk culture which mirrors past and present characteristics of Scottish folk traditions.

Like music, dancing, feasts, and festivals saturate *The Incomer* and *A Sparrow’s Flight*. In *The Incomer*, the festivals and dancing seem interconnected because during the midwinter festival:

When the sun went down in the afternoon the celebrations began. On the longest night the fires could not be allowed to die down nor the lamps be dimmed until the sun was reborn in the eastern sky. This was the night of watching, for the sun must be brought back again into the world, and the circle completed (99).

²²*The Incomer* (London: The Women’s Press, 1987), p. 6. Further references to this edition will be given after quotations in the text.

²³*A Sparrow’s Flight* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1989), p. 163. Further references to this edition will be given after quotations in the text.

To celebrate the midwinter feast and to keep awake, the people of Clachanpluck gather together to listen to music, and they dance 'like dervishes' (100) to fast reels and jigs. Elphinstone continues to invoke images of folk traditions in *A Sparrow's Flight*. At a festival which resembles a medieval fair, Naomi watches Thomas juggle balls and eat fire and 'she began to play, as if he were giving her the beat, not the other way round' (60). Music, festivals, and dancing are celebratory and entertaining; they also bring people together socially to celebrate the earth and the stars and to thank these entities for their prosperity.

On another level, dance and dancing for Thomas's people take on a deeper meaning. Thomas asks Naomi to join him on his journey to his home in the empty lands so that she may play at a dance performed once every seven years in his valley. Thomas tells Naomi that the devastation of the land forced his people into exile:

The dance was made in exile, so that the generations might be counted, and the number of years of our exile not be forgotten. When we returned, we brought the dance with us, and made a home for it in every valley. That tarn is ours. We do it every seven years, and never fail, and so we keep count of our history (114).

The dance for Thomas's valley is important and a necessary feature of their culture as it signifies the chronological and historical record of their society. By performing the dance every seven years, Thomas's people recount their history and thus keep it alive; consequently, the dance acts as a 'path through the generations, or the parts that people may play, or the living of one's life' (114). Since Elphinstone patterns the dance of exile on pagan symbols and circular tunes and dances, she calls to mind the Celtic and Pictish heritage within Scottish history and culture.²⁴

John Burns talks about three contemporary Scottish novels by George Mackay Brown, Sian Hayton, and Harry Tait in his essay 'Myths and Marvels'. He states:

Not all of them use Scottish material in a Scottish setting, but they do reveal a consciousness steeped in that archaic tradition, together with a delight in inhabiting the ambiguous landscape of legend and myth which is so congenial to the Scottish imagination.²⁵

²⁴See pp. 179-82 for specific imagery.

²⁵In *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies*, pp. 71-81 (p. 71).

Although Elphinstone's novels are not included in Burns's analysis, his words could equally apply to *The Incomer* and *A Sparrow's Flight*. Elphinstone's novels do use Scottish material in a fictional Scottish setting and clearly expose a consciousness steeped in archaic Scottish folk traditions which bring to mind an ambiguous landscape of legend and myth. The dancing, festivals, and music more than hint at a Scottish imagination; these direct references to aspects of the Scottish folk tradition unequivocally invite comparisons to Scottish folk culture.

If the music, dances, and festivals do not convince readers that the novels enjoy a Scottish setting, then certain geographical landscapes might strengthen this point. For instance, in *The Incomer*, Naomi tells Emily and Andrew that she has been travelling for years 'since last I crossed that sea. I've been right through Cumbria and Northumbria, and north beyond Lothian' (22). Similarly, as Thomas and Naomi travel to the empty lands in *A Sparrow's Flight*, Thomas comments upon 'the great wall' (40) which is 'further south. It crosses the whole land, from one side to another' (40). This wall alludes to Hadrian's wall, built to establish a border between Scotland and England.

Elphinstone does not directly state that Clachanpluck is a village in Scotland; yet the description of the land around Clachanpluck also intimates a Scottish landscape:

There were four towns equidistant from the village, with nothing between them except tracts of moorland and forest interspersed with complicated water systems. The burns flowed down unexpectedly, here to the north, there to the south, as if someone had taken the watershed and turned it topsy-turvy, flinging the countryside for miles around into a confusion of hillocks and lochans. A curious intricate country, lying at the foothills of the mountains that dominated the north-west horizon in long rounded contours, visible from the little cairn-topped hills that sheltered the houses below. The slopes west of the village were steepest, anticipating the mountains beyond the humping back of the ridge that kept the main force of the west wind off the settlement. These hillsides were forest-covered, blanketed with thick cover of oak and ash, chestnut and rowan, beech and birch -- huge forest trees extending through the years to slow maturity (1).

The mountainous scenery in this passage coupled with burns, hillocks, and lochans suggest the Scottish Galloway countryside. She also consciously calls her fictional village 'Clachanpluck', a place-name which originates in Galloway and connotes a stony cell, village, or kirk.²⁶ The

²⁶William Watson writes that 'Clachan' stands for a 'stone cell' in Galloway, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland* (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1973), p. 170; James B. Johnstone claims 'Clachan' means 'village' or 'church', *Place-Names of Scotland* (East Ardsley/Wakefield: S.R. Publishers, 1970), p. 132; and finally, Herbert Maxwell suggests that 'Clachanpluck' stands for 'Lauriston in Balmaghie parish' which

village's name, Clachanpluck, holds symbolic resonance because it clearly connects a Scottish past and Scottish present; in this way, Elphinstone indirectly identifies her novel as taking place in Scotland which hints that some elements of Scottish culture may be explored.

Elphinstone's novels venerate Scottish folk culture and geographically point to the Scottish countryside. Bhabha contends that the 'recurrent metaphor of landscape as the inscape of national identity emphasizes the quality of light, the question of social visibility, the power of the eye to naturalize the rhetoric of national affiliation and its forms of collective expression'.²⁷ Bhabha's remarks shed light on Elphinstone's fictional enterprise because her novels continually evoke elements of the Scottish folk culture and, therefore, the Scottish national identity. When Elphinstone incorporates facets of the Scottish folk tradition into her novels, she not only raises questions about the universal cultural construction of femininity, but she does so in a manner that gives Scottish women a national affiliation and collective expression of identity.

The Incomer: Themes: Female Subjectivity, Quest, Community, and Rape

Although Elphinstone's literary design is postmodern, her characterization is not entirely postmodern because the characters seem 'rounded'; in other words, readers have access to the individual characters' minds. Even so, the characters in both novels have a realist existence and symbolic significance. These different levels of meaning are suggested, in part, by the sections of the novel in italics which pose alternative visions of women in history, society, and culture.

For the most part, Elphinstone's female characters express ideas of self-worth and achievement because they recognize that their part in the world matters. For example, Emily realizes, 'there is so much to express and I cannot express it. But I have made gardens and orchards and children, and this village would be a different place without me' (25). Emily expresses a positive female subjectivity because women in Elphinstone's fictional world 'hold'

came into being circa 1465 A.D, *The Place Names of Galloway: Their Origin and Meaning Considered* (Glasgow: Jackson, Wylie and Co., 1930), p. 69.

²⁷'DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation', in *Nation and Narration*, ed. by Homi K. Bhabha (London/New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 291-322, (p. 295).

their own households, those which men enter. Births in the village hold great significance, especially if a daughter is borne: 'Boys were never spurned or neglected, but there was no denying that a daughter was an occasion for rejoicing, for it was upon daughters that the future depended' (89). Additionally, no woman in Clachanpluck 'would have a child she did not desire, because that would be cruel' (89). When the future depends upon women, women may experience themselves as important and essential to community survival. The constant reinforcement of the women's role in village life permits the women of Clachanpluck to understand the unwritten and unspoken sentiment that without women there would be no life and therefore no future.

Elphinstone's belief in women's strength fosters roles for female characters which demand intelligence and control; in *The Incomer*, for instance, women hold the most important positions in the community. Bridget runs the Inn and plays the harp, 'the only one in the village, and it had belonged to her great-grandmother and her grandmother, and now it belonged to her' (66). Emily finds her place in another way: unable to play music, she takes responsibility for the land. Every so often Emily must go into the forest to voice peace with the land; in doing so she acknowledges respect and honour for the wild she cannot control, and reaffirms her community's commitment to the land and what it offers. Emily and her daughter Fiona possess the same feelings with respect to the strength, knowledge, and affinity the earth offers, and both hold the forest and land as their own 'charge'; without their accountability, no one in Clachanpluck can foretell whether or not the land will die again. Finally, Anna too plays an important role in the community. She both cultivates the plants and the medicinal and culinary knowledge derived from them. Rachel Blau DuPlessis believes, 'in community, the "hard visible horizon" of the lone individual or the unique couple is overpassed; the individual is at once single and choral'.²⁸ In Clachanpluck, the interest of survival encourages women to mature individual talents and skills which allow each to develop a unique role and position in the small community. At the same time, the women's work is essential to Clachanpluck's long term growth; thus, each woman exists singularly and as a 'choral' member of a larger group.

²⁸*Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. 154.

Another reason that Elphinstone's characters are able to assert positive self-images rests in the village's principles of living. Women, men, and children share the resources of the village. For example, Patrick asks Anna if she has ever been hungry during the winter. Anna responds: 'I know. I know it was a gift to all of us. It's made this village a better place to be' (77). These words clarify how the resources of the village are pooled to make everyone's life in the community a little easier. Elphinstone also makes it clear that everyone's participation in daily work makes a difference to the community's prosperous survival; brothers and sisters do the same work side by side. Bridget and George learn:

the same ways from their mother and her sisters, who now did less of the heavy work, so that the main share of the outdoor work fell upon the brother and sister. There was more than enough to do, for the household required nearly all its food to be grown, its land to be kept hearty, its sheep and cattle to be looked to, its repairs done, and its fuel to be brought down from the forest. The indoor work, the baking and the poultry were left to the eldest and the youngest of a household (49).

This description of communal work sharing and lack of ownership reinforces the reader's impression that everyone's contribution matters; without the help of women and children, men could not survive.

Elphinstone refuses to categorize her characters into any conventional roles or stereotypes. She designs a fictional world which disputes Cranny-Francis's observation that under patriarchy, 'men and women are not equal but different; rather, men are dominant, women subordinate. Women are not autonomous subjects under patriarchy; they are the opposite or negation of men'.²⁹ In *Clachanpluck*, women and men are neither opposites nor negations; instead, Elphinstone posits women and men as complementary to one another and therefore constructs femininity and masculinity to be free from repressive constraints.

An interesting comparison can be made between the ideas of female subjectivity that Elphinstone generates in her small community of women, and that of Naomi, the main character and 'incomer' who settles in *Clachanpluck* for the winter. When the reader first meets Naomi, she stands at a crossroads which 'was the reason for the village' (1). The opening language and imagery of the novel suggest that the crossroads stand as a metaphor for

²⁹*Feminist Fiction*, p. 103.

the state of Naomi's mind and life; thus, the reader prepares for insight into Naomi's dilemma and attempts to grasp the issues with which she will have to contend.³⁰

On the surface, Naomi appears sure of herself and her appearance shocks Alan:

thick red hair and cheeks nipped red by the evening frost. Without her old brown jacket she was quite startlingly dressed in patched and tattered clothes in the brightest of colours, yellow and orange and purple and crimson, all as bright as her hair which stuck up round her head in curls (5).

Naomi's clothes are unusually vibrant and colourful for the other villagers who habitually dress in earthy colours. Her clothes perhaps imply the role of the 'jester' and permit her to start up an 'old game for her, fishing for interest, making people want her, encouraging them to think they had chosen to take what she offered' (11). More than this, though, Naomi's colourful clothes and extroverted manner reveal an inner confidence and contentment that are part of her 'calling to be fantastical. Wherever she went she must always be a performer, and she would never have chosen to be different' (12). Confident in her ability to perform as a musician, Naomi feels very comfortable as the centre of attention, 'knowing what she could do, and happy in being asked to do it' (29).³¹ Yet feeling confident in her superior skills, and knowing herself to be an extraordinary musician does not make Naomi arrogant; she does not try 'to show anyone up, because that wasn't her function' (31). Elphinstone portrays Naomi as a strong female character who recognizes and fulfills a profound calling to be unusual, dynamic, and creative, and who relishes her need to perform.

Since Naomi constantly travels to learn new music, she appears to be on some kind of quest. Carol P. Christ maintains that the 'spiritual quest of a modern woman begins in the experience of nothingness, the experience of being without an adequate image of self'.³² Elphinstone, however, offers an alternative picture of a woman on a spiritual quest. Naomi does not begin her quest in the experience of 'nothingness' because she recognizes her musical talent and chooses to develop her skills as the years and her travel pass. Naomi's music, then, represents a positive self-image and illustrates the depth of her self-knowledge. Even so,

³⁰The idea of the crossroads as a metaphor for a crossroads in Naomi's life is taken up more fully in the section on Landscape.

³¹It should be noted that music is an important part of Naomi's world because it breaks down barriers and brings people together. See pp. 9-10 in *The Incomer* for evidence of the importance of music.

³²'Spiritual Quest and Women's Experience', in *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, ed. by Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1979), pp. 228-45 (p. 238).

Naomi's decision not 'to go back where I came from' (13) because she has 'nothing to go back for' (14) confirms that she still lacks certain assurances about herself and her place in the world.

One example of the limitations Naomi experiences in coming to terms with self-knowledge rests in her decision to keep travelling, because in Elphinstone's fictional world 'asking questions is not respectful' (84). This social convention makes it extremely hard for Naomi to encounter both sexual and non-sexual love and intimacy. Naomi explains this frustration to Davey:

The things that everyone thinks are so obvious that they're not even worth mentioning, are quite incomprehensible to me. It's the reason I decided to stay always on my own. I never knew enough of the implications of what I chose to do with a person. And no one in any village could ever understand that. It hurt. It hurt me and it hurt them. I stopped getting involved before I made a conscious decision, and then when I found it was perfectly easy to live without sex, and I didn't fall apart, and in fact it was far easier and friendlier and less complicated, I decided to keep it that way (83).

As a result of her choice to exclude intimate relationships, Naomi comes to perceive that as time passes, it becomes 'easier and easier to be alone' (126). Even though Naomi knows herself as a 'musician, a kind of actor, [. . .] A spectacle for people who don't know me' (71), she denies herself the love and support associated with intimate relationships. Travelling for years without this kind of love and support, it becomes difficult for Naomi to remember that she has 'any substance at all' (71).

Elphinstone juxtaposes Naomi's confident external appearance with internal feelings of alienation and solitude; therefore, the reader may query whether or not an important part of Naomi's inner self remains hidden and covered. Naomi's internal turmoil prevents her from coming to terms with her self-worth; it interferes with the presentation of a positive view of her knowledge of self as a female subject. As the novel develops, Naomi becomes acutely aware of her own solitude and feels that she can bear herself:

no longer, [. . .] I have held back so long. I have needed no one and I have loved only the music, and the music and I have made our way through the world and hurt nobody. But there is something in me that has lain dormant through the long years, and is being dragged back to life in this place (122).

In this moment of self-awareness, Elphinstone permits the reader to perceive that because Naomi lacks the close contact which encourages self-worth and substance, she only enjoys solitude. Naomi's solitude in turn prevents her from attaining a sense of her needs and desires as a woman and as an individual. Since Naomi also denies herself the emotional and physical intimacy of a supportive relationship, whether it be with another woman or another man, she also fails to reach a complete affirmation of herself as a woman, a partner, and an individual.

Although it takes Naomi many years to break free from her self-imposed celibacy and solitude, when she does so she releases opportunity for growth of a distinctly female self. After Naomi and Davey enjoy sexual intimacy, Naomi concludes 'I have not been complete without this, [. . .] And never before have I been so much myself' (128). Naomi's words clarify that her decision to develop a unique and complete female self signifies a new understanding of herself as a woman, a musician, and an individual. Her decision to seek this freedom of choice and freedom to engage in passionate and intimate relations with women and men brings her alive. As Christ sees it, woman's quest 'seeks a wholeness that unites the dualisms of spirit and body, rational and irrational, nature and freedom, spiritual and social, life and death'.³³ Elphinstone portrays Naomi superficially confident, yet internally divided. Christ's hypothesis, then, illuminates one of Elphinstone's literary motives: the unification of physical and emotional yearnings which will allow her female protagonist to construct a positive image of herself as an individual and as a woman; hence, an individual woman.³⁴

The lack of hierarchy in Elphinstone's fictional world fosters positive female subjectivity and provides a setting in which women come to rely on one another for love and support. Male characters also give love and support to the female characters, but the novel focuses on the developing interactions between women in the village. Thus, the novel's action focuses on women, their roles and community while men remain peripheral.

Women in Clachanpluck, particularly Bridget and Emily, are both close to one another and closed in; the women in Clachanpluck maintain close ties with one another which fosters

³³*Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), p. 8. First published (Boston: Beacon Press, 1980).

³⁴Although poststructural and Marxist theory show us that it is almost impossible to experience a unified and stable self, within the context of Elphinstone's non-hierarchical and egalitarian world, I would argue that the potential exists for individuals to experience stability, wholeness, and unity.

individual strength and power while protecting the interests of the village from outside threat. When Naomi enters the village she automatically represents an 'outsider' and an 'incomer' who has the potential to reduce the women's knowledge, self-control, and female power.

The small community of Clachanpluck fosters a sense of loyalty and allegiance among the village inhabitants; this in turn promotes an intimacy which prevents any villager from engaging in conversation, revelations, or actions that will betray other members within the community's relationships or emotions. Naomi knows that her position as an incomer requires a certain degree of restraint; she must be careful in questioning Bridget because she realizes that she has 'been too curious. No one was going to tell tales, not while she was still a stranger' (62). The loyalty and closeness that the villagers share, however, does not blind them to the drawbacks of the arrangement; for example, when Naomi asks a question to which Bridget reacts strongly, she still perceives Naomi's distress in being closed out of the conversation:

She hadn't thought of this tough, well-travelled woman being homesick. She certainly hadn't meant to hurt her. She'd only been thinking about the village, and being careful, and not betraying anybody. It hadn't occurred to her that Naomi must always feel like an outsider (63).

Conscious of the ways in which women have been betrayed throughout the ages, Elphinstone carefully builds an environment in which loyalty to women is of utmost importance to the community's strength and survival. The reader begins to understand that for the women in Clachanpluck, a strong determination to love and support each other centres around excluding intimate relations between strangers in order to prevent a betrayal of female companions at all costs. Unfortunately, the women's communal sense of intimacy and protection works to keep Naomi outside their lives and their minds, and Naomi finds it difficult to find a place in the village as anything other than a travelling fiddle player.

Given that the women of Clachanpluck protect each other from outsiders and incomers, Bridget recognizes and fears that Naomi, an obviously strong and extraordinary woman, signals change to the community. Bridget understands that to let her into their insulated lives will inevitably result in new lives for everyone in the village. So too in the modern world: when one meets a new person, that interaction will change the course of individual relationships and states of mind. Elphinstone also recognizes that a contradiction exists

between wanting positive change and wishing to retain a comfortable, unchallenged lifestyle.

For instance, when Bridget listens to Naomi play her harp, she cries:

out silently for Naomi to stop, to stop before the whole fabric of life was rewoven, before she took Bridget's ordered years and unravelled them, setting them up in a new pattern, a new weaving of threads which would wind her away from everything that was sure and familiar (65-66).

Nonetheless, Bridget knows that in order to grow as a woman and an individual, Naomi must 'play' her out of her distant, closed, and ordered life, to make way for new ideas of female love, strength, and beginning.

Even though Bridget accepts that Naomi will change the women's lives, she still fears Naomi's presence and warns Emily against her. Whereas Emily freely accepts Naomi and the friendship she offers, Bridget still cautions her against the fiddle player. Bridget asks Emily what the fiddle player offers her:

'Music,' said Emily promptly. 'Being able to express something that I want expressed. She heals me of frustration.'

'Emmy', said Bridget, 'I think it's you who should take care.'

'Why?'

'You're not used to asking for anything. It means you have no defences.'

'But no one wants to hurt me.'

'No one ever wanted to hurt anybody. But it happens.'

'Music never hurt anybody.'

'The musician is not the music' (90).

When Emily refuses to accept her warning of Naomi's character and power to change their lives, Bridget goes on to say:

You expect that people should behave like rocks. Well, they don't, and certainly not the ones who play music. When you brought that woman here, you brought in fire, and I thought then it would mean a burning. But you chose to ignore it because she could seduce you with tunes. She did the same to me, and I never asked for it. Surely you know, Emily, that by doing this you've made everything different? (91).

In this scene, Elphinstone shows Bridget fearing, as some men do, women's friendship and the power and status it accords them. Bridget voices what many women have been trained to think; that is, that female friendships directly threaten male power and the dominant order and,

as such, should be extinguished at all costs. Bridget repeats the rhetoric of patriarchal civilization when she expresses the notion that ‘women’s talk is not inherently or naturally subversive; it becomes so when women begin “to privilege it over their interactions with men”’.³⁵ Although there is no reason for Bridget to feel that women’s interactions will threaten men as no dominant hierarchies or ideologies exist in Clachanpluck, Bridget’s warning to Emily about Naomi represents the former fears of a patriarchal community.

Elphinstone offers an alternative vision of female relationships as the novel progresses and the distance between the women and their differences lessens. As winter passes, the women begin to rely on each other for more than simply support and begin to see strength in one another and to recognize in each other what they individually lack. As Emily watches Naomi play her fiddle, she understands that she has failed to face Naomi truly; Emily knows that she has not been courageous because even though she loves Naomi:

I dare not say so. I love her brightness, the light she sheds on things I have never been able to illuminate. She draws me to her, and I would like to stretch out my hand and touch that hair which would feel so different from my own. She has what we do not have here in Clachanpluck (104).

Likewise, Naomi understands that Emily has ‘what I don’t have’ (115), and disagrees with Emily’s comment, ‘perhaps that makes us very dangerous to one another’ (115). On the contrary, Naomi believes that unlike many male contentions, women’s friendship does not create danger, rather, it makes the women ‘necessary’ (115) to each other’s emotional and spiritual development.

The way in which Naomi and Emily act upon these admissions of female friendship and companionship is of equal importance to the revelations themselves. For the women in *The Incomer*, entering and existing within a female community that supports strength, female self-hood, and female love ensures that these characters gradually learn to reach out emotionally and physically to one another. Since no hierarchy or laws exist to prevent women’s interactions, Naomi can freely reach out her hand to Emily:

It was taken at once in a firm grip. Her hand is much bigger than mine, thought Naomi, and hard, hard with using tools. I don’t know what this means.

³⁵Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman’s Life*, p. 44. Heilbrun talks here about the subversive nature of women’s talk in general, not Elphinstone’s novel.

'I don't know what this means,' said Emily.

'I am a woman,' said Naomi. 'And you are a woman. We are the same. There doesn't have to be a mystery' (115).

This passage exposes how Naomi and Emily demystify for the reader women's interactions and love for one another. In this revisionary manner, Elphinstone confronts feminist theorists who emphasize the divisions which patriarchal culture creates between women; namely, the feminist theorists who 'point out that since women occupy the position of subordinates they are likely to identify with the interests of the dominant group (men). They thus may be incapable of giving one another any strong degree of loyalty or support'.³⁶ Although it would be true to say that the women in the novel make up a benign hierarchy and, therefore, might be construed as a dominant group, Elphinstone's presentation of the female relationships and community within the novel attempt to construct women's relationships as non-threatening to both men and women. The men in the novel still enjoy strong relationships with females and in turn, the women enjoy strong, supportive relations with one another.

Nevertheless, some readers problematize Elphinstone's female community and her relationships between women in an entirely different manner. Ruth Wallsgrove says 'an awful lot of the book focuses on women's sexual relationships with the "weaker", or at least more flawed men. The women don't make love with each other. [. . .] Its apparent idealisation of a certain sort of heterosexual relationship with men didn't appeal to me'.³⁷ Wallsgrove's criticism of the relationships between women reveals that she clearly misses one of the major points of the novel; that is, the strong positive nature of female love and support outside that of a sexual nature. In an enlightening essay on female friendship in nineteenth-century America, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg hypothesizes that it is not essential to determine whether or not the women in her historical study had genital contact and, as a result, might be classified as heterosexual or homosexual. Instead, Smith-Rosenberg argues that problems arise with categorization and discussion of this kind because 'the twentieth-century tendency to view human love and sexuality within a dichotomized universe of deviance and normality, genitality

³⁶Paulina Palmer, 'From "Coded Mannequin" to Bird Woman: Angela Carter's Magic Flight' in *Woman Reading Women's Writing*, ed. by Sue Roe (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1987), pp. 179-205, (p. 190).

³⁷*Off Our Backs*, 'Review of *The Incomer*', (October 1987), p. 10.

and platonic love, is alien [. . .] And fundamentally distorts the nature of these women's emotional interaction'.³⁸ The same could be said for Elphinstone's female characters: when the reviewer prioritizes the sexuality of the women in the novel, the entire discussion of female love, support, and community becomes distorted and ultimately undermines Elphinstone's suggestion that female love and community can be productive and achieved without threat to male or female power.

Elphinstone's concern with the female self and female subjectivity gives readers an opportunity to imagine a world in which male power does not dominate women's action by showing how a non-hierarchical society can exist peacefully and freely without repressive consequences for either sex. Nonetheless, utopias neither exist nor endure; consequently, Elphinstone introduces a rape into Clachanpluck which irrefutably threatens female knowledge, safety, and self-hood. Elphinstone interjects the violent rape of a woman into a society where rape has been a crime unheard of for generations. Emily sums up the atrocity the word rape implies; she tells Naomi, 'I've never even used the word. They taught us it was unmentionable, a horror out of the past it was sacrilege to name' (174).

The two characters involved in the rape, Anna the herbalist, and Patrick the blacksmith and hunter, have had a previous relationship which Anna decides to end. The rape scene in the novel can be read on a number of different levels. First, Elphinstone depicts Patrick as a hunter and Anna as a herbalist; thus, one might contend that the rape symbolically represents humankind, i.e., 'man' as hunter, literally raping mother earth. Similarly, the rape might imply that men often hunt women and violently prey upon or consume women without provocation. Finally, Elphinstone uses the rape and Patrick's gun to symbolize the nature of evil in general, not the evil nature of men. The very idea of rape raises questions about 'acceptable' or 'non-acceptable' behaviour. The introduction of rape into a peaceful society asks readers to analyse the ethos of the fictional society of Clachanpluck while reflecting on the ethos of contemporary society. It will prove useful to examine the rape and the aftermath of the

³⁸'The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Woman in Nineteenth-Century America' in *The Signs Reader: Women, Gender & Scholarship*, ed. by Elizabeth Abel and Emily K. Abel (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 27-55, (p. 34).

crime in order to ascertain how in a matriarchy, or in this case, a benign hierarchy, women deal with an act that entirely violates and disempowers a woman in their community.

When Anna finally comes to herself after being raped, she comprehends that it is: 'Not the same world any more. Not the same body. Nothing. Life blotted out, shattered and flung into the dark. Anna. "Anna," she whispered at last out loud, like a requiem for a woman destroyed. "Anna." There was no answer at all' (156). These words signify to the reader that Patrick's rape physically mutilates Anna and symbolically destroys her known ideas concerning self-hood. When the bells start 'ringing out, pealing wildly together in panic, or in warning' (158), Bridget can only tersely announce to Emily 'rape, [. . .] There's been rape' (159), a word which soberly indicates that every woman's life will change. In a manifesto entitled 'Rape Is An Abuse of Power', a French feminist group condemns the violence associated with rape:

- Men rape because they own (have) the law.
- They rape because they are the law.
- They rape because they make the law.
- They rape because they are the guardians of the peace, of law and order.
- They rape because they have the power, the language, the money, the knowledge, the strength, a penis, a phallus.³⁹

These words on rape are ominous for any reader because they convey the ideological and physical implications of rape. Since rape leaves women 'helpless, voiceless, paralyzed, frigid, traumatized', it mirrors the everyday experience of women who live in a society that favours male desires.⁴⁰ Although the women of Clachanpluck live in an egalitarian culture, the rape signifies a threat to their powerful position in Elphinstone's fictional world. Clearly, the rape affects more than Anna's emotional and physical being, it also threatens the subjectivity and safety of all women in Clachanpluck and the rest of the land.

Naomi, for instance, hears the bells ringing wildly and understands that something is seriously wrong in Clachanpluck even though she cannot intuit what wrong or crime has occurred. Since Naomi still does not know what the danger signals are in the community, fear overrides her rationality and she decides to 'escape from Clachanpluck for ever, and take to the

³⁹*New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1981), p. 194. First published (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980). Please note Marks and de Courtivron do not give the name of the feminist group which published this manifesto.

⁴⁰*Ibid*, pp. 194-5.

free road, unburdened as when she came' (160). Nevertheless, Naomi cannot leave Clachanpluck without her fiddle which symbolizes her self-hood; hence, she returns to the village and faces both her fear and the crime.

To Naomi's consternation, when she returns to Clachanpluck, every woman seems to be missing from the village; moreover, the men are upset to see her:

They made no pretence of being uninterested, but watched her silently. Not one of them moved. But when she had passed she heard a whisper behind her, low voices muttering together. She felt a shiver in the small of her back, eyes fixed on her, signs of protection made against her (164).

The signs of protection made against Naomi are ironic in that she neither knows what has happened nor takes part in the violent events. The men's actions compel Naomi to feel 'alone, more alone than she had ever felt in her life. This was not solitude. This was the loneliness of a different species, of one who seems to be alone of all their kind in the world' (166).

Furthermore, George refuses to tell Naomi what crime has occurred; thus, Naomi begins to believe that some responsibility for the crime lies within her, that she, like Anna, is 'responsible' (175) for unprovoked male violence towards women. When the men transfer Patrick's violence onto Naomi, they attempt to undermine Naomi's strength and image of herself as an independent free woman.

Even though the women effectively eradicate the threat of male dominance from their community by shooting Patrick with his gun and so privilege a female community over male domination, Patrick's death does not put an end to the pain in the women's lives; rather, Anna's rape infiltrates every woman's psyche to the extent that Fiona, Emily, and Brigid, like Naomi, ultimately feel responsible for it. One might conclude from the women's guilt and shame that the rape threatens women's autonomy and independence and, therefore, women's ability to express and develop a distinctly free female self. Weedon suggests that what an event means to an individual 'depends on the ways of interpreting the world, on the discourses available to her at any particular moment. For example, the way in which a woman experiences and responds to domestic violence will depend on the ways of understanding it to which she has access'.⁴¹ Rape is not a part of the ethos of the society in which Emily,

⁴¹*Feminist Practice*, p. 79.

Bridget, Naomi, and Anna live; consequently, the women have no means of understanding the meaning and action of rape because it is not part of their lives. Weedon suggests that if a woman 'sees men as naturally violent or herself responsible for provoking violence, then she is unlikely to see it as an unacceptable exercise of illegitimate power which cannot be tolerated'.⁴² Emily bears out Weedon's hypothesis about discourse in general when again she says, 'perhaps I could have made things different' (175). These words disclose that Emily cannot view the rape as an unacceptable exercise of illegitimate power over women.

Naomi alone refutes and reprimands Emily for her naiveté in accepting responsibility for an action she does not commit. Naomi knows that no woman 'makes' the rape happen. She cries out that Patrick:

didn't rape Clachanpluck. He raped Anna. He didn't threaten Clachanpluck. He threatened every one of us. Including me. Emily, when I didn't know what had happened, I was terrified. There were only the men, and I thought it was because of me, because I didn't belong here. I thought that I was responsible, and I didn't even know for what. Don't you see? It stops us seeing each other (175).

Naomi attributes Patrick's crime to Patrick and discloses how his violent action threatens all women. Naomi's words confirm as Susan Griffin points out:

rape is a form of mass terrorism, for the victims of rape are chosen indiscriminately, but the propagandists for male supremacy broadcast that it is women who cause rape by being unchaste or in the wrong place at the wrong time -- in essence, by behaving as though they were free.⁴³

The women in Clachanpluck behave as though they are 'free' because the society in which they live encourages freedom; as a result, one might read the rape as an attempt by one man to challenge female freedom. When Naomi denies that the women in Clachanpluck are in some way responsible for the rape, she exorcises 'mass terrorism' by men and reaffirms independence and freedom for women. Once Naomi and Emily absolve themselves of responsibility for the rape, they discover and express true love and admiration for each other; they hold and comfort one another for their loss of innocence and Anna's female self. In other words, when Naomi and Emily acknowledge Patrick's responsibility for his actions, they

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³'Rape: The All-American Crime', in *Woman: A Feminist Perspective*, ed. by Jo Freeman (Palo Alto: Mayfield Publishing, 1975), pp. 24-39 (p. 39).

come to terms with themselves as women and develop a stronger, more open and honest female friendship in the process.

The rape clearly changes everything for Naomi and the other women in Clachanpluck; however, it does not simply leave negative effects. For instance, Naomi and Emily develop a stronger relationship and confirm a bond of friendship which allows them to exchange confidences, support, love, and knowledge. The rape also allows the women to acknowledge the fears connected to the earth's past as well as the capability for evil in themselves. Furthermore, the rape encourages the women to discern, 'healing hurts. It's not a soft thing that can be left to time' (205). Once this acknowledgement occurs, the women learn to trust one another and to recognize that together they can confront the present and attempt to heal the injustices of the past.

A Sparrow's Flight: Themes: Quest, Subjectivity, Journey, and Choice

Elphinstone's novel *The Incomer* is a powerful and confrontational study of the effect of rape in a society based on women's benign rule. The novel explores ideas connected to female subjectivity and female community; above all, the novel emphasizes issues of female strength and support in women's interactions with one another. While Naomi still has a past to contend with, her quest for self-knowledge begins in the recognition that she cannot continue to cut herself off from women and men and still live; instead, Naomi must embrace her past and come to terms with her earlier decision to leave home before she can discover the level of strength hidden in her female self.

Like George Mackay Brown in his novel *Time In a Red Coat*, Elphinstone in *The Incomer* and *A Sparrow's Flight* also presents readers with 'a startling vision of a world at once wholly imaginary yet immediately recognisable'.⁴⁴ *A Sparrow's Flight* again focuses on Naomi and her quest for self-knowledge; it also centres on the developing relationship between Naomi and Thomas, two travelling entertainers. The novel details an arduous journey across a wild landscape in which both characters must confront their hidden and painful pasts. As in *The Incomer*, male hierarchies do not dominate women's actions, women still guide

⁴⁴Burns, 'Myths and Marvels', p. 73

households and hold benign power, no moral or legal constraints on women are in place, and the characters are still recovering from evil in the past, so they respect the land by carrying on with self-sufficient lifestyles.

As Carol P. Christ sees it, women's spiritual quest 'concerns a woman's awakening to the depths of her soul and her position in the universe'.⁴⁵ For Christ, women's quest also includes moments of solitary contemplation when one asks the basic questions:

Who am I? Why am I here? What is my place in the universe? In answering these questions, a woman must listen to her own voice and come to terms with her own experience. She must break long-standing habits of seeking approval, of trying to please parents, lovers, husbands, friends, children, but never herself.⁴⁶

In *A Sparrow's Flight*, Naomi embarks on a spiritual quest to determine her 'self' and to confront her choice to leave her home and travel as a musician rather than raise her son. She struggles to listen to her own 'voice' and to come to terms with her own experience by grappling with her decision to 'please' herself over her son. A difficult challenge for anyone, but even more so for Naomi because of the inherent contradiction and social implications in any society, even this fantastical one, between motherhood and creativity.⁴⁷

Naomi's quest begins when she meets Thomas, a travelling entertainer who seeks her services as a fiddle player. He tells Naomi that no travelling fiddle player 'could do what I require. The reward would be beyond their understanding. I haven't sought out any travelling players. No ordinary musician could take what I have to offer' (12). Comfortable with her talents and sure of her ability as a musician, Naomi concedes to Thomas that 'I am not an ordinary musician' (12), even though she knows that the 'most sensible thing to do would be to leave at once. But it would be hard to live with herself afterwards, if she left this matter unresolved' (12). The musician within Naomi again decides her fate for her; as a result, she begins a quest for self-knowledge and musical fulfilment.

When Naomi begins her quest to resolve 'matters that have lain for many years' (13), she embarks on a quest for emotional fulfilment. Mary Anne Ferguson argues that the typical

⁴⁵*Diving Deep and Surfacing*, p. 8.

⁴⁶*Ibid*, pp. 8-9.

⁴⁷In this novel, Naomi's musical creativity can be compared to a career; thus, the conflict between motherhood and music mimics the conflict that rages between motherhood and a career.

pattern for the female novel of development has been largely circular rather than spiral, and that the female characters in this fiction tend to remain at home:

Instead of testing their self-image through adventures in the outside world, they are initiated at home through women learning the rituals of human relationships, so that they may replicate the lives of their mothers. [. . .] Women who rebel against the female role are perceived as unnatural and pay the price of happiness, if not madness or death. This 'natural' female development is viewed as inferior to the male's. Perceived as part of nature, women in most novels are presented as incapable of autonomy and integrity. They simply *are*, their existence a part of the world that men test in their own search.⁴⁸

Elphinstone repudiates this traditional literary pattern by devising a new novel of female development. In contrast to female figures who remain at home and replicate the lives of their mothers, Naomi turns her back on her child and family in order to pursue 'the beginning of a quest. [. . .] The promise of the music. [. . .] It was indeed what she was seeking, and had never ceased to seek through all the years of wandering' (22). Naomi consciously resolves to confront her musical destiny; hence, she rebels against conventional female norms and sets out on a quest which does not conclude in madness or death, but happiness and life.

Conscious that her past must play some part in her present state of mind, Naomi knows she cannot escape her past even though she constantly tries to evade it by travelling and searching for new music and new community. Through a parallel dream sequence, to be discussed later in full, the reader gradually understands that Naomi's struggle to come to terms with the choice to leave her son renders her emotionally distant and hesitant to disclose her past to anyone she meets. When Naomi and Thomas finally reach his village in the 'empty lands', Thomas's sister Linnet helps Naomi open her past by giving her a gift of music which has lain in the house for centuries.⁴⁹ In terms of the music Linnet offers her, Christ's opinion on the dialectic between 'story' and 'experience' sheds light on Naomi's musical challenge:

There is a dialectic between story and experience. Stories shape experience; experience shapes stories. There is no primary preverbal experience utterly

⁴⁸'The Female Novel of Development and the Myth of Psyche', in *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, ed. by Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland (Hanover/London: University Press of New England, 1983), pp. 228-243 (p. 228-29).

⁴⁹Rosemary Jackson believes, 'from about 1800 onwards, one of the most frequent landscapes of fantasy has been the hollow world, one which is surrounded by the real and the tangible, but which is itself empty, mere absence'. *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, p. 46. The 'empty lands' in Elphinstone's novel can be compared to Jackson's 'hollow lands'. References to the hollow/empty lands heightens the fantastical element of the novel and concurrently shifts the reader between the real and the imaginary.

unshaped by stories. In a sense, without stories there is no experience. On the other hand, there is a distinction between stories and experiences which enables us to see that not all stories are adequate to our experience. Conversely we experience a shock of recognition when we find a story which articulates an as yet unarticulated part of our experience.⁵⁰

The music Linnet offers Naomi, like Christ's 'story', shapes Naomi's world and fulfils her quest for past musical tradition; in other words, Naomi shocks herself with recognition as the lost music both articulates and fulfils a missing part of her self, psyche, and experience. Discovering and attempting to interpret the lost music opens a lost part of Naomi's inner self. This in turn allows Naomi to open the door to her past and, at the same time, poses a difficult challenge to her musical abilities.

When Elphinstone permits Linnet to open the door in her house that exposes relics of the past, she also allows Linnet to open symbolically Naomi's unarticulated quest; namely, when Linnet opens the door to her family's history, Naomi opens the door to her own exile and unresolved conflicts, as well as the loss she experiences when thinking about her 'abandoned' son. Linnet opens the door to the abandoned room as she explains to Naomi how her grandmother opened the sealed room when the people returned to reinhabit the empty lands:

She said nothing was ever intended to be suspended in time. Things as well as people live their day and depart, and there is no crueller thing than to force anything out of its own time. Everything has the right to die, and must not be denied (142).

Linnet's story about her grandmother's action elucidates certain 'truths' about life. When Linnet encourages Naomi to open the door to her past, she subtly gives Naomi the opportunity to survey past decisions and choices. The sealed room acts as a metaphor for Naomi's sealed past; the passage hints that if Naomi opens the door to her past and confronts unresolved conflicts, then her painful feelings, like the relics in the room, might be allowed to depart and to die a death in their own right.

This scene also exposes Elphinstone's interest in memory. Elphinstone appears to support, consciously or unconsciously, Gayle Greene's hypothesis that 'memory may look back in order to move forward and transform disabling fictions to enabling fictions, altering

⁵⁰'Spiritual Quest', p. 229.

our relationship to the present and future'.⁵¹ Naomi enters a room filled with ghostly memories and she confronts her past in order to enable an empowered future; in doing so, Elphinstone allows a clearer picture of her female character as a woman, a musician, and an individual to develop in the reader's mind and underlines the important role that memory plays in coming to terms with bygone choices.

Nevertheless, simply opening Naomi's mind to her past does not cure the pain enmeshed in her psyche; rather, Elphinstone illustrates the complexity of Naomi's distress over her lost son and lost mothering role by intertwining Naomi's quest to unravel the mystery of written music with the unraveling of her recurrent nightmares. The longer the written music eludes her, the more Naomi's dreams and memories intensify. When Naomi remembers the dreams, she increasingly feels:

a sense of loss so acute that it was a physical pain . He had been so substantial. She seemed to still feel the imprint of his body against hers, as though he had just been torn from her arms. She turned face down, and hid her face in the pillow. She couldn't feel all those feelings again. She couldn't live through all that again, when she had borne it once in silence. It hurt far too much, never to allow herself to speak of it (224).

Although the past causes Naomi much pain, she needs to remember it, because in Greene's words, 'forgetting is a major obstacle to change'.⁵² Forcing her protagonist to open herself up to the emotional pain associated with her son and with her lost mothering role, Elphinstone confirms that even though Naomi has been silent for fifteen years about her child, this does not represent 'courage' (227). The long and arduous journey with Thomas, who also must confront a painful past, reinforces the intimate physical and emotional deprivation connected to Naomi's childlessness; hence, when Naomi confronts her conscious and subconscious emotional traumas, the process of self-affirmation may begin.

Naomi's subjectivity in *A Sparrow's Flight*, as in *The Incomer*, appears through her music and she asserts ideas of self-hood through her role as a travelling musician. Elphinstone again conveys Naomi's self-confidence and self-assurance to the reader by manifesting her inner contentment with self in the clothes that she wears. Thomas, for example, finds Naomi

⁵¹'Feminist Fiction', p. 298.

⁵²Ibid.

easy to be with on their long journey because she likes herself. He knows this 'as soon as I saw your clothes' (52).

Even though Christ claims that women's spiritual quest begins in an experience of nothingness, emptiness, self-hatred, self-negation, and in being a victim,⁵³ Elphinstone offers an alternative vision of the female quest. She shows Naomi's search immersed in the positive experience of music which permits her character to express self-love and self-affirmation as opposed to self-negation and her protagonist represents a positive female subject who constructs herself through individual desires and choices.

While Thomas suggests that Naomi's music 'keeps you from feeling lonely' (53), in actual fact, Naomi does, at times, suffer loneliness. Even though Naomi realizes it would be nice to be in one place and intimately involved with both women and men, she recognizes that she would still 'rather be myself, and have my music, and choose my own journeys' (54), than be expected to live up to someone else's ideals and expectations. That Naomi's individual desires take priority over another person's desires becomes evident when she and Thomas come across a fair. Naomi asks Thomas, 'you think you're all the audience I need? You'd have to be more than one man for that' (57); thus, when she hears faint strains of music, she holds 'on to the straps of her pack to steady it, and began to run' (58). Similarly, Naomi tells Linnet, 'you can't live without [music]', and that she needs music in her life not only to survive, but to 'live' (107). One might conclude from Naomi's desperation to play for an audience and her telling pronouncement to Linnet that music represents her self-definition, that Naomi needs to play for many people in order to reinforce a high level of self-esteem and self-worth.

The scenes also show that there can be little separation between Naomi the 'woman' and Naomi the 'musician', because both selves constitute her female self. For example, when a man who views Naomi as an incomer stones her because the people of Thomas's valley see her as a ghost, she expresses frustration and anger to Linnet:

If you were my friend, I would tell you now that I feel very much alone. I can see that I represent something in this place far other than what I am. I am a musician, and I came here because I was promised a gift of music out

⁵³*Diving Deep and Surfacing*, p. 13.

of the past. If I forget that, I am afraid of becoming the thing that you have made me (140).

When people threaten Naomi's physical being or knowledge of herself as an individual, she turns back to her music as a representation of her inner self to assert her rights as a woman and as a human being. If Naomi may have nothing else, she can always find strength in her knowledge of self as a musician and, as such, she can recognize and construct herself in a positive manner by revealing her talent and position as an extraordinary fiddle player.

Naomi's understanding of herself as a musician, an outsider, and a woman is integral to the ritual of the music and the dance. While it is true that Naomi suffers the stigma of being an outsider in Thomas's valley, she still gathers strength and self-knowledge from her role as a travelling musician. Naomi's position as a musician allows her to interact with Thomas's people and, therefore enhances the construction of an autonomous and powerful female subject. Even though she will always be excluded from the intimacies of Thomas's society, as a musician, Naomi fundamentally knows herself to be necessary to their re-enactment of their history and the re-visioning of their society. All grudges held against her drop in the midst of the ritual; likewise, her gender is equally unimportant. The only matter of consequence is Naomi's role as a musician: 'When she reached the shore the musicians were waiting for her. They no longer had the faces of strangers. They were her own people, and their ranks opened to receive her without question' (179).

Once Naomi gains acceptance in Thomas's valley as a musician, she continues to recognize herself in the dance. Among the dancers she recognizes faces that she knows, 'mirroring the faces of the world where she belonged, and yet not any of them. She saw her own face, and faces she had not known were hers, and acknowledged them, both like and opposite' (180). In the middle of the dance, Naomi discovers a place for herself within Thomas's valley and learns through her music to see herself in a new light in a new world. Naomi's positive image of herself as a woman, an individual, and a musician illuminates for the reader the possibility for an affirmative female knowledge and self-hood.

Female subjectivity and female community are not Elphinstone's sole thematic interests in *A Sparrow's Flight*; instead, the novel also examines the possibility of friendship and love

between women and men. Elphinstone does not wish to write a love story; accordingly, Thomas emphatically states, 'there's always a tension about being with a person you might fall in love with. I've felt it just as much as you. Only I don't fall in love with women, so I suppose you won't feel that tension coming from me' (51).⁵⁴ Even though Elphinstone rules out any kind of sexual love or attachment between Thomas and Naomi, she does place her female protagonist in an awkward situation. As the journey progresses, Naomi becomes 'irrelevantly aware that she loved him' (113), and she later feels 'her whole body quicken' (240) when she touches Thomas. Elphinstone queries the ways in which woman and men traditionally interact by showing Naomi falling in love with a man who is not sexually attracted to her; although Naomi knows 'you can't put a part of yourself to sleep' (241), in the end she must accept the limitations of her love for him. In this manner, Elphinstone examines how Naomi replaces and reconciles her desire to love Thomas in a sexual way with a different kind of love; that is, the love between good friends.⁵⁵

Naomi and Thomas find a connection with one another as exiles because both are 'banished' from their homes due to past decisions and choices; as a result, both Naomi and Thomas are strangers to themselves and to the people with whom they come into contact. Jane Marcus suggests that 'exile is a political condition of banishment from a threatened state. An exile is a stranger whether or not she has chosen her condition'.⁵⁶ Naomi and Thomas set out on a journey to reclaim their past; therefore, they embark on a quest which in Catharine R. Stimpson's words, 'is, of course, that significant journey in which the process of the journey may matter as much as its end'.⁵⁷ Since Naomi and Thomas's journey from individual exile means walking for days on end through a wild landscape, Elphinstone uses this trip through the wilderness to show women and men relying on one another for emotional and physical companionship and survival.

⁵⁴See p. 334 in the Appendix for Elphinstone's comments on this subject.

⁵⁵One can also see Jungian overtones in the symbolic love relationship that develops between Naomi and Thomas. The love that Naomi and Thomas share with one another, as well as the ways in which they complement each other's personality, is suggestive of the animus and the anima.

⁵⁶'Alibis and Legends: The Ethics of Elsewhereness, Gender, and Estrangement', in *Women's Writing in Exile*, ed. by Mary Lynn Broe and Angela Ingram (Chapel Hill/London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), pp. 269-94 (p. 272).

⁵⁷'Doris Lessing and the Parables of Growth', in *The Voyage In*, pp 186-205 (p. 186).

The intimacy of the journey allows Elphinstone to develop slowly Naomi and Thomas's relationship in such a way that trust eventually grows between them and confidences are exchanged. As the rigour of the journey intensifies and both feel tired and strained, yet contented, images and secrets of each other tumble out that would in normal circumstances stay hidden. For instance, Thomas shares with Naomi that he is afraid 'of my own mind. [. . .] It's not so much what I have to face, as that I may not be able to face it' (82). Similarly, Naomi shares her most private pain with Thomas. When the recurring nightmares about her son become too much for her to bear alone, Naomi bursts into tears:

It was terrifying, that her private feelings should well up so forcibly into a situation that wasn't private at all. She choked into the quilt, and tried to hold her breath. She didn't have to cry. She hadn't cried unbidden for fifteen years. Naomi held herself tight, and nearly stopped herself. A hand was laid on her rigid back, not at all suppressively, but comfortingly. It was too much. She pulled the quilt round her head, her back firmly turned to Thomas, and shook with uncontrollable sobs. They began to overwhelm her. It was like breaching a wall to let in a little trickle of water, and finding the whole weight of the sea behind it. She was awake, and engulfed by the images of dream. It was terrible to be so helpless. Naomi began to shiver. Thomas pulled the rest of the quilt round her, and went on rubbing her back, up and down her spine, without saying a word (120-21).

No longer afraid to share pain or volatile emotional outbursts, Thomas and Naomi's friendship evolves from a relationship based on material needs, to one that enjoys emotional intimacy and satisfaction. This supportive relationship, then, revises traditionally hierarchical relationships which often exist between women and men.

Naomi and Thomas's verbal and physical exchanges symbolize the love that can grow between women and men. Even so, some feminist theorists like Simone de Beauvoir deny that this type of love can grow between members of the opposite sex:

It is only when her fingers trace the body of a woman whose fingers in turn trace her body that the miracle of the mirror is accomplished. Between man and woman love is an act; each torn from self becomes other: what fills the woman in love with wonder is that the languorous passivity of her flesh should be reflected in the male's impetuosity; the narcissistic woman, however, recognizes her enticements but dimly in the man's erected flesh. Between women love is contemplative; caresses are intended less to gain possession of the other than gradually to re-create the self through her; separateness is abolished, there is no struggle, no victory, no defeat; in exact reciprocity each is at once subject and object, sovereign and slave; duality becomes mutuality.⁵⁸

⁵⁸*The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. by H.M. Parshley (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 416. First published in English (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952). First published *Le Deuxieme Sex: I. Les Faits et Les Mythes. II. L'Experience Vecue* (Paris: Librairie Gullimard, 1949).

Elphinstone offers an alternative vision of female-male relationships in *A Sparrow's Flight* by demonstrating how love between women and men might play itself out in a similar manner to love between women. For example, at the end of Thomas and Naomi's journey, the cold drives them to sleep close to one another. Thomas asks Naomi how she normally sleeps with a friend. She responds by turning and facing him, putting her 'arm round him' (248). Thomas for his part receives 'her very willingly, and put his arm under hers, so her head was resting on his shoulder' (248). This scene shows Naomi and Thomas reaching new levels of emotional and non-sexual physical exchange; in this manner, Elphinstone confirms that no barriers need to exist between masculine and feminine intimate ties. She reveals that Naomi and Thomas, like her community of women in Clachanpluck, may also share love and support with each other in a familiar and satisfying manner.⁵⁹

However, a conflict does arise between Naomi and Thomas because Thomas collapses after he painfully remembers the death of his family for which he holds himself responsible. After collapsing, Thomas cannot respond to any physical sensation or question asked; instead, he rests 'curled in a heap on the top of the bedcovers, as though he had just been dumped there' (188). Peter asks Naomi to leave because he feels that Thomas's condition 'isn't for any stranger to see' (188). Naomi refuses to go, however, and responds three times to Peter's objections to her presence with the cry: 'and what if I am his friend?' (189).⁶⁰ Linnet answers with some sadness that she cannot be Thomas's friend, because 'my people are not friends with your people' (189). Naomi shows the depth of her self-knowledge and loyalty to Thomas; she refuses to conform to Peter's and Linnet's expectations and adamantly states: 'for me, Thomas has done nothing to be ashamed of, and I would like to stay with him' (189). Although Peter still objects, Linnet as a woman in the household overrules his desires and gives Naomi what she asks. In this manner, Elphinstone conveys to the reader Naomi's strong sense of herself as a woman and as Thomas's friend. She shows Naomi to be willing to

⁵⁹This scene reminds readers of the intimacy played out between Emily and Naomi after Anna's rape in *The Incomer*.

⁶⁰Although Elphinstone does not discuss Christianity, one might see an allusion to how the Apostle Peter denied knowing Jesus Christ three times on the night he was betrayed. In contrast, Naomi does not betray Thomas by denying knowledge of him; rather, Naomi emphatically asserts a high degree of love and affection for Thomas by openly admitting and affirming her friendship to him.

remove Thomas, even at the mercy of his twisted psyche, from his past by helping him walk back to the island, a place they both once knew as a home.

Thomas's disturbed and sickened mental state prevents them from completing the journey back to the island; thus, Naomi stops at an inn for several days and plays her fiddle in the evening in return for their room and board. During these days, Thomas continues to remain distant and unresponsive; he only comes back to himself infrequently when Naomi practises her music. During one of Thomas's returns to reality, he becomes agitated and questions what is, and what is not, real. Naomi, in a gesture of total and unconditional love and friendship, decides to give Thomas 'something real' (223). The gift is a small round stone taken from the beach Naomi left fifteen years previously. Naomi gives this precious gift, which is her sole connection to her former home, to prove to Thomas that the pebble:

belongs to the same world as you do, made of the same stuff as yourself. I can't help you by anything I say, but I can give you something that you may recognise. It's a strong gift, because it matters to me, but you matter more (223).

Giving of herself and her past freely, Naomi expresses that the love she holds for Thomas is unconditional and unshakable. Once Thomas grasps the level of commitment that Naomi's gift implies, and speaks of his painful past, he returns to his mind.

Naomi and Thomas's friendship develops quickly and passionately over the month that they spend together as they both confront agonizing memories of past events. While neither Naomi's nor Thomas's memories are free from shame or guilt, they both find a way to reconcile themselves to their individual losses. This makes the pain of their parting heavy, but also symbolizes an intimate non-sexual relationship that will be hard to break. In order to actualize their feelings of trust and companionship, Thomas and Naomi ritualize their friendship by cutting into their wrists and exchanging blood: they swear 'a bond to one another, according to the ritual, of friendship that might not be broken' (253). Elphinstone uses this ritual as a sign of the strength of the friendship and the intimacy that can develop between both women and men, not solely between women. In this sense, she consciously or unconsciously subverts the assertion:

Only women can give to each other a new sense of self. That identity we have to develop with reference to ourselves, and not in relation to men [. . .]

For this we must be available and supportive to one another, give our commitment and our love, give the emotional support necessary to sustain this movement. Our energies must flow toward our sisters, not backward toward our oppressors.⁶¹

In Elphinstone's novels energies flow between sisters, but they also move between brothers. Elphinstone's novels devise a world devoid of hierarchy and male dominant ideologies and structures; accordingly, *The Incomer* and *A Sparrow's Flight* provide a framework which shows how easily women and men can live freely together, not simply as dominators and subordinates or as the oppressor and the oppressed. The relationship also asserts, on a symbolic level, a new balance between women and men as psychic counterparts.

The long journey that Thomas and Naomi embark on opens to question Naomi's choices. To be sure, Thomas also has difficult choices to make in his life; nevertheless, this novel focuses primarily on Naomi's subjectivity, therefore the reader tends to focus on the difficulties she encounters in coming to terms with her decisions.

One of the most difficult choices Naomi ever makes is between raising her son or playing and teaching the fiddle as she travels to find new music. Helen, another travelling fiddle player, describes Naomi's dilemma to Thomas:

She knew all the time it was the music that mattered most, but because she loved the fiddle player, she chose to have a child. Having made the other choice already, you understand. And then she realised that if you take one thing, you lose another. She would never have become what she is if she'd stayed there, but her child belonged to her mother's household, and to be a mother to him herself, that was where she would have to stay. In my village, I think they'd have made her abide by the consequences. If she was old enough to have him, she was old enough to stand by him, you'd think. But she didn't, and they supported her. Only they made her agree that if she went away, she must stay away, so the choice didn't become confused again. Everyone could see, they said, that it was impossible to keep your heart in two places at once. Everyone except Naomi (67).

Helen's story reveals that Naomi's family and village give her a difficult choice; however, one might query what kind of choice is it when Naomi must choose between mothering a child that she loves, or pursuing music that she also loves and which keeps her emotionally alive. Is this a fair question to put to anyone in Naomi's position, or to put to anyone with strong talents and desires to live up to their potential? Could any woman ever make a 'right' decision given

⁶¹Radicalesbians, 'The Woman-Identified Woman', in *Radical Feminism*, ed. by Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine, and Anita Rapone (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1975), pp. 240-5 (p. 245).

Naomi's two disparate options? Naomi's family seemingly asks her to choose, in Phyllis Chesler's words, between 'reproduction and (hetero-)sexual pleasure; reproduction and physical prowess; reproduction and worldly or spiritual power'.⁶² Naomi remains in what can be called a 'no-win' situation: either she stays in her village and sacrifices her need and desire for musical power, or she leaves her home and effectively 'abandons' her son. Either choice alienates Naomi from her child and family; the decision, then, invariably invokes feelings of pain, guilt, and shame which result from (in)voluntary and unwanted separation. The decision to leave and become a travelling fiddle player forever exiles Naomi from her people, her land, and the love of her son. Characterizing Naomi haunted by her past, Elphinstone suggests the pain and suffering her protagonist encounters is a difficult and unnecessary choice that no woman should ever have to make. One might infer from this choice that Elphinstone's female protagonist exists in the role of one in exile: 'someone who inhabits one place and remembers or projects the reality of another'.⁶³

Helen continues to play a role in Naomi's emotional turmoil by bringing a message from the fiddle player who is the father of Naomi's child. Helen relays the words that Naomi's former teacher and lover send: 'You did the right thing Naomi, and no one is hurt by what you chose' (63). This message, while seemingly innocent and genuine in intent, does nothing except reinforce the pain Naomi suffers because she cannot come to terms with the fact that she 'abandons' her son for her music. Helen's message is ironic in its intonation and reception; even though no one in Naomi's village may be hurt by her decision to travel, what of Naomi herself? Is she not somehow deeply involved emotionally in the choice, and does she not feel the hurt and pain of this involuntary separation? Michael Seidel contends, 'exilic necessity derives from exilic anxiety, a lifelong scenario of estrangement'.⁶⁴ If exilic necessity derives from the lifelong scenario of estrangement, the reader might conclude that Naomi's persistent emotional pain estranges her from intimate relationships with other individuals. It also compels

⁶²*Women and Madness*, p. 21.

⁶³Michael Seidel, *Exile and the Narrative Imagination* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1986), p. ix.

⁶⁴*Ibid*, p. 5.

her to travel constantly in a (un)conscious effort to punish herself both for leaving her child, and for never grieving or speaking about her past choices.⁶⁵

Naomi never sees, nor understands, the confusion inherent in having a child and pursuing her music. While the novel suggests that Naomi believes that she should be able to do both concurrently and successfully, her family, village, and society assume otherwise; as a result, Naomi feels guilt and shame. Sandra Lee Bartky tells us:

Shame is called forth by the apprehension of some serious flaw in the self, guilt by the consciousness that one has committed a transgression. [. . .] Shame and guilt are alike in that each involves a condemnation of the self by itself for some failure to measure up; it is the measures that differ.⁶⁶

Elphinstone depicts Naomi believing that she has a serious flaw in her self and her psyche because she chooses music over raising her son. This difficult decision haunts Naomi's daily life owing to the fact that she knows 'there was a moment when I made it that way, but I don't know when it was' (251). Naomi's words imply that she internalizes shame and guilt in order to bury her past without being overcome by the consequences and pain of her position.

Thomas surmises that Naomi uses her music 'to keep herself from the emptiness of being cast out of the world' (38), and finds that he cannot blame her for this because 'music is better than ignorance or complacency, and it's infinitely better than madness. And perhaps in itself it's also something more' (38). Naomi continually seeks 'tunes that were virtually lost to the outside world' (63); her search for lost music allows her to avoid confronting her past and also partially justifies her travels. It is almost as if Elphinstone portrays Naomi seeking out new music because music, in lieu of motherhood, offers her protagonist 'a new horizon, a life's adventure that she might follow with all she had, and never any confusion, none at all' (119). Nevertheless, Naomi's love and passion for music, and her constant travel, do not appease her emotional haunting; thus, Elphinstone forces Naomi to relive her pain with Thomas who patiently listens to his friend's pain.

Naomi describes her painful departure from her village to Thomas. She tells him how she gave Colin to her sister:

⁶⁵See p. 251 in *A Sparrow's Flight* which chronicles this revelation.

⁶⁶*Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 87.

She carried him down to the beach to look at the boats. That was what he liked best. To distract him, you see. It worked. He didn't look back. When they'd gone, I picked up my fiddle and left. I didn't say goodbye to him. [. . .] I think now that was wrong. I owed him that. However small he was, he would have understood it in some way. But I didn't even give him that' (251).

While releasing these memories brings much pain, tears, and suffering to Naomi, reliving the memory allows her to understand that the choices she was given concerning her son and her music were not reasonable choices. Sharing her remorse, shame, and guilt with Thomas, Naomi comprehends that her feelings of guilt and shame are necessarily related to exile and are natural. Although Thomas can offer no solution to Naomi's remorse over her choices and her loss, he freely offers Naomi unconditional comfort and support and 'held her' (251). Showing Naomi and Thomas sharing and resolving emotional pain and haunted past lives, Elphinstone creates a dialectic between story and experience; she demonstrates to her readers that all choices, no matter how large or how small, are infinitely more complex than they may at first appear. Naomi's choice to leave her home was difficult and effectively permanent; yet, when she comes to terms with this decision, she is able to believe that 'there is someone I still have to seek. Not that he is lost, but I would like to find him again one day in the waking world, if that is possible' (222).

Narrative Style and Form: Mythic Prose, Dialogue, Inner Tales, Dreams, and a Twenty-Eight Day Cycle

Elphinstone's thematic structure imaginatively challenges the ways in which social and ideological institutions encode women as subjects. Elphinstone, like Tennant and Galloway, continues this imaginative endeavour by offering readers a challenging narrative style and form. Unlike Tennant and Galloway, Elphinstone does not contest the limits of textual realism by fragmenting narrative style and form; rather, Elphinstone contests traditional novel stylistics through a poetic use of language that endows her prose with a 'mythic' quality and an innovative use of dialogue; her narrative form also plays with traditional literary conventions because she incorporates inner stories in italics into *The Incomer* and offers a recurring dream sequence in addition to a twenty-eight day cycle into *A Sparrow's Flight*. Although Elphinstone juxtaposes poetic language and an innovative use of dialogue with inner tales,

dream sequences, and an experimental method of narrative division, her narrative style and form assert pluralism which continually shifts the reader between a medieval and (post)modern world.

One striking feature of *The Incomer* and *A Sparrow's Flight* is the 'mythic' quality of Elphinstone's prose. Elphinstone's literary style is fluid and lucid; as Mary Gladstone puts it, Elphinstone is 'philosophic and a weaver of fantasy. Her prose is suffused with poetic metaphor'.⁶⁷ While Gladstone's terminology 'poetic metaphor' is not entirely satisfying because she does not define this term, she astutely observes that Elphinstone's prose is poetic and lyrical; accordingly, the prose in both novels emerges, at times, as mythical and mystical.

In *The Incomer*, Elphinstone focuses on the land and designs a beautiful, yet wild, landscape. The land and landscape in Elphinstone's fictional world are of paramount importance to the novel's theme; both land and landscape are powerful representations of psychological and physical journeys. Similarly, land and landscape embody a symbolic connection with mother earth herself. Mrs Macleod Banks comments on the significance of the earth to the Scottish people:

Everywhere [. . .] The earth itself or the power connected with it has commanded the reverence of man . . . As parent of life and controller of fate, it was seen to hold beneath its surface the secret of growth and renewal and the mystery of decay; it was, as we know, the centre of the most ancient faiths.⁶⁸

As Banks sees it, the land and the earth are of great importance to the Scottish people because the earth holds the secrets of growth, renewal, and decay. Elphinstone seems to affirm a similar respect for the land and earth as she venerates landscape with poetic and lyric prose.

One fine example of Elphinstone's poeticism and lyricism appears in *The Incomer* as George and Fiona -- father and daughter -- stand outside a house in 'companionable silence':

The dance of the snow in the light grew wilder and thicker as a flurry of wind drove across the yard. The two of them huddled back in the shelter of the doorway, and the music within filtered through to them like a call from another country. Across the yard, where the gate opened on to the fields, there was a copse of beech trees. They stood facing it, while the wind rustled the branches and whispered among still-clinging brown leaves. Pale moonlight illuminated ground carpeted in white. The beech trees moaned

⁶⁷'A New Promise', *Cenchrastus*, 28 (Winter 87/88), 14-15 (p. 14).

⁶⁸Qtd. in F. Marian McNeill, *The Silver Bough: Volume I: Scottish Folk-Lore and Folk-Belief* (Edinburgh: Canongate Publishing, 1989), p. 56. First published (London: William MacLellan, 1956).

in the wind, or perhaps it was not merely the wind. There was a strange darkness in their shadow, as if they cast the shade not of bare branches but of a full canopy of summer leaves, dense enough to block out moonlight. [. . .] The rustling of the leaves was louder now, not thin and skeletal, but full-bodied and vigorous, and the scent of leaves was in the air. The light among the leaves was green and vibrant, bright as mosses on the forest floor in summer. The breeze stirred the leaves and shifted them; there was a point of blueness clear as the sky in maytime, so that their eyes, attuned to moonlight, were dazzled and they turned away, blinking. When they looked up again there was only the moonlight on the snow, and a red blur in front of their eyes like an image of vanished light (102-3).

In this passage, Elphinstone's prose takes on the features of a deep poetic experience. The language Elphinstone employs is onomatopoeic. Words like 'rustled', 'whispered', 'moaned', and 'stirred' draw the reader into the scene; the reader can hear the wind and trees moving and moaning and, as a result, simultaneously experience George and Fiona's amazement and awe. Likewise, Elphinstone's imagery creates specific emotional responses. As George and Fiona experience moonlight illuminating a ground carpeted in white, and feel bedazzled by the scene of leaves and blueness in the moonlight, so too does the reader undergo a concentrated emotional and imaginative awareness of the land and the landscape. Elphinstone's poetic language, then, heightens the reader's awareness of a fictional yet wholly realistic landscape; consequently, her writing at times communicates a mystical and mythical experience.

The prose in *A Sparrow's Flight* upholds a similar style to that in *The Incomer*. Imagery and sound continue to permeate Elphinstone's writing, which again results in a fluid narrative. One passage that illuminates lyrics and lyricism in the novel occurs when Thomas takes Naomi onto a mountain 'where earth met sky at last' (112). Thomas names the mountains to her, names which were made 'by shepherds like myself many centuries before the land was abused, and before the world was changed' (112):

'Wetherlam, Pike o' Blisco, Swirl How, Old Man of Coniston, Grey Friar, Crinkle Crag, Bow Fell, Esk Pike, Alan's Crag, Ill Crag, Great End.' The bulk of their own summit was in front of them now, a long plateau stretching from south to west. *'Ling Mell,'* recited Thomas, turning her to face the west, *'Middle Fell, Yowe's Barrow, the one below it, Seat Alan, Grey Gavel, Red Pike, Green Gavel, Scoat Fell, Pillar, Brandreth, High Crag, High Stile, Blake's Fell, Carling Knott, Mellbreak, Fleetwith Pike, Low Fell.'* They were turning now from west to north. *'Grass Moor, Wandope, Eel Crag, Sail, Grisedale Pike, Lord's Seat, Maiden Moor, Cat Bells. And the line in front of those: Robinson's Fell, Dale Head, High Spy.'*

Thomas let out a long breath, and faced her due north. *'Long Side, Carl Side, Skiddaw, Skiddaw's Little Man, Lonscale Fell, High Pike,*

Blencathra, Souther Fell, Clough Head, Great Dodd, Stybarrow Dodd, Raise, White Side, Helvellyn, Nethermost Pike, Dollywaggon Pike, Fair Field, Hart Crag. In front of them: Blaeberry Fell, High Seat, UllScarf. And just below us: Eagle Crag' (113)

The prose in this passage creates for the reader specific emotional responses through sounds and rhythm. Thomas names the mountains in a sing-song manner and he points the mountains out to Naomi slowly, yet lyrically. The sound and rhythm of Thomas's naming of the mountains accord him power to convey his cultural history to Naomi; the names and rhythm also bring to mind vivid images of a diverse mountain landscape. When Thomas names the mountains to Naomi, he reinforces their timeless stature and symbolic resonance. Walter J. Ong suggests that the fact that oral peoples 'commonly and in all likelihood universally consider words to have magical potency is clearly tied in, at least unconsciously, with their sense of the word as necessarily spoken, sounded, and hence power-driven'.⁶⁹ For the people in Thomas's valley, the names of the mountains have magical potency because they represent a social and cultural identity. The mountains always remind Thomas's people of who they are, and where they come from; therefore, the names and sounds of the mountains are necessarily spoken and power-driven. Elphinstone's lyrical language in *A Sparrow's Flight* expresses emotional exuberance; likewise, the sounds and rhythm build a familiar world for the reader which is reminiscent of a mythical and mystical past and future.

Elphinstone's lyrical language often infiltrates the characters' dialogue. Characters in fiction and drama are usually interpreted by readers as being endowed with certain moral, dispositional, and emotional qualities 'that are expressed in what they say -- the dialogue'.⁷⁰ In Elphinstone's writing, dialogue between characters is a principal means of disseminating the individual character's emotional and psychological unrest; moreover, the dialogue in both novels reveals how the characters gradually develop relationships built on loyalty and trust.

Norman Page speculates that since every word of a novel carries a certain weight of significance, 'it follows that the language in which a novel is composed is likely to have a density and meaningfulness, and will bear a degree of scrutiny, that is not always granted to,

⁶⁹*Orality and Literacy*, p. 32.

⁷⁰Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, p. 23.

or expected from, the discourse of everyday life'.⁷¹ Page also believes that novels are not reproduction of spontaneous speech, because the 'whole concept of realism as applied to fictional speech is often based on an inadequate or inaccurate notion of what spontaneous speech is really like'.⁷² Even so, character dialogue aspires to mimic the speech relations between individuals in everyday life; therefore, it can reveal a great deal about the thematic structure of a novel. Elphinstone uses character dialogue in *The Incomer* to show how female relationships develop in Clachanpluck and the dialogues between her female characters often unmask how women can love and support one another.

After Patrick rapes Anna, Naomi opens herself and her past to Emily. She describes to Emily how she had to make the difficult choice between raising her child or pursuing music:

'My sister loved him, and she had no child of her own. So we talked about it, all of us. They said it would be better if I went, but that if I did, I must agree not to come back.'

'Why?'

'Because I hurt them all. Can you understand that?'

'It seems to me that you hurt yourself.'

'And my village had to take responsibility for that. People don't belong to one another. Only little babies think they are part of somebody else. I wanted the music, you see, but I was afraid of being alone.'

'I can see that that would be a danger to them.'

'I think you know how much. It was for me as much as them. It was obvious that I had to go, and it would be no good trying to come back.'

'So you have been in exile ever since?' (200-1).

In this scene, the reader simply encounters speech between two women because Elphinstone strips the dialogue of psychological or physical character description. Since no extraneous character description enters the dialogue, Elphinstone forces the reader to focus on what is being said, rather than on what the author intends; hence, the reader turns to the character's dialogue in order to attempt textual interpretation.

⁷¹*Speech in the English Novel* (Basingstoke/London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 2. First published (London: Longman, 1973).

⁷²*Ibid*, pp. 3-4. Some scholars might argue that Abrams's and Page's comments on dialogue only apply to realist fiction. Even though I argue that Elphinstone's novels have some links with postmodernism, the characters in both novels engage in verbal dialogues from which insight can be drawn; thus, I quote Abrams and Page here in order to shed light on the function of dialogue in Elphinstone's fiction.

For instance, Naomi tells Emily that after she gives birth to Colin, a conflict arises between committing herself to her child while knowing that music exists in the world beyond her immediate reach. Naomi stresses to Emily that having her child 'hurt' her family; yet, Emily as an outsider observes that Naomi simply hurts herself. Emily also recognizes that Naomi does not choose exile; rather, this exile is forced upon her by a family who perceives Naomi as a 'danger' because she desires music and love. Emily's insight into Naomi's life and lifestyle come about free from authorial intervention; thus, a reader simultaneously hears Naomi's pain and draws conclusions about the condition of Naomi's exile. The dialogue permits Emily and the reader to comprehend that Naomi's family do not give her a choice between music and motherhood; in contrast, her family and community impose a decision upon Naomi which bars her to exile.

Elphinstone also relies heavily on dialogue in *A Sparrow's Flight*. The characters in this novel, particularly Thomas and Naomi, develop a strong rapport as they travel to, and from, the empty lands. Elphinstone breaks up Naomi and Thomas's long journey with frequent lapses into intense dialogue; as in *The Incomer*, the dialogues are often stripped of emotional or physical epithets and the reader must turn to the character's words to draw any conclusions.

An interesting episode in the novel occurs when Naomi and Thomas come across the ruins of a former city. Thomas responds to the painful memories brought on near the ruin by explaining to Naomi the evil of the past:

'They took more from the earth than they were ever intended to have. The land suffered, and gradually became sick through exploitation and neglect. But the people ignored it, and within their fortress they couldn't see what was happening. All they could see was naked power, forged out of the elements which were supposed to give life. They became mad with power, and forgot that they belonged to this world, and that they had needs, like every living creature. They pursued no other end but sorcery, and within their fortress fires blazed day and night, forging a new element out of the old, which withered every living thing that it touched.'

She frowned in confusion. 'You mean like alchemy? Gold?'

'No, no, you don't understand. Not a metal, an element. It was alive, but not with life like ours. It was dangerous, because it fed upon the elements of which life is made.'

Naomi sighed. 'I'm not a magician, Thomas. And if it's sorcery, I'm not sure I even want to understand. But I want to know what happened.'

'It happened as it couldn't fail to happen. No one controls the elements, although people may make use of them. They thought they had the power over life, but it is life that has power, not us. They brought something into being which couldn't be controlled. They ignored the danger, and the end was inevitable. The thing escaped them, and broke loose.'

'Like a dragon.'

'No, no. You're thinking in the wrong images. It's not a story, at least, not of the kind you're used to' (84-5).

In this dialogue, Thomas reveals to Naomi how the former inhabitants of the land became 'mad' with the desire for 'power' and 'control' over a 'life' and 'land' which cannot be controlled.⁷³ The desire for power and control over a non-controllable landscape brings about self-destruction. As Page tells us, 'in reading fictional dialogue we may well have the illusion of "listening" to the conversations of those we know well'.⁷⁴ Thomas's manner of speech draws the reader into the text; consequently, his lyrical language shapes the reader's sensory and intellectual impressions. Elphinstone juxtaposes stories and legends with metals, elements, danger, and human annihilation in the dialogues between characters. These images juxtapose folk traditions and Celtic legend with contemporary weapons of mass destruction; this opposition tends to shock a reader's senses. Moreover, when Thomas chastises Naomi for thinking in the wrong images, Elphinstone allows her dialogue to raise questions about the methods by which culture and society construct the ways in which individuals see, think, and speak. Elphinstone's dialogue and language are economical and poetic, and the verbal exchanges between characters speak louder than the characters' actions. Elphinstone imaginatively uses dialogue to unravel developing relationships between women and men and, at the same time, to call into question received ideas about the social construction of femininity, responsibility, the nature of evil, and the ways in which individuals see and think.

Elphinstone builds on her interesting use of dialogue by integrating six unique stories or tales about the creation of the world, evil, the history of women, and women's roles into the framework of the novel.⁷⁵ Elphinstone separates these inner stories from the main text by

⁷³The themes of evil and power are discussed more fully in the section on Borders and Border Crossings.

⁷⁴*Speech in the English Novel*, p. 2.

⁷⁵See pp 8-10, 60-1, 97-8, 119, 148-9, and 187-8.

using italics and extra spacing. Stylistically, then, Elphinstone calls the reader's attention to and emphasizes the importance of these inner stories and tales to the thematic structure of the novel. Jan Montefiore talks about the appeal of myth and 'fairy-story' to feminists:

The appeal of such traditional material as myth and fairy-story, especially for feminists, lies not only in its archaic prestige, but in its strong connections with human subjectivity, so that using this material seems to be a way of at once escaping the constrictive hierarchies of tradition and gaining access to the power of definition.⁷⁶

Montefiore contends that many feminist writers use myth and fairy story because these literary modes give feminists new access to the power of definition. Myth and fairy story, by virtue of their style and content are linked to the folk tale. M.H. Abrams defines the folk tale as 'a short narrative in prose of unknown authorship which has been transmitted orally'.⁷⁷ Like myth and fairy stories, the folk tale might appeal to feminist writers, especially Scottish feminist writers, because these types of oral narratives escape the constrictive hierarchies of literary tradition; in short, folk tales give the storyteller the ability to access new powers of definition.⁷⁸ In *The Incomer*, the female characters who tell the community and, of course, the reader, tales about women's history and the story of creation actively grasp power and redefine roles for women in culture and society.

Elphinstone provides her fictional community with six extraordinary tales which transmit the history of Clachanpluck's society. While all six tales are equally interesting and informative, two of the tales are particularly symbolic and resonant. The first concerns Emily's journey to the cave where she closes her eyes and opens 'her mind to such dreams as the earth might offer her' (118). She begins to understand:

I was denounced by a human being like myself who said that I was different, and my bones were burned to ashes so that I should be extinguished for ever from this earth. I was silenced; I was tortured and drugged and battened down behind locked doors. I was driven out of the world because I knew that everything was only the same, and I was destroyed. I have been betrayed by you, my sister, again and again and again. And you and I have both been betrayed, and told that ours was not the image in

⁷⁶*Feminism and Poetry: Language, Experience, Identity in Women's Writing* (London/New York: Pandora Press, 1987), p. 56.

⁷⁷*A Glossary of Literary Terms*, p. 71.

⁷⁸For instance, Grandmother Dummer's 'folktales' in *Sisters and Strangers* give Elsie and the narrator vital information which will enable the children to define themselves according to their own wishes and desires.

which this world was made, and that it were better not to exist than be born a woman (119).⁷⁹

Emily goes to the cave to seek wisdom from her mother earth; she receives a powerful history of female extermination and degradation which discloses alarming insights into the historical position of women in the social order. The words 'denounced', 'different', 'bones', 'burned', 'ashes', and 'extinguished' allude to the malicious and hysterical witch-hunts carried out in Scotland, Europe, and America which unnecessarily exterminated thousands of women for no other reason than that the women appeared different or challenged social norms. Emily's awareness that women were 'silenced', 'tortured', 'drugged', 'battered', and 'locked' exposes how women with knowledge and strength generally pose a threat to the dominant order; therefore, these women were, and sometimes still are, literally locked up and silenced in order to prevent any challenge to the prevailing authority. Emily also comes to understand that social conditioning persuades some women to collude with oppression by reinforcing the ideologies of male dominance and concurrently realizes that constant subjugation and collusion with the ruling male order renders women's lives unlivable.

Emily's earth dreams are not comfortable; they do, however, bring knowledge. Once Emily takes in the terrible visions of women's lowly position in history, she is able to envision a new social order:

Come away out of this, my sister. Come out, and leave the world of nightmare to the men who would create a nightmare for us all. What then? Then they will destroy the earth, or perhaps they have already destroyed it, and everything that we loved is doomed. The world is turning under our hands, yours and mine, and between us we can make it turn for ever. There will be no annihilation and no destruction, only the everlasting change which is the unending end of everything. You and I know that, for we see the reflection of ourselves in each others' eyes, and we are not afraid (119).

With these thoughts, Emily asserts a new vision of womanhood and femininity that rejects the 'nightmare' and 'doom' men create for women; she acknowledges that women hold the power to transform the future if women choose to contest the authority of cultural constructs. Karen E. Rowe tells us that folklorists argue that fairy tales and folk tales have always been one of

⁷⁹Emily's words in this passage are reminiscent of Tille Olsen's words on the female condition: 'Shut up, you're only a girl. O Elizabeth, why couldn't you have been born a boy?'. *Silences* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1989), p. 27. First published (New York: Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, 1978).

'culture's primary mechanisms for inculcating roles and behaviours'.⁸⁰ Since folklorists agree that folk tales generally inculcate roles and behaviours, one might infer that Elphinstone's inner tales provide women with positive images of femininity that allow Emily and the reader to learn why it is important to assume an independent status from the dominant power structures.

Anna also offers the reader insight as she tells Alan and Molly a creation story which tends to disrupt a reader's sensibility; her story transfers the power of creation from a man onto a woman.⁸¹ Elphinstone alludes to the original creation story when Anna says to the children, '*for it begins with the loss of a garden*' (187). This allusion immediately brings to mind the hierarchical power relations between men and women that result from the Christian biblical version of creation which blames Eve for the exile from the garden of Eden. Anna inverts the dominate-subordinate version of human relations by telling the children that '*there was a rose garden within a circle of yew, and the garden was made by a woman*' (188). When Anna attributes creation to a woman, she assigns women power, independence, and freedom. No 'God' or male deity controls woman's fate; instead, the woman in Anna's tale assumes responsibility for her own life and destiny which clearly offers the female characters, and women in general, a positive and autonomous role-model.

Humour lightens the tone of Anna's radical tale when, unlike traditional versions of creation, she depicts her 'createss' to be fallible. Anna's gardener plants her garden and rejoices in '*what she had made*' (188). Nevertheless, when Spring arrives, '*all living things began to awaken and grow*':

The woman saw how much work there was to be done, and her spirit quailed. There were not only the weeds. There was compost to make, and mulch to spread. There were flowers to be deadheaded, and the hedge to clip. And when the weeds died back there would be pruning, and grafting, and propagation (188).

Rather than allow her garden to die, the woman in Anna's tale '*consulted with the earth*' (188). Again, the woman's mother earth, not her 'God', nor her father, provides an answer '*that seemed both joyous and satisfactory. The earth gave her a man, to help with the work and share in her love, and to give her children when she wanted them*' (188). Anna's tale endows

⁸⁰'Feminism and Fairy Tales', p. 210.

⁸¹Anna's version of the creation myth finds an affinity with several versions of creation in Greek mythology. See, for example, Robert Graves, *Greek Myths* (London: Cassell & Co, 1981), pp. 10-12.

women with power and control because she portrays a woman living with a man peacefully and in harmony with nature. Sharon Davie, in an essay which explores orality in Zora Neale Hurston's fiction, contends that in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 'while the inner tale escapes *being* an "inner" tale, the comfortable categories of truth and fiction built up as the novel has progressed explode in the readers' hands'.⁸² So too do Elphinstone's inner tales explode in a reader's hands. By designing inner stories which redefine women's history and roles in creation and in life, Elphinstone challenges the authority that dominant versions of womanhood and creation hold. Elphinstone's inner tales provide new visions and/or versions of femininity and womanhood which deny male dominance and assert female autonomy and creative control.

Elphinstone's use of the oral tradition pays homage to Scottish cultural and national identity. Her use of the oral tradition and of the story within a story creates a narrative structure that revises history which enables women to generate positive ideas of self-hood. What's more, Elphinstone's innovative use of narrative structure places her in DuPlessis's category of 'feminist' because she constructs 'a variety of oppositional strategies to the depiction of gender institutions in narrative. A writer expresses dissent from an ideological formation by attacking elements of narrative that repeat, sustain, or embody the values and attitudes in question'.⁸³ Elphinstone's novel, filled with revisionary inner tales, ruptures traditional narrative structure in order to call for a radical revision of the contemporary hierarchies and ideologies in literature and in society which repress women's intellectual and emotional selves.

Elphinstone continues to dismantle conventional narrative form and emphasizes the dream-like quality of the narrative in *A Sparrow's Flight* through a recurring dream sequence which mirrors Naomi's psychological or unconscious life story. Greene observes that 'feminism is a re-membering, a re-assembling of our lost past and lost parts of ourselves'.⁸⁴ Naomi's recurring dreams and nightmares offer her the opportunity to reassemble the various

⁸²Free Mules, Talking Buzzards, and Cracked Plates: The Politics of Dislocation in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, in *PMLA*, 108 (May 1993), 446-59 (p. 452).

⁸³*Writing Beyond the Ending*, p. 34.

⁸⁴'Feminist Fiction', p. 300.

dimensions involved in the painful decision to forsake her child for her music; the dreams also provide the reader with insight into Naomi's unconscious enclosures. By remembering and reassembling her past, the reader might infer that Naomi asserts a feminine/feminist consciousness because the dreams help to redefine her self-image.

Naomi's dreams begin as she and Thomas set out on the journey to the empty lands. After playing at a festival, Naomi falls asleep in the back of a wagon and dreams about a child 'in a blue shirt and ragged salt-stained trousers trailing through sea that swished round its ankles and obliterated its faint tracks in the sand. A thin freckled child with bright red hair, on an empty beach curving to an unknown end' (73). In the dream, Naomi also feels 'the child following behind, gliding expertly on steady feet, rising up and sliding down, always following' (74). Even so, at the end of the dream, the child leaves Naomi, 'vanishing into the distance' (74). This dream symbolically implies that Naomi is always followed and haunted by a vanishing child; that in fact, her 'abandoned' child follows her wherever she goes.

Elphinstone amplifies the emotional impact of the child haunting Naomi in her next dream. As the journey continues, Naomi dreams that 'she was burdened. There was a baby to carry, a baby that grew heavier, dragging on her arm' (108). This dream announces to the reader that Naomi has a burden to carry; while in the dream the child represents a physical burden, in life, Naomi carries the psychological and emotional burden of leaving her child without saying goodbye.

Naomi's dreams unfold and mature as the journey to the empty lands progresses. Each dream continues on from the last and provides deeper emotional and physical detail. As the journey nears completion, Naomi's inner turmoil grows. Elphinstone depicts Naomi hurrying in a dream:

She was hurrying along the beach, stumbling among rocks and seaweed, burdened by the toddler whom she carried on her hip, a little boy of about fifteen months or so, who clung to her jacket, too scared even to cry out. She couldn't stop to comfort him. The boat was just along the shore, and in a moment it would leave them. The child was so heavy; her arm holding him steady felt close to breaking. With her other hand she groped her way forward, slipping over piles of banked up seaweed dumped by many tides. If it wasn't for the boy she could still make it, but she dared not leave him here, even to run ahead with a message, lest he be lost forever. She could see the outline of the boat, a black shape faintly etched against the water. It was pulling out. There was still a whole stretch of beach to go. She tried to

cry out, but couldn't find her voice; tried to run, with the weight of the boy pulling her off balance, knowing that it was too late . . . (220).

This dream jars the reader because it shows Naomi's desperate attempt to conjoin her child with her music. The reader sees Naomi running along the shore still burdened by her child; at the same time, however, Elphinstone portrays Naomi hurrying toward her music. Naomi knows that she can make the boat -- her music -- without the child; still, she desperately fears that if she leaves Colin behind she will lose him forever. This dream functions in two ways. On one level, the dream vividly illustrates Naomi's overriding desire to stay with her child and still follow her music. On another level, this dream exposes the social pressures on Naomi to raise her child or pursue a career. When Naomi hurries toward the boat burdened with her child, she displays her underlying belief that she can raise her child and simultaneously travel for music. The fact that the dream does not allow her access to either her child, or her music, perhaps symbolically represents the difficulties women encounter when they have to make a choice between motherhood and a career.

At the end of Naomi and Thomas's journey, Elphinstone permits Naomi to absolve herself of the pain and shame connected to her past choices. As Naomi describes her dream to Thomas:

There is a stretch of water that widens slowly, between the boat and the shore. Whether I take the boat, or whether I miss it, there is still the same stretch of water, whichever side of it I'm on. Even when the gap is very small, it opens up the possibility of regret' (251).

With these words, Naomi acknowledges to herself that even if she takes the boat and pursues music, or if she stays on the shore and raises her child, a stretch of water still exists which opens up the possibility of regret. Naomi's dreams of enclosure subconsciously alleviate her burden because the reader comes to understand that Naomi's family forces her to choose between two things she needs and loves: her child and her music. Thus, as the dreams tell us, whether Naomi travels or remains at home, regret undoubtedly accompanies either decision.

Judi M. Roller argues that 'the pattern developed by fragmenting the novel itself assists, too, in expressing the theme of fragmentation' and that the 'multiple point of view often used in the feminist novel [. . .] Is helpful to an author because it permits her to elucidate

points of view by separating them'.⁸⁵ Both points shed light on the narrative structure of Elphinstone's novels. Clearly, Elphinstone shows Naomi's psyche to be fragmented; thus, when Elphinstone incorporates inner stories and inner dream sequences into the novels, she incorporates multiple fictional points of view which highlight the conflicts women encounter in the construction of positive self-images. The inner tales in *The Incomer*, and the dream sequence in *A Sparrow's Flight*, offer alternative pictures of femininity and female history as the reader follows Naomi on her journey to greater self-awareness. Presenting these tales and dreams independent of the central character's consciousness, Elphinstone elucidates how emotionally and psychologically difficult it is for women to maintain independent and creative roles outside that of domesticity and motherhood. Moreover, the dream sequences possibly imply that it is the nature of human imagination to live in the memory of past events as well as in a present reality.

If Naomi's dreams act as a form of emotional and psychological enclosure, Elphinstone devises a stylistic enclosure by introducing into *A Sparrow's Flight* a disciplined narrative time. Elphinstone divides the novel into twenty-eight sections which she terms 'days' rather than chapters; consequently, the reader comes across 'First Day' (1), 'Second Day' (19), and 'Third Day' (30), instead of Chapter One, Chapter Two, or Chapter Three.

The twenty-eight day narrative form that Elphinstone uses in *A Sparrow's Flight* holds symbolic and aesthetic significance. The twenty-eight days allude to both the lunar cycle and the menstrual cycle; this narrative framework alludes to renewal and rebirth and reinforces the feminine nature of the land, agriculture, mother earth and, of course, Naomi the female protagonist.⁸⁶ The aesthetic patterning of twenty-eight days also holds meaning. By dividing the novel into days rather than chapters, the narrative framework and time breaks from conventional narrative patterning. Like night and day, Naomi and Thomas's journey maintains

⁸⁵*The Politics of the Feminist Novel*, p. 68.

⁸⁶While some feminist scholars might criticize Elphinstone for allying her female characters with nature because this characterization might perpetuate the woman/nature construct, I do not find the female character's association with nature problematic. The women in Elphinstone's fictional world maintain a spiritual connection with the land that ensures the community's survival; this alliance between woman and nature is in and of itself anarchic because the powerful female characters actively construct their present lives and future livelihood which contravenes passive representations of women and nature and defies simple biologic essentialism.

continuity of movement and form because the days follow on from one another in a natural and fluid pattern, unlike the artificial literary formulation of chapters which have the potential to disrupt and to dislocate the reader's attention.

The twenty-eight day cycle does, however, limit the novel's content. For instance, since the novel takes place over twenty-eight days, Elphinstone felt compelled 'to say every bit, I couldn't say a week later they got to know each other very well'.⁸⁷ The short time frame forces Elphinstone to develop carefully and conscientiously a strong relationship between Thomas and Naomi. Furthermore, the rigid time frame allows Elphinstone to focus on the individual journeys that Naomi and Thomas embark on to reveal that even though these journeys open haunting pasts, they also, like the lunar cycle, offer rebirth and renewal. The narrative time that Elphinstone adopts in *A Sparrow's Flight* symbolizes continuity and renewal; it also aesthetically reminds readers that in life, every individual has a time frame in which to confront past choices, many of which may be full of pain and regret.

Landscape: Land, Cave, and Forest

The Incomer and *A Sparrow's Flight* exhibit a great concern with the land and landscape. In both novels, the characters treat the land with great respect and the female characters in particular appear to feel an affinity for the land. Additionally, the land and landscape in Elphinstone's writing often holds metaphorical significance. For example, Naomi's fear of the forest and wilderness in *The Incomer* signifies her fear of past choices; likewise, the mountains in *A Sparrow's Flight* metaphorically symbolize Naomi and Thomas's arduous physical and emotional 'rocky' or 'mountainous' quest to reconcile themselves to their past.

Abrams tells us that in archetypal imagery, death and rebirth are intrinsically connected to the seasons which in turn are grounded in seasonal changes and the organic cycle of human life.⁸⁸ Abrams offers several versions of the archetypal journey; these include the journey underground, the heavenly ascent, and that of the earth goddess.⁸⁹ *The Incomer* takes place in winter and *A Sparrow's Flight* in the spring. Both novels depict Naomi embarking on a

⁸⁷Babinec-Elphinstone, Appendix, p. 331.

⁸⁸*A Glossary of Literary Terms*, p. 224.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*

journey through a wild landscape as well as through self-hood; therefore, Elphinstone's novels juxtapose internal and external landscapes in an effort to reappraise a woman's relationship to the land and to self.

The constant references to land and landscape in *The Incomer* and *A Sparrow's Flight* underscore the importance of land to the characters' lifestyles and processes of self-definition.

J. Douglas Porteous attests that:

Landscapes may be expressly used for symbolic purposes, where specific places may be identified with the stages of life's journey or where archetypal symbols such as sea and forest are used to convey meaning. [. . .] Or landscapes may be used more generally, to reflect the novelist's perception of the human condition, so that the reader remains unsure whether environments create or condition the characters, whether the congruence between character and landscape is symbiotic, causal, or coincidental.⁹⁰

In Elphinstone's writing, land and landscapes are used more generally to reflect the human condition. It will prove useful to consider specific images of land from each novel in order to come to a greater understanding of the symbolic force of Elphinstone's resonant fictional landscape.

Elphinstone places emphasis on land and landscape in *The Incomer* and *A Sparrow's Flight* to compel readers to look beyond the immediate sensory impression and to consider the wider implications that landscape holds within the text. Doris Y. Kadish believes, 'despite the undeniable need to read landscape pictorially, there is an equally urgent need to go beyond a pictorial reading to develop a fuller, enriched, or "completed" reading'.⁹¹ Throughout *The Incomer*, Elphinstone continually makes reference to the land and reinforces the need to respect what mother earth offers. When Emily and Molly, for instance, go into the forest to cut down holly for their mid-winter festival, Emily asks her daughter to 'wait, [. . .] Look at it. [. . .] It's a gift. [. . .] We have to acknowledge that before we take what we came for' (94). Emily reminds Molly to be careful when climbing the tree because 'it's alive' (94) and also asks her daughter to 'cut at a join, so's not to hurt the tree' (94). These lines deliver a vibrant image of climbing a tree and cutting holly, yet they also clarify how important it is to take care not to hurt

⁹⁰*Landscapes of the Mind: Worlds of Sense and Metaphor* (Toronto/Buffalo/London: The University of Toronto Press, 1990), p. 12.

⁹¹*The Literature of Images: Narrative Landscapes from 'Julie' to 'Jane Eyre'* (New Brunswick/London: Rutgers University Press, 1987), p. 4.

the tree. To Emily and the people of Clachanpluck, trees, like humans, are living things; trees, like humans, hurt when not acknowledged for their gifts and when abruptly relieved of their offerings. Elphinstone, through Emily, reminds her readers how important it is to venerate and show respect for nature.

Elphinstone makes her reader aware of the importance and significance of land and landscape by making the land synonymous with woman and womanhood. This equation of women with the land is readily apparent after Patrick rapes Anna and the women of Clachanpluck ironically hunt the hunter and the former predator becomes preyed upon. As the women chase Patrick through the forest, he thinks to himself, 'there is only one crime, and that is the crime against the land' (168). Patrick also feels himself to be 'no longer a being of the forest, but something inimical, hunted and apart' (169) and he understands that 'there was still earth under his body, but no longer his earth' (169-70). Elphinstone portrays the women of Clachanpluck hunting Patrick, and shows the earth and the forest to be alien to his presence; Patrick cannot come to terms with these feelings of isolation because he believes that the only crime in Clachanpluck remains the crime against the land. Elphinstone's inner tales and Emily's responsibility for the land confirm that in Clachanpluck, a woman is connected to the land; therefore, when Patrick commits a violent crime against Anna, he symbolically and metaphorically commits a crime against the land. As a result, the law of the fathers inverts and becomes the law of the mothers and Patrick must die in order to facilitate rebirth.

Another interesting use of land and landscape occurs at the end of *The Incomer* after Emily transfers her responsibility for the land onto her daughter. This action is significant because Emily as a mother hands over power to her daughter; hence, the reader becomes aware that women in Clachanpluck assume responsibility for caretaking not only of mother earth, but also of the women and men who live within their small community. Elphinstone augments this representation of female power by showing Fiona accepting that 'the burden of the past is mine also, and what has happened to my people and my land has happened to me' (218). With these words, Fiona confirms her willingness to take care of her people and her land; thus, when the sky breaks open and 'gathering death' (219) suspends over the forest, Fiona crouches down onto the rock which 'was solid as it had always been' (219). She recognizes and accepts that

'roots go down into the dark and find nourishment in the soil, and the bulbs lie quiescent in the cold soil' (219). When she rediscovers the regenerating nature of her land and her mother earth, Fiona also sees flowers like Tormentil, 'a flower one would expect to find on the bare summit of a hill' (219) breaking through rocky soil. These images reveal anew the sequence of death and rebirth and reaffirm that woman's affinity with the land fosters rejuvenation of the human spirit and human life.

Whereas in *The Incomer* Elphinstone focuses on the symbolic associations of the land in general, in *A Sparrow's Flight* she concentrates on specific features within the landscape; namely, the sea, the stars, and again the land, hold great significance.

The sea and sea imagery frequently appear in *A Sparrow's Flight*. The sea as a landscape image carries force for a number of reasons. First, the sea figures significantly in Naomi's life because she leaves her home and crosses the sea from Donegal to the land in which she now travels. Second, Naomi leaves her child with her sister by the sea because he loved watching the boats. Finally, as Helen, another travelling fiddle player tells Naomi, her son Colin now masters the sea in his own boat.⁹² The sea, then, seems to be an integral part of Naomi's past life and decisions.

Elphinstone manoeuvres the sea into Naomi's present at the beginning of Naomi's journey to the empty lands with Thomas. As they begin walking along the road to Thomas's valley, Naomi thinks that the road:

was more like the sea. A long swell of hills, their curves smooth as a whale's back, birds circling over them, the cry of curlews desolate as the calling of gulls over open water. It seemed one could follow those long undulations, slide down into the troughs with the smoothness of a narrow boat, then rise up slowly, carried by the moving swell of the land. Only this was not water, but earth, stripped to its bones and carved to deceptive smoothness through ages of ice and wind. It was land, but land limitless as the sea, an open road above the tree-choked lowlands that encircled it (32).

As Naomi understands it, there is no shelter along the hills, but merely an 'ever-present danger' (32). She knows that the road she walks on, 'was not a road, but a voyage with all the risks that implied' (32). Horner and Zlosnick suggest that in Chopin's *The Awakening*, in Woolf's *The Voyage Out* and *To The Lighthouse*, and in Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* the sea

⁹²See pp. 200-1 in *The Incomer*, and pp. 64-5 in *A Sparrow's Flight*.

metaphorically represents 'a source of terror'. This terror, however, appears to be the foundation of a future freedom because they also contend that the sea metaphorically carries a 'sense of openness'.⁹³ Horner and Zlosnick's insights about the sea as metaphor shed light on *A Sparrow's Flight*. The sea for Naomi clearly holds terror because it reminds her of past choices which signal emotional danger; at the same time, the sea offers Naomi a means of contending with past decisions. When she looks upon her journey with Thomas as a voyage, Elphinstone allows her female protagonist to risk the terror of reopening her painful past as she embarks on a metaphorical voyage of self-discovery. One might infer that when Naomi remarks to Thomas that she has 'made many voyages' (250), and believes that she has a 'whole voyage of discovery in front of her' (254), the sea as metaphor suggests that the road to Thomas's valley proffers Naomi a high degree of openness and freedom.

Elphinstone's interest in landscape extends from the sea and earth to the sky. As Naomi and Thomas exchange ideas on how to read written music, Thomas tells Naomi that his father was 'some sort of magician, I think. He was making a map of the stars' (155). Thomas goes on to say that his father passed through his valley 'looking for the ancient star maps which were written in the past upon the stones' (155). Although there does not seem to be a reason for making charts of the stars in Elphinstone's fictional world because few people read, the stars are important because they symbolize, like the sea, openness and the hint of discovery. Space and stars embody freedom; they represent, on one level, a wide open frontier or, as some critics might have it, 'the next frontier, the last frontier, the most important frontier [. . .] The final frontier'.⁹⁴ When Elphinstone depicts Thomas's father as a traveller who attempts to chart and discover uncharted and undiscovered territory, she implies that Naomi and Thomas, like Thomas's father, are also two individuals who travel on journeys to chart new directions for their lives.

Specific places in the landscape of Elphinstone's fictional world are also important. A cave that rests somewhere in the forest is one space that stands out as a location for the women of Clachanpluck to journey inwards. Fiona knows that something awaits her in the wilderness

⁹³*Landscapes of Desire*, p. 11 and p. 199.

⁹⁴John Rennie Short, *Imagined Country: Society, Culture and Environment* (London/New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 94.

and she convinces Anna to journey with her to discover what the forest hides. Once they reach the 'cave, if it was a cave' (40), Fiona feels that she 'would like to go in' (41), while Anna is 'not sure that I want to go in' (41). Even though Fiona and Anna respond to the cavern differently, they decide to enter it and, therefore, to attempt to garner new knowledge for themselves. Once inside the cavern, however, Fiona and Anna simply encounter fear. They meet:

a distillation of colour that confused their senses and forced them to shut their eyes against it. Or perhaps it was not that either, but merely the reflection of the flame that dazzled their eyes and hovered before their sight in a sharp greenness that was more than sunlight. If it were real then it was too bright, and they stood paralysed, helpless and blind as moles (42).

When Fiona and Anna enter the cave, they hold what they believe to be clear ideas of their lives and their self-hood; yet, the experience in the cave paralyzes the women. In Platonic thought, the image of the cave represents a belief in two worlds:

The world of Being and the world of Becoming. The latter, the material world which is apprehended by the senses and subject to time and decay, is merely a copy of the former, the realm of external and unchanging Ideas, which can only be apprehended by the intellect. These Ideas or Forms are the perfect archetypes -- the true reality -- of which all the individual things in the world of Becoming are imperfect shadows.⁹⁵

In the cave Fiona and Anna encounter reflections, shadows, and images which are inverted and copied from their world of Clachanpluck; since Fiona and Anna are still coming to terms with themselves as women and as individuals, and with their position in the world, they are perhaps stranded in between Plato's world of 'Being' and 'Becoming'. Since Fiona and Anna have yet to understand themselves as autonomous subjects and to carve a place for themselves in their world, the cave cannot offer them knowledge, only confusion and helplessness. It follows that when Fiona and Anna come to a greater understanding of themselves as powerful individuals, they might leave the world of 'Becoming' for the world of 'Being' and assume roles which aid in protecting and regenerating the land.

Emily, like Fiona and Anna, also journeys to the cave; yet, Emily understands herself as a woman and her function in Clachanpluck and therefore does not experience terror or fear within the cave. When Emily visits the cave, she feels peace and comfort which call to mind

⁹⁵Robert Wilcher, *Andrew Marvell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 135.

images reminiscent of growth and birth. Emily freely goes 'down into the dark, back to the beginning, foreshadowing the end' (117). She is 'enshrouded by the earth itself, she felt the welcome warmth of a place never touched by cold, where winter could not reach with long white fingers. A place of retreat, of waiting' (117-18). Emily curls 'herself up like a small animal in the shelter of the rounded rock, her arms folded across her chest' (118), and opens her mind to the dreams the earth might offer her. These images are provocative because they suggest the experience of a mother's womb: Emily crawls into the centre of the earth, she curls up, she retreats and waits, and she goes 'back to the beginning, foreshadowing the end'. Porteous believes, 'in literature the symbolic value of caverns has often been a negative one; they are the abode of demons, [. . .] The deep cavern symbolizes the abyss'.⁹⁶ Elphinstone offers an alternative picture of the cave in *The Incomer*; rather than the abode of demons and the abyss, Elphinstone reveals the cave to be a nurturing, renewing, regenerating life force. Emily journeys to the cave to meet with a 'place of knowledge, [. . .] To understand' (118); thus, the landscape of the cave bolsters female knowledge and women's ability to control the processes of self-definition.

Naomi too attempts to search out hidden knowledge. As a storm rages, she reaches for a gap in the branches of the forest and falls deep into the cave. Unlike Fiona and Anna, Naomi does not encounter the turbulence the two women find; instead, like Emily, Naomi feels 'peace beneath it, and a welcome darkness' (208). Within the cave of female knowledge, Naomi finds that her 'long exile was over at last' (209). When Naomi's exile ends, one is again reminded of Plato's cave which represents the 'ascent of the mind from a realm of mere images to the realm of visible things'.⁹⁷ At the same time, Elphinstone's descriptive language simulates the idea of the womb: 'rocked', 'darkness', 'blood', 'circling', 'water', and 'swelled' are all words that invoke images of the womb and pregnancy. Naomi's experience in the cave brings together Fiona, Anna's, and Emily's encounter in the cave. The cave for Naomi both personifies Plato's cave of Being and Becoming, and illustrates a move from the world of haunting images to the world of forms; likewise, the cave bears a striking

⁹⁶*Landscapes of the Mind*, pp. 100-1.

⁹⁷David J. Melling, *Understanding Plato* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 110.

resemblance to a mother's womb -- a womb that comforts and nurtures. Ellen Moers writes that in Wollstonecraft's first novel, *Mary, a Fiction*, the cave as landscape 'is a time of feminine stocktaking, an atmosphere of apartness, as much as a place'.⁹⁸ So too in *The Incomer*, the cave acts a metaphor for feminine stocktaking as well as the move from becoming to being an independent and self-assured powerful female subject.

The forest in Elphinstone's novels also holds great significance. Porteous claims that the forest has no archetypal positive image in literature because the forest 'is one of the primordial elements, a landscape of fear'.⁹⁹ Naomi's response to the forest in *The Incomer* appears to bear Porteous's theory out. While the people of Clachanpluck are at ease in their forest, Naomi as an outsider feels uncomfortable in it. Indeed, as Naomi travels through the forest, she feels 'disconcerted' (3) as the 'night closed in, the whole weight of it concentrated on the stranger who had been overtaken in its midst, and with it came the terror of the unseen' (3). Although the reader has yet to discover Naomi's haunted past, the language in these lines conveys certain sensory impressions; clearly, the traveller is a stranger for whom the forest signifies terror. Short believes, 'to be stuck in the dark forest is a metaphor for having lost one's bearings'.¹⁰⁰ Short's words illuminate several aspects of Naomi's conflict with her past. Naomi does not recognize the forest; therefore, she fears the forest because it represents an entity she does not know. The forest parallels Naomi's decision to leave her child to pursue her music because the forest, like Naomi's decision, weighs her down. Likewise, the choice, like the forest, fills her with emotional and physical sensations of terror. Since Naomi does not know if she makes the right decision to leave her son, she travels away from the past which represents unknown consequences. The imagery in these sentences, then, reveals the dark and unknown forest to be a metaphor for Naomi's dark, unknown, and unresolved former life.

Fiona and Anna's experience in the forest supports the notion that the forest might metaphorically represent unascertained knowledge. As Fiona and Anna struggle to discover the cave that the forest hides, they see that the forest 'was untamed [. . .] The presence of the

⁹⁸*Literary Women: The Great Writers* (London: The Women's Press, 1978), p. 255. First published (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1976).

⁹⁹*Landscapes of the Mind*, p. 98

¹⁰⁰*Imagined Country*, p. 21. The next two references are from this edition.

trees was overwhelming [. . .] The forest was impenetrable' (38). As they continue to walk in this dark forest, they are 'touched for the first time by a flicker of fear' (40). Like Naomi, Fiona and Anna have yet to understand what the forest offers and, in turn, what they seek from the forest; as a result, the forest remains an impenetrable wilderness for Anna and Fiona. The wilderness experience for Fiona and Anna signifies the more general negative literary experience in the wilderness; in other words, in the forest, Fiona and Anna encounter a wilderness that 'quite literally bewilders' and their time in the wilderness hints at the 'dark elemental forces of the human psyche' (21).

Even though Naomi, Fiona, and Anna initially experience unknown darkness and fear in the forest, as the novel progresses, the female characters come to terms with a greater degree of self-knowledge; consequently, the forest no longer creates anxiety or apprehension for the women. On the contrary, the forest offers Naomi, Fiona, and Anna some level of peace and comfort. For instance, after coming to terms with her exile within the cave, Naomi tells Emily and Bridget, 'I did find my way into the forest, after all' (229). Similarly, after Fiona takes hold of the 'charge' of Clachanpluck, she feels the forest is no longer impenetrable, but instead 'awake and vibrant' (221). Presenting two alternative pictures of the forest as metaphors for self-knowledge, Elphinstone gives an alternative model for the literary wilderness. Short observes that even though wilderness normally represents bewilderment, an alternative model sees the wilderness as the opportunity for discovering hidden depths and unused talents: 'This is the wilderness as a place of spiritual regeneration. Stripped of its spiritual significance, the wilderness experience becomes one of individual growth and development. [. . .] In the wilderness lies greater self-knowledge' (21). Even though the forest around Clachanpluck instills fear into those who have yet to assimilate its power, the forest offers knowledge to those who wish to find it. Naomi and Fiona gradually discover the hidden depths of the forest and ultimately encounter spiritual regeneration; one might conclude from this that the forest in Elphinstone's writing acts as a metaphor for self-knowledge.

The fictional narratives in *The Incomer* and *A Sparrow's Flight* are steeped in rich landscape imagery. Elphinstone concerns herself with images from the landscape like the sea, the stars, the cave, and the forest. These landscape images enhance the prose by carrying force

as powerful metaphors. Elphinstone also exhibits a general interest in the land and landscape as the embodiment of femaleness and femininity; she shows her female characters accepting responsibility for maintaining a spiritual connection with the land as well as finding a deep affinity with the landscape. Finally, land and landscape are associated with the archetypal literary landscapes that bolster the organic cycle of human life. Landscape images connected to death and rebirth flow throughout both narratives and metaphorically suggest that regeneration and rebirth are intrinsically connected to womanhood and femininity.

Borders, Borderlines, and Border Crossings

The word 'borders' might bring to mind visions of national and geographic borders, ideas of physical boundaries, the planted ground along the edge of a garden or wall, or even the ornamental design at the edge of fabric, a rug, or printed matter. In Scotland, the very idea of a border holds abundant nuances and significations. Crawford tells us that the 'whole idea of the border as both a line and an area of strife and intercultural contact' was an important cultural model for writers in Scotland and in the United States.¹⁰¹ Crawford also notes that the border between Scotland and England was known as the 'debateable land'; in essence, the border between these two countries 'was a moving boundary as well as a geographical area'.¹⁰²

Finally, Ned C. Landsman suggests the:

Border tradition is one of the central themes in Scotland's cultural history. [. . .] The whole of Scotland can be considered a Border region, as the perpetual presence of an ever-expanding society to the south and the legacy of national conflicts were factors of unusual importance in the creation of Scottish cultural symbols.¹⁰³

Crawford and Landsman argue that the very notion of a border in Scotland connotes lines and boundaries, strife and intercultural contact. If Crawford, Landsman, and history reveal the importance of borders in Scottish cultural and political thought, it naturally follows that these geographical and cultural borders will pervade Scottish literature and, in particular, Scottish women's writing.

¹⁰¹*Devolving English Literature*, p. 185.

¹⁰²*Ibid.* Carol Anderson also refers to this border in her essay 'Debateable Land', in *Tea and Leg-Irons*, p. 35.

¹⁰³*Scotland and Its First American Colony, 1683-1765* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 50

Maggie Humm's text *Border Traffic* explores the growing proliferation of 'borders' in contemporary women's writing. In her mind, the 'border functions both as a strategy and as a shape'.¹⁰⁴ Horner and Zlosnick concur with Humm's hypothesis. They maintain that 'being positioned on the margin of the dominant discourse seems to express itself in a preoccupation with boundaries, space and occupation'.¹⁰⁵ Elphinstone experiences dual marginalization as a Scottish woman writer and she exists on the border of national identity and cultural hegemony. Consequently, her novels are preoccupied with borders and boundaries which reshape and revise prevailing versions of feminine identity in a Scottish context. By creating many different kinds of shifting borders in *The Incomer* and *A Sparrow's Flight* -- for instance, geographic, physical, and emotional among others, Elphinstone contests the dominant discourses and ideological structures which construct individuals as powerless subjects. What's more, Elphinstone's strategy of continually shifting borders and boundaries launches an experimental postmodern literary challenge to the ideological construction of Scottish feminine identity.

The Incomer begins with the words, 'the crossroads was the reason for the village. The village happened because of travellers crossing from one town to another' (1). Elphinstone immediately sets up borders and crossings with these short sentences: the borders between four roads and four towns and the borderlines between travellers who cross the roads as they travel to the borders of different or alien towns. Opening her novel with the images of borders and crossings, Elphinstone announces an interest in the borders which separate communities and individuals from one another. The boundaries in turn intimate emotional and psychological boundaries which arise between incomers and the established village. The border crossings that this opening scene proclaims might be best expressed in Humm's words; that is, the border crossings designate 'a particular attitude, a certain inclination, in women's writing, towards translation, synchronic time, and new significations'.¹⁰⁶

Elphinstone's countless borders and border crossings in *The Incomer* continually reinforce translation and new signification; moreover, the borders and crossings open the idea of knowledge to question. For example, the first few pages of the novel tell readers that

¹⁰⁴*Border Traffic*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁰⁵*Landscapes of Desire*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁶*Border Traffic*, p. 13.

‘occasionally ships crossed the empty water to islands and countries beyond’ (1); that the traveller walks ‘purposefully northwards along the road from the south’ (2); that as darkness overcomes day the ‘traveller experienced that sudden realisation of darkness in which the perceived world begins to dislimn and merge into a shapeless presence of something other, no longer sky and trees and clear road, but merely a surrounding sense of place’ (2); and finally, readers are told that the traveller greets within the forest ‘some sense of form, or lack of form’ (2), and sees ‘eyes reflected back eyes, [. . .] A momentary gleam’ (3) which transform into ‘running footsteps and a cry in the dark’ (3).

In two short pages, Elphinstone introduces multiple borders and crossings. The ship’s crossing implies voyage, the unknown, and discovery. The road the traveller walks along institutes geographic and physical borders. The darkness that presses upon the traveller calls forth the borders between night and day, dark and light, as well as good and evil. The lack of form with eyes, footsteps, and a cry in the dark that the traveller encounters creates a border between the natural and the supernatural. Voyages, travellers on a road, the darkness, and human versus non-human forms are all images which set up opposites: the sea versus the land, the north versus the south, the dark versus the light; the natural versus the supernatural. These borders oppose what is known, with the unknown. Shifting the borders and crossings throughout the novel’s opening pages, Elphinstone implies that borders and crossings will also frequently shift throughout the text. When Elphinstone endlessly shifts borders, crossings, and boundaries, she asserts textual pluridimensionality, fluidity, and movement. Like Tennant’s ambiguity in *The Bad Sister*, Elphinstone’s multiple plural borders and ever-shifting boundaries make it difficult to assign meaning to either the novel’s characters or themes; the plurality which accompanies Elphinstone’s transgressive borders opens the very idea of emotional, physical, and psychological knowledge to definition.

The narrative prose in the opening pages of *The Incomer* evokes the idea of the archetypal journey. Some examples of this are the description of crossroads, towns, foothills, and winding roads; moreover, the reader encounters a traveller who walks ‘purposefully’ towards the crossroads. The traveller hurries as the dark encroaches knowing that the road, not the forest, is ‘clear and reassuring [. . .] Offering humanity, shelter and possibilities’ (4).

When 'the crossroad was reached' (4), the traveller feels 'relief flooding in like light' (4). However, Elphinstone adds an element of surprise to the novel when she reveals the traveller to be a tall 'woman, whose clothes looked as if she had done much travelling on winter roads' (5). Traditionally, archetypal journeys in literature center on male protagonists; consequently, when Elphinstone unveils the traveller to be a woman, she dislocates the reader's expectations and challenges conventional literary patterns associated with the archetypal journey.

While Elphinstone does not directly state that Naomi is on a journey towards self-hood, the archetypal journey imagery implies that Naomi is at a crossroads in her own life. Since Naomi says to Emily that she is 'looking for a place to settle for the winter' (12), one might argue that Naomi has reached a crossroads in her life which will somehow be connected to the search for self and identity. When Elphinstone depicts a female character journeying towards self-hood, she ruptures traditional literary representations of quest and journey and, therefore, poses a challenge to the hierarchical borders which habitually divide men and women, femininity and masculinity. Breaking down the hierarchical boundaries between the opposite sexes, Elphinstone's writing emerges as a postmodern literature of transgression; one can theorize that the shifting borderlines between femininity and masculinity in *The Incomer* attempt to envisage 'a different cultural horizon for writing and for women'.¹⁰⁷

A Sparrow's Flight, like *The Incomer*, begins with a vivid description of the paths of two unnamed travellers, one woman and one man. Elphinstone differentiates between the travellers by varying the narrative focus; she divides the first four pages into four separate sections. Elphinstone alternates the male voice with the female voice; thus, the four sections of prose offer readers two contrasting views of geographic and emotional borders which do not privilege gender.

Elphinstone opens the novel with the words: 'The tide was going out fast' (10). The word 'tide' denotes the ebb and flow of water or the alternate rising and falling of the ocean's surface; as such, the reference to the tide immediately reveals a transposing landscape. Further references to an island and a man 'crossing the causeway' (1) confirm a landscape which

¹⁰⁷*Border Traffic*, p. 9. Please note that this quote does not refer to Elphinstone's fiction, but to border fiction in general.

shows 'boundaries changing' (1). Seasons are also in transition; the male traveller recognizes that 'luckily the leaves were still too thin and patchy to shut out the meagre light; only the birch trees along the shore were in full leaf, the oak and ash within were bare' (2). The contrast between the mainland and the sea, the island and the sea, the mainland and the promontory, the earth and the sky, and winter with spring are visual landscape images which point to borders and crossings; those borders between land, sea, sky, and season require 'crossings' and 'journeys'.

Horner and Zlosnick cite Patricia Parker's contention that metaphor 'itself is seen as the crossing of boundaries, as a transgressive act', and that the 'multiplicity of plots associated with metaphor' include 'transference, transport, transgression, alienation, impropriety, identity'.¹⁰⁸ In light of Parker's hypothesis, it becomes possible to read the landscape motifs in the beginning of *A Sparrow's Flight* as a challenge to the fixity of physical boundaries and crossings. The reader infers from these ever-changing borders that the landscape images of the tide, the islands, the promontory, and the seasons simultaneously act as metaphors for physical travels and emotional voyages. What's more, the apparent transference, transport, transgression, and alienation promoted by the metaphorical landscape contributes to a greater understanding of Elphinstone's fictional borders and crossings and acts as a visual allusion to physical and emotional migrations.

The opening to *A Sparrow's Flight* also juxtaposes each traveller's response to their individual journey. The man does not look back to the island he leaves because 'he couldn't trust himself not to retreat, letting the next tide cut him off from whatever faced him on the mainland' (1). On the other hand, the woman feels that it is 'desperately important that she should get across tonight, and she was genuinely upset, even while she recognised that her disappointment was out of all proportion' (2). While the female traveller comes across to the reader as 'strong' (3) with 'green eyes dark and thoughtful [. . .] Her movements were quick and forceful, her hands never still' (3), the male traveller fears the forest and 'dared not look again, in case it were not a habitation after all, or only of the dead' (4). These lines show how Elphinstone juxtaposes the male character's fear of retreat from the mainland and his fear in the

¹⁰⁸*Landscapes of Desire*, p. 5.

forest with the female protagonist's eagerness to reach the island and her inner strength and contentment. In this manner, Elphinstone builds in these short phrases contrasting emotional borders between two travellers whose paths intersect; hence, she implies that these emotional and psychological boundaries which alternatively impede or motivate her character's individual quests hover 'at the borderland between sense and imagination' (4). Exchanging the narrative between an unnamed man and woman, the island with the mainland and with the sea, light with dark, winter with spring, and emotional strength with emotional 'instability', Elphinstone's narrative never stands still; it continually shifts its narrative seams.

The novel begins with the tide demarcating a border between land and sea and shows two travellers waiting to make a crossing: the woman to the island and the man away from the island onto the mainland. When the travellers meet at the inn, Naomi, the female traveller, delays her 'crossing' in order to accompany Thomas, the male traveller, on a journey in which they cross and recross emotional and physical borders. One example of a border in the novel occurs when Naomi and Thomas approach the empty lands. Naomi recognizes that 'there is a border between one kind of land and another' (26). Although Naomi in fact refers to the invisible borderline that marks the beginning of the empty lands, her comment on the landscape symbolizes emotional borders and borderlands that Naomi and Thomas will encounter. Thomas and Naomi's journey to the empty lands mirrors their inner psychological journey toward redemption for past choices; it naturally follows, then, that several different borders will be crossed and recrossed along the way.

The main borders that arise during Naomi and Thomas's journey relate to their individual pasts. Thomas, for instance, returns to his valley from exile to participate in the dance which recounts his people's exile. His role in the dance is complicated by the fact that seven years earlier he brought with him a travelling fiddle player who carried a disease which killed his sister and her two young sons. Thomas alone feels responsible for these three deaths; thus, he dances in the dance as 'the Fool' and 'the Hanged One' to try and absolve himself from the guilt which dominates his psyche. The anguish, however, becomes too much for Thomas and Naomi comprehends that his pain and suffering leave him on the brink of 'madness'. Thomas cannot see Naomi or 'the world she perceived about her. There was a

frightening elusiveness about eyes that looked, and did not fix themselves upon her. He could slip through the fingers of this world very easily, [. . .] And we should lose him' (196).

Naomi's words place Thomas on the border between 'madness' and 'sanity'; it is this border that Thomas must cross if he is to come to terms with self-knowledge and, as a result, survive. Naomi helps Thomas to make this crossing; she begs him to speak about his pain and 'bind it. Go on! You bind it into the past, Thomas, and then you can be free' (229). Once Thomas tells Naomi about the events which lead up to his sister's and nephew's deaths, he comes to terms with his past and consciously traverses his self-imposed border of 'madness' to 'sanity' and self-assurance.

Naomi, like Thomas, also has borders to cross. While Thomas's border appears to be 'madness' versus 'sanity' or sense versus imagination, Naomi's borders are less specific. Naomi's conflict plays itself out on the journey to the empty lands in a dream sequence; her border reveals itself to be a boat in her dream.¹⁰⁹ Naomi continues to miss the boat in her dream and therefore cannot cross the border which will relieve her of guilt and pain. Like Thomas, Naomi cannot remember her past without suffering; hence, she hides her past in dreams and refuses to speak about them. As the journey passes, the border between remembering and healing shifts and expands. When Naomi finally tells Thomas about her dreams, she says, 'there was always the possibility of turning back, but I didn't' (250). Since Naomi does not 'turn back' to her past or to her child, she establishes a symbolic boundary that cannot be crossed nor healed. Yet, when Naomi shares her dreams with Thomas, she also finds relief from the borders or self-condemnation and self-reproach and she too ends her long years of exile.

Once Naomi and Thomas speak their pain, they bind it into the past and heal themselves. After this process of self-definition occurs, Naomi finds that their 'journey was nearly over' (246) and her fears that the mountains impede her 'like a barrier' (246) quickly recede. Elphinstone confirms her characters' joint border crossings by returning them to the border from which their quest started: Naomi and Thomas sit at the edge of the sea and Naomi

¹⁰⁹Dreams play themselves out in the unconscious. Since Naomi's pain comes from her conscious life, when the conflict plays itself out in her sleeping psyche, she crosses another border from the conscious to the (un)conscious.

concludes, 'the tide's out. We can cross over now' (257). These final words affirm the novel's circular structure. The two travellers end where they begin; yet, Naomi and Thomas are different because they cross and recross physical landscapes and emotional borders which open new paths to self-knowledge and identity.

Edmund J. Smyth concludes that in postmodern writing, the 'borders between genres have become much more fluid'.¹¹⁰ Elphinstone devises a number of fantastical borders in her fiction which cross boundaries of literary genres and that are crossed by literary characters. One example of disruptive border in the novels rests in Elphinstone's underlying concern with evil. Evil can be a feminist theme, but it is also a general human theme. Evil in the novels takes on various forms. For instance, readers meet evil in *The Incomer* in the shape of money as 'an evil thing, which can bind a person, so one remains in bondage to another' (23). Likewise, one comes across evil when Patrick rapes Anna and screams, 'you'll pay for that!' (154). Evil enters *A Sparrow's Flight* in the 'ruins of a city' (85) which represent 'evil in the world' (85); likewise, evil lies in hidden pasts because fear and evil exist when 'you don't know who you are' (211). Elphinstone's borders intertwine fantasy with reality and show evil to exist in many forms: in money, in violence toward women, in the ruins of a city whose people instigated the untimely destruction of the land and of themselves, and in the lack of self-image and self-knowledge. The borders between science fiction, fantasy, and reality, then, permit Elphinstone to create a fictional world that appears imaginary, yet recognizable. In this manner, Elphinstone subversively calls into question the ways in which male dominated hierarchies and ideologies deny women and men access to self-knowledge, which in turn generates various forms of evil and self-destruction.

Humm contends that Townsend's attention to fairy tales and witches, Atwood's use of anorexia and Shamanism, and Rich's lucid movement into a new lesbian voice 'are all border crossings. It is as though these particular writers are speaking to us in a form of feminist theory where their writing signifies what they perhaps could not state or embody in their contemporary societies'.¹¹¹ Elphinstone's use of physical and psychological borders,

¹¹⁰*Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction*, p. 14.

¹¹¹*Border Traffic*, p. 2.

rich landscape metaphors, as well as a subversive revisioning of the archetypal journey in literature, links her with Humm's border women writers. Like Warner, Atwood, and Rich, Elphinstone's literary border crossings are a form of postmodern feminist theory. Elphinstone's borders, borderlines, and crossings self-reflexively play with feminism, postmodernism, and the ambiguous nature of Scottish national identity by devising literary borders which mirror cultural and social borders. Elphinstone subtly contests the constraints upon women through literary borders which open feminine identity and Scottish identity indeed, a Scottish feminist identity, to new definition and representation in a universal context.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari contend, 'if the writer is in the margins or completely outside his or her fragile community, this situation allows the writer all the more the possibility to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility'.¹¹² Margaret Elphinstone lives in the margins of a fragile Scottish nation; even so, her dual marginalization gives her the opportunity to forge a new feminist consciousness within a fantastical fictional world. Elphinstone's novels *The Incomer* and *A Sparrow's Flight* challenge existing relationships between the individual and society because they invert traditional hierarchies and confer upon women a high degree of freedom, autonomy, and self-control that is usually not seen in the late twentieth-century Western or Third World culture. Elphinstone's experimental novels truly bear out Marianne DeKoven's hypothesis that experimental writing 'expresses or suggests anarchism: the abolition of all forms of hierarchy, of dominance-subordination'.¹¹³ Elphinstone's literary enterprise, like Tennant's and Galloway's, expresses anarchism and calls for the abolition of hierarchy, domination, and subordination; since she does so in a Scottish literary landscape, Elphinstone asserts anarchy in a Scottish feminist context.

¹¹²*Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. by Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 17. First published *Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1975).

¹¹³*A Different Language*, pp. 16-17.

Chapter Six
Janice Galloway: The Trick is to Keep Breathing

But no matter whether my probings made me happier or sadder, I kept on probing to know.
--Zora Neale Hurston

Chapter Six, like Chapter Five, brings a new writer to the thesis. Janice Galloway in *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, like Tennant and Elphinstone, attempts to revise and reconstruct received ideas about femininity and womanhood in fictional form. Since Tennant's and Elphinstone's novels engage with fantasy and the supernatural, they might appear on one level to posit an entirely different feminist agenda than Galloway; however, even though Galloway does not venture into what might be considered an alternative world, her protagonist suffers a mental breakdown and, as a result, encounters and experiences the 'alternative' world of the disintegrating mind. *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* finds a connection with Elphinstone's and Tennant's writing because Galloway also exhibits an interest in manipulating conventional narrative form; theatrical dialogues, lists, word displacement, and short paragraphs in italics, among other techniques, permeate the narrative drive and dislocate readers from the text. Galloway's narrative practice, then, like Elphinstone's and Tennant's, invites the reader to engage with the novel's content and form.

Janice Galloway

Janice Galloway, like Margaret Elphinstone, is a relative newcomer to Scottish women's writing. Unlike Elphinstone who finds her fiction to be a natural extension of her life and her gardening work, Galloway characterizes her venture into writing as a result of being 'very very badly skint'.¹ Although Galloway did not win the writing contest she entered to alleviate her financial problems, James Kelman encouraged her to pursue writing and he introduced her to Peter Kravitz, senior editor at Polygon. Kravitz urged Galloway to write a novel which resulted in the publication of *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* in 1989.

¹Stella Coombe, 'Things Galloway: Stella Coombe Interviews Janice Galloway', *Harpies & Quines*, 1. (May-June 1992), 26-29, (p. 26).

The Trick is to Keep Breathing received immediate critical acclaim. The novel won four book awards, including MIND's 'Book of the Year' for Galloway's 'outstanding contribution to increasing public awareness of mental health problems'.² On top of these laurels, Galloway has been described as earning 'herself a seat at the top table of contemporary Scottish literature. How do they love her, let us count the ways: feminist pin-up, still sane voice in the crazed world of British psychiatry, literary vice-consul of the Scottish working class'.³ Add to these accomplishments several interviews and her own BBC Radio Four program which gave a consumer guide to the different therapies available for mental illness, and one could say Janice Galloway lives as a 'cultural totem' in her own time.

How does Galloway achieve such a respected and influential status within the British population? One reason that Galloway may hold such a revered position among the Scottish and English people rests on her ability to vocalize forthright and often volatile stances and views on a normally reserved British population. Many individuals respect her ability and choice to disrupt the establishment, and identify with Galloway's frustrations and unhappiness with certain conventions and institutionalized concepts in society. For example, while Galloway loves writing short stories, she does not like writing novels:

The process is just so different and I get very fed up with the literary establishment, as it were, thinking of the short story as a kind of junior form of writing....I think it's a phallic thing, you know, you have to produce the stiffy, which is the novel.⁴

For some, this verbal attack on literary conventions would be enough; for Galloway, though, it becomes important to generate change by going to the root of the norm. As Galloway succinctly puts it:

The novel is 'the thing' in writing and I'm convinced it's something to do with the male establishment's peculiar warped notions of dedication, you know these weird things that the likes of Yeats came out with, 'it's either the life or the art', if you're not living the life there's no fucking art, let's face it, there would be nothing to write about and I don't understand that attitude.⁵

²Peter Mason, 'Treatment needed by psychiatric hospitals', *Glasgow Herald*, 22 October 1991, p. 16.

³Ajay Close, 'Heavy Breathing', *Scotland on Sunday Magazine*, 19 January 1992, p. 9.

⁴Coombe, 'Things Galloway', p. 27.

⁵Ibid.

One might think that openly radical sentiments like these would not win Galloway any supporters in literary and non-literary worlds; however, the opposite appears to be true. Critics praise her as 'a major talent to watch develop'⁶ and refer to her writing as 'the future of Scottish fiction'.⁷ It appears, then, that Galloway is a female literary talent who receives establishment encouragement to write about anti-establishment issues; namely, mental illness and the fragmented female subject.

The Trick is to Keep Breathing

The Trick is to Keep Breathing centres on Joy Stone, a twenty-seven year old woman in the West of Scotland who suffers from depression after her live-in married lover dies while they are on holiday together in Spain. Described as a 'fictional but semi-autobiographical account'⁸ of a teacher who loses her grip on the world, the novel focuses on Joy's gradual descent into madness and her subsequent stay in a psychiatric hospital. While Galloway's own stays in psychiatric hospitals undoubtedly affect the novel's action and description, the author says, 'there isn't much in the way of criticism in this book, because it's meant to be a simple factual description of the way things happen, but Joy is having a nervous breakdown so of course her perspective is going to be jaundiced'.⁹

Galloway's novel, with its disorientating narrative structure, and its fractured character, offers the reader an analysis of a fragmented female subject in contemporary Scottish culture.¹⁰ Galloway depicts Joy's struggle to come to terms with social forces and ideological and discursive institutions in regard to her own roles and experiences; in the process, it becomes clear that the liberal-humanist version of reality, that of a unified and stable subject, fails to provide Joy with any positive notions of subjectivity and self-knowledge. In effect,

⁶Douglas Gifford, 'Old and New Masters', *Books in Scotland*, 39 (Autumn 1991), pp. 5-12 (p. 9).

⁷Robert Crawford, 'Review of *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*', *Scottish Literary Journal*, Supplement 33. (Winter 1990), 59-61, (p. 61).

⁸Mason, 'Treatment needed', p. 16.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰The reader should note, however, that a number of women writers also focus on fragmented female subjects: for example, Doris Lessing in *The Golden Notebook*, Margaret Atwood in *The Edible Woman* and *Surfacing*, and, to a lesser extent, Muriel Spark in *The Driver's Seat*. Since Galloway's novel has parallels with the Scottish literary tradition, for instance, James Kelman, Alasdair Gray, and James Hogg, and with contemporary women's writing, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* offers a new combination of interests for Scottish literature and the Scottish woman writer.

Galloway's vivid portrait of a woman unable to define herself in relation to her society decentres the individual subject and interrogates the ways in which culture and society confine women and men in certain hierarchical relationships and roles.

Galloway's novel does not simply interrogate female subjectivity; rather, it simultaneously raises questions about the terms 'madness' and 'reason'. Shoshana Felman surmises:

how can we know where reason stops and madness begins, since both involve the pursuit of some form of reason? If madness as such is defined as an *act of faith* in reason, no reasonable conviction can indeed be exempt from the suspicion of madness. Reason and madness are thereby inextricably linked; madness is essentially a phenomenon of thought, of thought which claims to denounce, in another's thought, the Other of thought: that which thought is not. Madness can only occur within a world in conflict, within a conflict of thoughts. The question of madness is nothing less than the question of thought itself: the question of madness, in other words, is that which turns the essence of thought, precisely, *into a question*.¹¹

Galloway continues to question the very discourses and ideologies which contemporary society is founded upon and perpetuates, by questioning the very nature of reason and madness in narrative form; thus, the novel's fragmented female subject shows the reader that distinctions between illusion, 'madness', and reality can be quite difficult to make.

There is no question that Galloway's novel challenges establishment values and suggests that women encounter many difficulties as they try to achieve satisfactory levels of self-knowledge and self-worth in a society designed to cater to male needs and interests. Patricia Waugh theorizes that those excluded from or marginalized by culture for reasons of class, gender, race, beliefs, appearance, or whatever, never experience a sense of 'full subjectivity' because these individuals already sense the extent to which subjectivity is constructed through institutional dispositions of power relations; these too are further reflected in fictional conventions which feed back into society.¹² She goes on to say that feminist fiction and criticism functions to retrieve the marginal and buried. It also attempts to undermine canonized forms, and implicitly fractures the universal liberal subject by introducing an

¹¹'Madness and Philosophy or Literature's Reason', in *Yale French Studies*, 52 (1975), 206-228 (p. 206).

¹²*Feminine Fictions*, p. 2.

awareness of the social construction of gender.¹³ Although Galloway may or may not agree with Waugh's hypothesis, her novel, consciously or unconsciously, reflects Waugh's beliefs. *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* focuses on Joy's subjectivity and her socially constructed self; it also looks at the ways in which Joy's culture and society marginalize her needs as a woman and as an individual, and ultimately forces the reader to ask the question 'what is normal?'

Social Discourse: Women's Magazines, 'Agony Aunts', Horoscopes, and the Media

The Trick is to Keep Breathing challenges a reader's expectations and awareness from the opening scene. The novel begins on the left hand page with a few short sentences in italics which reveal a character's inner thoughts and desires:

I can't remember the last week with any clarity.

I want to be able to remember it because it was the last time anything was in any way unremarkable. Eating and drinking routinely, sleeping when I wanted to. It would be nice to remember but I don't.

Now I remember everything all the time. You never know what you might need to recollect later, when the significance of the moment might appear. They never give you any warning.

*They never give you any warning.*¹⁴

The opening of the novel immediately experiments with traditional literary conventions and character presentation. The unnamed, genderless, raceless character implicitly and explicitly questions the reader's ways of knowing and understanding. Although the reader discovers within the next few pages that the narrator is a woman, the novel's initial scene suggests that the text will scrutinize an individual's existing ways of knowing and understanding as well as the systems and institutions by which a person gains access to her/his world.

The opening sentences of the novel also reveal a first person confessional narrative. In these brief lines, the reader comes into contact with a woman who says, 'I can't remember', 'I want to be able to remember', and 'Now I remember'. These lines show Joy confessing to herself and to the reader her innermost thoughts and desires; as a result, readers gain instant

¹³Ibid, p. 5.

¹⁴*The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1989), p. 6. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

access to Joy's ways of knowing, seeking, and understand her position and role in the world.

Dennis A. Foster asserts that confession is not an incidental narrative form. By contrast, confession:

Is a mode by which people enter into the discourse of their culture, where they step beyond reiteration of the stories and into interpretation. It represents an attempt to understand the terms and the limits by which the people are defined, both as they listen to the confessions of others and as they recount their own transgressions.¹⁵

If, as Foster hypothesizes, the confessional narrative is a mode by which people enter the discourse of their culture and attempt to interpret individual experience, then one might argue that Joy's confessional narrative not only exposes the various discourses which shape her individual experience, but that the author, through her protagonist, launches a subjective investigation into the discourses which limit and define women and men in society.

Why does Joy need to turn to the social and medical establishment for 'help'? One reason comes through the first scene in the novel which concisely, yet poignantly, depicts a protagonist who cannot routinely eat, drink, sleep, or remember a time that was 'unremarkable' (6). Joy's revelations clearly indicate that she suffers from some kind of mental distress. Galloway confirms this assessment in Joy's actions. After the health visitor comes to visit, Joy attempts to put the cups and biscuits away. However, she finds that she cannot keep the biscuits:

I lift the biscuits still on the plate and crush them between my hands into the bin. The opened packets follow. They only go soft. The wrappers crackle with life in the recesses of the liner so I let the lid drop fast and turn on the taps to drown it out. They run too hard and soak the front of my shirt. There isn't time to change. I get my coat and run like hell for the stop (24).

While one might argue over what constitutes a 'stable' or 'unstable' mind, one can assert that Joy's actions are not indicative of 'normal' or 'stable' actions. Joy slowly crushes the biscuits between her fingers into the bin. In and of itself, this is not necessarily an 'unstable' action; however, the wrappers of the biscuit packet suddenly 'crackle with life' and Joy must turn on the taps hard and fast to 'drown' out the sound. In Joy's mind, the biscuit wrappers take on new significance -- they are alive and threaten her self-consciousness so much she has to 'run

¹⁵*Confession and Complicity*, p. 7.

like hell' for the bus stop. If simple, everyday objects like a biscuit wrapper take on extraordinary meaning and instill fear, it follows that Joy might need to turn to outside sources to regain control over commonplace food articles and daily events.

Joy also turns to social and medical institutions to regain control over her daily activities because she does not encounter a great deal of positive support from the vast majority of people around her. One powerful example of how some individuals respond to Joy's loss and her subsequent depression comes from her headteacher Mr Peach. Mr Peach calls Joy into his office to see how she is 'coping'. After telling Joy, 'I want you to know nobody thinks you're going off your head. And you should try to cheer up' (75), Mr Peach proceeds to undermine Joy's precarious position:

BOSS	Try to cheer up. It upsets me to think you aren't happy. It upsets me to see you like this. You float past in the corridor and I never see you smile.
EMPLOYEE	I'm sorry about that. It's nothing personal.
BOSS	Yes. No-one is against you. You'll antagonise people if you don't make an effort.
EMPLOYEE	Yes.
BOSS	Smile then. I want you to look happy. We all do. Give us a smile (75).

Even though it upsets Mr Peach to see Joy 'unhappy', he does not consider reasons for her unhappiness. In effect, Mr Peach denies the validity of Joy and Michael's relationship because he does not expect Joy to feel any pain. Furthermore, Mr Peach asks Joy to smile and look happy; in this way, he treats her like a child or a performing monkey instead of a woman who suffers a real and painful loss. In a discussion of this scene in the novel, Margery Metzstein argues that although Joy 'is "losing the place" in terms of her prescribed role in society, and does not in a sense exist, she does have enough of a sense of self to be a thorn in the flabby flesh of those authorities with whom she comes into contact'.¹⁶ Metzstein does make a valid point; however, she perhaps oversimplifies Joy's reaction to Mr Peach. Joy does not actively work to be a 'thorn in the flabby flesh' of the authorities; rather, she requests support which the authorities do not grant her. This scene reveals that Joy's position as a mistress/lover prevents her from seeking out confidence, support, and advice from the people around her.

¹⁶'Of Myths and Men: Aspects of Gender in the Fiction of Janice Galloway', in *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies*, pp. 136-46 (p. 140).

Thus, she turns to the traditional methods of female problem-solving like women's magazines, 'agony aunts', horoscopes, and the media for help, the social discourses which claim to provide solutions to 'all' women's burdens, problems, and pain.

Women's magazines have been an integral part of Western society for longer than most women can remember. These magazines depict current fashions, cosmetic trends, proper etiquette, articles about how to catch and retain the 'ideal' man, how to maintain the perfect figure, complexion, and so on. In Marjorie Ferguson's view, women's magazines operate to instill the idea, 'femininity as a career is a lifelong commitment. It requires frequent refresher courses and occasional updating of its central tenets'.¹⁷ In light of Ferguson's hypothesis, and given the popular circulation of women's magazines, one might conclude that certain values, like a commitment to femininity, have become an integral part of women's cultural conditioning.

At several points in the novel, Galloway interrogates how women's magazines function in culture. Joy frequently talks about the headlines which typically appear on the covers of women's magazines:

Diet for a firmer new you!

Converting a Victorian schoolhouse into a des res!

How the royals keep looking good

Kiss me Quick Lips -- we show you how!

The Last Days of Melyssa: one mother's moving story of heartbreak and a little girl's courage against a crippling disease (27).

Galloway's ear for the language of popular culture forces readers to recognize the superficiality and oversimplification of reality in the heart of these familiar phrases. The headlines imply that all readers need to diet for a 'firmer new you'; that each reader can easily finance the conversion of a Victorian schoolhouse into a 'des res'; that each woman, like the royals, has the money to spend to keep 'looking good'; that Kiss me Quick lips are desirable and automatically attract men; and finally, that if Melyssa and her mother can survive a moving heartbreak, then so too can each individual woman triumph over greater or lesser personal

¹⁷*Forever Feminine: Women's Magazines and the Cult of Femininity* (London/Exeter: Heinemann Educational Books, 1983), p. 8.

problems. Since these types of magazines clearly set up contrasts between illusionary ideals and a female reality, when Joy turns to these magazines for help and advice, more often than not she encounters articles which cannot afford her a means by which to combat disempowerment and decreasing self-awareness.¹⁸

Ferguson also argues that a number of dominant themes often run through women's magazines. In her mind, one of the dominant themes suggests:

self -- not other -- determination is desirable, feasible, and obtainable through the exercise of just that much more control and effort on a woman's part. Both imply free choice rather than fated 'determinism', imply active doing rather than passive acceptance, and stress a distinctly anti-collectivist, highly individualist ethic.¹⁹

Joy does try to gain self-determination and free choice by following a magazine's directives.

She wakes up and thinks:

This is my One Shot at Today. I'm Young, Dynamic, Today's Woman. I'm Multi-Orgasmic. I have to Live Life to the Full. I didn't know what this meant but I thought it anyway. At the start of every day. It became pressing. I would get anxious if I hadn't done something new, discovered something, found a direction for my life. I filled in a diary I didn't want to keep but thought I had to so I could record the momentous changes that would occur now I was independent and free (193-4).

While women's magazines purport that women can easily achieve free choice and active acceptance, the above paragraph shows these same magazines deny freedom and self-determination. For instance, Joy's insistence that she is 'independent and free' seems laughable because she gets anxious when she has not, as the magazine commands, done 'something new', 'discovered something', or found a new direction for her life. Likewise, even though Joy does not understand what her one shot at today is, or how she can live life to the full, she still tries to live up to the magazines directives. This passage reveals how women's magazines set up unattainable goals that many women, like Joy, cannot achieve.

Women's magazines paradoxically work to undermine female self-worth because they implicitly and explicitly tell the women who choose to read them how to live and act. When a woman fails to succeed according to the magazine's directives, a sense of inadequacy

¹⁸Willia Muir takes up a similar theme in her novel *Imagined Corners* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1987). Mabel constantly reads women's magazines in order to be at the forefront of fashion and social etiquette. See pp. 8, 22, and 84, in *Imagined Corners*. First published (London: Martin Secker, 1935).

¹⁹*Forever Feminine*, p. 51.

frequently develops and in turn leads to greater problems in maintaining a positive self-esteem; hence, these same women usually turn to equally ineffective means of conflict resolution such as 'agony aunts' and astrology.

As permanent features in most women's magazines, 'agony aunts' present similar problems for women to the ones effected by these magazines in general. 'Agony aunts' primarily seek to resolve one person's individual problem/s with no other information than that enclosed in a short letter; thus, these 'aunts' remain uninformed about individual personalities and extenuating circumstances and cannot make a true assessment of each woman's situation.

Joy habitually reads the 'problem page' in her women's magazines. As Christmas approaches, Joy comes across a letter from a woman that reads:

Dear Kathy,
I am a single parent and unemployed. This is not something I usually dwell on overmuch, managing to take the rough (and there is a fair amount) with the smooth. But Christmas time is specially difficult. My ex-husband demands to see the kids and is able to buy them (222).

Kathy responds to her troubled reader in a lighthearted manner:

Oh dear, how fraught a Happy Christmas can be: and that's just a sample from my postbag! Let's stop and look at the thing more deeply. Look at the whole essence of the season of goodwill. For that is what it is. And it's all too easily lost among the commercial excesses on television and the high street. The best way to get more out of your Christmastide is fill it again with that sense of giving in the truest sense. Why not spend Christmas day by paying a visit to a local home or hospital? You needn't take anything: just your time and a willing smile (222).

To be sure, Kathy reminds her readers what the spirit of Christmas is all about: the sense of giving. For some letter writers and readers, this answer may fulfill their expectations and consequently remains an 'acceptable' response. Even so, Kathy's observations are problematic because she does not address her correspondent's position as a single, unemployed mother. Moreover, should Kathy look deeper, she would understand that visiting a hospital or local home on Christmas day might make her reader or the patient happy; yet, one time visits will not solve the patient's or the correspondent's long term isolation and loneliness.

Janice Winship condemns the role of 'agony aunts'. She argues that while the problem page reassures women that they are not alone with their personal problems:

It simultaneously undermines that support. It's all very well to answer personal problems with personal answers -- that is after all what the letter writers want and need -- but unless women have access to a knowledge which explains personal lives in social terms, that is, as women's problems, problems of age and class and race, and of who has more money and muscles, public space and private time than others, then the onus on 'you' to solve 'your' problem is likely to be either intimidating or can only lead to repeatedly frustrated 'solutions'.²⁰

Winship concludes that quite often 'agony aunts' relay intimidating advice and frustrated solutions to real problems. Throughout the narrative, Kathy reacts to her correspondent's questions with a forced jollity that ultimately results in forced intimacy; for Joy and the reader, it becomes all too obvious that Kathy's admonishing and recommendations do not provide any solutions to actual problems. On the contrary, Kathy's advice glosses over problems and makes it seem as if the women in question are not trying hard enough to survive happily. Since Kathy's responses throughout the novel to her correspondent's troubles are typically superficial and inappropriate, Galloway seems to criticize the role of these 'aunts'. 'Dear Kathy' perhaps functions in the narrative to show readers how 'agony aunts' commonly undermine women's problems and roles by offering relentlessly cheerful and inappropriate advice.

Horoscopes, like letters to 'Dear Kathy', pervade Joy's consciousness. Even while horoscopes seem to encourage readers to keep hope for a better future alive, the horoscopes, like letter pages, correspondingly fail to provide any answers to the problems and crises women face. The following is just one example of a horoscope with which Joy comes into contact:

A lot of astro-activity means it's time to sort out priorities: sure you're on course to get what you want from your current course of action? Could be a tense week. It's up to you to do something positive. The right attitude can move mountains you know! Romance is in the air from the weekend -- get out and grab opportunities to meet dark strangers with both hands! (162)

This horoscope, like the response from Kathy, reverberates with forced jollity and intimacy; it also implies that women have access to free choice and self-determination. The tone of the horoscope reassures Joy because in her mind, the astro-activity determines she might have a

²⁰*Inside Women's Magazines* (London/New York: Pandora Press, 1987), p. 80.

tense week; therefore, the positioning of the stars justifies her failure to cope with grief. In effect, Joy's horoscope allows her to say: 'It's not my fault if I have a terrible time this week: just the inevitable pattern of stars quite indifferent to me. Nothing personal' (163).

Similarly, a horoscope following Kathy's advice promises wonderful things for Joy: 'This is your birthday month so look alive to the changes that are surely on the horizon. It will have its share of surprises, not all of them pleasant, but all challenging. Submit to chaos for once!' (222). The irony in this horoscope is self-evident; clearly Joy has already submitted to psychic 'chaos' and, as a result, turns to horoscopes for answers and explanations for her chaotic mind and life.

Both horoscopes put forward to readers extremely general revelations. Both horoscopes imply that the individual is in control of her destiny. Most important, each horoscope works to reinforce the notion that changes and 'opportunities' are available for those who 'reach out and grab them'. Nonetheless, this is not true for many women. Joy, for example, resides within the boundary of the psychiatric unit; thus, no real 'opportunities' for 'dark strangers', 'romance', or change arise in Joy's life. For Joy and other women, horoscopes, like women's magazines and agony aunts, do not seem to offer feasible alternatives or advice to women's questions; instead, they simply and effectively undermine some women's capabilities to resolve actively inner conflicts. In a sense, women's magazines represent the dominant ideology in that they function to "naturalize" social reality, to make it seem as innocent and unchangeable as Nature itself.²¹ Subsequently, women's magazines as 'social reality' merely reinforce an individual woman's feelings of inadequacy and frustration when they, like Joy, cannot solve their emotional turmoil in what can be conceived of as a 'normal' manner.

Women's magazines and their components are not the only social discourses that condition individuals to act in certain ways. The media and pop culture also advocate desirable images of femininity, masculinity, and self-hood; thus, Galloway, like Tennant, introduces

²¹Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 135.

various elements of the media and pop culture throughout the narrative in order to show how people cannot escape its pervasive influence.

The word 'media' brings to mind different images from mass communication to television to the written word. In addition to women's magazines and newspapers, the media enters the novel in the form of books. In one illuminating passage Joy declares:

The written word is important. The forms of the letters: significances between the loops and dashes. You scour them looking for the truth. I read *The Prophet*, Gide, Kafka and Ivor Cutler. *Gone with the Wind*, *Fat is a Feminist Issue*, Norman MacCraig and Byron. *Lanark*, Muriel Spark, *How to cope with your Nerves/Loneliness/Anxiety*, Antonia White and *Adrian Mole*. *The Francis Gay Friendship Book* and James Kelman. ee cummings. *Unexplained Mysteries* and *Life after Death*. I read magazines, newspapers, billboards, government health warnings, advertising leaflets, saucebottles, cans of beans, Scottish Folk Tales and The Bible. They reveal glimpses of things just beyond the reach of understanding but never the whole truth (195-6).

This list of Joy's reading material juxtaposes philosophy, feminism, cult novels, poetry, literature, self-help books, folk tales, and religion with daily media such as newspapers, food labels, magazines, and government health warnings. The reading list includes Scottish writers and Scottish novels which in and of itself hints at Joy's Scottishness because the Scottish writers and novels she refers to appear to be an integral part of her culture and her identity. This passage suggests that individuals cannot escape the pervasive influence of the media in its many written forms; moreover, the scene shows Joy actively searching for an understanding of the 'whole truth', or answers to her position as a fragmented female and reasons for her lover's death.

Television is another medium which infiltrates the novel's structure. On one night in the beginning of the novel, Joy makes a list of all the programmes on television that she might watch:

three soaps
 four comedy shows
 four game shows
 one blockbuster serial
 two disaster movies
 one western
 two chat shows
 one wildlife documentary
 two socio-political documentaries
 six sets of news in varying lengths
 three sports slots

one investigation into the paranormal
one religious broadcast (16).

This list details thirty-one different programmes which are broadcast on one evening alone; the multitude of programmes available to the viewer signifies how television invades every aspect of life. While the programmes on the surface appear to offer a wide variety of choice which range from soaps to comedies to blockbuster serials to news to sports to a religious broadcast, the only television programme that appeals to Joy is the investigation into the paranormal. Although the television schedule seemingly caters to a number of individuals and interests, Joy can only find meaning or relevance in the one show which investigates extraordinary experiences; thus, one might infer from the large list of 'meaningless' programmes that Galloway criticizes the role of the media and its service to many individuals in culture.²²

Pop music and references to the radio also permeate Galloway's text. While numerous allusions to pop music and radio occur throughout the novel, three examples are particularly interesting. For instance, at one point in Joy's narrative she sits and listens to 'news and theological gossip, Pick of the Week, Desert Island Discs' (176). News, theology, and the 'Pick of the Week', like 'Desert Island Discs', are standard radio fare. However, the reference to 'Desert Island Discs', a programme in which a celebrity chooses the music s/he would like to listen to if stranded on a desert island, carries force because Joy's splintering self-hood and psyche leave her alone and stranded on an internal desert island. Likewise, Joy hears and talks about songs like '*The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*' (135) and '*Tie a Yellow Ribbon*' (168). These pop songs are significant because Joy, like Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders, also rises and falls both in mood and in psychic dissolution; at the same time, Joy wants to return home to a place where she feels comfortable with herself which echoes the '*Yellow Ribbon*' narrative thread. From Galloway's choice of radio show and popular song, the reader might draw conclusions about Joy's state of mind.

Even though Joy cannot find answers to the questions she asks about herself and her world, the extent of sources she might turn to for help confirm how different media, whether

²²The two women that Joy rides to work with mention that they are going to see the film *Fatal Attraction*. This reference in the novel is significant because Joy's lover is married; therefore, one might infer that Galloway inserts a reference to this film into the novel to reinforce Joy's position as a 'mistress' -- a woman who betrays and 'steals' another man's wife -- and attempts to destroy his family in the process.

books, television, radio, or magazines, claim to offer solutions to life's problems and conditions people to act and react in certain ways. Since Joy finally and emphatically decides that she must 'stop reading these fucking magazines' (223), one may conclude that Galloway resists the ideological representation of the ways in which women should solve their problems.

Felman articulates:

Depressed and terrified women are not about to seize the means of production and reproduction: quite the opposite of rebellion, madness is the impasse confronting those whom cultural conditioning has deprived of the very means of protest or self-affirmation. Far from being a form of contestation, 'mental illness' is a *request for help*, a manifestation both of cultural impotence and of political castration.²³

When Joy tries to reconcile herself to the cultural construction of woman and femininity, she loses control over her psyche and individual subjectivity; her 'illness' represents, in some sense, Felman's hypothesis that madness is the impasse confronting those from whom cultural conditioning has removed the very means of protest. Joy's mental 'illness', in the context of the novel and Galloway's critique of social discourse, is a request for help which manifests both cultural and social impotence. Since Joy cannot come to terms with her depression, and cannot accept society's answer to her pain and loss, she sinks deeper into a psychological breakdown. As a result, when Joy's self-image fragments beyond recognition, she seeks help from the medical establishment to alleviate her psychic fragmentation.

Medical Discourse: Health Visitor, General Practitioner, and the Asylum

Medical discourse, like social discourse, is part of the wider discourse of our society. It also pervades the cultural structure and systematically promotes institutionalized hierarchies.

Although *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* does not claim to be autobiographical, Galloway draws on the time she spent in a psychiatric unit because she firmly believes:

one of the most glaring ironies of her time on the wards was the proliferation of nurses and psychiatrists 'who had far greater social and mental problems than many of the patients.' The only difference was that the patients admitted their problems and the staff did not'.²⁴

²³'Women and Madness: the Critical Phallacy', p. 134.

²⁴Mason, 'Treatment needed', p. 16.

One might infer, then, that Galloway's lived experience will yield personal insight into the roles of the health visitor, the general practitioner, and the psychiatric unit in the treatment of one woman's depression and 'madness'.

Before Marianne leaves for America, she ensures that Joy visits a general practitioner to talk about her despondency and increasing inability to carry on with daily activities. In addition to prescribing medication for Joy, Dr Stead asks a 'health visitor' -- a woman or man sent into the 'sick' person's home to see how they are coping -- to visit his patient.²⁵ Even though Joy dreads the health visitor's arrival, she tries to convince herself that 'these visits are good for me. Dr Stead sends this woman out of love. He insisted' (20).

Joy's experience with the health visitor begins when she asks the woman: 'What are we supposed to talk about?' (22). The health visitor responds, 'I'm here to help you. To help you try to get better. I'm here to listen' (22). The health visitor speaks to Joy in short, simple, child-like sentences and, therefore, patronizes Joy and her depression. The health visitor also infringes upon Joy's privacy and psychological well-being because she walks into the cottage 'without knocking' (20) and ends up frightening her 'patient'. When the health visitor does this, she assumes the right to be in Joy's home; this action not only denies Joy respect, but it also reinforces her subordinate and 'sick' position.

As a result of the health visitor's patronizing tone, Joy feels that she cannot talk to a stranger about her life and problems. The health visitor tries to put Joy at ease by saying, 'you can tell me anything you like. I assure you it goes no further and I've heard it all before' (22). One observation to be drawn from the health visitor's declaration concerns her manner of speech. The health visitor's forced intimacy and insincere confidentiality, like the 'agony aunt's', deems Joy to be inferior because the tone suggests that Joy needs 'help' to get better. The reader must ask, better from what, better than what, and whose idea of better should Joy aspire to? As Phyllis Chesler theorizes, 'it is clear for a woman to be healthy she must "adjust" to and accept the behavioural norms for her sex even though these kinds of behaviour are generally regarded as less socially desirable'.²⁶ Galloway's protagonist does not recover

²⁵Although Galloway presumably capitalizes the spelling of 'Health Visitor' to mock the title, for the purpose of this analysis, the references will remain in the lower case.

²⁶*Women and Madness*, p. 89.

quickly and conveniently from her lover's death; as a result, the health visitor, at the behest of medical discourse, decrees that Joy fails to live up to the female norms demanded by society.

The health visitor's patronizing attitude, coupled with her infringement of Joy's privacy, places Joy in a subordinate position and threatens her self-esteem and self-hood. Since Joy falls into silence, the health visitor takes the opportunity to tell her a 'true story':

She knew how I felt. Did I think doctor hadn't given her case notes?
She knew all about my problems. Did I want her to tell me a true story?
Her niece had an accident on her bike once. And she thought, what'll
happen if Angela dies? what'll happen? But she prayed to God and the
family rallied round and they saw her through to the other side. That's
what I had to remember. She knew how I felt; she knew exactly how I
felt (23).

This passage shows the health visitor offering Joy an irrelevant 'true story'; the health visitor's personal crisis has no pertinence to Joy's own experience. When the health visitor asks Joy rhetorical questions that do not relate to her current state of mind, she insinuates that her ability to cope with turmoil is far superior to Joy's. This scene reveals that no two crises are the same and that no two individuals react to a crisis in an identical manner. The health visitor's visits and method of communication, then, simply reduce Joy's ability to cope with her disintegrating psyche. When the health visitor minimizes Joy's grief and depression, Galloway criticizes this aspect of the ineffective management of mental 'illness' by the National Health Service.

Joy's relationship with her general practitioner, Dr Stead, also serves as an exploration of privileged discourse. Society conditions Joy, like most individuals, to accord an unusually high level of regard and respect to her doctor because he controls, as it were, life and death. Even though Galloway represents Joy trying to maintain her self-respect and control of her mind by creating lists of questions to ask the doctor, Joy relies on Dr Stead to alleviate her depression; accordingly, Joy again maintains a lowly position within the medical system because the doctor views her as a mentally 'sick' woman which implies abnormality and inferiority.

Joy describes a typical appointment with Dr Stead to the reader. As she tells it, the same thing happens every time she goes to the doctor. He asks a few questions like, 'how are things/what's new/how's the week been treating you?' (50). Before Joy has time to think

about what the doctor means with his ambiguous word 'things', she reports trouble sleeping.

The doctor responds:

Try taking the yellow things an hour earlier in the evening. And the red things later. There's nothing left to do to the green things on this theme. Keep them as they were. [Already writing prescription] Do you need more? (50)

This excerpt shows Dr Stead treating Joy like a child. The colour-coded drugs come across as absurd not only because they are the primary colours children learn in school, but also because the doctor vaguely repeats the word 'things' and refers to the drugs by colours. The doctor's methodology intimates that Joy is not 'stable' or intelligent enough to know the drugs' names, their uses, and the proper way in which to take them. This short session also discloses that Dr Stead has no time to listen to Joy's difficulties; therefore, he resorts to drug therapy to maintain his patient's already sedated body and mind. Since Dr Stead has neither the time to get to the heart of Joy's depression, nor holds trust in her mental faculties, she leaves the doctor's office no better off than when she entered completely convinced that she wastes the doctor's precious time.

Galloway does depict her protagonist trying to gain control of her session with the doctor. Joy waits to see the doctor and engages in what she calls, '*preparation for the Doctor/ A short exercise lasting anything up to forty minutes*' (51). Joy's preparation for the visit emerges as a miniature play that reflects, on one level, her training as a drama teacher. As she prepares to see the doctor, Joy imagines herself saying what she really feels to the doctor and, in turn, hears the doctor verbalize what she believes him to be thinking:

PATIENT	I'm tired and I still need somebody to talk to. I need to get less angry about everything. I'm going nuts.
DOCTOR	Don't tell me how to do my job. Relax. You can talk to me. I made a double appointment so we can have twenty minutes. Go ahead. I'm listening.
PATIENT	What can I say that makes sense in twenty minutes?
DOCTOR	Try. You're not trying. You're looking for something that doesn't exist, that's why you're not happy. Look at me. I'm under no illusions. That's why I'm in control.
PATIENT	How can I be more like you?
DOCTOR	That's not what I meant. that's not what I meant at all. Envy is a destructive emotion. Besides I had to fight hard to get to feel like this. I'm bugged if I'm giving away the fruits of my hard work for nothing. You must tell me how you are (52).

Many dialogues like this appear throughout the novel. They convey what Joy perceives to be the subtext of her conversation with the doctor so the reader turns to these dialogues for insight into Joy's situation: she has no one to talk to, the pills are not working, the doctor does not have time to listen, and she should be able to control her life better. This imaginary dialogue also reveals Joy's perceptions about the treatment of her mental 'illness' within the British National Health System. For instance, even though the doctor gives her more time to talk, Joy cannot relax because she rightly perceives that in twenty short minutes she cannot say anything that will be of value. Likewise, when Joy hears the doctor say that 'envy is a destructive emotion', she really hears him say that he will not give up the fruits of his 'hard work for nothing'. Since Joy perceives herself in this scenario to be 'nothing', it seems fair to conclude that her dissolving psyche prevents her from asserting any control over her treatment in the short and unsatisfying sessions with her doctor.

Galloway clearly understands the kinds of power relationships that exist between doctors and their patients. The imaginary scene Joy paints between herself and her doctor confirms Galloway's interest in the social conditioning which leads women to remain submissive objects for male consumption. In a sense, Joy's narrative echoes in fiction Chesler's documentation of doctors' treatment of women in psychiatric institutions:

Laura: Fix yourself up, they told me. So every morning I got the hot sweats [insulin therapy] and every afternoon I spent in the beauty parlour with the other women. Of course, you had to pay for it . . . You have to hide your feelings, pretend everything is wonderful if you want to get out.

Joyce: I had a doctor who kept interviewing me. He'd go over the same story over and over again. I remember I was looking terrible, my hair wasn't combed, I had no make-up. He said, 'Why don't you fix yourself up? A nice girl like you!' And I said, 'I never want another man to look at me again'.

LaVerne: I finally figured it out. You weren't supposed to be angry. Oh no. They lock you up, throw away the key, and you're supposed to smile at them, compliment the nurses, shuffle baby -- so that's what I did to get out.²⁷

Joy's imaginary role-plays stimulate the reader to recognize that Joy does not need to look pretty, nor try harder, nor be reminded 'not to expect miracles' (54); instead, Joy needs

²⁷*Women and Madness*, pp. 158-59.

positive assessment of her depression and someone to listen to her problems which will help her to find an active solution to depression. As Joy's deteriorating mental condition suggests, for some individuals, neither health visitors, general practitioners, psycho-tropic drugs, or a return to conventional 'norms' of femininity, put forward any positive alternative to clinical depression; thus, Joy must turn to a psychiatric hospital for advanced 'help' in the hope of ending her self-destructive grief.

Madness and the asylum for Chesler generally function as mirror images of the female experience; in short, they are penalties for '*being* "female", as well as for desiring or daring *not* to be'.²⁸ Since Joy cannot adhere to the female norms deemed 'acceptable' to society, her mind splinters into a deep state of 'madness' as she struggles to come to terms with her vacillating and inconsistent mood swings.

When Joy first arrives at the hospital to talk about her referral, she sees Dr One who asks her, 'why do you think you've been sent to us?' (102). Joy tells the doctor her story and he asks her to come and stay in the hospital for a few weeks. However, when Joy arrives to stay at the hospital, she sees two different clinicians who again ask her, 'why do you think you've been sent to us?' (110) Understandably perturbed, Joy tells her story three times and eventually comes to believe:

Maybe this is a technique: something clever to do with familiarity and contempt or feeling worse before you feel better. I wonder about this as the story makes rounds of my mouth like a rat in a wheel. Maybe this is therapy.

Maybe (112-13).

While the persistent and identical questions remind readers of the persistence with which rats run around small wheels, the questions do not turn out to be a therapeutic technique. On the contrary, the fact remains that therapy at Foresthouse does not really exist. As Joy tells it, the women and men in the ward survive on daily anti-depressants and tranquilizers; at breakfast, everyone waits on the same joke: 'We have been woken up to take sleeping pills/anti-depressants/tranquilisers/suppressants. But we don't mind. We wait good-naturedly because we don't know any better' (139). Even though the pills are the patient's therapy, the drugs are

²⁸Ibid, p. 15.

not effective because they simply dull the patient's faculties without attempting to change the pain in women's minds and their lives.

Joy realizes that the hospital does not make her feel 'better'; hence, she makes an appointment to see a doctor. Although she attempts to prepare for this appointment by sketching out what she will say to the doctor in her head, Joy immediately gets flustered when she arrives in the doctor's room:

DR THREE You forgot you made an appointment:
 ME No. Yes. Nobody gives me times.
 DR THREE Well, what is it on this occasion?
 ME [Trying to remember] Treatment. I've been here
 four weeks. I see different people every time.
 DR THREE Yes?
 ME I don't think I'm getting any better.
 DR THREE It doesn't happen overnight.
 PATIENT Dr. Two said something about it last week. He
 said you'd have worked out some some sort of
 treatment.
 DR THREE What sort of treatment do you want?
 PATIENT I don't know. What do you suggest?
 DR THREE Ah but that's the whole point. I'm not suggesting
 anything. You asked to see me and now you're just
 wasting my time.
 PATIENT [Hit where it hurts] OK. What about counselling? Or
 analysis? ECT even. How should I know?
 DR THREE Don't be ridiculous.
 PATIENT What am I supposed to do, then. Give me some sort of
 clue.
 DR THREE What does everyone else do?
 PATIENT They stop asking (164).²⁹

Joy's dialogue with Doctor Three illustrates a number of points. First, the characterization of the role-players in the dialogue changes from 'DR THREE' and 'ME' to 'DR THREE' and 'PATIENT'. Since Joy mentions Dr Two and Dr Three, she becomes a 'PATIENT'; this characterization indicates a clinical relationship and, at the same time, intimates that Joy is a clinical 'patient' who 'patiently' awaits a variety of doctors and treatments. Second, the tone of the doctor's query, 'well, what is it on this occasion' suggests that the doctor views Joy as he would a tiresome child who continually asks bothersome questions; the doctor's question and tone undermine Joy's precarious position in the hospital as well as in society and culture.

²⁹Unlike Joy's imaginary role-playing, this dialogue with Dr Three presumably takes place because 'Moirra appears suddenly in the middle of the philosophising and tells me Dr Three is wondering where I am' (163). Additionally, following Joy's verbal exchange with Dr Three, Geraldine tells her that crying 'is no way to behave when you're going out' (165).

Third, Joy tells Dr Three that she has seen a different doctor every appointment. Dr Three's questioning answer, 'yes?' insinuates that this type of therapy is not unusual; moreover, his facetious remark that getting better 'doesn't happen overnight' is a clichéd response that does not offer Joy any therapeutic benefit. Finally, Joy rightly asks the doctor for treatment; yet, Dr Three reacts by accusing her of wasting his time -- time for which the National Health System pays him. In this scene, Galloway paints a dark picture of Joy's experience in a psychiatric unit and her therapy in a manner which openly condemns the inadequate and denigrating treatment of mental 'illness' in Great Britain.

One of Joy's letters to Marianne establishes her desire to get better. The letter also substantiates the absurd nature of Joy's experience with the five doctors in the hospital:

I'm not feeling too good right now. My birthday is coming. Christmas is coming. I've seen three different doctors in the past fortnight, none twice. Dr Four says I need ECT, Dr Two thinks I need a good holiday and a career move, Dr Three thinks I take too much caffeine -- a bit less and I'd be fine. Also a Dr Five turned up and suggested maybe we could have a chat. A CHAT. They increased everything sedative. This means my hands and legs take me by surprise occasionally: I have to remind myself they are attached (179).

Joy's description of her ineffective treatment exposes how the medical establishment fails to meet one woman's physical and emotional needs. To be specific, the five different doctors cannot agree upon an appropriate treatment for Joy's depression. Each doctor offers alternative advice from ECT to a good holiday to a career move to less caffeine. Even though Doctor Five appears to offer Joy effective and appropriate therapy in the form of 'a chat', Joy's written response to his proposal, 'A CHAT', clarifies that a short chat cannot even begin to release Joy from her deep psychic trauma. Joy encounters these doctors and treatments in a psychiatric unit, an institution dedicated, in theory, to helping people overcome depression, pain, loss, and suffering; yet, the only treatment for Joy's depression that the doctors agree upon is drug therapy. In this manner, Galloway makes it clear that Joy does not receive any effective form of treatment for her mental dissolution; instead, the drug therapy and Joy's position as a 'bothersome child' in the psychiatric unit merely teach her submission and suffering.

Galloway's description of hospital life also discloses the hierarchical nature of power relationships. Nancy, the Occupational Therapist, treats the women and men in her group like

children. When the adults on the ward attend an occupational therapy session centred on sewing, they instead spread coloured rags around them, and one man tries on a woolly hat. Joy records Nancy's response: 'Nancy said we were making a mess. We're worse than children' (141). At a different session, Nancy asks Joy and the other women on her ward to paint Christmas pictures and she attempts to motivate the women to paint by saying that the best pictures will hang in the children's ward. Joy does not find this activity stimulating so she asks to draw instead. Nancy reluctantly 'gives permission. I get two sheets of paper and a warning not to ask for more' (182). The occupational therapy sessions uncover how the women and men experience condescending attitudes from a 'stable' staff member; furthermore, the sessions expose how Nancy denies the adults maturity, and treats them like 'naughty children'. Since Joy already resides in a psychiatric unit, she experiences herself as a weak and unstable subject. Nancy's patronizing attitude toward Joy and the other patients prompts Joy to believe, 'thinking is no way to behave in here' (128); thus, she responds to her powerless position within the hospital hierarchy by waiting 'for the medicine trolley, willing it to appear' (128).

Galloway presents medical discourse to the reader as a male dominated ideological institution which fails to address the individual needs of depressed women and men. The psychiatric unit in this novel fosters what Adrienne Rich calls an 'addiction to depression--the most acceptable way of living out a female existence, since the depressed cannot be held responsible'.³⁰ In light of this hierarchical medical system that reinforces power relationships, Joy cannot be held responsible for her depression and inability to escape it because the British medical establishment in Galloway's novel functions in such a way as to heighten Joy's mental fragmentation and character dissolution.

Body and Subjectivity

Social and medical discourse do not offer Joy any effective means of coming to terms with her grief or controlling her daily activities. Therefore, throughout the narrative, Joy exercises a

³⁰Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979), p. 122.

great deal of care and control over her body. This care and control primarily concerns Joy's external appearance as well as her eating habits. On one level, Joy's preoccupation with her body may represent one area of her life she can control in the midst of an uncontrolled descent into depression and 'madness'; it might also be a response to the social pressures to be physically beautiful. On another level, Galloway's detailed descriptions of Joy's preoccupation with her body might symbolically represent the way some women writers like Cixous and Irigaray emphasize the importance of the body for writing out of women's bodily existence.³¹

Like Eve in *Sisters and Strangers*, Joy also engages in a daily bathing ritual. Also like Eve, Joy gears this ritual towards pleasing men. For example, after a scalding hot bath and an ice cold rinse, Joy reaches for:

Boxes and bottles on the bedroom floor: creams, fluids, cotton and paper. Moisturiser. To keep in the juice. Glutinous stuff for my elbows, knees and knuckles in case they're rough. I pluck my eyebrows, the single hair on my upper lip. Nail-scissors to make my pubic hair neat. Perfume for my ears, my neck, my wrists and navel; the flat space between my breasts, tips of my spine, between the toes. I file my nails, hands and feet with emery and pumice, pushing back the cuticles, defining whiteness with chalk. I paint my toenails. The radio mutters a play under the fallen bedspread. I paint them again. Then each fingernail the same way. I leave my armpits free from chemical interference: deodorant matts, it tastes bad. This is my token to naturalness in case this is what he prefers. I stand and pad on some talc from a canister instead, dripping white dust onto my knees and belly, puffs of smoke across my chest. I put on my prettiest underwear: net lace and satin, ribbon straps. Black. I wear a lot of black (47).

Joy methodically and conscientiously prepares her body for an evening with David in the event that she might be 'embraced, entered, made to exist' (46). Her bathing routine, underscored by the radio which 'mutters a play under the fallen bedspread', exposes how Joy, like many woman, engages in a ritualized play of making herself beautiful for men. The appearance of the radio within this beautification rite also implies media transmissions which encourage and condition women to look and act in certain socially 'acceptable' ways in order to attract socially 'acceptable' men.

³¹See Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa' and Irigaray, 'This Sex Which is Not One' for more insight into women writing out of bodily existence.

Joy's bathing ritual additionally suggests that women strive to create a physically 'acceptable' body. Sandra Lee Bartky believes that women in society are regarded as having a virtual duty to make the most of 'what we have':

But the imperative not to neglect our appearance suggests that we can neglect it, that it is within our power to make ourselves look better--not just neater and cleaner, but prettier, and more attractive. What is presupposed by this is that we don't look good enough already, that attention to the ordinary standards of hygiene would be insufficient, that there is something wrong with us as we are. Here, the 'intimations of inferiority' are clear: Not only must we continue to produce ourselves as beautiful bodies, but the bodies we have to work with are deficient to begin with.³²

Bartky's theories, coupled with Galloway's description of Joy's beauty ritual, show the reader that women are in many ways culturally conditioned to appear in certain ways, be it underweight in the Western world, or overweight in some Asian countries. This can be viewed in two ways: first, taking care of one's body does not necessarily hold negative connotations for women in society because women can be simply taking care of their bodies to maintain good health; on the other hand, some women, like Joy, might be maintaining their bodies for men which suggests personal unhappiness and implies a lack of self-esteem.

If Joy exerts control over her body through a daily bathing ritual, then she also asserts control over her body by regulating her hunger. In the midst of controlling how men view her body, Joy also consciously destroys this same body. Although beautification and self-destruction set up an apparent paradox, at the heart of the paradox is Joy's deep desire to know that her body exists and her self-hatred which stems from a lack of self-esteem; hence, she manipulates her body's appearance and her appetite in order to prove to herself that she lives and breathes. On one particular occasion, Joy learns '*I didn't need to eat*' (38). One might infer from this statement that Joy embodies Chesler's conclusion that depressed women display symptoms that 'express a harsh, self-critical, self-depriving and often self-destructive set of attitudes'.³³

Once Joy embarks on the path of self-mutilation by hunger control, a conflict arises because she finds it difficult not to be seduced by hunger and, at the same time, the hunger

³²*Femininity and Domination*, p. 29.

³³*Women and Madness*, p. 39.

disgusts her. Women's magazines often 'help' Joy to control her desire for food. One of the women's magazines that Joy reads elaborates the 'ULTIMATE DIET':

By this time, not eating has become so rewarding you won't want to stop. And who can blame you? But avoiding food is harder than you'd think. Repeated refusing starts to look rude and thoughtless. You know it's important they shouldn't see the deliberateness of your choice and indeed, sometimes it's hard not to develop a degree of paranoia in view of how persistent some people can be! You think they want to feed you as part of a conspiracy of fatness to undermine your hard-won control. Don't be afraid to develop a list of ingenious lies to sidestep their frequent assaults: say you've just eaten/ aren't too hungry right now/ feel squeamish today/ had a big breakfast/ are meeting someone later etc. Scrutinise their faces to see if they will leave you alone or persist. If they persist, avoid them in future. [. . .] Feel the tension in your stomach after even the lightest meal as a warning. Drink endlessly to bulk away the craving. You know it'll all be worth it in the end (85).

This message from a woman's magazine issues Joy and other readers strong imperatives: 'You know', 'You think', 'Don't be afraid', 'Scrutinise their faces', 'Feel the tension', and 'Drink endlessly'. This style of writing automatically carries hidden assumptions. When articles like these command women to 'develop a list of ingenious lies to sidestep their frequent assaults', the magazines assume that women need to lose weight, that women need to look a certain way, and that outsiders will automatically try to prevent women on a diet from achieving set goals. The article also argues that any amount of food causes tension in the stomach; yet, the dieter still needs to drink endlessly to 'bulk away the craving'. Mixed messages such as these serve to reinforce inferiority and further undermine Joy's already dissolving psyche.

Maggie Humm contends that women's bodies are disciplined and segregated, coded and appropriated by a science whose rhetoric serves as a summary of the fears and contradictions in contemporary society; as a result, women often rupture these boundaries of objectification by a mirrored reversal of such bodies.³⁴ She goes on to say that women's resistance to these images often takes positive forms, for example, celibacy, hysteria and anorexia so that these women become, in Michele James's words, 'shape shifters', or shamans of their own body by changing their body language as part of a move toward feminist identity.³⁵ While anorexia, bulimia, and hysteria are extremely self-destructive means that women sometimes use to confront and to conform to social 'norms' and expectations, as Joy

³⁴*Border Traffic*, p.124.

³⁵*Ibid.*

shows us, this type of control over one's body does not necessarily offer control over one's mind and life. Galloway employs two forms of feminine self-confrontation -- beautification rituals and hunger control -- to elucidate for the reader the pressures on women in society to conform to male expectations and desires; hence, Galloway makes it clear to readers that denigrating and self-mutilating gestures such as these fail to provide women with a high degree of positive female subjectivity and deny women any real escape from the confines of depression and female 'madness'.

Female Roles: Teacher, 'Wife', Mistress, and Friend

Galloway's thorough examination of social and medical discourses and Joy's physical subjectivity asserts that women are clearly constructed by the dominant social and cultural ideology as passive subjects. The novel also suggests that Western culture fails to offer women many alternatives to conventional female norms aside from character fragmentation and female madness. Keitel contends:

Psychotic personality fragmentation is the experience of being suspended at the verge of non-existence which cannot be communicated in its full range of content and emotion, either in everyday discourse or through psychological and philosophical theories. Psychotic experiences [. . .] Can be interpreted as self-confrontation, as the extreme form of an identity crisis which subsequently brings about radical changes in the affected person's perception of himself and the world around him. Such experiences assume a destructive or at least ambivalent character, and are generally felt to be highly charged with anxiety.³⁶

Since Joy cannot come to terms with her role in society, she lives at the verge of non-existence; her descent into madness reflects a volatile and self-destructive attempt at self-confrontation. While Joy's fractured mind constitutes a means of resisting existing social policies, Galloway also makes it clear that the roles Joy finds herself in, especially roles she attempts to emulate as perpetuated by women's magazines, discourage positive measures of self-knowledge and self-worth; consequently, Joy as a Scottish woman in contemporary society cannot relate to who she is supposed to be, or who she is supposed to represent. It will prove useful to analyze two

³⁶Reading *Psychosis*, pp. 2-3.

of the roles Joy accepts -- that of teacher and lover -- in order to come to a greater understanding of her uncontrolled character fragmentation.

One of the roles that Joy plays throughout the novel is that of a teacher. After Michael's death, Joy has no problem returning to work because work 'is where I earn my definition, the place that tells me what I am' (11). Similarly, teaching does not trouble Joy because she feels 'I need not be present when I am working. I can be outside myself, watching from the corner of the room. Getting to work is a problem, handling mealtimes is a problem. But not the job. Something always attends to that' (12). Within the boundaries of her school and her role as a teacher, Joy recognizes who she is and what she is supposed to do:

I devise programmes and plan lessons, I lecture and consult and advise, talk too fast to follow and wave my arms like a windmill. They break sweat trying to keep up. I wind up like a clockwork mouse, eliciting response, raging to make a difference (12).

Although Joy's description of her teaching style, for instance, 'talking too fast to follow', waving her arms 'like a windmill', and winding up 'like a clockwork mouse', sounds frantic and frenetic, the teaching does provide relief from her mental confusion and feelings of inadequacy because it allows her to avoid thinking about and confronting the real issues of Michael's death and her place in the world. Teaching offers Joy a means of maintaining a semblance of sanity because once she manages to get to her job, she understands herself in relation to her work; thus, Joy ultimately gains knowledge of one kind of woman she can be in her dislocated and fluctuating world.

At the same time, however, Joy's role as a teacher fosters unfair assumptions and stereotyping about her character by hospital staff and patients. For example, Tom gets angry and 'steely' (125) when the ward meeting discussing young people's joblessness disintegrates. Tom cannot accept his failure to maintain a group discussion; as a result, he badgers Joy: 'Well. What about you, then? Teacher? What do you think? Tell me what you think. Must have an opinion. Never met a teacher without an opinion' (125). Tom viciously attacks Joy for no other reason than his own inability to initiate and facilitate group interaction and he stereotypes her into someone she does not represent. When Tom transfers his frustration with the women and his own inadequacies onto Joy's career, it appears as though he resents her

occupation because it reflects higher education and the responsibility for 'teaching' others. Since Tom uses his secure and 'healthy' position as a group leader to humiliate Joy and to subordinate her self-respect and self-image, he destroys the allegedly safe environment of the psychiatric unit and denies Joy the opportunity to regain a positive self-image or to rekindle high self-esteem.

Likewise, when Joy hesitates over a chocolate Isa offers her because of her eating disorder, Janey takes offense. She shouts, 'think you're better than this place, don't you. Think you're better than me. Eh? Well fuck you teacher. Fuck You' (220). Even though Janey does not understand Joy's eating problems, she unfairly assumes that Joy has an inflated image of herself. This scene implies that Joy's education and status as a teacher exclude her from working-class culture; hence, Joy suffers marginalization in class terms as well as in terms of gender and her state of health. Bartky believes:

Stereotyping is morally reprehensible as well as psychologically oppressive on two counts, at least. First, it can hardly be expected that those who hold a set of stereotyped beliefs about the sort of person I am will understand my needs or even respect my rights. Second, suppose that I, the object of some stereotype, believe in it myself--for why should I not believe what everyone else believes? I may then find it difficult to achieve what existentialists call an authentic choice of self, or what some psychologists have regarded as a state of self-actualization.³⁷

Joy clearly experiences negative feedback from individuals who stereotype her by virtue of her role as a teacher; consequently, Joy's self-actualization and authentic choice of self are denied. In the eyes of those who despise education and teachers, Joy cannot exist outside of these stereotypes and roles. Since Joy cannot separate herself from these unprovoked representations, she cannot become an individual woman with an individual voice.

The most significant and complex role that Joy plays out constitutes the often confusing and subordinating role as a lover.³⁸ For Joy, the most difficult aspect of her role as lover emerges out of the complicated process in which she engages to ascertain the wants and needs of her lover, and subsequently reconciling his needs to her own needs and desires as a woman and as a lover. Carol P. Christ speculates that many women 'live out inauthentic stories

³⁷*Femininity and Domination*, p. 24.

³⁸Although Michael is also one of Joy's lovers, I do not discuss their relationship because he is dead and does not enter the narrative except in Joy's memories. Since Michael is present only in Joy's memories, I do not believe that Galloway provides enough evidence to draw any conclusions about their relationship.

provided by a culture they did not create. The story most commonly told to young girls is the romantic story of falling in love and living happily ever after'.³⁹ Galloway subverts this Western myth when she shows Joy to be incapable of living out this 'inauthentic' representation of a woman's romantic life.

Joy stays with her first lover Paul for over seven years. During this time she takes on the role of a housewife and learns 'to cook good meals and run a house. The fridge was always well stocked and the cupboards interesting. I cleaned the floors and the rings round the bath that showed where we had been' (42). Joy cleans the floor and rings around the bath because the dirt survives as 'evidence' of her existence with Paul; in other words, Joy needs proof that she and Paul are a couple and that they love each other and interact together. However, cleaning does not solve Joy's problem with non-existence because she recognizes that 'there was something missing. I felt we were growing apart. We were' (42). She turns to women's magazines for advice and tries to communicate and 'soul-search' with Paul; his answer to their unhappiness is 'split-crotch knickers' (42). Even though Paul's solution to the demise of their 'marriage' might make readers laugh, Galloway's allusion to the racy knickers intimates that Joy and Paul cannot communicate and that their relationship survives because Joy services Paul on a sexual and domestic level.

Both Paul's and Joy's actions and behaviour emphasize their inability to co-exist. Paul, for example, begins to read Joy's letters and uses the information about her other love interests against her.⁴⁰ Joy begins to lose a sense of reality and becomes afraid to leave the flat because she believes that Paul:

could tell things by feeling the walls when I was out or maybe through supervision. I thought he was Superman. I couldn't live with Superman without thinking
 a) Superman's weaknesses are my fault (like Kryptonite)
 and
 b) I was vastly inferior in every respect (42).

Joy copes with the break up of her relationship by comparing herself to Kryptonite, the element that takes the power and strength away from Superman. Galloway's references to the pop

³⁹*Diving Deep and Surfacing*, p. 1.

⁴⁰Letters and letter writing have traditionally been conceived of as a personal and distinctly female mode of communication. The letters again allude to a women's writing tradition which encompasses the confessional diary narrative form.

In addition to Joy's role as a 'wife' to Paul, Joy practises the role of mistress with Tony, her boss at the betting shop she works in on Saturdays. Joy's work at the betting shop is intriguing because it hints that Joy has a double life. Joy works as a teacher during the week -- a job suggestive of the middle class -- yet she works in a betting shop on the weekends -- a job suggestive of the working class. One might conclude from these two jobs that Joy is torn between a working class background and middle class employment and suffers estrangement and alienation from a stable class identity.⁴² Additionally, the presence of the betting shop implies chance; in a sense, Joy bets or takes a chance on finding companionship in her brief sexual liaison with Tony and, at the same time, also chances finding meaning in her life.

Galloway shows Joy to be conscious of her role as the only female in the betting shop. She dresses 'with great care in front of the mirror' (30) because 'on Saturday I work with men' (30). As Rachel Bowlby puts it, 'in dominant sexual codes, it is the woman's body which is taken by the man's; and more generally, it is the woman who is thought of as object or complement to the male subject'.⁴³ In this dominant male environment, Joy's conditioning as a female subject persuades her to believe that to be valid as a woman, she must exist as an object of beauty. Galloway compounds this image by depicting Joy denying her intellect. For instance, Joy periodically rings:

up the wrong thing and the men have to be patient with me. They nod in a long-suffering way among themselves. They prefer to deal with the men. They gather at the mesh and chat with Allan and Tony, the businessmen. If they see me looking, they get shy, smile and joke to cover up. They are reassured by my ringing up wrong numbers. Tony strokes my hair when he's in a good mood and tells them I'm a pet (32).

Likewise, when Joy finishes work and asks for her money, Tony 'pats my head again, holds out my money. He keeps holding it when I try to take it from him and says, Say please to Tony' (33). These images again paint Joy as a performing monkey who has to beg for her peanuts. Although Joy cannot regulate Tony's dominant and humiliating action, she smiles and accepts the money from him; in effect, Joy perpetuates male dominance and female subordination.

⁴²Joy's double life is reminiscent of James Kelman's novel *A Disaffection*, where his protagonist Patrick Doyle also struggles with working class roots and middle class employment.

⁴³*Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola* (New York/London: Methuen, 1985), p. 27.

Galloway uses role-playing in the narrative form to outline Tony's aggressive pursuit of Joy. This style of narrative delivery permits the reader to see Tony manipulate Joy's femininity and her position as his employee. Joy remains indifferent to Tony's phone calls and his offers to take her to watch his greyhound race; she consistently tells him 'I'm kind of busy this afternoon' (93). Tony cannot understand Joy's indifference; he needs to ask, 'what do you mean busy?' (93). Galloway continues to develop their conversation and Joy suddenly fabricates a dinner with Ellen:

PHONE	Break it. She'd understand.
ME	No, I'm sorry Tony. I can't. I really can't. You wouldn't like me to break a promise.
PHONE	Well, worth a try. But she doesn't have all that many runs left this season. [Means There's something wrong with you, going to see an old lady instead of grabbing the chance with me I'm used to better things I can get any amount of girls you know don't you realise what you're being offered here?] Better catch you early next time eh? [Means I know you're just playing hard to get]
ME	Yes. I'm sorry Tony. I am. I'm sorry.
PHONE	No skin off my nose. I'll forgive you this time. [Means Don't let it happen again and remember I'm your boss] (93-4).

Joy does not want to go out with Tony, nor does she play hard to get; even so, Tony, as a male employer in a phallogentric society believes that he has a right to exercise control over Joy's wishes and desires. As the dialogue and commentary in the brackets tell us, in Joy's mind, Tony sees a date with her as a simple extension of her work duties. Even though logically it seems as if Joy has a choice in this matter, in reality she does not. Tony employs Joy and therefore holds a small part of her financial future in his hands.

Although Joy manages to fend off Tony's advances on the first date, he coerces her into a second outing. After their second date, Joy knows that the 'kissing was taken for granted. He had paid good money, after all. A meal, dancing, flowers' (174). Joy knows that Tony buys her flowers, dances, and dinner; in turn, Joy rises up to social and cultural expectations because she feels that she owes him sexual favours. Galloway depicts Joy in this relationship as an object who is bought and paid for.⁴⁴ DuPlessis contends that since women

⁴⁴This scene suggests that women are part of the 'exchange economy'. For insight into this subject, see Elaine Showalter, 'Towards a Feminist Poetics', in *The New Feminist Criticism*, pp. 125-43, especially pp. 130-1; Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*; and Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structure of Kinship* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).

are 'constantly reaffirmed as outsiders by others and sometimes by themselves, women's loyalties to dominance remain ambiguous, for they are not themselves in control of the processes by which they are defined'.⁴⁵ Joy lets Tony kiss her and asks, 'is this what you want? [. . .] Will this keep you happy?' (175). When Joy willingly or unwillingly succumbs to Tony's desires, her loyalty to Tony remains ambiguous. Tony uses his privileged position as a male employer to manipulate Joy's subordinate position as an employee and a woman in need of money; this action reaffirms Joy as an outsider who cannot control the process by which culture defines her role in relationships with men. Since Joy holds these two lowly occupations, Galloway presents her protagonist with no viable alternatives to her inferior role in culture.

Joy's relationships with Paul and Tony do not seem to offer her a great deal of positive feedback because both relationships undermine Joy's self-respect and her idea of self-worth. However, Galloway counteracts these negative constructions by introducing David, an ex-pupil. Even though Joy never teaches David, she relates 'we liked each other for no particular reason' (131). David and Joy's interaction at school is minimal; yet, after her mother dies, David turns up in her classroom to return some books because he is leaving. He asks how she is, looking 'shy when I didn't get it. He wanted me to talk about my mother' (131). While this conversation could conceivably be a 'come-on' to Joy, Galloway portrays the scene in such a way that the reader can discern genuine interest on David's part for Joy's welfare.

Although David is ten years younger than Joy, in the end, they go out for a drink. Joy starts it:

I kissed his neck. Out of the blue. I started to undress him in the car. [...] I asked David if he wanted to stay over. Very grown-up and casual. I tried not to overhear the call to his mother, the excuse about staying with a friend (131).

A positive connection grows between them and, unlike Paul and Tony, Galloway shows David to be interested in Joy's moods and needs. Rather than expect Joy to clean house and cook for him, or tell him that he is a good lover, David accepts Joy's need 'to be touched. I wanted very much to be touched. It made me wonder if it would be better not to see him any more. I

⁴⁵*Writing Beyond the Ending*, p. 41.

said as much once and he just laughed. I didn't pursue it' (132). Moreover, instead of forcing Joy to listen to him, David:

pulled me beside him on the threadbare carpet and said to lie still and listen. I lay still listening.

Heartbeat and salt male smells through the warm shirt (132).

Galloway says the reason David 'seems to be the most functioning man is because he's the one who is currently functioning. [. . .] He does seem more positive because he's there'.⁴⁶

Clearly, though, Joy's description of her time with David exposes his willingness to give Joy what she wants and needs; he fulfils her desire to be touched. David has her lie down beside him and smell the sea salt and listen to his heart beat through a warm shirt and body. This imagery hints that David's sounds and smells help Joy to understand that he exists as a warm, living, breathing human being. His calm and quiet manner on this particular occasion shows Joy that life goes on and affirms the notion that life must go on even if one simply listens and breathes.

Joy goes on to describe the pattern of what she does with David like this: 'We get drunk and have sex and I scream a lot of the time' (133). Although this description for some readers will not seem to delineate a positive relationship, these activities are ways for Joy to begin to confront her confusion and to begin to understand her place in the world. Joy's alliance with David functions differently than that with Paul and Tony because Joy's wants and needs, rather than David's, remain the focus of attention. Whereas Tony says to Joy, 'how are things by the way? I always forget to ask. You never look ill to me so I forget to ask' (98-9), David looks deeper. He accepts her stay in the hospital without question and does not talk about his experiences at college; instead, David forces Joy to speak about the hospital. He asks, 'don't you want to talk about the hospital?' (135), 'do they know what you're talking about?' (136), and 'whose fault is it? Are you telling them everything?' (136). More important, though, David drives her to the hospital and comes to visit and he continues to call on Joy even after she decides to leave the hospital. David does not consider his needs above

⁴⁶Babinec-Galloway, Appendix, p. 334.

Joy's and he does not use her body as a confidence boost; hence, David unconditionally gives Joy the positive support and the encouragement she needs to begin the long healing process.

Galloway characterizes David as a younger man and, in doing so, implies that some males of a younger generation might hold different values and expectations in sexual and non-sexual relationships. Through David and Joy's interaction, Galloway intimates that the younger generation has the capability to learn from women and to learn from the past. David also reveals how men may learn to listen to women's needs and repudiate the role of an autocratic man. David's characterization, then, envisions a more positive and egalitarian future between women and men as both lovers and friends.

One of the key themes which emerges from Galloway's novel and an analysis of the roles Joy holds in relation to others is that Joy's subjectivity is not a given; Joy does not exist, survive, or live in a vacuum -- she does not exist in isolation. If Joy's negative and fragmented subjectivity reflects her own failings, it also exposes how her interactions with other women and men shape an individual's subjectivity. If the connections are positive, then it seems likely that subjectivity will also be positive; however, if one's intimate connections are primarily negative, then as with Galloway's protagonist, an individual's subjectivity will also be jaded and feelings of submissiveness and inferiority will abound. Galloway's protagonist finds no role in which she may find or develop a positive sense of self-esteem or self-worth as a woman or as an individual. Each role that Joy plays out explores another aspect of women's roles and exposes how these kinds of relationships for the most part fail to satisfy Joy's need to understand herself as a unique woman.

Narrative Form and Techniques: Falling Words, Word Displacement, Dialogue, Role-Plays, Memories in Italics, Lists, and Letters

Galloway's novel illustrates how Joy, like many women, makes futile efforts to compromise her personality, identity, and desires in order to fill social and cultural norms. Without a doubt, Galloway's narrative structure defies any traditional notions of 'what is literature'. From the first page, unusual stylistic features indicate an interest in resisting conventional literary patterns and styles. Like Tennant and Elphinstone, Galloway juxtaposes what is real with what is illusion. The fractured narrative denies a fluid reading of the text and the author

creates, quite literally, a disintegrated text which mirrors and underlines its disintegrated female subject. DuPlessis maintains that:

women writers as women negotiate with divided loyalties and doubled consciousnesses, both within and without a social and cultural agreement. This, in conjunction with the psychosexual oscillation, has implications for 'sentence' and 'sequence'--for language, ideology, and narrative.⁴⁷

Galloway's novel and her female protagonist negotiate with divided loyalties and divided consciousness both inside and outside of cultural agreement. As a result, Galloway's narrative techniques interrogate existing literary structures and practices and challenge the implications for 'sentence', 'sequence', 'language', 'ideology', and 'narrative' and provide a new vision and style of writing for women and women's literature. Galloway tests the traditional confines of literature in many ways; however, seven techniques which instantly engage the reader's attention are: words falling off the side of the page; word displacement; dialogue transcription; theatrical role-playing dialogues; the use of italics to convey Joy's gradual re-memory of Michael's death; the use of lists within the narrative; and finally, Joy's letters to Marianne which come at intervals in the text.

When the novel begins in italics on the left hand side of the page, the reader may feel disconcerted because the novel's opening does not follow a typical narrative pattern; in fact, some readers may not even read this essential italic text since it starts on what can be termed the wrong page.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, the reader soon settles into a comfortable pattern of reading short paragraphs without much hesitation. However, on page thirty the word 'sometimes' suddenly appears in the right hand margin of the left hand page and slides off the page into the middle of the book. A reader's first reaction to the odd structure might be to think the broken word must be a publishing error and think nothing more of the 'mistake'. Yet, one comes across this phenomenon on page forty-nine where the word 'sometimes' again recedes off the right hand page; hence, the reader may again question the word as a bizarre publishing error.

⁴⁷*Writing Beyond the Ending*, p. 40.

⁴⁸I have discussed the novel's narrative form with several colleagues. The majority said they would ignore Galloway's opening text because it begins on the left hand page, the side traditionally reserved for copyright and cataloguing information.

Nonetheless, on page sixty-four the reader meets several words which are disconnected from the text:

sometimes
presentiments
tell us to stop
it's too late
ignore these
sometimes
that feeling
deja (64)

When the reader sees this format, it becomes clear that a pattern begins to emerge, random to be sure, but a pattern of words slide off the page all the same.

As the narrative continues and Joy's mental dissolution heightens, the reader recognizes that far from being a publishing error, the words often occur when Joy experiences stress and anxiety. For example, when Joy goes out with Tony and lets him stay the night, words and phrases continually appear in the margin. Since these words appear in blocks with several lines of text between each occurrence, the sequences awaken a reader's awareness of the stress and confusion under which Joy exists:

sometimes
presentiments
that stop now
before it too
late but often
ignore the wa

warnings s
when the v
happens

often we igno
the warning

worst happ
we can onl
blame

ignore the
warning (174)

blame ours (175)

The effect of this type of narrative disruption is twofold. First, these words off the page break the reader's interpretation of Joy's confessional text and render similar insights into Joy's distressed state of mind. Second, the words sliding off the page emphasize the protagonist's inability to come to terms with her own desire to rid herself of Tony. The scraps of text falling off the page like 'before it too', 'late but often', 'often we ignor', 'the warning', 'when the', 'worst happ', 'we can onl', 'blame ours' release Joy's inner thoughts; they tell the reader that quite often an individual ignores the subconscious warnings and therefore the worst happens.

In this particular instance, the sliding words mirror Joy's lament that she ignored Tony's desire to stay over; since Joy ignores the warning signs, when Tony decides to stay with her, Joy believes that she only has herself to blame.

Galloway explains the 'curious scraps of text which fly off the page' as a 'visual in-joke for those on medication' because 'every time they change the dosage you see black shapes at the corner of your vision and they wiggle. Sometimes they look like insects, sometimes they look like words'.⁴⁹ Even though Galloway calls these sliding words a 'visual in-joke' for those who take psycho-tropic drugs, her comments do not necessarily invalidate a non-aware reader's interpretation of Joy's instability; instead, her remarks about the novel's disorientating textual structure merely complement a reader's developing awareness of the difficulties some women face as they battle to discover and assert self-worth and self-knowledge in the face of hierarchical dominance.

Another narrative technique which Galloway employs to disorient a coherent textual reading is word placement, or to be more precise, displacement. Galloway continues to stretch the limits of conventional form throughout the text by breaking sentences off in a character's mid-thought and beginning a new paragraph, drawing boxes or conversation bubbles within the text, designing brackets with definitions in bold type, forming sentences in capital letters, and the list could go on.⁵⁰ For example, when Joy prepares tea for the Health Visitor, Galloway's narrative form verbalizes and visualizes this process:

Tray
 jug
 sweeteners
 plates
 cups and saucers
 another spoon
 christ

the biscuits
 the biscuits (20).

This diagonal list permits the reader to view Joy's thought process, to see her go through the motions and counting to make sure she properly completes the tea tray. Distress shows when she forgets the biscuits, and the reader literally comprehends Joy's concern for presenting the

⁴⁹Close, 'Heavy Breathing', p. 10.

⁵⁰Galloway draws here on writing styles employed by Alasdair Gray and James Kelman. See Appendix, pp. 339-40, for her comments on this matter.

tea tray in such a manner that she appears to have all her faculties intact. Galloway's disruptive word placement disorients readers and aesthetically portrays one woman's struggle to liberate herself from the constraints of restrictive social and ideological foundations. What's more, the displaced narrative form perhaps visually mirrors Joy's status as a displaced woman in a society which cannot understand nor meet her needs.

One of the most interesting and telling passages in the novel which tests the limits and borders of sentence structure and grammatical construction comes at a critical point in Joy's hospital stay. After one of the staff members finds Joy hiding under a table in an empty room, a junior doctor shares her silence and asks if she wants to talk about Michael. After 'the uniform' puts her 'to bed' (186), Joy's teeth begin to chatter:

it

starts
again

especially for his *wife*

especially his wife

when you're in
love with a beautiful woman
it's hard

*sometimes i get that
feeling of*

your cheatin heart
will tell on

you

There is something more to
something more

when you think I've loved you all I can
There is always something

more

to COME (186).

Galloway crosses the borders of language and style and integrates elements of popular culture with Joy's lived experience in this passage. The snippets of pop songs such as 'when you're in love with a beautiful woman' promotes the popular idea that everyone can and will attain romantic love; the snippet also implies that love allows every individual to achieve any set goal. Even so, additional lines from pop songs postulate less optimistic outcomes. Lines such as 'your cheatin heart will tell on' and 'when you think I've loved you all I can' foreshadow the fallibility of love as well as unhappy endings. For Joy, these lyrics are particularly relevant and powerful because they suggest that since Michael cheats on his wife, their love cannot last:

instead, the something more to come is, in fact, Michael's death. The words 'more to COME' simultaneously convey sexual innuendo and Joy's belief that since love does not transcend death, something more --either guilt or depression -- is likely to arrive. The word displacement juxtaposes elements of pop song with Joy's own thoughts; thus, the passage reveals how she cannot escape from her own mind or from pop culture's attitude towards romantic love.

Since Galloway's displaced literary style mirrors Joy's displaced position in culture as well as her disoriented mind, one might conclude from these unconventional narrative techniques that Galloway engages in what John Mepham calls a 'systematic undermining of trust, of a sense of reliable interpretation'.⁵¹ Mepham argues that this systematic undermining of a reader's trust and reliable interpretation:

can be achieved by a systematic ambiguity, or plurality of context, for each utterance. This is the textual strategic rule of postmodernist fiction, to produce systematic uncertainty of signs by locating each one of them within more than one interpretative framework, thereby frustrating the reader's will to interpretative synthesis.⁵²

As the above excerpt shows, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* advances the idea that the individual does not exist in isolation; instead, the novel shows how pop culture informs and helps to construct every individual's self-knowledge. The novel's uncertain and unstable narrative structure uproots the reader and systematically undermines a 'correct' reading of the text; thus, Galloway's postmodern experimental format allows the reader to experience the character's mental dissolution while testing the confines of women's experience in both the fictional microcosm of a mental institution and contemporary Scottish society.

Galloway's interest in experimenting with conventional literary typography extends to dialogue. John Linklater contends that in *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, it is 'as if she picked up on an approach from Kelman, and a playfulness with typography from Alasdair Gray, and created something entirely her own'.⁵³ Galloway confirms her debt to Kelman. She describes reading Kelman and suddenly realizing that people do not communicate in inverted commas:

⁵¹'Narratives of Postmodernism', p. 150.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³'Novelist in the shop window', *Glasgow Herald*, 19 May 1990, p. 27.

'of course you take away the inverted commas, what a stupid convention [. . .] Where people say "I'm about to speak now". Real life isn't like that'.⁵⁴

Galloway's aversion to traditional methods of dialogue transcription attempts to reveal dialogue for what it really is: a mode of communication between speaking individuals. For instance, when Joy's sister Myra comes to visit, Myra asks Joy, 'so who died?'. Joy responds:

A man I was living with. I wave my arm expansively. This is his house.

This is a nice place, she says, casting a watery eye round the ruins of old furniture and the sheets.

I have to control the urge to throw back my head and guffaw like a drain. Sherry shoots up my nose and makes me choke. I'm almost sick with holding it down.

How did you get it? she says, oblivious.

It wasn't easy, I say. I had no entitlement. He was married and the separation wasn't finalised. But his wife was kind enough to let me have all this crap she didn't want. Alcohol fumes smart my eyes. I've had more to drink than I thought. I am not being careful.

Married, she says, as though it explains everything. Married man. HAH!

He asked for a big place so the kids could come. There are two bedrooms upstairs.

Kids, christ! Kids! Bloody like the thing eh? Typical (62-3).

Indented paragraphs instead of inverted commas indicate a character's speech; moreover, as in Elphinstone's work, the dialogue gives readers access to Joy's inner thoughts throughout the conversation. For example, Joy's words, 'I am not being careful' exemplifies how individuals often think to themselves while carrying on conversations; the thought also reveals how Myra's presence makes her uncomfortable and fearful. Joy's desire to laugh out loud shows readers how certain responses and thoughts are often concealed when people engage in dialogue. Finally, Myra's comment 'married' seems to Joy as though it explains why everything goes wrong in Joy's life -- from Michael's death to Joy's 'illness'. When Galloway deprives the dialogue of traditional punctuation, she consciously and meaningfully states that human beings do not speak to each other in inverted commas; she shows her characters interacting with one another as speaking individuals and, as a result, the reader might come to a greater understanding of the individual character's motivations and actions.

⁵⁴Babinec-Galloway, Appendix, p. 337.

Dialogue in the novel does not simply occur between characters; it also goes on between Joy and her inner self. Galloway, though Joy, transcribes much of the novel in diary form; hence, the reader encounters Joy's dialogues with herself without inverted commas and without authorial intrusion and therefore might conceive of her inner dialogues as a representation of her identity. One revealing passage takes place as Joy tries to find out how other people manage their daily lives. One answer that she comes up with is: 'They don't even know there are any questions' (198). Her response lays bare for the reader the heart of the conflict which rages in her psyche:

The difference is *mind*ing. I mind the resultant moral dilemma of having no answers. I never forget the fucking questions. They're always there, accusing me of having no answers yet. If there are no answers there is no point: a terror of absurdity. Logic will force me to do things where desire hasn't a chance. Which leads us to

There is no point, ergo

It has possibly something to do with families therefore possibly also my mother's fault. Maybe you could have hereditary *mind*ing (198).

The ambiguous word 'they're' -- i.e., the questions or the authoritative hospital staff -- reminds Joy that while she tries to find answers to life's questions, answers are not always available. Linklater speculates that Galloway's narrative technique 'conveys the fractured personality of the central character, [. . .] It also makes the assertion that stream of consciousness is as much a visual as a verbal matter'.⁵⁵ Clearly, Joy's stream-of-consciousness, diary-like confessional narrative exposes Joy's fractured mind and subsequent struggle to answer social and moral life questions. The narrative also reveals Joy's oblique 'sanity' because she recognizes that logically there are no answers to many of life's questions and that the difference between her response to this revelation and another individual's rests on the fact that she 'minds'. Galloway removes inverted commas from the dialogue and she allows her reader immediate and direct access to Joy's inner conflict and self-hood; thus, the dialogue transcription and confessional stream-of-consciousness narrative expose how society and culture at times limit an individual's ability to cope with the problems and conflicts encountered in daily living.

⁵⁵'Novelist in the shop window', p. 27.

Another manner in which Galloway manipulates customary literary patterns is through the use of role-playing within the text. Many of these theatrical dialogues are set up within the novel as small plays in which Joy defines herself and another individual as role-players, for example, 'PATIENT-DOCTOR', 'ME-PHONE', 'EMPLOYEE-BOSS', and so on. When Galloway makes Joy a character within her own drama, she gives her the opportunity to carry on a soliloquy with herself. The dialogues also permit Joy to comment upon the other character's words in the text.

Paul arrives at Joy's house toward the end of the dialogue with the box of her personal belongings that she sends to his address from Spain. After it becomes clear to Joy that Paul will answer some questions if she asks him, Joy begins a role-play which is significant in social and psychological terms because she assumes the role of 'HARRIDAN' and allocates Paul the role of 'EXLOVER' or 'EX' (212):

HARRIDAN [Bull by the horns] Are you all right? Are you happy?
 EX Considers for a second. [Tries to look calm while brain is in overdrive and eyes glaze over] Happy enough.
 HARRIDAN [Spitting out more] I keep wondering how you are. You hardly ever come. Am I doing wrong things? Give me clues. Do you want me to pretend not to be..I don't know. What is it you want me to be?
 EX [Sighing] No No It's not that.
 HARRIDAN I can't talk to you any more. I'm scared you want that to be the case. Can I touch you? [Sensation of breaking glass.] I just want to touch your arm. I get the feeling I'm not going to see you again.
 EX [Blushes and looks at floor] Don't be silly. You'll see me. [Both know now this isn't true but no-one is allowed to say it out loud. They have to play out the charade to the end. Anything else would be tacky] (213).

Paul arrives at Joy's flat with the box she sends home from Spain; thus, Paul confronts her with their failed relationship and with the reality of Michael's death. Since this situation clearly makes Joy uncomfortable, she perceives their conversation in dialogue form. Joy becomes a 'Harridan' in this situation not only because she acts out the scripted role of 'Harridan' allocated to the rejected woman, but also because her words expose unresolved feelings and emotional attachment to Paul. Joy's questions and words, 'Am I doing the wrong things: Give me clues. Do you want me to pretend not to be..I don't know. What is it you want me to be?', signal to the reader Joy's desperate cry for companionship and reassurance that their

relationship did not completely fail. On the other hand, Paul's verbal responses, 'Happy enough', 'No No It's not that', and 'Don't be silly You'll see me', in conjunction with Joy's comments in brackets confirms that their conversation simply exists as a charade. Since the reality of these revelations threatens to undermine further Joy's already perilous state of mind, the theatrical dialogues permit Joy some reprieve from her deep emotional pain. Galloway uses these internal role-plays to explore Joy's self-confrontation and to expose how society fails to understand her protagonist's needs. What's more, the dialogues are a means by which Galloway crosses and devises new literary boundaries as she explores the idea of how all individuals in society work from a 'script' in situations that require social role-playing.

Like Margaret Elphinstone, Galloway also uses an italic form throughout the novel. Galloway's scenes in italics are full of broken or displaced sentence structure and also contain broken ideas. The italics reveal Joy's slow remembering of the tragedy of Michael's death and also identify why Joy finds it difficult to cope with her memory versus her reality. A useful concept to keep in mind at this point comes from Gayle Greene. Greene contends that in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, the 'refusal to confront the pain of the past keeps the past continually alive'.⁵⁶ Greene also asserts that Morrison holds an interest in the 'ways in which the past influences today and tomorrow'.⁵⁷ In the novel, the italic sequences reveal how Joy slowly attempts to confront the past which she keeps alive; moreover, the italics reveal how Joy's past influences her disintegrating present.

Joy's memories in italics force the reader to work out how Michael dies and her immediate reaction to his death. One scene that Joy tends to focus on throughout her narrative unravels her uneasy feeling that something is going wrong:

The men float back into the gunsight. Still there, staring. Something lies among them, flat on the tiles. My shirt moves and I tilt, dragging towards the weight. A little boy, five or six, stands with a piece of the shirt in one brown fist. Tugging.

Signora, signora.

*I understand only this word.
He points at the group of men. Their circle grows.*

⁵⁶'Feminist Fiction', p. 314.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*

Signora. Your husband is dead (29-30).

This memory is very visual and simulates film-like techniques; to be specific, the passage initially comes across as a scene from a film. Joy's words seem to come from a film script which introduces characters and describes the setting. However, the description suddenly turns to action when Joy becomes a character in the 'script'; a young boy tugs on her shirt and pulls her toward a group of men. The description again takes over until the young boy announces, 'Signora. Your husband is dead'. The stark realism of the young boy's words are in direct contrast with Joy's surreal allusion to his eyes that 'bloom'; thus, these final words emphasise the harsh reality of Michael's death and foreshadow her subsequent loss of touch with reality.

The sporadic italic memories and stories, like their sporadic style, continue as Joy slowly loses her grip on the world. They also record in a flash-back form how Joy eventually tries to come to terms with her deep grief. Galloway's film-like italic scenes again bring Joy and her memory into contact with popular culture; they also gradually transcribe a change in the way Joy perceives her grief. Joy's memories, for instance, slowly recede into dreams of a field where '*someone is buried under the earth of this purple field. I'm the only one who knows*' (210). Joy dreams this dream again, but the dream changes because she and Michael are now 'somewhere falling apart' (226):

Michael whispers not to tell anyone our secret. He is only pretending. We can meet every so often in this derelict building but I must not tell. The man touches my arm but doesn't look like Michael. When I look hard, I see he has someone else's mouth. I ask when will I be able to die too and he laughs. It is part of the joke. I must always wake up from these dreams and know he's really dead after all. He keeps laughing while he speaks. It's all part of the joke (226).

Joy's dreams, like the memories in italics, might interest readers because they unveil her psychic distress. In the dream, Michael tells Joy they can meet every so often in this 'derelict building'. The derelict building alludes to Joy's fragmented or derelict mind; hence, she subconsciously understands that she will always have access to Michael's memory. Although Joy knows the man in the dream is Michael, he does not have the same mouth. The different mouth might allude to the Dutchman or the German who attempted to breathe life back into Michael's body; this allusion authenticates for Joy the reality of Michael's death. Finally, Galloway ironically twists the word 'joke'. In the dream, Michael laughs at Joy and says, 'it's

all part of the joke'. This sentiment carries irony because first, dead men cannot laugh. Second, even though Joy lives on, her inability to control her actions and thoughts make her life resemble a 'joke'. And third, the fact that Michael and Joy can meet in dreams, yet when Joy wakes up Michael remains dead, is a tantalizing joke and play upon the very finality of death because in the context of the dream, Michael's death is not real.

Galloway's italic sequences, like Elphinstone's, are effective and invigorating because they reveal certain 'truths' about Joy's painful loss through memory. Juxtaposing Joy's memories with her physical inability to maintain her grip on reality, Galloway's italic sequences decentre Joy's past and present reality through memory and daily experience; accordingly, the author outlines the possibilities for psychic resolution and implies that her protagonist will have the option to move beyond mental fragmentation.

Galloway's disruptive narrative structure does not simply relate the negative aspects of character fragmentation; in contrast, the postmodern experimental text also allows the reader to see small ways in which Joy makes positive steps toward controlling her psychic dissolution. One positive measure that Joy takes to command her mind centers on her habit of writing lists which answer questions for her and help sort out her feelings. These lists are important because they symbolize an intellectual effort on Joy's part to impose order on her chaotic mind and life. Although women traditionally use lists for shopping and domestic work, Joy subverts this female ordering technique by using the lists to clarify her need to search for direction and organization.

Work does not present problems for Joy because she recognizes a role in which her responsibilities as a teacher are laid out:

I teach children.

I teach them :

1. routine
2. when to keep their mouths shut
3. how to put up with boredom and unfairness
4. how to sublimate anger politely
5. not to go into teaching

That isn't true. And then again, it is (12).

Even though the list of what Joy teaches the children primarily asserts negativity and repression, the list does offer her insight into her ambiguous role as a teacher. While the list

offers Joy insight, it does not give her the motivation to go to work on a regular basis; therefore, Joy devises a list of 'reasons' to go to work:

- I have to go to work because
1. it will be warmer than here;
 2. it brings home the bacon;
 3. there will be people (70).

These two lists elucidate what Joy's role as a teacher comprises and make tangible the physical and psychological benefits associated with her job. The lists challenge Joy to define herself and her needs in such a way that she must come to some understanding of her needs as a woman and an individual in society and, at the same time, disclose Joy's deep need to create form out of chaos.

Perhaps the most intriguing list that Joy writes for herself while in hospital summarizes the history of suicide among women in her family. Joy presents '*The Evidence*' (199) for her 'case' and creates a 'courtroom' drama out of her illness. While the men in Joy's family die from less interesting causes like 'coronary thromboses, bronchial disorders, mining accidents. Even some natural causes. With my father it was booze' (199), the women are different:

1. My maternal grandmother died in a house fire. She laid out her marriage certificate, her teeth and glass eye in a row before she went to bed and left an electric fire burning in the corner of the room. The smoke filled the street. The coroner said it was an accident. [. . .]
2. Aunt Connie took an overdose of painkillers. She had been refusing to eat for weeks [. . .]
3. My aunt Iris jumped over an iron parapet onto a railway track. [. . .]
4. One of the cousins (I forget which) drove into a wall at fifty miles an hour. No-one was allowed to see the body. [. . .]
5. My mother walked into the sea. Not the first time she tried something like that but the most unusual one. It didn't kill her. She had time to come round and have four heart-attacks in hospital first. [. . .] Two days back home she had another attack and smashed her head when she fell on the fire surround (199).

This list of female suicide paints a devastating portrait of the inability of women in Joy's family to escape the female disease of depression and to assert any ideas of self-worth or self-knowledge. Even though no clear reasons are given for her relative's suicides, the reader can assume that while suicide does not necessarily liberate women from male oppression because death is final, the act of suicide entails an independent release for the women in their struggle to determine some kind of freedom from oppression.

Although this list of female suicide may seem too exaggerated to be true, the level of fictional exaggeration or 'truth' is not at issue. Joy's account of female depression is important and helps to explain her current psychic crisis; however, it is more significant that Joy delivers this information in list form. Clearly, the list illuminates that it is devastating to think about female depression, suicide, and death in this format. The list of evidence holds implications for the reader because the possibility exists that Joy simply sees herself as another number of the familial casualty list. Yet, the list points out to Joy that suicide does not offer an attractive alternative to female depression and life's pain; therefore, one might conclude that Galloway uses this desolate account of hereditary suicide to convey the depth of her character's dilemma. Joy's lists, then, expound and unravel the 'facts' of her 'case', they impose order on her chaotic condition and force Joy to acknowledge that she needs to take responsibility for her self and her actions.

The most positive relationship that Joy enjoys in the novel is with her friend and colleague Marianne. Although Marianne never actually appears in person in the novel, the reader comes to know her through Joy's letters. The letters to Marianne in America are another imaginative narrative construction and one of the few instances in which Joy honestly and lucidly communicates. The letters represent a lifeline for Joy; they are tangible means of working through her problems with a female friend who honestly cares for her health and her psychological well-being.

The letters to Marianne reveal facts about Joy's hospital experience. They describe the hospital's layout, her bed, and the daily routine of sleep and pills. For Joy, the letters detail a lived experience in the context of a psychiatric institution and delineate the actual process of being mentally ill: for instance, how doctors and nurse treat Joy, how she relates to other patients, and how the patients in general are treated as naughty, unstable children who need 'help'. Still, Joy's letters to Marianne function on a deeper level; they allow Joy to determine what she really wants and how she really feels:

I'm trying, Marianne. I do want to know how to get better. I wait to see doctors but there is nothing fixed. Maybe this is part of the therapy. I don't know. Ros says she has seen a psychiatrist twice. She has been here a long time. I know I have to try (121).

And:

A critical time is coming very soon. I have to think about all sorts of things I can't bear to. I have to get better. I have to get better because a) it'll stop other people worrying about me; b) I'll stop being a drain on the NHS; c) it has to be better than this. All theory, however. I can't muster any faith in its being true (179).

In these letters, Joy tells herself and Marianne that she tries, that she wants to know how to get better. The letters offer Joy a safe alternative to expressing her confusion and frustration with strangers because even though the letters do not respond to Joy, the written words allow Joy to reveal her vulnerability and fears without threat of further psychological oppression. Since Marianne cannot immediately answer Joy's thoughts and questions, Joy freely verbalizes that she has to get better for a number of reasons, but most of all because surviving 'has to be better than this'. Unlike the letters to 'Dear Kathy' in the women's magazines, Joy's letters to Marianne do not have a forced jollity or intimacy, nor are they full of clichés. Rather, Joy's letters are filled with the simple, hard facts of her 'illness', depression, and coping mechanisms; consequently, the letters give readers insight into Joy's psychic dissolution as well as her desire to be healed.

Marianne and Joy's friendship and relationship is also important because they maintain a reciprocal friendship. Marianne and Joy exchange details about their daily lives through the mail and each woman finds strength in the knowledge that someone else makes a great effort to keep a long-distance connection alive. Marianne supports Joy through her emotional crisis; her letters also give Joy feedback on the hospital:

It's so good to get your letters. Well, maybe not good in view of what's in them but you know what I mean. Foresthouse sounds like hell. No it doesn't: it sounds like the staffroom. I think you'll last (149).

Marianne compares the hospital with the staffroom at Joy's school; thus, Marianne provides Joy with comic relief while relating the hospital to Joy's own experience. Once Marianne identifies the connection between the hospital and Joy's job, then Joy might see the humour in both situations. Moreover, Joy can begin to understand that her position in the hospital hierarchy is similar to her position in the school/staffroom hierarchy and, as a result, she may

learn to cope with her lowly position in the hospital by comparing it with her lowly position in the school.⁵⁸

Clearly, Joy's letters to Marianne allow her to verbalize and detail her healing process. Joy's letters accord her the opportunity to express her feelings about the hospital and her illness to a female friend who understands Joy's needs, but who will not push her to recover too quickly. The letters foster greater trust between the two women, so much so that Joy finally writes:

I wrote to everyone who came to see me and told them I'd be at home most of the time from now on. I haven't OK'd this but I have made up my mind. And I told the agency to sell the cottage. I don't know if I am making good decisions or right decisions. I am just making decisions. That is one step further forward. I am trying not to mind about making mistakes (227).

Again, Joy's letters to Marianne are not filled with forced jollity or intimacy because the intimacy already exists in their relationship. Even though Joy's final letter to Marianne exposes fear about making decisions, it does expose Joy's desire to free herself from emotional pain. The letters between Joy and Marianne simply reveal positive relations between women in the novel, and the strength that may thrive in individual women when they work together to support and encourage one another.

Galloway uses an experimental narrative structure to reconstruct her female character as a female subject. She interrogates and contests existing literary structures and practices; thus, she creates, in a very real sense, a new system of representational practices for women writers. Testing the confines of narrative structure, Galloway also challenges the literary canon and her experimental postmodern narrative format tenders new ways of seeing women and exposes the cultural conditioning which constructs women as subjects in society and culture.

Style and Language

Galloway's literary style and language are also imaginative and powerful. Even though the novel focuses on a young woman who loses her grip on the world and presents a first person subjective account of psychic fragmentation and descent into 'madness', the tone of the writing

⁵⁸For some examples of how Joy's colleagues view her, see pp. 75 and 224-5.

always remains matter-of-fact. Joy simply relates the events of her day and objects and activities around her.

In the beginning of the novel, Joy sits alone in the dark. One of the reasons Joy gives for this occupation is, 'brightness disagrees with me: it hurts my eyes, wastes electricity and encourages moths, all sorts of things' (7). This descriptive, yet matter-of-fact imagery allows the reader to draw individual conclusions about Joy's reality and her depressed state. Galloway's effective delivery of this deadpan narrative continues throughout the novel. For example, Joy describes the windy road she lives on thus:

The twisty roads are there to prevent the kids being run over. The roads are meant to make drivers slow down so they get the chance to see and stop in time. This is a dual malfunction. Hardly anyone has a car. If one does appear on the horizon, the kids use the bends to play chicken, deliberately lying low and leaping out at the last minute for fun. The roads end up more conducive to child death than if they had been straight (13).

Joy's unemotional description exposes the absurdity of twisty roads. Her unaffected language merely explains how the road's purpose has been twisted: while the roads are meant to be safe for children, they end up being more conducive to child death. Joy's plain words, then, ironically inject a funny 'twist' into the narrative.

Robert Crawford concludes, 'what the reader keeps coming back to is Galloway's clear delight in words. It is this, more than anything else that makes her novel outstanding'.⁵⁹ A passage which supports Crawford's assertion occurs when Joy lodges another functional description of her final visit to Michael's grave:

He was here alone for a while: now there are four more. The headstone is white with black letters, just the name and the dates. Start and finish: both quantities known.
I count it out. Nine years between us now: my birthday makes the distance shorter. This also means one day, I will overtake. The squares of turf are still visible but healing over. I think about him being under there but feel nothing much. Over my head, cloud gathering: rolling dustballs into one dirty corner of the sky. I forgot to bring gloves. [. . .] I'm here and Michael isn't. I want to get out of the cold (229).

In this scene, Joy's unadorned characterization is quite disturbing. Joy notes that while Michael was alone for a while, four more people have joined him. These words convey the knowledge that time moves on -- that people always die and children are always born. Joy also

⁵⁹'Review of *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*', p. 61.

tells us that the turf around Michael's grave is still visible but healing over. Like Michael's grave, Joy's pain remains visible; yet, as her letters to Marianne tell us, Joy's wounds are also slowly healing over. Most important, though, Joy matter-of-factly observes, 'I'm here and Michael isn't. I want to get out of the cold'. With these final words, Galloway implies that Joy makes a conscious decision to get out of the cold and move beyond Michael's tragic death. While Joy's acknowledgment that in nine years she will surpass Michael's age may be disturbing, the thought also transmits hope. If Joy knows that in nine years she will overtake Michael, then perhaps she will overcome her depression and fragmentation and come to understand herself as a unique and powerful woman.

Wit and Humour: Emphasis on 'Joke', 'Acceptable' Humour, and 'Unacceptable' Humour

The Trick is to Keep Breathing is a serious and dark novel which follows a young woman's descent into desolation; however, Galloway frequently alleviates the oppressive narrative tone by interjecting wit and humour in numerous places throughout the text. Galloway plays with the idea of 'joke' and tests the limits of 'acceptable' and black humour; in this manner, she calls into question received ideas about wit and humour and, at the same time, adds comic relief to a narrative full of emotional pain, hopelessness, and despair.

Since every individual has a unique sense of humour, the word 'joke' holds different meanings for different people. For some, the word joke might bring to mind something that is said or done to provoke laughter; for others, a joke might be used in a negative construction to humiliate another person. Even though Joy cannot laugh or see hidden meaning in her deep despair, she appears to recognize the importance of laughter in the healing process. Joy constantly reiterates the word joke throughout her confessional narrative in an attempt to understand herself in relation to her disintegrating mind and her position in a disorienting and confusing world.

One example of Joy's attempt to find humour in her life comes in the cultural cliché 'there is no such thing as a free lunch'. After Michael dies, people keep coming to visit Joy. Joy ultimately feels guilty about these visits and since she knows that there is no such thing as a free lunch, she wonders 'when the price came' (46). As the cliché tells us, free lunches -- or,

in this case, visits -- always have strings attached. Since Joy cannot find the strings attached to the visits, she continues to contemplate the idea of the 'free lunch':

There is No Such Thing as a Free Lunch.
There is no such thing as Lunch.
Joke (46).

The singular word 'joke' appears in the narrative and ironically reminds Joy and the reader that for Joy, lunch and no lunch is indeed a joke. Even though she tells herself that the cliché is supposed to be a 'joke', for Joy, 'lunch' never comes 'free'. In fact, Joy has to pay for her lunch in more ways than one.

For instance, Joy pays for her lunch by way of calories; once she takes in the food, she must vomit it back up in order to control her weight.⁶⁰ Similarly, lunch is not free for Joy because when she vomits her food, she also wastes the time and money her friends spend on meals and meal preparation. Finally, lunch or dinner is not free for Joy in her relationship with Tony because after he takes her out on a 'date', she knows that the 'kissing was taken for granted. He had paid good money, after all.' (174). The cliché 'there is no such thing as a free lunch' makes people laugh because obligations are inevitably connected to the free lunch. While Joy emphasizes the irony of the word joke, the reader becomes all too aware that Joy does not have free lunches; rather, food and meals, like visits from strangers, hold multiple meanings and complications.

Another interesting reiteration and play on the word joke occurs when Joy stops to visit Marianne's mother Ellen. In Joy's mind, Ellen 'thinks food is medicine' (85) and that 'food is love' (85). When Joy comes to visit, Ellen always offers her food to help Joy recover from the painful loss and to show how much she loves her daughter's friend. On one occasion that Ellen asks Joy to join her for 'a spot of lunch' (85). Joy responds:

Lovely, I say. I'm starving.
It isn't even a joke (85).

The ironic emphasis on the word joke in these lines subverts its meaning. The word joke at this point in the narrative reveals that Joy literally starves from hunger, and that she also starves for love, affection, and companionship. Paul Lewis believes that 'humor and fear often seem

⁶⁰Since Joy does not have control over her life, vomiting her food and starving herself offers a measure of absolute control.

to arise together or in sequence not because fear causes humor but because they have a common origin in incongruity'.⁶¹ Lewis's proposition illuminates Galloway's use of the word joke because her protagonist's fear and humour are often incongruous with cultural and social norms. Since Joy's humour and fear are often rooted in internal and external conflicts, Galloway emphasizes the word joke in order to define a greater understanding of her character's weak position in the world.

Galloway also launches an inquiry into the notion of socially 'acceptable' jokes and humour in *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*. Mary Douglas defines the joke as a 'play upon form. It brings into relation disparate elements in such a way that one accepted pattern is challenged by the appearance of another which in some way was hidden in the first'.⁶² Jokes typically play with form and bring into relation disparate elements. Jokes also normally challenge an acceptable pattern by introducing hidden patterns within the first. Since jokes more often than not are made at another individual's expense, it seems pertinent to ask what makes a joke socially 'acceptable'.

When Joy thanks Tony for the flowers he sends her at Foresthouse, Tony responds by telling Joy a joke:

Q: How many psychiatrists does it take to change a lightbulb?

A: One. But the lightbulb must really want to change (173).

A reader's initial reaction to this joke, like Joy's, might be to laugh, albeit slightly uncomfortably. This reaction would probably be considered a 'normal' response. However, this psychiatrist joke appears a further three times in a narrative about mental illness which suggests that the joke holds wider implications than the opening laugh.⁶³ The joke perhaps offers a socially and culturally 'acceptable' method of dealing with individual feelings of insecurity and fear which commonly arise when presented with a psychiatrist or someone who attends psychiatric treatment. Psychiatrists are professional doctors who theoretically 'cure' or 'heal' those people who suffer from 'sickness' which affects the mental faculties; as a result, the psychiatrist comes to represent a threat or a taboo to any individual who considers

⁶¹*Comic Effects: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Humor in Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 5.

⁶²*Implicit Meanings* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 96.

⁶³See, for instance, pp. 183, 200, and 219.

herself/himself to be 'stable'. Since those people who seek out the help of a psychiatrist are periodically viewed as 'abnormal' or 'unstable', one socially acceptable means of coping with this uncomfortable relationship seems to be making a joke about it. The joke, then, effectively undermines and attacks the psychiatrist and the person who willingly or unwillingly consults them.⁶⁴

Joy understands that Tony tells this psychiatrist joke as an 'acceptable' and subversive way of dealing with his awkward feelings towards her stay in the hospital. Galloway repeats this joke throughout Joy's narrative for equally subversive reasons. When Joy reiterates the psychiatrist joke to herself, she focuses on the punchline, 'but the lightbulb must really want to change' (200) because, 'this is of the essence. The defendant is afraid of health' (200). The psychiatrist joke for Joy holds an entirely different agenda than it does for Tony. Whereas Tony tells the joke to release tension, Joy subverts the joke by recognizing within it her desire to stay unwell. The psychiatrist joke sums up Joy's wish to remain 'ill' because 'illness' absolves her of responsibility for her actions. The joke in this situation becomes 'acceptable' because at the heart of the joke, Joy draws a brutally honest conclusion about herself. The joke permits her to realize that 'the defendant's entirely selfish interest in the state of sickness is undisputed' (200). In this context, the psychiatrist joke forces Joy to make a conscious decision between ending her continual pain with suicide or finding the strength to come to terms with her grief.

Galloway's inquiry into 'acceptable' wit and humour also includes simple observations. When Joy visits Ellen, she watches her knit: 'dipping and folding strands of hairy yellow wool' (34). Although Ellen thinks the sweater will be lovely on her daughter, Joy thinks, 'it'll make Marianne look like a car sponge' (34). Joy's comment raises a visual image which invites laughter and also alleviates the oppressive narrative tone. Likewise, when Joy talks about her desire to commit suicide, she toys with:

pills, the fresh collection in my locker saved for emergencies. I toy with broken glass and razor blades, juggernauts and the tops of tall stairwells. I toy. But there's no real enthusiasm. My family have no

⁶⁴I would argue a similar case for the geriatric joke on p. 31. People make jokes about old age because they fear it; therefore, it becomes a socially 'acceptable' means of dealing with the uncomfortable issues associated with aging and death.

real talent in that direction. Every time I try to work out how to do the thing properly it cheers me up (199).

The very idea that Joy toys with suicide is not funny; yet, her verbal exploration of the various methods and her deadpan conclusion that she does not have 'real enthusiasm' because her family has 'no real talent in that direction' both surprises and shocks the reader. As a result, when Joy concludes that it 'cheers' her up when she works out 'how to do the thing properly', her insincere attitude implies that she holds no real interest in suicide. When Joy pokes fun at suicide in such a matter-of-fact tone, the passage, like the image of Marianne as a car sponge, becomes socially 'acceptable' because it operates to lift the narrative once again above complete hopelessness and despair.

In addition to Joy's ironic and 'acceptable' humour, Galloway introduces an element of black humour or what might be called 'unacceptable' wit and humour into the novel. For example, when Joy is at Foresthouse, a gynaecologist comes to see her. The gynaecologist does not wear a name badge, he does not tell Joy his name, nor does he ask for her name. Instead, the doctor immediately asks Joy, 'if it was true I didn't menstruate' (140). Joy answers 'straight out: It's true, I said. I don't menstruate. I gave it up to save money' (140). Even though the doctor does not find her comment in the least bit funny, Joy cannot stop herself from laughing. Many readers, especially female readers, might be struck by the hilarity of Joy's words for two reasons. First, women obviously cannot give up menstruating; thus, the very thought of wielding some kind of control over this biological process is amusing. Second, Joy's announcement that she gives it up to save money provides comic relief because, as most women are aware, not menstruating would certainly save a small amount of money.

On a deeper level, this scene provides black humour because the reader sees Joy trying to gain a measure of control and power in a powerless situation. The male gynaecologist represents complete and total authority over Joy's body and her reproductive cycle. Even though Joy resides in a psychiatric unit, the gynaecologist approaches Joy in a cold, clinical manner; since he exhibits a complete disregard for her precarious mental state, the doctor strips Joy of her femininity, her dignity, and humanity even before he removes her clothing. Galloway allows her protagonist to regain some measure of control in her equally blatant

disregard for the gynaecologist's authority and power. Joy's 'unacceptable' comic reply to the doctor's indifferent query undermines his position in the medical hierarchy and awards her a small measure of power and control in a situation where she previously has none.⁶⁵

Another scene in which Galloway infuses a high degree of black or 'unacceptable' humour and wit also takes place in the hospital. Joy sits in the dayroom and knits while a movie for the patients entitled 'ZOMBIE FLESH-EATERS' (183) begins. For the reader, in and of itself, the title of the film asserts black and ironic humour. As Joy tells it, the patients at Foresthouse are woken up to take 'sleeping pills/anti-depressants/tranquillisers/suppressants' (139). The patients are in theory walking 'zombies'. The women and men only rise to take more pills and tablets which reduce visual perception and thought processes; moreover the drugs act in some respect like 'flesh-eaters' because psycho-tropic drugs usually carry varying degrees of physical and emotional side-effects. Placed in the context of a psychiatric unit, the title of the film 'ZOMBIE FLESH-EATERS' is funny because it mirrors the physical and mental state of the hospital patients; furthermore, the very idea that any authority in a psychiatric ward allows patients to view an entirely mindless and destructive film such as the title implies cannot be anything but black and sardonic humour.

Different levels of humour and wit enter *The Trick Is To Keep Breathing* at any given moment. Galloway experiments with 'acceptable' humour and frequently provides black comedy to relieve the desperation which infiltrates Joy's narrative. Michael Neve suggests, 'jokes, like dreams, and like parataxis or slips of the tongue, express repressed or unconscious wishes. And, as Freud rightly observes, the boundary of the joke, like the unconscious, is that it does not have one'.⁶⁶ In the novel, jokes do not have a boundary because Galloway employs light and dark humour in Joy's narrative to call into question received ideas about femininity, authority, institutions, and power. Margaret Elphinstone suggests that Joy Stone 'stuck in contemporary Ayrshire, can go no further than madness'.⁶⁷ Even though it remains

⁶⁵This scene with the gynaecologist is significant because while the doctor recognizes that Joy no longer menstruates, his only concern seems to be whether or not she is pregnant. No doctor in the hospital ever addresses Joy's eating disorder; as a result, her eating disorder is amplified and made important by the doctors' omission.

⁶⁶'Freud's Theory of Humour, Wit and Jokes', in *Laughing Matters: A Serious Look at Humour*, ed. by John Durant and Jonathan Miller (Essex/New York: Longman, 1988), pp. 35-43 (p. 37).

⁶⁷'Contemporary Feminist Fantasy', p. 48.

arguable whether or not Joy completely escapes 'madness', Galloway gives her protagonist a sense of humour which does move the narrative beyond utter 'madness'.

Christine Brooke-Rose theorizes that the different view of the world needed for high comedy, 'apparently not acquired by women, might, however, also explain the lack of success (broadly speaking) of women in "postmodern" experiment, where outrageous humour is one of the chief ingredients on the male side'.⁶⁸ Galloway pokes fun at the emotional, physical, and institutional boundaries which threaten to enclose and encode Joy as a passive female subject. She employs the outrageous humour which characterizes successful postmodern novels; thus, one might argue that Galloway's wit and humour offer her character an alternative to dwelling solely in hopelessness and despair and simultaneously assert a successful Scottish postmodern feminist literary enterprise.

The Ambiguous Conclusion

One question that remains for the reader at the end of the novel concerns whether or not Joy uncovers a positive resolution to her depression and pain. Following her final italic memory of her last night with Michael, the reader meets Joy in the bathroom. She cuts her hair short and colours 'it purple with permanent dye I bought ages ago and never used' (232). Cutting long hair to a short style has often been a metaphor for women who begin to assert 'control' over their lives; thus, it naturally follows that Joy continues to make startling decisions about her disintegrating position in culture.⁶⁹

Joy opens her box from Spain and finds that the 'things are only dimly recognisable' (233). She keeps one or two items from the box and throws the rest away because they have 'nothing to do with me any more' (233). The narrative continues to chronicle Joy's decisions to get on with her life and characterizes Joy for the first time as calm and collected. She quietly listens to Debussy and watches her Christmas tree lights while sipping whisky. Additionally, Joy makes the striking statement, 'maybe I could learn to swim' (235). Like Chopin's Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening*, and like Tennant's Eve in *Sisters and Strangers*, the sea offers a

⁶⁸*Stories, theories, and things*, p. 274.

⁶⁹When Joy cuts hair, readers might be reminded that Jane Wild carries out a similar activity in Tennant's *The Bad Sister*.

new landscape for women.⁷⁰ Susan Rosowski argues that many women awaken to the limitation of the female experience as they try to find value in a world defined by love and marriage.⁷¹ Rosowski goes on to suggest that in the female *bildungsroman*, women discover that the 'art of living is difficult or impossible: it is an awakening to limitations'.⁷² Joy awakens to the limitations of her experience in *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*; even so, she offers a direct challenge to social and cultural limitations confining social codes and practices by forgiving herself. She hears herself say 'quite distinctly, my own voice in the empty house':

I forgive you.

Nobody needs to know I said it. Nobody needs to know (235).

It does not matter whether Joy's statement 'I forgive you' refers to forgiving Michael for dying, or to forgiving herself for losing her grip on the world and descending into the traditional form of female illness, depression, after Michael's death. Metzstein contends, 'it is the stage of "the letting go" that Joy Stone needs to reach, and in fact does, by the end of the novel'.⁷³ Metzstein's hypothesis is arguable because Joy's state of mind at the end of the novel is left ambiguous. As Galloway remarks, the end of the novel remains ambiguous because Joy 'doesn't know either, why should you know if she doesn't know?'.⁷⁴ While the reader cannot determine whether or not Joy 'lets go', one can see the potential for hope and healing in Joy's future in her final words and actions.

There are no clear messages or answers in Galloway's novel. Many sections of the text and Joy's comments are extremely ambiguous because firstly, culture and society often present women with ambiguous roles and choice and secondly, mental 'illness' and depression are by nature ambiguous. The narrative form often confuses the reader and asks the reader, like the character, to put together fragments and memories and, in doing so, 'to reconstruct and generate a story'.⁷⁵ When readers reconstruct the non-linear narrative, one meets Galloway's

⁷⁰For Joy, learning to swim also means she cannot, like her mother, try to end her life by walking into the sea.

⁷¹Susan J. Rosowski, 'The Novel of Awakening', in *The Voyage In*, pp. 49-68 (p. 49).

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³'Of Myths and Men', p. 138. Metzstein takes the line 'the letting go' from 'After Great Pain' by Emily Dickinson.

⁷⁴Babinec-Galloway, Appendix, p. 340.

⁷⁵Crawford, 'Review of *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*', p. 60.

sense of despair for her character and for women's lowly and ambiguous position in the social and cultural order. Galloway does, however, lighten the mood of the novel by injecting moments of humour with an ingenious playfulness with words; consequently, the reader leaves Galloway's novel less dispirited and more hopeful for a change in women's lowly position within the ideological and discursive order.

The Trick is to Keep Breathing attempts to expose and criticize the social and medical discourses which subjugate women and women's strength in society. Experimenting with narrative form and 'madness', Galloway consciously or unconsciously supports John Berger's theory that 'the way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe'.⁷⁶ Once women in Scotland and around the world begin querying the cultural consensus on women's roles and position in society, then women's knowledge will increase. The questioning will allow individuals to defy conventional representations of femininity and female knowledge and, therefore, make way for new ways of seeing and presenting women to the world.

⁷⁶*Ways of Seeing* (London/Harmondsworth: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1979), p. 8. First published (London/Harmondsworth: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1972).

Chapter Seven *Conclusion*

Thought has always worked through opposition.
--Hélène Cixous

Cixous rightly notes that thought works through opposition. Emma Tennant, Margaret Elphinstone, and Janice Galloway are three contemporary Scottish women writers who are rethinking the ways in which women are represented in life. The six novels in this thesis challenge and oppose existing notions of femininity and womanhood in fictional form. Tennant's *The Bad Sister*, *Sisters and Strangers: A Moral Tale*, and *Faustine*, Elphinstone's *The Incomer* and *A Sparrow's Flight*, and Galloway's *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* expose how culture traditionally constructs female roles which are not always relevant to all women. As the novels show us, dominant hierarchies infiltrate every aspect of life and when women are forced to accept passive and subordinate roles, they often struggle with emotional confusion and psychic dissolution; or, as in Elphinstone's writing, when the ideological and discursive constraints are lifted, positive images of femininity and womanhood prevail. The six novels call into question received ideas about female subjectivity and reveal how woman and men are socially constructed to enact limiting and confining 'acceptable' roles.

Tennant, Elphinstone, and Galloway play with experimental literary forms that incorporate elements of the Scottish literary tradition; namely, these writers engage with doubling, duality, the supernatural, fantastical fictional worlds, and the oral tradition. The experimentation with conventional literary forms estranges readers from the text, defamiliarizes and denaturalizes existing cultural codes and practices, and asserts a postmodern literary agenda. The experimental narrative techniques also tend to mirror and mimic how the female characters are also alienated, estranged, and marginalized from society and culture.

These three women writers, with their challenge to existing representations of female subjectivity in literature and in life, as well as their interest in querying conventional literary forms and constraints, appear to be participating in an avant-garde literary movement. In the Western world, the term avant-garde has often been associated with collective projects. These collective projects are usually linked to some kind of 'artistic experimentation and a critique of

outmoded artistic practices with an ideological critique of bourgeois thought and a desire for social change'.¹ Moreover, avant-garde movements tend to launch critical attacks from the margins, a space which habitually remains free from social conventions and expectations.

Avant-garde fiction, like postmodern fiction, defies traditional criteria for narrative intelligibility and coherence. Susan Rubin Suleiman defines the nature of the avant-garde:

Where the reader expects logical and temporal development, avant-garde fiction offers repetition or else the juxtaposition of apparently random events; where the reader expects consistency, it offers contradiction; where the reader expects characters, it offers disembodied voices; where the reader expects the sense of an ending, it offers merely a stop. Even typographically, it may assault the reader, either by offering fragments with no indication of the order in which to read them [. . .] Or else by confronting us [. . .] With several hundred pages of unbroken, unpunctuated words forming, apparently, a single monstrous sentence.²

Robert Crawford looks for this kind of a collective avant-garde movement in Scottish literature. He contends that in Scotland, 'avant-garde work has tended to be produced in isolation', and that the Scottish avant-garde often 'seems to be a single individual'.³ While Crawford rightly raises the question of a contemporary avant-garde movement in Scotland, his assertions are arguable.

Crawford's thoughts about the existence of a Scottish literary avant-garde are useful because he contemplates a number of writers who may or may not be connected to a specific avant-garde movement. Even so, Crawford's conclusion that avant-garde work in Scotland tends to be produced in isolation and that the Scottish avant-garde seems to be a single individual are limited for two reasons. First, Crawford explicitly states that Scotland's 'audience for "advanced" writing is bound to be minute, and the audience for "advanced" poetry even smaller'.⁴ Crawford's comments that Scotland has such a 'minute' audience for 'advanced' reading are patronizing and elitist. Without establishing evidence for such general claims, Crawford sets himself up as a member of the avant-garde literary elite who becomes one of the privileged few who can appreciate and consume 'advanced' writing, whatever that

¹Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics, and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 12.

²Ibid, p. 36.

³'Thoughts About a Scottish Literary Avant-Garde', in *Gairfish*, pp. 26-31 (p. 28).

⁴Ibid, p. 30.

may be. Crawford's essay also fails to provide a comprehensive account of the avant-garde movement in Scotland because, yet again, his analysis denies the female voice. Crawford's essay, like his text *Devolving English Literature*, does not record the voice of any woman writer save Liz Lochhead.⁵

The fertile Scottish women's literary imagination appears to reflect a collective avant-garde. The postmodern novels of Tennant, Elphinstone, and Galloway reflect the constraints of contemporary society on women and their ability to achieve success or access to traditionally male arenas. Their novels also focus on the negative effect ideological and discursive institutions such as education, language, medicine, among others, have on a woman's ability to construct positive subjectivity. In this way, Tennant, Elphinstone, and Galloway may be linked with the historical avant-garde's 'iconoclastic attack on cultural institutions and on traditional modes of representation' which:

presupposed a society in which high art played an essential role in legitimizing hegemony, or, to put it in more neutral terms, to support a cultural establishment and its claims to aesthetic knowledge. It had been the achievement of the historical avantgarde to demystify and to undermine the legitimizing discourse of high art in European society.⁶

Tennant, Elphinstone, and Galloway, as members of a contemporary Scottish women's avant-garde literary movement, attack the traditional cultural structures which support male dominance and restrict women's movement in political, cultural, and social systems. Demystifying and undermining the 'legitimizing discourses' of 'high art', in this instance novel writing, the postmodern experimental narrative structures of Tennant, Elphinstone, and Galloway, their fragmented and questing female subjects, as well as their subversive use of humour and satire implicitly interrogate the literary and discursive institutions which encode women as inferior subjects. This avant-garde literary movement does not alienate an 'unadvanced' reading audience; rather, these three writers invite multi-faceted reader response by expressing pluralism and freedom for women from the constraints of the cultural order.

⁵Crawford mentions Lochhead in his conclusion that the 'closest we come to a metropolitan avant-garde is in the contemporary group of Glasgow writers which includes Alasdair Gray, Edwin Morgan, Liz Lochhead, Tom Leonard, and James Kelman'. Ibid, p. 28. Lochhead's inclusion in this list is merely perfunctory as she is always mentioned in connection with both Gray and Kelman. Since Lochhead remains in the popular perception one of few Scottish women writers, Crawford does not advance the study of women's writing in Scotland.

⁶Andreas Huyssen, 'Mapping the Postmodern', in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, pp. 234-77 (p. 245). First published *New German Critique*, 33 (1984), pp. 5-52.

The collective project avant-garde with which Tennant, Elphinstone, and Galloway engage is a milestone in Scottish literature as well as in British literature. In an article that laments the death of new British writing talent, Lorna Sage complains that one reason for this lack of talent is a lack of a 'tradition':

There isn't an ancestral 'tree' to climb, a tradition of what it means to be a British writer. That was lost (depending on your view) with modernist internationalism -- the generation of Lawrence, Joyce, Woolf -- or petered out with Evelyn Waugh and Ivy Compton Burnett, or died with Amis, Wain, Brain, etc (and Larkin, who was nearly a novelist, after all) in the post-war years, in self-parodying parochialism.⁷

Sage's comments are interesting because she argues that there is no 'ancestral' tree for British writers to climb on; yet, she only mentions, with the exception of Joyce, Woolf, and Burnett, male English writers. Sage clearly remains unaware of Scottish literature and, in particular, Scottish women writers like Tennant, Elphinstone, and Galloway who betoken a collective avant-garde literary movement that confronts the marginalized position women hold in culture. One might conclude, then, that Tennant, Elphinstone, and Galloway, along with numerous other Scottish women writers, envision new representations of women in the world and offer British literature a new ancestral 'tree' to climb on.

Tennant, Elphinstone, and Galloway are not alone in their revisionary literary enterprise. Many Scottish women writers, past and present, whose work would also benefit from detailed critical analyses, challenge cultural and social practices in fiction in order to effect feminine liberation. While these writers are beyond the scope of the present thesis, their work deserves scholarly attention. It seems prudent, though, to take into account Linda Hutcheon's cautionary words: 'As Nicholas Zurbrugg has argued, too many of the theorists of postmodernism have simplified and misread the complexities and creative potential of postmodern cultural practices'.⁸ Clearly, to briefly discuss several novels at the end of this detailed study of three contemporary Scottish women writers would be to oversimplify and misread the complexities and creative potential of the fiction of several other Scottish women writers. Even so, one can say that Scottish women writers, past and present, show similar

⁷'The tangled roots of what we write', *Observer*, 2 May 1993, p. 59.

⁸*A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 19

interests in contesting patriarchal political and social structures, in challenging passive representations of women in literature and in life, and in liberating women from restrictive and confining roles in culture.

Some examples of novels which attempt to liberate women from restrictive and confining roles in culture in the modern period are: Catherine Carswell's *The Camomile* and *Open the Door!*; Willa Muir's *Imagined Corners* and *Mrs Ritchie*; Naomi Mitchison's *We Have Been Warned* and *The Corn King and The Spring Queen*; Nan Shepherd's *The Weatherhouse* and *The Quarry Wood*; and Nancy Brysson Morrison's *The Gowk Storm*.

In recent years, women writers in Scotland have been overtly challenging restrictions and limitations imposed on women in culture; for instance, Jessie Kesson's *Another Time, Another Place*, *The Glitter of Mica*, and *The White Bird Passes* as well as Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and *The Public Image*. Likewise, contemporary women writers are also contesting the ideological and discursive structures that limit women's access to positive female roles. Some examples of novels which attempt revision of this kind are: Alison Fell's *The Bad Box* and *Every Move You Make*; Shena Mackay's short story collections *Dreams of Dead Women's Handbags* and *Babies in Rhinestones*; Dilys Rose's short story collection *Our Lady of the Pickpockets*; Candia McWilliam's novels *A Case of Knives* and *A Little Stranger*; Alison Kennedy's short story collection *Night Geometry and Garscadden Trains* and her novel *Looking for the Possible Dance*; and finally, Sian Hayton's *Cells of Knowledge* and *Hidden Daughters*.⁹ The above catalogue of women writers who are beyond the scope of this thesis set an exciting agenda for scholars interested in women's writing and cultural politics.

Although the three writers in this thesis are 'well-known' in Scotland, outside the Scottish literary establishment few examinations of their work have been undertaken; this tends to relegate their literary work to the margins. The six close readings of novels by Emma Tennant, Margaret Elphinstone, and Janice Galloway which draw on contemporary critical theory and original, unpublished personal interviews, are crucial at this time because the analysis places contemporary Scottish women's writing in an international context and brings

⁹One should note that both Candia McWilliam and Alison Kennedy recently appeared on the Granta List of the 'Best Twenty British Writers' under the age of forty. See Nicci Gerrard, 'Forget the tradition these writers are themselves', *Observer*, 2 May 1993, p. 59, for more details of this list.

Scottish women's literature and Scottish literary criticism in from the margins. The thesis also establishes a need for more critical attention to the work of numerous other excellent Scottish women writers because Scottish women writers clearly offer 'British' literature a 'tradition' to climb on. One need only look to Scottish women's literature to see exciting and innovative fiction that looks forward to defining women, feminism, the feminine, and Scotland in a new way.

**Appendix
and
Bibliographies**

Interview One: Emma Tennant

LSB: In a discussion of *The Bad Sister*, Paulina Palmer writes: '[Tennant's] treatment of women's community and lesbian relations contains elements which are downright prejudiced and offensive. She sensationalizes them, identifying them with a lurid word of witchcraft, violence, drugs and sado-masochism. In this respect she does contemporary feminism a disservice, reproducing the misogynistic stereotypes of femininity popularized by a phallocratic culture'. How do you feel about this criticism?

ET: I think the trouble is, often with people like that, they just want to put things on record, they're very eager to find that kind of thing. Well, let me think, it's been such a long time since I wrote *The Bad Sister*. I do remember especially wanting to show the women in that kind of way from the point of view of the lairds and landowners; that was the way in which they were meant to be seen, basically, from the point of view of the laird whose land they were trespassing. These smug and pompous men -- which is what they all were, you know, still are, owning most of the moors and one thing or another -- would be thinking to themselves, 'here's a band of witches turning up'. I wanted to make the women, in fact, as lurid as possible, to show up the terrible shock, the contrast introduced in that landscape which was otherwise full of servile, formal gamekeepers, bailiffs and that kind of thing. These women were, I suppose, far from being prejudiced and offensive, more like the earliest wild women who roamed the Greek forests and the mountains. I believe this really, I do certainly believe it myself, that there was if not an entirely matriarchal, but certainly with all the gods and goddesses, the most extraordinary women -- they simply can't have been invented -- who had no restraints and no idea of kindness, motherliness, sisterliness, good manners, whatever: all the things that have been laid onto women. They were just these wild women who did exactly what they wanted and that is indeed what men have always feared, I think with particular resonance just now. When I see Palmer's question of, this accusation or whatever it is, I see that I wanted to make the women as threatening to those sorts of men as humanly possible. When it comes to the two maids which she may be referring to when she is talking about drugs and sado-masochism . . .

LSB: Do you mean Jeanne and Marie?

ET: Yes. That was very much taken from Jean Genet who wrote a play called *The Maids* which was about those two maids. You can look up the case in something like the 1920s. Together the two maids murdered their employer, who was a woman, because she made them out of their tiny wages replace an iron that they had dropped, so they finally murdered her. They were sisters who also lived together and were probably lovers. It's the most extreme case of oppression of women in that they were servants, they couldn't get away, they were brutalized the whole time, and they clung to each other, not at all sado-masochistically, but because they had nowhere to turn. That was just a fantasy, of course, of Jane Wild.

LSB: Okay, so I got it right, it was just a fantasy.

ET: Sure. It's a fantasy in the sense that it also probably had some touching on reality where one must assume that Jane's real mother could well have worked in the big house, or a big house, at a certain point, and had some kind of fairly humble or menial position where she was basically taken advantage of, or maybe just slept with the laird. So therefore, for the highly imaginative child, it's that the mother has been, just like H.G. Wells's mother, a housekeeper and him being raised on the other side of the green baize door. He never really recovered from the shame and humiliation of what things were like in those days.

LSB: Okay. Those last fifteen or twenty pages or so get very ambiguous. It's great because you can't figure them out and I think that a lot of people when they try to analyse the novel try to pinpoint what's going on and I don't think it can be done.

ET: It can't be done.

LSB: It must be ambiguous.

ET: That's right. The whole point of the novel, and you've obviously got it, is its ambiguity. It's about the two sides of everything. It's about doubles, and I noticed when I was writing it that practically every image that comes into it has got its doubles. The name Dalzell is also pronounced DL -- it hasn't even got one pronunciation, it's got two, so I must have chosen it out of some deep thing. You're right, absolutely, you can never pinpoint in that book and in no way are you meant to. I think that although my book is obviously nothing compared to James Hogg's masterpiece, it's the same kind of thing where you can't really pin all that much in *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, and you're not really meant to, which is why the novel holds a power that lasts. Anyway, I think that my answer to Palmer's criticism is that she does contemporary feminism a disservice by insisting on stereotypes. I should simply say that there are plenty of people like that around and they often reduce everything. They try to reduce everything because of their own sort of hysteria. They don't usually make very good critics.

LSB: No. I suppose you're right. When Stephen cites Meg's claim that the 'root of all wrongs of society' is 'the suppression of masculine in women and of feminine in men', are you endorsing Jung's suppositions on androgyny?

ET: I've really forgotten whether I was then thinking about Jung, but on a simpler level, I certainly feel that basically what has gone wrong altogether is the balance, speaking in a very kind of old hippyish way. What has gone wrong is that people precisely are stereotyped into being this or being that and everybody knows it. I think that because people have been stereotyped, there's a lot of reason for a great deal of the violence and horribleness that goes on in the world actually. I really do feel strongly about that.

LSB: Is that why some of your novels, in fact quite a lot of your novels, are quite violent?

ET: Yes. Very often I suppose they for all I know are making the point that these violences are done by one sex, which is the male, who having grabbed the whole power, that power forces them to act violently towards much less powerful people who are women. The books are very often a playing out of the revenge of a woman driven to madness by having had her personality and power removed, and then violently killing, or perhaps her collapse and dissolution into madness. Some people, I think in America, said that the end of *The Bad Sister* was very shocking; she ought to have put on her wellies and pulled herself together. (laughing).

LSB: How could they have actually said that?

ET: It's rather like Paulina Palmer. People can say things like that because they have no kind of idea about what writing is so that they think you have to write moral tracts in which the woman pulls herself together at the end and goes and gets a nice job. It's very ridiculous.

LSB: In an interview with John Haffenden, you say that the editor of *The Bad Sister* is definitely a man. Would this have any bearing on the fact that the editor fails to understand the nature of women's problems in society?

ET: Yes, of course. One of the points of the book for me was to have this dry masculine voice as the editor at the beginning and the end, showing the inability to accept -- of course, this book was written in 1977, and now all sorts of efforts have been made which may have resulted in the new man. The new man may not really be a successful construct. (Laughs) On the other hand, there has been an enormous amount of concentration, hasn't there, on the

subject of trying to give more to instincts and more to the intuition and so on, probably than there was then. I also thought the dryness of a very Scottish editor, with the dry, almost legal mind, being the bookend which I think was really Hogg's device, would work particularly well. And of course he had to be a man, so the answer would be yes.

LSB: How would you define the female double?

ET: I think that the female double as I defined her in *The Bad Sister* is a bad double, a shadow, the side which will encourage her to kill or whatever because, as I think I've put somewhere in the book, of the impossibility for women of being able to have any sort of a muse because the muse is female and therefore the woman has got to have another woman coming to visit her as the bad sister. The whole tradition for thousands and thousands of years of a male artist, writer, poet, and so on being visited by this female gift that is going to bring the poetry has never been considered possible for a woman. Again, this puts the balance out badly, so that when a woman doubles, she's not going to double well. I think a male writer doubles -- I mean the genius male writer -- doubles well because he simply has got the fascinating muse side which produces the masterpieces, then he turns back into himself and is no doubt horrible to his wife and children. (Laughs) But at least he's got a proper straightforward double and yet it's all skew with women. So I can't define the female double rather than say *The Bad Sister* does try to do pretty well that. I consider it to be the first novel, and I could be completely wrong, about the female double.

LSB: Why don't we go on to *Sisters and Strangers*. Grandmother Dummer says that 'in the countries where Protestants rule the roost, the funny part is that the mother is sacred, still -- although the freedom of women is a great deal more pronounced'. Do you agree with this statement?

ET: Yes, I think I do. If you want to do a quick sort of Scottish thing, it's basically that my experience of growing up in the borders surrounded by a native dialect, I think, has affected my use of language because I write sometimes with a precision that is more Scotch than English. I think it is because I spoke a broad Scottish dialect as a child, and you're always jumping in your mind from one way of thinking. I don't think any more in it, but right up to the age of ten I thought entirely in it. So I suppose when I'm doing something which I feel is very Scottish, like *The Bad Sister*, or Dr Jean Hastie in *Two Women of London* -- I feel very very strongly the Scottishness in Dr Jean Hastie, I feel her pronouncing her words and thinking in a certain kind of way which is just completely Scotch. Of course I don't think about it in *The Bad Sister*. I just have never felt at home with English imagination really. You could say, although it might be much too easy a point to make, that if you're very powerful, you don't need imagination. And as England was, after all, the greatest imperial power and Scotland was always under it just like everywhere else, you don't actually need to imagine very much because you call the shots. Things that were originally imagined a long time ago have been written down as rules. That is why I think England has gone into novels about class and novels that have irony which is usually people going through some class barrier and succeeding or not. Whereas Scotland has indeed always gone on hasn't it? Being able to take hold of the wildest ideas and then disciplining them into extraordinary and fantastical tales which, like Stevenson's, are both completely convincing and completely fantastical. It just seems to me to be much more interesting to read something that's more than just one thing really.

LSB: Yes, well I read *Queen of Stones* and thought it was real.

ET: Everyone thought it was real. It was cunningly printed, the typeface. You know, I went down to Dorset and somebody who had read it there said, 'of course I remember that happening'. I didn't know where to look because it would have been so embarrassing. It was a bit worrying actually.

LSB: Does being Scottish and living and writing in England for the majority of your life affect any aspects of your creativity or other thought processes?

ET: I would say that it would be completely wrong for me to put myself, or to think of myself as a Scottish novelist. In fact, Elaine Showalter described me like that in her book *Sexual Anarchy*. She said that the Scottish novelist Emma Tennant had done a brilliant interpretation of Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Then she came over here and some people said to her, 'oh you shouldn't call her that, that's not what she would be described as'. I wouldn't think that, or I couldn't, because I don't live there. But I'm not part of a circle, after all, a literary circle of Scottish writers. I think the best things about Britain, my evaluation of it, have got most of their roots in Scotland. I think that with the exception of *Woman Beware Woman*, which I like, is rather like Scotland, showing another world where things are very different from here. One is always rather longing to get back to, but probably knows by now that one will not be going back and living there. I've brought up my daughters and my son here and I don't think for a minute that I would go back to Scotland and live, so I suppose it's very unfair to say 'I'm a Scottish writer'. I would say that there are strong roots.

LSB: Although you still consider yourself writing in a Scottish literary tradition?

ET: I do really, yes. In fact, the National Library of Scotland has bought all my manuscripts and notes. The notebooks are really weird. I've also a few letters that people have written to me, not many. So the answer is, in that sense, if the National Library of Scotland thought I was a Scottish novelist, but it's difficult.

LSB: Well, I understand. I consider you a Scottish novelist just because of the way you write and how you deal with imagination.

ET: Quite. I think I would, although I think that it's a mistake when somebody isn't living in a place to say 'I'm a'. I think you have to sort of say, you're an 'ex'. I went to school in London, so I wouldn't like saying that I was a Scottish novelist but I would like to feel that the Scottish literary tradition, or the Scottish air, or the Scottish feeling of everything, got into my work. If I hadn't grown up there, I wouldn't be the writer I am -- that's one way of putting it.

LSB: That's great. Being typecast in many predetermined female roles, Eve remains alienated from knowledge of a female self. Do you feel the same to be true for a majority of women in contemporary society?

ET: Yes, I do. That's why I wrote the book. I feel the same to be true for the majority of women and I also think that unintentionally the title is ambiguous because *Sisters and Strangers* really means that women are so to speak their sisters, but they're strangers to each other. As soon as a woman is moved as a result of the demands of a male controlled society, from one stereotype into another, then the women in the stereotype she's left behind very often don't feel very much solidarity with her. I think it's like the old divide-and-rule thing. In point of fact, *Sisters and Strangers* was going to be a non-fiction book; it was going to be a collection of historical essays. I thought of the idea in 1972, believe it or not, and it turned out that I'm not really a historical writer. It didn't work. I did one essay on witches and I did a lot of research into witchcraft, burnings, and the hangings in Scotland, and the publisher didn't get it. I realized that it wasn't really right and it all just sort of became nothing for eighteen years until suddenly one day I saw that I must write it as fiction. When I had the idea, I wasn't even writing fiction, and I still think now what I felt then.

LSB: Were there seven roles?

ET: Yes. But in a way, the minute that people are labelled they of course become alienated by the very fact of being labelled. And then, at last, one label turns against another label. The dread, for instance, that younger women have for middle-aged women, which I remember absolutely having. You can't even think about it, it's so awful! You can't think about it. Now

why can't you think about it? Because nobody's going to want to fuck you in your middle-age? Is it because you're going to be nearer to death? Not really. Is it because everybody's going to be like Germaine Greer's book -- which I haven't read -- on *The Change*? It's something you sort of push away so you don't very often find spontaneous friendships unless there's a very motherly woman who sort of takes a young woman under her wing. There's a tremendous dread, and a lot of middle-aged women absolutely hate young women because they're clearly jealous of them because they have their lives ahead of them.

LSB: That Sally and Eve make love and eventually marry seems to indicate an openness towards female love and lesbian existence. However, Sally and Eve only make love as a birthday present for Adam, and marry simply to end the 'deadly rivalry' between them. Does this suggest a contradictory view of lesbian relationships and female community to you?

ET: In a sense they're sending up Adam, I mean, after all, that's the tone of the book. Oh men love looking at women together sexually. Actually, Eve and Sally don't really marry. If one looks at it on another level, they are two great friends who happen to be living together in a cottage in Cornwall and there has been a sort of deadly rivalry. Then people get older and they overcome their rivalry because that phase of their life is over. I think otherwise it's more of a humanist question. With something that's meant to be funny like that, I hope I make serious points as well. I think that all along the grandmother is looking back on what we then realize is her past and she's sending up the reader, sending up herself, and sending up Adam as she does it.

LSB: It's great. When Grandmother Dummer says that 'Oedipus never had any desire for his mother -- only the desire that his mother had never been impregnated by any human agency at all', are you suggesting that men would like to deny that they are, in Adrienne Rich's words, 'of woman born'?

ET: No, I'm not. I just sometimes get really fed up with the Freudian thing that has almost changed everybody's thinking about the determination to wrest the mother away from the father, and kill the father, and all that kind of thing. I think that my feeling or experience of what men think about that sort of thing is that they very often don't want to feel that anything has stood between themselves and the mother, whom they very often come to hate -- they hate their mothers often don't they? Again, it's a sort of a joke. It's just that I refuse to take this doctrine that all male children are in love with their mothers and try to kill their fathers. Sometimes they just like their mother and they think it would be rather nice if there had been nobody else around. But again, it's a sort of a joke and it's impossible to answer it seriously because it's such an unserious book.

LSB: You've said that a lot of your books have been a blend of 'Calvinism and romanticism'. Can you tell me a little more about this?

ET: Yes. I think that is a very Scottish mixture, don't you? I was perhaps trying to describe that there is a strong feeling of moral disgust at the world and at the self-indulgence of the flesh which is very Scottish and Calvinistic. But at the same time, the romantic thing is to do with imagination, a kind of unusual mixture for me, but I think a very Scottish mixture. When I'm writing a book and I think it's going well, and it might be going to be good or rather good, I do feel very strongly those two poles both tugging away against each other: then I think I must be getting a good taut line going between those two, something which I think English writing seems to lack.

LSB: At times, I feel the characters -- particularly Jane Wild and Eve -- are struggling to determine a solid sexual identity. Are the sexual identities of your characters defined?

ET: Yes, I dare say they are. But I think that any girl or young woman, let's say girls or young women, have to find some kind of solid sexual identity. I think it's so unfair and awful that society has made it such a terrible struggle, when there's no doubt that men and boys have

a terrible time and there aren't any jobs and you have to deal with your emerging sexuality. But, nobody has any kind of a time like two daughters. I've got two daughters of 18 and 22, and I mean they're absolutely fine, but what they see people go through at school, that kind of struggle doesn't really ever change. I don't know if you've ever felt it? You must have really, it's just difficult to describe it like that. It is frightfully hard, you always have to think about how you look, how you present yourself to the world, what they're going to think when they see you. It's a nightmare!

LSB: Oh, it's terrible! I never like going camping because I can't take a shower. It's terrible but that's how you're conditioned to feel.

ET: Yes, you are. You're conditioned in every sort of way to feel self-conscious, that's the appalling thing. Which is why it is very nice getting older if you make it at all -- don't go raving mad -- because you know exactly what you want to do and what you don't want to do, what you'll say and what you won't say much more. But when you know you're supposed to have such a terrible time when you're older because you're no longer being sort of stared at by men -- it's crazy! And I think that that is the struggle. I think in both Jane and in Eve, certainly, and in *Woman Beware Woman*, poor Minnie's struggles did her in, didn't they? She couldn't define herself against a sort of successful, powerful family and she became stereotyped as the jilted girl. Nobody ever gets stereotyped as the jilted man.

LSB: No, that's true, you don't think about that do you?

ET: No, you just don't think of those sorts of labels. But there are many, many girls like Minnie, aren't there? Girls living in a kind of haze of memory of something exciting that happened and so on -- a bit Anita Brooknerish, but there are lots of people like that.

LSB: Your characters also seem representative of the struggle to be female or, at times, to become or to be male and female. Do you find that this struggle to formulate identity leads to disassociation from a defined self?

ET: I think that it's impossible for identity not to be disassociated. In *The Bad Sister*, the fact that Jane's Scottish and a woman, two disassociations basically, she's doubly disadvantaged if you like. The woman meets the struggle in my books either by going mad and killing someone, or both. It's almost impossible to come to terms with the horrific contradictions which society seems to be offering every woman. The only way in which I can ever see a self for a woman being defined is a Victorian one, still true today, which is through education and intellectual effort and understanding, which again, can be passed on through teaching or writing or whatever it is, to a younger woman so as to never allow anyone to be a Tillie Olsen ever again because that is the most heartbreaking book. The only way in which a woman can properly with dignity define herself is to gain an understanding of exactly how crushingly difficult the situation is and not be taken in by advertising, by magazines, by any crap that's written about it, and actually look at the truth, learn to work with it, and overcome it, and then pass on messages but not in any kind of moral way. But I'm sure you would agree because that's what you are doing.

LSB: I would agree, that's what I am trying to do. Education and passing on messages is the only way to get an identity.

ET: It's the only way, exactly. Well there you are, we can speak alike, that's the only way you get an identity and then when you have got it, then you can even do something useful. I hope even my writing books might then be of some use to you, or you would hardly be writing about them and then what you write may be passed on.

LSB: So would you say that you have a pretty defined self after going through . . .

ET: Through educating myself and through having quite a lot of fairly difficult personal experiences, a lot of which may well come simply from my rather strange or rebellious character. I don't think before I do something as a rule, I just impulsively think that something was a great idea. (Laughs)

LSB: And then later on think it wasn't? (Laughs).

ET: Yes, and then it wasn't. So then you're left with the result. Then of course you need more and more education to be able to overcome that and to be able to earn, after all, to go out into the world. Writers stay in from the world so I think that's a good question.

LSB: Although you have said that you have only used myth in *Alice Fell*, do you think that in novels such as *The Bad Sister*, *Sisters and Strangers*, *Queen of Stones*, and *Woman Beware Woman*, you are examining the myth of femininity or what it means to be female in contemporary society?

ET: Yes. I think it's just two different meanings of myth really. I mean the actual myth in *Alice Fell* was Persephone, whereas the more loose way to use it, which isn't wrong, is the myth of femininity. I think that I would use the word to examine the meaning of femininity. Let us say the different definitions that society has for femininity which force Jane Wild to be a passive girlfriend and suppress a lot of her self in order to be that which leads her to fatal consequences. *Sisters and Strangers* is stereotyping. *Queen of Stones*, the terrible effect on female children of being brought up. I think that *Queen of Stones*, of course, is solely being brought up on the Grimm brothers idea of Cinderella which leads to a horrible early sort of pre-pubescent rivalry and alienation. In *Women Beware Woman*, being left out, being left behind, not having the advantages in education, because as we now know well, in a mixed class, you will often find girls just aren't looked at by the teacher and I keep reading that more and more, don't you?

LSB: I just read something like that on Friday.

ET: Yes, every week. I'm very glad they're doing it, but apparently the teachers don't know they're doing it and so the girls learn to be overlooked and left behind. In *Woman Beware Woman*, Minnie is a sort of left behind person who obviously had a very selfish mother who wasn't going to pass down any kind of interesting help to her, to put it mildly, so she'd had it. It's awful really, isn't it and I suppose it is like a fairy tale a bit because she's caught between the awful mother and the frightening Moura. She's again driven completely off her trolley. (Laughs)

LSB: I guess I'll leave you with the question would you define yourself simply as a writer, or perhaps as a woman writer, feminist writer, or anything else?

ET: I don't really know. I think it's very difficult. I hate labels because you see sometimes somebody who would describe themselves as a feminist writer and you're then talking about the kind of French women who wouldn't use certain masculine words which to me is completely baffling, I'm afraid. I would much rather be known as a writer. I'm often described as a feminist writer. I think by now it would be fair to say that yes, I am a feminist writer. Any book I've written that has had any effect on people, or that people have actually thought about, or written about, has always probably been to do with what's wrong with society. Which makes one a feminist because that is the definition of feminism, isn't it, to try and rewrite or readjust the balances. So I would have to say that I am a feminist writer, but not always. Yes, I think feminist writer is probably fair actually. Yes, I can't dodge it really.

LSB: No, not with *The Bad Sister* and *Sisters and Strangers*.

Interview Two: Margaret Elphinstone

LSB: What does being Scottish mean to you?

ME: Well, I'm not sure that I am Scottish in so far as I grew up in England. My father's family is Scottish and as a child growing up I was always told I was partly Scottish. Of course, when I arrived here, I'm English. So it's being caught between two boundaries, I think, which has been very important. Of belonging and not belonging. Being outside and inside at the same time. I think it's a very familiar position for a lot of people, on the edge of things and not knowing quite what they are. It can be quite uncomfortable and quite creative.

LSB: I'm interested because Emma Tennant spent her childhood in Scotland and then she went down to England so that she always felt like an outsider down there. She says that very much affected her use of language and dialect and the way that she thinks. Can you relate to her feelings at all?

ME: What I would relate to is the language aspect of it. Every time I open my mouth it's perfectly clear that I'm from the south of England. I'm quite happy to be from the south of England, but it leaves you in a very tenuous situation to be writing in terms of any particular culture when you know you come from several. I think coming from several is a strength and I'm glad that I'm all these things. But linguistically, teaching Scottish literature when I don't really speak Scots is quite an intriguing situation and sometimes it's uncomfortable but it's another outlook. When I have tutorial groups here they're full of Scots and Americans and Italians, we're all looking at Scottish literature and I think all those perspectives are helpful; you know we need every one of those people to see it from where they come from.

LSB: How would you define a Scottish literary tradition?

ME: I think it took me years to define it at all. I did English literature at Durham University for my first degree and such Scottish literature as we did nobody said 'this is Scottish'. We did Henryson and Dunbar and I'm sure it says in my lecture notes somewhere 'and by the way they were Scottish', but that was about it. We looked at the ballads. We didn't look at any of the Scottish novelists: no Scott, no Stevenson, no Hogg, nothing like that. I did a special option on Yeats in my final year and of course we said he was Irish, but I don't think I fully grasped from that course that we were looking at another culture, another nationality. Yeats was quite important in my thinking coming at an important time in my life, but it was years before I realized that you could try to define a Scottish tradition. Of course when I did, I realized I was very familiar with it because I had been brought up on a lot of the books which I'd been given as children's books. I was given Stevenson to read and I read some Scott in my early teens. MacDonald, his fairy tales were my favourite books aged about seven or eight, but I certainly didn't think 'this guy is Scots'. I think it was years later that I defined it and it was partly through Douglas Gifford that I did define it. He wrote that he saw *The Incomer*, which he reviewed, as part of a Scottish literary tradition. I thought 'how do you see that?' And it was talking to him that I began to think 'goodness, maybe that's where I get it from'.

LSB: How would you define a Scottish female literary tradition?

ME: I think it's very hidden. I would include myself in a Scottish female literary tradition. I think it's very interesting how much of it has been about borderline situations, borderlines of madness, borderlines of reality. Well, look at Emma Tennant: it's this absolute on the edge feeling. I think it's because Scottish women have been so marginalized in their own reality, that it comes out in weird, exciting, and very different and very dynamic ways. I think I'm beginning to feel, recently I suppose, there's definitely a struggle going on for women's

writing to emerge in Scotland; it's up again very rigid patriarchal attitudes. I want to include myself in that group whose voice should be heard.

LSB: Douglas Gifford wrote in a review of *An Apple From the Tree* that 'Elphinstone has a dark view of progress, akin to that of George Mackay Brown, but with an added feminism which is never strident, but insists on the prime role of women in renewal and resistance to the poisoning of the world'. How do you feel about this comment?

ME: Well I liked that comment when I read it. I certainly like being told I'm akin to George Mackay Brown because I admire him greatly and to have somebody say that, it's quite affirming. But with the added feminism . . . I think that's probably fair. What it makes me think of is the place where I really started writing, when I was staying down at Greenham Common. The first short story I did, which you may have come across, called 'Spinning the Green', certainly came out of a quite active involvement in issues about poisoning of the world and so on. But I don't think 'we're going to get a point about the environment in here'. But I suppose I've been so concerned with it for so long, it ups and outs. I don't mean that I'm totally or naively unconscious, but in fact what I think I'm saying is that I have a much stronger line than I often realize on the way I perceive things and the way that I do things and the life I've led. I often don't realize that this perhaps for a lot of people isn't very mainstream and that when it comes out in my work, they see this as more borderline than I do. I certainly think it goes along with my involvement in protests and certainly the gardening and all that side of my life. Somebody once said to me at a reading in Orkney that 'I enjoyed reading *The Incomer*, it's a useful book. It told me how to make a compost heap'.

LSB: In an interview with Jennie Renton, you say that you 'don't like the idea that I'm writing only about women for women. I write about men and women, though I have often had a woman protagonist'. Understanding this, would you say that you are aware of being a woman writer, or would you define yourself simply as a writer, a feminist writer, or anything else?

ME: Yes, well I'm aware of being a woman writer definitely and it's been quite interesting to me that I've had the theory after the practice. This year I've been teaching a course with Alison on feminist theory and women's writing. I hadn't done much theory at all before I came here because I was out of academia for sixteen years when all the theory happened as it were. The way we were doing the course is that she would teach a theory lecture and I'd teach a lecture on a text that I chose to illustrate the theory to an extent. That course has made me think a lot about how I am aware of being a woman writer. I'm quite intrigued, I find Cixous quite difficult. But when I come to this writing the body, I think it's very iffy, you know, it's not a sort of biological phenomenon. Like Showalter's 'wild zone'. When I first read it, I thought, 'this is amazing', and then when I thought it over, I thought 'it's too didactic'. It's like she's saying 'well that is it and this defines everybody'. I don't think two different circles could possibly define everybody's experience. So, I find some if it quite reductive, but it's certainly made me think. I think the historical side of it has made me think more about the tradition of women's writing and whether it can be defined. What I don't want to do is ghettoize, and sometimes I would rather not be published by The Women's Press, because I think in practical terms there are a lot of men who don't pick up Women's Press books. I did a reading in Aberdeen last week and afterwards a man in the audience said to me, 'I thought you were going to be some feminist, but you're quite a normal person. How do you feel about being published by The Women's Press?' I said, 'would you buy a Women's Press book in the bookshop?' He said, 'well, I might now'. I guess it's because I didn't have three heads. I don't want that initial barrier. I don't want men to think that 'this is not for me' or that I'm in a sort of women's world. I talked to a friend last night who had just had a review of her women's concerts as domestic music. I'd rather that what I write is available for anyone to read who likes it, or doesn't like it. There are so many factors. You know you asked about Scottishness before this, and there's gender and class and race and upbringing and where I've spent my entire life. Gender is one of those important facts, it's not the issue. I think feminism must come through the writing just like compost heaps do because it's part of what I think about.

LSB: Would you say that contemporary Scottish women writers have evolved themes, imagination, and narrative forms that are their own?

ME: Yes, I would. I hesitate to generalize but certainly as I talked about in my paper, the fantasy element fascinates me because I do see that as a theme that recurs in very different writers. Put Sian Hayton and Muriel Spark side by side and you've got these ghosts and strange beings in both and yet there's difference in treatment. Emma Tennant -- never quite knowing what's real. Liz Lochhead does it too and she can be very surreal in her dramas. There's the exploring of psychological state through stories that are on the edge of reality in *Dracula* and there's quite a lot of it in *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off*. I know less about poetry and it's very intriguing to me how many Scottish women writers have gone back and very explicitly revised male texts -- many of them have gone back to the nineteenth century, not all as explicitly as Tennant, for example, but how they go back and revise it.

LSB: It's interesting. I think that a lot of people would probably say that it is unoriginal, but I don't see it that way, I think it's just taking a tradition and showing it from another perspective that's been ignored.

ME: It's a necessity, I think, in terms of history. Women in Scotland have almost no acknowledged history it seems to me and it has got to be discovered because of course women have existed. In the novel I've just written -- it's not published yet, it will be by Polygon in Autumn 1994 -- is about Norse Shetland and it's very much about women. There are a lot of men in it too. But I think certainly with the Vikings, you read the historical accounts and you see they occasionally give you an account of brooches that have been dug up and you think, 'oh, they were worn by a woman, they existed'. But you'd think from historians that the Vikings were a society that was 99% male and obviously it wasn't, so I thought about rewriting that history, going back and filling in the gaps between the very fragmented evidence we have.

LSB: Like many of Emma Tennant's female characters, your protagonists often seem to be on a quest to determine or to understand a female self. Do you find that the struggle to formulate an identity leads to a disassociation from a defined self?

ME: I think that's spot on. I've heard Joy Hendry in a lecture something about the stereotypes of Scottish women -- the wee granny and the young lassie. These defined images that women are surrounded by are so unquestioned. When I've been in the States or even in England, I've felt this sense of liberation -- not because the US is such a liberated country -- but a lot of the defined selves that are imposed upon me had vanished. Nobody wanted to know 'are you Scottish, are you English'. If I said I was Scottish, anyone would have believed me. People thought it very romantic if I lived in Scotland; but the constriction had fallen away, that every time you opened your mouth you defined yourself. The other thing that fell away is that in a superficial way, there's something not in the States that I'm used to being constantly there, about what a woman is, should be doing, can be doing. Maybe it's superficial saying 'have a nice day' which I find very heartwarming. (Laughs) It may be very superficial stuff but there's this sense of a brick being lifted off your head when it's new to you. I've lived in a lot of different places and had many different roles in life. In the 60s I did my hippie number and in the early 80s I was living at Findhorn.

LSB: Oh, you lived in Findhorn.

ME: Yes. Actually, it was my first encounter with American women who seemed to me to be so free to state how they felt. I was in Shetland for many years before I went to Findhorn and a lot of my friends at that time were so-called hippies and I grew from that to this. I find myself in this very male academic department where these men have worked for twenty-five years, all the time I was doing all those things, and I feel as though I'm pretending -- you know, today I'm going to go out and pretend to be a university lecturer. It's all there in Burns.

personae and things, and I think that it is very typical of the tradition. I suppose because I've moved from place to place and I've dropped out and I've dropped in and have also been a mother and all that, I've had a lot of selves put onto me. Now some have gone again because my children are away from home, but I think I've this sense of all the parts you play, things you're supposed to do, roles you get into, and identity is somewhere. I think I get my identity from talking to my friends and going for walks or being out alone in places. I work things out by talking to people, and those are the things that matter. All these roles are almost like a game.

LSB: Would you describe yourself as a feminist?

ME: Yes, but often I don't say so when it's not convenient. Yes, definitely in terms of what I think about, where I come from, what my life's been like. I would say that feminism means what I mean it to mean which goes back to the 1960s charter of women's liberation. I remember when that happened and it was important to me, and the gradual realization of what oppression is and what it means not to be 'I', you're 'other', you're object not subject and all that. But I wouldn't walk into a room full of hostile men and say, 'here I am, I'm a feminist'.

LSB: How would you feel if your fiction were to be defined as feminist fiction?

ME: Well it often is and I feel fine. What annoys me of course is what other people think that feminist means. I would say fine when it's not loaded with other people's emotions about what they think it means to them.

LSB: Emma Tennant and Janice Galloway examine myths of femininity or what it means to be female in contemporary society. Would you include yourself in this type of analysis?

ME: Yes, quite definitely. Although I think I see myself closer to Tennant in terms of method. I've used images of utopia and dystopias, creating other worlds of possibilities. I think I'm moving closer now to exploring this world. My recent short stories are contemporary and I think I'm moving towards the here and now. As you've probably noticed, *The Incomer* and *A Sparrow's Flight* are intended to be part of a quartet; hence all the quartets in *The Incomer* and hence you've got winter and spring and there's going to be summer and autumn. I don't know if there ever will be now because I think I've left it too long. Maybe I'll come back to it one day but at the moment I've finished with that world. I think it's quite likely that after a few years I might come back to it. Of my last two stories, one is set in medieval Iceland and one of them is set today on the West coast. It's still fantastic, it's still weird, and one of my friends says my stories are creepy and I take that as a compliment. It's quite surreal, but not necessarily supernatural. Of course, it's about what it's like in contemporary society or it won't have any relevance to anything or why would anyone read or write about it.

LSB: *The Incomer* is set in a world distant from a dominant male order, without many images of dominant patriarchal ideology. In your opinion, does the novel represent how women can achieve and survive in an environment free from male oppression?

ME: Yes, I think that was certainly what it was intended to do, what would it be like for women in an environment almost free from male oppression? But in Milton's paradise, there's no plot, it's a pretty boring place, nothing happens. If you look at Gilman's *Herland*, there would be no story if these guys didn't come along and tell the story. You've got to have a plot which means you've got to have a devil, you've got to have some sort of serpent in the garden. You've got to have Patrick. It can't be a complete utopia or what would you say? What it represents is how women can achieve and survive in a world **almost** free from male oppression but it's also got to relate to what we do deal with, so in those terms it's a paradigm for contemporary reality. Here and now, rape is something that women have to deal with although there it is absolutely unknown. They know what it is, but it's almost unheard of and that's certainly not the case in the world in which we live. I think I was trying to get the

distance of how would it be if this was such an extraordinary thing: but it also it happens in that world because if it didn't, it would be too far from where we are.

LSB: *The Incomer* also focuses on relationships between women and a female community: in other words, it seems to me that women in the novel are defined in relationship to each other, rather than in relation to male power. Could you comment on this?

ME: Yes. In fact it's interesting that some of the negative comments I've had in reviews -- and I haven't actually had any horrid reviews of *The Incomer* -- have people saying the men aren't strong enough, or there's not enough about men, that the men are peripheral. I was trying to create a world in which women's networks predominate and the men are more peripheral. No doubt in that world, the men have their own community, but I didn't describe it. I expect they all get together down at the smithy, but that wasn't the focus, and certainly in terms of how the place is run, the sort of politics of Clachanpluck, I see a definite women's network of how they talk about things, arrange things, sort things out. You couldn't say there is a hierarchy and there's not meant to be; that's meant to be quite anarchic. It's through the women that I see that happening. The other interesting response that I had is how many people have seen it as a lesbian novel. One review was quite interesting. It was actually from a journal in California. I can't think how they got a hold of it, but she said 'this is a disappointing novel in that the lesbian relationship between the two women is never consummated'.

LSB: But it was never meant that way. It was about women's love for each other. I thought it was very clear that that's what the novel was about and there wasn't any intention of a lesbian relationship.

ME: Well there wasn't meant to be. It wasn't what I was thinking about at the time and it intrigues me that it's been looked at in that way. The level of talk that goes on between women seems to me to be about the stuff of life, about how we all relate and what's going on. It has to be disguised because it's very threatening, that kind of communication. I think one of the things that I didn't notice that is in the book, and I think it needs to be in there, is that it's quite a threatening paradigm that men have become peripheral in terms of the novel. And they are peripheral in the women's lives. There's no male hierarchy at all and the men, like women, certainly have their place in the society -- they are in no way excluded -- but they belong to a household that is centred around a woman. They're defined in relation to that household, but they have autonomy. They're not oppressed. They don't belong to anybody so that it's nothing like the situation in which most women have lived under patriarchy and yet it's perceived as very threatening and disempowering to put a man in that situation.

LSB: Would you say that Patrick and his gun represent the evil of an oppressive male power or the nature of evil in general?

ME: A bit of both I guess. The gun is a fairly obvious symbol. It was important to me what this gun would mean symbolically in that kind of a society. I think that we surround ourselves without knowing it constantly with images and symbols that reflect our psyche and we might be talking about a computer and that's a chair, but why were they made like that in the first place? It's reflecting something. For example, I think these chairs are made like that because students sit on their own and write things down. If I had a row of cushions in here it would be desperately threatening. I suppose the very shape of that gun and what it does, there's actually no place for it in the mythology. But what do you do with a long thing that shoots things? Not that men don't have genitals, but why would you **make** something like that? It's an anachronism, it's archaic, it's not meant to be there. There aren't shapes like that in the buildings they build, they haven't got spires and steeples. I didn't think that out, I suppose the whole idea of it being a gun is bringing a Freudian male symbol into the world and nobody can quite relate to it. It makes them uneasy not just because you can shoot people with it, but because it's not something somebody in that world would have made. One of the things I didn't want to do, and I don't think I did, is put the evil onto men. I don't think that Patrick or Davey or George are bad. Even looking at Patrick and Anna, I don't think Anna good and

Patrick bad because Anna is a woman and Patrick is a man. What I think is that Patrick has offended against the ethos of the society in which they live which is a much more terrible thing. Rape is part of the ethos of the society in which we live, therefore it's not very terrible in terms of the hierarchy; you might get a prison term for six months or something because if you're living in a patriarchy, symbolically it's not that evil and what it does to the woman has to be discounted in some way. Whereas if you live in a world where there are other values it becomes an absolute outrage which of course I think it is. That was the point. Of course, there's the whole sticky area -- and I was thinking of that film *The Accused* -- does Anna ask for it? It's a shady area which I wanted to approach head on because it seemed to me that it's the crucial question of the book, what is this rape, what happens around it, who are these people who get involved in it, because that to me is the real crime, symbolically, it's the centre. It's the obvious crime other than the crime against the land. There are all these analogies and I tried to make it as horrible as possible. It had to be seen to be a violent and outrageous act, but at the same time, not to say Patrick was like the devil in paradise I mentioned earlier. Davey says afterwards that he loved him, that his friend Patrick had many sides, but that he's taken on this symbolic crime; he's kind of scape-goated himself in some way.

LSB: My main questioning of the novel concerns Emily's, Bridget's, and Fiona's struggle with the land. Does the cave represent an affinity and respect for the land, or the more magical and supernatural powers of the force of nature?

ME: One thing that's important is that they're not in control. They have some measure of power -- it's a tricky word to use -- a strength, but then don't see themselves in control of nature or the land. We live in a world that does. I was in the Exhibition Centres at Killiecrankie the other day and there was this big display and it said 'Man Tames the River'. And I thought 'my God, this is 1992 and they're still saying this'. The women in the novel are interacting with forces beyond them. I think it's quite important that this kind of magic, I don't know what you would call it, magic or affinity, or whatever they do, it's not the sort of witchcraft that does spells and makes things happen. They're not trying to manipulate, they have affinity and respect, but not a comfortable relationship because the wilderness isn't comfortable -- it's full of beasts. Respect also means out of bounds, you respect something you are in awe of. I think it's knowing, coming back to the question of how to deal with evil: that people can actually go out and rape and destroy and that's got to be dealt with. I think that's the kind of responsibility the women have to take, but not in any definite way -- Fiona isn't going to come back from the mountain and start issuing orders, it's more an interaction.

LSB: In my interpretation, *A Sparrow's Flight*, like *The Incomer*, is a quest for female knowledge and the recognition that in order to come to terms with a female or a male self, one must confront the past. Do you agree with this?

ME: Yes, I would agree a major theme in the book is dealing with the past. Obviously sex and identity and guilt are all in there and gender identity is part of it. Naomi in relation to motherhood, for example, and Thomas in relation to feeling like he's murdered his children. Yes, I think it's to do with past conflicts and this load of guilt that stops you being who you are and you can't run far enough from it and it's following you everywhere and the only thing to do is turn and face it, which is probably, I would imagine, what monsters are about. You can't go on carrying guilt, well you can, but it will kill you. It won't go away by you trying to get further and further from it, and so they literally make this journey back to where the guilt was for Thomas and they meet Naomi's along the way. I think confronting the past is a lot to do with confronting guilt and confronting one's own limitations. They didn't get it right and they've both had to make choices that were wrong and they've both perhaps made terrible mistakes, even if Naomi's choice was correct. Even though nobody's judging her, there's always -- you know that Frost poem, the road less travelled -- there's always the way you didn't go and that's something that also has to be lived with. Maybe you have to look at the crossroads again to check out that you're still Okay. I would agree with your interpretation.

LSB: Both novels also involve a commitment to music, dance, privacy, myth, and social ritual. Do you feel this is part of Scottish literature and the Scottish literary tradition and therefore permeates your writing? Or are there other reasons for these imaginative creations?

ME: Let's take that in two parts. I think that music and dance are very explicitly part of the Scottish tradition and music keeps turning up in my writing. One of the nicest letters about my books I ever got was from my ex-professor at Durham. He wrote to me saying 'it's obvious to me that you've become a musician, and I'm so glad you enjoy playing the fiddle'. I thought, 'great, I would never even begin to play the fiddle and the only thing I can play is a tape recorder'. I play it and I play it and I play it and I listen. All those years in Shetland I got very interested in music and folk music and it got me interested in ballads. I listened to a lot of that sort of thing. I'm also intrigued because I'm quite ignorant about music. I can't make all the right noises in criticizing it. I'm interested in a pagan past. I'm not interested in being a pagan in the present -- it's pretty irrelevant. I read books about folk lore and myth like Marian McNeill's *Festivals*. I think we're terribly lacking in ceremonies and rituals. I grew up in a religious household and we always had grace before we ate. I wouldn't dream of doing that now, certainly not to a patriarchal God, but it was a ritual, a ceremony -- you knew when you were eating and when you weren't. My children haven't had that. I think it's useful to mark things and passing seasons, and living in the city I really miss knowing where the moon is. I used to know all the time. I think this is important in the Scottish tradition. I think it's also from a lot of other sources as well. It's for a writer herself to define her tradition because you're in it and things you've read are mixed up with things you've done or stories people tell you or somebody said. The story I've just written arose out of somebody telling me about four sentences about somebody who lived down the road. I was walking and thinking about how to use it as a story, it's those things -- there's a reason for everything.

LSB: I find Naomi and Thomas's friendship and interaction compelling and compassionate. Would you say that their relationship is an attempt to show that men and women can share the same feelings, emotions, and support similar to the ones that communities of women can generate?

ME: It is. I didn't want these two in a sexual relationship. It was very important to me that they didn't have one and the simplest way that they didn't was to make Thomas gay. It's not the only reason why he's gay, and once I'd started writing, the theme grew, but initially it was that simple. They weren't to fall in love because I wasn't going to write a love story. This is about love and friendship and of course Naomi is attracted to Thomas, but it's not reciprocal and she has to settle for friendship. Certainly in Thomas -- and I got very fond of Thomas -- after the earlier book I did want to look closely at a man because it is true that *The Incomer* is a book about a community, largely about women in a community, and the men, not even Davey really comes forward in that way. This is a book about a relationship between a man and a woman and knowing what a man also is like in the same way and knowing how Thomas feels, getting inside his head. When I was writing it I felt I knew those two terribly well and everybody else is a sort of chorus to this relationship and meant to be. In a way it was an easier book to write in that it's much easier to focus on two characters than to interweave the community as I was trying to do in the earlier book. In fact, the book I've just done is an even bigger attempt to interweave a community. I got very involved between Naomi and Thomas. I felt the intensity as I was writing of that relationship. I also had this very rigid form I had imposed on myself of the twenty-eight days, which had obvious link ups, symbols, and significance. I had to say every bit, I couldn't say a week later they got to know each other very well. I think the choice of that form -- you know you often choose things that you don't really know the significance of and it turns out to be right -- I think it was very right in terms of the kind of way I tried to show the relationship. That form imposed a discipline of really showing the two starting to connect.

Interview Three: Janice Galloway

LSB: Do you think there is a women's writing tradition in Scotland?

JG: If there is, I'm not aware of it. I don't come at things from an academic angle. I come from a background where academic possibilities were not ostensibly open to me. I went to university where academic possibilities were open to me but chose instead to read the work rather than read what people had written about the work. As a result of which it's been possible for me to bypass what academic norms are to a surprising degree. I go out of my way to keep avoiding them because I believe they're the death to creativity.

LSB: I think it's quite important to do analysis to a certain degree but I can understand what standpoint you're coming from.

JG: I'm quite happy for it to be other people than me doing the analysis. It's very difficult to create and at the same time be an analyst because there is no way if you create that you can avoid trying to put yourself in there. You can't do that for too long, or you have to get in a very strange, self-deceptive frame of mind where you pretend to yourself you're being an academic, you're not also a writer. It's just too much hassle. I'm quite happy to keep the two distinct, utterly distinct jobs. One feeds into the creative process and has its own form of creativity but is quite a separate thing than the act of creating fiction and poetry. These kinds of questions I wouldn't know how to begin answering and in a great many cases wouldn't want to answer anyway. The whole direction of what I think is important, the whole direction of what I prioritize is utterly different to that which an academic might prioritize.

LSB: What do you prioritize?

JG: Well, at the moment it's practical things that interest me as a writer like time frame. Exactly what we're talking about, like how you get the time simply to write at all interests me. Talking to other writers about how they get the time. It's talking about technical problems that are a priority for me. For example, if I get together with writers what I'm likely to ask them about is how they handle time and space, how do you handle moving through time without saying 'three weeks later', how do you handle memory, the difference between reality and unreality, how do you handle the technical things is what I prioritize.

LSB: Let's talk about your feminism. You are a feminist, are you not?

JG: Yes I am.

LSB: Have you always been up front about that? You're not afraid to announce it in a group of men?

JG: Never. Absolutely never.

LSB: Do you think your fiction is feminist fiction, or is your feminism just inherent in the fiction?

JG: Well again because I don't academicize, it means someone else would have to define what feminist fiction is and then they would have to decide for themselves whether or not it is. I wouldn't spend time thinking about that myself. What I do like to do is occasionally read things that other people write. I like reading bits and pieces of academic work, especially when it's about people I know and work alongside, that's interesting. One of the main problems of academic criticism is that it can get carried away with itself. It can start thinking it's the be all and end all. It can start to think it's the 'truth' of the novel which is when you have a problem.

The most interesting forms of academic writing to me are the ones that are experimental or on the edge, or so-called marginal; for example, feminist critique, although there is a danger in its becoming too mainstream. The establishment has a way of absorbing the dangerous and trying to make it part of itself. You have to be very careful. It's one of the really interesting areas, the areas that you can't pin down too much, areas where academics can't be too sure, in other words. It's fascinating to read what people are making of your contemporaries -- and sometimes screamingly funny -- and what they're making of you sometimes can be very illuminating. I read somewhere that somebody said for them my work didn't write about feminism, it didn't propound or postulate feminist theories in any way. I'm kind of stuck for how fiction can do that anyway. She wrote it was written with feminism as its background, 'it writes through feminism'. In other words, we're no longer having to prove anything, we're no longer having to say feminism is valid. We take it for granted that feminism is valid. If we're ever in the area of having to establish that feminism is valid then I just back out because it's as daft as trying to establish to someone who refuses to believe that Auschwitz existed. I just take certain things for granted and I take it for granted that feminism is valid: it's an interesting perspective to look at the world and therefore what I write comes through that. My writing just takes the fact that women are extremely interesting but have very different things to say about the world than men for granted. I do feel that what I'm doing is being as rootedly female as I can be. So what matters to me in my writing is how I feel as a woman about the world. That's why texture is so important; this is what I feel through the skin because the composition of a woman's skin is so different than the composition of a man's skin. Things like that matter to me. If you try to get as much of the physical experience and as much of the mental experience and as much of what it is that a woman prioritizes -- and again it is different now that I've had a baby what I prioritize -- a whole lot of realignments go on. But to keep pushing my priorities to the front and say no, I'm not interested in this so-called global perspective, I'm not interested in a so-called objective perspective because there's no such thing as an objective perspective -- everybody is coming from somewhere, everybody is defending some kind of interests and all this crap about objective academic standards has been finally seen to be crap. It's been built by white middle class, middle-aged men who come from a moneyed background, who come from the perspective that certain things are valid because it keeps them being the people who are powerful and the people who say what's what. It's fairly obvious that we women have our own place in the landscape to sit under and my duty as a writer is to stand as hard and as firm in that place as I can and not delude myself that anything remotely resembles objective truth. I just have to be as much me as possible in the hope that that is somehow relevant to how other women feel.

LSB: Do you think Joy Stone represents a contemporary woman in culture or is she just a singular person?

JG: She is a person. It was very much about a particular individual that I wanted to write. A particular individual has not only their own experience in life, but you have other things that bond you to other people. The most interesting thing about Joy for me was her very individual experience. The kind of things that pile up on Joy, the things that happen to her in a very kind of concentrated way, make it seem to the people around her that she is singular. But what they're overlooking is the fact that of course there are enormous bonds that she has with other people and the individual things that she is experiencing in her individual way are also steeped in the things which are communal experience to, for example, women. In other words, Joy is a kind of heightened reality, she's lost the skin if you like and she's feeling the world as a woman without several layers of skin and several layers of protection that the rest of us use when things start to get tight or when things start to get uncomfortable or when things start to move in self-destructive cycles. I believe that the world is not organized in a way that is healthy for women to live in. The world is very much organized in ways that are singularly unhealthy for people to live in to begin with. Women more than men, I think, have a tough time trying to make sense of what they are fed as being a good way to live, as a moral way to live, as a sound way to live. There are other kinds of images that you're fed and you're supposed to be that as well. It is impossible to think and to feel and to be sane and to be female all at once. We might manage three at any given time and we live through those. Joy is at a

stage where she's having desperately to try and make sense of all four; the more they don't make sense, the more she gets polarized. Of course, the trick in society is that you label people who do that as too sensitive or too stupid or misguided or insane, but they're not. Joy's problem is that she's too bloody sane, not that she's insane. The rest of us have too much insanity if you like, rather than sanity, to push to one side and say, 'that cannot be absorbed right now, I can't take that on right now because it's going to create big difficulties in getting on with what we call ordinary life'. So Joy is possibly communal in that she's female and how the people visit the house treat her, the way that her lovers in the past treat her, the kind of experiences that are common to women are what I think other women would resonate with.

LSB: I wanted to ask you about her lovers and the relationships she has with men. The only one that I think is remotely positive is the one she has with David. Do you find David more sympathetic to her position? Is it because he is younger that he seems to be interested in more than just sex? For example, David seems more sympathetic to Joy, he always asks her about the hospital . . .

JG: David just does what he does. I come firmly from the belief that you can never understand why other people are doing things. It's only afterwards, when the things have blown up in the air you can salvage bits and say 'oh that might have been what was going on', but only when you get there. I guess the reason why David seems to be the most functioning man is because he's the one who is currently functioning. Joy's at least distanced herself a wee bit from the other men. She has no idea what she's doing with David and no idea what he's doing with her and neither does he, which to me is symptomatic of every fucking relationship you ever have in your life. You have no idea what is going on, you just keep your fingers crossed. You're just hoping for the best, and it hasn't been bloody awful yet so we'll see what happens next. There are obvious things that she's profoundly unhappy about in that relationship. There are obviously things he's very wary about and very afraid of in that relationship. I guess he does seem more positive because he's there. You're never given any motivations. He doesn't understand what he's doing, she doesn't understand why he's there. It's left therefore to you. I have had other people say to me 'David's the most ghastly, she's vulnerable and he's just landed on her and using her'. I'm very pleased when I hear contradictory opinions because it means that I have tried . . . I would hate to think that what I'm doing is saying that this is this kind of person.

LSB: No, you don't do that at all. It's a hard book to analyse because it's so ambiguous.

JG: Good, good. If you like, it's an almost anti-academic stand. I don't like to construct. It's easy for academics to take and blend it into the scheme of things and say, 'ah, yes, this is an example of this, that, and the next thing. When that happens, this is the so and so'. I hate that happening and there is quite a deliberate thing going on in me to give as few traditional academic clues as possible. I am astonished, astonished that it has been so well received by academics. I know that there are people who have spoken to me at a personal level and I have had a lot of letters from people saying that the book spoke to them, but these were so called ordinary readers. I had not expected anyone who belonged to any part of any academic mainstream to like it much at all.

LSB: I don't know. I think that a lot of your techniques are very interesting, like the fact the novel seems to be anti any kind of conventional literary realism. I'm intrigued by your theatrical dialogues. Do you use the dialogues for any particular reason? Is it because Joy is a drama teacher?

JG: No, not at all. People do that. We're doing it at the moment. If I went away and wrote this into a novel I would probably put either academic and artist -- (laughs) -- very ironic, or I would put interviewer and interviewee according to the roles we're playing at the time. Communication for me is one of the hardest businesses that people ever engage in. The sad thing about it is that most people don't even realize that they're failing at it. Most people seriously think that they're having meaningful conversations in the pub and it doesn't worry

them that they can't remember any of it the next day. It doesn't worry them that they keep having rows, the same rows with the same people or worse, the same rows with different people. An awful lot of people to me don't connect, they don't seem to take their lives with any seriousness, i.e., 'why is that and what is that, that person doesn't understand a word that I said and what does that mean about that and what does that mean about being alive'? It's so random that it's at most bouncing off each other. I can spend hours thinking about this. One of the ways we attempt to circumvent it is that we fall into roles with each other. For example, when you said I'm going to use a tape recorder and I'm going to switch it on, I'm sitting here ignoring it as far as possible. I don't sit fiddling with the buttons and make a point of it and say 'this is fascinating, how does it work' because I know what your job is to get on with and I know to a certain extent what is expected of me. I can play along with that and I can, if I want to, be difficult and not play along with it. I'm partly able to play along with it because I know the kind of thing you're looking for and what you want to do with it. But that involves an understanding of you in a role because I don't know you as a person. Therefore, you're acting in role and I'm acting in role. It would be logical to me simply to get that point across very briefly, that lack of communication, and that we tend to talk to people as personae rather than as persons. The quickest shorthand for that and the most entertaining shorthand for that is to write about it like that.

LSB: The bits with the doctors in the book are really funny. Tell me, no one in authority actually showed you a film called *Zombie Flesh-Eaters* in a psychiatric unit.

JG: Worse things than that go on in psychiatric units. There are certain things that you cannot write in fiction because people would not follow you: people try to make sense of fiction, because people don't try to make sense so much of life. Because of the lack of communication, things that happen in real life you could not put in fiction because folk would say that doesn't happen but it's happening under their noses all the time. I've got a short story where there are two men fighting and there are people who are trying to kid on that they can't see it. Now of course they can see it, but the rest of us take that as perfectly normal. You see somebody walking past and you know perfectly well that you've seen them. We seem to assume that that's perfectly normal. Yeah, I've seen much worse things than *Zombie Flesh-Eaters* on the telly and in psychiatric units. Much worse.

LSB: How much of your experience in the psychiatric unit or hospital influenced what you wrote?

JG: Hugely. I very much wanted to do that because that's one place where you think that people would try and again, everything to me comes down to the pathetic failure of human beings to be able to communicate, that you're on your own your whole life and sometimes you kid yourself that other people understand what you're about; but I don't think anybody ever does. To a certain extent it's ridiculous because you're only here for a tiny little condensed period of time and it's foolish and arrogant to think that it matters you be understood -- there's this horrible trick played on you whereby as a human being your existence is the only means through which you can experience anything so your existence and the fact that it can be communicated is hugely important. Your intellect tells you it's arrogance or an absurd thing. I seriously thought that the psychiatric wards would be the kind of place that people knew the pity and the horror and all the rest of that, confronting the fact that you cannot communicate and would actually be interested in communication. I never encountered anywhere less interested in human communication than a psychiatric ward. So of course it became a paradigm for what else was going on, but it was so bizarre. I thought, folk don't know what goes on in these places. A tiny wee glimpse is enough. The psychiatric ward is the way it is not because there's anything wrong with Joy, she's just being a recorder. They are extraordinary places because a lot of people go in under the serious impression that they are at last going to communicate with someone and it's a big error, a big error. State institutions in particular; I think one reason why people care even less what goes on in them is that by and large middle class people don't end up in them. Maybe that's the reason private ones are different. It's taken for granted that people who are in the NHS wards by and large live in

poverty and nobody ever addresses the fact that their poverty might be one of the things that has led them to end up in a psychiatric hospital. Nobody addresses the socio-economic circumstances very well. It's about containment, about how soon can we get you back out into the world and be a functioning work unit, be a functioning mother, be a functioning whatever. Middle class people, if they spend any kind of time in psychiatric hospitals, either are gotten out quick because there is such enormous stigma attached to that kind of thing and people keep it quiet, or they become part of the army of the written off. They try to get a separate room off the main ward because they can see that it's bedlam in there. 'Poor Uncle Ted is used to different things'. They never think for a minute that the people on the ward might like to be used to different things. I think it has got to do with class why private ones are different.

LSB: What do you think about Alasdair Gray and James Kelman? Do they influence how you write?

JG: Yes! I think both men are like equal and opposite parts of the same genius. If that isn't true -- this is moving into academic territory, what am I doing here? (Laughs) Alasdair was the first one I encountered and I literally fell over *Lanark*. It was on the floor in somebody's house and I fell over it. I couldn't believe *Lanark* because it was coming from a basis that Scottishness actually means something, that again, like writing through feminism, it wrote through Scottishness. It wasn't about Scottishness. It wasn't like these bloody awful novels that are still trying to prove that Scotland matters. It took it for granted, for granted that this is where it was rooted, this was its place in the landscape and therefore that was its standard, that was its norm. You just come from there, they're not proving anything; it's just where you come from and that's what you write about. Scots have traditionally been very bad at taking their Scottishness for granted and being natural about it; for some reason we've traditionally been very bad about it. Alasdair seemed to be able to do it and it was the first book that I had encountered that had done that -- that Scottishness wasn't exotic, the Scottishness was normal and it was everyday. It was also his syntax. He was able to render Scottish speech without spelling the words all funny. If there's anything I hate, it's words spelled funny. There was also not the heavy class messages: this person is not educated and that is why their words are spelled even funnier than the other words that are spelled funny. It was a remarkable achievement. The flights of fancy -- they're not really fancy, a 'hyper-reality', the bits where he veers off into a kind of future territory and the kind of dream landscapes to me were every bit as real, and in some ways even more real, than repressed reality because that was where the emotions got to be analysed. The book was such an eye opener. I went round literally in a daze after I had read *Lanark*. I read it in two sittings and wrote a story not long after I read it which was the first thing I had written, which was taken from a dream. The story broke up the syntax because I suddenly discovered that this isn't just a quirky technique, this actually is more immediate. This gets right into the reader what you're thinking, dreams suddenly do break up and something else happens, literally. So, Alasdair's breaks in typography and things like that were an eye opener; they actually made it easier to read than a conventional book instead of more difficult to read. I think a lot of rubbish has been written about Alasdair by and large, like the typography is affectedly quirky, and so on, it's just he does things literally on the page that other people take for granted because they're so steeped in academic norms that they think the blank page and word after word like knitting is somehow normal. It's not the least bit normal. It's a very hard way to try and accept someone else's reality and truth whereas Alasdair gets a hold of you and he breaks you up, literally, and he forces you to dash about. He forces you to feel certain things, forces you to feel literal confusion, every page suddenly erupting. Then I encountered Kelman. It was just after I wrote this story. I entered it for a competition because I needed money, it was that simple, and James Kelman was the judge. I didn't win or anything, but he came out and said that he liked it and that I should send it to *Edinburgh Review*. So I found some work by this man. It's a very strange experience meeting him, he's very intense. I don't know if you've ever met Jim, he's since become a kind of friend. Jim is a very politicized individual, an individual full of integrity and somehow it shows, it radiates something like electricity. I couldn't get this meeting with this very strange man out of my head so I went and found some of his work and again, that was a vastly shocking experience. He had taken away the inverted commas and suddenly you

thought, well of course you take away the inverted commas, what a stupid convention. When people talk they're not always aware that they're talking. There will be certain things after you and I have this exchange that I think I've said but I didn't say and was just thinking. Likewise for you: there may be certain things which you wish you'd said and didn't but which feel stronger than the things you actually did say. What a stupid convention, where people say 'I'm about to speak now'. Real life isn't like that. It was so immediate, I was so taken up by it. And he takes it a stage further than Alasdair, the rendition of Scots syntax, the rendition of Scots speech. You don't actually have to write in a standard English, you can write in your own standard. You can be in the middle of your own universe. It was reading Kelman that made me see that. You don't have to veer off and say let us look at these funny working class Scottish people and render their speech patterns, you can be it, write it. Kelman proved that to me, he's an enormous influence.

LSB: How do you feel when people analyse your work?

JG: I can enjoy it. It depends on how it's written. If something's written well and it has got interesting insights, it's like reading somebody else's fiction or somebody else's poetry, or somebody else's piece of journalism, or somebody else's academic work. If it's good, it's good, and I can enjoy it for that. It's very difficult trying to relate it to me because it's somebody else's work. I can admire it for saying what it's saying. I can occasionally say I don't recognize that as the story I wrote, or hold on a minute, I didn't think I was doing that. If they argue the case very well, what I think I was doing is neither here nor there because once I've finished a piece of work, it's no longer mine. You can't have the effrontery to publish something and then say it still belongs to you. As soon as you publish it, you've given it away. You've said, 'there you are, what do you make of this?'. If other people go away and write about what they made of it, it's very interesting. People writing inconsistent things or axe-grinding or just posturing, though, that drives me daft.

LSB: I'm glad to hear you say that. Well, when I finish this, maybe I'll send it off to you and you can say 'no, you're totally wrong'.

JG: You can't be wrong if you're writing it from the middle of your reality. You might change your mind later, but you can't be wrong.

LSB: Let's talk a bit about Joy's list of female relatives who have committed suicide. It's kind of horrifying, but it's very intriguing. I was just wondering what was going on there. Is it deliberately exaggerated?

JG: No, I didn't exaggerate it at all.

LSB: I hope that isn't from personal experience.

JG: Yes, it is. I don't actually know what's exaggerated and what isn't because I believe that a whole lot of fictions are perpetrated about what is normal. You know, we're only just starting to crash through the idea of what a normal family is, for example, what a normal marriage is, and all the rest of this rubbish. So, what is normal for woman's experience, how much do you not talk about because it's made difficult for you to talk about, or how much do you not talk about because you're afraid you'll upset people or whatever the current taboos are in society, prevents certain aspects of what are in fact normal lives. How do I look at the experience of depression in somebody's life? Most of the women I know say they've experienced periods of depression -- I don't mean fed up. So, how normal is it in terms of other women? When the book came out, I had the most bizarre exchange with one Scottish critic. She said 'I hope none of this has happened to you' and kind of went into gales of laughter which I could only describe as embarrassed laughter. She was terrified that I would say on air 'actually, all of this might have happened to me'. She didn't know what was going to happen. You had to keep it light, we didn't want to talk about depression as reality. So of course I said 'it actually doesn't matter what proportion of this has happened to me. Let's talk about this as a work of fiction'.

and then we moved into much safer territory altogether. The question of what's autobiographical and what isn't actually doesn't matter. But when I came to certain parts of the book -- now this is a real writer's question, how do you decide what to write about, how do you base that -- I thought, 'look at your own life. Look at who has committed suicide in your own life and that's a list of various aunts and people'; that is real, but there is more that I could have put in. Again, you can't have fiction like real life otherwise people wouldn't believe it. (Laughs)

LSB: Well, your family certainly has a history of clinical depression! (Laughs)

JG: Most people if you force them to sit down and say Okay, let's look at alcoholism in your family, for example, and they'll say, 'oh well, it happens to other people, I don't have a drink problem'. Then you'll find someone, and then you'll find someone else, and then you'll find someone else, because you're so used to blacking it out and saying that it happens to other people, we don't talk about that, or that's not normal. So I thought, 'come clean, don't exaggerate it, you don't know what's exaggerated, you don't know what's normal. all you can do is write it down'. Of course I heightened certain parts of it and lowered other certain parts of it, but that to me was me taking myself as normal, you know, how authentic that is, but it's true for me. I am normal for me no matter how quirky I am to anyone else. I'm normal for me and that is me looking at what I felt was the most normal life I could grasp a hold of which was mine and say what patterns in a woman's life that show being female is a pretty risky thing and needs to be addressed.

LSB: What about popular culture? You talk about it a lot and there are a lot of examples of it in the novel. Can you talk about how pop culture functions in your novel?

JG: Well again it's the context of the 'real world', if you like. I think an awful lot of academic based novels, an awful lot of voices who wish to be canonized and so on and so forth, attempt as far as possible to avoid popular culture because they feel it dates a novel and after a few years it will be out of sync or whatever, and you're then actually ignoring how the bulk of people actually live their lives. For a great many people, popular culture is the only culture they ever encounter and it's certainly so pervasive it touches everybody's life. I don't need to be interested in it to know the kind of music that is currently selling in the charts. I don't have to be a movie buff or even go to the cinema to know which movies are showing at the local cinema and what the content of them is likely to be because it's almost impossible to avoid that. You have to make a strenuous effort to avoid it. Any way you try to access information, you also access popular culture. It's just a way of saying how saturated we are with a lot of -- it was just an attempt to show Joy's real world. She's surrounded by all this shit, basically. Popular culture is something that underestimates most people's capacity for intelligent thought, and it keeps it at a very low level because for most people to begin to think intelligently means automatically to become depressed. And a lot of people spend their entire lives running away from the ghastliness that surrounds them, the ghastliness that is most of western culture, the meaninglessness that is most of western so called culture. For Joy it's more than self evident that the bulk of shit she's meant to find entertaining is -- that we just bypass day after day after day and we just generously assume, 'well, it's meant to be crap' and we treat it as kindly as possible. We make all sorts of excuses for why the television is Okay really or why are entertained by so called escapist movies. I think people are inordinately generous about how much rubbish surrounds them and they give it far too much a place and Joy just isn't giving it its place -- she's forgotten how to give it its place, she's got other priorities in her mind. Her state, I think, shows up the bulk of crap the rest of us are content to process just as givens.

LSB: What about you? Have you spent any time outside Scotland? Lived anywhere else?

JG: Not large amounts of time, I've spent little amounts of time in places, not large amounts of time.

LSB: Do you have any interests about going anywhere else?

JG: Yes and no. I don't imagine staying for extended periods anywhere else. I can't imagine staying for an extended period anywhere else because to me the whole thing about my job which is writing, comes from, as I said at the beginning, from immersing yourself in the authenticity of where you come from. To me, there are a number of paradoxes in any art form, and for me the deeper you can go into the personal, the more general it becomes. The deeper your personal, the more likely you are to be going into the nearly human and you will eventually hit something that applies to everyone. And that for me also includes geographical location, it also includes looking the language you use, and the deeper I get into that and the more authentic I can make it, the more chance I feel I have of actually hitting things that make sense to other people from totally different cultures. You can get into Euro-mentality, you know, which means recycling the same stuff and not mentioning product names because they would be different in another country. You can get into a blank Next and Habitat mentality in writing if you aren't very very careful and to me that means part of assigning myself to a place and saying this is it, this is where you will attempt to understand. This tiny wee patch of where you are right now is where you will attempt to understand, understand that fully and you understand something about human beings. Attempt to understand little things like the differences in approach between countries. It matters because it can give you insight into where you are and that is why I enjoy moving around. I spent six weeks in the States once and learned an inordinate amount of things in six weeks in the States.

LSB: Which bit were you in?

JG: Moved about, but mostly in . . . I started in . . . I can't remember it, a place in Virginia, what's the name of it, it starts with a D. Danville. Which is where they grow a lot of tobacco and I couldn't believe how parochial it was.

LSB: There are so many different parts of America that are parochial it's unreal.

JG: It's the 'small townsville'. The first question I was asked was, 'which church do you go to?' There was no question that I went to church, no question at all. (Laughs) And, 'are you married?'. When I said 'no', 'what a shame' was their answer. It was almost like I was a good woman going to waste. So many things were taken as givens: what you did in your life, it scared the hell out of me. Then I went to Philadelphia, which was completely different. Then I went to Boston, which was completely different again. Where else have I been? Paradise County, Pennsylvania. That's a lot of Amish which was completely different again in a totally different way.

LSB: Did you go around the Amish country?

JG: Yes, and I think I got sent up a lot. Some chap I spoke to insisted he didn't know what Europe was. I think he was just at it. Didn't see anything of the west at all. I had to access things very quick because I wasn't there for very long and it's astonishing how quick you can actually get into what seems to be the priorities of certain geographical areas, at least the superficial priorities. I don't mean the priorities of individuals, but the priorities of an area. I'd like to travel. I've travelled very little in Germany. I would like to see Germany more because I think Germany has the key to British culture and what seem to be German priorities I think very much are British priorities. Scottish ones are slightly different again -- the French seem to have more in common with Scots. I would like to travel just to assess different ways to approach the problems of being human and it doesn't actually matter where you live, because as far as I'm concerned, since I've kind of got the hang of being here, I might as well stay here.

LSB: What about the end of the novel. I read the end of your novel as very ambiguous. I think it's hard to tell whether Joy is going to get better or if she's going to get worse. I would say she's making some steps, she's making her decisions . . .

JG: Again, that's how I'm accessing her reality. It's ambiguous because she doesn't know either, why should you know if she doesn't know? I don't know. Some people have said it's very upbeat, some people have said it's awful, 'she's obviously on the slippery slope to alcoholism'. I'm delighted when I hear that people feel quite strong but opposite things. I didn't have a message at the end. I felt she talked about looking for the light, that's what she'd like to do. She wants to get better, but that doesn't necessarily mean somebody does, but that's what she wants and wanting to is the start. I felt it was kind of upbeat, but plenty of other people have perfectly valid cases for why it shouldn't be. It's up to them, that's fine.

LSB: Oh that reminds me, what about the letters to Marianne? That's the only point in the book where Joy is what might be called lucid. I think Marianne is more therapy than anything Joy encounters in the hospital, the letters to Marianne reveal what's happening in Joy's life. Did they have any particular function in the novel or were they just reaching out?

JG: Yes they are. Again, it's the idiotic irony factor that it's always easier to talk to someone who isn't there than it is to talk to someone who is there. The people who are there, who are being fucking paid to talk to her and find out what's going on, are so singularly clueless at it, and so singularly awful at it, that the letters are the last form of therapy Joy has left because friendship is the ultimate therapy. I was also trying to underpin the fact that there are all these people around her that are ostensibly involved in her being ill, so called 'ill', and her getting better, and are actually just making matters worse where she's letting them impinge at all because they aren't looking at her. She's just subject matter, she's case matter, she's a 'sick' person -- in other words, not a person. Yeah, trying to order it on paper for someone else, knowing somebody's out there and is trying to make sense of it, partly because of the fact they are safely thousands and thousands of miles away. You know it's always easier to spit things out on the phone than it is eye to eye. It's the same thing, just the same thing. The letters are even safer.

LSB: They take a while to get there.

JG: And you can't get them back once you've put them in the mail. (Laughs)

LSB: When I saw you last at the Women 2000 conference, you said you were working on your second novel and you hoped your editor said it was rubbish because you wanted to start over again. Did you ever finish your second novel?

JG: Yes, I finished it three months ago.

LSB: When is it coming out?

JG: It's coming out in spring 94.

LSB: That's good. Did you like it?

JG: I don't know yet. I haven't read it as a novel yet, I've only read it as somebody who's writing it and when I'm involved in the process of writing I haven't a clue whether it's good or not. The worry for me is simply trying to get it to make sense as it comes out on the paper. I think it eventually makes some kind of sense, whether it's clear enough sense now I need to read it as a reader and I can't do that until it's actually published which is too late. (Laughs) God, it looks authoritative, all painted and with a cover on it -- that's when the panic starts. I'll read it as a reader then and I'll know whether it's any good. I hope it kind of makes sense, but it's quite a different animal, quite a different thing.

LSB: It's always hard I think when you have a first novel that's a real success and then the second one. It's really hard to follow up, people have these big expectations for you. Do you feel pressurized by that?

JG: Well sure. Enormous. Everybody wants to be loved. It doesn't matter how many times I tell myself it doesn't matter what academics think, it's what you think, you're the author of your life as well as the author of your book. If you thought it was Okay, it's Okay. But everybody wants to be loved. If people are making a big fuss of you and making you feel like finally you have come home to something, you belong doing something, you are accepted -- well with me it's always being understood -- I was staggered when people said they understood what the book was about -- and then to be told, 'well we thought we understood you, but we're not so sure now, we might have made a mistake', it's a horrifying prospect. But in the end it is a prospect that I must try and minimize. It must not matter, because if that matters what you try to do is 'please the teacher' writing, you're trying to get these critics to say nice things about you and then you've lost your sense of where you're coming from and why you started writing in the first place. It's lovely to get good reviews. It's wonderful to get good reviews. It's even better not to care.

LSB: Yes, but it's really hard not to care.

JG: I aspire not to care. (Laughs)

LSB: Get real, welcome to the real world!

JG: At the moment, of course, I care very much. If it's badly received it will affect me. But you try to hold on to what you know is a logical perspective as opposed to the emotional perspective.

LSB: Good luck.

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