



UNIVERSIDADE DA CORUÑA

HAND-IN-HAND WITH HÉLÈNE CIXOUS:  
A RE-VISION OF THE WORK OF  
SCOTTISH WRITERS WILLA MUIR, JESSIE  
KESSON AND JANICE GALLOWAY

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## ABSTRACT

In the early years of the twentieth century, Willa Muir warned women of their own self-destruction if they aligned themselves with the power of the Self that came to them, which was imposed by the 'Law of the Father,' the authority represented by a Calvinist religion based on the coldness of rationality and on the value of human beings measured according to their productivity, and by a Church that regarded the world of emotions as profane, an evil that had to be repressed. In the late twentieth century, Janice Galloway continues to denounce the pernicious effects of the power represented by the Church, and by extension the community, which continues to exercise repression in the unconscious of women in Scotland.

From this repression, the three writers examined in this thesis - Willa Muir, Jessie Kesson, and Janice Galloway - offer their heroines a way out, a new voice which Hélène Cixous called 'sortie,' a new liberating voice in continuous negotiation between the Self and the Other, without ever leaving the feminine language, the caressing and liberating of the voice of the unrepresented mother which vibrates in women's minds full of musically and love.

## RESUMEN

Ya a principios del siglo XX, Willa Muir advirtió a las mujeres de su propia auto-destrucción si se alienaban con el poder del Self impuesto por la 'Ley del Padre,' la autoridad representada por la religión Calvinista en Escocia basada en la frialdad racionalista y en la valía de los seres humanos según su productividad, y por una Iglesia que consideraba profano el mundo de las emociones, y por tanto un mal que debía ser reprimido. A finales del siglo XX, Janice Galloway, sigue denunciando los efectos perniciosos del poder representado por la Iglesia y por extensión de la comunidad, que continúa reprimiendo el inconsciente de las mujeres en Escocia.

Para combatir esta represión, las tres escritoras estudiadas en esta tesis - Willa Muir, Jessie Kesson y Janice Galloway - ofrecen a sus heroínas una salida, una nueva voz que Hélène Cixous llamó 'sortie,' una nueva voz liberadora en continua negociación entre el Self y el Otro, sin abandonar nunca la escritura femenina, la voz acariciadora y liberadora de la madre que resuena en la mente de las mujeres llena de musicalidad y de vida.

## RESUMO

Xa a principios do século XX, Willa Muir advertiu ás mulleres da súa propia auto-destrución se se alienaban co poder do Self imposto pola 'Lei do Pai,' a autoridade representada pola relixión Calvinista en Escocia baseada na frialdade racionalista e na valía dos seres humanos segundo a súa produtividade, e por unha Igrexa que consideraba profano o mundo das emocións, e por tanto un mal que debía ser reprimido. A finais do século XX, Janice Galloway segue denunciando os efectos perniciosos do poder representado pola Igrexa e por extensión da comunidade, que continúa reprimindo o inconsciente das mulleres en Escocia.

Para combater esta represión, as tres escritoras estudadas nesta tese - Willa Muir, Jessie Kesson e Janice Galloway - ofrecen ás súas heroínas unha saída, unha nova voz que Hélène Cixous chamou 'sortie,' unha nova voz liberadora en continua negociación entre o Self e o Outro, sen abandonar nunca a escritura feminina, a voz acariciadora e liberadora da nai que resoa na mente das mulleres chea de musicalidad e de vida.



## PREFACE

The aim of this thesis is to show that very strong links exist within a specific group of women writers belonging to the Scottish literary tradition of twentieth-century Scotland. The great success that Janice Galloway has achieved since she wrote her debut novel *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (1989) can be seen as part of the achievements of a literature written by women in Scotland in the twentieth century wishing to escape from and struggle against strong Scottish patriarchal structures of power which repressed them. My research focuses on the work of Willa Muir, Jessie Kesson and Janice Galloway, who wrote in different historical periods of twentieth-century Scotland: Willa Muir wrote during the interwar period - the so-called Scottish literary Renaissance; Jessie Kesson wrote at long intervals during the post-Second-World-War period; and the contemporary Janice Galloway who started writing in the 1980s, and has recently published the second part of her memoirs entitled *All Made Up* (2011), which won the Scottish Book of the Year Award in 2012. *Jellyfish* is her latest book of short stories, published in the summer of 2015.

This thesis attempts to build bridges between these three generations of women writers against the theoretical background of French Feminism, in particular the work of Hélène Cixous. With reference to Cixous's literary views on *écriture féminine*, or feminine language, I shall try to analyse how these three Scottish women writers subverted and destabilised a conventionally accepted tradition in the context of the lived experiences of women in Scotland during the twentieth century. My main purpose is to

review their work using a different approach which has not been specifically considered so far - French feminism -, an approach which involves writing as re-vision, a term which I quote from Adrienne Rich's "When We Dead Awaken. Writing as Re-vision," included in her illuminating book *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence. Selected Prose 1966-1978*:

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. And this drive to self-knowledge, for women, is more than a search for identity: it is part of our refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society. A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to know how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us; and how we can begin to see - and therefore live - afresh. A change in the concept of sexual identity is essential if we are not going to see the old political order re-assert itself in every new revolution [...] We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it, not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us. (35)

The main objectives of this research are:

- To provide an overview of the position of Willa Muir, Jessie Kesson and Janice Galloway within their respective Scottish literary movements.
- To emphasize the role of these women writers within a patriarchal tradition and to show how this affects their writing.
- To analyse how these women writers break the silence and subvert the patriarchal structures of power through a different way of writing in their works by giving their female characters a voice of their own.

In order to carry out these objectives, I have divided this study into five chapters: firstly, an introduction that includes the literary corpus, the philosophy of Hélène Cixous and post-structuralist and psychoanalytical French feminism debates, and an overview of the Scottish Renaissance as a political and cultural movement in the inter-war period in Scotland and its impact on later periods of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Secondly, I analyse the novels and essays of Willa Muir, Jessie Kesson and Janice Galloway in three separate chapters in order to provide a distinct voice for each of the writers, considering the social and literary context in which they lived and developed their literary activity. To do this, I have selected some of the works of each writer that I consider more transgressive and which, therefore, best reflect the philosophy of Hélène Cixous and feminine language.

In the fifth and final part of the thesis I draw conclusions based on the foregoing chapters which allow us to understand in which ways Willa Muir, Jessie Kesson and Janice Galloway have subverted a literary system which was “lopsided,” and how they destabilised a conventionally accepted tradition in the context of the lived experiences

of women in Scotland during the twentieth century, by searching for a new language which Hélène Cixous called *écriture féminine*. To this end, I shall approach my research from the background of the feminist theories of Hélène Cixous including feminine language, a language which is not a simple or straightforward language, easy to theorize or define, but is a complex language, plural, and which may be subject to multiple interpretations and may include all kinds of texts. But above all, feminine language is a language which resonates in a territory different from the language dominated by the enclosed and monolithic territory of the male discourse in which the woman is excluded from a male-constructed society which considers her as the opposite of man, as an ‘Other’, as she states in “Sorties”:

Defining a feminine practice of writing is impossible with an impossibility that will continue; for this practice will never be able to be theorized, enclosed, coded, which does not mean it does not exist. But it will always exceed the discourse governing the phallogocentric system; it takes place and will take place somewhere other than in the territories subordinated to philosophical-theoretical domination. It will not let itself think except through subjects that break automatic functions, border runners never subjugated by any authority. (92)

The research and writings of Hélène Cixous are considered further below in chapter 1.2.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1- LITERATURE REVIEW

In an article entitled “*DNB to NEW DNB: Good News for Dead Scottish writers, especially Women,*” (1999), Isobel Murray explains in detail how she undertook the new enterprise of contributing to the creation of the New Dictionary of National Biography (New DNB). This new dictionary was meant to be an extension of the old Dictionary of National Biography, which was mainly the responsibility of George Smith (1824-1901), of Scottish origin. Colin Matthew, also born and raised in Scotland, appointed editor of New DNB, had decided not to change any subject which had previously appeared in the old dictionary, keeping all the same subjects and authors which had appeared in the original DNB, no matter how their reputation had declined or disappeared from the literary arena. When Isobel Murray, an academic deeply involved in late-nineteenth and twentieth-century literature in Scotland, assumed this new challenge of un-burying Scottish authors and having them published, she saw in amazement that the editors of the twentieth-century supplements to the New DNB had for the most part neglected Scottish poets and writers, Neil Gunn, James Leslie Mitchell (Lewis Grassie Gibbon), Douglas Young, Ian Macpherson, and among them numerous women writers such as Violet Jacob, Nan Shepherd, Willa Muir and Jessie Kesson: “The numbers of entries consisted of 25, (1 female included) [...] The ‘1 female’ was Mary MacKellar, and the only words about her ‘Gaelic poet and translator’ whose or bibliographical details were not cited in any other modern books of reference.” (160)

Murray argues that the work of these and many other Scottish men and women has been neglected due to “the patriarchal Scottish literary mind that presided over generations of English Literature teaching, notably my own,” (161) but at the same time she underlines the extraordinary effort made by the new generation of scholars, who have carried out a great process of discovery of well-known women writers in the last two decades and have raised them to the rank of important figures of literature that they deserve. Catherine Carswell, Nan Shepherd, Willa Muir, Jessie Kesson, Violet Jacob, Mary Findlater, Violet Jacob, Dot Allan, Mary Findlater, Helen Cruickshank, Marion Angus, Olive Fraser, and Rachel Annand Taylor were some of the figures that she would finally include in her list for the DNB, some of them and plenty other new names having been already included in the *History of Scottish Women Writers*, edited by Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan (1997), the most important work on Scottish women writers produced so far - women writers from the Gaelic ballad tradition of Sarah M. Dunnigan and Mary Ellen Brown to the contemporary poets Liz Lochhead and Jackie Kay and novelists A. L. Kennedy, Janice Galloway and Dilys Rose.

In the introduction to the volume, Macmillan and Gifford acknowledge the efforts made by earlier scholars for their contribution to gender studies, especially American scholars, in gathering together the analysis of those works by women writers. One such case is American scholar Elaine Showalter, who, in her masterpiece *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), has made a great effort to un-bury the history and writing of many women silenced by mainstream literary history, although in Macmillan and Gifford’s view, Showalter avoids relevant aspects such as place and class when

analysing the works and lives of women writers born in different places. This is the case, they argue, “of women born in Australia or New Zealand or India or South Africa or France, usually because of the mainly colonial pursuits of their fathers, thirteen born in Ireland, one in Wales and ten in Scotland” (xvii). However, in the introduction to *A Literature of Their Own* Showalter points out that her aim when writing the book was to theorize on “the issues of nationality, subculture, literary influence, and literary autonomy,” and most importantly, she adds that the title of the book was inspired by a statement from the celebrated John Stuart Mill’s *The Subjection of Women* (1869): “If women lived in a different country from men and had never read any of their writing, they would have a literature of their own.” (qtd. in Showalter 3-4). Showalter’s project was to write a story about female experience and the linguistic struggles of women writers to present that experience, with the aim of challenging the traditional canon which so far had meant that the assumption of male dominance led to the assumption of female anonymity. Her research from a feminist perspective, together with that of other American scholars such as Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert’s *The Madwoman in the Attic. The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literary Imagination* (1979), Mary Ellmann’s *Thinking about Women* (1968), or Patricia Meyer Spacks’s *The Female Imagination* (1975), has shown the literary achievement of many competent women novelists to be inseparable from their sense of themselves as women, from their questioning - and in some cases - radical outlook on society, or from their critical stance regarding their contemporary issues.

Another comprehensive piece of work which has contributed to the study of

modern Scottish literature is the four-volume *The History of Scottish Literature* (1987), where Cairns Craig includes essays on Scottish fiction, poetry and drama, and other subjects which aim to shed light on a Scottish tradition in literature which has remained invisible, as he argues, darkened by English or American culture. In the opening remarks of the fourth volume, he explains that it was not until the 1960s and 1970s that, thanks to the Government's involvement in funding the arts through the Scottish Arts Council,<sup>1</sup> the Scottish publishing industry started to present and re-publish works from the nineteenth and early-twentieth century and to open new paths for those contemporary writers wishing to assert their identity in Scotland. He claims that the fact that Scottish literature had been sidelined for decades is because "where Scottish literature and history were taught, they were taught as subsidiaries to the 'mainstream' of English literature" (3), and as the dominant language and subjects were English, "writers are assimilated into the development of English literature as though they were an integral part of its creativity rather than Scotland's" (4), which in his view has led to the lack of recognition of Scottish writers and Scottish culture. In this respect, Craig cites the two great waves of the developments of Scottish literature in the twentieth century: the great Scottish literary movement in the 1920s, known as the Scottish Renaissance (which will be discussed later in this introduction), and a second notable

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<sup>1</sup> The Scottish Arts Council was replaced by a wider organization called Creative Scotland in July 2010. Its purpose is to promote and encourage the Arts, Screen and creative industries in Scotland, and it works with both national and international projects in the creation of a network which helps the development of projects which contribute to the welfare of the Scottish people. At the same time, Creative Scotland's main purpose is to give access to the Arts to the people of Scotland who cannot have this opportunity by other means. Creative Scotland is a non-departmental public body, but as it depends on public funding, it is accountable to the Scottish Government. Its funding - a small percentage - also comes from the National Lottery, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.



wave of Scottish creators spanning from the late 1950s to the 1970s, which completely changed the picture of the Scottish literary scene thanks to, in his own words, “the liberation of the voice into the varieties of accent and dialect and alternative language which the collapse of the English literary imperium made possible, [...] and at the same time, the rapidly changing nature of Scotland’s social experience, gave rise to a renewed energy which did justice to the varieties of forms in modern literature” (8).

However, in Craig’s volume, little space is granted to the literature written by women in Scotland in the twentieth century. Joy Hendry participates with the chapter “Twentieth-century Women’s Writing: ‘The Nest of Singing Birds’,” in which she pays homage to some of the twentieth-century Scottish women writers whose work, she says, “has been minimised and marginalised, particularly in poetry” (291). She discusses the work of poets such as Violet Jacob, Marion Angus and Helen Cruickshank, “who are largely dismissed as minor versifiers by the critics” (292), and fiction writers such as Jessie Kesson, Naomi Mitchison and Willa Muir, whose work was out of print for decades, or in the case of Willa Muir, whose work was always in the shade of her husband’s, the Orcadian poet Edwin Muir. Muriel Spark’s novels are given whole chapters in the volume, probably because she is the only Scottish woman writer who has achieved international recognition outside the Scottish tradition, thus she has been undeservedly neglected by Scottish critics as well as other Scottish contemporary writers such as William Boyd, Allan Massie or Ronald Frame.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In an illuminating article entitled “Divergent Scottishness: William Boyd, Allan Massie, Ronald Frame,” included in *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies* (1993), Douglas Dunn discusses whether these writers have been disregarded by contemporary critics because they do not follow the “atmosphere of ‘political

In this regard, Carol Anderson’s “Listening to the Women Talk” included in *The Scottish Novel since the Seventies* (1993) highlights the work of three fiction writers born in different stages of the twentieth century: Jessie Kesson, Emma Tennant and Sherman Macdonald, who at the time the article was published, lived in “physical exile from Scotland - all three live in London <sup>3</sup> [...] excluded for so long, female voices speak, not ‘authoritatively’ but eloquently, from (beyond) the margins of Scottish society” (172). She suggests that Scottish women writers, either consciously or not, share a common experience of exclusion and marginalization, and therefore they share similar themes in their fiction, since “if male Scottish authors have had to contend with difficulties generated in part by a problematic relationship to national identity, language and literary tradition, for Scottish women this experience is compounded by gender” (171).

The reappearance of ‘lost’ Scottish women writers in the last decades encouraged Carol Anderson and Aileen Christianson to produce *Scottish Women’s Fiction. 1920s to 1960s: Journeys into Being*, an innovative volume published in 2000. The title of the volume recalls Nan Shepherd’s words in her non-fictional work *The Living Mountain* (1977), a lyrical piece of writing in which she reflects on the

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correctness’ which encourages social narrowing in favour of a working class, left-wing, vernacular authorship”(150). He suggests that their inclusion in the concept of Scottishness should be regarded on the basis of their “deracination and spiritual homelessness” and not on cultural and political grounds. In the light of this, he points to the “small-mindedness” of the Scottish Renaissance movement as being part of the origin of prescribing the ‘quality’ of being a Scot, a prescription which the novel has inherited with unfavourable literary consequences for writers with a “diasporic background” whose “subsequent education might be as valid as any other kind of Scottish experience” (156). And he asks sharply: “What is to be done with Scottish writers who refuse to subscribe to the average pieties of socialism, dialect, poverty, Glasgow, Edinburgh, small-town life, rural predicament or nationalism?” (157).

<sup>3</sup>Jessie Kesson died in September 1994 in London, at the age of 78.

experience she lived in the Scottish hills, a spiritual journey which she compared with the Buddhist pilgrimage to a mountain, and which she called a 'Journey into Being': "I believe that I now understand in some small measure why the buddhist goes on pilgrimage to a mountain. The journey is itself part of the technique by which the god is sought. It is a journey into Being" (84). The writers dealt with by Anderson and Christianson were all born in the late-nineteenth century or early-twentieth century: Catherine Carswell, Willa Muir, Rebecca West, Nan Shepherd, Naomi Mitchison, Nancy Brysson Morrison, Jessie Kesson and Muriel Spark. According to Anderson and Christianson, most of them remained invisible in the studies of modernism, and particularly during and after Scottish Renaissance, probably because, Anderson and Christianson argue, it "was presented as a predominantly male movement" (11). The aim of Anderson and Christianson is not, they point out, to create a canon of Scottish women writers, or to present their work with only one voice, but to generate discussion of the writers' works from different perspectives within a contemporary literary framework. They agree that these women writers were aware of the Scottish tradition which sustained their culture: the oral tradition of ballads, songs and storytelling of the Scottish culture they lived in, but at the same time they shared a disaffection for the limiting Scottish patriarchy this culture meant for them, a culture based on Calvinist principles to which they consciously reacted with:

Some degree of feminist awareness, all of them having lived through the changes wrought by early twentieth feminism [...] a concern with female identity runs throughout their works, in most there is some exploration of

women's sexuality, of relationships with other women and men, or motherhood, and of the experience of exclusion from institutions and social power. (8)

Despite the growing flourishing of the work dealing with women, and increasing numbers of lists in feminist literary studies, there continue to be complaints. In an illustrative article published in the Scottish literary magazine *Chapman* entitled "Why Engender?" (1994), Leslie Hills complains that "attempts to celebrate identity in Scotland fall foul of a deeply misogynist society - a society demonstrating its misogyny in its press, its public life, its politics and the daily lives of women" (47). According to the research on women's lives and their histories carried out by the organization *Engender*, which attempts to improve women's lives in Scotland, Hills argues that the position of women in Scotland is not equally distributed "in terms of work, income and housing" which in her opinion means that "issues of particular concern to women were not merely ignored: their existence was not recognised" (45). The situation she envisioned for women in the 1990s in Scotland stood far from what is expected in a democratic nation in which the level of equality between men and women and the standard of living conditions should be respected. The Scottish welfare, in her view, fails to provide satisfactory protection to children and destroys work for their mothers, which means that many women "fall back on benefit and are again at the mercy of the punitive social security system" (46). Under these conditions, she argues, women have less control over their own lives, fewer chances to make decisions on their own future and therefore fewer opportunities to achieve posts of responsibility which help provide

protection for women. All this, Hills adds, made the work of women invisible in Scotland in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century in many fields. She criticizes, for example, the 1992 Chambers' *Anatomy of Scotland* which only included one woman out of ten contributors: "The Foreword states that his book 'is about how Scotland works, it is about who runs it, where power lies, and the way in which power is exercised' And indeed it is. In its detailed description of patriarchy, in terms of its stated intention, it cannot be faulted"(47).

Hills echoes Peter Jones's words in the introduction to the volume that celebrate the Scottish myth, "a set of myths and assumptions about the nature of Scottishness that have over the years [...] coalesced to form the character of the nation as it sees itself today" (qtd. in Hills 47), to which she argues: "The problem for women in Scotland is that these dominant myths are [...] at best gender-blind and at worst totally exclusive of women in Scotland. The history of women, their struggles and triumphs has not been absorbed by the dominant Scottish myth" (47). She claims that the history of women in Scotland has been different from that of men as women have not taken part in the dominant myth that men have under patriarchy, and she proposes that in order to give more visibility to the lives and work of women in Scotland it is necessary to re-evaluate their works and lives for a full understanding of their history, and of Scottish history.

From the same viewpoint, in their introduction to the volume *Out of Bonds. Women in Scottish Society 1800-1945* (1992), Esther Breitenbach and Eleanor Gordon highlight that although the work of women has been made invisible, and is absent from recent Scottish history, this is not, according to them, a result of women's absence from

political, social and public life. It is, they argue, due to the blindness of historians towards women's experiences, and their lack of awareness of their vital importance to a complete understanding of Scottish history. From this viewpoint, in an article in *The Feminist Review* entitled "Understanding Women in Scotland" (1998), which was commissioned by the Equal Opportunities Committee of the Scottish Parliament, and which is part of a research project on gender equality issues in Scotland from 1993-2000, Breitenbach, Brown and Myers further explore the historical situation of women throughout history, and underline the double marginalization that has affected Scottish women writers; a combination, they suggest, of political and cultural forces within Britain, and specifically of male domination within Scotland. They highlight that the fact that Scottish society has often been characterised as patriarchal gives rise to the assumption that women have been marginalised and suppressed not only within their own families but within the social, political and literary arenas.

Even some historians who are apparently sympathetic to the problem of women's lack of visibility seem to accept that women's natural status is that of invisibility. In this respect T. C. Smout, one of the leading contemporary social historians of Scotland, has observed that "the history of the family, and of child upbringing and the place of women within and without the home, is so neglected in Scotland as to verge on becoming a historiographical disgrace" (qtd. in Breitenbach and Gordon 2). However, not all Scottish historians seem to share Smout's opinion. In the volume *Scotland in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (1996), edited by T.M. Devine and R.J. Finlay, Roderick Watson contributed his article "Maps of Desire: Scottish Literature in the

Twentieth Century,” and his only reference in it to women writers is dedicated to Willa Muir, comprising a summary of her work as a contribution to her husband’s translation of Kafka’s works into English. Even more striking is the reference that Scottish writer and language activist Billy Kay makes in *Scots - The Mither Tongue* (1986). In this book, he gives a well-documented account of the importance of the Scots language in the life and identity of the Scottish nation over history, however relegating Margaret Oliphant and Susan Ferrier to a nearly residual literary position, alluding to them as being among “many less gifted writers” (116), when compared to “novelists of major stature” such as Robert Louis Stevenson and George Douglas Brown:

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was still a period of great achievement in Scots literature. Sir Walter Scott, James Hogg and John Galt were novelists of major stature in the first half of the century, while Robert Louis Stevenson and George Douglas Brown gave the tradition a lift towards the century’s close. In addition, there were many less gifted writers such as Susan Ferrier, Mrs Oliphant and the group of “Kailyard” novelists, all of whom nevertheless contributed to an understanding of Scottish life in a period of great social change. (116)

In the acclaimed *Scottish Novel* (1978), American literary historian Francis Russell Hart provides what he accounts as a comprehensive analysis of the Scottish novel, beginning with the Gothic novel of the 1770s and ending with the social novel of the 1960 and 1970s; an analysis he finds necessary due to neglect of the “comprehensive interpretative survey of Scotland’s novelists (vii). Interestingly, in the

chapter dedicated to mid-Victorians, he merely devotes one page to the analysis of Margaret Oliphant's works, whereas the study of the works of her contemporary George MacDonald is more extensive. However, Hart acknowledges Oliphant as "the visionary of the 'Seen and Unseen,' as master of the Blackwoodian ghost story"(100-101). But perhaps more alarming is the exclusion of relevant women of the Renaissance period such as Nan Shepherd, Catherine Carswell and the extraordinary Jessie Kesson. This is also the case in Maurice Lindsay's celebrated *History of Scottish Literature* (1977), which has been praised as one of the first extensive studies of the history of Scottish Literature - after Kurt Wittig's *The Scottish Tradition in Literature* (1958), and David Craig's *Scottish Literature and the Scottish People, 1680-1830* (1961). In this volume, Lindsay begins by examining the early Gaelic ballads in Scotland, and extends his remit to the prose and poetry written during the Scottish Renaissance, as far as the 1960s. In this study, which aims to be "a full account of Scottish Literature" (7), he provides little account of the work by women writers, by only citing the work of two lyricists, Alison Rutherford (1712-1797) and Jean Elliot (1727-1805), both writing under pseudonyms, who "pretended that their productions were by other hands, song-writing not being as lady-like a pursuit as sewing" (187), and summarising the work of nineteenth-century poetesses Violet Jacob (1863-1946) and Marion Angus (1866-1946) in one paragraph. As far as twentieth-century women writers are concerned, he cites Muriel Spark, whose *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* (1960), he argues, "centres upon a Scottish eccentric, Mrs Spark's later novels ornament the literature of England rather than Scottish literature" (435).



With the flourishing of Scottish literature in the last two decades, editors and publishers have dedicated numerous chapters to the work of Scottish women writers and particularly the three women writers studied in this thesis; the case of Jessie Kesson, as we mentioned above, being of notable relevance due the ‘exile’ she had to live in London from 1951 until her death in 1994, after a harsh life on farms in Scotland and a painful childhood first with her mother in Elgin, and then in an orphanage in Skene. In this respect, it is worth mentioning the invaluable efforts made by Isobel Murray, Kesson’s biographer, who un-buried all her fiction, poetry and radio talks. Murray contributed books such as *Jessie Kesson: Writing her Life* (2000) for which she was awarded the National Library of Scotland/Saltire Research Book of the Year Award; an excellently-conducted interview in *Scottish Writers Talking 1*, entitled “The Sma’ Perfect. Jessie Kesson” (1996); a whole chapter in the New DNB, and the collection of Kesson’s radio talks which she edited and were published under the title of *Somewhere Beyond* in 2000. Murray promoted the republishing of her novels *The White Bird Passes* (1958), *The Glitter of Mica* (1963), *Another Time Another Place* (1983), and the collections of short stories *Where the Apple Ripens* (1985), as well as numerous articles on Kesson’s life and work.

As far as Willa Muir is concerned, *Chapman*, a magazine based in Scotland, has published articles on her work and a special issue entitled “Peerie Willa Muir” in 1993. The doctoral thesis *The Life and Work of Willa Muir* written by Kirsty Anne Allen in 1996 is kept in the Willa Muir archive in the University Library, St Andrews, Scotland; and *Moving in Circles: Willa Muir’s Writings* (2007) by Aileen Christianson is a

comprehensive exploration of her novels and essays with respect to modernism, and of their connections to the feminist cause of the 1920s. Willa's two novels *Imagined Corners* (1931) and *Mrs Ritchie* (1933) have also been republished and revisited by the critics, and especially her essays "Women: An Inquiry" (1925), "Mrs Grundy in Scotland," and "Women in Scotland," both published in 1936, single her out as an eminent feminist writer who eagerly brought to light the repressed and difficult place of women in Scottish culture.

Not only reviews such as *Chapman*, mentioned above, and other Scottish literary journals and reviews such as *Scottish Studies Review*, *Association for Scottish Literary Studies*, *Scottish Reviews of Books*, *Edinburgh Review*, *New Writing Scotland*, or *Granta* have devoted much coverage especially to the works of Willa Muir and Janice Galloway, but also international reviews based outside Britain whose interest in Scottish literature has grown in recent years; these include for example *Scottish Studies*, edited by Peter Lang and published in Frankfurt am Main; *Studies in Scottish Literature*, published by the University of South Carolina, and *The International Journal of Scottish Literature*, which is the extension of *The Association for Scottish Literary Studies* in Philadelphia and is included in the prestigious literary review *Modern Language Association* (MLA). All these reviews and magazines have contributed to making visible the work of these and many other Scottish women writers, and over the past years they have published numerous works on contemporary fiction by women writers and poets who stand out in the British literary scene for their originality in style and voice, and who have therefore deserved both national and international awards. This

is the case for example regarding Janice Galloway, who has gained notable international stature, and whose novels and short stories have been acclaimed and translated into different languages and are also included in both Scottish and international university syllabuses.

With regard to Galloway's work, and as early as 1994, Liza Suzanne Babinec dedicated one chapter of her dissertation *Cultural Constructs: The Representation of Femininity in the Novels of Emma Tennant, Margaret Elphinstone, and Janice Galloway*, written from a post-structuralist and post-colonial approach. *The Edinburgh Review* published a whole issue of essays on her work entitled *Exchanges* in 2004. In the same year Julia Novak published her thesis *Rewriting Clara Schumann: Intertextuality and Intermediality in Janice Galloway's Clara*, while in 2000 Mary McGlynn's dissertation *The Poor Mouth: Versions of the Vernacular in Twentieth-Century Narrative*, analysed Galloway's début novel *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (1989) from a post-modern point of view, as Mary McGlynn herself points out in an article "Janice Galloway" included in *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* (2001):

Reading *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* as anorexic and bulimic [...] allows its skeleton to be seen, arguing in part that the text withholds information from the reader, allows its skeleton to be seen, and incorporates undigested chunks of the language of others; the second section on Galloway viewed her non-traditional family structures as parallel to her non-traditional narrative structures. (12)

Janice Galloway belongs to a wave of Scottish women writers who began to write in the early 1980s, including Margaret Elphinstone, Dilys Rose and Sian Hayton in fiction; Kathleen Jamie, Carol Ann Duffy, Jackie Kay, and Liz Lochhead in poetry, all of them women writers who have challenged the position previously given to women in Scotland. As Gifford, Dunningan and MacGillivray underline in their comprehensive analysis of *Scottish Literature* (2002), this generation of contemporary writers writing in the 1980s after the post-referendum disappointment regarding the Scottish Assembly in 1979<sup>4</sup> in a way which has forced them to revise and rewrite the old texts and myths of ideas, given the political and social changes of the twenty-first century. They represent a new wave of writers wishing to search for ways out into the future, and to open doors to a new era, employing a richer and more creative way of looking at Scotland, as Gifford *et al.* suggest: “No longer demanding allegiance to a single MacDiarmid agenda, but recognising other people’s right to perceive Scotland differently, and to imagine it differently as well” (735), but whose roots stem from the tradition of writing the ‘Industrial Elegy,’ and share the concerns of realist novels based in Glasgow, the

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<sup>4</sup> On 1st March 1979 Scotland voted in favour of the Scottish Assembly, a legislative body for Scotland which proposed to devolve a number of powers from the Parliament of the United Kingdom. The 1978 Act provided for special conditions in the referendum, requiring that for the Act to be passed at least 40% of the electorate would have to vote “Yes”. In addition to the arguments which surrounded Scottish devolution, the public debate was taxation-centered. The proposed Assembly would not have independent powers to modify taxes, and consequently would be highly limited in its operations, and this made the “No” vote rise. The result of the referendum was a narrow majority in favour of devolution, not sufficient for the Act to be passed. The disappointed supporters of the Scottish Assembly organized a campaign under the slogan “Scotland said yes”, claiming that the 40% rule was undemocratic and the referendum result justified the establishment of the Assembly. In August 2009 the Scottish National Party, in power after winning a majority in the 2007 election, announced the 2010 Referendum as part of their third legislative programme, in which a possible referendum on the issue of independence would be proposed. However on 7th November 2010, they announced the withdrawal of their plan, and postponed it until after the 2011 General Elections for the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish Independence Referendum finally took place in Scotland on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2014, and the “No” voters won with 53% to the question “Should Scotland be an independent country?”

industrial city in the interwar period, for example Edwin Muir's *The Three Brothers* (1931) and *Poor Tom* (1932), George Blake's *The Shipbuilders* (1935) or Alexander MacArthur and H. Kinsley Long's *No Mean City: A Story of the Glasgow Slums* (1935) which anticipated a Glasgow condemned to economic depression after an epic period of shipbuilding and heavy industry with skilful communities.

This is then the setting for Janice Galloway's Scottish novels. Galloway has responded to the challenge thrown down by the contemporary post-industrial novel of the 1980s with Alasdair Gray and James Kelman as its main representatives, concentrating on contemporary and varying versions of post-industrial Lowland urban culture, and envisaging it far from sentimental views. In her novels she not only provides an account of a rotten end-of-the-siècle Scotland but also she satirizes the state of modern Scotland through disturbed female characters striving to find a voice which, as in the case of Willa Muir and Jessie Kesson's protagonists, is a voice which, as I shall show in this thesis, speaks through the distinct language of separation, through finding a way out of a system which is an escape, and at the same time a challenge to the authoritarian principles of Scottish society.

## 1.2- HÉLÈNE CIXOUS

In the introductory part of the collection of *New Lectures of Psychoanalysis* published in 1964, James Strachey emphasizes the importance of the works of Sigmund Freud for the better understanding of the human being as a subject, and his inquiries into the world of dreams for the discovery of the unconscious. As Strachey notes, Freud's research on the human mind, which led him to the discovery of the unconscious, has been crucial for later studies and revisions based on his theories, in particular the exploration of the feminine mind. For Freud, the feminine mind was that dark subject that he left without a full explanation, being aware that a thorough analysis of the female mind would lead to a revision of women's role in society and the re-evaluation of men's theories of the mind and the role of women in society. In this respect, Strachey quotes the last paragraph of a lecture Sigmund Freud gave on "Femininity" in 1932/33, in which he states:

But do not forget that I've only been describing women in so far as their nature is determined by their sexual function. It is true that that influence extends very far; but we do not overlook the fact that an individual woman may be a human being in other respects as well. If you want to know more about femininity, inquire from your experiences of life, or turn to the poets, or wait until science can give you a deeper and more coherent information. (qtd. in Strachey 169)

In these last words, Freud implies that woman is a dark continent to be explored and this exploration must be done through the experiences of women themselves, and it seems that it is only women themselves who have the key to their own lives. In fact, science developed, and since these first essays of Freud, many women have researched in the field of psychoanalysis. Their analysis also stems from the studies of Freud's followers such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, and in the case of French feminism, of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Lacan's development of Freud's theories relies entirely on structural linguistics, and aims to demonstrate that the unconscious is present in all writing, and that through writing we learn to analyze and to articulate a set of master signifiers around which identity is organized, and through which the sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed. These 'master' signifiers are our unconscious identifications around which we are alienated in terms of law and desire, hence once these signifiers have been identified, we can go through the process of separating from them and form a new identification more in consonance with our desires.

According to Lacan, what he calls the 'Law of the Father' is the medium through which human beings belong in a culture, a culture which is phallogocentric and oppressive, being represented and enforced by the figure of the father of the family, who considers the rest of the world as the Other because they exist only in relation to him, possessor of the phallus. This 'Law' represses our unconscious desires from an early age when the construction of identity starts to form and, as Freud had already found out, comes out in dreams, or through symptoms of anxiety, guilt, depression or

psychosomatic illness. Lacan establishes a strong link between the sexual on the one hand and the cultural on the other, and he claims that there is a need for language to be analysed differently when it comes from a woman's repressed identity.

This repressed identity was the starting point of the first feminist psychologists willing to rewrite the process of female psycho-sexual development proposed by Freud and Lacan at the beginning of the twentieth century<sup>5</sup>. Psychoanalysis has shown how effective the study of autobiographical writing can be, especially for women, and French feminism, rooted in a tradition of European philosophy, linguistics, and psychoanalysis, proposes the feminine as that which is repressed, misrepresented in the discourses of western culture and thought. Indeed, the logical ordering of reality into hierarchies, dualisms, and binary systems implies a prior gender dichotomy of man/woman. On the basis of this reclamation, French feminists propose a form of writing which they call *écriture féminine* or feminine language, which essentially deconstructs the phallic organization of sexuality and its code in writing. French feminism, whose main representative is Hélène Cixous, holds that a new woman's writing is necessary to recover from the repression of the feminine unconscious in western discourse and from models of subjectivity which require the exclusion of the feminine, and consequently the female body.

Hélène Cixous was born in Algeria in 1937, to a Sephardic father and an Austro-

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<sup>5</sup> In England, for example, Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974) helped restore the interest in psychoanalysis. Greatly influenced by anthropology and Marxism, she concentrates her theories on the symbolic status of the phallus, the Law of the Father, and the position for women within the symbolic order.



German mother. After writing her doctoral thesis *L'Éxile de James Joyce ou l'Art du Remplacement* in 1968, she was appointed Professor of English Literature at the University of Nanterre, and in the same year she took part in the process of establishing the experimental University of Paris VIII in Vincennes, which has been located in Saint Denis since 1978, where she currently holds a professorship in Feminist Studies in the *Centre de Recherches en Études Féminines*. In 1975, she began to publish her works in the publishing house *Des Femmes*, and two years later she encountered the work of Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector, who impressed her by the way she approached the female characters, which represented the woman she had been discussing in her theoretical writings. In the early 1980s, Cixous started to write for the Théâtre du Soleil, while she continued with her teaching at Paris VIII, and enjoyed several scholarships in the United States, Canada, Scotland and England, where her texts have been translated.

The work of Hélène Cixous is widely known in all fields of cultural theory and embraces all kinds of genres such as poetry, autobiography, theatre and criticism, and female literary writers of high stature such as Sarah Cornell, Toril Moi, Susan Suleiman, Susan Sellers and Verena Andermatt Conley have examined her works and brought them to light. Her early life in Algeria, and the effects of the Second World War and colonialism influenced her life experience, as she herself explains in “Sorties,” one of the most illuminating articles which is included in her celebrated *The Newly Born Woman*, published in 1975. Along with “The Laugh of the Medusa” it became one of her most important articles on the woman’s question, and from both works I will quote extensively in this thesis as they vividly represent Cixous’s life and work, setting a

precedent in the world of feminist criticism for the claiming of a new poetic writing which expressed the woman's desire for change:

I come, biographically, from a rebellion, from a violent and anguished direct refusal to accept what is happening on the stage on whose edge I find I am placed, as a result of the combined accidents of History [...] I learned to read, to write, to scream, and to vomit in Algeria. Today I know from experience that one cannot imagine what an Algerian French girl was, you have to have been it, to have gone through it. To have seen "Frenchmen" at the "height" of imperialist blindness, behaving in a country that was inhabited by humans as if were peoples by nonbeings, born-slaves. I learned everything from this first spectacle. I saw how the White (French), superior, plutocratic, civilized world founded its power on the repressions of populations who had suddenly become "invisible" like proletarians, immigrant workers, minorities who are not the right "color." Women. Invisible as humans. But of course perceived as tools – dirty, stupid, lazy, underhanded, etc [...] A commonplace gesture of History: There have to be *two* races – the masters and the slaves. (70)

From an early age, Cixous fought against the injustice of oppression, and during her academic career in France, she adopted the psychoanalytical theories of Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva, whose experimental texts proposed to revolutionize the socio-political structures of power. Like Jacques Lacan, Derrida developed his theories of language from the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, who had

founded the theory that meaning was a result of the difference between signifiers. Derrida developed this theory and coined the term *différence*, which means that the meaning of a sentence is not totally represented by the meaning of the words of which is composed. In his view, language is also represented by other meanings which reside in the writer's mind, and which the reader must decipher; thus the meaning of a sentence cannot be reduced to a single reading but on the other hand it has to be deconstructed and submitted to different interpretations. This subversive theory challenged the fixed theories which implied that there was only a written truth which imposed its law through a language which men had imposed upon women. Derrida defined this theory as 'logocentric' and Hélène Cixous translated it as 'the Empire of the Selfsame,' which served her to create her idea of 'binary oppositions', which opposes activity (masculine) to passivity (feminine) or Self versus Other, as she writes in "Sorties":

Already I know all about the "reality" that supports History's progress: everything throughout the centuries depends on the distinctions between the Selfsame, the ownself (what is mine, hence what is good) and that which limits it: so now what menaces my-own-good (good never being anything other than what is good-for-me) is the "other." What is the "Other"? If it is truly the "other" there is nothing to say, it cannot be theorized, It is the other in a hierarchical organized relationship in which the same is what rules, names, defines, and assigns "its" other [...] there has to be "other"- no master without slave, no economico-political power without exploitations, no dominant class without cattle under the yoke,

no “Frenchmen” without wogs, no Nazis without Jews, no property  
without exclusions. (70-1)

Her writing, like the writing of other female writers of the French Feminist Movement such as Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Cath  rine Cl  ment or Claudine Hermann stems from the anti-bourgeois Marxists politics which prevailed in the 1960s, becoming more visible in the revolutions of May 1968, which proclaimed the death of absolute truths such as the death of Man, the death of God, and the death of the privileged works of Art. In other words, they wished to deconstruct the whole patriarchal system which had prevailed so far where women were absent, without a Voice. H  l  ne Cixous’s writings then formed part of a cultural and political debate which happened in France in the late 1960s and the 1970s, and during this time she published a series of theoretical writings on feminism of which *The Newly Born Woman* (in collaboration with Catherine Cl  ment), and “The Laugh of the Medusa,” published in the same year (1975), have become two of her most relevant *manifestos*, whose theoretical aim is to disentangle the male-western ideology that excludes women from any socio-cultural and political movements, and whose ideology she summarizes in only one sentence in “The Laugh of the Medusa”, included in the volume *New French Feminisms* (1981): “Either woman is passive or she doesn’t exist” (118).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> This phrase comes from Lacan’s phrase ‘La Femme n’existe pas,’ first pronounced in the seminar “Encore” (1972-3). The phrase was not properly understood by some militants of the women’s liberation movement, who described it as misogynistic as it was mistakenly translated into English as ‘Women do not exist.’ In *The Lives and Legends of Jacques Lacan* (1981), Catherine Cl  ment informs us that for Lacan, *La Femme* - meaning ‘Woman’ - is “the eternal woman, age-old and immutable, half of the Totality whose center is Man. A product of patriarchy, domination under whose domination we still live” (62).

Cixous's solution is to transgress this patriarchal ideology, which oppresses and silences women through language, a new language which she calls *écriture féminine* - or feminine language - and through which woman becomes manifest, comes back to life, awakens from death, to give way to a new woman who is a source of life and energy and who transforms passivity into activity in a political act of writing. She puts her emphasis on feminine language, a new voice that comes from the woman's unconscious, from somewhere where the bond between herself and her mother is repressed by patriarchal culture, and which is now liberated and comes out through a new language full of rhythm and musicality, as she claims in "The Laugh of the Medusa":

In women's speech, as in their writing, that element which never stops resonating, once we've been permeated by it, profoundly and imperceptibly touched by it, retains the power of moving us - that element is the song: first music from the first voice of love which is alive in every woman [...] a woman is never far from "mother" (I mean outside her role functions: the "mother" as nonname and as source of goods). There is always within her at least a little of that good mother's milk. She writes in white ink. (251)

Hélène Cixous's most important contribution to the field of feminist psychoanalysis is her conception that by writing herself, the woman writer is taking a step forward socially and culturally, in such a way that her writing engages with a political debate in which women assert their individuality in a world dominated by men.

In the case of literature, the fact that women express themselves through writing demonstrates their desire to be heard in the socially and culturally dominated male establishment. She insists that it is crucial for women to write about their experiences, because through them they can liberate their repressed bodies. In this light, she states in “The Laugh of the Medusa” that the act of writing is an important channel whereby women can deconstruct this closed system that represses them: “Writing is precisely the very *possibility of change*, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of transformation of social and cultural structures [...] Women *seizing* the occasion to speak, hence her shattering entry *into history*” (249-50). This voice which speaks out in writing comes, in her view, from the repressed relationship between daughters and their mothers, and for this reason she examines the representation of the maternal in women’s writing as she thinks that the mother, or the maternal body, remains present in the mind of the daughter, and becomes visible through the act of writing.

The bond between daughter and mother is related to the first stages of what is called in psychoanalytical terms the pre-oedipal phase or pre-oedipal stage, that is to say, the stage before the child has entered the ‘Law of the Father,’ a stage in which the strong bond is between the mother and the child. It is therefore the longing for the mother that makes the act of writing lead to the recovery of the maternal voice and which reproduces the sounds and music which the woman writer remembers from a moment in life in the company of her mother, and which still manifests itself in her daughter through the musicality of the words she writes, freed from the constraints of

the laws established by her entering into the language of the Law, of conventional masculine writing.

It is therefore of crucial importance for the development of this thesis to situate Hélène Cixous's work in the Lacanian perspective on what the splitting of the self involves. This starts in Lacan's view of the formation of identity, or the construction of the Self, in what he calls the mirror stage, which begins in early childhood, and which coincides with the stage in which the child's identity develops from his initial dependency upon his mother, and when he is born to language, to the Law of the Father. This initial - or pre-oedipal stage - is a stage of innocence and protection in which the mother fulfils the desires of the child, and the child finds recognition in his mother's gaze which reflects the baby's self back to himself as in a mirror.

Psychoanalytical feminists have found that this pre-oedipal phase is central to female development, that daughters, just as sons, begin life attached exclusively to their mothers. From this point of view, in *The Reproduction of Mothering. Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978), Nancy Chodorow, following earlier psychoanalysts such as Christine Olden or Alice Balint, states that a good mother feels a "new kind of love for the child who is at once her own self and concentrates entirely on the infant [...] the ideal mother has no interests of her own" (68). According to Chodorow, women get gratification just by taking care of their children because they either experience "oneness with him/her" or because they experience him/her as an "extension of themselves" (85), but she highlights that the mother must behave as a good mother, or she will be caught up in "maternal overprotection," (84) forcing the

child to maintain total dependence for a long period.<sup>7</sup> The transition to separation from his/her mother at an early age - by the end of the third year - when children may require complete protection from their mothers, causes a serious disruption in this mother-child relationship, and that frustration may be provoked in the child as he may have the feeling that he is waiting too long for the mother, and becomes traumatized and gives up hope.

This disillusion arises because, according to what Freud calls 'the castration theory', in the case of girls, when they look at their brothers and see that they have a penis, the resulting feeling of castration makes them shift their attention towards their father, and enter what Freud calls the Oedipus complex. A girl will renounce her love for her mother and acquire a sense of not having a body of her own, and puts herself in the hands of her father, leaving behind her self, her body, and becoming the Other, or as Cixous explains in "Sorties": "An alterity that does settle down, that falls into the dialectical circle. It is the Other in a hierarchically organised relationship in which the same is what rules, names, defines, and assigns its other [...] the other is there only to be re-appropriated, recaptured and destroyed as other" (71).

In Cixous's view, the only way for women to recover one's body is to return to one's self, to the good mother, who, as she lyrically claims in "Sorties," is not the "clinging mother" but the mother "who is repressed and then recovers, and who follows, not who precedes, who listens. Hers is the voice that sings before law, before the

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<sup>7</sup> For further study see: Bowlby, John. *Attachment and Loss: Separation, Anxiety and Anger*. London: Hogarth Press, 1973.



symbolic took one's breath away and reappropriated it into language under its authority of separation.”(93) The recovery of a woman's voice and a harmonious relationship between Self and Other, one's body and one's emotions, of one's unconscious, which is where harmonious relations between Self and Other reside, requires that real state to exist for a woman to be herself, to recover her body and fight the symbolic impositions of a repressive system which makes her feel herself to be the Other, the Nobody in History, as Cixous again claims, “I, revolt, rages, where am I to stand? What is my place if I am a woman? I look for myself throughout the centuries and don't see myself anywhere. I know that my fighters are masculine and that their value almost inevitably is limited. They are great in the eyes of men and for each other” (75).

In this thesis I shall not address the extensive range of Cixous's works. Instead, I shall focus primarily on her early essays that I have mentioned in this chapter, “The Laugh of the Medusa” and “Sorties” which in my view best represent, as already explained, the vision of Cixous with respect to feminine language. I also refer to her other early texts *Souffles* (1975), *LA* (1976), her essay “Coming to Writing,” also written in 1976, and included in the volume of Cixous's essays collected by Deborah Jenson in *Coming to Writing and Other Essays* (1991), and lastly *Illa* (1980). The latter and the first two works have been of paramount importance for the study of the three female authors' works considered in this thesis, as they invite women to break their silence, and be born to a new life of affirmation through the recovery of the music of the words of the mother, the origin of feminine writing.

### 1.3- THE SCOTTISH RENAISSANCE

“I am a Scotsman and proud of it. Never call me British. I’ll tell you why. It’s too near brutish, having only the difference between U and I. Scant difference, you think? Yet Hell - deep and Heaven - high!” - Hugh MacDiarmid<sup>8</sup>

The words above were pronounced by Christopher Murray Grieve - Hugh MacDiarmid - (1892-1978), the father of the Scottish Renaissance. This literary, socio-cultural and political movement emerged in the 1920s as a movement asserting the existence of a Scottish traditional culture which was supposed to be forgotten or lost, and whose head figures were Hugh MacDiarmid and F.G. Scott, both from the southern border of Scotland. The movement was born as a response to the literature which had been written in the last two decades of the decades of the nineteenth century, the so-called ‘Kailyard’ period, in which the novelists exalted an idealistic view of the past, and they wrote, as Cairns Craig states in the introduction to the volume *The History of Scottish Literature* (1989), “in the lachrymose awareness of the death of the culture they sought to celebrate before the darkness finally descended” (1).<sup>9</sup>

As well as the great poet and thinker of the Renaissance period Hugh MacDiarmid, literary critics also cite Edwin Muir in poetry, and James Leslie Mitchell -

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Marshall Walker’s *Scottish Literature since 1707*. London and New York, 1996.

<sup>9</sup> In *Neil M. Gunn and Lewis Grassie Gibbon* (1983), Douglas Gifford points out that “the kailyard novel became propaganda by the Tory establishment to drown the nineteenth-century movement in Scotland for political reform [...] Novels like Maclaren’s *Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush* (1894) has painted the Scottish countryside as a place of pretty rural innocence, with peasants with hearts of gold, poor scholar-poets dying melodramatically in the arms of widowed mothers, attended by gruff church elders trying manfully to restrain their tears, with faithful collies and sunsets.” Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd (5-6).

Lewis Grassie Gibbon -, Neil Gunn, Compton Mackenzie, Naomi Mitchison and George Blake in fiction. These Renaissance writers shared a feeling that, as Douglas Gifford explains in *Neil M. Gunn and Grassie Gibbon* (1983), “what occurred in the last thousand years of Scottish political and social history was mainly bad for Scotland.” They therefore shared a desire to return to the Golden Age, convinced that the history of Scotland had deviated from the true path and they should return to it, having detected “an inherent sense in modern man of a lost time when direct and better appreciation of the basic relationships with nature and Self was a better state of being. [...] This is the Golden Age consciousness.”(1) The latter was similar to the primitive state of man, a more innocent and free man in perfect communion with nature, away from wars, social exploitation and religious repression that distorted his nature, as described by Grassie Gibbon:

It is not by suppressing and distorting human nature and taming that war and the blacker oppressions may pass, it is by liberation and restoration of the essential man in all of us. Man of that perfect civilization yet may be will be no tamed and will not be clipped and educated beast unchancily kept on leash; he will be man of the Old Stone Age, liberated at last from the dreads and taboos that still bind us, in his hands the instruments of culture used, sanely, splendidly, as last. (qtd. in Young 5)

Craig holds that, behind the Scottish Renaissance writers’ rejection of a literary past, there was a desire to break with a past which was strictly related to the English and the American cultures, and therefore was part of the Scottish vindication of a tradition

which had existed before the Union of the Parliaments in 1707, a fact which had provoked the assimilation of the Scottish culture and its language by the English. From this viewpoint, in “The Scottish Renaissance and the Irish Invasion: Literary Attitudes to Irishness in Inter-war Scotland,” Liam McIlvanney highlights that Hugh MacDiarmid reacted against a Reformation which took place after 1707, and which he and his contemporary Edwin Muir blamed for dividing Scotland “against itself and reduced the country to provincial philistinism” (80). This was, in McIlvanney’s view, an acerbic reaction against Calvinism and Scottish Presbyterianism, a religion which repressed the Scottish imagination and prevented the Scottish people from “what would otherwise have been, its natural course of development” (81). McIlvanney echoes MacDiarmid’s words:

The Reformation which strangles Scottish Arts and letters subverted the whole national psychology and made the dominant characteristics of the nation [...]. As a consequence Scotland today singularly destitute of aesthetic consciousness [...] the line of hope lies partially in re-Catholicization, partially in the exhaustion of Protestantism. (qtd. in McIlvanney 80)

The Scottish Renaissance coincided with other political movements of independence from English culture after the First World War which followed the political claim initiated by Ireland at the end of the nineteenth century, a claim of independence which was to be called the Celtic Revival, in Roderick Watson’s words “a genuine longing for spiritual value and national identity, both of which were felt to be

under threat from capitalism, mass society and increasingly industrial world” (287). Scotland had undergone an increasingly industrialised phase after the First World War as a great number of miners, artisans and textile and agricultural workers were moving to larger urban areas within Scotland such as Glasgow, or to other British cities. Scottish people, as Francis Russell Hart suggests in *Scottish Novel* (1978), were “vigorous industrialists and builders, but they never reconciled themselves spiritually to their own urban creations” (114). This was, in his view, the fact that created conflict within the Scottish imagination: the war between Kailyard and anti-Kailyard. In this respect, Cairns Craig also argues that it was not easy to create a favourable environment which would give place to a unified Scottish identity given on one hand the situation of instability of a profoundly patriarchal, agricultural society, and, on the other hand of a modern industrial country into which people from agricultural areas were migrating for work, not only to the industrial areas of Scotland but also to other areas outside Britain such as Canada, the United States, Africa and Australia:

In many respects, modern Scotland was a crossroads between the New World’s melting pot cities and the decay of the old world’s traditional rural communities. The ‘real’ Scot, the ‘true identity’ was entirely unstable; it was an instability which, in comparison with the surety of other cultures’ certainties - and particularly England’s - gave rise to the conception of the Scot as, in some sense, schizophrenic, self-divided. (7)

The prominent personality of Hugh MacDiarmid, and his tenacious struggle in favour of a Scottish national culture and the assertion of a language of its own - Scots -,

earned him the indisputable post of head figure of the movement, and he became one of the founders of the Scottish National Party (SNP) in 1928. MacDiarmid wrote some of the finest lyrics and long poems of the modernist period, and his poetic experiments with the Scots language began in 1922 with the poem “The Watergaw,” and three years later continued in his better-known collections of poems *Sangschaw* and *Penny Wheep*, although “A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle” (1926) became his masterpiece. This is a long poem which has been considered by critics as a challenge to T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922), and which David Daiches and Jon Stallworthy in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* (1993) describe as “an epic statement about Scotland [...] in which he alternates between lyricism, savage satire, comic irony, philosophic reflection, and personal confession” (2209).

In an interview published in *The Dark Horse* in 1999, poet Douglas Dunn talks extensively about the Scottish National Party and the powerful role that MacDiarmid played in national Scottish poetry: “I’ve always acknowledged him as a source of energy. In a sense he was a father figure. But the only way to survive with MacDiarmid is to be a prodigal son” (26). Although Dunn considers him an important referent in Scottish poetry, politically speaking, he differs from the general national opinion that MacDiarmid was the best thing to happen in Scotland after the Union. In his words:

If a man who was a communist and a Fascist and flirted with Nazism was the most important thing to happen in Scotland since 1707 and people really believe that, then God help us. What the Scottish Parliament has to do through its various agencies is try and eradicate the psychology which

makes it possible to say that, by giving us confidence in the present so we don't have to look back on an icon like Hugh MacDiarmid. (29)

In *Scotland* (1991), Dunn provides a different point of view to Hart's and Craig's theories on the schizophrenia which seems to pervade the Scottish character. He argues that to stereotype the Scottish character to a simple question of temperament is to reduce it to oversimplification, and suggests that "aggressive nationalists" have constantly claimed that "Scottish character has dwindled under English and other influences until it is indistinguishable from them" (4). Despite this reductionist point of view nationalists claim, and like any other country, he underlines, Scotland is an open country, a country which once "negotiated a Union with England" and despite the fact that its two languages have been lost with the passing of time, it "has sustained an aptitude for other languages as part of its Europeaness or universality of outlook" (5):

It is a country "a country of contrasts, differences and antitheses, which lead you to think of them as clues to behaviour. Scotland is Lowlands and Highlands, it is towns, cities, industry, countryside, agriculture, mountains, moorland, Rivers, lochs and wilderness [...] It is Picts, Scots, Gaels, Norse, Irish, Welsh, Irish and English. But it is also Jews, Italians, Poles, Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshi, Chinese and African. It is men and women who are content with their nationality. (5)

Dunn concurs with the idea of Scottish history which Edwin Muir so well described in "Scottish Journey" (1935), included in Palmer McCulloch's *Modernism*

*and Nationalism. Literature and Society in Scotland 1918-1939* (2004), in which Muir puts into question Scotland as a nation due to “geographical and partly racial” reasons. In his reaction against MacDiarmid’s nationalistic views on the creation of a Scottish National Party, and in defence of socialism, Muir argues Scotland was not a nation with an organic centre, but a country with geographical and linguistic differences between north and south which had been forged throughout centuries of life. Thus, Muir considered McDiarmid’s nationalistic views utopian, “desirable ideas, but like all utopian ideals it takes no account of history past or present” (364-5):

All Scottish history is inadequate and confusing, it has still to be written to show why Scotland’s existence as a nation was always unstable and incomplete, and why it finally dissolved. The reasons for this were partly geographical and partly racial; these various obstacles then - geographical, inaccessibility, local culture, separate language - have almost vanished, and there seems to be no palpable hindrance to the union of Scotland as a nation. If there was a really strong demand for such as union [...] the real obstacle to the making of a nation out of Scotland lies now in the character of the people, which is a result of their history, as their history was in a large measure of the things of which I’ve been speaking, geographical and racial, and that obstacle, being the product of several centuries of life, is a serious one: it is in fact Scotland. It is these things that make the National Party of Scotland so unconvincing. One can see that self-government for Scotland is a



desirable idea, but like all utopian ideals it takes no account of history past or present. Where is the force that will drive the people of Scotland to proclaim themselves a nation? In the heads of the people mainly middle-class, with a mixture of the intelligentsia. Who see that Scotland a nation is a desirable aim. But meanwhile for the people themselves, like the people of every industrial country of Europe, the most convenient term is Socialism. (364-5)

It was precisely Edwin Muir's defence of socialism what made him lose his close relationship with the nationalist movement, and particularly with MacDiarmid: "Edwin's interest in it was tepid", Willa Muir relates in her memoir *Belonging* (1968). She explains that Edwin could not support MacDiarmid's idea of Lowland Scots as Scotland's national language as "it was Orkney he spoke [...] in any case, he had already adopted English as his language and preferred to graft his poetry on to the great tree of English Literature" (111). Both Edwin and Willa Muir shared the feeling that they only "belonged to each other," and therefore never subscribed to any political movement, although they clearly reacted against some of the predications of the Scottish National Party. Edwin and Willa Muir reacted against a nationalism which did not provide a solution for an economically depressed Scotland, and instead of embracing the Scottish National Party, they embraced socialism, as they insisted that "the evil of Scotland could not be "cured" with nationalism and only the industrial system itself could modify and ultimately cure the ills it had produced," as Willa explains in *Belonging* (173), where she extends the discussion by examining her and

Edwin's marginal status in terms of nationality, in Scotland, in England, and in Europe; her relationship with every place is complex, marginal and full of creative, if difficult, tensions. On the one hand, she can record the simple relief of understanding the language of Britain, or the pleasure of "our sense of belonging to the historic Rome" (256). On the other hand, she considers her and Edwin's chosen status of "non-joiners" of nations, groups, and political parties (165-6).<sup>10</sup>

Scotland was in Edwin's view suffering from the consequences of an aggressive Industrial Revolution whose heart was in London, and whose tentacles had spread to surrounding industrial areas, and the Scottish National Party was not concerned with social and industrial developments for the future, something that ultimately would be provided by Socialism. What's more, in *Scott and Scotland* (1936) he reacted against MacDiarmid's convictions that the revival of the language of the Scottish borders could help regenerate the Scottish *malaise*. Edwin wrote about his conviction that Scotland lacked a living organic centre, a whole language which could unite the Scottish mind,

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<sup>10</sup> In 1936 Edwin published *Scott and Scotland: The Predicament of the Scottish Writer*, a small book commissioned by Hugh MacDiarmid and Lewis Grassie Gibbon, which was to be included in a series of writings about Scotland, entitled *The Voice of Scotland*, published by Routledge in 1935 and 1936. In *Scott and Scotland* Edwin argues about the emptiness of Scotland after the Union, which he considers has deprived Scotland of its common tongue and tradition, and therefore of organic energy. He concludes however that the revival of the Scots language was irrelevant to the quest for a renewed golden age of Scottish literature. *Scott and Scotland* was a provocation in the world of the National Movement, and aroused MacDiarmid's rage. Neil Gunn would write *Whisky and Scotland* (1935), (Eric Linklater would address the fighting between England and Scotland metaphorically-represented in *The Lion and the Unicorn* (1935) Compton Mackenzie would deal with Catholicism in *Catholicism and Scotland* (1936), Willa Muir wrote about *Mrs Grundy in Scotland* (1936), A. S. Neil would be the very man to do *Education in Scotland* (1936) and MacDiarmid himself would finish the series with a volume on *Red Scotland*.

The provocative statements in *Scott and Scotland* and Muir's discriminatory opinion on the poetry which was being written during the Movement compared with the poetry which had been written before the Reformation infuriated MacDiarmid, and he declared Edwin Muir "The Enemy," as Willa points out in *Belonging* (190).

disunited due to varied historical, geographical and economic reasons, and he concluded that these reasons led the literary mind to embrace and absorb the English tradition since the writer in Scotland could not find an organic community to complete his literary plans or to embrace a significant literary tradition which supports him.

“And what of the women writers of the period?” Gifford, Dunnigan and MacGillivray wonder in *Scottish Literature* (512). They argue that despite the fact that Willa Muir, along with other important female women writers of the period such as Catherine Carswell, Nan Shepherd, Nancy Brysson Morrison and Naomi Mitchison were writing at the same time as their male contemporaries, their works were neglected and relegated to a secondary position during the movement. Thus they consider the Scottish Renaissance “as an exclusively male creation” and in the chapter “Opening the Doors: Fiction by women 1911-47,” they suggest that the literature written by the women writers of the period should be analysed separately as, they state, “the body of work created by literary women of this time reflects themes, concerns, and literary developments with a sufficient identity of their own and shows these women to have been on the cusp of something new in Scotland” (541).

From this viewpoint, in her critical essay “Fictions of Development 1920-1970,” included in *A History of Scottish Women’s Writing*, Palmer McCulloch reinforces the idea that the Scottish Renaissance movement as predominantly male in a society still profoundly patriarchal which marginalised women not only in the literary but also in the domestic debate. At the beginning of the twentieth century, she argues, the idealised roles of women still prevailed in a repressive Presbyterian Scotland, and the Scottish

Renaissance was a literary movement essentially nationalistic and patriarchal for which the representation of women was that of the lyrical muse, the Victorian eternal feminine who nurtured the poets of the movement.<sup>11</sup>

Scottish scholar Christopher Whyte has also criticized the Scottish Renaissance movement for being male-based, because in his view it “succeeded in side-lining and excluding women writers and their work, so that it was left to a later generation, in the 1970s and 1980s, to unearth the fiction of Willa Muir, Catherine Carswell, and Nan Shepherd, in an effort of almost archaeological proportions” (62). In the introduction to his edited volume *Gendering the Nation. Studies in Modern Scottish Literature* (1995), Whyte echoes the statement made at an academic day seminar by a scholar: “Nationalism is always bad for women,” and he argues that the early years of the twentieth century devolved to men the embodiment of Scottishness, making them the national hero. A controversial figure of still-patriarchal Scotland’s literary scene, Whyte has powerfully satirised Scottish mythologies and has argued for a more inclusive Scottish national identity and has challenged the assumption that identifies Scottish culture with an idealised view of its history, made by men who struggled to preserve its freedom, endangered by the English. According to him, this conservative nationalism conflates Scottish identity with a romanticised, patriarchal past, as echoed by politics, social organization and the Scottish literary canon. Whyte points out that such a nostalgic manifestation of national identity excludes all those groups who belong to Scotland, who do not identify themselves with its past legend:

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<sup>11</sup> In “Note from the Margin,” Christopher Whyte argues that the woman in Hugh MacDiarmid’s “The Drunk Man Looks at his Thistle” appears either symbolising the muse of the poet, “preoccupied with the basic issues of physical and emotional survival” (30).

Scottish culture, we are told, was mutilated by the twin disasters of the Union of the Crowns and the Union of Parliaments, landmarks in a process of assimilation to England which increasingly diluted a pre-existing core of genuine Scottishness. [...] The dangers of such a stance are that it is committed to the restoration, not only of Scotland as it was, but of relations between genders, classes, racial groups and differing sexual orientations that would be unacceptably oppressive in a modern context. If we want to bring back a Scotland that once was, what place will there be in it for blacks or lesbians or the children of Pakistani immigrants? (xii)

Whyte has disarmed canonical modernist criticism, re-reading the work of the modernist poets of the Scottish Renaissance in a different vein, not from the point of view of what is visible to a limiting nationalist point of view, but from the point of view of what is hidden. In *Gendering the Nation*, he provides an illustrative example of this in Hugh MacDiarmid's "A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle" (1926), a faithful representation of the modernist lyric, the lyric in the voice of the poet talking to himself through a long dramatic monologue which is considered to be the national emblem of Scottish modernist tradition. Throughout the 2685 lines of the poem, the drunk man finds himself lying on a moonlit hillside staring at a thistle which he considers the national emblem of Scotland, speaking aloud in a style close to the modernist 'stream-of-consciousness,' and musing on the fate of Scotland as a nation, and on the human condition. This representation of Scotland as a nation in the person of a drunk man

reminds us of what sociologist Barbara Littlewood has summarized as being symbolic of Scottish culture:

In the popular imagination, Scotland is often conceived of as a sexually repressed and repressive culture, with much of the blame put on a special tradition of Protestantism which took root here. Closely linked with this misogyny is manifest both in violent and non-violent ways, in the burning of witches and the writing out of women from Scottish History. The heroes and villains of our popular histories, with the exception of Mary, are invariable male. Currently, we might add, popular representations of Scottish men continue to celebrate the inarticulate (except if drunk, or discussing football), physically competent (except if drunk, or dealing with the weans), man's man. (qted in Breitenbach, Brown and Myers 45-46)

It seems then that questions of gender did not arise within the Scottish Renaissance, as Gifford *et al.*, McCulloch and Whyte suggest. Nevertheless, McCulloch notes, "despite the dominant male ideology of the times, the prospects of change and development against all odds is reflected in the great amount of writings by women whose feminist views challenged the established pillars of Scottish society" (361). The new feminist awareness that emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century to claim sexual equality meant a radical change in the prejudices of society, and women writers of the period recognised the necessity to subvert that which for centuries had been accepted as the absolute definition of female identity. McCulloch focuses on the most

representative women writers of the interwar period, Catherine Carswell (1879-1946), Willa Muir (1890-1970), Rebecca West (1892-1983), Nan Shepherd (1893-1981), Naomi Mitchison (1897-1999) and Jessie Kesson (1916-1994), and concurs with many other literary critics in recognising the fact that they have not only had to struggle against a strongly patriarchal society to make themselves visible, but also they had to assert themselves as women writers in a national paternalistic cultural movement which relegated them to a secondary position in the nationalistic movement<sup>12</sup>.

McCulloch cites Carswell's *Open the Door* (1920) and *The Camomile* (1922) as two novels that were able to challenge the stereotypes of women's experience, and the authority exercised by a deeply patriarchal society, governed by the repressive precepts of Calvinism, at a time when Victorian society had created a definition of femininity that idealised women's domestic role as wife and mother, and this definition meant the exclusion of their social, literary, or political roles. Their political views were influenced by the great social convulsions which had started in the late-nineteenth century and were still in vogue in the early-twentieth century. These were periods in which women writers struggled to make themselves visible not only because they were excluded from their literary activity, but also because of their lives and personal experiences and conflicts, as Virginia Woolf puts it in the essay "Women and Fiction" in 1929:

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<sup>12</sup> This "Canonical Double Cross" echoes the title of an article written by Marilyn Reizbaum, included in the volume *Decolonizing Tradition. New Views of Twentieth-Century "British" Literary Canons* (1992). In this illuminating article, Reizbaum discusses the confrontations of both Scottish and Irish women writers when challenging the male canon. She argues that it is difficult for women to find a voice of their own in countries where nationalism has not sought a positive dialogue with feminism, and in many cases it has repressed the incorporation of women, both within the social and the literature scene. This article will be discussed later in this thesis, in the chapter dedicated to the work Janice Galloway.

The extraordinary woman depends on the ordinary woman. It is only when we know what were the conditions of the average woman's life- the number of her children, whether she had money of her own, if she had a room to herself, whether she had help in bringing up her family, if she had servants, whether part of the housework was her task- it is only when we can measure the way of life and the experience of life made possible to the ordinary woman that we can account for the success of failure of the extraordinary woman as writer. (44)

In the last few decades, the proliferation of feminist literary studies has helped bring into question the secondary status of relevant women writers of Modernism, as a response to the male canon. The interpretation of the works of Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein or George Eliot as modernist figures has been of much importance to the reconfiguration of Modernism as what previously was construed as an elitist movement involving a closed circle of male writers known as "The Pound Era."<sup>13</sup> These feminist studies have shown provocative alternative readings of modernist writers and have investigated the textual strategies that enabled modernist women writers to claim

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<sup>13</sup> Ezra Pound was one of the most influential American poets of the twentieth century. From 1908 to 1920, he resided in London, where he associated with many writers, including William Butler Yeats, for whom he worked as a secretary, and T.S. Eliot, whose *The Waste Land* (1922) he edited and improved. He was a link between the United States and Britain, acting as contributing editor to Harriet Monroe's important Chicago magazine *Poetry* and spearheading the new school of poetry known as Imagism, which advocated a clear, highly visual presentation. After Imagism, he championed various poetic approaches. He eventually moved to Italy, where he became caught up in Italian Fascism. Pound furthered Imagism in letters, essays, and an anthology. In a letter to Monroe in 1915, he argues for a modern-sounding, visual poetry that avoids "clichés and set phrases." In "A Few Don'ts of an Imagiste" (1913), he defined "image" as something that "presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." Pound's 1914 anthology of 10 poets, *Des Imagistes*, offered examples of Imagist poetry by outstanding poets, including William Carlos Williams, H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), and Amy Lowell.



authority in spite of the efforts of the “men of 1914” to make modernism an exclusively male group. In this light, in *The Gender of Modernism* (1990), American scholar Bonnie Kime Scott provides valuable research on the field of Modernism, and renders a new vision of the works of not only canonical figures such as Virginia Woolf, but of non-canonical writings which help explain in depth this period through the lenses of gender. She argues that:

Modernism as we were taught at mid-century was perhaps halfway to truth. It was unconsciously gendered masculine, the inscriptions of mothers and women and more broadly of sexuality and gender, were not adequately decoded, and detected at all. Though some of the aesthetic and political pronouncements of women writers had been offered in public, they had not circulated widely and were rarely collected for academic recirculation. Deliberate or not this is an example of the politics of gender (2).

Virginia Woolf’s writings were explicitly radical and subversive in the cultural atmosphere that pervaded the war years and she challenged the rhetoric of the establishment: “The war against Modernism, the war against culture, the war against dissent, and the war against the woman’s war” (Lee 278). In all her feminist writings, anti-authoritarian strategies are an essential part of her subversive modernist attitude. Most of the women she knew were involved in social work and politics, were supporters of votes for women, and opposed Victorian conservatives, who followed the puritan principles of Queen Victoria, a leading figure who established the principles of the

middle classes, and who supported socio-political limitations for women, who remained as symbols of the good name, respectability and manners of the family.

The woman as a symbol of the repressed middle-class woman, relegated to the hearth and the heart of her husband and children, was present in numerous novels and poems that had already achieved great popularity in the last decades of the nineteenth century. One of the best-known, which served the first feminist purpose of challenging Victorian conceptions in the suffrage movement, was ‘The Angel in the House,’ a poem written by Coventry Patmore first published in 1854 and revised up until 1862. Although largely ignored when it was published, it became enormously popular during the nineteenth century and its influence continued well into the twentieth. The poem was dedicated to his submissive wife, Emily, whom he believed to be the perfect Victorian wife and mother, selflessly devoted to her husband and children,<sup>14</sup> and it praises her purity and devotion to his family as she provides the perfect protection which the modern man needs when facing the complications of modern life.

In ‘Professions for Women,’ an article written in 1931 to be read to The Women’s Service League, Virginia Woolf argues that the main obstacle for a woman writer is precisely ‘The Angel in the House,’ the image of the pure woman, and the repressive figure which hung as a heavy shadow over her, interfered with her work, and

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<sup>14</sup> This poem appears in *English Literature* (1993). See also in the same volume an interesting excerpt taken from Sarah Stickney’s ‘The Women of England: Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits’ (1839). Like Patmore’s poem, this book became a great success, and followed the Victorian principles on women’s religious piety, their education and their roles in the family, which Queen Victoria herself fervently encouraged: ‘There is great happiness [...] in devoting oneself to another who is worthy of one’s affection; still men are very and the woman’s devotion is always one of submission which makes our poor sex so very enviable. This you will feel hereafter - I know, though it cannot be otherwise as God has willed it so.’ (qtd. in *English Literature* 1595).

acted as a dominant force which prevented her from expressing herself, her body, her sexuality, and her unconscious: “She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily [...] Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer,” she says, but then, she argues, the second step is the most difficult task in a male world: “Telling the truth about my experiences as a body” (Barret 59-60).

The work of Willa Muir, Jessie Kesson and Janice Galloway is indebted to the work of their female predecessors such as that of Virginia Woolf. Despite having written in different periods of twentieth-century Scotland, the three women writers whose work I examine in this thesis have succeeded in giving a voice to the ‘Angels,’ their heroines whose bodies and desires were constructed by the conventions of a strong Scottish patriarchal culture, unable to express themselves and their bodies because they had vanished, disappeared, having lost the key to a world which oppressed and repressed them. It is, however, worth acknowledging the valuable influence of the tradition of male writers in the work of Muir, Kesson and Galloway as they also form a notable part of a Scottish tradition of divided selves whose attitude toward the past in Scottish culture is controversial, portraying characters trapped in the dilemma of whether to remain loyal to an archaic culture or to betray it in favour of a modern world.

As I have explained in this introduction, Willa Muir was one of the first Scottish women writers of the beginning of the twentieth century to claim a voice of her own in the socio-cultural climate of the thirties, ruled by writers such as her husband Edwin

Muir, Hugh MacDiarmic, Neil Gunn, Compton Mackenzie, George Douglas Brown, and Lewis Grassie Gibbon, the latter being one of the most representative Renaissance writers to assert the old values and golden past in the new modern world, a world which he represented in his celebrated trilogy *A Scots Quair* (1932-4). All of them are, however, in debt to George Douglas Brown's *The House with the Green Shutters* (1901), which set a precedent in the kailyard tradition and best describes the tradition of the Scottish novel of the nineteenth century, such as those of Walter Scott, James Hogg and John Galt.

Willa Muir's writings present a divided and traditional society trapped within Scottish communities and the dialectical conflicts to which this fact gives rise, but specifically she follows the pattern of her female contemporaries Catherine Carswell and Nan Shepherd in portraying characters trapped in Scottish traditional communities but wishing to escape. All of the female protagonists of their novels typify real women of Scottish burghs ruled by Calvinist principles which predicate that sex is evil, especially if those who practice it are women who do not follow these principles. In search of their own bodies and desires, the female protagonists escape in search of themselves/ bodies, in search of integrity, both cultural and ideological, which they are unable to find in Scotland.

The work of Jessie Kesson is closely linked to the kailyard and traditional ballads, probably her main influence being Gibbon's *A Scots Quair*, in particular the first volume of the trilogy *Sunset Song* (1932) because of its representation of the relationship between woman and the land. The woman who loves the land also loves

herself, but she realises that there is no place for her in the narrow-minded communities she inhabits, and contradictory feelings arise on them, on the one hand the profound love for the land they inhabit but on the other a profound solitude as women, as happens to Gibbon's heroine:

Two Chrises there were that fought for her heart and tormented her. You hated the land the coarse speak of the folk and learning was brave and fine one day and the next you'd waken with the peewits crying across the hills, deep and deep, crying in the heart of you and the smell of the earth in your face, almost you'd cry for that, the beauty of it and the sweetness of the Scottish land and skies [...] And the next minute that passed from you, you were English, back to English words so sharp and clean and true. (37)

Like Gibbon's Chris, Jessie Kesson's heroines represent a complex reality which shows the painful change from an agricultural-based Scotland to a modern, industrialised one, with the consequent disintegration of the small communities. Kesson focuses on these old crofting communities using a language full of lyricism which transgresses the kailyard nostalgic sentimentality through a uniquely distinctive prose style which gives voice to the ordinary folk of rural Scotland. A male voice, however, which silences women and relegates them to passivity, ploughing them and abusing them in the same way as the new methods of working the land abuse and plough the earth. Her fiction appeared at long intervals due to the harsh life she had to lead, beginning with her first work of fiction *The White Bird Passes* in 1958, and remained

unknown until it was unearthed in 1977 at the time, in the nineteen fifties and sixties, when there was a group of writers publishing different themes, from the philosophical work of Alan Sharp, James Kennaway, George Friel and Robin Jenkins, to those portraying the Scottish proletarian experience such as Archie Hind and William McIlvanney.

The work of contemporary Janice Galloway stems from the tradition of writing about the 'Industrial Elegy' as Gifford, Dunningan and MacGillivray call it, with more realist novels based in Glasgow, the Scottish industrial city in the interwar period, and the antithesis of the rural innocence of the north of Scotland. Novels such as Edwin Muir's *The Three Brothers* (1931), and *Poor Tom* (1932), or George Blake's *The Shipbuilders* (1935) anticipated a Glasgow condemned to economic depression after an epic period of shipbuilding, and heavy industry, with skilful communities. These novels anticipated the cultural climate of the post-Second World War period, which turned away from a traditional and mythical Renaissance beginning in the 1920s. In this respect Alexander MacArthur and H. Kinsley Long's *No Mean City: A Story of the Glasgow Slums* (1935) could well embrace the new theme of the industrial novel, showing an unemployed working-class hero struggling for survival in a society unable to offer him possibilities for freedom and escape, leading him to self-destruction through alcohol and drugs, a theme pervades the contemporary post-industrial novel of the 1980s with Alasdair Gray and James Kelman as its main representatives.

As I mentioned above, this is the setting for Janice Galloway's Scottish novels in the late twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first century. Galloway has

responded to the challenge thrown down by Grey and Kelman, concentrating on contemporary and varying versions of post-industrial Scottish Lowland urban culture, and envisaging it far from sentimental or romantic views. In her novels she not only makes an account of a rotten end-of-the-si  cle Scotland but also she satirizes the state of modern Scotland through disturbed female characters in search of a voice, who are unable to survive the old cultural values that are shown to be destructive for them, and how to struggle to live with the new ones. Her characters are an example of the divided self whose tensions and fears reflect the tensions and paradoxes of a modern Scotland which is still trying to define its 'Scottishness' in political, social and cultural terms.

In this introduction, I've attempted to show an overview of the scenario for the novels of Willa Muir, Jessie Kesson, and Janice Galloway. In the following chapters, and through the exploration of their works, I shall analyse how these women writers strive to find a voice for their female characters through the distinct feminine language of separation, through finding a way out of a system which is an escape, a 'sortie' and at the same time a challenge to the authoritarian principles of the twentieth-century Scottish society.

## CHAPTER 2: WILLA MUIR (1890-1970)

### 2.1- INTRODUCTION

“I was born a she-old woman, a term of abuse, why? Some system of values doesn’t value me. Lopsided. Patriarchal. Women make the world of men Active/Passive- power view.”<sup>15</sup>

These reflections are part of the numerous philosophical essays that Willa Muir wrote to proclaim her views against a patriarchal world based on economic principles that endangered women, views which could be applied to the universal feminist claims, and particularly to the “battlefield” of women in history which decades later Hélène Cixous herself discusses in “The Laugh of the Medusa”:

We see that “Victory” always comes down to the same thing: things get hierarchal. Organization by hierarchy makes all conceptual organization subject to man. Male privilege, shown in the opposition between *activity* and *passivity*, which he uses to sustain himself. Traditionally, the question of sexual difference is treated by coupling it with the opposition: activity/passivity. (64)

Willa Muir’s view is that the patriarchal creed prioritises men in a world that has been “lopsided” for thousands of years, and therefore she adheres to the anti-western

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<sup>15</sup> Willa Muir: “Miscellaneous Notes on Women and Power.” Special Collections Dept., St Andrews University Library (? 1958).



rational philosophy that states that reason, intellect and science are the domain of men, whilst passion, sensibility and emotion are relegated to women. This was the struggle which pervaded all her work, a struggle which created at times contradictory feelings in her as a woman living in the early twentieth century. Along with other women writers of the period such as Catherine Carswell, Rebecca West, Nan Shepherd and Naomi Mitchison, she struggled against the separation between reason and passion, intellect and sensibility, scientific thought and emotions, a struggle that marked her life and the lives of the women protagonists of her novels.

Muir's training in psychology and classics gave her a deeper insight into the psychoanalytical theories of Freud and Jung, and hence she was a good *connoisseuse* of the theories of the repressed unconscious, which she applied in denouncing the rational and repressive theories of Calvinism, the religion which according to her and many women writers of the period repressed the minds of the Scottish people, and especially of the women who were ruled by middle-class Victorian principles of the 'Angel in the House.' Through her statement regarding women being passive or apparently not existing, Willa Muir adheres to an interesting analysis which decades later was applied by the French feminists, whose theoretical project was to disentangle this Freudian repressive conflict of activity/passivity associated with men/women. They proclaim women as the source of life, power and energy, which is translated into a new form of language when it is written down, a language which is to be called *écriture féminine*, and which challenges this patriarchal binary opposition as it puts into question the phallogocentric view of the oppression of women.

Without any doubt, Muir was the woman writer of the Scottish Renaissance period who most explicitly reacted against this single history written by men. In her numerous essays archived in the University of St Andrews library, Scotland, she powerfully vindicates the right to express a female identity against the preconceptions of a narrow-minded society that repressed women's minds and bodies and relegated women to being passive. Her essays and novels, like the ones of her female predecessors, such as Virginia Woolf, who struggled for a kind of writing which challenged the male establishment, spoke against the accepted domesticity of the women with whom she was most familiar. At the same time, she shared the assumptions of the feminist women writing at the time who perceived the inherent capacities and qualities of women, and saw the necessity of inscribing their story in history, bringing back a voice which, as Cixous claims in "Sorties": "Sings from a time before Law, before the Symbolic took one's breath away and reappropriated it into language under its authority of separation" (93). Thus, similarly to Carswell, Shepherd, West, or Mitchison, Muir's experience then can be read as being beyond the limits of the role expected from a woman of the period, and it subverted the ideals of Victorian femininity that still prevailed in the early-twentieth century.

In the doctoral dissertation *The Life and Work of Willa Muir* (1996), Kirsty Anne Allen provides a comprehensive analysis of Muir's life and work, vital for the better understanding of Muir's conceptions on her definition of female identity. Allen relates that Willa was born Wilhelmina Johnston Anderson in Montrose, Angus, on the east coast of Scotland in 1890. Originally from Unst, Shetland, her family moved to the

small town of Montrose, and she inherited from them the feeling of in some way or other being out of place, a feeling which persisted throughout her life and writings. She continuously expressed the feeling of not belonging to the world she was expected to be a part of, a feeling of geographical dislocation from her Shetland roots that seemed to shadow her throughout her life, as Allen quotes from a journal Willa wrote on her visit to Prague between 1947 and 1948:

All emigrants are Displaced persons. My parents were P.D.s in Angus. So, I grew up not fitting into the Angus tradition and therefore critical, resentful, unsure. Hence my secret desires to own a house to belong somewhere. My people spoke Shetland at home, which was not valid outside our front door. I remember standing in Bridge street, where we lived, fingering my pinafore, dumb with embarrassment, while four or five older girls squealed in delighted mockery of what I had been saying and urged me to say it again. (qtd. in Allen 17)

The first years of Muir's life and experiences in Montrose were decisive in forming her views about life and in her writings that contradicted the Victorian-based principles of a middle-class family who dictated a traditional gender role for her. Her relationship with her mother, a woman of strong Presbyterian beliefs, created a sense of frustration and anger in her, and this fact reinforced her sense of 'otherness,' and developed the female role in opposition to the role which was expected of her, or, as Allen points out, "to define herself by her deviance from the masculine 'norm' (36). During the years she spent at the University of St Andrews she became involved in the

Women's Debating Society and Women's Suffrage Society, which principal Sir James Donaldson encouraged to complement the Men's Union which he had instituted in 1888, regarding which she strongly maintained "that strong principles conduce to narrow-mindedness"(10), as Aileen Christianson quotes in *Moving in Circles: Willa Muir's Writings* (2007). Muir's involvement with University magazine *The College Echoes* began in the autumn of 1909 with the appearance of her first contribution, a poem entitled "Shadows." *The College Echoes*, Allen reminds us:

Was a powerful organ of influence that both reflected and formed the opinions and the attitudes of the university students, and that aroused a lot of debate [...] and the editorials in *The College Echoes* often devoted much space to the discussion of the effects and the repercussions of the admission of women to the university. The debate about the rights and roles of women in modern society was as popular in St Andrews as in the rest of Britain and gender equality became a controversial issue as public opinion was divided between the traditional Victorian principles and the urgency to move forward in a world in constant change. (57)

This feminist anti-establishment debate at the University of St Andrews was an essential part of the socio-political and literary movement that was 'in the air' all over Britain, and whose theoretical background came from Mary Wollstonecraft's earlier theories about education in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). This revolutionary text set a precedent in its vindication of the rights of women at a time when they had no political rights, and where she argues about the struggle between

passion and reason and states: “If women are to be excluded, without having a voice, from a participation of the natural rights of mankind, prove first, to ward off the charge of injustice and inconsistency, that they want reason” (67). Wollstonecraft vehemently proclaimed that education gave women a new awareness of the world around them, and argued that the education given to the middle-class girls of her time was restrictive and inappropriate. What is more, her rational theories on education were opposed to the sentimentality that reduced women to being mere sexual objects for men. Thus, she argued that by providing women with a rational education they were enabled through their strength of mind to function independently of men, and to play a full part as human beings in society.

Muir met poet Edwin Muir in 1918 in Glasgow while she was a lecturer in a London training college, and he was an accountant in a shipbuilding company in Glasgow, after he had been “thrown into Glasgow at the age of fourteen, into a whirlpool of struggling competition,” as Muir herself explains in her memoir *Belonging* (133). The youngest of a family of farmers from Orkney, he had suffered the shock of having to change life from an idyllic Orkney “not very far from the Middle Ages, in an atmosphere saturated with legend, myth, ballads and Bible stories” (36), to a chaotic industrial city like Glasgow, and he shared with Willa the uneasiness of having to live in a place where he did not belong, in his case in a city - Glasgow - where “they were of no account” (133). They married one year later in London where they became part of a literary circle of bohemian freelancers who devoted their lives to writing for small reviews, journals and teaching. Above all, Willa and Edwin Muir shared their love of

poetry, love, innocence, dreams and mystery, qualities that she believed could only be found in the unconscious, a region where True Self was, as she recalls in *Belonging* (1968): “There was one region in Man, he said, where innocence and a good conscience still reigned, in the unconscious. The very well-spring, the central ego of man, he called it” (3). This True Self was the vehicle which helped create sufficient harmony between them so that they felt they belonged together until he died in 1959.

Muir explains in *Belonging* that the sensitive relationship ‘I’ - ‘You’ which was established between them was made possible thanks to the anti-patriarchal attitude he had toward life, an attitude which went against what would be expected from the dominant male in vogue at the time, but which seemed natural to both of them. This unlimited exchange of feelings helped create the relationship which opened to something limitless and balanced between them: True Love, as she explained: “True Love, I felt, never seeks to exert power, especially over the beloved. If he is kind, one does not conclude that he is under one’s thumb: If he is unkind, one does not retaliate” (136). Between them was born the bond necessary for them not to belong to anyone or anything else, but to each other; an Edenic space which allowed them to translate their anti-patriarchal position into the body of literature, the words of music and lyricism in their writings, and which altered the male-female relationship which was expected in the period, an unrepressed unified subject which openly walks and is split into ‘You’ and ‘I’, which Cixous finds an unlimited exchange between Self and Other, and which facilitates good conditions for language and writing. This is the feminine space which creates feminine writing, and which becomes the lyrical space within which to write, as

Blyth and Sellers suggest in *Hélène Cixous. Live Theory* (2004): “A ‘feminine’ approach to the other is generous and giving, it avoids the “masculine” impulse to appropriate or annihilate the other’s difference, allowing the other to remain as ‘other.’” (15)

During the 1920s and 30s Willa and Edwin Muir travelled extensively around Europe and they lived in Prague, as well as in Germany, Austria and Italy. Both were interested in the developments in European literature at the time and, between 1930 and 1962, they translated more than forty novels, the best known of which are the works of the German writer Franz Kafka. The journey to Prague, first intended to be a business trip, finished by becoming a journey of Muir’s reflections about herself and the position of women in Prague, through a series of observations and reflections on their position in society regarding people and their work, and through which she shows her progressive ideas on women’s work, and through whose digressions she came to recognise that she was against women in Prague being confined to doing the housework, and being treated as mere objects, in contrast to the women in France, where thanks to the work of the suffragettes, women had achieved a better role in society. Some of these reflections appear in her “Memories Under the Dome” (1962), archived in the University of St Andrews:

Women exist only to work for their men, and to work hard, but it is bewilderingly overlaid by French fashions, the YWCA, and women’s suffrage - at least among the educated classes [...] A domestic servant in a Prague flat works like a slave. She sleeps in the kitchen on a shake-

down, gets up every morning at 5, earns very little, and kisses her mistress's hand devoutly morning and evening. And yet the mistresses grumble: for during the "freedom" of factory life, and there are many rebels who refuse to carry coal from the cellar and to do the family washing and ironing without extra pay. [...] all the young men who have not attained to the splendour of a bank sit in the cafés and wait for drinks or a turn at the diminutive billiard table. Of course, one never sees the women so magnificently unoccupied: they are at work. (unnumbered page)

Although the Willa and Edwin Muir worked together, it has been acknowledged that Willa, considered to be the more able linguist, was probably the main translator in these projects, also translating many books herself, under the name of Agnes Neill Scott. Muir was aware of the painful and frustrating invisibility that was implicit in fostering the life and the work of a literary figure such as her husband and although she had a profound love for him, she was aware of the personal prestige she had had to sacrifice for his sake. In a journal from 1950, she discusses her insignificant existence, which Patricia Rowland quotes in "A Quorum of Willas," published in *Chapman*. Rowland quotes the thoughts that appeared in a journal in 1953 and which help reflect Muir's resignation, and the contradiction of what she is and what she is expected to be:

And the fact remains. I am a better translator than he is. The whole current of patriarchal society is set against this fact, however, and sweeps it into oblivion, simply because I did not insist on shouting aloud. "Most



of this translation, especially Kafka, has been done by ME. Edwin only helped.” And every time Edwin was referred to as THE translator, I was too proud to say anything; and Edwin himself felt it would be undignified to speak up, I suppose. So that now, especially since my breakdown in the middle of the war, I am left without a shred of literary reputation. And I am ashamed of the fact that I feel it as a grievance. It shouldn’t bother me. Reputation is a passing value, after all. Yet it is now that I feel it, now I am trying to build up my life again and overcome my disabilities: my dicky backbone, for instance because I seem to have nothing to build on, except that I am Edwin’s wife and he still loves me. That is much. It is almost all, in a sense, that I could need. It is more than I deserve. And I know, too how destructive ambition is, and how it deforms what one might create. And yet, and yet, I want to be acknowledged. That is why I say: I am in a mess. (6)<sup>16</sup>

As well as the two published novels *Imagined Corners* (1931), and *Mrs Ritchie* (1933), Muir wrote two celebrated essays on women: “Women: An Inquiry”(1925) and another on women in Scottish culture entitled “Mrs Grundy in Scotland”(1936), *Living with Ballads* (1965), a comprehensive work on the importance of ballads in Scottish

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<sup>16</sup> These doubts arose when in August 1953 Edwin was revising his autobiography *The Story and the Fable*. Muir relates how they spoke about his encounters with Gerda Krupp in Riva, Italy, a part of their lives which had been buried for 30 years, and which Edwin tried to deal with. Muir thought he would not mention it in his autobiography and so he wouldn’t and she “excuses” Edwin in *Belonging*, her autobiography, by saying that he could have felt obliged to return his love to Gerda’s passionate demands, and this was due, she thought, to his weak and vulnerable character: “What did she do to you?” I asked. “She must have felt your emotional state was vulnerable, and launched a shaft of power into it.” (qtd. Rowland 5).

culture, and a memoir of the life she shared with her husband: *Belonging* (1968). She also wrote two further novels which remain unpublished, which are archived in St Andrews University Library: *Mrs Muttoe and the Top Storey* (1938-40) and *The Usurpers* (1950-2), along with numerous short essays, letters, radio scripts, journals and miscellaneous notes on the role of women, which give sense to her life and her feminist cause. But above all she had a great love of poetry which she shared with her husband Edwin. A selection of her poems has been published by Aileen Christianson in *Moving in Circles: Willa Muir's Writings* (2007).

Together with her female predecessors, Muir thought that the fact of being a woman limited her potential for artistic creativity, and she suggested that for a woman writer the fact that she wanted to speak about herself may not be the way to be heard in a world where they are silenced and relegated to the role of wives and mothers. In a letter to her friend Florence McNeill she acknowledges the difficulty of writing as a woman in a male world and the contradictions that this creates in them.

For a woman or any being whose nature it is to live through the emotions, clarity of mind can only be got by taking the natural order. And I do think that many of us thinking and educated women of this age go against our natures by striving to force ourselves to deal first through the intellect, living too much with ideas and not sufficiently trusting to the truths that would come to us through the deeper sensual and emotional channels. So we get confused, uncreative and 'pathological.'  
(qtd. McCulloch 200)

As well as other women writers of the period, Muir had to fight the contradictions of what they felt, and what they were expected to feel, in their role as mothers and wives, and in their desire to express their creativity and to express themselves as women. She was aware of the difficulty of challenging the “paternal image,” the patriarchal power, but did however succeed in portraying women protagonists in the search for their own identities, in a narrow-minded community influenced by a strong sense of Presbyterian religiosity and morality. In this regard, in *Religion and Society in Scotland Since 1707* (1997), Callum G. Brown emphasizes the fact that the main role of Presbyterianism in Scotland was that of “moulding a distinctive civil society and civil consciousness” (177), and he adds that evangelical conversion in Scotland functioned differently when it was addressed to women, especially mothers, who were considered the trainers in morals of the family, as they possess more emotional virtues and are thus closer to God than men: “Evangelicalism focused religious discourse with increasing intensity upon the home and family, and upon the inculcation of religious and moral values in the next generation through the piety of mothers (197). In the evangelical campaigns organised by the Free Church of Scotland women were represented as pious mothers whose commitment was to perfect their roles as pious servants of God and puritanical guardians of the morality of the family, as Brown quotes:

Mother! Young Mother! You have the little immortal creatures yet  
around your path; care you not what they shall be, and where they shall  
dwell for ever? Will you not begin now to teach the young heart to pray,

and lead the little feet towards the heavenly home? All you are doing now will give shape and colour to your child's future character, impressing the lineaments of a pious family, or leaving the stamp of a prayerless, a godless mother. (qted. in Brown 201)

In her novels, Muir's heroines are immersed in a repressive Scottish past from which their inheritance impels them to follow the ancestral roles designed for them as women, and this inheritance includes Presbyterian piety. In this respect, she identified with older Scottish women writers such as Susan Ferrier, with whom she sympathised over the satirical elements of her novels, and in an essay for a radio broadcast archived in the University of St Andrews, Muir highlights Ferrier's subtle challenge of the established power: "She exercises her satire on the ancestral chiefs who were trying to become fashionable squires, also on a minister of the Church of Scotland [...] her sympathies are clearly with the other party, the evangelical high-fliers, who later left the Church in the disruption of 1843." But Muir especially approves of the way Ferrier excels at satirically portraying the smallness of vision or narrowness of mind as central facts of provincial life. She points out that:

She was satirical and piously sentimental by turns, but it is in her satirical work that one remember most, as popular taste at that time demanded heroines who were infinitely submissive to the oppression of the elders [...] and yet you know in Miss Ferrier's novels the meek lady always gets her own way in the end. Inevitably she refuses to make the eligible match urged upon her by authority and marries the young man of her

choice. Ferrier dealt with the same situation as Scott, attempting to write a fiction attractive to both Scottish and English readers. (unnumbered page)

However, Ferrier was writing with an added awareness of herself, a writing which Walter Scott himself said “belonged to a female tradition, and linked her with Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeword, Jane Austen and Charlotte Smith, as possessing particular qualities, especially of observation and light satire” (Gifford *et al.*, 447). Following the same thread of thought, in *Scottish Novel* (1978), Francis Hart observes that provincial manners are explicit in Ferrier’s *Marriage* (1818) and *The Inheritance* (1824) through the depiction of central characters that come to rural Scotland. With respect to her third novel *Destiny* (1831), Hart suggests that the heroine “must undergo an educative process through travel and learn to balance the claims of worldly vision - associated with a cosmopolitan vision - with those of local piety, traditional community, and the tranquillity of provincial withdrawal” (57). These problems of provincial manners are evident in her two published novels *Mrs Ritchie* and *Imagined Corners*. Muir seemed to look desperately for an autonomous self, freed from the double contradictions of on the one hand being a woman with a voice of her own, and on the other being Edwin Muir’s wife, and struggled against the dichotomy of ‘being acknowledged’ and ‘belonging’ to Edwin, one of the leading figures of the Scottish Renaissance, which created in her a lack of confidence that she could not discard during the life they shared together.

Muir had struggled with the idea of belonging since her early days in Montrose,

where she felt geographically displaced, which created in her an uneasy feeling of isolation, and now she was immensely attracted by the idea of belonging that Edwin had constructed in his poetry. In the essay “Willa Muir: Crossing the Genres” in *The History of Scottish Women Writers*, Margaret Elphinstone expands on the idea of identity that this sense of dislocation creates in her, and she suggests that Muir’s work is not inseparable from that of her husband. She seemed, Elphinstone notes, to be very much influenced by the “Edenic and labyrinthine images of Edwin’s poetry.” Moreover, she suggests that their work in common “uncover[s] the fruitful exchange of not only the ideas that belong in both Muir’s construct of the conscious world, but also the images that reflect the unconscious” (400). Muir, on her part, in *Belonging*, admits to being an active part of Edwin’s own perceptions in the thirties: “Our thoughts and feelings reached out into the cosmos and into the unconscious with a sense of natural freedom, and the whole world of books was ours”(170), and she recognised that she was greatly influenced by Edwin’s literary and intellectual conceptions of the time and by those of his contemporaries, which, according to Edwin himself in *An Autobiography* (1954):

Were discussed from every angle, philosophical, religious, and literary, as well as scientific. The conception of the unconscious seemed to throw new light on every human problem and change its terms, and ... I ... snatched at it as the revelation which was to transform the whole world of perception. (150)

## 2.2- WILLA MUIR’S ESSAYS: “WOMEN: AN INQUIRY” “WOMEN IN SCOTLAND” “MRS. GRUNDY IN SCOTLAND”

Most of these philosophical discussions Muir shared with her husband materialised in her essay “Women, an Inquiry,” which was published in London in November 1925 by Virginia and Leonard Woolf’s Hogarth Press and which “was greeted with virtually unanimous press silence” (Allen 199). In the introduction to the volume *Willa Muir: Imagined Selves* (1996), Kirsty Allen defines “Women: An Inquiry” as a “conservative exploration of the symbiosis and complementarity of the sexes” (ix) and not did Margaret Elphinstone show enthusiasm in her criticism of the essay, describing it as a “pamphlet” for “being inconstant in its paradoxical definitions of gender difference as both essential and socially constructed” (405). It must be taken into account that Muir was aware of the tensions between the conscious and the unconscious mind studied in applications of Freudian theories, and of the insecurities and contradictions of Freud himself regarding the feminine mind, which James Strachey has collected in *New Lectures of Psychoanalysis* (1964), where he emphasizes the importance of the works of Sigmund Freud for the better understanding of the human being as a subject, and of Freud’s inquiries into the world of dreams for the discovery of the unconscious.

As Strachey notes, Freud’s research on the human mind, which led him to the discovery of the unconscious, was crucial for later studies and revisions based on his work. This applies in particular to the exploration of the female mind, that dark subject

that Freud left without a full explanation, probably being aware that the full exploration of women's minds would lead to a revision of their role in society, and in re-valuation of existing theories carried out so far. This applied, for example, to his theories on feminine sexuality, as Freud clearly states in his essay "Femininity," where he implies that it is only women themselves who have the key to their own lives, and this exploration must be done through the experiences of women themselves.

Muir's "Women: An Inquiry" is in Kirsty Allen's words in *The Life and Work of Willa Muir* "a quite outstanding exploration of the perceived qualities, capacities and characteristics of women and the necessity of integrating them into every social sphere" (200). It is, in Muir's own words in *Belonging*, an illustrative document that offers a remarkable analysis of the nature of femaleness, "the inquiry into the nature of Women," (111). In this essay, she provides an illuminating insight into her conceptions of the nature of women, and she states that the natural creative work of a woman is different from that of a man, and shares the contradictions of most women writers of the period, stating that although the role of the mother is of primary importance, women must try to find a way to balance their roles as creative subjects, dedicating time to the cultivation of their minds.

Muir was aware of the moral and rational world men had constructed for themselves: "The knowledge that it is one-sided, because men have for so long been dominant over women, is valuable in helping to distinguish what is essential from what it is dominant [...] In a masculine civilization the creative work of women may be belittled, misinterpreted, or denied" (2); but still she believed that what makes women



different from men and unique as human beings is precisely the world of feelings, of emotions, which she considered of vital importance for creativity and growth: the unconscious, although she remarks that “men are not all intellect and consciousness, nor are women all intuition and unconsciousness (26). Some decades later, in her memoir *Belonging* she reiterated this idea of trying to find a balance between the conscious and unconscious part of herself: “ I could never detach myself from my emotions and rise into their immortal world of art [...] Thinking about the implications of my inability to detach myself from emotions, which I suspected might be not only a peculiarity of mine but a characteristic of most women” (113-4).

In a more contemporary debate on femininity, H  l  ne Cixous claims there are certain specific experiences to which the opposite sex cannot gain access, and which she explains in “Coming to Writing”: “All women feel in the dark or the light, what no man can experience in their place, the incisions, the births, the explosions in libido, the ruptures, the losses, the pleasures in our rhythms” (56) [...] Woman’s sexuality is in her view “infinitely plural” whereas masculine sexuality is “static and singular”(87), and she adds that the pleasurable sensations that a woman can feel can never be attainable by men, or at least with the same degree of intensity. One reason is that whether it be “feminine” or “masculine” *Jouissance* or pleasure cannot be expressed in language - it functions in the margins or even outside the space of the verbal: the unconscious. Muir’s is clearly a reaction against the philosophical system which subordinates the feminine to the masculine order, a conception which assumes that the lower position of women in a man-state world is natural, and represses, enslaves, confines women to its

Law; a phallogentric philosophy which equates the masculine order with the history itself, as Cixous argues in “Sorties”:

There is no place for your desire in our affairs of State. Love is threshold business. For us men, who are made to succeed, to climb the social ladder, temptation that encourages us, drives us, and feeds our ambitions is good. But carrying it out is dangerous. Desire must not disappear. You women represent the eternal threat, and anticulture for us. We don't stay in your houses; we are going to remain in your beds. We wander [...] On the other side is the fall: enslavement for the one and for the other, domestication, confinement in family and in social function. (67)

Kirsty Allen draws parallels between “Women An Inquiry” (1925) and Virginia Woolf's celebrated essay “A Room of One's Own,” published four years later, and defines Muir's book “as a fascinating document which offers a remarkable analysis of the nature of femaleness” (200). Allen suggests that the source of this work could be due to the lack of communication between Muir and her mother, a woman with strong Victorian principles, a relationship which provoked in Muir a feeling of endless uneasiness which followed her most of her life: “Young women were no longer willing to accept that the burden borne by their foremothers need necessarily be the lot of the modern woman with an education, quasi-independence and contraception” (27). Willa's views were separated from her mother's by a generation gap between two worlds which seemed culturally and historically irreconcilable, and for a long time, Willa expressed an equivocal and ambivalent attitude to her mother. Willa was aware of the barrier of

fundamental misunderstanding that separated them, a feeling that saddened her. "Male dominance was my mother's creed", she recognises in *Belonging* (136), which created a constant feeling of uneasiness in her that darkened their relationship. By 1949, when Betty Anderson had been dead for almost 20 years, Muir was still unable to construct a true picture by which she could perpetuate her mother's memory. In "Journal: Prague 1947-48," she described her as "in many ways, a simple woman with simple ideas and conventions" (unnumbered page), and in a later journal entry from 1952 she declares her intention of "trying to write about my mother" (unnumbered page). The book was never written, but there are various references to the ideal mother in Muir's work which reveal very real anger and resentment. A decade later, at the age of 70, however, in an unpublished powerful essay she wrote in 1960-1, under the pseudonym of An  cula, "This Lop-Sided World," after travelling extensively all around Europe, she seems to have gone through the experience of reconciliation with her mother, and recognises the importance of a mother not only in the family, but as a carrier of tradition in history: "In a world which has been lop-sided for thousands of years Mum might well have become a monster through frustration, but the evidence points to the intact survival of her power to keep the family going. The family would be worse off without the beneficent shadow of mum in a weary land" (54).

This ambivalent attitude toward her mother is reflected in her struggle not to become like her mother, a victim in the role of mother-housewife, the martyr of conventional motherhood, a repressive figure in a patriarchal family who wished to pass on her own pressure to conform to the degrading and passive role of 'Angel in the

House.’ This rage has been characterised in Freudian psychoanalysis as the result of the resentment of the daughter towards the mother for not having given her a penis, and for the mother having remained silent and passive, consequently relegating her daughter to secondary status in comparison with her son, who entered the symbolic - the power of the ‘Law of the Father.’

In the same way that Willa claims in “Women: An Inquiry”: “Men are born of women and of women only” (4), in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1986), Adrienne Rich states: “Patriarchy could not survive without motherhood and heterosexuality in their institutional forms” (43). Rich emphasizes the importance of motherhood, and the need to recover the strong bond between mothers and daughters, but at the same time she claims the need for daughters and mothers to have an autonomy of their own, as, she argues: “daughters need mothers who want their own freedom and ours. We need not to be the vessels of another woman’s self-denial and frustration” (246), a feeling she coined as “matrophobia,” a separation of self from the bondage imposed on mothers and a search for individual desire and freedom:

Matrophobia can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mother’s bondage, to become individuated and free. The mother stands for the victim in ourselves, the unfree woman, the martyr. Our personalities seem dangerously to blur and overlap with our mothers’; and, in a desperate attempt to know where mother ends and daughter begins, we perform radical surgery. (237)

In “Women: An Inquiry,” Muir challenges old Freudian views of institutionalized and sacrificial mothers, and against the patriarchal splitting of mother and daughter, she proposes in post-Freudian terms a woman mother whose power can achieve reconciliation with her lost self and who claims recognition of the experience of motherhood as a gift one gives to the other. Cixous considers that motherhood represents what is possibly the most intense and complete relationship with the other that can be had, and she remarks in “The Author in Truth” that the potential or actual experience of being pregnant gives women a unique perspective on the other, also the capacity to experience more pleasure as “virtually or actually mothers, women do after all have an experience of the inside, an experience of the capacity of other, an experience of nonnegative change brought about by the other, of positive receptivity” (155).

An important part of “Women: An Inquiry” is then devoted to the role of women as mothers, and as such, their exclusion from the “typical men’s State where the creative work of women is ignored” (14). Such sentiments are expressed in a number of philosophical essays Muir wrote to proclaim her views against a patriarchal world based on economic principles that endangered women-mothers, and on her struggle between being a person on her own and a mother. In “Notes on Motherhood and Food Provision with the Heading ‘Self Centred’” (1956), she expands upon the contradictory roles of mother and worker, and she relates that which differentiates a woman from a man, and it is the lack of a centred self, as a woman is always dependant on her children: “In the mother’s world, there is food to be got, to be cooked, to be given to the family. Warmth

and shelter are to be given: clothes, coverings, protective wrappings, a roof, a home. All these primitive needs existed before finance did, before money was invented, and money is an interloper in the feminine world” (unnumbered page).

The original sin that supported her sharp objections to Calvinism is brought up in “Women: An Inquiry,” where Muir is concerned with a radical theory of motherhood as the distinctive function of women which has been viewed lopsidedly by the Church, an institution which follows phallogocratic principles. In her view, the Church contradicts itself when, on the one hand, it places the Mother in heaven and worships her as the Mother of God, but on the other hand, it underestimates women’s important role as mother, because, as she states, “all women are potential mothers” (4):

The theology of the masculine world branded Eve as the first cause of evil, and explained the pains of child-birth as a just punishment from Heaven. Still more significant, however, is the fact that Adam and Eve were created by a masculine god in a garden [...] but motherhood was smirched with Original Sin [...] women were regarded mere receptacles, passive receptive bodies which created nothing. Men must have felt that motherhood was important, or they would not have tried to explain it away altogether. But the sentimental ideal of woman as the mother still persists [...] Yet if motherhood can be defined, rightly or wrongly, as the sole function of women, it must be a function which in some way

expresses the quality of womanhood as distinct from manhood. (4-5)<sup>17</sup>

Muir was convinced that the patriarchal law considered women as second-class citizens, and the patriarchal Church assumed that they were second-class souls, and blamed them for being heirs of that original sinner, Eve. From an early age Willa reacted strongly to the predestination of women to be doomed to passivity and was aware of the gap between the self she knew and the female stereotyping expected of her, and yet, she notes in *Belonging*, “we females were strong natural forces deserving a status of our own as free citizens” (136).

In the article “The Author in Truth,” Cixous explains how the development of women’s story in history has been marked by accounts of the beginning of the world itself, of its pleasures and its prohibitions, which she exemplifies in the story *Eve and the Apple*, in which the struggle between Eve and the word of God, the Law, takes place. Eve takes the apple in an impulse to give way to her desire, to experience what is inside it, thus transgressing God’s law and being punished for it, but she experiences the pleasure, “the desire to know with the lips the strange fruit and the common fruit” (154). This is the enigma of the apple, this conflict between the pleasure of tasting while transgressing the word of God, or of staying alongside the Law, and remaining hungry

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<sup>17</sup> This powerful statement on the repression of motherhood connects her to the feminist debate of the 1960s and 1970s, when motherhood started to be considered a political institution in a social context as a vindication of the affirmation of women. Like Willa, H  l  ne Cixous was not able to construct a true picture of her mother until very late in life. In an interview with Susan Sellers and Ian Blyth, Cixous recognises that she was not able to write until she was able to be reconciled with the death of her father, and similarly when her mother was about to die, “enough of my father [...] enough of my father means not enough of my mother [...] behind this word there were so many nostalgias and yearnings and the fear of separation [...] my mother is a kind of extraordinary funny and wonderful casket, full of treasures of her own childhood, a whole world which has tragically disappeared [...] and I started to write Osnabruck” (108).

and ignorant, submitting to that which the Law dictates. Muir shows her nonconformity with the Law, and her indignation is aroused at what is dictated and she has the same feeling of being threatened as Cixous, when she invites women to know their repressed bodies “to create their own independent moral values [...] the conventional woman hangs conventional ideas between herself and her own nature, thus negating her deepest instincts. She despises and represses part of her humanity. Women must therefore be frankly sincere with themselves if they are to be creative” (22).

In “Women in Scotland,” a short essay she wrote in 1936 for *The Left Review*, and which appears in Kirsty Allen’s *Willa Muir: Imagined Selves* (1996), Muir engages again in a vindication of motherhood as a source of life, and raises the contradictions and problems for women of how to reconcile within themselves on the one hand the fact of creating an environment for their husbands and children without sacrificing their self respect as individuals, and on the other hand the fact of being a mother and a financially independent woman in Scotland. She suggests that although Scotland was at the time considered a Socialist country, “yet it is difficult to speak of women’s movements in Scotland, since most Scottish working-class women - and men too - are dominated by the belief that outside the home men should have “the say” (1). She criticises “artificially created environments such as the State, the big business Monopoly, the Factory” (2) which have fed and idealised the figure of mother and wife as the “administrator” of the home and the children, confined to being the employee of her husband and yet, a role which kept her apart from the competitive economic market. She argues against the sole role expected of women as environment: “The man, as an



individual, emerging from the home circle to dominate the alien world outside; the woman, as an environment, dominating the home circle” and she claims to have achieved “balance between environment and individual” (2). This vindication leads her to vehemently engage a feminist political claim in favour of Scottish women’s taking part in public affairs so they can fight for their rights as mothers and individuals, and at the same time she urges Scottish men to take part in the movement:

Scotland as a nation has been for so long a ‘puir auld mither’ that Scottish mothers are likely to have a fellow-feeling for her. And if this fellow-feeling is not be exploited by monopoly capital behind a barrage of Nationalist slogans, it must be used now as a means of enlightening Scotswomen. For they need to be shown where they stand, and I suspect that they are waiting for a lead. Scotsmen, co-opt your women! (4)

From this viewpoint, in *Bella Caledonia: Woman, Nation, Text* (2008), Kirsten Stirling discusses this idea of ‘woman as environment’ versus ‘woman as individual,’ and how Muir uses the idea of woman as environment to argue that political work should be able to incorporate a different female relationship to space and authority. According to Stirling, Muir relates the notion of environment to a Marxist reading, “seeing capitalism as an artificially created environment encroaching upon the mother’s circle of environmental authority, and then compares the domestic maternal environment with that of the State in terms of moment and management and responsibility”(56). Muir rejects the exclusion of women from both the domestic and the political arenas, and proclaims the need for their involvement in national

movements, as she knows how destructive it can be for a woman to be constrained by the moral norms which preserve the male-dominated society. She is concerned about double standards for women both sexually and socially, thus encourages women to work on their conscious/rational selves in order not to be treated as inferior.

The women in “Women in Scotland” are allegorically represented in the figure of Mrs Grundy, the protagonist of “Mrs Grundy in Scotland,” an article written by Muir in 1936, which was commissioned by Hugh MacDiarmid and Lewis Grassie Gibbon, and which was to be included in a series of writings about Scotland entitled *The Voice of Scotland*. This is a series which, as Margaret Elphinstone notes in “Willa Muir: Crossing the Genres,” “seems an eminently fitting place for what is perhaps Muir’s most overtly radical work, in so far as she tackles the combined issues of gender and nationality for the first time in the history of Scottish critical or political theory” (413).<sup>18</sup> Muir received her project with great enthusiasm, she says in *Belonging*, “more or less to entertain Leslie Mitchell, and it was a slap-dash performance” to whom she dedicates “Mrs Grundy” “for the delectation of LEWIS GRASSIE GIBBON and can only be dedication instead, humbly and sorrowfully, to his memory” (189).<sup>19</sup>

In “Mrs Grundy” Willa expands on the ideas portrayed in “Woman: An Inquiry,” in challenging the stereotype of the prototypical woman as “The Angel in the

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<sup>18</sup> Edwin Muir participated with *Scott and Scotland*, but his discriminatory opinion on the poetry which was being written during the Movement compared with the one which had been written before the Reformation enraged MacDiarmid, who declared Edwin Muir “The Enemy,” as Willa relates in *Belonging* (190). Willa lamented that Edwin’s harsh criticism was due not only to his disconformity with the “emptiness of Scottish life” in general, and St Andrews, in particular, “a hiatus caused, he felt, by the lack of an organic society with an alive centre” (189).

<sup>19</sup> As I already noted in the part dedicated to the Scottish Renaissance in chapter one, James Leslie Mitchell used the pseudonym Lewis Grassie Gibbon as *non de plume*.

House,' the maternal woman trapped in the hypocritical British Victorian role of respectability. Among numerous notes kept in the archive of the University of Andrews are Willa's notes on Mrs Grundy, "the feminine backbone of Old England" (4), a Victorian dame who lives in London and who represents traditional aspects of Victorian England in 1854, and the conscience of the nation centred in London: "The history of Mrs Grundy's development is an interesting reflection of the history of actual social forces" (5). Some of the notes on "Mrs Grundy" appear summarised as follows:

The English- increasing wealth

Rise of Middle class

Mrs Grundy became a social figure of "propriety" in etiquette demanding an income to keep it up.

Mrs Grundy an example of class

Inferiority of a class struggling to invade a higher one

Climbing on earth only. Very modern!

Social framework strong, religion weak

The higher you climb on earth the nearer you come to heaven.

Mrs Grundy, a moral censorer. Keep others down as individuals.

Mrs Grundy preserved Scottish character as against financial work.

(unnumbered page)

"Mrs Grundyism" was a term used in the late Victorian period among the middle classes which supported a puritanical standard of sexual behaviour and respectability. This new powerful class which arose reflected the Calvinistic creed of a strong desire,

as Muir herself states, of “climbing on earth,” and this climbing meant a creed based on commercial enterprise, hard labour, and severe repression of worldly pleasures: “The higher you climb in earth, the nearer you come to heaven.” To this repression was added the wish to repress people’s manners both in the family and socially thus Mrs Grundy became “an example of class [...] a social figure of ‘propriety’ in etiquette demanding an income to keep it up.” According to this, Muir reacts against this Victorian image of the passive woman who reproduces the old roles assigned for women in society: as the angel in the house, the woman as the embodiment of natural goodness, the example of domesticity and respectability, the guardian of her children and her husband’s physical and spiritual caretaker.

“Mrs Grundy” is a harsh criticism of those passive women who follow these stereotypes, and who maintain the traditional standards to achieve a social role in society. For her, these women threaten the foundations of the family and church and become a social evil. They are a danger for society because they have come to represent the traditional female stereotype in society: “The women enveloped their men. They were the environments for their families. The men had no occasion to remember that women too might be individuals with a turn for adventurous enterprise” (45-6). Furthermore, “Mrs Grundy” explores and illustrates the effects of austere and self-righteous Presbyterianism on Scottish life and culture, and suggests that it has alienated the Scots from a true knowledge of themselves and of their community. In fact, when Mrs Grundy arrives in Scotland, her negative influences are more associated with religion. Mrs MacGrundy, as Muir calls her when she arrives in Scotland, is not the

mirror in which women see themselves, but a representative of what she thinks it is that establishes tradition. She represents, as Catherine Kerrigan suggests in “Nationalism and Gender, Scottish Myths of the Female,” included in *Scottish Studies* (1994): “Those women who seek outlets for their intelligence and desires threaten the foundation of family and church and are therefore the great evil [...] to Muir she is dangerous because socially she represents the values of the nation, the only form of identity: she has persuaded the nation that she is the national spirit of Scotland (109).

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, much of Muir’s writing reflects the contradictions which dictated her earlier life and experiences at home. The tyranny of Victorian tradition was enforced by a strong Presbyterian church in Scotland, which she always blamed for its conscious destruction of people’s minds; this feeling seemed to come from her father’s strong affiliation to the Free Church, a church which, according to Scottish Marxist historian Allan MacClaren, sought “to regulate society on Calvinist principles, with the bourgeois “elect” using evangelization as an attack on the working class “non-elect” (qtd. in Brown 178). She disliked, as Edwin did, the idea of the original sin that the Calvinist Scots proclaimed as a repressive force that created a feeling of guilt that suppressed and paralysed the poet’s creativity and imagination. According to this Calvinistic principle, due to the original Sin, all human nature is radically corrupt, and there is no redemption for them, and the only hope is to put themselves in the hands of God, and become members of the elect, because the only way to redeem the original sin is to “die” for God and consecrate their entire lives to him, in order to pass on the day the of judgement, as she argues in *Belonging*:

Calvinists spent much of their time on earth in rehearsing Judgement, censoring their own and other people’s conduct, showing up others as less likely than themselves to be counted among the Saints [...] If the whole human race inherits, life among orthodox Calvinists is regarded as a penance for that, every little pleasure has to be paid for, and all human suffering is part of the payment. (242)

Accordingly, in *The Modern Scottish Novel* Cairns Craig states that the Scottish imagination and community were governed by the fear of God. The “God-fearing,” as he calls it, became central, nearly obsessive for Scottish writers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and in many cases provoked lifelong traumas in the characters of their novels. Craig has extensively argued about the role of Calvinism in the Scottish imagination, and has observed that for good or worse, Calvinism was the foundation of the key institutions - religious and educational - which helped create a national feeling during the Reformation, and that it was also a sign of that which helped the Scots maintain their distinctiveness while Scotland was under the British Empire, and “no Scot could avoid involvement in the imaginative world that Calvinism projected” (37).

Calvinism has been fiercely attacked by many Scottish women writers for being an enforcer of patriarchal authority, and for ignoring women or using them as symbols of embodied wickedness. In the unpublished article “This Lop-sided World,” Muir fiercely attacks Calvinism for enforcing patriarchal authority, suppressing women or using them as symbols of evil:

This passion for wreaking obscure vengeance on women helped to burn Jean of Arc and to persecute hundreds of alleged witches. It was concentrated by John Knox, the leader of the Scottish reformation, in the blast of his trumpet against the monstrous regimen of Women. One may be surprised, perhaps, that Knox did not suppose the Devil to be a woman; presumably the Devil was too powerful a figure to be made feminine in a patriarchal society; he was the prince of Darkness. (50)<sup>20</sup>

Muir fictionalises the devastating psychological power of Calvinism in the minds of Scottish people in her first novel *Imagined Corners*, which I shall examine in the next chapter.

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<sup>20</sup> In “Bolchevism and Calvinism” published in *European Quarterly* (May 1934), Edwin Muir wrote: My purpose in this essay is to draw a comparison between Calvinism and Bolchevism (which seem to me to resemble each other in important respects) Calvinism has historically run its course; it has helped to change the face of a society and as a factor in historical development has disappeared. It has thus for the student a double advantage over Bolchevism: we can see it completely in its rise, triumph, decline and fall, and we can estimate some of its consequences [...] the following statements are true of Calvinism: first it was a deterministic theory holding that certain changes were inevitable and that its own ultimate triumph was assured. In its secular policy it was eminently realistic employing the pretext of liberty, as all young movements do before they attain power, but using the same weapons as its enemies: that is repression and discipline within, and craft and force without. [...] While in its triumph still hostile to literature and other forms of traditional culture, it showed an extraordinary enthusiasm for education and an almost fanatical belief in its efficacy. It essentially sought and secured the victory of a class which was at the time under stigma, for ‘The Elect’ were roughly the new commercial stratum which was already beginning to rise to the top. [...] It preferred the claims of the mass to those of the individual, exercising a strict control over private people’s private affairs. It revolted against the traditional conception of love and marriage and the Calvinist was essentially concerned with his relation to God; the Calvinist wished to create a society completely governed by a religious discipline [...] and is well known in history from such figures as William the Silent, Crownwell and Knox. (qtd. in McCulloch’s *Modernism and Nationalism. Literature and Society in Scotland 1918-1939*, p. 356)

### 2.3- IMAGINED CORNERS

“The body in itself is evil,” insisted the minister, “until we deliberately consecrate it to God” (110)<sup>21</sup>

*Imagined Corners* (1931) reflects Muir’s search for a True Self, the harmonious place in the mind where Self and Other meet as a way of escaping in dreams and the imagination of the characters to challenge the repressive morality and conventions of small-town Scottish life. Contrary to the titles of her other novels, which allude to their literary content, the title *Imagined Corners* was taken from seventeenth-century poet John Donne’s “Divine Sonnet” VII:

At the round earth’s imagined corners, blow  
Your trumpets, angels; and arise, arise  
From death, you numberless infinities  
Of souls, and to your scattered bodies go.

As a seventeenth-century intellectual, Donne knew that the Earth was round, but in the poem he portrays it as in that old medieval biblical vision as a world with corners. In the poem Donne shows a grand vision of the end of time, and at the same time, his uncertainty of meeting God. The poem describes the end of the world, and the Last Judgement, and does so in terms of the poet’s own feeling and fears. The image represented on the first line is the Earth with corners, which conveys to the reader the two visions of looking at the world, the Earth with or without corners, with or without

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<sup>21</sup> Willa Muir’s *Imagined Corners* . Edinburgh: Canongate Classics, 1987.



fear of the final Judgement Day. Likewise, Muir's novel itself portrays the idea of the tension between the conscious and unconscious corners of the mind, and how the protagonists are able to challenge the imposed corners which govern their small world of Calderwick in 1921.

In *The Life and Work of Willa Muir*, Kirsty Allen explains that *Imagined Corners* was appraised and welcomed by critics as a mature novel that was not only Scottish-based, but also as a piece of criticism from a writer with an open-minded point of view. However, the novel did not receive much public approval when it was published, as Allen quotes from an anonymous reviewer in *The Glasgow Herald* in 1931:

Mrs Muir, although a Scot by birth, by temperament, and we imagine, by inclination, possesses the inestimable advantage of having, like the sophisticated Elise of her novel - both in body and spirit - resided long enough and far enough away from her native land to be able to view its virtues and its vices with a serene detachment. (235)

In another edition of the same newspaper 56 years later, and after the publication of a new edition of the novel by Canon Classics, journalist Lesley Duncan welcomes the book in her article entitled "Paperback of the Week" and suggests: "The novel's most impressive quality is its cheer intelligence. It is as if this brilliant woman had flung into her fiction all her wide-ranging speculations on the nature of religious belief, women's status in society, the anarchic influence of sex, the infinite shallows as well as depths of

human relations” (Allen 236-7)<sup>22</sup>. Indeed, in this narrative in which the narrator’s thoughts pervade the minds of the characters, Muir creates a subversive text which attempts to challenge the society which is still repressed under the constraining religious creed of Calvinism, and opens doors allowing for the transformation of Elizabeth, the woman protagonist, enclosed in a narrow hellish community, and trapped in this patriarchal web as a passive victim of what happens around her. This patriarchal law based on Calvinist principles relegated women to a secondary status, making them passive victims of a masculine State, governed by the Ecclesiastical Church solely by economic principles, and therefore relegated women to a secondary position since they were not the subject of creation of economic growth, although, as Muir herself points out in “Alas, We females! A Modest Proposal for the Solution of Many Problems by the Abolition of the Female Sex. With Flora Grierson,” the Church contradicts itself since “as a body, as a community, it is regarded as feminine (Mother Church)” (unnumbered page).

From the same point of view, she openly argues in *Belonging* that the discriminatory role of women in the Church has arisen because of the repressive system of values allocated to men and women, in which women are still considered guilty of

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<sup>22</sup> “One thing I have learned from publishing a novel is that reviewers are apparently mostly half-wits, stupid both in praising and blaming [...] nobody, for instance, has seen that the dreams I give my characters are meant to be at least as important as their waking actions. That William Murray is another version of Elizabeth in different circumstances: that opinions put into the mouths of my characters are not necessarily mine: and that I was trying to illuminate life, not to reform it, to follow my own light, not deliberately to explore blind - alleys in Scotland, although, being Scottish, my approach to any universal problem is bound to be by way of Scottish characters...” (qtd. in Pick “Introduction to *Imagined Corners* ix) (to Neil Gunn)

the wrongs of History:

Male dominance had been my mother's creed and as a child I met it like a toad meeting the teeth of a harrow [...] 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... by the time I went to teach in England I was already alert to the comedy of my position as a woman in a patriarchally-minded country. (140-1)

In *Scottish Novel* Francis Hart states that *Imagined Corners* is "a *Middlemarch* of a modern northeast Scottish coastal burgh torn by sexual and religious conflicts" (209), with a plot which establishes different centres of consciousness in the narrative, and a large number of characters in a fictitious town but which adds a female protagonist who causes the development of the plot which is set in a deeply contrasted culture. In the view of Hart, *Imagined Corners* opens in "witty kailyard," but soon the return of Lizzie Shand - widowed Madame Mutze - heats up the debate in the narrowness and emptiness of dim Scotland which castigated free souls, and especially women, and the freedom of the world she has discovered. She has come back "to see if Scotland has any integrity, ideological or cultural [...] she discovers her home, her self, her limits, and stays long enough to lose her contempt for Calderwick and to find

beneath the mill town's gossipy, mean and dull exterior a severe honesty and a genuine if limited charity" (208). Hart cites Elizabeth Shands' thoughts:

There is an undercurrent of kindly sentiment that runs strong and full beneath many Scots characters, a sort of family feeling for mankind which is expressed by the saying "We're all John Tamson's bairns"... It is a vaguely egalitarian sentiment, and it enables the Scot to handle all sorts of people as if they were his blood relations. Consequently in Scotland there is a social order of rigid severity, for if people did not hold each other off who knows what might happen? The so called individualism of the Scots is merely an attempt on the part of every Scot to keep every other Scot from exercising the privileges of a brother [...] the whole of Calderwick is bound together by invisible links of sympathy [...] it is not everyone who can live without embarrassment in a Scots community. (qtd. in Hart 208-9)

*Imagined Corners* then moves from the sentimentality of the kailyard to the "mature balance between light and dark" (vii), as J.B. Pick points out in the introduction to the 1987 edition of the novel. For him, the novel goes beyond "the bitter reaction to the sentimentality of the Kailyard school of Douglas Brown's *The House with the Green Shutters* (1901)," and offers a new insight so far ignored in Scottish fiction, "a psychological perceptiveness, a psychological realism and a sharp, affectionate detachment" (viii), which situates Muir in the feminism of an intelligent woman with open views regarding universal dilemmas, which opens up the possibilities for escape in

some way or another “to go deep, make your own discoveries and live by them [...] there is acute and painful observation of the ways in which men and women limit themselves and defend themselves from one another” (x). In truth, Muir resisted the idea that changes happened quickly, but she predicted a better future for women. In her powerful essay “This Lopsided World” she predicts that the equality of the sexes would inevitably come because of what later French feminists would call the deconstruction of binary oppositions. She strongly believed in an harmonious partnership between men and women: “What I see coming is a harmonious partnership between men and women such as already exists sporadically, a general climate of opinion in which all notions of dominance by either sex have been eliminated (55).

The novel is without any doubt a fictional exploration of Muir’s feminist concerns, where she asserts her individuality and independence as a woman writer, and also reflects the tensions and contradictions that shadowed her throughout her whole life, tensions that split her between being herself on the one hand as a woman who openly vindicated rights in favour of women in a profoundly repressed society, her role as a woman in a man’s world, and on the other as the muse of a well-known poet still living in a Victorian age. In “Willa Muir: Crossing the Genres” Margaret Elphinstone alludes to Muir’s training in the theories of psychoanalysis when portraying this shattering of the self, the subject, when she creates two different female protagonists, two Elizabeths, Elizabeth Shand, married to Hector Shand who lives in narrow-minded Calderwick, and Elise, the woman who decided to flee Calderwick years ago with the man she wanted, and against her family’s will. In this light, in a suggestive article

written in 1994 for the *Scottish Literary Journal* entitled "Selves, Names and Roles: Willa Muir's *Imagined Corners*," Isobel Murray makes an interesting comparative analysis between Muir's novel and Grassie Gibbon's *Sunset Song*, written one year later. She suggests that Gibbon may have drawn inspiration from Muir's protagonist and her divided self to portray his own female character, Chris Guthrie, who finds herself divided into two conflicting identities, the refined, cultured English Chris and broad Scottish-born one: "Two Chrisses there were that fought for her heart and tormented her. You hated the land and the coarse speak of the folk... and the next you'd waken with the peewits crying accross the hills" (Gibbon 32), although in Murray's view, Gibbon does not succeed in finding a response to Chris's dream and moves around the dislocation of her self all through the trilogy.

In contrast to Gibbon's *Sunset Song* and similarly to Nan Sheperd's *The Quarry Mood* (1928), or Catherine Carswell's *Open the Door* (1920), Muir's feminist views seek to exit the blind alleys, shut doors and closed windows which her characters encounter in the external world. "Each character," Elphinstone argues, "is enclosed within a private, individual world that also becomes a prison. But there is another world, another possibility open to seek the freedom that the other world offers"(404). This is an important contribution to the narrative story, the struggle of the divided selves, the struggle between the conscious imposition by law and the repressed dreams and desires of liberation, of belonging and not belonging to a world of which they now are part, to which Muir exposes her characters.

These tensions and contradictions of a split self are the representations of her

own struggles and the contradictions which pervaded her life, since her first memories in Montrose, and which seemed to her essential for the construction of her self. This fact is related to her close contact with the theories of Modernism and her insights into the theories of psychoanalysis, which provided her with a subversive view of what had thus far been called the unified subject, which subjugates human beings to having a single history of identity, as Hélène Cixous argues in “Sorties”: “The Empire of the Selfsame [...] the same masters dominate history from the beginning, inscribing on it the marks of their appropriating economy” (79), but which Muir translates into a feminine plural, fragmented subject in constant negotiation with its Other. It is the harmonious relationship of Self with Other, against the empire of the masculine Selfsame that Muir aspired to in a human relationship, an Edenic state which kept her in love with Edwin because as she states in *Belonging*: “Our thoughts and feelings reached out into the cosmos and into the unconscious with a sense of natural freedom” (170). This repressed unconscious part of the mind is what Muir explores in *Imagined Corners*, and all the polarities and contradictions which arise.

*Imagined Corners* was published in June 1931, in between the pressures of the translations which she shared with Edwin, the illness and subsequent death of her mother, the care of her son, and financial demands, all of which prevented her from finishing the novel sooner. At the same time, Edwin wrote *The Three Brothers* (1931), which Hart describes as a “theological novel of personal crisis” (210) in which Edwin explores all the blind alleys of Calvinism in the minds of the three protagonists, and a place, Scotland, which has become hell. *Imagined Corners* relates the story of two

families: the Shands and the Murrays, all caught up in the oppressing web of Calderwick, a small town on the south-east coast of Scotland, and governed by the fear of a Presbyterian God. Reverend William Murray, the minister of the United Free Church, a man who “had not quite escaped the influence of his father, who had ruled this house, as he had ruled his school, on the assumption that the female sex was devised by God for the lower grades of work and knowledge, and that it was beneath the dignity of a man to stoop to female tasks” (Muir 16); Sarah Murray, his single sister in charge of the housekeeping, who serves the Reverend and their brother Ned, a rebellious young man doomed to be the outcast in the family by not accepting the University student role that his brother the Reverend has designed for him: “With hundreds of millions in the world to practise on they make a dead set at me. All I ask is peace and security and they all climb by kicking me down. Are all the low, sneaking, cunning imbeciles to enjoy a home and a job at my expense? Just because I am not so low and cunning as they are? Good God!” (28).

On the other side, John Shand, 42, the eldest brother of the Shand family, the heir of the family business whose “position in Calderwick was now unimpeachable” (35), and which he shares with his brother Hector; Mabel, John’s wife, who is 22, and a devoted wife, and the guardian of the family tradition, Aunt Janet. Hector Shand, who was born thirteen years later than John to a second marriage of his father, is a man who drinks heavily and “uses women to feed his vanity,” and is newly married to young Elizabeth Shand. Lizzie Shand, the Shand brothers’ sister, three years younger than John, ran away from Calderwick with a married man, a foreigner, the head of the



modern languages department in Calderwick Academy twenty years ago, at the age of nineteen, “a wild creature, a wild thing, she had been , always in hot water” John reflects: “Nobody knew what it meant to him when she ran off with that German, he nearly threw up everything to go after her. But even if he had tracked her down, how could he have brought her back to be a perpetual reminder of disgrace? A drunken father was bad enough without a dishonoured sister; no family could have lived with them both. (25-6)

In this extraordinary story, Muir succeeds in recreating with great intensity what happened in Calderwick between two Septembers in the pre-First World War period and recreating the central action dealing with the return of Elise Mutze (Lizzie Shand) within a week. On the other hand, young newly married Elizabeth Shand discovers that her identity is split into what she expects from her life and her marriage, and what Calderwick expects from her:

She took refuge in a device of her childhood. I’m me, she thought; me, me; here behind my eyes [...] her thoughts came back to the question of her own identity. Elizabeth Ramsay she was, but also Elizabeth Shand, and she herself, that essential self which awoke from sleep has felt lost because she had forgotten the fact.... She was not only herself. She was herself - and - Hector [...] Pride is the stalk, she said to herself, but love is the flower. Give up the old Elizabeth Ramsay, she told herself, emotion sweeping her away, and become Elizabeth Shand. (65-6)

Calderwick, according to her husband Hector Shand, is a suitable place for a woman like her. She is not comfortable with the role which has been assigned to her although there is little she can do to change it, and this creates a conflict of selves within her. "I'm not me," Elizabeth Shand thinks when she believes that she has to accept the role of a servile "Noble Wife and perfect lady," and hidden within the self-made figure of the perfect wife, she now presented the comforting appearance that Hector expected of her: "The perfect wife was not only selfless and loving - she was sympathetic, understanding, tactful and above all, charming" (127). Her husband Hector has been raised in a family whose men are rightful to be promiscuous whilst their women must remain passive angels, constrained by the myth of wifedom, and she herself has been the victim of her upbringing, from her early years submitting to the pressure that a husband was the only justification for her existence, and believing that a woman who could not attract and keep a husband was a failure, as the narrator reminds us: "That some such theory should emerge in a society which regarded the sexual act as sinful was inevitable; one cannot train women in chastity and then expect them to people the world unless the sinfulness of sex is counterbalanced by the desirability of marriage" (120)

Elizabeth Ramsay, she was, but also Elizabeth Shand, and she herself, that essential self which awoke from sleep, had felt lost because she had forgotten that fact [...] the change in her name which she had hitherto lightly accepted now seemed to her of overwhelming importance [...] Hector, separate as he is, she argued, would not be sleeping so quietly if

he and I were not in harmony. So even in sleep, that last refuge of the separate personality, there must be in communion between us. He rests in me and I in him. In a sense therefore it is true that we are part of each other [...] She was not only herself: she was herself - and Hector. (65)

What confirms Elizabeth Shand's disconformity with a patriarchal society where the Head is the Church is her perception of this as a hostile world. The young Elizabeth struggles to define her own identity in a place within which the dominant order is assured and controlled by profound religious principles. Muir writes of women's lives in a male dominated society in *Imagined Corners*, and of life and the evil influence of Scottish Calvinistic religion on the lives of the men and women of Calderwick, where her female protagonist becomes, as Cixous would say "this nobody, trapped in the veils of History," and which now Muir attempts to revive through her female protagonist. Elizabeth has to fight the two extremes of her vision: the religious one, which forces her to adopt God the Father as the only being who can control her emotions, and her body; and on the other hand, the awakening of her body, her passions and her sexual feelings. She does not believe in a God who punishes or who discriminates against the body, but in a God who understands the communion between body and spirit. She is like young Dorothea in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1872), a young woman who resists acceptance of the old authorisation principles of religion, and believes that once religion has lost its authority, a new debate is opened to moral and philosophy: "I am not religious in the ordinary sense. I don't think I am a Christian. I don't believe in your heaven and hell. I believe in something that flows through the universe. You can call it

God if you like [...] It is not outside, it's inside oneself. And yet it comes suddenly, as if from outside." (72). Like Dorothea, Elizabeth has lost her faith in a supernatural God, and thinks that this supernatural being is a human invention made in the image of a human's ideals, and who ignores the needs of the inferior beings who live on Earth. There is no heaven or hell for her, but an inestimable state in her imagination, which unites her to the Other in a poetic, mystical communion with the Universe.

Margaret Elphinstone, in her article "Willa Muir: Crossing the Genres" alludes to the feeling of not belonging that seemed to pursue Muir from her early years in Montrose, and which was potentially essential for the construction of her own identity as a woman, a marginal position from which she wrote and from which she subverted the Scottish paradigms which affected and repressed Scottish women. "For Muir", Elphinstone explains, "as for the two Elizabeths in *Imagined Corners* Europe represents an equivocal kind of freedom. For a Scottish woman, it seems, the issue of Belonging is most painful when it relates to Scotland, and yet it is in relation to Scotland that it must be resolved" (404). *Imagined Corners* becomes then the textual representation of Muir's twin tensions of belonging and not belonging throughout her life, and she looks to psychoanalysis as a way to address the dualism of self which includes all her personal struggles of belonging and not belonging, with the universal and the local, and how the universal can be found in the local. And as Elphinstone points out, this dualism is strictly related to her sense of belonging to a world with which she did not identify with from an early age, and the tensions and contradictions which this fact created in her caused "a dynamic negotiation of an identity that both Elizabeths have to engage with in

Calderwick” (402).

But Elise, once Lizzie Shand and now the widowed Frau Doktor Mutze, has a conflict too: “The two halves of herself which Karl had held together were now falling apart again (146). She is excited when she reaches Calderwick: “For the moment all the various personalities in Elizabeth Mutze were fused in one” (154), and when she meets young Elizabeth, she finds that they are a reflection of each other, which precipitates the discovery of Elise’s identity and wholeness and helps her reconcile the pieces she consists of: “You and I, Elizabeth, would make one damned fine woman between us” (246). Elizabeth and Lizzie Shand, become in the novel Muir’s alter egos, the two sides of the same coin, and personify the double contradictions Willa Muir had been entrapped in and which tormented her throughout her life: on the one hand, the rebellious young woman, trapped in a profoundly patriarchal small Scottish town, and on the other hand, the mature, middle-class liberated woman who has travelled extensively, after breaking the ties with her family, but who finally comes back home in order to find that nothing has changed no matter how much time has passed. Muir’s feminist concerns are central in the character of Elise, who possesses the courage to release herself from the patriarchal Presbyterian culture of her Calderwick childhood, while young Elizabeth seems to have been confined to a world she despises. It is only when Elizabeth is freed by Elise - that she can explore the emotional and intellectual aspects of herself. Elise’s return to the world passes inevitably through separation from this patriarchal world, no matter how painful this separation is for all the family, her two brothers, and the scandal that this means to the small community of Calderwick.

It is through the experiences that Elise encounters in life that she is able to become an autonomous self, and to situate freely in relation to herself, not just to the community and the family. The desire to escape and see more beyond the confines of this suffocating and dull town is wonderfully portrayed by Muir in a beautifully written stream of consciousness, through the mind of Mabel:

But if Lizzy Shand were in the south of France, why on earth should she come to Calderwick in the middle of winter? As she gazed out of the window she noted that Calderwick was colourless – grey skies, grey pavements, grey people. She herself would become grey in the course of time. Sarah Murray, she thought with a flash of spitefulness and horror, was grey already, inside if not out, although she was only a little over thirty. (82)

Muir creates two heroines in a novel where, as she writes in *Belonging*, there is “sufficient material in it for two novels,” (158) and creates two Elizabeths, who in fact could be only one. The two Elizabeths personify the balance between mind and spirit, and the tensions that this creates in two women negated by a traditional society. It is at the same time the tension of dealing with Scotland, or leaving it. The ending of *Imagined Corners* with its principal female characters leaving Scotland together to go to the South of France confirms the theories of the need to fuse Self and Other, as Lacan says: “The other is necessary to accomplish, even if temporarily, a perception of the self [...] the Image I see in the mirror provides me with the archetype of self-perception; only someone else’s gaze can give me the feeling that I form a totality (qtd. in

Crownfield xi). In *Imagined Corners*, the only way that Elizabeth, the female protagonist, finds to escape these constraints that burden her life in Calderwick is to flee Scotland. Cairns Craig stated in *The Modern Scottish Novel* (1999) that the only way to discover one's self for many Scottish characters in fiction is by challenging the community of fearful selves which suppress their identities: "An ultimate truth not of any enclosed and self mutilating community but of a universe of which the self is no longer afraid [...] the discovery of a self that is immune to fear" (69). This transcendence of fear, he argues, is made extensible to all the novelists of the Scottish Renaissance who have portrayed characters who step beyond the community's boundaries, thus for example, Lewis Grassie Gibbon's Chris Guthrie in *A Scots Quair* (1932-4), Joanna Bannerman in Catherine Carswell's *Open the Door* (1920), or Martha Ironside in Nan Shepherd's *The Quarry Mood* (1928). In this respect, Elise Shand resembles Carswell's heroine Joanna Bannerman, who escapes the patriarchal religious and moral constraints of a traditional Glasgow in order to gain experience and self-determination in a wider world. Her transcendence of the fearful self which she has left in Scotland results inevitably in her self-knowledge, and her sexual awakening, the recovery of her repressed body, and it anticipates H  l  ne Cixous's call to transcend the limits imposed by the law, and look for exit doors and new experiences.

In a letter to F. Marion McNeill, 21 July 1931, Muir explains why she lets the sophisticated Elise leave Scotland, and does not make her stay. She sensibly explains that her protagonist must act according to her wish, freed from national geographical limits, and come back to her home when she wishes, as Palmer McCulloch quotes in

*Modernism and nationalism: Literature and Society in Scotland 1918-1939* (2004),

from a letter to Elizabeth Kyle, published in *Scots Observer* June 1931:

Let me finish off just what I have to say about *Imagined Corners*: you object to my letting Elise leave Scotland. Well my dear, it was supposed to be 1913 when there was nationalism, also, I was thinking more of Elise when I followed her than of national sentiment, and Elise would not have stayed in Calderwick, however, it might have benefit from her presence- which I don't deny [...] I was not describing what ought to be in Scotland but what actually would have happened there in 1913 to the characters in my book: and I think I am right in conceiving that Elise and Hector were bound to leave it. Elizabeth was almost equally bound to come back. But all that I left to the imagination of the reader, being more concerned to present and illumination of life in Scotland than a reformation of it. Anyone who has really felt the thoughts I expressed in it will be all the fitter to reform Scotland, but it is indirect, not direct propaganda that literature provides. I'm proposing to write another novel about Calderwick but you needn't look for Nationalism with a big N in it. Nonetheless I think I shall be "doing my best" for Scotland. Some people can talk and fight and work politically. Probably I could do one the three quite well, but what I want to do more than anything else is to write a great book, and if I succeed I shall have served Scotland too. (qtd. in McCulloch 208-9)



Muir portrays women who are caught in the patriarchal web, passive victims of what happens around them, in the same way she openly states in *Belonging* the frustrations she herself experienced as a woman living in a Presbyterian Scotland of the twentieth century, and expresses her feminist concerns by stating that the patriarchal Church has declared women guilty of original sin, and therefore doomed them to be passive victims of the State: “There was no parity of esteem as between male and female in patriarchal structures, whatever values they may have started with” (140). In *Imagined Corners*, through the character Elise, Muir attempts to dismantle a society which has been repressed under the constraining religious creed of Calvinism, she clearly defies a Church which believes the body to be evil unless it is consecrated to God - the Law - and she deconstructs the phallogentric view of the Calvinist principle which reigns in Calderwick, and which obscures women’s bodies and alienates them under the influence of the Calvinistic God, the human fathers, and their male sons. Willa clearly reacts to the repressive force of Calvinism against women’s bodies, and re-creates this repressive attitude and brings Elizabeth’s body back to life, presenting her as having not a fragmented body ruled by the hegemony of her husband’s desire but a body which is plural, and full of pleasurable zones and which speaks from pleasure, from *jouissance*, which challenges the repressive Church’s principles, in the same way as Cixous claims in “Sorties”: “Let them tremble, those priests; we are going to show our sexts! [...] Because they want to make us believe that it was too dark to be explored” (69).

Elise’s views, then, as a renewed and much-travelled woman, dynamites those

principles. She comes back to Scotland with the hope that something has changed which makes her no longer resentful of her escape from the little town where she had been born and brought up. Before she ran away she had lived in a state of perpetual resentment, but now after twenty years she feels no bitterness, and now on her journey back on the train to Scotland she examines her recollections and expectations: she feels that Calderwick might have been there waiting for her all these years she has been away in search of herself, but doubts assault her: “She would find out how far she had progressed [...] if Calderwick had also progressed how could she measure against it the changes in herself?” (151). Elise introduces young Elizabeth to the world of feelings “the world of thought, of ideas, spreading into vast impersonal abstractions which made another infinity [...] and that was the world in which Hector had not taken part”(175).

Both Elizabeths search for a relationship with their other half in order to create a communion of selves, a harmonious relationship that Elise awakens in her Elizabeth in the world of the repressed unconscious, where deep emotions lie. Young Elizabeth is thirsty for unfixed discourses, a language which speaks from the poetic proximity of the outside world, from outside Calderwick. Therefore, in contrast to the old voices to which she has been submitted, she devotes herself to the pleasing stories that the newly-returned Elise relates to her, a new voice which challenges the fearful selves of the community of Calderwick, and which offers Elizabeth the possibility of transforming herself into a new woman, the possibility to escape. Both find themselves in a universe of emotions, and poetry: “We’re only separate like waves rising out of the one sea. Last night I saw it and felt it so clearly, the oneness underneath everything - and I knew that

religion and poetry and love were all expressions of that oneness [...] (192).

This awakening of her unconscious makes her question the role of the Calvinist God in the repression of her body: "The body in itself is evil", insisted the minister "until we deliberately consecrate it to God" (110). Elizabeth had not been able to be aware of her body, as it had been ruled by her husband, but as Cixous claims "The Dark continent is neither dark nor unexplorable, it is still unexplored because we have been made to believe that it was too dark to be explored. She has not been able to live in her "own" house, her very own body. She can be incarcerated, slowed down, and appallingly tricked into apartheid for too long because her body is dark, evil" (68). She has been afraid for a long time, afraid of herself, of her body, because she, like all women in the community of Calderwick, has internalised the belief that the body is evil. She has not had eyes for herself, but for her husband, and sex frightened her. But the sex which she has been made to believe was too dark, and which she hasn't dared to enjoy, is there to be enjoyed, and wakes up day by day after the return of Elise.

One night Elizabeth wakes up from a nightmare in which she found that she lost her sense of identity until she could remember her maiden name. And she looks for refuge in her own body, the body she had not been aware of. A body which belonged to her husband, and the real Elizabeth's awakening happens when she is aware of her body, and is able to express herself through her body:

What was it that tempted her to despise her body? Had she not always found a magical satisfaction in the thought that she was in her own little

finger, her toes, her thighs, her belly, and her breasts? She ran her hands over her body. You are me, she said, repeating the statement again and again as if it were an invocation. She had cried out upon William Murray for saying that the body unsanctified by God is evil, and now she had herself fallen into that heresy, the heresy of thinking that the body, when some part of oneself holds aloof from it, is the wrong-doer. (174)

Elizabeth Shand's marriage to Hector had been as pernicious as the Calvinist religious dogma. Only when she disentangles herself from the expectations of her role as a 'noble wife', and follows the example set by the Bohemian Lizzie, can she begin to gain self-knowledge. Elizabeth must separate from Calderwick in order to become a fearless self, to transcend the repressing Calvinist creed which has converted her into a victim. Therefore her escape becomes possible when she acknowledges that Elise is the perfect 'Other' with whom to have a harmonious relationship. Elise, on the other hand, has found in Elizabeth her central self. Theirs is a new poetic approach towards the 'Other', an exit from the repressive morals of Calderwick, a harmonious space that welcomes the arrival of the unknown.

## 2.4- MRS RITCHIE

The law was a sacred institution which existed to enforce upon other people the order to which she herself adhered, and to challenge it was heresy against Mrs Ritchie.- *Mrs Ritchie* (203).

*Mrs Ritchie* (1933) is probably the work which best demonstrates Muir's fierce opposition to the repression of female bodies and the unconscious under the Calvinist doctrine, and the tyranny of the Victorian tradition which was enforced by a strong Presbyterian Church in Scotland, which she always blamed for its conscious destruction of the community selves. This novel is a psychological study of women's history, and in it Muir shows the political implications of what is denied to women: their bodies. What happens to Annie Ritchie when she becomes Mrs Grundy, the sociable feminine figure who represses her body and puts herself in the hands of God, under the symbolic 'Law of the Father'? Muir translates Mrs Ritchie's repression of her body/unconscious into a subversive text and she shows the political implications of what is denied, the denial of the protagonist Annie Ritchie's body, her self, and consequently she shows her repressed sexual experience and unconscious, and the world of freedom and imagination which dominated her struggle.

The novel challenges a repressive God the Father who, under the prescription of the Presbyterian Church, is the centre of Annie's small universe, and everything that happens, has meaning only in relation to him. The novel is a political attack against those constraining principles which the Church sustained, and which have repressed

women throughout history, as Muir herself states satirically in her notes on the novel which are included in “Miscellaneous Poems and Folk Songs. Notes for Mrs Ritchie, predominantly on Calvinist doctrine” (1933): “Mrs Ritchie spent her life in placating public opinion? No, in parading herself righteously before public opinion she accepted the drumming only as an accompaniment- only as an expression of disapproval. She knew what to do to outface the world” (unnumbered page).

Catherine Kerrigan has singled out *Mrs Ritchie* as a “counter narrative, a direct response to and rejection of canonical narratives, whose dominant narratives have preserved and promoted a fixed image of women” (108), and she describes Mrs Ritchie as a female figure supported by culture and tradition, accepted as a natural force: “Mrs Ritchie is Muir’s extraordinary - and terrifying - portrait of the psychology of religious fundamentalism [...] the angel in the house has become a demon, the ‘national spirit’ is shown to be destructive” (110). Kerrigan argues that Mrs Ritchie is the embodiment of the monolithic national spirit which represses the imagination and transforms women into monsters, creating fixed identities which lead eventually to fundamentalism. These identities are in her view being supported by a nationalistic traditional culture and are accepted as “natural forces” (110). Mrs Ritchie has become the dutiful wife, held captive by the domestic environment, and doomed to be a servile member of her community. Her sense of inferiority and of belonging to a lower class has been changed into an obsessive wish to climb on Earth in order to come to Heaven:

Mrs Ritchie would have been as happy as a respectable woman could be.

She had the cleanest and best-kept house in Calderwick; her two children

were free scholars at the Academy; her husband's silent, bowed figure was clad in its blacks nearly as often as if he had been a minister. She had risen high in the world of a Rattray; indeed she barely remembered her Rattray connection, and her children hardly knew their cousins by sight.  
(171)

*Mrs Ritchie* was not highly acclaimed when it was published, and was considered by an anonymous reader in *The Listener* in 1933 to be “a Greek drama in the kailyard, a story full of subtle realism and often humorous in a particular way” (qtd. in Allen 272). Its contemporary reviewers have not been very favourable, and recent criticism seems to be in the same vein as that when the novel was published. For example, in her essay “Cakes Not Turned. Willa Muir's Published Novels,” Janet Caird wonders if there is link between Mrs Grundy's study of the morality and social conventions in Scotland and *Mrs Ritchie*'s imposing of Calvinistic moral standards of conduct (18). In fact, in this novel, she argues, Muir succeeds in creating “a true Monster [...] and finds justification of her conduct in a fiercely primitive and fundamentalist form of religion where God and the Devil loom large as vengeful entities” (14-5). She suggests that *Mrs Ritchie* could have become a “female *House with the Green Shutters*” (17), but in her view Muir did not succeed in writing a coherent novel which convinces the readers of its well-developed theme, as she concentrates for too long on the psychological aspects of the characters rather than focusing on the action of the novel: “The style is undistinguished, the dialogue not always convincing, the book gives the impression of having been written too quickly;

an embryo rather than a fully developed creation” (18). Muir, however, was convinced that she had written a more consistent novel than her *Imagined Corners*, but the reviews in the July 1933 edition of the *Times Literary Supplement* placed it within a tradition that was “a little worn,” as Aileen Christianson writes in *Moving in Circles: Willa Muir’s Writings* (2007):

The unpleasantness of people who are at pains to be virtuous is in fact a theme that grows a little worn; and Mrs. Muir’s rehandling of it here has hardly, perhaps, sufficient freshness of treatment to vitalise its solemn inveteracy. MRS. RITCHIE is the portrait, set in a Scots town of before the War, and framed for the reader in a pair of green shutters, of the typical self-righteous domestic despot of literary tradition, who drives her family to desperation in an atmosphere of hatred and high tea. (104)

*Mrs Ritchie*, like *Imagined Corners*, is set in Calderwick, and places Muir’s anti-alterego as the central character in the setting of the town’s restrictions and small-mindedness. The protagonist - a young girl whose family name is Rattray - comes from a very poor background of which she feels ashamed: “A black, that was what she was, and her father, yes, and her mother. A fine family to be born into. Worse than the Blacks of Africa or America.” A drunken father, a laundrywoman mother and a sister who “had little to lose” (5) make her shrink in the small community of Calderwick:

Annie’s sister would not have been humiliated by the accusation that she was like her father; she might have laughed or she might have knocked



many heads together, but she would not have been miserable. Annie Rattray's vitality had a more difficult course to run, her insistent personal self was now in revolt against that other self which had surged within her like a drunken frenzy." (39)

Annie refuses her destiny of working in the mill like her sister when she finishes school, and she is determined to become a teacher. She suffers humiliations inflicted by her schoolmates, but nothing is comparable to the experience of humiliation that she feels at her mother's refusal to let her have an education. She is degraded in her deep inner self, that self that had been given by her father, and undergoes a period of anarchy in which she feels despairing, and suicidal. Then follows an interior conversion of leaving behind the rudimentary part of her self, of discarding things from her past as a concession to the new self that emerges in tears. Without realising she has felt humiliated as there was something devilish within her, now the feeling of self-pity has disappeared, and she has been converted into a new self, by the insurgence of a new light which illuminates her life, which appeared to her in a vision of God in a lyrically-described epiphanic moment at Calderwick station. She had been singled out by God as his Creature, and the figure of God appears to her as a sunray on a cloudy day at sunset, in a poetic moment described by the omniscient narrator:

The red eye of the sun peered from a rift in the clouds, and as if a ray had penetrated her, Annie felt that God was looking at her, and almost in the same moment she knew that until this very evening she had been giving herself to the devil. It was the devil who had led her into humiliation.

And because the wages of sin is death it was a last temptation of the devil that had nearly drawn her to fall from the bridge [...] and He had singled out Annie Rattray. (41)

As I have noted earlier, contemporary critics have agreed to set *Mrs Ritchie* in the tradition of the obsessive behaviour of a parental monster. In the words of David S. Bob, in “The Published Novels of Willa Muir,” the novel “is a tale in *The Green Shutters* mode telling of a family’s descent into ever-deeper reaches of pain, cruelty, obsession and madness, driven by the manic single-mindedness of a parental monster” (151). The same happens in George Douglas Brown’s *The House with the Green Shutters* (1901), which has been considered by Cairns Craig in the introduction to the 1995 edition of the novel as “the first major twentieth-century Scottish novel and it stands as gateway to the new century and to the post-Victorian era.” Craig views the book as “a challenge to the two major and most successful genres of late nineteenth-century Scottish writing - the so-called Kailyard school of Barrie, Maclaren and Crockett and the adventure of Robert Louis Stevenson”(vi). A story which ends in the determined destruction of the Gourlay family, a family whose self-assertion is sustained by the ‘The House of the Green Shutters,’ and which represents the tradition and respectability of John Gourlay’s family, endorsed by its firm attachment to a God fearing ethic.

*Mrs Ritchie* also follows the fearsome Scottish religious life portrayed in James Hogg’s *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), in this case in the embodiment of a male protagonist who adopts destructive behaviour based on a

profound sense of morality in order to settle in the society within which he lives. Annie Ritchie, in turn, is, Bob's words: "Puritanical, rigid, hypocritical as she is, Annie is only a grotesque concentration of the dominant ethos of the Scottish small-town life which the Muirs found when they returned to Scotland after their marriage" (151). Annie Ritchie's 'grotesque' behaviour is comparable to that of Hogg's protagonist - Robert Wringhim - in her repression by a Calvinist doctrine which transforms her, as Cairns Craig suggests when he refers to Wringhim, "from victim of a fearful God into the fear-inspiring companion of the devil and terroriser of his own family and friends" (38). Hogg's novel has been described by Francis Hart as "a complex of diabolic possession, theological satire, and local legend" (22). He places the novel in the Scottish Gothic grotesque tradition of George Tobias Smollet, and of Walter Scott in the historic tradition, which is also comparable to the diabolical genre where the mind is possessed and transformed. In his view, this power that he calls Scottish Gothic "derives from the awful corruption of theological doctrine, from intellectual pride and sophistry," and whose antecedent is Stevenson in the discovery of diabolic power as another side of the self (24). Hogg's sinner is sure that he has "two souls, which take possession of my bodily frame by turns" (23). The fact is that the self is possessed by an Other, or as Cairns Craig puts it, "the confrontation between the two poles of fear - the fear and the fear inspiring" (39) is especially present in Stevenson's *Dr Jeckyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), a story which personifies the fear imposed by Calvinism which creates two personalities in conflict, the Self against the Other, and how Dr Jeckyll, the antagonist of the terror imposed by Mr Hyde, who, in constant state of repression, also becomes fear and hatred.

Muir's protagonist has also been abducted by a powerful external force that makes her hate everything worldly, and makes her serve God in an intimate and exclusive mutual relationship. "But what had bewitched her?" Annie Rattray asks herself (47); she feels sick when looking at her father's chest hair, she sees the devil everywhere, and her mother's house is full of dirt, which she avoids in passing through. Her mother's house makes her feel dirty, for "the shelter of the paternal roof, alas! Offered no protection from the contamination of the world, in spite of her mother's self-sacrificing devotion" (59). Her lowly-class condition is not the destiny that God the Father has chosen for his elected creatures, and employment in the mill seems to Miss Julia Carnegie, the Sunday School teacher, to be "her proper duty to society and to the "Maker" and to fit herself to be a credit to her sex in her domestic relations" (59). Thus she moves to the Carnegie's house, a fervent family and devotes of the Free Church of Scotland who "had inherited not only a broad human desire for security in the bosom of a family, but an exclusive and isolated private relation to God" (68). Miss Julia, the Sunday school teacher, lectures Annie on missionary work, and Annie finds that she unconsciously likes the tales of Africa and the exotic illustrations of "the handsome books" (71), which make her grow and fly:

Africa was indeed a Dark Continent, and Miss Julia's voice took a deeper, a more solemn note as she expounded to Annie the degradations of the torrid zone. The map of Africa became a dark blot on the round belly of the earth, a devil's mark upon the belly of the earth. Annie and Miss Julia drew closer to each other over the polished table, and in their

virgin minds hippopotami rolled their vast bulk, crocodiles heaved their obscene heads, insatiable lions sprang from cover, and cruelty lewdness and murder roamed unchecked. It was a hot, savage night of lust that Miss Julia called up, as if tropical sunlight were a darkness that quenched the flickering ray of the human spirit, and the fervour of her imagination was not less startling than the unexpected [...] the devil himself peered out from the tangled bush of Africa and dark motions in the undergrowth marked his attendant lions. (71-2)

As Aileen Christianson suggests in *Moving in Circles: Willa Muir's Writings*, Muir explores the “complexities of sexuality, the empire, Africa and race written more eurocentrically than can be done more than a hundred years later” (113). *Mrs Ritchie* spans a period from 1886, when Annie Rattray is a young girl at school and plays “the runaway slaves” (34) in the playground, to when her son John Samuel, newly arrived from the First World War, commits suicide by throwing himself under a train. The Victorian period (1837-1901) was significant in the history of relations between Europe and Africa, hence Willa’s imagery of Africa brings us back to Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1902), one of the major novels in the world of literature, and an interesting psychological exploration of the boundaries of conventional European morality of the time. In Conrad’s novel, the narrator Marlow looks passionately at maps of other continents, unknown to most Europeans:

At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth [...] but there was one yet - the biggest, the most blank, so to speak - True, by this time it

was not a blank space any more. It had got filled since my boyhood with rivers and lakes and names. It had ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery - a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over. It had become a place of darkness. (21-2)

In the introduction to the 1995 edition of *Heart of Darkness*, Robert Hampson argues that instead of bringing light into darkness, “the civilization mission actually uncovers the darkness at its own heart” and quotes V.G. Kiernan’s words: “Africa in this period became very truly a Dark continent, but its Darkness was one the invaders brought with them, the sombre shadow of the white man” (xi). The novel, which is written from the perspective of European contact with the Congo, “is firmly fixed within a racist and imperialist Christian framework [...] it foregrounds the power-relation between Europe and Africa” (xxxii) and Hampson cites Edward Said’s words: “The imaginative examination of things oriental was based more or less exclusively upon a sovereign Western consciousness [...] according to a detailed logic governed not simply by empirical reality but by a battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections” (qtd. in Hampson xxxii).

The imagery of the darkness of Africa as a symbol of all that stands for the irrational, evil, primitive, or native in contrast to the rational, civilised, imposed missions of the Western World, leads us back again to Muir’s challenging of Freudian theories of the feminine, the female body which is repressed, and misrepresented in discourses of Western culture and thought. Annie Ritchie is the universal woman whose body has been characterized as a lack, an absence, in the same way as darkness and

strangeness is related to Africa, as Cixous claims in “Sorties”:

Women haven't had eyes for themselves. They haven't gone exploring in their house. Their sex still frightens them. Their bodies, which they haven't dared enjoy, have been colonised. Woman is disgusted by woman and fears her [...] *The “Dark Continent” is neither dark nor unexplorable*: it is still unexplored only because we have been made to believe that it was too dark to be explored. (68)

Annie Ritchie struggles against the dark primitive feelings which awaken her unconscious, but which must be repressed. The images of the darkness of Africa awaken Annie's imagination, even sexual instincts which have been repressed by the moral imperatives of the Law - God. Annie has struggled since she was a child between these two imperatives, the two paradoxes of female existence, the struggle between her two selves. As Christianson suggests, African imagery is explicitly present in *Mrs Ritchie*, symbolised in the Rattray family, the black spot in Calderwick since it did not belong to the middle class of Calderwick: “In Calderwick at that time anything detrimental was referred to as a “black” (5). In the school playground, the game ‘Runaway Slaves’ plays a significant role in her internal struggle, as the omniscient narrator reminds us: “She could control the rope adroitly and she acted to perfection the part of a savage master [...] her renaissance was progression, although she did not know what was happening to her [...] she was opening out in obedience to the universal law that turns children out into adolescents and gives them a chance to be born again.” (34)

Miss Julia's authoritative lessons on self-abnegation and the assertion of a self-condemned to be the perfect mother repress her desires, and make her obedient to the Law. Her moral and religious obligations are the morals and principles which Queen Victoria dictated, a 'Mrs Grundy,' an example of noble woman, committed exclusively to the opposite sex. Miss Julia constantly reminds her of the example she has to follow: "A woman's place was certainly the home, but without in any way quitting their proper spheres women could quite well exert themselves to influence a larger circle than that around the domestic hearth [...] Look at the dear Queen, how truly she was the Mother of her people!" (72). Annie then becomes socially respectable after exchanging her drunken father for God the Father, which posits her in a desirable position both in her family and in her community. She marries joiner Johnny Ritchie, a man without any prospects or future, but in the end a malleable person, easily adaptable to the traditional role of the husband who follows her commandments, the commandments of the Angel of the House, the dutiful wife and mother, and pillar of the Church who gives herself to others.

The fear and repression caused by a tyrannical mother figure such as Mrs Ritchie can only lead to the destruction of the family, making the family members weak and useless to her, thus provoking the death of her husband Johnny Ritchie, the suicide of her son John Samuel and the fleeing of her daughter Sarah Annie. John Samuel, incapable of detaching himself from the authority of his mother, mistakenly enlists as a soldier: "It was time to get out into the bright equal sunshine where everybody stood in the same light. It was time to escape from the searching ray of God's eye" (226) but



soon he realizes that war makes no sense to his tormented life, and in moments of epiphany he sees with clarity the monster his mother has made of him, and how her hostile influence has castrated his imagination and sensitivity:

What made it ghastly was the systematic organization of warfare under the banner of Bunk, making chaps fight for Bunk called patriotism or Bunk called God. A man could fight and be reconciled to this enemy and quit fighting for ever and ever, Amen [...] A man could kill his enemy and be quit of him, but Bunk preached immortality and kept alive a mob of revengeful ghosts [...] A man could live in this world, looking, tasting, listening, enjoying even the cold and the rain, using his hands, his feet, all his members, but Bunk preached heaven and hell and scared him out of his natural enjoyment, and of all the devotees of Bunk, of all the poisonous, deadly, strangling devisers of Bunk, his mother, Mrs Ritchie, was the worst. (254)

Similarly to young John Gourlay in *The House with the Green Shutters*, John Samuel is paralyzed, dehumanized by the fear of his all-powerful mother and he finds consolation in drinking, thinking that his authoritative mother would suffer through his degradation too. He increasingly discovers that there is no future for him, that the only possibility of renewal, the only way to challenge his mother's ethics of power is death: "A full stop he took now seemed irrevocable and final [...] only his mother went on and on; in a fixed rigidity, incapable of change of renewal - for there was no renewal - she persisted" (260). He, like young John Gourlay, represents the fearful selves who are not

able to transcend the repressive Scottish Calvinist culture which speaks in the name of a repressive God who maims the imagination and self confidence of its own community. In contrast to John Samuel, Sarah Annie represents a challenge for Mrs Ritchie, who thinks that “it was almost as if the devil, abandoning John Samuel, had entered into his sister” (265). She is an assertive fearless self who, like Elizabeth Shand, must separate from Calderwick to transcend the narrow-minded Calvinist creed which has ruined her family.

## 2.5- WILLA MUIR'S LATE WORKS: LIVING WITH BALLADS AND BELONGING

*Living with Ballads* (1965) and *Belonging* (1968) were Muir's last prose works, and as Aileen Christianson suggests in *Moving in Circles: Willa Muir's Writings*: "They have a solidity and completeness attained by neither her unpublished novels nor her translation work" (169). In Christianson's words in her introduction to *Belonging*, *Belonging* "is a moving reconstruction of two lives in the twentieth century and an illuminating analysis by a particular feminist of those two lives, of Scotland, Europe and that century. It is both informative and creative, her last great work" (xii).

Willa's memoir of her life with Edwin starts when they are introduced to each other in Glasgow in September 1918 - when she was working as a lecturer in London and he in a shipbuilding firm in Glasgow -, and finishes when he died on the third of January 1959:

That was the end of our Story. It was not the end of the Fable, which never stops, so it was not the end of Edwin's Poetry or my belief in True Love. But any story about human beings is bound to have an end, like this story about us, a pair of ingenious people who fell in love and went journeying together through life [...] We belonged together. (309-10)

In between, the mixed account of life and work that they shared for forty-one years, their travels to Prague, Dresden and Hellerau, Italy, Austria, St Tropez, and the

United States, and their experiences with the poets of the Renaissance and disagreements with the Scottish National Party. Muir conceived *Belonging* as a memoir of her shared life with Edwin, something that Edwin Muir himself had not been able to accomplish in his *An Autobiography* (1954). In Christianson's words, she is "less central in his story than he in hers, however much she might have been ever present in his daily life" (xiv-xv). Muir's true feelings for her husband were not totally corresponded by him, who was more interested "in aspects of himself rather than on a narrative of his life"(xv). His autobiography was more focused in "the story and the fable behind his own 'male-history' for it to be 'definitive' as a life history, with its attention to the inner, the poetic and philosophical. On the other hand, Muir's memoir, Christianson points out, "resists a reading of it as 'definitive, significant male-history' by placing herself so firmly as part of the story, ensuring that she, even though it is not her autobiography, process a 'never-finishing performance of the female self' where her constructed self acts both as narrator and narrated" (xv).

Christianson argues that the first part of Edwin Muir's autobiography, published under the title *The Story and the Fable* (1953), was written during an unhappy period in St Andrews, and revised later when they lived in Newbattle Abbey. Muir started writing *Belonging* a decade later in bad health and still unhappy, and in her account of her life experience with her husband, some significant feelings emerge throughout the book. In this view, Lumir Soukup, a good *connoisseuse* of the couple's relationship, has pointed out in "Belonging," an article published in *Chapman* (1993), that Muir corrected what she herself called Edwin's "flights of fancy" (30), and suggests that although Muir's

accounts can be read more accurately, both autobiographies should be read together, as they complement each other. Muir was aware that she had worked under the shadow of her husband all her life, but she never regretted the loss of her independent career as a qualified lecturer, translator and writer. In the same article, Soukup quotes part of an interview that she had had with Muir in 1968, when she asked her where her views on a woman's role next to her husband had fitted in, and she replied:

My career was Edwin. I devoted my life to Edwin, and I knew what I meant to Edwin, and he knew what he meant to me. We both remained true to each other, and to ourselves as well. That is what our life was, a daily tryst, and his poems are the fruits of it [...] my own writing could never have been as important as Edwin's and I am glad I recognised that early on. (33)

When Edwin Muir died, *Living with Ballads* was in its preliminary process, but Muir felt in a way obliged to continue with the project as he had been given a financial grant from the Bollingen foundation in 1956. Muir, "visibly broken in body but even more bruised in spirit" (Soukup 31), was in the end able to write *Living with Ballads*, a work, Soukup suggests, "too complicated and vast a range for one person to encompass alone" (31). The book became an extensive study of the world of the ballad in Scotland, following her acerbic reaction against Calvinism, a religion which in her words repressed the people's imagination, the people's unconscious, the imaginary vitality of originality and represented people's archaic feelings. In this work, Willa rewrites the ballad tradition, historically associated with male writers, and demands it to

be considered as an art form in the poetic discourse: “In the underworld of feeling there is a sense of power, of rhythmic flow, of movement, of living energy, but only when it issues into consciousness, however dim, can all that energy find itself a name and purposes” (54).

Muir also explains that in the area of north-east Scotland where she was raised, ballads were heard only in the voices of working-class people, especially farm workers, who would sing while doing the farm work or on moonlight evenings. She emphasises that the performers were usually mothers who would teach their daughters singing games which they repeated at school. These singing games which were pleasurable to the ear and produced in the girls “harmonious satisfaction” (14) when they were concerned with romantic relationships, and in which “the father, the mother, and the lad were all token figures” (17)

Our singing games had this kind of shape: they were strongly rhythmical [...] our emotional energies did not emerge as concepts, but as primarily rhythmical and often symbolical waves of feeling, which fell into concrete shape. This set a certain distance between any feeling and the expression of it, and set a distance also between our ordinary selves and the selves absorbed in the game. In a sense we were liberated from our ordinary selves. That was part of the satisfaction (32)

Muir examines the traditional ballads which existed in early times and through an accurate historical account, she relates that in the eighteenth century, the north-

eastern Lowlands of Scotland, specifically Aberdeenshire, were still under the feudal power of the lairds, and that it was the country people who were able to sing the ballads. These ballads were in her words “medieval enough to carry a load of ancient magic and wishful thinking” (94), and the country people passed them on, while the town people, governed by Calvinism, were learning to distrust the world of imagination. The “totalitarian” Calvinist reformers found in ballads “an enemy,” an Other which they tried to repress, as they represented the world of common deep feelings and emotions while the Calvinist doctrine emphasised rationality, logics and the cultivation of individuality. Most importantly, she suggests that mothers are important figures in the ballads and “much of the oral tradition” (55), both in matriarchy and later in patriarchy as they, she notes, “have at hand magical skills which are taken for granted by everyone” (142). Thus the hostility that the severe Calvinist reformer John Knox showed against Mary of Guise and Mary, Queen of Scots, was, in her view, due to his desire to finish with matriarchy, still “perceptible in the Scottish Ballads and still lingering in the air [...] and he blew a blast of his trumpet against the monstrous regiment of women.” (191). She adds that his regiment, his doctrine, was insensible to True Love and true feelings which the ballad represented: “Calvinism ignored the Queen of Love as it ignored all Queens, since it concentrated on Death rather than Birth, but it could not destroy her.” (198)

Following the same thread of thought as Muir but in a contemporary setting, Catherine Kerrigan argues that ballads should be claimed as an important part of women’s history in general and Scottish women’s history is particular. In the

introduction to a volume *An Anthology of Scottish Women Writers* (1993) in which she gathers together poems of Scottish women spanning the period from the seventeenth century to today, Kerrigan emphasizes the importance for cultural history of the numerous accounts of women's personal experiences such as motherhood, childbirth or frustrated love relationships in which women are portrayed as victims of men, submissive wives and lovers, or because women themselves were active singers and hearers of ballads. What is why, she argues, the role of women is crucial for the transmission of the oral tradition, which they passed on to their daughters:

To say that the ballads are an extraordinarily rich source of women's history is an understatement. The ballad tradition represents an experiential and emotional range which has few equals, and therefore offers a whole social, cultural, political and psychological text to be studied, reinterpreted and reclaimed. In the ballad women's joys and pleasures exist side by side with their fears and anger. The latter emotions in particular are a potent reminder of Scotland. The last country in Europe to stop burning witches. (4)

Similarly, in her article "Old singing women and the canons of Scottish Balladry and Song," Mary Ellen Brown also explores the relationship between women and ballads, many of them collected and edited by William Motherwell in 1825, and to this end she gives an account of some of the most important editions of ballads published so far, in which she shows that the singing of these ballads belonged to an active vernacular women's oral tradition. She emphasises that the original texts date from the



seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and quotes the words of Peter Buchan: “The ancient Ballads of Caledonia are venerated by those lovers of their country who delight in the native imagery of their homes, and in hearing the martial and warlike deeds of their forefathers said or sung in the enchanting voice of their fair country-women” (44). Traditional Scottish ballads and songs, she argues, have been associated with women’s names “as possible authors, certainly as tradition bearers, repositories of material which has some claim to being particularly Scottish [...] and that their gender and gendered experiences have something to do with their repertoires” (51). Brown cites the case of Mrs Brown of Falkland who wrote under the name of Anna Gordon, whose repertoire is assumed to have been learned from women in her house at an early age. A reading of Gordon’s texts reveals a great number of recurrent topics which are generic in women’s life situations, and which range from love and marriage, and family conflicts between the wife and mother-in-law, to childbirth or children, all aspects of the traditional role of the woman as a wife and a mother. Romantic love appears repeatedly in the form of a woman looking for the right husband, and in the prejudices depicted where the man of a lower class always marries a woman of a lower class.

Along with her numerous essays and her two powerful novels, Muir’s *Living with Ballads* is a challenge to a still deeply patriarchal Scottish mind which repressed women, and condemned them to be dutiful wives and mothers. Her acerbic attacks on a Calvinist doctrine clearly expressed a desire to transcend the patriarchal Scottish principles, and to seek exits and open doors to her female protagonists: Elisabeth Shand, Mrs Grundy, or Mrs Ritchie are women trapped in a male web which Willa understood

as damaging and limiting, and it was sustained by a strong religious principle which limited and repressed women's bodies and minds. As a great *connesseuse* of psychoanalysis, she was aware of that perfect state for an individual which she called 'the underworld of feelings,' that poetic space in the world of emotions and deep personal feelings where the Self and Other meet in perfect communion. She was able to translate these poetic feelings into words and political essays which in Cixous's words are a specific feminine writing which becomes a powerful 'sext.'

Muir's challenge to a patriarchal world echoes Cixous's solution to transgress this patriarchal ideology which oppresses and silences women, through language, a new language which she calls *écriture féminine* - or feminine language - and through which woman becomes manifest, comes back to life, awakens from death, to give way to a new woman who is a source of life and energy and who transforms passivity into activity in a political act of writing. This new language is a language is a new voice which comes from the woman's unconscious, from somewhere where the bond between herself and her mother is repressed, and which is now liberated and comes out through a new language full of rhythm and musicality.

In the next chapter, I shall show that Jessie Kesson, in the same way as Willa Muir, and in her quest for feminine writing, involved herself in history, in the world of rewriting myths and cultural memory, and she enriched her works with the ballads that recreate the feelings and experiences of the working people in north-eastern Scotland, creating texts full of folk songs and ballads which echo her own memories, passed on to her by the countrymen and women of Aberdeenshire and which define their experiences

with pleasure, contributing to the writing of a rich, lyrical, imaginative world that Willa Muir in *Living with Ballads* calls ‘the underworld of feeling.’

## CHAPTER 3: JESSIE KESSON (1916-1994)

### 3.1- INTRODUCTION

Passionately she had longed for the wind to come. To blow herself and the landscape sky high into movement and coherence again. Almost she had been aware of the wind's near fierceness. Ready to plunge the furious hillside burns down into Cladda river. To hurl the straws over all the dykes. To toss the chaff into the eyes of the protesting people, bending before it, flapping in their clothes like scarecrows. To sting the trees in Carron wood into hissing rebellion, to give the land some loud, loud cry, other than that of pain. - *The White Bird Passes* (157).

Kesson's work is without any doubt a lyrical, euphoric reclamation of the essential bond between writing and the mother as source and origin of the voice to be heard in all female texts, of a mothering tradition which challenges the male social and literary establishment, placing itself in the literary tradition which turns to the fecund mother as guarantor of stability and genealogical truth.

In the introduction to *Jessie Kesson. Writing her Life* (2000), the most comprehensive revision of Jessie Kesson's life and works carried out so far, Isobel Murray writes: "Jessie herself seemed to understand that there was only one psychotherapist available - herself. She must write herself, write her life, and give it the continuity and integrity it had so signally lacked (unnumbered page). Murray's words evoke those of Hélène Cixous influential article "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975), where she claims the need for women to write about women as a process of acknowledging and reclaiming their female past: "Woman must write herself: must

write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies - for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text - as into the world and into history - by their own movement (245).

Kesson had to endure great hardship before she was deservedly awarded an honorary doctorate in Literature from the University of Aberdeen in 1988, at the age of 72. Jessie Grant McDonald<sup>23</sup> was an illegitimate child born in October 1916 in Inverness, a town her mother chose because “In those days it was an awfa’ thing for respectable folk like fit my grannie and the oe wis, so that my Mum obviously took awa’ fit they wid cry in those days her shame, and went to the nearest place and went to Inverness” she said to Isobel Murray in an interview at the Edinburgh Festival in 1985. She spent her childhood with her mother in Elgin until she was separated from her and sent to an orphanage in Skene, Aberdeenshire, at the age of nine, and it was in the orphanage where she first heard about the house where she had been born. In the interview she gave to Isobel Murray, published in *Scottish Writers Talking* (1996), she remembers the excitement of a little girl that she felt when Mrs Elrick, the matron, described the house in Inverness:

I wis born - and I went about cocking up - I wis born in a big hoose, I am  
telling the rest of the kids, and of course nobody could gainsay that cos  
Mrs Elrick said it and she didna tell lees. It really set me up! Well, the

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<sup>23</sup> She was given this name by her grandmother, but her grandfather wanted her to be called Ness: “You was born in Inverness,” her mother used to say “We’ll call you Ness because a town canna object!” (Murray 56).

thing is, I never *saw that* hoose till I was married, and I got married in Inverness actually; and I thocht I'd hae a keek along and see it, and I saw it. Everything she said was right - it was a big hoose - and there was an avenue leading up till't. It wisna geraniums, it was in the autumn: I think it was chrysanthemums - that was the only difference fae her story - *except* that she didna' tell me it was a workhouse! (56-7)

It was in the orphanage that Kesson learnt to read and write, and became aware of her love of poetry: "I read avidly anything and everything. Poetry was my greatest love. The deep joy of discovering, in my journeys through the realms of gold, some new poems other than the poems we had to learn by heart - poems which one guarded in one's heart, jealous lest someone else should discover their beauty" (Murray 7). It was there that she started to write poems, encouraged by her dominie, but where her dreams were frustrated by the Trustees, who recommended a job more adapted to a woman. For this reason she was sent to work on a farm; in the short story "The Useless One. Chronicle of a Failure," included in Isobel Murray's *Somewhere Beyond* (2000) she sadly relates her frustration at the Trustees' decision: "The Orphanage Trustees had the final word. No University Education. That was explicit in the letter the dominie had enclosed with my Higher Leaving Certificate: "My efforts were Unavailing. But, you have the gift. You never know what the years will bring to you yet. But *festina, festina lente*" (139); however, she pursued her love of poetry with the excitement of a young girl full of dreams, a love that accompanied her throughout her life until the last days, as she relates in her radio talk "Railway Journey":

I'll follow my secret heart  
My whole life through,  
I'll keep all my dreams apart,  
Till one comes true. (Murray 9)

Despite all the difficulties she had to endure, her brightness of character and her penchant for poetry were the two characteristics that accompanied her during her life. Isobel Murray describes her as "a woman of sound mind" (xv). The natural talent which she inherited from her mother, and the ballads she heard during her childhood in Our Lady's Lane off the High Street of Elgin, surrounded by misery and prostitution, followed her and dominated her writing. Her struggle with her painful existence which was first a consequence of her separation from her maternal environment, and then because of her frustration at not being able to accomplish her dream of going to University, instead being sent into service, made a serious psychological impact on her. The isolation she felt, and the profound impact of rejection, provoked a nervous breakdown never understood by those surrounding her, who alluded to her lack of consistency and her immaturity, as related in her celebrated book *The White Bird Passes* (1958): "A disintegrated personality? The Minister suggested. "I am afraid so," the Head Trustee admitted. "That's why this question of further education presents a problem. The pity is that we sometimes get them too late to adjust the balance" (143).

Although Kesson tried hard to conform with what was expected from her, she eventually had to spend a year in a mental hospital in Aberdeen, a period of "rest" prescribed by her dominie Mrs Thane, and which was to leave a negative mark on her

for the rest of her life: “She was offered no after-care, no care of any kind. So what she did was to act as her own psychotherapist. One way to look at her writing is to see it almost as a series of exorcisms,” Murray notes in the introduction to *Somewhere Beyond* (x). This was a painful period which she later related in the story “Somewhere Beyond” through the characters of a play: she narrates the nostalgia she felt for home, and for the orphanage while in the mental hospital, and her desire to escape from a situation which made her sad: “I don’t feel about things and people any more. Not the way I used to feel about them when I was in the wynd and in the Orphanage. I used to be terribly excited and happy, and looking forward. I haven’t been like that since I left” (Murray 103).

Kesson’s feelings about her education and her future, and her subsequent isolation in the mental hospital under the diagnosis of neurasthenia are common to many women writers who have had their expectations frustrated. She was, as Hélène Cixous would claim, a madwoman, guilty of the wrongs of a History that prescribed a society that confined women to domesticity, thus their desire of fulfilling themselves as professional women was in most cases frustrated. Kesson suffered the consequences of being a woman under a still-present Victorian philosophy in which women had no choice, they were doomed to be subservient to the morals of Victorian principles which meant that women’s work meant only work for others, hence their physical experiences, their personal lives, ambitions and conflicts remained invisible.

In this vein, Elaine Showalter has written extensively on the dramatic consequences for a woman trying to assert herself in a world made and “written” by



men, especially in her books *A Literature of their Own* (1977) and *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and the English Culture 1830-1980* (1985). Her work, and that of other American feminists such as Sandra M Gilbert and Susan Gubar, has been crucial for the understanding of British Victorian society that created a definition of femininity that idealised women's domestic role as wife and mother, excluding women from any social, literary, or political role. They explain that the new woman who appeared during this period was one who challenged the traditional dogmas with aspirations of self-fulfilment through education and paid work. Such new aspirations, went against the prescriptions of Darwinian psychiatry that condemned them to sickness, sterility and suicide, as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar state in *The Madwoman in the Attic. The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979): "They explicitly linked the epidemic of nervous disorders - anorexia nervosa, hysteria, and neurasthenia - which marked the *fin de si  cle* to women's ambitions (xxxii)."

Kesson, then, is one of thousands of women writers struggling with mental illness throughout their lives, caught between the powerful desire to express themselves and forces like class and social pressure. Ironically, such illness was most frequent among the middle classes and intellectuals, and the fact that it could affect the domestic servants or arise in the harshness of rural life was not taken into account: here as elsewhere, Kesson was a striking and solitary exception. After a trial period out of hospital she met and married John Kesson in 1937. Her desire for writing stayed with her, as we can see in the poem "a Scarlet Goon," written when she was twenty-nine,

after she had become a cottar<sup>24</sup> wife on farms in north-east Scotland, a job she didn't like because "it was absolutely feudal," as she states in the interview with Murray (66).

The Kessons were farm workers in north-east Scotland from 1939 to 1951, and she persisted in her writing first for the *North-East Review* and the *Scots Magazine* and then for the BBC in Scotland. She wrote poetry and prose, often about her painful childhood and the people who perished in the war, but the thing she loved most was the beauty of Nature. With reference to *A Country Dweller's Years: Nature Writings by Jessie Kesson* (2009), a collection of Kesson's nature writings for *The Scots Magazine*, and some of her radio plays and talks, Isobel Murray highlights Kesson's "literary idol," the Scottish Renaissance writer Neil Gunn, with whom Kesson shared her passion for the natural world and her keen interest in the poetry of Wordsworth. With Gunn, as well with Grassic Gibbon, she shared the love for the land, the ballads and the theory of 'Golden Age Myth,' the nostalgia for an idealized and innocent primitive world which existed before the rational mind of Calvinism re-appropriated the union between Self and nature<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> "A cottar," she explains in the interview with Isobel Murray "was in the older days farm workers who lived in a row... but the cottar was the word- Burns used it ye ken "The Cottar's Saturday Nicht"... His cottages were tied to the job, aye, if you lost your job you lost your cottage" (79)

<sup>25</sup> In *Leopard* (2008) Jim Fiddes quotes some paragraphs from five letters Kesson exchanged with John and Mary McMurtrie talking in the letters about her time in the village: "I'm glad I lived in that other era --when the horse ploughed, and you could see the steam from its nostrils spread out and across the frosty mornings. When the hens clucked around your feet. When those who could sing, sang and those who could dance, danced. And Main's Wooing performed in the Milne Hall was the communal high spot of winter. We are in danger, I think of becoming plastic people. No one in the Kirktown was that.

In 1946, immediately after Neil Gunn had stopped writing for the *Scots Magazine*, Kesson published her “Country Dweller’s Year,” a series of twelve nature writings which she wrote under the pseudonym of Ness MacDonald, her maiden name, which Murray collected in *A Country Dweller’s Years: Nature Writings by Jessie Kesson*. These writings are a lyrical exaltation of the twelve months of the year, and, Murray points out in the introduction to the book, they show “her fascination for nature, its colour, light and change.” Poetry pervades every line of her monthly observation through “scents, music and birdsong”, and, “Country Dweller’s Year” “indicates a mastery of English, combined with an occasional, well-judged use of the Doric. Also, the notes on sources of the quotations show that this farm-worker has a wide knowledge of poetry, songs she remembers from school, traditional classics like Wordsworth and Coleridge, and contemporary writers like John Drinkwater, Rose Macaulay and the Georgians.” (xviii).

The year 1946 marked a turning point in Kesson’s career as a writer both for periodicals and for the radio. She wrote and performed two short programmes for the BBC “Over the Sea to Skye” and “Apples Be Ripe,” and the *Scots Magazine* published some of her poems “Ferm Deem”, “Abriachan Summer,” “Dusk” and “Autumn Dyke,” all of which were collected by Isobel Murray in *Somewhere Beyond*. Kesson also contributed to *The North-East Review* with some relevant pieces of narrative, all of them the prelude to what would later on become *The White Bird Passes*. However, Murray argues, there is no evidence in her writings of the twelve calamitous years the family spent moving from farm to farm in north-east Scotland: “The reader of ‘Country

Dweller's Year' knows nothing of falling roofs or pregnancy, of changes domestic or geographical: the reader is admitted into a nearer intimacy with the writer" (xiii). Kesson was able to transform her harsh reality into a natural poetic space of intimacy in which she achieves a passionate identification with the landscape, the trees, the woods, and especially the land where she found solace and refuge, as she writes in "January":

Time out of mind I have stood on a silvered hill when it was neither night not day- but the silence between. I have come from the closeness and intimacy of a country ceilidh, and ceilidhs in country districts have just enough interest to absorb me. When belated 'good-nights' are said, I stand for a moment looking at the door that shuts me out from its inhabitants and its cheer; I look at the great, clear, silent world stretching before me and I am the most solitary being in existence. Solitary only until I have walked far enough from the hospitable house to throw away its songs, its laughter, its intimacy from my mind. Then I cease being solitary and become immersed into the being of a moonlit, winter's night. Elation predominates. I am in possession of the whole landscape. A light looming in the distance brings discord even while it brings friendliness; for, when the hoar-frost glitters under the moon; the sky has no colour but clearness, the stars flicker palely, then the night is ethereal and has no kinship with paraffin lamps glowing in wee, scattered hooses. (Murray xiv)

In 1951, Kesson and her husband moved to London with their daughter and son

in order to accomplish her literary and broadcasting expectations. For the next four decades Jessie combined running a home, writing unceasingly, and working in hard physical jobs, often in public institutions: “I always worked in the nitty-gritty. It’s really the nitty-gritty.... I wis aye observant, speaking about human souls. Unconsciously,” she said in the interview with Murray (72). She published three novels at reasonably long intervals, and eventually achieved world-wide recognition in 1980, when Michael Radford’s prize-winning television adaptation of *The White Bird Passes* (1958) was universally acclaimed. She continued to write for radio and was described by radio producer and writer Steward Conn as one of the finest radio writers, and in 1983, she published *Another Time, Another Place*, while she and Radford again collaborated to create the film which won fourteen international awards. Her work includes the novels *Glitter of Mica* (1963), and the collection of short stories *Where the Apple Ripens* (1985). In addition, she wrote poetry, newspaper articles, and ninety plays for radio and television, some of them collected by Isobel Murray, her biographer, in *Somewhere Beyond*. Kesson died in London in 1994.

It seems clear that Kesson’s life influenced much of her writing. Her mother showed a natural love for the countryside and ballads, which she shared happily with young Jessie in the course of daily life despite the work she had to bear as a prostitute, and also during their long walks in the countryside on their visits to her grandmother’s house. These first memories made in the company of her mother pervade her all writings, and especially her radio talks, in which she dramatises all the childhood events that took place in the company of her mother that marked her for the rest of her life. In

the introduction to *Somewhere Beyond*, a collection of Kesson's poems and radio talks never previously published, and central to the understanding of her writing over 50 years, Isabel Murray writes: "Although Kesson prefers to be acknowledged by her later works that are not concerned primarily with her life, the truth is that all her work is impregnated by all the events that confirmed her painful existence" (x). This volume includes a long series of plays for radio, poems, and short stories selected in chronological order. Among others, in the talk "We can't go back" for *Woman's Hour* in 1957, and the plays "The Childhood," "Somewhere Beyond", and "Reunion", in which she recalls memories of her childhood, she imagines a past without the passing of time, in which she remembers and describes her experiences with the voice of a young girl, expressed in inspiring lyrical words. In "The Childhood" (1949), for example, the male reader opens the play in which the protagonist is a young boy called Danny Kernon - one of Jessie's alter egos - who arrives at an orphanage and describes the homesickness he feels, especially for his mother. Nature has helped him create a wall of protection that prevents him from any suffering, and at the same time compensates for his lost love. Nothing remains the same for him any more, he cannot write extensive letters to his mother to express how much he misses her, and he takes refuge in imagined happy past times at home in her company. The passing of time does not matter here as he lyrically imagines:

My love. It didn't belong to the barrows any more. It belonged to things  
from whom I expected no affection - the things of the country, the bird  
and beast, yes, and the very clatter of the pails in the byre. They wouldn't

let me down, for they couldn't love me. I was safe with them. They would neither flatter me nor scorn me, nor turn away. They were there for ever and ever. I was safe with all these things undying. (Murray 57)

In *The White Bird Passes* I shall look at Kesson in all her lyrical grandeur. *The White Bird Passes* narrative transcends all genres and historical moments in modern Scottish literature and brings us back to a world full of poetry and music, scent and colour, a world which, far from being full of nostalgia, invites us to reflect on the deep relationship between a daughter and a mother which Kesson envelops in a poetic world of fairy tales, folk music and ballads which resound in their walks together to the house of her grandmother, a world full of protection and warmth that illuminated Janie's life when back at the slum, and later at the orphanage.

### 3.2- THE WHITE BIRD PASSES

If Janie had been suddenly stricken with blindness she would have had a perpetual picture of her mother in her memory. Not a photograph. Her mother had so many faces. But a hundred little images. Each of which was some part of her Mother. And her Mother some part of each. The way her red hair glistened and crept up into little curls when it rained. Her long legs sprawled across the fender. Her tall, swift stride. And her eyes that looked as if they were smiling when the rest of her face was in a rage. *The White Bird Passes* (22)

Kesson was emotionally marked by the hardship of her childhood, starting with the painful separation from her mother, then the impact which her mother's death made on her, and all the humiliations and frustrations she had to bear in the orphanage, the mental hospital, and all the menial jobs she had to do. Murray stresses the confessional aspect of her writing, and she emphasises the strategic nature of this autobiographical writing: "She had to create herself and tell her own story, defining herself as best as she could: this is what she did in *The White Bird Passes*" (183). Murray has stated in numerous articles the fact that Jessie Kesson's writings are a reflection of her life. However, in the case of *The White Bird Passes*, for example, she argues that the young protagonist does not faithfully reflect Jessie Kesson as, Murray writes in "Jessie Kesson: Writing herself": "Janie in *The White Bird Passes* is the last of at least fifteen constructed versions of Kesson's childhood, all notably different, and she is the one that most satisfied her author" (185-6), and she highlights that Kesson usually protected herself and her painful experience using the second and the third person narrative, and creating different alter-egos, on occasions the protagonist role of a man, such as the case



of Danny Kernon in “The Childhood.” In this respect, in the same article, Murray discusses the sharp line between fiction and autobiography:

Fiction is not the same as autobiography, in that it is dangerous to identify author and character. To complete the paradox, let me ask whether an autobiography is not in fact fiction. By the time any writer has consulted her inevitably unreliable memory, selected and eliminated among the things she does remember, selected among literary forms and stances and points of view and chosen between first and third-person narrative, the eventual construction will be something else, and something that exists on the page and not in the past, written by someone who is no longer identical with the irretrievable person who experienced something like this in what we amusingly call real life. (187)

Although Kesson refused to be called a feminist, she instinctively struggled against empathy with a male conception which considered women to have a secondary status, and in her work she uncovers the repressions and traumas of working class women in a sensitive way that had never been achieved before. Among her influences, she cites in interview with Murray, Neil Gunn: “I love that man’s work - I could go back and it’s like drinking fae a fresh spring-well, I can go back again and again and again to read his work,” and Nan Shepherd, who encouraged her to write, and to whom she dedicated the poem “To Nan Shepherd,” included in *Somewhere Beyond*. Another important person in her life was the dominie who suggested her enrolment at university when she left the orphanage, and to whom she dedicated *The White Bird Passes*. But

without any doubt, the most important influence upon her was her mother, from whom she inherited a natural talent for poetry and who marked her for the rest of her days with her own painful life, who passed the oral tradition on to her, and from whom she inherited her natural taste for ballads, as she emphatically tells Murray in the interview: “ [...] but actually it was my mother, great credit to her, she was the one that had the poet in her - she really had - it wis her gave me my great love for all o’it, my mother” (60).

The work of Kesson has been linked to that of older novelists and also to contemporary writers, comprising a period from 1958 - *The White Bird Passes* - to 1985, when she wrote her last novella, *Where the Apple Ripens*. In “Contemporary Fiction I. Tradition and Continuity,” Douglas Gifford connects Jessie Kesson’s works, especially *The White Bird Passes* and *Another Time Another Place* (1983) with previous literary works by Scottish women writers who explored and gave voice to the problems that women in Scotland had to face in relation to their personal and sexual identities within an exceptionally male-dominated society. In the historical period that she published *The White Bird Passes* - post-Second World War - Jessie Kesson emerges as a voice that represents the voice of other women writers willing to assert themselves in a world that still resisted women’s social and aesthetic freedom. Gifford describes her as “a voice of real energy and defiance that vigorously presented and questioned the situation of women in Scotland” (586) and places her in the tradition of Susan Ferrier’s *Marriage* (1818) and *The Inheritance* (1824), which were, in his view, the first Scottish novels which provided a new vision of women’s lives and worked as a starting point for

other Scottish women writers' exploration of their female protagonists' repressions and traumas. However, Jessie Kesson is above all a woman writer who transcended the boundaries of her contemporary Scotland and wrote on the oppressions and repressions of women in a repressive and deprived society. She felt herself to have the position of an outsider, an "ootlin," and her stories are "always about people who don't fit in!" she tells Murray (58).

Writing had been her only desire, and this being the only way to liberate her desire places her within the realm of the feminine writing which Hélène Cixous claims is the way open to woman to express what is repressed within her, and which lets the woman writer look back to her suppressed origin, through her own experiences. Kesson's protagonists faithfully reflect her long-lasting past, a past which celebrates the recovery of her silenced mother, the poetry of her words through the ballads and songs she would sing to her, and the past which they shared with the other women who lived in the ironically named Our Lady's Lane. Kesson's works are, then, clearly open to her unconscious, as she suggests in the interview with Murray: "Writing made my spiritual life easier. Supplementing me, I had my writing. It was a dark secret and fit ever else wis wrang I knew" (66). This is the supplementary *jouissance*, the spiritual ecstasy, a feeling that she senses and through which she experiments when she writes beyond the hardship which life has imposed on her, and that is the mystic experience we find in *The White Bird Passes*. What does she take pleasure from, what is her pleasure? She explores a fiction that would not be written in the name of the Father, but in the name of the Mother. It is in this mystic search for the love of the mother, and not the father, that

Jessie Kesson finds the pleasure with which to write *The White Bird Passes*: a rewriting of her genesis, a path necessary for the rebirth of a new woman as Cixous notes in *LA* (1976):

On her path to an exit, the woman to be born must give birth to her  
mother several times

She keeps the forms of her hidden queen in her inner theatre.

Do not forget it. Who knows where the music, fear, pain, the pain of  
pleasure comes from?

No passage flows without her poignant revelation.

Fear does not produce fear. I find this distant period when my mother had  
been created for me - as with the sky and the earth - so that we can make  
a body against death. (51)

Some other critics have commented that *The White Bird Passes* can be set in the Kailyard tradition because of the apparent sentimentality of the place and landscape and the vivid folklore of her narrative. It is, as Cuthbert Graham notes in his introduction to the 1980 edition: "Social comment. It belongs in fact, to the long succession of north-east fictions of radical realism, stretching back over a century to William Alexander's *Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk*, embracing Ian Macpherson's *Shepherd's Calendar*, Lewis Grassie Gibbon's *A Scots Quair*, John R. Allan's *Farmers' Boy* and David Toulmin's *Blown Seed*" (4). But, as with Muir's *Imagined Corners*, Kesson's world in *The White Bird Passes* was indeed closely associated with the same literary tradition as that of Lewis Grassie Gibbon's *Sunset Song* (1932), one of the most acclaimed Scottish novels

of the twentieth century, and the first and most celebrated book in Gibbon's trilogy<sup>26</sup>, noted especially for its geographical and cultural setting among the farming cottars of north-east Scotland, for his much criticised taste for sentimentality, his recreation of the national past through folk songs, ballads, and the rhythms of community speech, and above all his insight depicting of the female protagonist Chris Guthrie's inner voice.

In this regard, "Jessie Kesson: Writing Her Self" Murray explains that when *Sunset Song* was published, Kesson was only sixteen, and still at the orphanage, she exclaimed "in a mixture of delight and frustration" that this was the book she had always wanted to write, and that Chris Guthrie was the heroine that best depicted her life, and this is probably the reason why it took her so long to write her book, as "perhaps she was too intimidated." However, as Murray herself points out in what follows, Kesson was a woman of her time, not only concerned with her woman protagonist's experiences but always by how the oppressive farming life negatively affected the minds and lives of the workers in north-eastern Scotland:

I do not think it is diminution of Gibbon's achievement to suggest that Kesson went on to outdo him by a long way in her depiction of female consciousness. But she never saw gender issues as isolated, separated from the complex of social and economic issues that imprisoned farm workers in tiny worlds, and in tied houses from which they could be

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<sup>26</sup> I have mentioned Gibbon and his celebrated trilogy both in the first and second chapters of this thesis. *Sunset Song*, *Cloud Howe* and *Grey Granite* were written under his mother's name between 1932 and 1934, the three books being grouped under the title *A Scots Quair*. Edinburgh: Canongate, 2006. For an in-depth study on the trilogy, see Francis Russel Hart's *Scottish Novel. A Critical Survey*. London: John Murray LTD., 1978.

evicted at the farmer's whim every six months. So feminist issues or gender issues certainly concern her, but perhaps never exclusively so. (182)

In his introduction to the 1987 edition of *The White Bird Passes*, Douglas Dunn highlights the lyricism and 'smeddum' of *The White Bird Passes*. He explains that 'smeddum' means 'energy, spirit, drive, vigorous common sense and resourcefulness' and he remarks that Jessie Kesson's novel is "a book in which 'something is what it is' especially when that 'something' is lyrical, or sentient beyond words and communicative only through the feeling that its narrative discloses" (unnumbered page). In this regard, he emphasizes Kesson's fine sensibility in creating a lyrical work out of overtly contrasting settings in the novel - the slum where young Janie is brought up, her subsequent suffering from being detached from her mother, and on the other hand her extraordinary mastery when describing the beauty of the Scottish countryside of woods which accompany the young girl's beautiful memories of her childhood:

The book is too lively, too much ingrained in its own truth to favour an inflated nostalgia for deprivation. Janie's love, improved and instructed, her sheer forward momentum, her imaginativeness and strength of personality, enable her to survive on better terms than official decision-makers could have forecast [...] this book's sociable poetry, its sensitive and unflagging honesty, its embrace of poverty and human dignity, are all such that in the closing pages you can practically hear the wing-beats of that metaphorical bird as it departs. (unnumbered page)

In the same thread of thought, in the first paragraph of the 1980 edition of *The White Bird Passes*, Cuthbert Graham describes the young protagonist, Janie, as “the white bird of youth and innocence - not a fragile creature but one who in every sweep of its powerful wings asserts human pride, dignity, independence and imagination” (i). *The White Bird Passes* was published in 1958, and follows the conventional Bildungsroman pattern of a young girl who is separated from her maternal world, and is obliged to go to an orphanage where she awakens to poetry, and becomes aware of her desire to write. Certainly, in the novel we are introduced to the young girl’s mental processes from the very beginning, and as the novel develops, her imagination and sensitivity, and at the end of the novel Janie has not only awakened to sexuality but also to a self-awareness that she has gained through her painful experiences in the orphanage, hence writing poetry would become the way to express herself against the prescriptions of her trustees:

If Janie has to go into service at all, I suggest that she works at a local farmhouse. She likes outside work. And she’s good at it... what do you think yourself Janie? “Janie found the small Trustee’s face. “I don’t want to dust and polish,” she told it. “And I don’t want to work on a farm. I want to write poetry. Great Poetry. As great as Shakespeare. (151)

*The White Bird Passes* narrates the early years of Janie MacVean, who grows up in the rural north-east of Scotland in the early 1920s, being brought up in a slum in Elgin by her mother Liza: “Our Lady’s Lane; that was what the Monks had called this thoroughfare eight hundred years ago. The name may have fitted it in their time;

perhaps it had been a green and cloistered place in those distant days. But, in this Year of Grace 1926, it was no longer green, although it still remained cloistered” (7). However, Kesson never describes Our Lady’s Lane off the High Street of Elgin in a derogative way, but although it was a place full of poverty, degradation and prostitution near the centre of the Cathedral city, she fills it with the idealism of a child’s eyes. The fear of being separated from her mother accompanies Janie, who resists being taken away to an orphanage by the Cruelty man:

To Janie it seemed that Liza, numbed and white and bewildered, was really the one who needed care and protection. Janie found herself able to provide both.

- We’ll go away, Mam. Miles and miles away together. Where nobody will ever find us. They can’t take me away from you if they can’t find us”, she reasoned.

- They’d catch up on us sometime,” Liza answered dully, but not dogmatically.

- Not for years and years, maybe. We could sell bowls and bootlaces, like Beulah does. Nobody worries about tinker children. So they wouldn’t worry about us any more. Not if we become real tinkers. (97)<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> In Douglas Dunn’s words: “It doesn’t matter if in this case, ‘they’ were right. What is important to the story is that it happens, and it did. Bureaucracy contests its principles against an affectionate relationship the book has already evoked as well as desperate social circumstances in which the law and its officers are uninterested. There is never any doubt as to the outcome, bureaucracy wins. Retrospective anger, bitterness, or sentimentalised overstatement might be what a reader expects in an episode like this, where an underprivileged child becomes the property of officialdom, and her mother, in those years before the Welfare State, drifts into the inevitable consequences of her loneliness and her ‘profession.’ Introduction



Then follows the painful separation from her mother, which Kesson vividly relates in one of her earliest works, “Railway Journey,” included in Murray’s *Somewhere Beyond*, which illustrates the sad story recalled by the protagonist nine years after she was sent to the orphanage. Here, Kesson expresses the deep love she felt for her mother, a love that would never cease and which created in her an inescapable wish to return to her childhood, and a desire to be in the Ness of Kelbie’s Close again.

Kind ‘Cruelty’ Man! “Don’t cry for your mother,” you’re going to a nice orphanage, where you’ll be well cared for, and get plenty to eat.” I didn’t want plenty to eat. I just wanted to jump out of the carriage and run home to my mother [...] I wasn’t crying for the Liz McClean you know. I was crying for the mother who loved me in her own bitter way; I was crying for the good companion who could tell wonderful stories, for the woman who ‘loved beautiful things.’ (3)

In interviews Kesson appears as a lively and realistic woman who recognises that her own experiences as a woman were of crucial contribution to *The White Bird Passes*. Hers was an unconscious desire for writing, as she notes in the interview with Murray “when you write a thing it’s in a way private, it’s between you and the anonymous reader – you’re illuminating and experiencing for this person,” Moreover, she felt that her characters had a desire to be “outlings”, outcasts, “queer folk who were who were out and who, perversely enough, never had any desire to be ‘in,’” as she states in the interview with Murray (58). Through Janie, her alter ego in the novel,

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to the 1987 edition of *The White Bird Passes* ( unnumbered page)

Kesson establishes an evident link between her unconscious desire to be an “ootling” and her liberation through writing; this concurs with the critical feminist perspective claimed by Hélène Cixous, who in the first paragraphs of her influential article “The Laugh of the Medusa” claims the need for women to write about women and to look ahead: “Woman must put herself into the text - as into the world and into history” (347) [...] “It is necessary and sufficient that the best of herself be given to woman by another woman for her to be able to love herself and return in love to the body that was ‘born’ to her” (352).

It is in this process of acknowledging and reclaiming a woman’s female past that Hélène Cixous describes that Jessie Kesson situates herself, in the writing of *écriture féminine*, in response to the prevailing patriarchal language, the language of the Law, which tries to prevent her from expressing patriarchal denial that she can write. Cixous examines fully the representation of the maternal in women’s writing as she thinks that the mother, or the maternal body, remains present in the mind of the daughter, and becomes visible through the act of writing, and her presence vibrates in the musicality of the words, a poetic language which is only comparable to the sustenance of a mother’s love, the food which nourishes the desire of her daughter, and which the mother and only a mother can provide. It is therefore the longing for the mother that makes the act of writing lead to the recovery of the maternal voice and which reproduces the sounds and music which the writer remembers from a moment in life in the company of her mother, and which still manifests itself in her daughter through the musicality of the words she writes, freed from the constraints of the laws established by

conventional masculine writing. This feminine writing arouses a sense of pleasure that evokes only music in the daughter's ears, as Cixous writes in *Souffles* (1975):

The mother is mythic. Her beauty strikes me. Make me gush. Makes me flow. She produces my strengths. Softness. Makes me want to fulfil her. Empties me. Destroys and begins anew. DA! Handles me again. Projects new features. All of a sudden I resemble her! Then, how beautiful I am! Aspiration that is what I am. Refashions me with my hands. Appeals to the most brute powers in my being for the hymn that my voice makes sound in me: my forgotten languages, my piercing sounds, my liquids, the guttural types of music with which I used to masturbate my ear drums, they vibrate again, the brass, the tubas again strike the depth of my stomach, my cymbals, my German tongues. (10)

From this viewpoint, and in consonance with Cixous' theory on the relationship between the mother-daughter bond and poetic language, Julia Kristeva emphasizes how poetic language is closely related to the first stages of what it is called in psychoanalytical terms, the pre-oedipal stage, that is to say, the stage before the child has entered the 'Law of the Father,' a musical stage in which the strong bond is between the mother and the child:

From the very first even before I went into psychoanalysis, I was interested in poetic language. It occurred to me that it was dominated by certain features which we also found in the echolalias of children, that is

the rhythm, the music. We all know that poetic language is musical and that music can often dominate the meaning. If you take Mallarmé for example, you often understand the music but not the meaning. This dominance of music led me to recognize a resurgence of pre-language. Of the music of infant echolalias in poetic language. In Freudian terms, infantile language can mean two things. First it refers to what we call the pre-oedipal, important phase because it involves the whole issue of narcissism... and it is also a period when the child is dependent on its mother. So if poetic language displays pre-linguistic musicality it's because it also wears witness to our fragile narcissism and to the mother-child relationship ... The pre-oedipal phase and maternal dependency.<sup>28</sup>

*The White Bird Passes* is a lyrical, euphoric reclamation of the essential bond between writing and the mother as source and origin of the voice to be heard in all women's texts, of a mothering tradition which challenges the male social and literary establishment, placing itself in the literary tradition which turns to the mother as guarantor of stability and genealogical truth. In *The White Bird Passes*, the bridge between Janie's past and her present is metaphorically represented through the lyrical evocation of her mother Liza. It is from this lyrical space of intimacy that Kesson, through the lenses of the memory of Janie, gives life to her own mother, in a romanticised space that provides the young girl with a sense of pleasure and protection. She remains as a soothing being in the mind of her daughter, who "imagines" her as the

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<sup>28</sup>Julia Kristeva. On Linguistics. [http:// www.youtube.com/watch?v=0IXLUsoEDYPw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0IXLUsoEDYPw).

soothing centre of her childhood, the comforting figure who brings her memories of a relationship with the world in dialogue with nature, and which opens to a poetic empathy between them: “I’ll never smell a daffodil in all my life again without minding how I first saw the orphanage. So many things lay in my mind. Urgent elusive scraps. The sense of lostness when the train screamed past Loch Na Boune, the last known landmark of Janie’s world. Screaming out of time and place altogether. I am leaving my Mam (110).

The world that Janie is obliged to leave behind her is the protective home of her mother, and with it all the memories which surround them. This garden of daffodils will persist as a space of intimacy and protection in the girl’s mind through an unbreakable bond between daughter and mother, a space of desire to which Janie will come back in search of love and solace. This space of intimacy is comparable to what Cixous calls *Jardin D’Éssai*<sup>29</sup> described as ‘Harmonious,’ a world that does not speak from the mastery and rules imposed on her by the English language she was imposed to learn during her childhood in Oran, but from a language of nursery rhymes and songs which she heard at home, but which recovered through writing, as Susan Suleiman echoes in the introduction to *Coming to Writing and Other Essays*: “ I lost Oran. Then I recovered it, white, gold, and dust for eternity in my memory and I never went back. In order to keep it. It became my writing,” (xx).

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<sup>29</sup> In an interview to Hélène Cixous and Jacques Derrida, included in Susan Sellers’ volume *Hélène Cixous: White Ink, Interviews on Sex, Text and Politics* (2008), Derrida metaphorically alludes to *Jardin d’Éssai* as a garden of Genesis where all human beings come from, the beginning of the world: “ ‘We are from the same garden’ could open onto all the world’s gardens. But the literal reference is first the *Jardin d’Éssai*, a botanic park, in Algiers, with tropical tress, next to a soccer stadium where I often played. This Garden still exists. We ( Cixous and himself) have never been there together, but it represents a sort of paradise lost.” (171)

In Kesson’s novel, the new language, which is imposed by the isolation and the law of the orphanage where young Janie is confined for years, is replaced by the poetic proximity of the memories she has of her mother. The empty space created in her by her mother’s absence cannot be replaced by the father’s law, and her wishes and desires remain private for her, something “supplementary” because she remains isolated in time and place. Hence Kesson creates in her mind the poetic space of her mother’s words which are made manifest in the rhythm and musicality of the text and in which young Janie can find a space of intimacy with her mother outside the Law - the walls of the orphanage. This poetic space is comparable to the one cited by Verena Andermatt in an eco-feminist recreation of H  l  ne Cixous’s writings, in her illuminating article “H  l  ne Cixous: The Language of Flowers,” included in *The Green Studies Reader. From Romanticism to Ecocriticism* (2000):

A space opens to a ‘poetic approach’ of the other [...] bringing into harmony a relation established through poetic language that reveals being. In this apparent collapse of dialectics, Women have a conscious and unconscious memory of their childhood as a paradise garden [...] the nature-garden functions as a metaphor, as a paradise of sorts, before the fall, before symbolic separation, before the loss of nature or of the maternal body (150).

For Cixous, as for Kesson, going back to childhood is going back to the feminine, to the lost key to the world, the lost paradise which is being recovered through writing, as she suggests in *Illa* (1980): “There are childhoods that do remember, and

some women are made entirely of childhood.” In *Illa*, Cixous remembers her Oranian childhood which she associates with her mother, and which remained far away from the laws of language because it speaks only in its own language, and which accompanies her, away from the language which is imposed upon her, and which “speaks from afar, which has ears only for itself” (138). This is a lyrical space which speaks from a distance, from the time before the symbiotic bond between mother and daughter was cut by the social, symbolic system. It is a space which is faithful to the natural world, and which listens to the sounds of language - the language of musicality of the mother’s voice - that transgresses the law imposed by the repressive symbolic order, as Hélène Cixous herself beautifully describes in *Illa*, and which Andermatt echoes:

An Oranian childhood that remembers the plants at the foot of the hills inside the *Jardin d'Éssai*. What I can still understand of what the plants are saying, I learned from there. It was a childhood absolutely faithful to the world: natural [...] We have been taught a language that speaks from above, from afar, that listens to itself, that has ears only for itself, the dead language of deafening, that speaks to us in advance. We have been taught a language that translates everything in itself, understand nothing except in translation; speaks only in its language, listens only to its grammar, and we are separated from the things under its orders. (qtd. in Andermatt 150)

Janie’s mother becomes the allegory, the source of inspiration that characterises *The White Bird* as a poetic text. Kesson in her turn creates a pleasurable text enriched

with the song of her mother's world, which evokes in her daughter's mind only words full of music and lyricism. Through the sensitive subjectivity of the young girl, Kesson offers in *The White Bird Passes* a world full of metaphors, in a text full of rhythm and musicality when Janie remembers, imagining her pleasant life beside her beloved mother, who is present in Janie's mind through the musicality of her words, and the special rhythms of the sounds of the language she creates, in order to recreate her experiences. The "beauteous things" her mother loved remained always in her heart. They were things that Janie in *The White Bird Passes* always associated with poetry and nature and her desire to walk alone beside her mother in those long walks to her grandmother's country home. That is the world she remembers as they strolled to visit her grandmother in the countryside:

It was spring along the road to Grandmother's country. Not the dusty daffodiled, yellow spring that Janie glimpsed on the barrows of High Street, but a spring that was sharp and white. Star of Bethlehem flowers clustered together in groups, like milestones flasing along the way. Hawthorn wound itself in thorny whiteness, smelling like heart-break, if heart-break could smell. The great fir wood of Laveroch shadowed the road; yellow primroses and blue vetch lost their own colour in its shadow, pale, like the wood's own wild white anemones drifting down the banks. (63)

Meanwhile the path through the wood widened. The sky pierced its way through the trees again; hyacinths blazed truly blue. And the light of the



world outside the wood surprised the eye with momentary blindness. Primroses took on their own colour again, and vetch shouted in masses along the bank. Grandmother's house stood high and red as Janie had remembered it. Where the sky met the fields marked the end of the world. But Grandmother's house stood safely in the centre, looking down over all the world. And all the world looked up and saw Grandmother's house. (66-7)

Janie's strolls to her Grandmother's house are full of music and lyricism, and therefore establish a poetic relationship with the world in dialogue with nature which opens to a poetic approach, and her memories bring back allusions to the ballads that her mother sang to her in early walks to her grandmother's house. Her dreams and desires are reflected through folk rhymes that dance through her mind, bringing into harmony a relation established through poetic language that reveals the unconscious memory of her childhood as a paradise garden. Thus the countryside smelling of primroses and anemones that Kesson describes is a poetic space, a paradise which works as a metaphor for Janie's lost paradise before the separation from her mother, which, in psychoanalytical terms, was the time before she was separated from the maternal environment. Equally, this poetic language brings Kesson memories of her childhood, and enables her to build a lyrical bridge with the childhood she carries within herself, and with her mother as a sign of nature.

With reference to Kesson's longing for the natural world, in an article published on the online magazine *Leopard* (2008), Jim Fiddes writes about the letters which

between 1940 and 1980 Kesson exchanged with Mary MacMurtrie, the wife of the minister at Skene when she was at the orphanage. Fiddes mentions the mixed feelings which Kesson had on her own life experience and on the land of Skene, and he compares her with Chris Guthrie, Gibbon's protagonist in *Sunset Song* who "could one minute view life on the land as harsh and full of drudgery, the speak 'coarse,' and the next minute see the beauty of the land and the expressiveness of the language" (3). But most of the times, Fiddes points out, Kesson referred to Skene as a place where she found physical and spiritual solace, not only in the orphanage but especially in church services, where the songs and music evoked lyrical moments of ecstasy, and pleasant memories of the nature and garden of her childhood, which resonate in her mind with the poetic words of Shakespeare: "That smell so heavenly sweet. The senses ache at thee." (5). In subsequent letters to Mary MacMurtrie she kept writing about her love for the garden of her childhood, as Fiddes quotes:

My love for gardens came with my first awareness of the external world.  
The garden of the wood - in long early walks with my mother. Real woods. Not commercial afforestations. And then, of course, my grandmother's garden and all the cottage gardens on the road to her house. Skene - the Kirktown I mean - never seemed to have cottage gardens like the ones I left behind in Morayshire. I wonder why.

Kesson transforms what Janie perceives as the crude reality of isolation at the orphanage, and incorporates Janie's memories into a pleasurable poetic text, challenging the traditional linear, hierarchical language of order, transforming it into a language

which Cixous in “The Laugh of the Medusa” calls “arational (if not irrational), contrallogical (if not illogical), resistant to hierarchies and circular” (343) and which does not obey the rules of language. In *The White Bird Passes* a poetic language reverberates which has been repressed, and which translates the monological discourse of male language into a language which, as Julia Kristeva describes in *Desire in Language* (1977) “musicates through letters” (157). Kristeva suggests that this new language that the feminine writing creates is a language which challenges the conventions of patriarchal texts and therefore incorporates new poetic forms and meanings from other texts which pervade our dreams and repressed experiences and desires. There is no place for Janie’s mother within the artificial walls of the orphanage, not even for her name, or a photograph, which might have eased the pain. The fact that Janie’s mother is silenced and made invisible stigmatises her daughter’s life and necessarily raises questions about her identity and the patriarchal authority her Trustees exercised over her. They insensibly thought that by isolating her, they could secure a social identity for her, and now she feels that she lacks something important in her life, she misses the intensity and exclusivity of the relationship she had with her mother<sup>30</sup>:

If Janie had been suddenly stricken with blindness she would have had a perpetual picture of her Mother in her memory. Not a photograph. Her mother had so many faces. But a hundred little images. Each of which

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<sup>30</sup> Following earlier psychoanalysts such as Winnicott, Olden and Balint, Chodorow emphasises the need of the mother during the daughter’s early years. Chodorow has also stated that a girl remains preoccupied for a long time with her mother alone because she experiences a continuation of the “two person relationship of infancy” (96), as she puts it in her celebrated book *The Reproduction of Mothering. Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978).

was some part of her Mother. And her mother some part of each. The way her red hair glistened and crept up into little curls when it rained. Her long legs sprawled across the fender. Her tall, swift stride. And her eyes that looked as if they were smiling when the rest of her face was in a rage. (16)

The orphanage years are a time when Janie misses important things that a mother can give to a daughter. She needs more than ever the emotional intensity and weight of a mother's love, the protection that only a mother can provide, the repairing vitamins to nurture her entire self. Not being able to express verbally her dissatisfaction with the future the trustees have planned for her, she gives voice to her feelings by writing poetry. At the same time, Janie searches for a relationship with the external world that Cixous has described as "Harmonious" (Andermatt 150), using a language that does not speak from isolation, from the distance of the cold orphanage, but from the poetic proximity of the outside world which is denied to her, and which stands metaphorically for the high Cairngorm mountains. The Cairngorms symbolise the orphanage authority that prevents her from seeing the outside world, a voice that comes from a time before the orphanage re-appropriated it into its authority of separation from her mother, a voice that speaks from the poetics of the mother's words. Thus, in contrast to the prescriptions she has been obliged to listen to, Janie devotes her time to her writing, to a new voice which challenges her separation from her mother and appropriates to her a language which offers her the possibility of transforming the world which has been imposed on her, a possibility to escape from the small world in which

she is confined, and where she feels imprisoned. Anyone who entered the world of the orphanage came out narrowed and reduced.

Out through the village, thinning down into scattered crofts. Out toward the Cairngorms, slinking behind their own protective mists with every step she took in their direction. She could have seen the whole of the world, if the Cairngorms didn't rise immense and blue, shutting Skeyne away from it all.

*O Cairngorms, sae heich and blue*

*I'd see the warld*

*Were't na for you! (115)*

Cixous exhorts women to fly through all the wide-open spaces without being confined by real or symbolic walls. In her desire to discover a new world, Janie was gradually discovering a sense of freedom which made her dream of going beyond the symbolic walls of the Cairngorms: "Even the Cairngorms themselves had lost their terrifying immensity. I'll go beyond them next week ... I'll know at last what lies beyond the Cairngorms" (151). Kesson's quest for her mother, for a feminine writing which challenges repression, passes inevitably into the rewriting of myths and cultural memory, and she enriches her novels with the folk song and ballads that recreate and echo her childhood memories. This poetic un-burying of the maternal body contributes to the writing of a rich, abundant, exalted world passed on to her by the working people of Aberdeenshire, and is the exalted world that Willa Muir in *Living with Ballads* (1965) calls 'the underworld of feeling:' "In the underworld of feeling there is a sense

of power, of rhythmic flow, of movement, of living energy, but only when it issues into consciousness, however dim, can all that energy find itself a name and purposes” (54).

This is the poetic voice that that we find in *Another Time, Another Place*.

### 3.3- ANOTHER TIME, ANOTHER PLACE

If no-one ever marries me  
And I don't see why they should  
They say that I'm not pretty  
And I'm seldom good - *Another Time, Another Place* (1)

In an interesting article concerning Kesson's vision of self in *Another Time, Another Place* (1983) Janice L. Knudsen states: "Jessie Kesson may be a Scottish writer, and *Another Time, Another Place* may be rich with Scottish dialect, and placed in a distinctly Scottish setting, but her novel of suppressed desire and imaginary freedom resonates with feminist issues" (203). According to Douglas Gifford in "Scottish Fiction since 1945 II. Despair, Change and Hope," *Another Time Another Place* can be seen as "a turning point in Scottish women's writing, both thematically and formally [...] a new-found confidence in presenting her story in an impressionistic mosaic of short, fragmentary episodes, capturing the sense of a break-up of older conventions, literary and social, and with her ability to keep bits of tradition, in song, dance, and storytelling" (903).

In the same thread of thought, in "Listening to Women Talk," Carol Anderson laments the neglect to which women writers have been submitted in the Scottish literary tradition and cites the importance of the novels of Jessie Kesson, who together with Emma Tenant and Sharman MacDonald are three neglected Scottish writers who are doubly marginalised by the fact of being women and living and writing outside Scotland. She notes "there is still shamefully little written about them" (171), and

argues that these three women writers, despite living beyond the borders of Scotland, write eloquently about Scotland: “Kesson may write of life in rural Scotland but her themes and narrative techniques demand that she be seen as an innovator who uses tradition for her own ends” (175). For her, Jessie Kesson is a woman writer who explores female subjectivity in a world which is alien to her as a woman and as a writer, and the female protagonists in her novels reflect the tension between self-expression and the restrictions of their time and place. She places the heroine of *Another Time Another Place* in the oral tradition due to her anonymity in the novel, and notes that “the argument that woman is something that cannot be represented, something that is not said, [...] is relevant too to a text concerned with femininity and female experience” (173).

Although Kesson always resisted identification with feminist writers, she was aware of the restrictions of women’s lives in the strong patriarchal society in which she lived. Of her three novels, *Another Time Another Place* is probably the most openly concerned with feminist issues, portraying a young woman psychologically challenged by the farming community where she lives in Aberdeenshire, Scotland. In the interview with Isobel Murray published in *Scottish Writers Talking* (1996), Kesson talked about the desire she had to write this novel, something that was “inside o’ misel that I want to get oot and to write” (62), and stresses her satisfaction with the novel, and as a woman who felt herself to be an outsider in her own community:

In *Another Time Another Place*, for once I really thought that this was what I want to show. And I think the reviewers missed it, or it could be



that I didna dae it good enough. One or other. It was to show that the girl was as alien to the farm as the Italians [...] And this, that was what was really meant. And what the film missed out obviously, and you couldna get this in the film. Because what they missed out was her relationships and her ootlinish outsidersness with the cottar wives. (62)

Like *The White Bird Passes, Another Time Another Place* is a semi-autobiographical novel written in the third person. It narrates the story of a newly married Kesson during the Second World War, after being released from the Mental Hospital, and being sent to a croft in the north east of Scotland. Her dreams of writing remain with her as she finds herself trapped doing farming jobs which do not satisfy her. The title itself shows her longing to be somewhere else, to escape from a place and a time which suffocate her existence, and she constantly dreams about going away from “the Stand Still Order” (118), from the monotony of a farming village in which she does not find a place for herself, as a woman who does not fit her newly acquired title of mistress, and who suppresses her passion and desire until a group of Italian prisoners arrive at the farm, as Kesson points out in the interview with Isobel Murray: “They were exotic compared to the reidhanded phlegmatic country men, you know [...] the sex was overemphasised! That was in my mind, it wais there a richt, but it was moistly in the mind [...] No sex in Scotland! A´the auld wifies were gaen mad!” (81).

In “Listening to the Women Talk” Carol Anderson suggests that the anonymity of the protagonist in the novel “can be read as both an individual and a universal, timeless figure”(173), and argues that this woman protagonist is the woman

unrepresented in history, comparable to the protagonists of other novels by Scottish women writers of the period. So, for example, she compares the young wife of *Another Time Another Place* to Joanna Bannerman, the female protagonist of Catherine Carswell's first novel *Open the Door!* (1920), also based to some extent on her personal experiences and which describes the heroine's repressed desires that she seeks to liberate throughout the novel despite the constraints which surround her, and who in her longing for escape falls in love with an Italian man. In *The Camomile* (1922), Carswell sees Scotland, and specifically Glasgow, as a place from which a woman must flee if she is to find any kind of artistic realisation: "A voice cries in my ear this is not your world! Get out of this and find your place! But where, what is my world? Are not the people I have grown up among? Why should their thoughts be so unfamiliar, even grotesque to me" (9).

Likewise, in her autobiography *Lying Awake* (1950) Carswell expresses the doubts she has herself with regard to her feminine self, and she wonders why her sense of self must be conditioned by the sense of the place of her attachment to a man. Carswell's preoccupation with the nature of female identity is adopted and deepened by Kesson, who is also concerned with the struggle the woman protagonist has to face to retain her identity within her marriage, and in defining herself in relation to other men and women, and to herself, between her role as mother and wife and her desire to express herself as a woman: "They had never known her real name, she remembered. And had bequeathed her with a name of their own choice. "Wifie", the general title of the Cottar Row touched both her mind and her mouth with irony. Wifie, the title that

had made her feel old before her time” (123).

In the same way, Willa Muir’s young Elizabeth in *Imagined Corners* also looks forward to running away, leaving the claustrophobic Calderwick and heading for the liberality of Europe. She has come to live in the small town in the north-east of Scotland, where her name becomes associated with her husband’s and almost nothing remains of herself. She feels hopelessly trapped and unhappy: “I’m not me,” she finds herself thinking when she accepts the role of “noble wife” and “perfect lady” (134), and dreams about “running about without gloves and saying damn, and screaming with laughter in the street like a mill-girl” (75). Her other self is only possible outside the constrained walls of deeply calvinistic Calderwick, and she finally flees from Scotland with her soul mate, her sister-in-law, who comes to rescue her: “Elizabeth was looking for her other self. Had it been a man whose arrival she was expecting with so much interest; had it been a man who now came into the room, she would have been afraid of her own emotions” (165).

For Kesson’s young protagonist, the fact that another self is possible outside the constraints of marriage in the company of Paolo makes her excited and open to new experiences, and to feel the freedom from social constraints: “It was monotony that was beginning to make herself feel old. Or maybe it was marriage that shut a door, the door that led to romance and adventure, one that she had never given herself time to unlock” (84). The young woman identifies with the rhythms of nature and the fury of sexual longing they awaken in the conventional life she has to bear, and she struggles with the feeling of being an island outside the community, isolated and repressed, longing to

escape, and a sense of awareness grows and intensifies when a group of Italian prisoners arrive at the small town:

Prisoners of war, heroic men from far-flung places: the young woman felt a small surge of anticipation rising up within her at the prospect of the widening of her narrow insular world as a farm-worker's wife, almost untouched by the world war that raged around her. She always felt she was missing out on some tremendous event. (3)

The prisoners' situation of exile is similar to the one she is living in her marriage, thus their arrival means fresh air for an unhappy life marked by the commands of her husband and the repressive farming community that surrounds her. She now feels happy about the new experiences she is starting to live in the company of the prisoners, far from the fixed discourses she has to bear next to her husband: "The texture of her own life now seemed to hang suspended by the uncertainty of her new, undefined responsibilities. Shy of intruding on the Italians next door, anxious lest she should miss out on a knock on her wall, yet apprehensive of responding to it, since that first time it happened"(15). She dreams about her desire for sexual fulfilment, her most urgent dream because her early life was truncated by her early marriage and the demands of farm life, and she envies her friend Elspeth's freedom of choice, her assertiveness:

There was nothing funny in the aura of dignity that Elspeth always carried within herself. An independence lacking in the young woman and

her neighbouring cottar wives. But then there was a fundamental difference between them. Elspeth worked her own small acres of land [...] Elspeth, as she often claimed, could “pick and choose,” could remain unmoved by Finlay’s moods and demands, and not be afraid of telling him “exactly where *he* gets off.” The young woman envied Elspeth her liberty of choice, her freedom of utterance. (7)

The young woman resists the traditional, universal definition of self that is imposed on her by the community, and also resents the demands of farm work: “A New start. The prospect beginning to light up in her mind, was snuffed out by the sudden remembrance of the Stand Still Order, that prevented farm-workers from leaving the land” (118). Her rejection of farm work, and her longing for escape from an oppressive patriarchal crofting community recalls again Lewis Grassie Gibbon’s young protagonist Chris Guthrie in *Sunset Song* (1932), who feels herself split in two, the Scots Chris of her family and her ancestors, and the more refined “English” Chris created by her schooling; a woman who, like Kesson’s protagonist, remains untamed, and detached from the name imposed after her marriage, as Hart points out in *Scottish Novel* (1978):

This conflict between the lyrical Chris, the daughter of a crofter, emotionally attached to the land, and the social implications that living in a small farming community means, has provoked nationalistic debates among scholars who see the situation of Gibbon’s protagonist as the situation of Scotland at the time. Kurt Wittig, for example, has described Chris as “Chris Caledonia” because she represents the conflicts between

personal and social history at a moment in history in which the mythic farming communities were about to disappear, but he argues that finally the character of Chris is able to unify personal and social history “as part of a larger, mythological cycle, where nothing endures: the land, the seasons, and the links with archaic ancestors” (234).

Kesson was in fact a woman of her time, aware of the social changes that the dying of the farming community meant, and of how their lives were affected by the changes that were taking place at the time, but she was especially aware of the human experience of her female protagonist who suffers a double imprisonment: the imprisonment of living in a farming community which does not fulfil her personal and financial expectations, and also the imprisonment of herself as the passive woman relegated to the expectations of what being a woman and wife means in a deeply patriarchal society. In *Another Time, Another Place*, her young woman sees herself constantly as being like the land in the hands of men, but which is eventually able to endure the struggle because it represents both a masculine and a feminine force:

The land is the property of men as her body is the property of her husband who tames her body to his own will. She is strong and able to survive like land which is the property they ploughed, and dragged, and “rolled to change its patterns to green shining corn [...] It is hard to believe that such fragility had survived the heavy roller that had gone over it yesterday, hard to believe it survived such an onslaught in its small, shimmering, elasticity. (80-1)

Her experiences as a woman compared with the land are lyrically portrayed by Kesson, much as happens, in Christopher Whyte's view, to Gibbon's protagonist - Christ Guthrie - whom Whyte compares with the land itself in his article "Not (e) from the Margin":

Land is owned and ploughed and reaped. It is bought and sold. It can't own itself. Nor can it get up and go if it doesn't like the way things are being run. It can't talk back or change its name or say that, no thank you very much, it doesn't feel like being impregnated with the seed on this particular night of the week. The (feminine) land is a non-person. (31)

In Whyte's illustrative article published in *Chapman* (1995), nature is allegorized as either a powerful maternal force, the womb of all human production, or as a measure of sexual excitement. It is, as well, the physical territory which is represented as a source of erotic delight, and sometimes of overwhelming provocation to her masculine violator. Similarly, in Kate Soper's "The Idea of Nature" it is viewed as "a virgin terrain ripe for penetration, that the metaphor of the land as female is most insistent; and also most equivocal a virgin to surrender to her lover (rapist, another for the son to direct his sexual attentions towards his mother" (142). It is precisely this nature/woman, this "virgin terrain ripe for penetration to surrender to her lover" that Kesson lyrically portrays, that eco-feminists such as Kate Soper and Verena Andermatt wish to bring back to life, to liberate from man's power, from his repressive man's hands and discourses, because as Andermatt suggests in "Hélène Cixous: The Language of Flowers": "Nature is born under the sign of birth, fertility, song, vibration, proximity.

And the absence of symbolic language that separates subject from object. Nature consists of flora and fauna. It is a discourse herbarium and a bestiary, part of an archaic, unchanging world of immanence.” (152). In “Sorties,” Cixous’s affirmation of a female language helps situate the female body outside the dual hierarchies imposed by the male Western philosophy, and proposes a novel vision of a new woman not made subject to, or dominated by the male Western thought, in which woman is always on the passive side of nature, and outside culture. And thus the elaboration of culture reduces nature/woman: “Where is she?” she asks, “activity/passivity, sun/moon, culture/ nature, day/ night, father/ mother, head/ heart” (63).

In *Another Time, Another Place*, Kesson’s protagonist has always remained passive, she has been able to make decisions about her body or had any control over her destiny, condemned as she is to live with an inarticulate and insensible man: “My man wouldn’t mind if I got down on my knees and cleaned up horses’ dung” (12). Not if I would give him “something to put by,” she replies when her neighbour Elspeth suggests her she should do some work for the Italians:

Her man, she knew, wouldn’t have very much to say about the Italians. Not in words. Always on his own, as a cattleman, and working apart from his fellow farm-workers, he had got out of the way of using words. Sometimes, sometimes she felt he had grown out of the need of words at all. She was learning though to interpret by look and mood. The way her man, himself, could interpret each need and nuance of the dumb beasts he worked amongst. (10)



In the patriarchal world that Kesson describes, her protagonist has always been necessary but excluded from all decisions, and relegated to the enslavement of domesticity, confined in her family role. She is the Other, the woman in a hierarchically organised relationship in which The Same - the male law - is what rules, names, defines, and assigns “its” Other, who is obliged to live in another person’s body. For Cixous, the starting point of the repression of the feminine lies in Freud’s theory of castration, in which men and women are defined only in terms of anatomical difference. She argues that certain social or anatomical determinations of difference are used to reinforce and justify patriarchal systems of power and control. For this reason, she rejects Freud’s theory of the Oedipus complex in which the child, having seen the mother and the father naked, observes that the mother does not possess a penis, and unconsciously fearing being castrated, switches his/her affections and allegiance from the mother to the father and enters a verbal stage which is ruled by what Lacan later considers as the entry into the symbolic, the law of the Father, which means that a girl represses her desire to continue her attachment to the mother; it is in this stage that the unconscious is created. The unconscious, then, emerges as the result of the repression of desire. The unconscious is desire.

Psychoanalytical theory offers a universal theory for Kesson’s nameless woman’s repressed unconscious, the desires that dance through her mind. In “The Sma’ Perfect,” the interview she had with Murray, Kesson stressed her passion for words and writing as the purest way of expressing one’s feelings, and the purest way of expressing the unconscious desire to write about her private experiences, as a private confession

between herself and the reader (58). In *Another Time Another Place*, Kesson projects her desires of escaping into the young nameless woman who feels subordinated to the stand-still order of the community, who looks for a feminine sexuality which is rich and plural, and which challenges the repressive forces of the patriarchal order. It is her body, freed from repressive constraints, that wants to be heard, hence Kesson's need to write about the repressed, and it is here that Kesson's text most closely approaches feminine language as the cultural and political force that Cixous claims it to be.

It is a feminine language in search of a social freedom, written out of a personal situation of imprisonment. In order to let her protagonist escape her double imprisonment, both personal and social, Kesson opens the doors of her imagination to liberate her repressed unconscious, an unconscious which as Cixous proposes is rich and fluid, a window where the light comes in to her, and this freeing takes place through real or imaginary doors, but also through the window from whence the light comes. It is the window which separates the inside from the outside and which gives shape to the repressed, the otherness, to the unheard or unseen, which live in the unconscious.

Again, Kesson goes back to her childhood memories and in her quest for the feminine writing, she involves herself in History, in the world of rewriting the myths and cultural memory, and enriches the text with the ballads that recreate the feelings of the working people in north-eastern Scotland, creating a text full of folk songs and ballads to echo the young woman's thoughts which define the world of her imagination with pleasure, contributing to the writing of a rich, abundant, exalted world of what Willa Muir in *Living with Ballads*: "In the underworld of feeling there is a sense of

power, of rhythmic flow, of movement, of living energy, but only when it issues into consciousness, however dim, can all that energy find itself a name and purposes”(54). In the same way that ballads recreate the inner, personal world of Kesson’s young protagonist, a world where she feels she belongs and which rings in her mind through rhythmical songs learnt by heart in her childhood, so the ballads echo a country’s oral tradition which is passed on from generation to generation and which belongs to the people’s unconscious because it belongs to their imagination, tracing back to ancient times.

In her rewriting of the ballad myth, Kesson is not only giving life, freeing the young protagonist’s repressed wishes and desires but also freeing cultural myths which belong to the people’s imagination. Women and History become text, a poetic text which challenges fixed discourses and the hierarchical narratives of Stand Still Order, as Cixous writes in “Sorties”:

When “the repressed of their culture and their society come back, it is an explosive return, which is absolutely shattering, staggering, overturning, with a force never let loose before, on the scales of the most tremendous repressions: for at the end of the Age of Phallus, women will have been either wiped out or heated to the highest, most violent, white-hot fore. Throughout their deafening dumb history, they have lived in dreams, embodied but still deadly silent, in silences, in voiceless rebellions. (95)

Kesson’s young protagonist is the universal woman represented in the ballad

world, as her joys and pleasures, and also her fears and anger stand in parallel. For a time, and reflected in the eyes of the young Italian prisoners, she becomes an intensely sexual woman, dwelling with her two selves - for her community she is the passive, accomplished farmer's wife, hard working and disciplined, with the prisoners she feels free, desirable, sexual, and at times she even wishes that her husband, the man who had closed her doors to romance and adventure had died in the war:

Dear god *forgive* me. The young woman was appalled by the thought that had sprung so sudden and unbidden into her mind. If her man had gone to the war and been killed, she would have had a second chance. Another time to start a new life, to be up and away from the ingrowing, incestuous way of the farm, in search of something that had eluded her. Often, in the evenings, when she stood watching the flow of traffic far down on the main road and the smoke rising up from trains rushing past on the other side of the firth, it seemed as if a whole vista of escape unfolded itself before her eyes. (97)

The vision of Self that emerges at the end of *Another Time, Another Place* is the vision that Kesson herself predicted in the final pages of *The White Bird Passes*. It is the Self that the community expects from her, and as the war ends and the prisoners leave the village, the young woman is wiser and less naive but must be subordinated to the less personal, less sexual self that will be accepted by her community. Physically and psychologically trapped by the 'Stand Still Order' (118) at the end of the novel, and by the limitations of her life as a woman (66) in a patriarchal community she does not feel

identified “No Roma, No Napoli. So this was what it was like to be a prisoner” (91), and in her solitude her repressed feelings speak more through her silences and feelings than through her words. It is her body, freed of rural repression, which must be heard in the text and therefore Kesson approaches the female language in pursuit of social freedom and personal to her nameless woman, opening door to her imagination so she can release her unconscious, to unravel what she has never heard, which appears in a message in a bottle that Paolo had left for her:

*Dina con amore e molta felicità* Paolo Umberto Luigi. They had never known her real name, she remembered. And had bequeathed her with a name of their own choice. ‘Wifie,’ the general title of the Cottar Row touched both her mind and her mouth with irony. Wifie. Luigi would never have found the Italian word for that in his dictionary. Wifie, the title that had made her feel old before her time. (123)

In the next chapter I shall analyse some of the most transgressive works of Janice Galloway, who is a lifetime admirer of Kesson’s work. Galloway’s love of music and poetry, and her search for a feminine writing which gives voice to the new contemporary woman beyond the limits of contemporary Scotland makes her an indispensable writer in the Scottish literary scene of the beginning of the twenty-first century.

## CHAPTER 4: JANICE GALLOWAY (1955-)

### 4.1. INTRODUCTION

The apparent invisibility was my attraction to writing - writing to make visible. Now that Scottish writing has a profile, it's a bloke profile, and one I find I wish to distance myself from... for whatever reason, I am finding a need to shift sideways, to take away the bits that are buttoning me down. –Janice Galloway

The comment above made by Janice Galloway, published following a 1999 interview in *Edinburgh Review* places her within a large tradition of women writers attracted to fiction as a way to unveil, to *make visible*, or to present women's stories to contemporary Scottish society which is still male-prioritized, for whom the word Feminism is a derogatory term which still stigmatises the work of a woman writer, as Galloway confirms in another interview with Linda Richards for the online *January Magazine* :

The word “feminism” is so loaded with booby traps [...] you can never be sure exactly what they mean when they use the word. Scotland is, in many ways, a country that is struggling with its difficulties about gender. There are real gender problems in my country. If I am labelled feminist some readers will be automatically pushing me away. I think one has to be very careful of terms. Alasdair Gray for example, is one of the most famous writers in Scotland and writes in a more clearly defined political feminist way that ever I do, but my work is examined for it more.

(unnumbered page)

At the heart of Galloway's words lies her desire to be heard, and the wish to ally herself with what H  l  ne Cixous calls feminine writing, a language which speaks for the woman's experience, from her own path of meditation which involves questions about her history, her body and which produce a written response, a fiction which is poetic, feminine, not constrained by traditional modes of writing - as Galloway calls it, *bloke's* writing which is *buttoning* her down. From her words, literature in Scotland today still seems to be confined to being supported by a strong patriarchal viewpoint which corresponds to what many feminist women have denounced as narrow-minded with regard to the position of women in history, a position which has been clearly denounced by other French feminist writers and philosophers such as Elaine Marks, who points out in "Women and Literature in France" that literature today still supports the male view which affirms that "I am the unified, self-controlled centre of the universe; the rest of the world, which I define as the Other, has meaning only in relation to me, as man/father, possessor of the phallus" (832).

Galloway adheres to this transgressive position with respect to tradition and order in her desire to "shift sideways," to find a voice which "has to come from someplace subconscious, somewhere bigger than your conscious mind" (March 89) and at the same time she clearly places herself in the tradition of modernist Scottish women writers such as Willa Muir, Jessie Kesson, and other such innovative writers who preceded her, including Catherine Carswell and Nan Shepherd in Scotland, and Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf in England, all of whom experimented on the borders of modernism

and opened up revolutionary and liberating ways of writing, and new ways of understanding universal feminist issues, or as she points out, as a way of transgressing their position as women in the social and literary tradition.

In her short stories and especially in her debut novel, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (1989), Janice Galloway produces a recognisably Scottish way of looking at Scotland. Thus, for example, in the interview given to Cristie Leigh March, Galloway herself highlights her “aesthetic encounter, not acquisition” with writers that stand out for their powerful subversive writing, such as Jessie Kesson’s *The White Bird Passes* (1958), and Catherine Carswell’s *Lying Awake* (1950), although she confesses that she does not “feel wildly inspired by things Scottish” (86). She shares with these writers her desire to escape from and struggle against strong Scottish patriarchal structures of power, her awareness of women’s sexuality, and of their relationships with other women and men, motherhood, and their experience of exclusion from institutions and social power, especially by Calvinist constraints, and the domestic spaces that seem so confining to them. Her texts, like theirs, represent the unconscious forces that work against tradition and in many cases work through experimental narrative, which represents what is repressed, or unsayable in their unconscious, and which works against the male narrative forms. This is a textual transgression and as we have seen in the chapters dedicated to Willa Muir and Jessie Kesson, it is a language that Hélène Cixous calls feminine language, or a way of expressing through language that which has been repressed by a patriarchal culture, the language which opens to women’s expression of themselves, their bodies and their sexuality.



In the interview with March in *Edinburgh Review*, Galloway also claims that she is in search of a “cutting edge, a *voix* it has to come from someplace subconscious, somewhere bigger than your conscious mind,” (89, her emphasis). This powerful statement places her in a contemporary feminist debate which Hélène Cixous started in the late 1960s and which is necessary for the articulation of the woman’s voice as a challenge to repressive and silencing authority, a new source of potential alternatives to the mythical representation of passive women, in Galloway’s case, in Scotland, a passive role assigned to them by a hegemonic body established by political forces, such as the Church and the Law. The Church and the Law, whose physical representation has been the male figure, followed the western male philosophy that Cixous defines in single sentence in her feminist manifesto “The Laugh of the Medusa”: “Either woman is passive or she doesn’t exist” (118), and according to Cixous, women’s challenge means women’s speech, and their speech is located in their bodies, when language and the dominant culture are understood to be ruled by what Lacan called “The Law of the Father.”<sup>31</sup>

The new voice - the “cutting edge Voice” Galloway refers to - which lies in feminine texts reveals a newly born woman, a woman as the source of life, power and energy who comes back to life from death, from a lack, an absence, in and who subverts a patriarchal system which oppresses and silences women; a voice that, in the form of written language becomes what she calls *écriture féminine*. Galloway follows Cixous’s challenge to give her female characters a voice to speak out loud, breaking out from the

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<sup>31</sup> Lacan’s ‘Law of the Father’ has been discussed in the introduction to this thesis. For a detailed theoretical insight on this subject, see Jane Gallop’s *The Daughter’s Seduction. Feminism and Psychoanalysis*. Cornell U.P. New York: Itaca, 1982.

silence that torments them. The fact of speaking out loud is a transgression, and implies the possibility of change, of a space to speak which has historical and political consequences, as by speaking, women undermine patriarchal privileges, and as Cixous notes in “Sorties”: “Every woman has known the torture of beginning to speak out loud, heart beating as if to break, occasionally falling into loss of language, ground and language slipping out from under her, because for woman speaking -even just opening her mouth- in public is something rash, a transgression (92). What Cixous suggests is that the articulation of women’s bodies must be interpreted in relation to the social contexts in which this occurs, through the language which describes their experiences, a language which has been forbidden by of the Law of the Father, which denies women, who become, in Cixous’s words: “This no-body that is dressed up, wrapped in veils carefully kept distant, pushed to the side of History and change, nullified, kept out of the way, on the edge of the stage, on the kitchen, on the bedside” (69).

Galloway is a contemporary writer who is aware of her place as a woman and as a woman writer in contemporary Scotland. As many literary critics have stated, Galloway belongs to the current wave of Scottish women writers wishing to speak out loud about their isolation in a still profoundly patriarchal society. A number of such women began to write in the early 1980s, including Margaret Elphinstone, Alison Kennedy, Dilys Rose and Sian Hayton in fiction and Kathleen Jamie, Carol Ann Duffy, Jackie Kay, and Liz Lochhead in poetry, all of them women writers who have challenged the position previously given to women in Scotland. As Gifford, Dunningan and MacGillivray underline in their comprehensive analysis of *Scottish Literature*

(2002) they follow a wave of contemporary writers writing in the nineteen-eighties after the post-referendum disappointment about the Scottish Assembly in 1979<sup>32</sup> in a way which has forced them to revise and rewrite the old texts and myths of ideas, given the political and social changes of the twenty-first century. They represent a new wave of writers wishing to search for ways out into the future, and to open doors to a new era, and who employ a richer and more creative way of looking at Scotland, as Gifford *et al.* suggest: “No longer demanding allegiance to a single MacDiarmid agenda, but recognising other people’s right to perceive Scotland differently, and to imagine it differently as well” (735). They point out that despite this desire for deconstruction of a past which is longer sustainable, they attempt to find a bond which allows them to maintain a sense of identity, given “the all too common and international sense of a lack of place in history, and the consequent lack of identity and meaning to deconstruct the literary panorama based on a new willingness to allow a multi-faceted difference from their literary predecessors” (736).

Janice Galloway was born in 1956 in Kilwinning, Scotland, but grew up in Saltcoats - Ayrshire, with her mother and a much older sister. In a memoir entitled *This Is Not About Me* published by Granta Books in 2008, she looks back on her past in an effort to heal some memories of a childhood which was hard and painful, with a drunken and at times abusive father<sup>33</sup>, and of the hardship at home, her mother having

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<sup>32</sup> See chapter one.

<sup>33</sup> Earlier in the book, and so far unknown for her readers, she relates the first memories she has of her father “[...] I have other memories of my fingers under my father’s shoes, the bursting sensation that goes with them. But this is the earliest. I will add the surprise of random cigarette burns, sudden dips and falls, a pepper of shocks [...] *Shhhhh*. I have a recollection of waking up next to Eddie Galloway, once. He’s warm, almost hot, and there are dark shapes on the ceiling with the curtains shut. I am behind him, my

had to take charge of the household in poor living conditions, and of the age difference between her sister and herself which made their relationship difficult. Interest in books and her excellence at music became her refuge in such a desolate home landscape. Her first school years were not easy either, not being helped by her mother to read novels, especially by women writers, an attraction that she constantly refers to in interviews.

In an online article entitled “Objective Truth and the Grinding Machine, (how I started writing),” written for the Edinburgh International Book Festival publication, Galloway recalls her love of literature at an early age and clearly expresses her disappointment felt at home, at school, and later at university, at the small number of women included in the Literature and Music syllabuses:

At home, I read OOR WULLIE and THE BROONS. I read the BEANO and liked DENNIS THE MENACE but thought BERYL unlikely. The BUNTY was best because it had GIRLS in it [...] I also read Enid Blyton Fairy Tales (but not the Famous Five dear god no) and folk tales over and over then began fingering the mythology and world Religion books on the adult selves whereupon the librarian (or Defender of Books from the Inquiry of Grubby People and Children) smacked my hands and told me I wasn't allowed *those ones*: [...] I didn't stop looking: I stole it. I ran errands to the same library for my nineteen-years-old sister who read six books a week and hit me (literally) if I brought back books by

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arm trying to reach round his waist and not managing and he looks round over my shoulder with his eyes big and calls me sexy. It was only noise to me, the word, but I remember it. *Sexy.*” (25)

women authors. *Women canny write*, she'd say. *Women canny write*.

She remembers with special affection her head teacher of music, Ken Hetherington, who replaced all these repressions and fears with understanding and tolerance, and who encouraged her to compose and perform. Her disappointment when she left school led to serious depression that lasted years until she developed what he had taught her by herself. Her thirst for knowledge led her to enrol at the University of Glasgow, where she studied Music and English, and where she excelled at philosophy and French. At university she was shocked to see the small number of women attending classes and also the absence of Scots names in the syllabuses. All this, probably mixed with an unhappy atmosphere at home, created growing depression in her, and led her to abandon university for a time. She then became involved in social work, something she found more morally adapted to what she expected from life, and which made her more aware of moral justice and class-consciousness. Back at university, Galloway continued to be involved in the community social work of the university, where she worked as a welfare rights worker. Since then, she has written three novels: *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (MIND/Allan Lane Award, 1990), *Foreign Parts* (McVitie's prize, 1994), and *Clara* (Saltire Scottish Book of the Year, 2003), which was inspired by the life of the celebrated nineteenth-century concert pianist Clara Schumann. In this third novel, the longest and best crafted of the three, she goes beyond the Scottish urban scenario, and she creates a more universal feminist perspective, as she herself states in the interview she gave to Samantha Morton in the online archive for writers in 2004:

The lives of creative women, especially creative women with husbands

and children, are routinely overlooked as dull while the bad boys - the mad, bad and dangerous to know sorts - are eulogized. There was a deliberate desire to address that. I'm also fascinated by mental illness, and this story makes it inescapable. Robert Schumann suffered from serious mental illnesses all his life [...] if it hadn't been for Clara's care...

Galloway has also published three collections of short stories, *Blood* (1991), *Where You Find It* (1996), and *Jellyfish*, published in the summer of 2015. She has been involved in the Scottish literary scene as a contributor to well-known literary publications, such as *Edinburgh Review*, and as the co-editor of some others which help promote new Scottish writers and poets, such as *New Writing Scotland*. In February 2002 she wrote the libretto for the full-length opera by Sally Beamish - *Monster* -, commissioned by Scottish Opera and premi  red in Glasgow at the Theatre Royal. *Rosengarten* (2004), written in collaboration with sculptor Anne Bevan, is an illustrated book on the subject of obstetrics which combines her words in prose and poetry with Bevan's sculpture and visual images, and which symbolizes her idea of coming to life as the primary and ultimate experience shared by human beings. On the other hand, her involvement in this project reinforces her feminist response to the issue of women as bearers of life, a feminine question which has been buried and forgotten as she states in the interview with Samantha Morton in 2004:

I am fascinated by the idea of human intervention in that most vulnerable of situations - the desire to save life, sometimes at appalling cost, how the

machinery that routinely saves lives nowadays grew up of daring and desperation. Birth is the one human experience we all share, yet how we arrived is often so closed, so covered. And obstetrics got a rotten deal from 80s feminism I wanted to look at it fresh, in a more humane way.

Two of her latest works are two memoirs entitled *This is Not About Me* (Scottish Non-Fiction Book of the Year), published in 2008 at the peak of her writing career, and *All Made Up* (2011), which won the SMIT Book of the Year and a Creative Scotland Award. Also in 2008 she contributed to *Lights off the Quay*, a book commissioned by the Edinburgh International Book Festival, along with three of the finest writers in Scotland, AL Kennedy, John Burnside and Don Paterson with the “tragically ironic “Fineday” - as Gavin Gallace defines it in the introduction to the book (viii). She has written and presented numerous radio series for BBC Scotland, and lately she has contributed a series of radio talks for BBC Scotland on her nostalgic memories of the beach of Saltcoats, the coastal town in southwest Scotland where she spent her childhood. She has also worked extensively with musicians and visual artists such as Sally Beamish and Anne Bevan, and she has also written a book of poems entitled *Boy Book See* (2002). Her love of music and the different manifestations of art pervade all her works.

Galloway’s writing stems from desperation, from a strong desire to react to “the provocations of contemporary life - things that irritate to such an extent, they need to be exorcised somehow,” she states in the online interview with Samantha Morton. This desire, this desperation to exorcise voices which are still buried under a strong

patriarchal tradition, this giving voice to the disempowered, silenced or marginalised groups, address questions of how to reassert herself as a woman, as a woman writer, and as a woman writer writing in Scotland, all of which has made of her a distinctive feminine voice in Scotland today. Her struggle to find a voice has in her opinion much to do with “it is not said rather than what is,” with Scotland’s history as a colonised nation, and its former lack of political power in the decisions taken by “successive Westminster governments who can afford to be smug even when they acknowledge their awesome cultural ignorance of all territories north of Manchester,” as she points out in the online journal *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* (1995):

Learning, for example, that new ways of rendering different truths, different meanings, different perspectives on what it might matter to write about are essential if you are going to write honestly. Learning for example, that the way forward is to actively write outside the “rules”, to talk with what is real to ourselves as centre - not because, as an external power elite might have you believe, we can’t talk right but precisely because we *can*. It is only then, through being true to what you feel to be real through your skin, the soles of your feet and the voice that issues from your mouth, being true to your emotional and linguistic place on the landscape, that there is the vaguest hope of reaching and touching other people.

Galloway has been included in what is called the Glasgow School, a group of poets and fiction writers who started writing during the Scottish Renaissance early in



the twentieth century, who focused their attention on the real problems of people in a devastated Scotland, as a reaction to the earlier sentimentalised vision portrayed in the Kailyard fiction. According to Moira Burgess in *The Glasgow Novel. A Survey and Bibliography* (1986), the Glasgow School starts “in the twenties, the first substantial body of non-kailyard fiction about Glasgow; the proletarian wave of the thirties, greatly concerned with the contemporary problems of politics, depression and unemployment, and the postwave” (46).<sup>34</sup> Similarly, in his article “Imagining Scotlands: The Return to Mythology in Modern Scottish Fiction,” Douglas Gifford places Galloway in the tradition of the Glaswegian novel and highlights her being influenced by the Alasdair Gray’s second novel *1982, Janine* published in 1984, and James Kelman’s *The Busconductor Hines* (1984), not only in the experimental narrative she employs, especially in her first novels and short stories, but also in her realistic depictions of the lives of the characters who struggle to survive in a deprived Glasgow, a realistic way at looking at Scottish lives which have been described by Gavin Wallace in “Voices in Empty Houses: The Novel of Damaged Identity” as ‘the Scottish malaise.’ This Scottish malaise, Wallace argues, can be traced back to the traditional inner dialectic struggle of the characters of the Scottish novel, “a dialectic which is of the *voiced and unvoiced*” that the Scottish novel has traditionally depicted and whose characters have suffered: the novel whose common themes appear in the works written since the 1970s in Scotland, and whose themes, according to him, comprise James Kelman’s novels:

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<sup>34</sup> See also the in-depth study by Francis Hart, *Scottish Novel. A Critical Survey*, 1978, where he defines the modern novel in Scotland as a challenge “to project a new ideology of national survival and at the same time demythologize a past that had become a force of romantic betrayal” (215).

The spiritual and material deprivations of unemployment and decaying communities, failures to find - or accept - self-fulfilment in education, work, emotional relationships, inarticulacy and alienation escaped through alcoholism; destructive mental instability; the paralysing hyper-awareness of class and cultural differentiation; crippling incapacities to give love, or to receive it. (217)

However, in interviews Janice Galloway refuses to be labelled a Glasgow School writer, a term which she considers old-fashioned and restricting today, given the number of Scottish writers writing in all parts of Scotland: “Jings. A.L. Kennedy is from Dundee, Duncan Mclean is Orkney by way of Aberdeen, Irvine Welsh is from a small Edinburgh suburb. I am from Ayrshire [...] I don’t think there is such a thing as a Glasgow School.” Janice Galloway also refuses to be labelled a feminist writer because, she says, “the word ‘feminism’ has become a joke word again” (March 85, 87). She follows what James Kelman has described as “detailing of day-to-day experience [...] crucial and potentially subversive to gain a full understanding of how the lives of ordinary people are lived from moment to moment” (120) but she prefers to say that she writes from a female perspective, with a human interest in what happens to her female protagonists day by day, penetrating their unconscious in order to give voice to their silences.

This preoccupation with writing about the female experience, with her awareness of being a woman in a foreign land, in a land in which she experiences a sense of lack, or as Cixous claims in “Coming to Writing” “no legitimate place, no land,

no fatherland, no history of my own” (15) makes Galloway cry out, break through walls and search for open doors to give voice to her female characters. Hence in her collection of short stories *Blood* (1991) Galloway presents the power relationships between men and women in deprived domestic environments, in a world of decay where women find it difficult to find their place, as Douglas Gifford explains as “the combination of sensitive interpretation of women’s pain and a sharp eye for the farcical, the grotesque, and the excess of modern society” (609).

In the same vein, in “Breaking through Cracked Mirrors,” Josiane Paccaud-Huguet suggests that the world represented in Galloway’s short stories is a world which “resembles Eliot’s wasteland transposed to the postmodernist zone [...] a world of decomposition, therefore of cracked mirrors which can no longer reflect the image of full subject, where door and windows tear open over the craters of experience” (56). But Galloway’s preoccupation with human life is above all her main concern: “The visceral [...] We are human beings, bags of bone and blood and viscera,” as she highlights in an online interview with *The Scottish Review of Books* (2009). Galloway’s preoccupation with human life passes inevitably for the questioning of the traditional role of the family in contemporary Scotland, a family which is represented in her work as patriarchal-based, still founded in the creed of Calvinist conceptions, as Mary MacGlynn explains in her article “Janice Galloway” included in *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* (2011):

Galloway rejects the traditional notion of family in concert with calling traditional notions of nation and Scottishness into question. We confront

again urban characters disconnected from the idealized rural past; even more explicitly, their inherited conceptions of Scottishness are tied to a Calvinist or Presbyterian inheritance obsolete and ineffective. The value of the past, on both personal and national levels, is repeatedly called into question. (34)

#### 4.2- GALLOWAY'S SHORT STORIES: BLOOD AND WHERE YOU FIND IT

Galloway's rejection of a national past that is closely linked to the repressive structures governed by the Presbyterian creed is portrayed as a constant crisis in the innermost selves of women and their bodies in a contemporary male Scotland which delimits them with respect to men. In *Blood*, women's bodies are something which are not to be taken into account, because they bleed, or belong to men's territory, a territory which men delimit as theirs, as also occurs in *Where You Find It* (1996), Galloway's second collection of short stories, where her female protagonists must confront their role not only in the family but also in their relationships with men, with a feeling of resentment regarding their own bodies, and feeling guilt of the wrongs of history, a national history whose negative effects are still present in the lives of contemporary Scottish women, still having to struggle to articulate themselves, their bodies. It is probably this mixture of questions of gender, body and nation which pervades her protagonists' lives while they are trapped in complex human relationships in deprived environments which limit their ability to express themselves, as Galloway herself points out in the interview with Cristie Leigh March:

Scottish women have their 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 feat it is somehow

self-indulgent to be more concerned for one's womanness instead of one's Scottishness, one's working class heritage, whatever. Guilt here comes strong from the notion we're not backing up our menfolk and their "real" concerns. Female concerns, like meat on mother's plate, are extras after the men and weans have been served. (86)

The first story in her collection of *Blood*, the eponymous "Blood," is a clear example of how Galloway employs feminine language, the expression of a woman's repressed body in the symbolic world where she does not find a place, a world in which she finds it difficult to express her desires. This difficulty is, in Galloway's own words for the online magazine *The Scottish Renew of Books*, something that deserves to be examined psychoanalytically: "Every time you catch yourself in the mirror you think, Christ, is that what I look like? Women are constantly confronting that [...] that's the fascination in "Blood": we leak, we ooze, we bleed. Yet the life up here contains none of that. If you divorce both parts, and focus only on this bit, you are concentrating on aspiration." Whatever the aspiration, however, it is difficult and painful for a woman to succeed in her aims in a world which is male territory; in the case of the female protagonist of "Blood" to concentrate on what she most wishes for seems nearly unattainable for her, because she bleeds. A young music student in a "school which had no gate, just a gap in the wall with pillars on either side that led into the playground" (4) struggles with the pool of blood under her tongue after having a tooth taken out by a dentist "whose pores on the backs of his fingers sprouted hairs, single black wires curling onto the bleached skin of the wrist, the veins showing through" (1).

“Blood” metaphorically represents the physical limitations of the young woman when performing what she most wishes, her piano music, and she struggles with both the bleeding of her mouth, and her incapability of playing a piece of music. The young woman feels helpless at the impossibility of playing in her practice class, to say ‘Mozart’ without “spilling over the white keys and dripping onto the clean tile floor [...] this unstoppable redness seeping through the fingers at her open mouth” (9). Her incapability of pronouncing the name ‘Mozart’ indicates what Paccaud-Hughet suggests is “the language production and repression” (67), or as she also argues, the impossibility of entering the symbolic world “to restore the reality of the female body with its holes and losses because of the lack of her tooth, which stands for women in the symbolic system of binary oppositions as a lack” (68).

All this brings us back to Galloway’s biography, where she relates all the painful difficulties she had to undergo in order to play music, a forbidden activity throughout her early life. At the end of the story, however, the young girl is able to play her piece of music, in spite of the painful experience she has had to bear. Galloway has found for her protagonist’s aspirations a door open to the world, which is her music, the thing she loves the best, or as Colin Clark wisely explains: “The dentist may have stolen the words from her mouth and the boys vandalised the girls’ toilets with abusive slogans, but music is a deeper emotional language that the girl is able to communicate with, and it bonds to her” (143).

In his article entitled “Children of a larger Growth? The men in Janice Galloway’s Short Fiction,” Clark, a secondary school teacher and writer, analyses the

words of the male protagonists in the short fiction of Janice Galloway, and he defines them as “colloquial, often bad-tempered, frequently abusive” (136), which at the same time, he argues, coincides with records of the abusive language register in schools, and sexist conceptions that male students use towards the school girls today<sup>35</sup>. Clark suggests that the dominance of patriarchy in Scotland is still dependent on a male culture that can only be supported by the perpetuation of ideas surrounding the tradition of the possession of women and their bodies: “The kinds of words used across urban Scotland in daily discourse are offensive to women. Women have lacked a prominent literary voice that speaks for their reality, and consequently we men are unaccustomed to having our speech represented by women, this is what we sound like to a woman’s ear. And it is not that pleasant” (141).

The language that many men in Scotland are accustomed to hearing is in Lacanian terms the Law of the Father, symbolically represented by the phallus, a Law which supports and perpetuates the language of the father in the culture into which they all are

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<sup>35</sup> I arrived in the classroom, feigning confidence, took the register, and got the boys started on the work that had been left for them. Then I prayed for peace. For ten minutes the boys seemed to be doing their work; at the end of those ten minutes things started to unravel.

“Sir, what team do you support?”

“Shh. On with your work.”

No, really, Sir. What team?

“Never Mind. You should be working.”... so I replied:

“No team. I’m not interested in football.”

“Aye, right. Is it Celtic or Rangers?”

“I’ll tell you after class.”

“Did you see the game last night?”

“What game?”

Silence. Then...

“Sir, you married?”

“Nope.”

Some muttering. Not married. Doesn’t like football. In the twisted logic of the school playground, the syllogism is completed...

“Backs on the wall, lad. The teacher’s a poof.”

I should have lied.



born; a patriarchal world supported by a fundamentally oppressive misogynist western philosophy where woman constitutes a lack, an absence, therefore in the world of patriarchal culture women are forbidden by men to speak. Thus Man is the only subject allowed to speak because he is the master of his own language, and consequently places the women as the Other, as something negative which stands outside the symbolic. It is a language and behaviour which reproduces old systems of male oppression of women, and where respect is understood as repression of, and violence towards, women.

The young girls in Galloway's short stories represent the marginalised women who have been dispossessed of their bodies, their language, and their voice, and this highlights the fact that they belong nowhere. Hence Clark wonders, "the lessons men teach in Galloway's fiction are brutal ones. Is this a masculine idea of how the world works? Or is it the way it really is? (139). In "Blood," while the young school girl bleeds, the graffiti on the toilets' walls remind her that "GIRLS ARE A BUNCH OF CUNTS" (5); the use of block capitals reinforces a language that through repetition succeeds in its aim, and in Clark's words "manages to cause the girls to avoid using the toilet if at all possible. Sexual territory aggressively demarcated. The language of the playground, violent and misogynist. The ideology of difference" (140). Through the words in capitals or other examples of male authority and repression, Galloway highlights the fact that in the male world which has marginalised women because of their bodies, girls remain passive about their own bodies. The word 'cunt,' which originally refers to the female genitalia in pejorative terms, is used by the male pupils to remind girls that they are guilty of their own female organs, and therefore they represent

Woman in History, as Cixous claims in “Sorties,” each girl is “innocent, mad, full of badly remembered memories, guilty of unknown wrongs, she is the seductress, the heiress of all generic Eves” (6).

In the same way, in her second collection of short stories *Where You Find it*, Galloway reproduces the abusive language of power and authority towards contemporary women implying that the exercising of power and repression is repeated through time, and that male privilege is shown in, as Cixous states:

The opposition between *activity* and *passivity*, which he [Man] uses to sustain himself [...] and if we consult literary history, it is the same story. It all comes back to man - to *his* torment, his desire to be (at) the origin. Back to the father [...] Philosophy is constructed on the premise of woman’s abasement. Subordination of the feminine to the masculine order, which gives the appearance of being the condition for the machinery’s functioning. (64)

This is what happens in “Last thing”:

Somebody was dragging me by the neck a man he said YOU’RE COMING WITH ME but his voice wasn’t right like he was choking or crying maybe something was wrong it was definitely the man saying YOU’RE COMING WITH ME and he showed one of his hands up under my jersey I could feel the big shape of his hand sort of pulling my jersey under my jacket and going up onto my belly and it make me stop and

breathe wrong. (176-7)

Or again, in her story “Someone Had To,” also included in *Where you find it*:

And I hit her NOT hard to begin with but she just LOOKS not even  
FLINCHING when you TOLD her what would happen so I did it again  
STAND UP KIMBERLEY curling in a corner NOT EVEN TRYING TO  
STAND UP just watching while I shook her, I lifted her up put the  
cigarette agains the skin of the wrist IT WAS MEANT TO BE A  
LESSON. (124)

In these short stories, men not only exercise power to teach women to submit their bodies to their own will, but also, as heirs of a nationalistic tradition, the only men who can supersede them as exclusive possessors of the phallus are those who maintain the same tradition, authority and omnipotence over women, so father and sons struggle to create a Scottish identity in opposition to the feminine character. Galloway suggests that the dominance of patriarchy in Scotland is dependent on a male culture that can only be supported by a perpetuation of ideas surrounding the tradition of possession of women and their bodies by themselves as inheritors. The excerpt below is taken from “Scenes from the Life No. 23: Paternal Advice,” included in *Blood*, in which a drunken man living in a filthy house full of scattered useless objects tries to teach his five-year-old son “to fight your own battles” (14), as the time has come for him to learn.

The wee boy comes to visit “in a smutty school shirt, open one button at the neck for better fit, and showing a tidemark ingrained on the inside. One cuff is frayed.

The trousers are too big and are held up by a plastic snakebelt; badly hemmed over his sandshoes and saggy at the arse”(13). What SAMMY the father has to teach his son, WEE SAMMY, is a lesson that must be passed on from fathers to sons only. It is a transmission of powers under the patrimony of men, and from which women are excluded: “Did your mammy say anything to you about me wanting to see you? About what it was about? Naw, did he now, son? Eh. Well. Its to do with you getting so big now”(14). The grotesque scene reaches its climax when SAMMY the father lifts his frightened wee son on to the mantelpiece, places him in the place of the clock, and encourages him to jump:

SAMMY: show your daddy youre no feart son. I’ll catch you. Don’t be feart, this is your da talking to you. Come on. For me. Jump and I’ll catch you. Don’t be scared. Sammy, son. I’m waiting. I’m ready.

*A few more seconds of tense silence click out of the clock. WEE SAMMY blinks. His hands lift from the wall and he decides: one breath and he throws himself from the screaming height of the sill. In the same second, SAMMY skirts to the side. The boy crashes lumpily into the tiles of the fire surround. His father sighs and averts his eyes, choking back a sob.*

SAMMY: “Let that be a lesson to you, son. Trust nae cunt.” (16, her emphasis)

In “Contemporary Fiction II: Seven writers in Scotland,” Douglas Gifford alludes to Galloway’s satirical way of looking at modern Scotland and suggests that this story can be traced back to the work of James Kelman’s “black Glasgow humour,” and

that it faithfully represents the archetypal west of Scotland punter - SAMMY- as the father in “an old West of Scotland urban folk-tale retold as a mini-drama” (609). This way in which Galloway “mingles the humane and the cruel, the sympathetic and savagely sceptical,” as Gifford points out, is textually represented in “Fair Ellen and the Wanderer Returned.” Gifford calls it “a kind of ballad lampoon” (609), a parody of the traditional love story where the faithful sleeping woman awaits her destiny, untouchable, passive, for the man she loves.

Galloway celebrates feminine language and subverts the tale of the princess who sleeps endlessly until the prince comes and wakes her with a kiss, and they then live together ever after, by giving Ellen, the protagonist, the role of Woman who subverts her role in history, the role of passivity, of the Sleeping Beauty, in opposition to the role of the active man. Galloway proposes a different plot for a monolithic male tradition which has kept woman in coffins, sleeping in the woods, passive, awaiting the man’s arrival, and presents Ellen in a contemporary setting, a farm somewhere, in a universal tale about a woman who awakens to History. Hers is a revolution of literary culture which supports Cixous’s feminine language, a literary language which in Gilbert and Gubar’s words “reinstates the phallogocentric hierarchies that have traditionally subordinated the feminine [...] seeks to excavate and celebrate the semiotic beyond the symbolic, the pre-oedipal beyond the oedipal, the multiplicity beyond univocity” (377), and which subverts the single narratives which dictate women’s roles according only to their anatomy.

After ten years waiting for a man who promised to marry her, ten years of

solitude, silence and hard work on her parents' farm, Ellen makes the decision to marry another man, a man who can secure a better future for her. One day the wanderer appears "it was as she rose from stooping [...] she was fully erect now" (70), he approaches her thinking she still belongs to him, "as though she were asleep and he need only wake her" (72), but when she stands and speaks to him it becomes what Cixous calls "a *Voice-Cry*. Agony - the spoken word exploded, blown to bits by suffering with anger, demolishing discourse" (94). She is tired of waiting for ten endless years of silence and solitude and he can only find cold words in her. She is not dead, passive or locked up in a coffin, like Snow White. She has awakened from the dead, she is now visible, not hidden in the dark woods, she has a voice which speaks out loud, a voice which cries for freedom:

- You should go now. Go and not come back. Yes he waited on, unwilling to give up his dream. He spoke a last hope. If he should die and she cut through his words like a knife across meat. If he dies I will be free. Look at me. I am grey and cold with waiting. Did you never wonder how it was for me? And do you think now I want to wait again, to fetch and carry for you when your time is come after all these years of nothing. If he dies I will be free for the first time. I have done with waiting.
- I loved you. He said it simply and his eyes were dry.
- Maybe you did. Their eyes met and broke. But it was a long time ago.

(75)

Through Ellen's story Galloway puts into play the reversal of the classical Snow

White story, and tells Ellen's story differently. She unburies her, brings her back to life from death, from nothing, in parallel to what has happened to women in history, a history governed by the 'Law of the Father,' and which in Cixous's words still pervade women's lives today, as she writes in "Sorties": "When they wake up from among the dead, from among words, from among laws. *Once upon a time...* One cannot yet say of the following history, it's just a story it's a tale still true today. Most women who have awakened remember *having slept, having put to sleep...*" (66).

Through Ellen, Galloway expresses the notion that women always function within the male discourse, on the side of a culture which has negated women's voice, annihilated their energy, repressed their bodies. But when the women's repressed bodies, their voices return, when they stand up as young Ellen did, there is an explosion which transforms and reverses history, tradition, and disrupts the social order, giving way to a new order. The wanderer's dream is the dream of man in history, the man who sustains a culture which loves the woman while she remains passive, while she is "absent, hence desirable, a dependent nonentity, hence adorable" (Cixous 67).

Ellen stood up from stooping, and faced the wanderer, she arose from her dream, with no need of a prince's kiss to awaken her, and she now navigates her own body, free and open to new spaces. The wanderer's discourse has been taken over by Ellen's discourse and his becomes the reductive language of the patriarch, the language constructed under the Law. Now that the opposition between passivity and activity has disappeared, his is the language of disarmed power, and using the only language he knows, the oppressor's language, the language which denies, denigrates the woman's

body: “Youre a hard bitch [...] she saw him leave, saw the people scatter as he went down for there had been nothing to see after all” (76). As she has not submitted to his will, to his dreams that she would remain passive, in the wanderer’s view Ellen becomes “the seductress, the heiress of all generic Eves [...] the “matrix” alienation, that which fixes the guilt of reproduction on the ill male organs” (Cixous 6).



#### 4.3. THE TRICK IS TO KEEP BREATHING

I believe that anything having to do with the body should be explored, from the functional to the libidinal, to the imaginary; and then how all this is articulated at the symbolic level. It is beyond doubt that femininity derives from the body, from the anatomical, the biological difference, from a whole system of drives which are radically different for women than for men. - Hélène Cixous<sup>36</sup>

In “And Woman Created Woman,” an essay included in Christopher Whyte’s *Gendering the Nation* (1995), Alison Smith links Galloway’s fiction to the transgressive fiction of former Scottish women writers such as Willa Muir, Catherine Carswell and Nan Shepherd, and highlights their portrayal of women and the conventions which it dictates with regard to their own bodies, their repressed sexuality, how they come to terms with these conventions, and how they reject the notion that they were born to be devoted women and wives to men, answerable to God, by looking for their own liberating spaces, concurring with Smith’s idea that “women have a great deal of power in the making of their own destinies, regardless of the ways of gods or men” (26). This liberation through writing, this way of writing themselves, despite their repressed bodies, is precisely what links Janice Galloway to her female predecessors. Such liberation is excellently portrayed in her debut novel *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, in which she explores the psychological collapse of a young woman struggling with she feels, and what she is expected to feel, in contemporary Scotland.

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<sup>36</sup> “My Text is Written in White and Black, in ‘Milk and Night’” (Interview with Christianne Makward) Trans. Beatrice Cameron *et al.* *Hélène Cixous. White Ink. Interviews on Sex, Text and Politics*. Ed. Susan Sellers. Stockfield: Acumen, 2008. 58-78.

*The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, published in 1989, was appraised and welcomed by critics as “an outstanding new voice among outstanding new ways of looking at women in modern Scotland” (Lang 179). In this respect, Gavin Wallace regards Janice Galloway’s *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* as “the perfect analogue to Grays’s exploration of psychological collapse from a feminist perspective” (223), and cites Alasdair Gray’s *1982 Janine* (1984) as the first novel to articulate well the Scottish contemporary burden through the main protagonist, Jock, an inarticulate, drunken man, whose struggle resides in the failure to find a voice, a man who is unable to find an identity in a post-modern Scotland. Wallace cites several other contemporary writers writing in the 1980s who also challenge old Scottish myths and who deal with the same subject matter such as Gray and James Kelman, but who, he comments, “in radically different ways suggest even clearer and more constructive escape routes from the Scottish malaise” (225). He also mentions Brian McCabe’s *The Other McCoy* (1990), Robert Alan Jamieson’s *A Day at the Office* (1991), and Andrew Greig’s *Electric Brae* (1992), and especially Ron Butlin’s *The Sound of my Voice* (1987), which he considers: “An innovatory landmark of Gray’s *Lanark* [...] a consummate synthesis between narrative technique and thematic content. The novel is unbearably ‘painful’: a claustrophobic anatomy of its protagonist’s struggle to escape the poisoned Scottish past which has exacerbated his increasingly destructive alcoholism” (228).

In an extensive study of the works of Alasdair Gray, Beat Witschi also parallels this lack of articulation with the socio-political situation of Scotland in the post-modern world; Gray, in her view, has innovated the proceedings of the Glasgow School of

Crisis which claimed that it represents realistically the cultural, economic and political troubles of a devastated post-industrial Glasgow, but on the other hand “reshapes the literary modes of the past into something new, into a vision of Glasgow the validity of which points far beyond the local” (59). According to Witschi, both *1982 Janine* and *Lanark* (1981) rewrite the old myths and “the tensions inherent in the old novelistic visions (e.g: of the Glasgow School of Crisis)”(205), and can be traced back to a Scotland that suffers from cultural fragmentation. The claim that Scotland is a nation without a centre goes to back to the Renaissance writers such as Hugh MacDiarmid and Edwin Muir and explains the disappointment of Scottish writers then having to write in the milieu of English mainstream literature. Scotland is, according to them, a victim and symbolically represents the absent centre. In Witschi’s words, Alasdair Gray’s work:

Mirrors the similarity of an international (western) level. At the same time the discussion of Gray’s work has shown that Gray not only thematises the difficulties of finding a Scottish identity but also of a transnational, that is to say western identity. The result of this is that the old cultural values [...] are shown to be destructive, thus illustrating the need for “new and more humane values. (208)

In this respect, Witschi places Gray’s work in the challenging western cultural experience in fin de siècle Scotland in post-modern terms, and she echoes Linda Hutcheon’s words when describing the crisis which not only affects Scottish literature but western philosophy:

The centre no longer completely holds. And, from the decentred perspective, the “marginal” and what I will be calling [...] the ex-centric (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 homogeneous monolith (that is middle-class, male, heterosexual, white, western) we might have assumed. The concept of alienated otherness (based on binary oppositions that conceal hierarchies) gives way, as I have argued, to that of differences, that is to the assertion, not of centralized sameness, but of decentralized community - another post-modern paradox. (qted. in Witschi 209)

Galloway places herself in the position of a feminist writer and denounces the consequences of the Scottish male constructions of power supported by a strong Calvinist misogyny which have undermined the rights of women in a devastated Scotland, a position which has excluded women from the socio-political and literary scene. In an online article entitled “Reading Alasdair Gray” for the literary review *Context* (2009), crucial to the understanding of her view of the neglect of the position of women writers in Scotland, and of her being influenced by the works of Alasdair Gray, Galloway denounces the “sidelined or misunderstood as a rather recalcitrant part of objective (i.e, masculinist) discourse,” and also how the mainstream literary circles have also sidelined the “bravery, passion or hope” in the work of Scottish male authors such as that of Alasdair Gray. Most significantly, she acknowledges how greatly Alasdair Gray’s work influenced her writing, and explains how he changed the reduced vision of

Scotland she formerly had, but most importantly, how through his genuine sensibility towards the female experience he clearly changed her way of looking at women:

I'd always assumed what my education had taught me was true: that my country was a totty wee place with no political clout, a joke heritage, dour people, and writers who were all male and all dead [...] Alasdair Gray's was a voice that offered me something freeing. It wasn't distant or assumptive. It knew words, syntax, and places I also knew, yet used them without any tang of apology, it took its won experience and culture as valid and central [...] it spoke to the intellect directly and simply didn't proscribe what I was meant to see or think, and was not afraid of fun or admissions of emotion. It was aware too of the kinds of self-consciousness and repressions I knew, the tangle of guilts that so often inform the Scottish psyche and bedevil its written expression [...] Even more, however, it was a voice that took for granted it wasn't the only voice. From its own experience of marginalization (and they are multiple), it knew the whole truth didn't belong to one sex either. In short, *it was a man's voice that knew that's all it was - a man's*. [...] but also, with Gray, there is a feeling of Woman as somehow inescapable, a sometimes paranoid, sometimes warm perception of her suffusing and permeating the narrative [...] Gray's writing not only knows that women experience, feel, and often think differently, it seems to be filled with a regret for that fact, and in this way, Woman - the female principal - exists

in Gray's writing the way she exists in no other current male writer's work. (2)

In *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, Galloway writes from what Cixous calls Death, or an Other, and which Joy - the young protagonist calls Nothing, from a woman's experience and as a women writer in Scotland, clearly placing herself in the social-political assumptions of Cixous's feminine language when giving voice to a female body which has been repressed, negated by the oppressive forces which suppress her identity as a woman: the Church, the Law, the Married, which symbolize the patriarchal power in Scotland, supported by Calvinistic principles which control the religion, the philosophy and the language of the people, but which Galloway attempts to subvert through her narrative which transgresses the old symbolic system.

In "Text is Written in White and Black, in 'Milk and Night'" included in Susan Sellers's *White Ink: Interviews on Sex, Text and Politics* (2008), Cixous is interviewed by Christiane Makward and she underlines the importance of re-thinking the body, of reflecting on how the female body has been stolen, how it must be re-appropriated, and how this re-appropriation of the body, of the feminine body, must be considered in political terms. The reclamation of the feminine body becomes manifest through writing, a feminist act which reverses women's history of alienation, absence, and passivity:

I believe that anything having to do with the body should be explored, from the functional to the libidinal, to the imaginary; and then how all of this is articulated at the symbolic level. It is beyond doubt that femininity

derives from the body, from the anatomical, the biological difference, from a whole system of drives which are radically different for women than for men. But none of this exists in a pure state. It is always, immediately “already spoken”, caught in representation, produced culturally. (Sellers 66)

Galloway enters this exploration of the female body which Cixous claims to be a liberating and transgressive experience which breaks through the wall of the masculine order, and constructs a narrative which, in the same ways as Cixous’s writing, breaks the conventions of linear, structured narrative. It is through the medium of a fragmented narrative that Galloway writes the biography of Joy Stone’s stigmatized body, and which represents Joy’s repressed unconscious forces working in her mind, forces which are manifested in text, in the words on the page, which symbolise her inability to articulate her own story in a world which will not listen to her. The repressions and gaps are what she cannot say, the unsayable: the painful story of a young drama teacher who lives in a housing scheme on the outskirts of Glasgow:

It’s called Bourtreehill, after the elder tree, the bourtree, Judas tree; protection against witches. The people who live here call it Boot Hill. Boot Hill is a new estate well outside the town it claims to be part of. There was a rumour when they started building the place that it was meant for undesirables: difficult tenants from other places, shunters,

overspill from Glasgow. That's so far away from everything. (13)<sup>37</sup>

In *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, the struggle of the female protagonist arises from her inability to articulate the narrative of her life after the death of her partner, Michael, a married man who drowned during a short holiday in Spain, after they had decided to start a new life together in a small rot-infected cottage in Glasgow. Galloway skilfully explores Joy's hell through a subversive narrative from where she can tell Joy's intensity of her emotional state, in a society which does not understand her, and from where she allows Joy to defy the world of authority that tries to negate her. "I watch myself from the corner of the room" (7) is the first sentence of the whole reconstruction of herself after the dramatic holiday with her partner. Joy struggles to seize every painful day, just staying alive, "lasting," as she insistently tells her friend Marianne, in a narrow-minded world that is incompatible with her feelings, coping with the contradictions of what she feels and what she is expected to feel, unable to survive the feeling of guilt that this situation creates in her. She is looking desperately for an autonomous self, freed from a cultural tradition that menaces by negating her, which represses her by creating in her the confusing feeling that makes her feel like a "black hole."

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<sup>37</sup> In his study of "Family and the Scottish Working-Class Novel, 1984-1994" published by Peter Lang in 2000, Horst Prillinger defines what the term working class means in the Scottish novel today, and quotes the words of Cairns Craig's own discussion of the "flexibility" of the term:

- a) actual working classes...
- b) characters from the working classes who now straddle class divisions;
- c) novels in which a working class perspective is the angle of critique on non-working-class life;
- d) novels which adopt a notion of "working class" to include or to problematise those who are effectively of the lower middle class but whose situation is, in economic terms, no different from the working class [...] in fact, it would be easy to argue that the schoolteacher is the archetypal figure who has a pseudo-bougeois position in terms of status but is actually working class in terms of his/her [...] consciousness since they are almost always from the working classes. (30)



Joy, like the blank pages, has become an empty space, an absence, “outwith conventional social and emotional structures - no family, no role, and no way to mourn” (Norquay 132). And she must challenge assumptions that are deeply rooted within her family and those who surround it who are afraid of her insistence on speaking out loud. She feels empty, both physically and psychologically. When the doctor suggests that her lack of menstruation may be due to pregnancy, she is given a scan, but it shows, in keeping with two blank pages: “Empty space. I had nothing inside me [...] I was still there. A black hole among the green stars. Empty space. I had nothing inside me (unnumbered page).<sup>38</sup> Galloway deconstructs this world by entering Joy’s unconscious, and creates a subversive text from where Joy can speak, from where she allows Joy to defy the world of authority that tries to negate her while she suffers her breakdown. To this end, she presents a protagonist/ narrative that challenges the traditional, hierarchical language of order, deleting page numbers, and even whole pages of text in parallel with Joy’s state of mind while she searches for her own voice. Her refusal to be controlled by these repressive attitudes that surround her is explicitly underlined by the marginalia of the text, as Hélène Cixous explains in “Sorties”:

When “the repressed” of their culture and their society come back, it is  
an explosive return, which is absolutely shattering, staggering,

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<sup>38</sup> This “black hole” has been claimed by Cairns Craig in *The Modern Scottish Novel* (1999) as the representation of the feminine in Scotland with Scotland itself, “a black hole”, a “nothing at all” as both have suffered from similar methods of marginalization: “The image not only of a woman negated by a patriarchal society but of a society aware of itself only as an absence [...] a society living, in the 1980s in the aftermath of its failure to be reborn” (199).

overturning, with a force never let loose before, on the scale of the most tremendous repressions.... must wreck partitions, classes and rethorics, regulations and codes [...] take pleasure in jumbling the order of space, in disorienting it, in changing around the furniture, dislocating things and values, breaking them all up, emptying structures and turning propriety upside down. (95)

Galloway's novel becomes a *manifesto* against a world whose social structures repress and negate Joy's life: "THE CHURCH, THE LAW, THE MARRIED," (84) which create a feeling of constant guilt in her, a repressing Calvinist attitude of which her mother used to remind her, and which is described by many recent Scottish critics as culturally traumatic. The Church, which Joy identifies with the moral authority of the Law, plays a fundamental role in her painful existence. Her education at home was the first Calvinist experience to engender a constant feeling of guilt in her; Joy's struggle for freedom is a struggle not to be confined to being an absence, a black hole, after her lover's death. Hence, Joy dramatises her behaviour both at her mother's and her partner's funeral, stating ironically that she adjusts to being a "civilised and polite" (unnumbered page) woman when behaving at funerals: "I was remarkably good. Didn't spill a drop" (82), she says ironically after her mother's funeral, adding the following sarcastic footnote: "Love/emotion = embarrassment: Scots equation. Exceptions are when roaring drunk or watching football. Men do rather out of this loophole" (82)

I can't think how I fell into this unProtestant habit. I used to be so conscientious. I used to be so *good* all the time. [where **good**=

**productive/hardworking/wouldn't say boo]**

[Where good=value for money]

[where good=not putting anyone out by feeling too much, blank,  
unobstructive]

[where good=neat, acting in a credit-worthy manner] I knew the routine.

Like everybody, I wanted to be loved. (81-2)

Through Joy's comments, Galloway attempts to challenge a society that is repressed by the constrained religious creed of Calvinism, a creed which in Willa Muir's words in *Living with Ballads* "emphasises the helplessness of the individual, who has no say in the arrangements made for his eternal future" (191). Similarly, in *The Scottish Novel*, Francis Russell Hart examines the themes and myths that have formed the national character, represented in the Scottish novel since its beginnings; in his chapter "Contemporary Scotland in Fact and Myth," he underlines the myths that have constructed a national character through the centuries, these themes constantly recurring in Scottish literature. He points out that no matter how repressive or conservative, the myths have survived, although paradoxically they have been constantly challenged. He explains that the Scottish community has been governed by the Calvinistic idea of the fear of God, and that this fear has haunted the Scottish imagination for centuries in all forms of repression, even affecting the Scottish novel, thus:

A national mythology centered on distinctive institutions, has kept alive these institutions and at the same time preserved nagging doubts about their viability. Church, education, law, and mercantile enterprise,

conservative by nature, have survived through determination to preserve the national character, with the result that they have been reluctant to change [...] and there is agreement that religion continues to play an influential role in Scottish society. (204)

From the same viewpoint, Cairns Craig has alluded on numerous occasions to Calvinism as the traumatic foundation of Scottish identity. In *The Modern Scottish Novel*, he refers to “the fearful and the fear inspiring, a confrontation which creates two poles of fear”(39), which led Robert Louis Stevenson to create *Dr Jeckyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), or to James Hogg’s *Private Memories and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824). In speaking about how Calvinism maimed the Scottish imagination, Cairns Craig argues that:

Calvinism was the foundation of the key institutions - religion, education - through which Scottish identity was shaped, and through which it maintained its distinctiveness during Scotland’s participation in the British Empire: whether for or against Calvinism’s conception of human destiny, no Scot could avoid involvement in the imaginative world that Calvinism projected. (37)

This repressive Calvinist attitude has also been criticised by feminist scholars such as American literary critics Elaine Showalter and Susan Gubar, who have argued that Calvinism has always been an explanation for male chauvinism, misogyny and sexual repression in Scotland. In the Scottish arena, Breitenbach, Brown and Myers, in

an article published in 1998 in *The Feminist Review*, offer an objective vision of the position of women in Scotland, and they echo Barbara Littlewood's words, illustrating contemporary Calvinist Scotland:

In the popular imagination, Scotland is often conceived of as a sexually repressed and repressive culture, with much of the blame put on the special tradition of Protestantism which took root here [...] Scottish socialism offered no relief from the puritanical ethos of Calvinism, a good socialist could be just as much a patriarch in his private life as any Kirk elder [...] Currently, we might add, popular representation of Scottish men continues to celebrate the inarticulate (except if drunk, or discussing football), physically competent (except if drunk, or dealing with the weans) man's man. (qtd. in Breitenbach, Brown and Myers 45-46)

It is precisely in this "puritanical ethos of Calvinism" that Galloway attempts to help Joy to find a voice of her own in order to be in possession of her own body. By writing in opposition to a paternal structure which reduces Joy to "Death", or "Nothing", or a "black hole", "an empty shell" Galloway engages with the political feminist debate which Hélène Cixous claims to be necessary for the articulation of the Woman's voice, as a challenge to repressive and silencing authority, a new site of potential alternatives to the mythical representation of passive women in Scotland, whose passive role was assigned to them by a hegemonic body of established political, civil, and religious controls whose physical representation has been the male figure. But

by speaking for herself, her body Joy must challenge assumptions that are deeply rooted within her family and those who surround it, it is an act of irreverence, of transgression towards the forces which oppress and repress her, no matter how painful for her is to speak out loud, because as she speaks she undermines patriarchal privileges.

In trying to challenge these assumptions, Joy Stone is every woman who speaks with feminine language, because, as Cixous claims, the feminine language is necessary for women to articulate their bodies as they have been driven away from language, and she encourages women to use as full expression of their experience as a powerful subversive force. Masculine language, Cixous believes, has been used for the repression of women, as she emphatically states in “The Laugh of the Medusa”:

I maintain unequivocally that there is such a thing as *marked* writing; that, until now, far more extensively and repressively than is suspected or admitted, writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural - hence political, typically masculine - economy; that is a locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated, over and over, more or less consciously in a manner that's frightening since it's often hidden or adorned with the mystifying charms of fiction, that this locus has grossly exaggerated all the signs of sexual opposition, where woman has never *her* turn to speak - this being all the more serious and unpardonable in that writing is precisely *the very possibility of change*, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures. (249)

However, it is not easy for Galloway to find a voice for Joy, because Joy, like Galloway herself, is full of “multiple isolations, unspoken feelings, repressions” which are, as she claims in the online article “Tongue in my Ear: on writing and not writing *Foreign Parts*,” closely linked to a sense of linguistic inferiority, a divided sensibility which makes them think in Scots and write in English. This lack of a voice of their own creates psychological damage, and as a consequence, an inability to express themselves that Galloway links to the political neglect of Scotland by “the external power elite,” the English governments:

Such real psychological damage has been wrought by centuries of contempt for Scottish accents, syntax and expression that many Scots themselves caricature [...] Now it isn't hard to see the connection here with Scottish writers finding a difficulty in trusting their own mouths [...] That is also true, of course, of all disempowered, artificially silenced or marginalised groups. For the woman writer from working-class Scottish background, the problem is trebly familiar (unnumbered page)

In the same light, in an article published in 1992, Marilyn Reizbaum echoes the ‘Canonical Double Cross’ suffered by women writing in marginalised cultures, and parallels the negative effects that oppressed spaces of national identity offer to women in Scotland and Ireland with those suffered by those cultures in relation to “their former colonisers.” (166). From the same view point as Galloway, she suggests that “Feminists in Scotland and in both Northern Ireland and the Republic have set out to reinterpret nationalism and to establish a role for themselves as feminists within it [...] Scottish

women have until recently been hardly vocal” (173), suggesting that Scottish women have been voiceless, and absent, in a patriarchal national system which has marginalised them, relegating them to a secondary position in the socio-cultural establishment. Reizbaum argues that Scotland and Ireland have suffered a “double exclusion” because, she says, “the struggle to assert a nationalist identity obscures or doubly marginalizes the assertion of gender (the woman’s voice) (165).

She goes on to say that women have been relegated by paternalist nationalism to being passive, fixed in the past. As for women writing, in the same way they have been obscured, unrepresented in the male literary canon, “compelled to resist or challenge the demands of the nationalist imperative in order to clarify the terms of their own oppression, and consequently disregarded on the basis that their concerns do not embrace the more significant issues of national determination” (172). Reizbaum echoes Eavan Boland, one of the finest Irish woman poets, who in 1987 corroborated her own words by affirming her awareness of her invisibility as a woman in a culture which did not see her:

A society, a nation, a literary tradition is always in danger of making up its communicable heritage from its visible elements. Women, as it happens, are not especially visible in Ireland. They are very indistinct indeed in its literary canon. Years ago I came to realize when I published a poem that what was seen of me, what drew approval, if it was forthcoming at all, was the poet. The woman, by and large, was invisible. It was an unsettling discovery. Yet I came to believe that invisibility as a



woman was a disguised grace. It had the power to draw me, I sensed, towards a greater invisibility, towards the suffering which lay below the surface of Irish history and out of reach of its tribalism. Marginality within a tradition, however painful, confers certain advantages, it allows the writer clear eyes and a quick critical sense.” (qtd. in Reizbaum 177-8)

In *The Trick is to keep Breathing*, Janice Galloway adheres to this call for subversion and radical change, for a construction of a new framework for Scottish writing, a space not of suppressed national identity, but a space where a different range of voices can be heard, a space that must move towards a feminine sensibility, with insight into the anti-patriarchal position of feminist women writers. However, representing the feminine in Scotland against the symbolic representation of the Church and the State is problematic as Cixous claims for “there is no place for your desire in our affairs of State [...] for us, men, who are made to succeed, to climb the social ladder, temptation that encourages us, drives us, and feeds our ambitions is good [...] You women, represent the eternal threat, the anti-culture for us” (67).

Galloway challenges tradition and makes Joy involve her story in history, as a new woman who is allowed to speak, the non-passive woman who is able to face the oppressor’s language. In *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), Judith Herman noted that the recovery of a woman’s body after a trauma can only succeed under certain circumstances: “The completed narrative must include a full and vivid description of the traumatic imagery. What they see, they hear, they smell [...] the importance of bodily

sensations in the reconstruction of a complete memory” (177). Joy’s efforts to work through her memories, to liberate herself from bad dreams, pass inevitably for the articulation of the narrative of her own body, but by speaking her body, she must challenge assumptions that are deeply rooted within her family and those who surround it who are afraid of her insistence on speaking out loud.

Galloway puts Joy’s fragmented body into a subversive text, which works not only as a metaphor for Joy’s personal breakdown, but for the breakdown between Joy and her community, including the cultural values of those considered ‘normal’ who consider others ‘mentally ill,’ and consequently the latter are marginalised, excluded, and ‘black hole,’ with a feeling of belonging to nowhere, and being excluded by everybody. Joy’s fragmented body is put into a text which, according to Glenda Norquay resists “typographical and syntactical convention, trailing words across the page, allowing phrases to slip off it at times of crisis, panic, sexual attack, but they are novels written against the grand narratives and mastering discourses which shape us” (135). In defying the symbolic structures of power which surround and choke her, Joy metaphorically comes back to life from a history of exclusion which is inscribed in her body, and which now suffers when she tries to articulate her own reality, as Cixous states in her essay “Coming to Writing” included in the volume *Coming to Writing and Other Essays* (1991):

Life becomes text starting out from the body [...] History, love, violence, time, work, desire inscribe it in my body, I go where the “fundamental language” is spoken, the body language into which all the

tongues of things, acts, and beings translate themselves, in my own breast, the whole of reality worked upon in my flesh, intercepted by my nerves, by my senses, by the labor of all my cells, projected, analysed, recomposed into a book. (52-3)

One of the particular characteristics which makes *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* a post-modern novel, as in the case of Alasdair Gray's *1982 Janine*, lies in the way the text itself is presented which parallels the disturbed psychological state of the protagonist. This kind of narrative has been called metafiction by many contemporary critics such as Patricia Waugh, who defines the term as "writing which consistently displays its unconventionality, which explicitly and overtly lays bare its condition of artifice, and which thereby explores the problematic relationship between life and fiction" (4). In *Surfiction. Fiction Now and Tomorrow* (1975), Raymond Federman puts it this way:

While pretending to be telling the story of his life, or the story of any life, the fiction writer can at the same time tell the story of the story he is telling, the story of the language he is manipulating, the story of the methods he is using, the story of the pencil or the typewriter he is using to write the story, the story of the fiction he is inventing, and even the story of the anguish (or joy, or disgust, or exhilaration) he is feeling while telling his story. (12)

Beat Witschi has examined Alasdair Gray's most well-known literary works in

post-modern terms, showing how he envisages the old myths and incorporates them into a new vision of a post-industrial Scotland in crisis. To this end, he argues, Gray re-envisions the Scottish literary situation in political terms, where the personal becomes the political: “The element of crisis is therefore very prominent in Gray’s work [...] or if we translate this onto a more personal level we observe a crisis as a process at the end of which lies physical and /or mental breakdown” (211). Gray uses new literary devices which express the fragmentation of an individual and which clearly represent the new values of a modern Scotland, in which “the Scottish experience of fragmentation - which can perhaps be defined as the ‘absence of the centre.’ That is the loss of the old values of what ‘Scottishness’ means and stands for, thereby also defining the significance of such phenomena as Glaswegian working-class machoism” (210). Like Gray, Galloway undermines the traditional models of Scottish writing, providing a text which expresses the dislocation of Joy’s life, and which describes the tensions and fractures in her life. The text is disrupted, as is Joy’s life:

I have to concentrate. One finger at a time, releasing pressure and rebalancing in the chair to accommodate the tilting, adjusting, redistributing pieces of myself. Hands are bastards: so many separate pieces. The muscles in the thighs tightening as the feet push down and the stomach clenching to take the weight then I am out the chair, shaky but upright. My knees ache. I move, ignoring the carpet as it tries to nudge through the soles. (8)

At the same time, the fragmented text/body embodies the vision of Scotland

itself, as has been argued by Cairns Craig, who in *The Modern Scottish Novel* examines how experimental narrative subverts the traditional modes of writing by including elements belonging to the spoken language of the Scottish characters in contrast to earlier patterns which expressed a more English narrative, and he refers to Grassic Gibbon's "Scotticising of the English narrative" (167), implying that:

The oral works as an alternative to the limited fixities of type and attempt to represent the flexible and unique forms of the individual voice. The visual effect of the novels in which dialect plays a crucial role - the *texture* of the page - is very different from those written in standard language: typography ceases to be the neutral medium through which meaning is conveyed and becomes itself one of the key components of meaning [...] typography itself becomes the medium of creation in place. Instead of language being a mimesis of the world it becomes an imitation of the forms of language itself, in reflection of and in resistance to the condition of a country and a culture where the written language has been the medium through which the native voice of the people has been repressed. (168-9)<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> In *Grassic Gibbon's Sunset Song*, Douglas Young describes Grassic Gibbon's linguistic style as "the creation of a distinctive spoken style which gives authenticity to the speakers and what they are saying to us and which, therefore, makes the novel seem so real" (23). Young explains that Gibbon used this distinctive language first to attract more readers, and secondly because much of his beloved dialect was lost. Therefore he thought of a local language for their characters which represented the language that recalled the language he had used as a child. In the preface to *Sunset Song*, Grassic Gibbon justifies why he used this distinctive style and makes a comparison between the Scots and the English on the one hand and the Dutch and German on the other: "If the great Dutch language disappeared from literary usage and a Dutchman wrote in German a story of the Lekside peasants, one may hazard he would ask and receive a certain latitude and forbearance in his usage of German. He might import into his pages some score or so

Craig also alludes to George Friel's *Mr. Alfred, M.A* (1972), in which the language of a Scottish teacher of English confronts the language of the English people, or what Craig calls the relations between the word - the English language, - and the world - the Scottish tongue -. He also cites Muriel Spark's *The Comforters* (1957), and especially her better-known novel *The Ballad of Peckam Rye* (1960) which, he states, "plays with type precisely to defy the limitation of the world to a series of one-dimensional types for which it is impossible to say there was another world than this" (179). From a more modern viewpoint, Cairns cites the works of "visual artists" (179) such as Edwin Morgan, Hamilton Finlay and Tom Leonard, who in a more contemporary style combine the printed word with visual and sculptural art and "translate the textual into the natural as a correspondence with the ways in which the natural is itself transformed into art in the garden" (180). The three artists use alternatives of meaning which challenge the standardised forms of expression, and in particular the verse of Tom Leonard establishes a complex relationship between the oral and the textual form.

Joy's narrated recovery from her pain depends on her being able to express her sense of fragmentation and shock, and the psychologists fail to understand her, so her emotions challenge the established authorial boundaries and become the subjects of "treatment": "You can tell me anything you like. I assure you it goes no further and I've heard it all before" (23), Galloway writes ironically. Joy's behaviour deviates from the

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untranslatable words and idioms – untranslatable except in their context and setting; he might mould in some fashion his German to the rhythms and cadence of the kindred speech that his peasants speak. Beyond that, in fairness to his hosts, he hardly could go: to seek effect by a spray of apostrophes would be both impertinence and mis-translation. The courtesy that the hypothetical Dutchman might receive from German a Scot may invoke from the great English tongue. (xiii). Edinburgh: Canongate, 1988.

norm and she is diagnosed as ‘mentally ill,’ but her alleged mental illness provides her with a commentary that deconstructs the doctor, the mental institutions and the psychological and social norms they represent. Galloway challenges the male psychiatric establishment, with its sharp line between the sane and the insane, and its rigid categorizing of types of insanity.

Joy’s painful existence is considered mad by the rest of the world. Her painful existence means being immersed in a world of doctors, health visitors and psychiatrists who call into question her sanity, trying to correct her ‘illness’, her deviation, and thus intensify even more her disorientation. Her irreverence regarding the psychiatrists’ discourses of power is clearly stated when the doctors become an object of ridicule by changing light bulbs, which serves as an ironic comment on their treatment of patients as objects. Galloway uses irony here not only to challenge the authority of psychiatry, to escape the language of dominant discourse, and her insecurity concerning her own voice; she attempts to undermine this social structure which is the Law, parodying the conversations between Joy and her health visitors.

Galloway disrupts conventional narrative, doing what Cixous claims in “The Laugh of the Medusa”: “Writers must wreck partitions, classes and rhetorics, regulations and codes [...] take pleasure un jumbling the order of space, in disorienting it, in changing around the furniture, dislocating things and values, breaking them all up, emptying structures, and turning propriety upside down” (256). This deconstructive strategy has been discussed by Carolyn Masel in “Melting moments: The Emphatic Self in *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*” included in *Exchanges*, a collection of essays on the

work of Galloway published by *The Edinburgh Review* in 2004, in which she defines the dialogues with the health visitors as “Kafka-eske [...] a farce that does not efface the pain their incompetence causes [...] perhaps more Beckett than Kafka” (36), hence the doctors’ inability to release Joy’s suffering:

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 wanting 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)

Underlying Galloway’s assumptions of finding a voice for Joy lies the contemporary debate concerning the silence and repression which isolate women writers over time, and about the extent to which women should reclaim a language of their own, an expression of their own. Irony as a weapon used to parody the symbolic structures of power has been revisited by post-modern feminist critics such as Linda Hutcheon and Patricia Waugh. In “The Power of Postmodern Irony” (1992), Canadian feminist literary critic Linda Hutcheon states that irony is a deconstructive way of challenging repressive ideologies and established conventions which are supposed to be universal, and one of



the common means of such contesting is, according to her, “intertextuality in general, and parody in particular” (108). With strong links to French feminism, in her political manifesto *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth Century Art Forms* (1985), Hutcheon explains that parody is a new form developed out of the old without really destroying it, and in which women’s writing plays a crucial position in the challenging of this function. Through parody, she writes, women place themselves and define themselves against a dominant culture or discourse which threatens to negate them, and in doing so, they create all forms of texts which are potentially revolutionary, at the same time as they acknowledge the power of the male establishment they parody:

One way to do that, a way with great subversive potential, is to speak the language of the dominant (which allows you to be heard), but then to subvert it through ironic strategies of exaggeration, understatement, or literalization. Parody is the mode that allows you to mimic that speech, but to do so through re-contextualizing it and therefore without subscribing to its implied ideals and values. Women writers (witness Jane Austen) have known of this transgressive power of parody for a long time. (34)

The treatment of irony which Galloway employs to challenge the authority of the Church works as a weapon against the authority exerted by the minister at the funeral of her partner Michael. At Michael’s memorial service the Reverend Dogsbodys’ words written in capital letters break the linearity of the unnumbered page in which Joy mimes the gestures the minister performs. Joy feels not just left alone, but

also excluded from everybody's, including Michael's life. The page number is deleted, as is Joy from Michael's, life. The power of the authority exerted by the minister at her lover's funeral silences her, so the page is silenced. She becomes the "stain" of the community that needs to be "wiped out":

ESPECIALLY OUR LOVE

TO HIS WIFE AND FAMILY( ).

Half way into the silence for Norma Fisher, my arms were weightless.

The rest came piecemeal as the moral started to compute.

1. The Rev Dogsboddy has chosen this service to perform a miracle.
2. He's run time backwards, cleansed, absolved and got rid of the ground-in stain.
3. And the stain was me.

I didn't exist. The miracle had wiped me out. (79)

The fact that Joy blames the minister for not protecting her from the repressive attitude of those who surround her can be understood as challenging the hegemonic role that the Protestant Church has played in Scotland, which historically enforced the traditional roles in the family and dictated what they should think. In *Religion and Society in Scotland Since 1707* (1997), Callum G. Brown explains that piety and femininity were female qualities required of women by the Church, which therefore encouraged them to become good wives and mothers, and to express their femininity by behaving according to Church principles. Brown, for example, quotes from different articles: "Women were the moral heart of the family, battling with dissipated and

drunken husbands.” He adds that:

The all-engrossing occupations of a wife and a mother seemed to absorb her whole being; - only one theme occupied her, - the training of her children; [...] the midnight hours, which she passed in watching and labouring for him and his children, were spent by her husband in scenes of folly and of vice [...] Men became resistant to Calvinism because it denigrated human abilities and the worth of their own efforts in improving their status.” (197)

In her article “Janice Galloway’s Newly Gendered Vision,” Cristie Leigh March argues that “Joy’s house provides an additional threat, rather than a refuge [...] The cooking and sewing, small domestic chores, dysfunction as healing activities, reminding her that she is a housewife going to waste because she no longer acts within a domestic partnership” (115). Joy pretends to be an exemplary woman according to the established norm, but this apparently spotless domestic landscape which she creates is nothing but the surface of a shattered reality which hurts her instead of healing her. At home, Joy feels guilty because she has not fulfilled the feminine domestic expectations that her mother had for her, and she cleans “till my hands are swollen from cold water, red as ham” (18). She agonises with the efforts of a dutiful housewife, struggling to put chaos into order, and to demonstrate she is a sane, “proper” woman, capable of fulfilling the role of the organised, welcoming housewife who sets the table ceremoniously when the health visitor comes to visit her. Although she does her best her to accomplish her duties at home, the house damages her, causing “needless punctured pincushions into

my finger ends and left little scratches on my wrists alongside the bruises from shifting furniture, sears from the oven and tears in my nails from cleaning.” The domestic space reveals a decay and instability that reflects Joy’s own shattered body: “The cleaning is just a sham”, she tells us, “superficially everything looks fine but underneath is another story” (38).

The ‘story’ Joy refers to is her rejection of what the domestic space means to her. HOME SWEET HOME (216), as she sarcastically calls it, becomes a nightmare. Her house is infected by the infectious process of putrefaction, where fungi work as a metaphor for repressive authority which menaces by penetrating the concrete and frustrating her happiness with a married man. When she finally talks to “Dr One” in tears she makes a dramatic account of her state:

I’m starting to hate things. I hate where I work. I see small things about too many small people and it makes me bitter. I don’t want to be bitter. Bitterness hurts. I’m lonely. I’m afraid I’ll go sour and nobody will love me any more. Something about me kills people. I’m losing days and drinking too much. I’m not a proper woman. I no longer menstruate. Sometimes I think I don’t exist. (unnumbered page )

In parodying and challenging the language and the stories, Joy is challenging the LAW, the authority that is exerted upon her. The minister, as well as psychiatrists, are mocked, altered and called into question as means of authority. The ironically named Dr. One and Dr. Two, Joy’s psychiatrists, represent the power of hegemonic culture to

label, to categorize, and therefore silence those who do not conform to preconceived standards of normality. The central irony here is that her pain, her freedom to say out loud what she feels, and to be heard, is silenced<sup>40</sup>.

The discourse Galloway uses to convey Joy's railing against the health authorities corresponds to how mental services are organised, and how psychoanalytical theories are employed. She is an excellent *connoisseuse* of mental health practices, thanks to the work she carried out in hospitals as a social worker, and in *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* she is critical of the fact that the talking therapies carried out with patients seem to be rather negative, instead of offering a context to talk seriously about what happens to Joy, thus criticising the organization of mental health practices in hospitals. In this light, in an article entitled "Women and Mental Health" published in

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<sup>40</sup> It is worth reporting here part of the speech given by A.L. Kennedy at the Internationaler Eifel-Literatur Preis (8 June 2008), where she argues about the need to listen to the language that non-normal groups have to say, as words make the language the world: "When I first began learning how to be a writer - and I would emphasise that I am simply continuing to learn now and hope that I always will be learning - when I first began, I was working in community arts. I would go into hospitals, schools, elderly care homes, rehabilitation centres, people's houses - all kinds of settings where people my society regards as being not normal, less-than-normal, less-than-useful are kept out of the way. And we would find out together what these groups and individuals wanted to say, how they wanted to say it - and in the course of this exploration we would uncover more about who we were and who we could be and what we could achieve. During this time, it was made very clear to me that the central story we tell of ourselves and to ourselves and to others is a very large part of who we are and who we become. When we take control of that story, when we take control of our words, we become stronger, more flexible, more confident, more focussed, we become more successful at being ourselves. Over a number of years, I saw people who were the weakest in my society use an art form which is regarded as high status to change how they were seen, change how institutions worked with them and to begin to reshape reality. I also, on many occasions, saw institutions unable to cope with articulate, positive and ambitious clients who had begun to enrich their own lives and who wanted more. I had daily proof that words hold our dreams, our prayers, our hopes, our loves, they rehearse who we would like to be and how we would like to be, they celebrate our ability to give joy to others and our ability to create for the sheer joy of that creation.

As you will know, the nature of reality is, in many ways, quite negative - we suffer pain and loss and then we die, we are in many ways, irreparably alone - nature is ruled by entropy, energy is lost, all things turn to cold and dust. Anything which is anything becomes nothing. But when we use words, we take nothing - ideas which leave no mark upon the mind which thinks them, chemical dye on wood pulp, the breath of our mouths - and we make an unlimited number of worlds, of realities. We move from nothing to something. By a simple, perhaps over-familiar, act of magic, we reverse the laws of time and space.

*The Feminist Review* in 2001, Liz Bondi and Erica Burman argue about the different psychoanalytical practices taken up by specialists in hospitals and health care centres. They state that especially after the emergence of the Second Wave Women’s Movement in Britain, feminists objected to some of these practices, and argued that in many cases therapists played the role of “rapists” when working with women, implying that therapies they used “entailed massive violations of women’s lives” (15).

This feminist position has provoked discussions amongst feminists, who have been divided over what kind of psychoanalysis must be the most convenient: those based on Lacanian theories, which emphasize the inevitable loss of the mother, linking her absence to the symbolic order of language, and in which language itself is seen as a source of subjectivity that is at once incoherent and problematic for women; and on the other hand the object-relations theory, which is based on the daughter’s enduring maternal attachment, and the subject position which result from this bond. Out of this controversy arose what Bondi and Burman call “a third force” within the domain of the “talking therapies”, alongside psychoanalysis and cognitive-behavioral approaches” (18). This perspective argues for a humanistic therapeutic practice which Bondi and Burman explain as follows:

The patient/doctor model is replaced by a client/practitioner relationship, the latter characterized by equality, respect and volition [...] the humanistic psychotherapy movement is also strongly associated with non-medical understandings of mental health and illness: its practitioners tend not to be medically trained; it predominates in settings in the

voluntary sector [...] And can also be seen at work in a shift away from the paternalism of classic Freudian female agency, whether in the sense of new forms of political agency espoused by feminism, or in the democratizing of agency envisioned by the humanistic psychotherapy movement, or in the emphasis accorded to maternal agency in object relations theory. (18)

As the novel progresses, Joy becomes aware that she is not mad, but merely desperate to go beyond the limits of the “straight jacket” of her life (225). Her desire to “learn to submit to terrifying chaos and not revert” (223) proves that she is challenging the fixed diagnoses of the moral authority that have marked the boundaries in her life, and she is now aware that she “must look alive to the changes that are surely on the horizon [...] not all them pleasant but all challenging” (222). Having always been constrained by the predetermined, unalterable, hegemonic culture, she now knows that it is in her power to revise her own story, to reconcile it with her own suffering, because “the voice is still there” (235).

I can clean the worst of the visible damage, strip and wash the walls,  
open the doors to let winter air refresh.

I can leave all the windows open as well: there’s nothing anyone would  
come in and steal. I can paint the window frames white again, lift the  
carpet tiles in the hall with a scarf over my nose and mouth. I’ll make  
lists. Things that need to be done for the week or so. The week after that.  
After that.

Tomorrow. (234)

By giving Joy a voice, Galloway is opening the way to new conscious and revolutionary ways to drawback the curtains of the patriarchally-minded Scotland. She suggests that the dominance of patriarchy in Scotland is dependent on a male culture that can only be supported by perpetuation of ideas surrounding the tradition of the possession of women and their bodies. Joy embodies the marginalised women who have been dispossessed of their bodies, their language and their voice and highlights the fact that they have no place but she is now 'a newly born woman', who dispossessed from patriarchal repressions, engages with a political cause which frees her from the boundaries of the national home, and wide awake, finds the way open to new spaces and voices which welcome the arrival of the unknown, where she is able to speak and experience life from a different perspective.



#### 4.4- CLARA

It took longer than she would have imagined. But it was done. A trio entire. Her first piece of chamber music, the music Robert had always said was the mark of a finished composer. This time, the composer was herself (*Clara* 297).

By writing her fourth novel *Clara* (2002), Janice Galloway shifts her attention away from the working-class Scottish setting, as she says in the interview with Cristie Leigh March for *The Edinburgh Review* (1999): “I was starting to feel a bit stranded with The Scottishness. *It doesn’t matter what I write it’s going to be urban and gritty isn’t it?* To hell with that. This is not urban. A bit gritty but not in the ... um ... expected way,” (98 Galloway’s own emphasis). From her words, Galloway seemed to wish to fly away from the “Scottishness” in her novels and short stories and involve herself in what seems to be the root of her desire for writing, a desire to explore universal truths and give a voice to women whose creativity has been ignored and therefore they have remained lost in history.

In interviews, Galloway frequently mentions Tillie Olsen’s *Silences* (1965), one of the books which best illustrates and explores the problem of the silences in the creativity of talented women writers who stopped writing due to their own experiences as women and bearers of life. These “unnatural silences”, as Olsen herself puts it in her book, were always on the side of mostly silent women “who are traditionally trained to place other’s needs first, to feel these needs as their own; their sphere, their satisfaction to be in making it possible for others to use their abilities” (17). Part of the attraction in

writing *Clara* was the desire to let her female protagonists speak, to unveil what lies behind the male assumption that what they say is true, which places women and what they do in a secondary position, as she points out in the interview with March: “A go at reconstructing structures [...] simply for a woman to be a woman [...] not falling into the conventions of assuming guy stuff is ‘real’ stuff” (86) and or, as she more explicitly tells Linda Jackson in *Exchanges* (2004):

People who are constrained from telling their own story for one reason or another. Or who say it and no one listens. I am interested in what silences people, what frees people from silence [...] I am interested in watchers, and in women and children and servants and seamstresses and the last desk place right at the back of the second - violins - the generally unrecorded voices in all sorts of histories. Clara’s story is full of resonances that would appeal to me on that score alone. (167)

*Clara* won the Saltire Scottish Book of the Year Award in 2002. In that same year, soon after the publication of the novel, journalist Alfred Hickling highlighted in *The Guardian* that: “Galloway makes clear that the misery of being Friedrich Wieck’s daughter was matched only by the misery of becoming Robert Schumann’s wife. What emerges is a work more imaginative than biography, yet more authoritative than crude speculation.” In fact, Galloway’s purpose was not to write a romantic novel about a conventional woman who lived (1819-1896) in the Romantic period, and what shocked her most about the life of Clara Schumann was her actual life story, the effort to keep the psychological balance between on the one hand being a good daughter, wife and

mother, and keeping working and creating on the other. This was Clara's main struggle and a constant in her life. But first and foremost she had to demonstrate that she was the dutiful 'Angel in the House,' the Victorian woman who always chose to comfort and support others rather than herself. However, Galloway told Linda Richards in *January Magazine*:

She was never regarded as feminine in her time [...] I think Clara was regarded as quite aggressive. It is extraordinary, when you go to Germany today you still find people who either love her and think she was a saint, or people who say: bitch, dreadful woman! And that thing is still there: she was aggressive. She muscled in on his creativity.

The fact that Clara has been labelled as a bitch in a world of male composers in the nineteenth century encouraged Galloway to research the topic for six years until finally *Clara* was published by Jonathan Cape in 2002. The intensive work Galloway involved in writing *Clara* came from Galloway's immense love of music, a subject which has pervaded her life and works since her school years, when her secondary school head teacher was Ken Hetherington, to whom she dedicates the novel, and who replaced all her repressions and fears through his good understanding and tolerance, encouraged her to compose and perform. More importantly, *Clara* is closely associated with the affinity between music and her writing, and she stresses that not only the words themselves, but the silences, encourage the reader to listen to the text, as she told Linda Jackson in *Exchanges*:

The music of language, of how the words bounce and resonate as sentences, lists, broken lines... If I can't HEAR (her emphasis) the words as they go onto the page, I can't seem to keep writing them down. I lose them [...] In stories where no voice is dominant, or where no characters appear (I do have some!) the bounce and rhythm of the words becomes even more important. I wouldn't divide that enthusiasm and motivation from prose, though there's a lot of suggestion it's "poetic". Not with me. That's how prose works for me. (170)

Galloway's fascination with the rhythm, the musicality of the words in the text concurs with the message of Hélène Cixous when she talks about feminine language, and the affinity between writing and music, an essential bond which makes a text "poetic," as Cixous explains in Blyth and Sellers' *Hélène Cixous. Live Theory* (2004), in which she talks about the important role of music in her writing and how "everything I write has a kind of rhythm, a scansion which is very heterogeneous, sometimes with silences, sometimes with long measures of writing, sometimes, on the contrary, with very short ones [...] And this, I know, is a kind of voice that can be in women with a strictly musical voice" (100-1).

Galloway writes the novel by opening the door to Clara's unconscious, creating a work full of lyricism which stems from Clara's repressed feelings, the musicality of her unconscious, of the unsayable words, her silences. This is the *jouissance*, the pleasurable feeling that Galloway reveals, senses and that she experiments with when she writes beyond the hardship which life had imposed on Clara Schumann. It is in this

mystic search for the love of the mother and not the father that Galloway finds the pleasure required to write the novel, a rewriting of Clara's genesis. Galloway cries out, breaks through walls and searches for open doors to make visible Clara's own history to give voice to her life experience, and follows what Cixous suggests in "Sorties" that "the articulation of women's bodies must be interpreted in relation to the social contexts in which they occur, through the language which describes their experiences, a language which has been stolen by of the Law of the Father" (69). Thus, the articulation of Clara's body, her life and work experiences, passes inevitably for the articulation of her silences, everything that she felt but that was kept secret, in a world in which everything was dictated by her father, as Galloway explains in a conversation recorded by *The Scottish Review of Books*:

Clara was taught to self-conceal early by her father. He trained her to use a "for posterity" written style that gives almost nothing deeply personal away save stock responses. On her death Clara left a lot of writing but she assiduously avoided letting the reader into what she was thinking except between the lines, almost by accident. I had to read as much as I could and begin constructing a plausible psychology from those white spaces between, from decoding her behaviour as recorded by others as well as by herself, from listening to her favourite music and from her actions. Clara had to be a novel. There was no way I could say what I wanted to in a straight biography, even if I wanted to write one. My territory is psychology: giving her away unawares i.e. allowing her

actions to imply her motivation and feeling, had to be embedded in the telling. (8)

Galloway enters the unconscious of Clara by using the third person interior monologue in order to lyrically relate her sensations and feelings from the age of four when she is still unable to speak, but her memories remain vivid in her mind: “Father raising his inventions to the sky. Mother, in another place entirely, singing” (13). She awakens to a world where her father is the master who teaches, the “I” who instructs morally, while “what her mother thought he never asked. The Lord gave and the Lord took away and why was not a question [...] Marianne was full of blessing including a body that healed quickly, a mind that soaked up notes like a blotter and the capacity to perform well” (23).

Galloway intensifies the experience of Friedrich Wieck’s mastery over his daughter Clara, “this child chosen for greatness” (34), and places it in Freudian terms, an oedipal father-daughter relationship, as in the case of *Clara*, the social role of the mother is silenced, the father cuts the child from the mother’s body and forces her to enter his world, where she is submitted to his normative treatment, the norms under which he was taught and which he wishes to pass on to his only daughter:

God, Religion and Virtue vibrate together in response to the slightest touch when one is young. Spare no reasonable rod. To do so is to give in to easy sentimentalism that will later give cause for regret. A Child remembers little of Childhood, or how things begin, of the Necessary

coercive discipline of the new: they retain only the good effects which result. The Mind and the Tree bed best when young. And children forget. They forget. That may be borne in Mind. (35)

There is no place for Clara's mother from a very early age in this paternal world, because of this artificial father-daughter bond that her father has created for her. Friedrich appropriates Clara's mother's position since he feels capable of replacing her, when Clara is still unable to speak, and she awakens to the figure of her father, a self-taught pianist destined to be a professor of religion, who chose the name for her and "lusted for Clara irrespective of her sex [...] before he knew what she was, who she was, he knew what she would be: the greatest pianist he could fashion, his brightness, a star" (23). Friedrich was a traditional man who knew that God wanted him for the piano, and he taught while "war altered the landscape" (38), and his sense of omnipotence led him to consider that all that was around him belonged to him. He found Marianne, his would-be wife:

A French name. Something, call it romance for the sake or argument, seemed a viable option. She played, she sang, she looked decorative, she was eighteen. Eleven years younger than himself, a little headstrong, but possessed of excellent taste. She laughed at his jokes, and she was well connected, well trained. Her grandfather was a flautist, a composer: the name Tromlitz was *known*. (38-9)

Clara is taught to repress herself at an early stage by her father. He trains her in lessons which do not seem to her to be music lessons, but lessons of morality and obligation: "He was always watching, assessing, noting whether Clara behaved as he would wish. As her Best Self would wish" (43). In her memories, she is unable to distinguish her hand from that of her father, a man who in martial fashion plays his own music, "the same melodies over and over, designed for discipline [...] this is the start of everything: stubborn pursuit of self-defined perfection through tedious hours of the same, the same" (12). Next to her father's training, she hears a voice that surpasses everything, her mother's voice, a voice that soon disappears physically but pervades her memory forever. Her mother's voice is the sound of the music, the thing that she likes most is personified by her beloved mother:

Father.

Father taught. Father talked a lot in a noticeable voice. He instructed [...] Walks were not just walks, dear me no. They were A FUNCTION OF SOCIAL ORDER. EXERCISE IN FRESH AIR. Walks were lessons and discipline, sound preparation for a sound and godly life. And the walks were silent. (24)

While Clara studies, writes and plays incessantly under the close watch of her father, and almost never speaks, she tries to think about language, singing. "Mother. Tongue. The two words come easily together for her. She sees how they fit" (42-3). The memory of her mother evoked words of music and lyricism in her:



And Mother? Ah Mother.

Mother sang. Mother rocked her sometimes, rocked without her sometimes. Mother stayed at home with Mozart, swollen as a sow. Mother played. Mother played [...] she would recollect the fullness of her dress and the body beneath, a handing over of flowers, a suggestion of embrace. It spoke of something intimate, closeness at one time unremarkable. One embraced Mother, she was the shape she was [...] when Clara thought of her mother, she thought of singing, the anchors she once thought written notes made on the page, cloth. She thought of terrible fear and pity mixed. She thought of Woyzeck. (27)

From the moment of the divorce of her parents when Clara is only eight, Friedrich, feeling capable of replacing the departed Marianne, insensibly thinks that by isolating his daughter he will secure a social identity for her, imposing the only talented language he knows, the language that represents ‘The Law of the Father’ which speaks with the voice of mastery and authority. He not only tries to become the possessor of Clara’s education but also the possessor of her mind, becoming the owner of everything she does, while Clara remains silent and unheard entrapped in his domain, adopting the role of the servile daughter who reproduces in her diary what he dictates, because he has become the possessor of her dreams and desires:

Who better than her father/her teacher/her guiding light. Who should teach her to catalogue time, to name the dates and how to spend them, that her time is not now, not ever, her own? Who should teach her that

impressions are not enough, but names, places, facts must be detailed enough to look back upon, reuse when needed for verification, classification, durable proof? Who does she belong to, after all? Whom? My diary. His own hand. *Mine* [...] His daughter is *I*, he is *father*. (61)

The fact that Clara's mother is silenced, made 'invisible', separated by her father from her upbringing, necessarily raises questions about the patriarchal authority that her father executes on her: "He sees and knows everything. Since this a history [...] she doesn't feel what he can't conceive of; his priorities, her hopes and fears are the same thing. Whatever he writes, he has no doubt she'll take it on trust, and should she? After he's gone - by which he means dead - people will cite him as her voice (61). Clara's mother is away, and with her the world of feelings, of emotions. In her father's domain, Clara is supposed to have abandoned her love for her mother and submitted to the martial love of her father whose main desire is to occupy the position left by Clara's mother by imposing the only language he knows, the language which represents his authority. Incapable of negotiating directly with her father, and feeling hopeless about the future he has designed for her, she writes many more words than she speaks. She is only allowed to scribble notes to unimportant friends, her diary entitled *Diaries are Posterity's*, which is to say an "Authorised Version, and this, without saying, is the authority that applies [...] Between the ages of seven and thirteen, the ages beloved of Jesuits, he's there is the flesh" (62).

This is a time when Clara misses important things a mother can give to a daughter. Clara needs more than ever the emotional intensity of a mother's love, the

protection that only a mother can provide, the repairing vitamins to nurture the entire self she has had to give to her father. Incapable of negotiating directly with her father, Clara remains speechless, coping with the contradictions of what she feels and what she is expected to feel, and writes letters to her mother in which she tells her about her progress in her music lessons and expresses her desire that they will see each other soon “and then I will play a great many pieces with four Hands with you” (63).

In this father-daughter story, Friedrich has not only the right to submit his daughter to isolation, to submit her to his dominant dictations, amendments, authority, but also to choose for her a man who will supersede him in his own image, who is his heir who will maintain the same tradition, authority and omnipotence over her, and who will become like him. He realises that his daughter is susceptible of being distracted by real conversations, when one of his young students, Robert Schumann, falls in love with Clara. She is only twelve years old but she feels that “Herr Schumann was not like her father. Herr Schumann was frothy and talkative. He was writing a novel, an opera, a play, then he was always writing something,” and above all he liked poetry, and read her single lines:

*Gottwald was blue-eyed and soft; Vult was a black haired, black-eyed villain.*

*Sunburned maidens with white teeth shaded their eyes with sickles that they might look undazzled upon the flute-playing students.*

*The flowers and the dead lie buried together.*

*I have a secret*, he whispered, leaning so close her ear burned. *I am so sensitive that sometimes even music disgusts me*, and Clara believed every word the lodger said. (84-5, Galloway's own emphasis)

Friedrich's blindness stops him realizing that his daughter is thirsty for pleasant conversations, conversations full of love and life. He, however, considers that Robert's poetry has "hints of despair, melodramatic threats, hypochondria" (85) and that he probably could not provide his daughter with the future he had planned for her: "Schumann hadn't enough manliness for that" (85), he argues. For a man like him, heir to a tradition which maintains the masculine in opposition to the feminine character, the man who supersedes him must be a man who is able to compete with him in manliness and authority, and who is able to desire and possess her in the way he does.

But Clara searches for a relationship with the external world, outside the world her father has designed for her, using a language which does not speak from submission, but from the poetic proximity of Schumann's words; Schumann reads incessantly, writes poetry, and studies Beethoven, Goethe, Bach, Herder and Wenzel, "and enough Shakespeare to cause indigestion" (86), and she thinks he will bring a new voice which challenges her father's language and will offer her the possibility of being transformed into a new woman. With him, Clara devoutly fulfilled her role of Angel in the House: she was mother of seven children and a devoted wife, but her relationship with Schumann constantly created in her contradictions between the woman and devoted wife who deeply loved her husband, and the woman whose love for her husband meant for her "Self-denial. The greatest Duty"(391), a self-denial that

prevented her from developing her artistic creativity.

Although they worked together, Clara was recognized in the world of musical creation as a great composer in her own right, but she was aware of the painful and frustrating invisibility that accompanied the need to feed an important figurehead such as Robert Schumann. However, as also happened to Willa Muir, Clara and Robert Schumann were able to find True Love, an unbounded love for the other, the feminine space that allowed them to share the poetic space of musical creation: “Love until death was something she had already. It attached to the words *my husband*, no one else. And it never would. That was the meaning of love until death” (405). When Schumann was hospitalized due to his incurable disease, Clara understood that it was time to get out of her invisibility, to become a true professional in the eyes of the world and stop hiding in her role of angel in the House. She understood that “the need to earn was a blessing, not a burden; it was a purpose, a meaning, the exercise of skill” (416).

When Schumann died, Galloway offers comfort to Clara: her pain is exchanged for joy because at that moment the whole universe begins for her, a world that opens doors and windows not only to all the world, but to herself. Clara is now a woman, a person, a body that looks out of the window in the hope of finding a new voice that opens up the world of life and music, and awakens new sensations in her: “It is six o’clock, a summer evening. She unlatches the hospital window and throws it wide. The sound of birdsong from the garden rises and fills the sky blue. It is pretty, she realises, almost with shock, this view beyond the shutters.” (423)

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The study that I have carried out has followed the objectives proposed in the introduction. Firstly, I have provided an overview of the social and literary context in which Willa Muir, Jessie Kesson and Janice Galloway wrote, referring to other writers or literary movements that were relevant and influential, and I have also considered some existing academic criticism of their work. Secondly, I have analysed how the three writers reacted openly against a patriarchal system where they felt they did not belong, and how in turn they were born to their own ‘renaissance,’ to a new writing that used Cixous’s feminine language in order to give voice to their female protagonists.

The work of Willa Muir, Jessie Kesson and Janice Galloway female stems from that territory Cixous describes as a challenge against the established power systems in the different social contexts in which they lived, and their need to transgress the life that oppresses them, in the deeply patriarchal society in twentieth-century Scotland. These writers have chosen the path of writing primarily as a political act of visibility and transgression against the male power which has made the role of women lopsided in the western philosophical discourse, and these three writers insist that it is essential for a woman writer to be heard, in consonance with Cixous words in “Sorties”: “It is in writing, from toward woman and woman, and in accepting the challenge of the discourse controlled by the phallus, that woman will affirm woman somewhere other than silence, the place reserved for her in and through the Symbolic” (93).

Therefore, through a semi-autobiographical act of writing which should prevail

and resonate with female language, Willa Muir, Janice Galloway and Jessie Kesson identify the oppressive and repressive structures that organize the lives of their heroines, with the aim of de-constructing them and providing space for a new voice emerging from the search for the Other that the male power, the patriarchal law, the 'Law of the Father' has colonized and repressed; as we have seen in the personal struggle of the heroines of this thesis, in order to carry out the process of bringing a new voice to life, the release of repression, they must excavate their unconscious, their lost bodies, which sometimes became an emotional suffocating hell full of contradictions between the Self created by the language imposed by the patriarchal system and the Other which has been repressed. It is through this struggle, this dialectic through writing, that Willa Muir, Janice Galloway and Jessie Kesson awaken, give life to their heroines while creating a new language that articulates their experiences and repression, and which echoes the musicality of the words of a mythical past which took place before their repression - before they entered the language of the 'Law of the Father'- which speaks with the music and the sound of the words of the repressed bond between them and their mothers.

The two novels and two essays of Willa Muir which I have chosen to study for this thesis were written during the so-called Scottish Renaissance, a political and cultural movement which was at its height in the period between the First and Second World War which, as I have explained in the first part of the introduction to the thesis, aimed to break with the vision of the last two decades of the nineteenth century in which the literary themes offered an unreal and idealized vision of Scotland, a period

which they called the Kailyard tradition. The poets and novelists of the Scottish Renaissance dreamt of the mythical and primitive origin of the Land before the land reform that took place after the First World War, by which many workers in all sectors of the Highlands of Scotland were forced to leave their homelands and move to urban areas of southern Scotland, and at other times to other British cities or to other continents. This fact, together with a nationalistic vindication of Scotland freed from English constraints, led them to mourn for an idealized 'Golden Age' in which they felt full identification with the land of their birth. Hence one of their main objectives was to restore life to the myths, and the exaltation of the Self in full communion with the earth and nature, a theme that was celebrated in an extraordinary way in the novel by Neil Gunn *Highland River* (1937), in which his young protagonist finds himself in a spiritual and poetic journey through the Highland river to return to his childhood, and which was questioned in Grassie Gibbon's trilogy *A Scots Quair* (1932-4). This trilogy is a hallmark in the Scottish Renaissance due to its exploration of the tensions and contradictions between the old communities and the new world through the voice of Chris Guthrie, the female protagonist, who struggles to find a place in a rural community which does not offer shelter to her, and which imposes a patriarchal Self on her while she tries to find a balance between an active, cultivated, modern Chris, and the passive role that the community expects from her.

These contradictions and tensions between the Self which the patriarchal Scottish community imposed on women and their repressed Other are present in the work of Willa Muir, Jessie Kesson and Janice Galloway through their heroines. Willa



Muir's *Imagined Corners* (1931) speaks with a feminine voice of the search for this new voice for her heroine Elizabeth Shand in a Scottish community which offers no emotional shelter as they are Presbyterians whose lives are based on authoritarian principles that deny her true emotions, and who believe that "the body in itself is evil until we deliberately consecrate it to God" (110). The search for her true self inevitably involves dividing herself between the imposed religious principles of the community of Calderwick, and her desire to give way to her repressed emotions, to her body, trapped in her familial and the community's authority and will. Elizabeth challenges her fate, and finds fulfilment of her desires and repressed feelings in the caressing and musical voice of Elise Shand, her sister-in-law, with whom she flees Calderwick to a world that welcomes her to the poetic voice of her repressed feelings and desires.

The works of Willa Muir that I have examined in this study confirm Cixous's philosophy refuting the theory of binary oppositions in which the woman must remain passive in the male realm. Willa exhorts women to challenge the purely patriarchal system in which they live and which condemns women to adopt a passive, harmful and destructive role; the most representative example appears in her novel *Mrs Ritchie* (1933) through her heroine Annie Ritchie, a passive and pious woman who represses her passions and feelings to follow the will of the Law of the Father, the authoritarian principles of the Presbyterian Church, which leads herself and all her family to the great tragedy of self-destruction. Similarly, in "Women: An Inquiry" (1925), Willa denounces those women who follow and align themselves with the principles established by religion in Scotland, and does so through the figure of Mrs Grundy, a woman who

adopts the passive role of the ‘Angel in the House,’ the protective figure of her family, a figure called by Willa ‘the environment.’ Willa urges women not to look in the mirror of Mrs Grundy as she represents the authority of religion and passivity, and calls instead for a world full of creativity that is not dominated by male authority, as she is aware of the imposition of moral and rational knowledge that men have created for themselves: “The knowledge that it is one-sided, because men have for so long been dominant over women [...] In a masculine civilization the creative work of women may be belittled, misinterpreted, or denied”(2).

Jessie Kesson wrote the two novels that I have discussed in this thesis in the decades after the great heyday of the Scottish Renaissance. *The White Bird Passes* (1958) inherits the poetic world of Neil Gunn whom Kesson admired, and specifically its identification with the natural world and the land, and it portrays a heroine who is reborn to a spiritual and poetic self that comes from the memory of her mother’s voice before the established order separated her from her arms. It is this purely poetic work which best represents the philosophy of the first writings of Hélène Cixous, the suffocating search for the true Self in the Other - the pursuit of a repressed maternal world which Cixous described in *The Newly Born Woman*, a world which “sings from a time before the Law, before the symbolic took one’s breath away and reappropriated into language under its authority of separation. The deepest, the oldest, the loveliest visitation. Within each woman the first, nameless love is singing” (93). This poetic world in the novel in *The White Bird Passes* is represented by an intimate space in the memory of young Janie’s mother, whose voice echoes in her mind in words full of

musicality and life through sensations reminiscent of the company of her mother, and of the ballads she sang, full of musicality and life. However, no matter how pleasant these memories are, Janie dreams of a new voice, a means of escape, a way out into the external world which will welcome her with new feelings, and makes her feel liberated from her suffocating memories.

Kesson's *Another Time, Another Place* published nearly three decades later (1983) is perhaps the most feminist of Kesson's work, and follows the pattern of Willa's *Imagined Corners* or Gibbon's trilogy, in particular the first volume *Sunset Song* (1932), in portraying a newly married unnamed woman confined to living in a rural community that silences and relegates her to passivity, under the 'Stand Still Order.' The woman, like Willa's Elizabeth or Gibbon's Chris struggles with contradictory feelings she has on the one hand for her love of the land she inhabits, but on the other hand her profound isolation as a woman and her desire to escape to another time and another place, away from the community in which she lives. The arrival of a new voice, that of the Italian prisoners with whom she feels identified awakens in her a new voice which returns her to the words of musicality of her repressed Other, a body of repressed feelings, forced to live in the absence, in the emptiness that her non-name suggests, because she has lived in a body, a house which was not hers, but now she awakens to a world of sensations that brings her back to the poetic rhythms of nature, to a harmonious world that unites the Self with the Other that Cixous considers necessary to the rebirth of life and emotions.

After examining the work of the contemporary Janice Galloway that was

included in this research, I consider that the feminine language of Hélène Cixous resonates strongly in her work from late-twentieth century and early-twenty first century Scotland. In *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (1990) and in her short stories, Galloway writes desperately in search of a female voice in the contemporary urban setting of post-industrial Scotland in the late 1980s, feeling unable to survive because of the new cultural values that Scotland offers her and which make her aware of an absence. Of the three writers, it is Galloway who best expresses the hell which represents for her heroines the idea of loss, of not finding a soothing place to mourn in a community ruled by Calvinist principles which instead of providing them her with shelter, makes them her feel an absence, a blank space. In *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, her first novel, Galloway writes from what Cixous calls “Death” which accompanies the hellish struggle of the young protagonist in search of a new self, and in this search she first encounters chaos, incomprehension and the feeling of being nothing. It is this encounter with the Other, this process of separation from the unified self, where Galloway’s young protagonist has been forced to live, the common experience which she shares with Willa Muir and Jessie Kesson’s protagonists. They have had to confront what Cixous calls “Empire of the Selfsame,” the repressive power of a still-parochial Scotland which has subjugated women who, as Cixous says in “Sorties,” “have known the torture of beginning to speak aloud, heart beating as if to break, occasionally falling into loss of language, ground and language slipping out from under her, because for woman speaking - even just opening her mouth - in public is something rash, a transgression” (92).

Of Galloway's numerous short stories, I selected for study "Blood" and "Fair Ellen and the Wanderer Returned," included in *Blood* (1991), as they are clear examples of how Galloway employs the feminine language through the expression of the repressed women's bodies in a world subjected to the Lacanian language of the 'Law of the Father' which supports and perpetuates the language of male authority in contemporary Scotland. It is a language that reproduces old male discourses over women and a language which understands the mastery of men through pressure and violence against women. In "Fair Ellen and the Wanderer Returned," Galloway challenges this monolithic and repressive tradition of the "Empire of the Selfsame" and through the young protagonist Ellen, she dynamites the male discourse when after years of isolation waiting for a man, she wakes from sleep back to life with a new voice that challenges him, and it is precisely this new voice that Cixous claims for the newly born woman: "Voice: unfastening, fracas. Fire! She shoots, she shoots away. Break. From their bodies where they have been buried, shut up" (94).

The second of Galloway's novels that I have analysed, *Clara* (2003), transcends the Scottish boundaries and relates the life experience of Clara Schumann in a musical environment full of many silences, first with her authoritarian father and then with her husband Robert Schumann. In the life of Clara portrayed by Galloway, I have found the voice of the universal woman with the desire of her Other, the real emotions of the music she loved and the embraces of her mother which she remembered through the words of music and love. Clara was nowhere for many years, being first under the rule of her father who subjected her to his martial language which did not understand her

emotions, and then suffering loneliness in the company of her husband. Clara challenged her father first and then slowly she walked the path necessary for her encounter with the Other, the music, and the musical composition that she so much loved. The day her husband Robert Schumann dies, Galloway offers a new vision for Clara, a hope for a new voice that opens the world of music and poetry which awakens new sensations in her.

I can therefore conclude that this is the voice, the liberating encounter of the Self with the Other that Galloway, Willa Muir and Jessie Kesson propose for their heroines in different periods and social contexts of the twentieth-century Scotland. In the early years of the twentieth century, Willa Muir warned women of their own self-destruction if they aligned themselves with the power of the Self that came to them, which was imposed by the 'Law of the Father,' the authority represented by a Calvinist religion based on the coldness of rationality and of the value of human beings measured according to their productivity, and by a Church that regarded the world of emotions as profane, an evil that had to be repressed. In the late twentieth century, Galloway continues to denounce the pernicious effects of the power represented by the Church, and by extension the community, which continues to exercise repression in the unconscious of women in Scotland.

From this repression, the three writers offer their heroines a way out, a new voice which Cixous called 'sortie,' a new liberating voice in continuous negotiation between the Self and the Other, without ever leaving the feminine language, the caressing and liberating of the voice of the unrepresented mother which vibrates in

women's minds full of musically and love. In twenty-first century Scotland, this new woman's voice that emerges between the Self and the Other, a voice full of life and affirmation which can be understood as "smeddum," the Scottish term which the celebrated poet Douglas Dunn uses to describe the lyrical voice which emerges from Jessie Kesson's *The White Bird Passes*, "a voice full of energy and vitality which we can hear from the wings of that metaphorical bird as it departs" (Introduction to *The White Bird Passes*, 1987).

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## ANEXO: RESUMEN

El gran éxito que Janice Galloway ha cosechado desde que publicó su primera novela *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (1989) puede ser visto como parte de los logros conseguidos por una literatura escrita por mujeres en la Escocia del siglo XX que desean huir de y luchar contra las represoras estructuras patriarcales del sistema literario y social escocés. Mi investigación se centra en el trabajo de Willa Muir, Jessie Kesson y Janice Galloway, que escribieron en diferentes períodos de la Escocia del siglo XX: Willa Muir escribió durante el llamado Renacimiento Literario Escocés, que abarca el período entre la primera y la segunda guerra mundial; Jessie Kesson escribió durante el período que siguió a la segunda guerra mundial, con largos intervalos de tiempo entre sus novelas; y la contemporánea Janice Galloway, cuya creación literaria comenzó en la década de los ochenta y ha recientemente publicado la segunda parte de sus memorias tituladas *All Made Up* (2011), por las cuales fue premiada con el Scottish Book of the Year en 2012. Su último libro de relatos *Jellyfish* ha sido publicado el verano de 2015.

Esta tesis intenta construir puentes entre estas tres generaciones de mujeres bajo el marco teórico del feminismo francés, en particular en la teoría literaria de Hélène Cixous. Con la ayuda de la visión literaria de Hélène Cixous sobre el lenguaje femenino o *écriture feminine*, intentaré analizar como estas tres escritoras desafían y desestabilizan una tradición aceptada que responde a la filosofía occidental basada en la oposiciones binarias en la que la mujer es excluida de una sociedad dominada por un poder masculino que la considera como su “Otro.”



La finalidad de este trabajo de investigación es revisar el trabajo de estas escritoras desde un enfoque diferente que implica la escritura como una revisión, un término que tomo del artículo de Adrienne Rich “When We Dead Awaken. Writing as Re-vision,” incluido en su esclarecedora obra *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence. Selected Prose 1966-1978*(35). Para ello he considerado los siguientes objetivos:

1- Proporcionar una visión general de la posición de Willa Muir, Jessie Kesson y Janice Galloway dentro de su respectivos movimientos literarios.

2- Enfatizar el papel de estas escritoras dentro de una tradición patriarcal y mostrar como este hecho afecta en su escritura.

3- Analizar como estas mujeres rompen el silencio y transgreden las estructuras de poder patriarcales proporcionando a sus personajes femeninos una voz propia.

Con el propósito de llevar a cabo estos objetivos, he distribuido el presente estudio en cinco partes: Primeramente, una introducción en la que incluyo el corpus literario, la filosofía de Hélène Cixous y los debates post-estructuralistas y psicoanalíticos del feminismo francés, y finalmente una visión general del Renacimiento Escocés como movimiento político y cultural en la década de entreguerras y sus repercusiones en diferentes períodos del siglo veinte hasta la actualidad. En segundo lugar, he dividido el análisis de las novelas y ensayos de Willa Muir, Jessie Kesson y Janice Galloway en tres capítulos diferentes con la finalidad de proporcionar una voz diferenciada a cada una de las escritoras, teniendo en cuenta el contexto social y literario en el que vivieron y desarrollaron su actividad literaria. Para

ello he seleccionado algunas de las obras de cada escritora que considero mas transgresoras y por lo tanto representativas de la filosofía de Hélène Cixous y el lenguaje femenino. En la parte final de esta tesis intentaré llegar a conclusiones que nos permitan entender de que manera Willa Muir, Jessie Kesson y Janice Galloway han transgredido un sistema literario desigual para hombres y mujeres en Escocia del siglo XX, y como consiguen desestabilizar una tradición convencionalmente aceptada a través de un lenguaje nuevo que Hélène Cixous denomina *écriture féminine* o lenguaje femenino, un lenguaje que no es simple y fácil de entender, de teorizar o de definir sino que es un lenguaje complejo, plural, y que por tanto puede someterse a múltiples interpretaciones y puede incluir todo tipo de textos. Pero sobre todo el lenguaje femenino es un lenguaje que resuena en un territorio diferente del dominado y limitado por las teorías monolíticas del discurso masculino en el que mujer es excluida de una sociedad que la considera su 'Otro.'

## HÉLÈNE CIXOUS

El trabajo de Hélène Cixous abarca todo tipo de géneros tales como la poesía, la autobiografía, el teatro y la crítica, y ha sido estudiado y traducido por académicas de alto nivel como Sarah Cornwell, Toril Moi, Susan Sellers, Susan Suleiman o Verena Andermatt. Su niñez en Algeria y los efectos de la segunda guerra mundial y el colonialismo marcaron su experiencia vital, tal y como ella misma relata en "Sorties," uno de los artículos mas esclarecedores sobre su teoría literaria que aparece incluido en

*La Jeune Née*, traducido al inglés como *The Newly Born Woman* (1975), y que junto con “Le Rire de la Meduse” (“The Laugh of the Medusa”), publicado el mismo año, se ha convertido en uno de los artículos más aclamados sobre la teoría literaria del feminismo francés. Tanto el primero como el segundo son parte fundamental en el desarrollo de esta tesis ya que muestran de forma clara la vida y el trabajo de Hélène Cixous y marcan un precedente en el campo de la crítica feminista por su reclamación de una forma de escritura poética que expresa el deseo de la mujer por el cambio.

Desde una edad temprana, Cixous se rebeló en contra de la injusticia de la opresión y durante su carrera académica en Francia intimó con las teorías psicoanalíticas de Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida y Julia Kristeva, cuyos textos experimentales proponían revolucionar las estructuras socio-políticas del poder establecido. Como Jacques Lacan, Derrida desarrolló sus teorías del lenguaje a partir de las teorías del lingüista Ferdinand de Saussure cuya teoría establece que el significado es el resultado de la diferencia entre significantes. Derrida desarrolló esta teoría y acuñó el término *différence*, que significa que una frase no está totalmente representada por el significado de las palabras que la conforman. En su opinión, el lenguaje está también representado por otros significados que residen en la mente del escritor y que el lector debe descifrar. De ahí que el significado de una oración no se puede reducir a una sola lectura sino por el contrario debe ser de-construida y sometida a varias interpretaciones. Esta transgresora teoría revolucionó las teorías establecidas que implicaban que existía una sola verdad que imponía su propia ley a través de un lenguaje que los hombres habían tradicionalmente utilizado para imponer su poder sobre las mujeres. Derrida

definió esta teoría como 'logocéntrica' y Hélène Cixous la tradujo como 'el Imperio de lo Mismo' ('the Empire of the Selfsame').

Los textos de Cixous que utilizaré en el desarrollo de esta tesis forman parte de un debate político y cultural que ocurrió en Francia en la década de los sesenta y setenta durante las cuales publicó dos de sus manifiestos mas importantes citados anteriormente cuyo objetivo teórico era desenmarañar la ideología machista occidental que excluye a la mujer de todo movimiento político, social o cultural, y cuya teoría Cixous resume en "The Laugh of the Medusa": "Either woman is passive or she doesn't exist" (118). La solución para Cixous es transgredir esta teoría patriarcal que oprime y silencia a la mujer a través de un nuevo lenguaje que ella llama *écriture féminine*, o lenguaje femenino, que despierta a la mujer de la muerte y la devuelve a la vida para luego convertirse en una nueva mujer que es la fuente de vida y de energía transformando la pasividad en actividad a través de un acto político que es la escritura. Para ella, el lenguaje femenino es una voz que procede de su inconsciente, de algún lugar donde la unión entre ella y su madre ha sido reprimida por la cultura patriarcal pero que se transforma ahora en una unión llena de ritmo y musicalidad a través del lenguaje.

La contribución mas importante de Cixous al campo del psicoanálisis feminista es la concepción de que cuando la escritora escribe sobre ella misma, está dando un paso adelante tanto cultural como social de tal manera que su escritura se compromete con un debate político en el cual afirma su individualidad en un mundo dominado por los hombres. Cixous insiste en que es crucial para la mujer escribir sobre sus propias experiencias porque a través de ellas puede liberar su cuerpo. La voz que surge a través

de su escritura en su opinión procede de la relación reprimida con su madre y por tanto considera que es fundamental examinar la representación de la figura maternal en la escritura femenina porque cree que la madre permanece presente en el mente de su hija durante un largo tiempo y se hace visible a través del acto de la escritura. La unión entre la hija y su madre comienza en la primera etapa llamada pre-edipiana (pre-oedipal) así llamada en términos psicoanalíticos, en la cual existe una fuerte unión entre la hija y su madre, y que es anterior a la fase en la que el individuo pasa a formar parte de la ley impuesta por la figura paterna ( 'The Law of the Father'). Es por tanto el deseo de reencontrarse con la madre es el que manifiesta en el acto de la escritura y a través del cual la hija se reencuentra con su madre, y cuya voz se manifiesta a través de las palabras que la escritura emplea cuando escribe, liberada ya del lenguaje impuesto por la ley del padre, es decir, la escritura convencional masculina.

Es por tanto de crucial importancia para el desarrollo de esta tesis situar el trabajo de Hélène Cixous en la perspectiva lacaniana en lo que respecta a la separación del Yo. Esta teoría comienza con la visión de Lacan sobre la formación de la identidad, de la construcción del Yo, en la etapa que el llama 'el Estadio del Espejo' ('the Mirror Stage'), que comienza en la temprana infancia y que coincide con la etapa en la que la identidad del niño parte de su dependencia inicial con su madre, y despierta posteriormente al lenguaje, a la ley del padre. La etapa inicial- o etapa pre-edipiana- es un estado de inocencia y protección en el cual la madre complace los deseos del niño se refleja en la mirada de la madre.

Las psicoanalistas feministas han comprobado que esta etapa pre-edipiana es

fundamental para el desarrollo en el desarrollo femenino, y que tanto hombres como mujeres comienzan su vida unidos única y exclusivamente a sus madres. Sin embargo la transición de separación de su madre a una edad temprana - a finales de su tercer año de vida- cuando los niños pueden aun necesitar protección completa de sus madres, causa un trastorno en esta relación entre madre e hijo, una frustración que puede provocar en el niño una sensación de abandono y abandona su esperanza de reflejarse en ella. Esta desilusión ocurre porque según lo que Freud llama la teoría de la castración en el caso de las niñas cuando miran a sus hermanos y comprueban que ellos tienen pene, y el resultado de sentirse castradas las hace dirigir a atención hacia el padre, en entrar en lo que Freud denomina el complejo de Edipo. La niña renuncia a su amor por la madre y adquiere una sensación de que no posee un cuerpo suyo, y se abandona en los brazos de su padre, abandonando su cuerpo, su Yo, convirtiéndose en el Otro, o como Cixous lo define en "Sorties" "una alteridad que no encuentra asiento, que cae en el círculo dialéctico. Se convierte en el Otro en una relación organizada jerárquicamente en la cual el que gobierna, nombre y define es siempre el mismo y el Otro esta allí solamente para ser re-apropiado, recapturado y destruido como Otro (71).

La recuperación de la voz de la madre y la armoniosa relación entre el Yo y el Otro, el cuerpo de uno y sus emociones, de su inconsciente, que es el lugar donde reside el Yo y el Otro, requiere un lugar en que una mujer puede ser ella misma, para que pueda recuperar su cuerpo y luchar contra las imposiciones simbólicas de un sistema represivo que la hace sentirse como el Otro, la Nada en la historia, como Cixous de nuevo denuncia: "Yo, me revuelvo, con rabia, ¿Cual es mi lugar? ¿Cual es mi lugar

si soy una mujer? Miro atrás en el tiempo y no me veo en ningún lugar. Se que mis contendientes son masculinos y que su valía es limitada. Solo son importantes a los ojos de los propios hombres.” (75).

## WILLA MUIR

En “Notas sobre la Mujer y el Poder” (“Miscellaneous Notes on Women and Power” ) que se conservan en la biblioteca de la Universidad de St Andrews, Escocia, Willa Muir escribe: “Nací una mujer, un término que significa abuso, ¿por que? Algunos sistemas de valores no me valoran. Desigual. Patriarcal. Las mujeres hacen el mundo de los hombres activo / pasivo - Visión de poder.” La visión de Muir es que la cultura patriarcal prioriza a los hombres en un mundo que ha permanecido desigual durante miles de años, y por lo tanto se une a la filosofía anti-occidental que señala Cixous en la que el mundo activo de la razón, el intelecto y la ciencia pertenece al dominio del hombre mientras el mundo pasivo de la pasión, la sensibilidad y la emoción son relegados al mundo de la mujer. Esta es la lucha que persiste en todo el trabajo de Muir, una lucha que en ocasiones creó en ella obvias contradicciones dado el contexto social y cultural de principios del siglo XX en el que se educó y vivió.

Junto con otras escritores del período del Renacimiento escocés, Muir luchó contra la separación entre razón y pasión intelecto y sensibilidad, el pensamiento científico y las emociones, una lucha que marcó su vida y la vida de las protagonistas de

sus novelas. Su formación en psicología y humanidades le proporcionó una visión más crítica y profunda sobre las teorías psicoanalíticas de Freud y Jung y por lo tanto era buena conocedora de las teorías del inconsciente reprimido, que aplicó en sus novelas al denunciar las teorías represoras y racionales del Calvinismo, la religión que según ella y sus contemporáneas reprimía las mentes de los escoceses y especialmente de las mujeres que seguían los principios victorianos del ‘Ángel de la Casa.’ Sus declaraciones en contra de todas estas teorías que convierten a la mujer un ser pasivo carente de intelecto la coloca como una de las precursoras de las teorías que décadas más tarde fueron desarrolladas por las feministas francesas, cuyo principal objeto era, como hemos visto, el de desenmarañar este conflicto freudiano de actividad y pasividad asociado respectivamente al hombre y a la mujer.

Sin ninguna duda, Muir fue la escritora del Renacimiento escocés que reaccionó de forma más explícita en contra de la historia monolítica escrita por los hombres. En sus numerosos ensayos guardados en la biblioteca de la Universidad de St Andrews, reclama el derecho a expresar una identidad femenina en contra de los prejuicios de una sociedad mediocre que reprimía la mente y el cuerpo de la mujer, relegándola a la pasividad. Sus ensayos y novelas, así como las de sus predecesoras como Virginia Woolf, que luchó por un tipo de escritura que retaba el sistema escrito y gobernado por los hombres, estaba en contra de la aceptada domesticidad de las mujeres que le era familiar. Al mismo tiempo Muir compartió sus teorías con escritoras del Renacimiento Escocés tales como Catherine Carswell, Nan Shepherd, Rebeca West o Naomi Mitchison, que como ella eran conscientes de las capacidades inherentes de las mujeres



y sintieron la necesidad de inscribir sus experiencias en la Historia, recuperando una Voz que como Hélène Cixous reclama en “Sorties”, “canta desde un tiempo antes de la Ley, antes que lo Simbólico se llevara su aliento y la secuestrara bajo un lenguaje dominado por su poder de separación” (93).

Casada con Edwin Muir, uno de los escritores mas importantes de Renacimiento Escocés, compartían su amor por la poesía y la inocencia los sueños, cualidades que según ella sólo podían residir en el inconsciente, una región en la que se encuentra el verdadero Yo, que a su vez ayudó a crear la suficiente armonía entre ellos hasta la muerte de su marido en 1959. Durante la década de los veinte y treinta Willa y Edwin Muir tradujeron mas de cuarenta novelas, las mas conocidas las escritas por el escritor alemán Franz Kafka. Aunque trabajaron juntos, se afirma que Muir era considerada una mejor lingüista, y era con toda probabilidad la principal traductora, escondiendo su nombre bajo el seudónimo de Agnes Neill Scott, ante la dolorosa y frustrante invisibilidad que implicaba fomentar la vida y el trabajo de una figura literaria como la de Edwin Muir .

Además de dos novelas: *Imagined Corners* (1931) y *Mrs Ritchie* (1933), Muir escribió dos ensayos sobre la mujer “Women: An Inquiry” (1925), y otro centrado en las mujeres en la cultura escocesa titulado “Mrs Grundy in Scotland” (1936), además de un extenso análisis sobre la importancia de las baladas en la cultura escocesa *Living with Ballads* (1965) y una biografía de la vida que compartió con su marido y compañero literario Edwin Muir, *Belonging* (1968). Muir también escribió dos novelas mas que no han sido publicadas y que se conservan en la biblioteca de la Universidad de

St. Andrews: *Mrs Muttoe and the Top Storey* (1938-40), y *The Usurpers* (1950-2), junto con numerosos ensayos, cartas, guiones radiofónicos y notas sobre el papel de las mujeres que dan sentido a su vida y a su causa feminista. Pero sobre todo sentía un gran amor por la poesía que compartía con Edwin. Una selección de sus poemas ha sido publicada por Aileen Christianson en *Moving in Circles: Willa Muir's Writings* (2007).

“Women: An Inquiry” explora las cualidades, las capacidades y las características de las mujeres y reclama la necesidad de que sean integradas socialmente, ya que aunque su papel como madres es de extrema importancia, las mujeres deben intentar entrar un equilibrio en su vida para poder crear, dedicando tiempo al desarrollo intelectual. Muir era consciente del mundo racional y moral que los hombres habían construido para si mismos; sin embargo cree que lo que hace a las mujeres diferentes de los hombres y únicas como seres humanos es el inconsciente, ese lugar donde reside el mundo de los sentimientos, de las emociones, que ella considera de vital importancia para la creatividad y el crecimiento intelectual. En este sentido, y en un discurso mas contemporáneo, en su ensayo “Coming to Writing,” Hélène Cixous reclama que existen ciertas experiencias a las que el sexo masculino no puede tener acceso tales como las incisiones en los partos de sus hijos, las explosiones de su libido, y los placeres del ritmo de su cuerpo. La sexualidad de la mujer es en su opinión “infinitamente plural” mientras que la sexualidad masculina es “estática y singular”(87), y añade que las sensaciones de placer que una mujer puede llegar a sentir no pueden ser alcanzadas por el hombre, o al menos no en el mismo grado de intensidad. Este placer, según ella, no puede ser expresado en el lenguaje convencional sino en sus márgenes o

incluso fuera de los márgenes, en el lenguaje no verbal, el inconsciente.

En sus tesis doctoral *The Life and Work of Willa Muir* (1996), Kirsty Allen subraya que la fuente de inspiración de “Women: An Inquiry” podría ser la ausencia de comunicación entre Muir y su madre, una mujer con fuertes principios victorianos, una relación que provocó en Muir un sentimiento de infinito desasosiego que la persiguió durante toda su vida. Muir era consciente de la barrera histórica y cultural que las separaba y no fue hasta 1949, veinte años más tarde de su muerte cuando comenzó a reflexionar sobre su relación con su madre y en una década más tarde, a la edad de 70 años escribió “This Lopsided World,” un ensayo que nunca fue publicado, donde reconoce la importancia de una madre no solamente en la familia sino como portadora de una tradición: “En un mundo que ha sido tan desigual durante miles de años entiendo que mi madre se convirtió en un monstruo por su frustración, aunque supo mantener intacta la supervivencia de su poder para sacar la familia adelante. La familia habría sucumbido sin la benefactora sombra de mi madre en una tierra exhausta” (54).

En “Women: An Inquiry,” Muir reta la teoría de Freud sobre las madres convencionales y sacrificadas, y contra la separación patriarcal de la madre y su hija, y propone una madre post-Freudiana cuyo poder puede conseguir la reconciliación con su Yo perdido y a la vez una mujer que reclama la experiencia de la maternidad como un regalo del otro. Asimismo, y de nuevo volviendo al discurso contemporáneo, Cixous considera que la maternidad representa lo que es posiblemente la relación más completa y más intensa con el otro, y en su ensayo “The Author in Truth” señala que la experiencia de una mujer durante el embarazo le proporciona una perspectiva única

sobre el otro y a la vez la capacidad de experimentar mas placer: “O bien madres reales o madres potenciales, las mujeres tienen una experiencia desde el interior, una experiencia de la capacidad del otro, una experiencia de cambio no negativo dado por el otro, de receptividad positiva” (155).

La críticas incisivas al pecado original en la filosofía calvinista están también presentes en “Women: An Inquiry,” en particular por el hecho de que las mujeres han sido tratadas de forma desigual por la Iglesia, una institución que sigue principios regidos por el poder masculino. En su opinión, la Iglesia se contradice a si misma cuando por un lado coloca a la Madre en el cielo y la venera como la madre de Dios, pero por otro lado, infravalora su papel importante como madre terrenal porque como refiere “todas las mujeres son madres potenciales” (4). Por ello, Muir estaba convencida de que el patriarcado consideraba a las mujeres ciudadanos de segunda clase y las culpaba por ser herederas del pecado original, Eva. Desde una edad muy temprana, criticó insistentemente la predestinación de las mujeres a ser pasivas y era consciente de la distancia que existía en ella misma y el estereotipo de mujer que se esperaba de ella. Mostraba su disconformidad con el Poder, y tal y como hizo Cixous años mas tarde, exhortaba a las mujeres a conocer sus propios cuerpos “con el propósito de crear un valor moral independiente y valorar su propia naturaleza y sus propios instintos. Las mujeres deben ser sinceras con ellas mismas si quieren ser creativas” (22).

En “Women in Scotland,” un ensayo que escribió en 1936 para *The Left Review*, y que aparece incluido en el libro de Kirsty Allen *Willa Muir: Imagined Selves* (1996), Muir insiste en la reclamación de la maternidad como fuente de vida y pone de relieve

la contradicciones y los problemas que este hecho supone para las mujeres a la hora de por un lado reconciliarse con ellas mismas y por otro lado servir de refugio para su esposo y sus hijos, sin sacrificar su respeto por ella misma como mujer. En este ensayo, Muir sugiere que aunque Escocia era en aquel momento un país socialista, era difícil hablar de los movimientos a favor de la mujer ya que “la mayoría de las mujeres- y hombres- de clase trabajadora están dominados por la creencia de que fuera de casa los hombres tienen la última palabra”(1). En este sentido critica de forma vehemente al “Estado, al Monopolio de los Negocios y a las Fábricas” que han alimentado e idealizado la figura de madre y esposa como administradora de la casa y de los hijos, condenada a ser la empleada de su marido, y critica el papel único que se espera de ella: “El hombre, que sale de su círculo familiar para dominar el mundo externo; la mujer, como protección, dominando el círculo familiar” (2). Este pensamiento conllevó su adhesión al clamor feminista a favor de que las mujeres pudieran participar en asuntos públicos de manera que pudieran luchar por su papel como madres e individuos y a la vez exhortaba a los hombres a participar en esa lucha. Muir rechazaba abiertamente la exclusión de la mujer en la vida familiar y política y proclamaba la necesidad de su lucha en movimientos sociales, porque ella misma conocía lo destructivo que puede ser para una mujer el hecho de estar limitada a las normas morales que mantiene la sociedad dominada por los hombres. Asimismo, le preocupan los prejuicios sociales y sexuales a los están sometidas las mujeres, y por lo tanto exhorta a las mujeres a rechazar el hecho de ser seres pasivos, inferiores.

Las mujeres en “Women in Scotland” están metafóricamente representadas en la

figura de la señora Grundy, la protagonista de “Mrs Grundy in Scotland,” un ensayo que Muir escribió en 1936 para Hugh MacDiarmid y Lewis Grassie Gibbon con el objetivo de ser incluido en *The Voice Of Scotland*. Esta era una revista literaria en la que Muir podía publicar su trabajo más radical ya que trataba temas de género e identidad por primera vez en la historia de la crítica literaria escocesa o de la teoría política. En “Mrs Grundy,” Muir abunda en las ideas que expresa en “Women: An Inquiry, ” y desafía el estereotipo de la mujer como ‘Ángel de la Casa,’ la mujer secuestrada en el papel victoriano de respetabilidad y comportamiento sexual puritano, una dama victoriana que vive en Londres y que representa los modales tradicionales de Inglaterra durante el reinado de la Reina Victoria. Este papel representaba a la perfección el credo calvinista, un credo basado en el trabajo y la represión de los placeres terrenales, que asignaba a la mujer el papel pasivo de domesticidad y respetabilidad, y de guardiana de su hogar y el cuidado físico y espiritual de su marido.

Cuando Mrs Grundy llega a Escocia, su influencia negativa es la religión. Sumada a la tradición victoriana, se encontraba una religión radical presbiteriana que Muir criticaba por el poder de represión y destrucción que ejercía en las mentes de las personas, un poder que, según explica Cairns Craig en *The Modern Scottish Novel : Narrative and the National Imagination* (1999), ha establecido los fundamentos de la sociedad escocesa- la religión y la educación- y por tanto era especialmente represor hacia las mujeres ya que fortalecía la autoridad patriarcal e ignoraba a las mujeres o las usaba como símbolos de maldad. Muir recrea este devastador poder psicológico del calvinismo en la mente de los escoceses en su primera novela *Imagined Corners* (1931).

La novela refleja su búsqueda del verdadero Yo, ese lugar de armonía donde el Yo y el Otro se encuentran como forma de escape a la moralidad represiva y al convencionalismo de la vida parroquiana escocesa. Esta es una novela subversiva que trata de desafiar la comunidad reprimida por los principios calvinistas con el fin de dar una salida, una voz a la joven protagonista Elizabeth, secuestrada en una comunidad regida por una implacable mentalidad calvinista y atrapada como una víctima pasiva de lo que ocurre a su alrededor.

La novela es sin ninguna duda una prueba de las preocupaciones feministas de Muir, en la que afirma su individualidad e independencia como escritora y refleja las tensiones y contradicciones que la asolaban, las tensiones que surgían entre el hecho de ser ella misma, la mujer que reclamaba los derechos de las mujeres en una sociedad profundamente reprimida, y por el otro lado su papel como mujer confinada a ser la musa de su marido Edwin Muir. Para ello, y aplicando las teorías del psicoanálisis sobre la separación del Yo que tan bien conocía, Muir crea dos protagonistas diferentes, dos Elizabeths, que luchan por ser una sola; por un lado una representa la lucha entre lo impuesto por el Poder y los sueños reprimidos, y por otro lado los deseos de liberación, de ser o no del mundo al que pertenecen. Estas tensiones y contradicciones de la división del Yo provenían como se ha citado anteriormente de sus investigaciones sobre las teorías del psicoanálisis, que le proporcionaron un punto de vista subversivo sobre lo que hasta el momento se había llamado el Yo único, que subyugaba a los seres humanos al pertenecer al 'Imperio de los Mismos' (The Empire of the Selfsame) a una visión monolítica del mundo, tal y como Cixous describe más tarde: "Un mismo dueño

que ha sido inscrito desde el principio de tiempos, una marca de apropiación del individuo” (79), y que en esta novela Willa transforma en un Yo que es femenino plural, un Yo fragmentado en constante negociación el Otro. Es por tanto esta negociación entre el Yo y el Otro en contra del siempre Yo impuesto por el poder masculino a lo que aspira Muir en la relación de las dos Elizabeths, el mismo estado edénico que la mantuvo unida a su marido Edwin Muir, un lugar de “inconsciente sensación de libertad natural,” como cita en *Belonging* (170). Esta parte reprimida del inconsciente es la que Muir explora en *Imagined Corners*, y todas las polaridades y contradicciones que ello conlleva. Es solamente cuando Elizabeth es liberada por Elise que puede experimentar los aspectos emocionales e intelectuales sobre ella misma. Las experiencias que Elise ha vivido fuera de la comunidad patriarcal de Calderwick son la única forma de llevar a un Yo autónomo y situarse libremente en relación con ella misma.

En *Imagined Corners*, Muir desafía a la Iglesia que cree que el cuerpo es el demonio, el mal, a menos que sea consagrado a Dios- o al Poder, la fuerza represora que el calvinismo ejerce sobre los cuerpos de las mujeres, dando voz a Elizabeth, convirtiéndola en una mujer nueva, devolviéndole su cuerpo, y presentándola como un Yo verdadero y no fragmentado a expensas de su marido, sino un cuerpo que es plural y lleno de zonas placenteras y que habla desde el placer, or *juissance*, que reta el poder de la iglesia tal, lo cual encaja con la filosofía de Cixous: “Déjalos que tiemblen esos sacerdotes; vamos a mostrarles nuestros textos/sexos [...] porque quieren hacernos vernos que estaban demasiados ocultos para ser explorados” (69).



El final de *Imagined Corners* con sus dos protagonistas dejando Escocia hacia el sur de Francia confirma la teoría de fusionar el Yo y el Otro, como Jacques Lacan dice: “El otro es necesario para complementar, aunque sea temporalmente, una percepción del Yo [...] La imagen que veo en el espejo me proporciona el arquetipo de la auto-percepción; solo la mirada de otra persona puede darme el sentimiento de que yo soy una totalidad” (Crownfield xi). Elise introduce a Elizabeth en el mundo de los sentimientos, del pensamiento, de las ideas, y ambas Elizabeths buscan en ellas su Otro para poder crear la comunión armoniosa entre las dos. La joven Elizabeth está sedienta de un lenguaje que hable desde la proximidad del mundo fuera de Calderwick que le ofrece la posibilidad de transformarse en una mujer nueva la posibilidad de escapar. Las dos se encuentran en un universo de emociones y poesía: “Solo estamos separadas como lo están las olas de un mar. La noche pasada lo ví y lo sentí tan claramente, la unión que subyace en todo y supe que la religión la poesía y el amor eran expresiones de esa unión (175).

En “Selves, Names and Roles: Willa Muir’s *Imagined Corners*” (1994) Isobel Murray establece un análisis comparativo entre la protagonista de Muir en *Mrs Ritchie* (1933) y otro referente de la literatura escocesa, la novela de Grassie Gibbon *Sunset Song* escrita un año mas tarde, en 1932. Murray sugiere que Gibbon pudo haberse inspirado en la protagonista de Muir y su teoría de la división del Yo para la representación de su protagonista femenina Chris Guthrie, que se encuentra dividida entre dos personalidades diferentes; por un lado, la refinada y cultivada Chris inglesa, y por otro lado la inculta Chris nacida en Escocia. Sin embargo, en contra de lo que le

ocurre a Chris Guthrie, las protagonistas de Muir buscan una huida a los callejones sin salida, a las puertas y ventanas cerradas a través de la negociación de sus Yos divididos, el Yo de la imposición del Poder, y el Yo que expresa su deseo de liberación.

*Mrs Ritchie* es probablemente el trabajo que mejor demuestra los principios de Muir con respecto a la represión del cuerpo de la mujer y del inconsciente llevada a cabo por la doctrina calvinista y la tiranía de la tradición victoriana. Esta novela es un estudio psicológico sobre la historia de la mujer en la que Muir demuestra las implicaciones políticas de lo que le es negado a las mujeres: sus cuerpos. ¿Que le ocurre a la protagonista Anne Ritchie cuando se convierte en una señora Grundy, la figura materna considerada socialmente que reprime su cuerpo y se pone en las manos de Dios, la simbólica ley del poder? Muir traduce la represión del cuerpo/inconsciente de Anne Ritchie en un texto altamente subversivo que muestra las implicaciones políticas de la negación del cuerpo de la protagonista y consecuentemente da voz a su cuerpo e inconsciente reprimidos y al mundo de libertad e imaginación que marcó su propia lucha.

La novela desafía a un Dios Padre represivo quien, bajo la prescripción de la iglesia presbiteriana, es el centro del universo de Annie, y todo lo que le ocurre tiene significado solo en relación a él. Annie lucha contra los oscuros y primitivos sentimientos que se despiertan en su inconsciente pero que debe reprimir, los instintos sexuales reprimidos por los imperativos morales del Poder-Dios, y se casa con Johnny Ritchie, un hombre sin muchos proyectos de futuro pero una persona muy maleable y adaptable al papel tradicional del marido que sigue el mandato de su devota esposa, el ángel de la

casa, el pilar de la iglesia dedicada devotamente a los demás. El miedo y la represión gobernadas por una madre tiránica puede solamente llevar a la destrucción de la familia, convirtiéndoles en débiles e inútiles, provocando la muerte de su marido, el suicidio de su hijo y la huida de su hija Sarah Annie, quien representa el desafío a su todopoderosa madre tal como hizo Elizabeth Shand y que, desafiando el miedo a Dios, debe separarse de Calderwick para trascender el credo represivo calvinista que ha arruinado a su familia.

*Living with Ballads* (1965) y *Belonging* (1968) fueron los últimos trabajos de Muir. *Belonging* es la autobiografía de su vida con Edwin Muir, que comienza cuando se conocen en Glasgow en Septiembre de 1918, y termina cuando él fallece el 3 de enero de 1959. Entre estos años, Muir relata sus viajes por todo Europa y los Estados Unidos, y sus experiencias con los poetas del Renacimiento Escocés y sus desavenencias con el partido nacionalista escocés. Cuando Edwin Muir falleció, *Living with Ballads* estaba en su proceso preliminar, pero Muir se sintió obligada a continuar con el proyecto que terminó siendo un extenso estudio sobre el mundo de las baladas en Escocia, y como respuesta a su animadversión al calvinismo, la religión que en sus palabras reprimía el inconsciente de las personas, su vitalidad y sentimientos arcaicos del inconsciente. Muir relata que en la región del noroeste de Escocia donde ella se había criado, estas canciones populares se oían en las voces de la gente trabajadora especialmente campesinos que cantaban mientras realizaban las tareas del campo o durante las noches de luna. Muchas de estas voces eran procedían de madres que enseñaban a sus hijas canciones que luego éstas repetían en el colegio, canciones que

eran agradables al oído y que producían en las chicas una satisfacción armoniosa cuando se trataba de relaciones amorosas.

Estas baladas estaban “cargadas de magia ancestral y de deseos” (94), y la gente del pueblo las transmitía de unos a otros mientras que la gente de la ciudad, gobernada por el poder calvinista, rechazaba este mundo imaginativo. Los calvinistas “totalitarios” vieron en las baladas un “enemigo,” un Otro que intentaron reprimir porque representaba un mundo de sentimientos y emociones profundas mientras que su religión proclamaba la racionalidad, la lógica y el cultivo de la individualidad. En este sentido, en *An Anthology of Scottish Women Writers* (1993), Catherine Kerrigan reclama que las baladas deberían incluirse en la historia de la mujer en general y la historia de la mujeres escocesas en particular por sus numerosos relatos de experiencias personales de las mujeres tales como la maternidad, el nacimientos de sus hijos o sus relaciones amorosas en las que las mujeres aparecen representadas como víctimas de los hombres, o porque las propias mujeres eran transmisoras o receptoras de esta tradición oral, que ellas a menudo transmitían a su hijas.

La transmisión oral de la cultura escocesa, concretamente la de las vivencias de la sociedad rural del noroeste de Escocia, es parte fundamental en el trabajo de Jessie Kesson. Kesson, del mismo modo que Muir, en su búsqueda por una escritura y una voz femenina, se sumerge en su propia experiencia de vida y en la experiencia de vida de la mujeres de su época, reescribiendo un mundo de mitos y memoria cultural, enriquecido con las canciones que recrean los sentimientos y las experiencias de los campesinos del noroeste de Escocia, consiguiendo crear textos llenos de poesía que refleja el mundo de

sus recuerdos, contribuyendo a un mundo ensoñado que Muir llama ‘el submundo del sentimiento,’ y que por tanto transgrede el mundo de la imposición racional del simbólico, del mundo que habla en el ‘Nombre del Padre.’

## JESSIE KESSON

En la introducción de la biografía de Jessie Kesson *Writing her Life* (2000), la versión mas completa de la vida y obra de Jessie Kesson hasta la fecha, Isobel Murray escribe: “Jessie sabía que solo había una psicoterapeuta posible - ella misma. Tenía que escribir sobre ella misma, escribir su vida, y darle la continuidad de la que carecía” (sin numeración). Estas palabras evocan las de Hélène Cixous en “The Laugh of the Medusa,” donde reclama la necesidad de las mujeres de escribir sobre si mismas como parte del proceso del reconocimiento y la reclamación de su pasado: “La mujer debe escribir sobre si misma: debe escribir sobre las mujeres y hacerlas presentes a través del acto de la escritura, de la cual han apartado de forma tan violenta como lo han hecho con sus cuerpos - por las mismas razones, por la misma ley, con el mismo objetivo. La mujer debe estar en el texto - así como en el mundo y en el historia (245).

El trabajo de Jessie Kesson es sin ninguna duda esa reclamación poética de la unión esencial entre la escritura y la madre como fuente de origen de la voz que debe ser oída en el lenguaje femenino, de una tradición maternal que reta el sistema literario y social masculino, y que se coloca en una tradición literaria que vuelva a la madre

fecunda como garantía de estabilidad y verdad genealógica. Kesson pasó su niñez con su madre en Elgin, un pueblo del noroeste de Escocia, hasta que los servicios sociales de la época la separaron de ella para internarla en un orfanato en Skene, Aberdeenshire, a la edad de nueve años. Fue allí donde aprendió a leer y a escribir y donde surgió su amor por la poesía, motivada por su sacerdote, aunque su ilusión por el escritura se vio frustrada por los informes de los servicios sociales que recomendaban un mejor trabajo para una mujer. Por esta razón fue enviada a trabajar en una granja, aunque el talento natural por la poesía que heredó de su madre y de las baladas que escuchó en su compañía y su alegre carácter la acompañaron toda su vida.

Sin embargo, ante su imposibilidad de adaptarse a un mundo en el que no encajaba, fue internada en un hospital psiquiátrico, hecho que dejó una profunda huella en su experiencia de vida tal y como cuenta en muchos de sus relatos que Isobel Murray reunió en *Somewhere Beyond* (2000). Casada con John Kesson en 1937, su trabajo de empleada en las granjas del noroeste de Escocia desde 1939 hasta 1951 no la disuadió de su gran pasión - la escritura -, tal y como refleja en el poema “A Scarlet Goon,” incluido en la colección de Murray, y pronto comenzó a escribir para las revista literaria *North-East Review* y *The Scots Magazine*, y mas tarde para la cadena BBC en Escocia. Escribió poesía y prosa, con frecuencia sobre su dolorosa niñez y la gente que había perecido en la guerra, aunque el tema que mas le apasionaba era el mundo natural, y era una amante lectora de Wordsworth. De su amor por mundo natural y la tierra surgió en 1946 “Country Dweller’s Year” bajo el seudónimo de Ness MacDonald, una composición de doce ensayos en los que hace una exaltación de la naturaleza durante

los doce meses del año, y en los que muestra una fascinación no solo por la naturaleza sino por la luz y el color. Continuó escribiendo pequeñas novelas radiofónicas para la BBC y poemas para *The North-East Review* mientras vagaba con su marido de granja en granja. En 1951 se mudaron a Londres con sus dos hijos para cumplir sus expectativas literarias, y durante las siguientes cuatro décadas combinó la escritura con trabajos domésticos principalmente en instituciones publicas.

Kesson publicó tres novelas en tres largos intervalos de tiempo y consiguió reconocimiento internacional en 1980 cuando Michael Radford adaptó su novela *The White Bird Passes* (1958) al cine. Su amplia producción radiofónica y poética, sus otras dos novelas *Another Time, Another Place* (1983), también llevada al cine por Radford, consiguiendo 14 premios internacionales, y *Glitter of Mica* (1963) la convierten en una de las escritoras mas representativas de la historia de la literatura escocesa moderna, trabajo que se vio reconocido con un premio *honoris causa* en la Universidad de Aberdeen en 1988 a la edad de 72 años. Jessie Kesson murió en 1994 en Londres.

Entre sus principales referentes se encuentran dos de sus contemporáneos Neil Gunn y Nan Shepherd, y su sacerdote que valoró tu talento poético durante su estancia en el orfanato y a quien dedicó *The White Bird Passes*. Pero sin ninguna duda su mayor influencia fue su madre, de quien heredó un talento natural por la poesía que la marcó el resto de su dolorosa vida, la persona que le transmitió la tradición oral y de quien heredó su gusto natural por las baladas. En “Contemporary Fiction I. Tradition and Continuity,” Douglas Gifford establece una conexión entre el trabajo de Jessie Kesson, en particular *The White Bird Passes* y *Another Time Another Place*, con otras escritoras

escocesas del periodo del Renacimiento escocés que exploraron y dieron voz a los problemas a los que tenían que enfrentarse en una sociedad con principios autoritarios masculinos. En su opinión, en el momento histórico en el que se publicó *The White Bird Passes*, el periodo de postguerra de la segunda guerra mundial, la voz de Jessie Kesson emerge como una voz desafiante que cuestiona el papel de las mujeres especialmente en el contexto del mundo rural en el norte de Escocia, y es precisamente por este motivo por el que su voz trasciende los límites del contexto literario de sus predecesoras ya que escribe sobre las opresiones y represiones de las mujeres en contextos deprimidos socialmente.

En su entrevista con Isobel Murray, Kessie Kesson declara que se sentía como una “extranjera” (‘ootlin’), y que sus relatos eran “siempre sobre personas que no encajan en la sociedad” (58). La escritura era su único deseo, y este único deseo la coloca en el territorio de la escritura femenina que Hélène Cixous reclama como la única forma de expresar lo que subyace reprimido dentro de ella y que le permite mirar atrás hacia su propio origen a través de su propia experiencia. Su obra por tanto está claramente abierta al inconsciente, tal y como expresa en la entrevista con Murray: “La escritura hizo mi vida espiritual mas fácil. Era mi perfecto complemento” (66). Este complemento que tan feliz la hacía, este placer, este éxtasis espiritual llenaba los espacios dolorosos que las penalidades que la vida le había impuesto. Y este es el placer de donde procede *The White Bird Passes*. ¿De donde procede este placer? Qué es ese placer? Kesson explora una manera de escribir que no está escrita en el Nombre del Padre sino en nombre de la Madre. Es la búsqueda mística por el amor de la madre, no



del padre, es la re-escritura de su génesis, el camino necesario para el renacer de una mujer nueva, tal y como anota Cixous en *LA* (1976): “En el camino hacia la salida, la mujer que va a renacer debe dar a luz a su madre varias veces [...] No lo olvidéis. ¿Quién sabe de donde procede la música, el miedo, el dolor, el dolor del placer? Ningún pasaje fluye sin su dolorosa revelación (50).

El mundo que Kesson retrata en *The White Birth Passes* está muy cercano a la tradición literaria de Lewis Grassie Gibbon y concretamente a *Sunset Song*, una de las novelas escocesas más aclamadas del siglo XX, y la más celebrada de la trilogía *A Scots Quair* (1932-4) especialmente por su contexto geográfico y cultural entre la tradición rural de las granjas del noroeste de Escocia, y por su crítica hacia la sentimentalidad del kailyard, por su recreación del pasado a través de las baladas y la musicalidad del habla del campo, pero sobre todo por su representación de la voz interior de la protagonista Chris Guthrie. En este sentido, en la introducción a la edición de 1987 de la novela de Kesson, Douglas Dunn subraya el gran valor poético de *The White Bird Passes*, y utiliza el término escocés ‘smeddum’ para implicar que es una novela llena de energía, vitalidad y vigoroso sentido común, una sensibilidad que contrasta con el contexto adverso de la novela - por un lado el barrio de chabolas en las que vive Janie y su sufrimiento por la separación de su madre, y por otro lado el extraordinario dominio poético cuando describe la belleza de los bosques escoceses que acompañan los hermosos recuerdos de su niñez: “Este libro es poesía social, su sensibilidad e incansable honestidad, su entrega a la pobreza y a la dignidad humana son tales que en las últimas páginas se puede oír batir el ala de ese pájaro que metafóricamente parte”

(página sin numerar).

*The White Bird Passes* es por tanto una reclamación poética de la unión esencial entre la escritura y la madre como fuente y origen de la voz que debe ser oída en los textos de las mujeres. En este sentido, la unión entre el pasado de Janie y su presente esta metafóricamente representado a través de su madre Liza, y es desde este lugar poético tan íntimo desde el que Kesson a través de la memoria de Janie da vida a su propia madre en un espacio que proporciona de la niña una sensación de placer y protección. Liza permanece como un ser reconfortante en la mente de su hija, que la imagina como el centro reconfortante de su infancia, el ser que la consuela porque la devuelve a una relación con el mundo en diálogo con la naturaleza y que a su vez abre un espacio poético entre ellas. El mundo que Janie se ve obligada a dejar atrás es el hogar protector de su madre, y con todos los recuerdos que lo rodean. Este espacio de intimidad es comparable a lo que Cixous describe en *Jardin D'Essai* como ‘armonioso,’ un mundo que no habla desde la ley y el orden, que para Janie aparece impuesto por el aislamiento de su madre durante años, sino desde la proximidad poética de los recuerdos que Janie tiene de ella. El espacio vacío creado por la ausencia de su madre no pueden ser reemplazados por la ley del padre, y sus deseos permanecen solo para ella como complemento a su soledad en el tiempo y en el espacio.

Janie puede verse como la representación cultural de las mujeres fuera de la historia, como Cixous nos recuerda en *The Newly Born Woman*: “What is my place If I am a woman? I look for myself throughout the centuries and don't see myself anywhere” (75). Ante la incapacidad de expresar de dar respuesta a esta pregunta, y de

verbalmente su insatisfacción sobre el futuro que los servicios sociales han planeado para ella, Janie da voz a sus sentimientos a través de la poesía. Janie busca una relación con el mundo externo usando un lenguaje que no hable desde el aislamiento, desde la frialdad del orfanato que está separado del mundo que anhela por un muro infranqueable, la sierra de los Cairngorms, que simboliza la autoridad que le impide ver el exterior, de abrir puertas y ventanas a la voz de su madre, y en su deseo por descubrir un nuevo mundo, Janie empieza a descubrir un deseo de libertad que va mas allá de las simbólicas paredes de los Cairngorms: “Incluso los Cairngorms habían perdido su aterradora inmensidad. Los cruzaré la próxima semana... y sabré lo hay detrás de ellos”(151).

Aunque Kesson se resistía a ser identificada con escritoras abiertamente feministas, era plenamente consciente de las restricciones de las vidas de las mujeres en la represora sociedad patriarcal en la que vivían. De sus tres novelas, *Another Time, Another Place* (1983) es probablemente la mas preocupada por la causa feminista, presentando a una joven cuestionada en una comunidad rural donde vive en la región de Aberdeen, Escocia. Como *The White Bird Passes*, ésta es una novela semi-autobiográfica escrita en tercera persona y narra la vida de una recién casada Jessie durante la segunda guerra mundial, después de haber sido dada de alta del hospital psiquiátrico en que había estado internada durante un año. El título de la novela muestra el fuerte deseo de la protagonista de huir a otro lugar y a otro tiempo donde pueda aliviar su dolorosa existencia, y constantemente sueña con escapar del “Orden Establecido,” (118), de la monotonía de la aldea rural en la que no encuentra un lugar,

en el que tiene que reprimir su pasión y su deseo hasta que un grupo de prisioneros italianos llegan a la granja donde trabaja.

Carol Anderson ha comparado a la joven protagonista de *Another Time, Another Place* con Joanna Bannerman, la joven protagonista de la primera novela de Catherine Carswell *Open the Door!* (1920), también basada en las experiencias personales de una recién casada que debe reprimir sus deseos que busca liberar a pesar del contexto represor en el vive, y en su deseo por la liberación se enamora de un hombre italiano. De igual manera, en una novela que escribió dos años mas tarde *The Camomile* (1922), Carswell ve Escocia y en particular Glasgow un lugar en el que una mujer es incapaz de encontrar ninguna realización artística y busca la forma de huir. También en su autobiografía *Lying awake* (1950), Carswell expresa las dudas que la acechan con respecto a su ser como mujer, y se pregunta porque este ser debe estar condicionado a su compromiso con un hombre. La preocupación de Carswell se ve reflejada en las mujeres protagonistas de las escritoras del Renacimiento Escocés, como hemos comprobado con la joven Elizabeth de Muir en *Imagined Corners*. Al igual que Elizabeth Shand, la joven protagonista de *Another Time, Another Place*, Kesson muestra también su preocupación sobre la realidad a la que debe enfrentarse dentro de su matrimonio y por como se define en su relación con otros hombres y mujeres y con ella misma, entre su papel como madre y esposa y su deseo de expresarse como mujer: “Yo. Su imagen, reflejada en el espejo colocado encima del fregadero, mirándose una a la otra antes de estallar en una amplia sonrisa de identificación. Una luz repentina de alegría la sobrecogió: ‘Una mañana me desperté y me miré en el espejo,’ canturreó ante

la sonrisa del espejo, que reproducía sus palabras”(13). Para ella, el hecho de pensar que otras realidades pueden ser posibles, otra forma de ser ella misma al lado de Paolo fuera del contexto represivo de su matrimonio, evoca sensaciones nuevas de una sexualidad plena, porque su juventud se ha visto truncada por un matrimonio anticipado y por las exigencias del orden establecido en su comunidad rural, en la se ve a si misma una propiedad de su marido, como la frágil tierra que él cultiva y que domina, a su voluntad.

En *Another Time, Another Place* nos encontramos de nuevo con la teoría de Hélène Cixous ‘Either woman is passive or she does not exist,’ frase que en su teoría refleja las oposiciones binarias que gobiernan el mundo occidental en el que la mujer está siempre en el lado pasivo de la naturaleza, fuera de la cultura. La joven protagonista de Kesson nunca ha podido tomar decisiones sobre su cuerpo o tener control sobre su vida y destino, y ha estado condenada a vivir con un hombre inarticulado e insensible, que la relega a la esclavitud de la casa. Ella es el Otro, la mujer en una sociedad organizada jerárquicamente en la que ‘El Imperio de lo Mismo’- la ley masculina - es lo que gobierna, lo que describe, lo que define y asigna a su Otro, que está obligado a vivir en el cuerpo de otra persona.

La teoría psicoanalítica de Cixous ofrece otra teoría universal para los deseos reprimidos de la joven protagonista de Kesson, y a través de la escritura, Kesson proyecta sus deseos de huida del orden establecido de la comunidad a la que se siente subordinada. La mujer sin nombre desea una sexualidad rica y plural que reta este orden establecido. Es su cuerpo, liberado de la represión rural, el que debe ser escuchado en el texto y por eso Kesson se acerca al lenguaje femenino en búsqueda de una libertad

social y personal para su protagonista, abriendo puerta a su imaginación que puedan liberar su inconsciente, una ventana que separa el interior del exterior que re-configura y desenmaraña lo que nunca ha sido visto ni oído de su inconsciente, un mensaje en una botella que Paolo había dejado para ella:

Dina. *Con amore e molta felicità. Paolo, Umberto, Luigi.* Nunca habían conocido su verdadero nombre y habían elegido uno nuevo para bautizarla. 'Wifie'. Luigi nunca habría encontrado esa palabra en el diccionario. Wifie, el título que la había hecho mayor antes de tiempo. ¿Cómo habían introducido el mensaje dentro de la botella? No lo sabía, quedaría en su mente como algo maravilloso, un misterio. Pero ella sabía lo que significaba, porque lo sabía. (123)

La mujer que emerge al final de *Another Time, Another Place* es la visión que Kesson predijo en el final *The White Bird Passes*. Su Yo es finalmente el Yo que la comunidad espera de ella y cuando la guerra finaliza y los prisioneros se van, la joven tiene mas experiencia y es menos inocente pero su visión frágil de si misma debe seguir subordinado al ser menos personal menos sexual que será aceptado por la comunidad. Físicamente y psicológicamente atrapada en el 'Orden Establecido,' la novela no ofrece un final feliz a su protagonista: "Sin Roma, Sin Nápoles. Así era ser prisionera" (91), y en su soledad sus sentimientos reprimidos hablan mas a través de sus silencios que a través de sus palabras.

## JANICE GALLOWAY

En una entrevista con Cristie Leigh March para la revista literaria *Edinburgh Review* en 1999, Janice Galloway dijo: “La aparente invisibilidad fue mi atracci  n a la escritura - escribir para convertir lo invisible en visible. Ahora que el perfil escoc  s tiene un perfil, es un perfil masculino del que quiero distanciarme [...] Por la raz  n que sea estoy encontrando una raz  n de tomar caminos alternativos, de desabotonar lo que me aprieta.” Por sus palabras, Galloway insin  a que la literatura de finales del siglo XX en Escocia parece estar a  n sustentada por un visi  n patriarcal hacia las mujeres, que corresponde con la denuncia de muchas escritoras feministas incluida H  l  ne Cixous y con sus contempor  neas del movimiento feminista franc  s, y que Elaine Marks en “Mujeres en la literatura en Francia” resume de la siguiente manera: “Soy el   nico, y el   nico que tiene control sobre el universo; el resto del mundo, que defino como el Otro, tiene solo significado en relaci  n conmigo como hombre/padre, propietario del falo” (832).

Galloway se une a esta posici  n transgresora del feminismo franc  s, y con su deseo de buscar caminos alternativos a la teor  a de supremac  a masculina, lucha por encontrar una voz que “debe proceder de alg  n lugar del inconsciente, alg  n lugar mas grande que nuestra realidad” (March 89), y al mismo tiempo se sit  a no solo en la tradici  n literaria de Muir y Kesson sino tambi  n de otras escritoras de fuera de Escocia como Dorothy Richardson y Virginia Woolf en Inglaterra, que escribieron en los m  rgenes del modernismo y abrieron nuevas y liberadoras formas de escritura, y nuevas

formas de entender los temas feministas universales, o como Galloway señala, como una forma de transgredir su posición como mujeres en la tradición literaria y social. En este sentido, en la entrevista citada anteriormente, Galloway expresa su admiración por las novelas *The White Passes* de Jessie Kesson y *Lying Awake* de Catherine Carswell y comparte con ellas su deseo de escapar de y luchar contra las fuertes estructuras patriarcales de poder, su preocupación por la sexualidad reprimida de las mujeres y sus relaciones con otros hombres y mujeres, la maternidad, y sus experiencias de exclusión de las instituciones y del poder social, especialmente debido a la represión calvinista. Sus textos, como los de sus predecesoras, representan la fuerza del inconsciente reprimido que lucha en contra de la tradición monolítica a través de formas narrativas experimentales que representan lo que está reprimido en el inconsciente. Esta es una transgresión textual que tal y como hemos visto en el caso de Muir y Kesson, Hélène Cixous llama lenguaje femenino, el lenguaje que abre la expresión de las mujeres con ellas mismas, sus cuerpos y su sexualidad.

Galloway es una escritora contemporánea consciente de su lugar como mujer y como escritora en la Escocia contemporánea. Pertenece a la nueva generación de escritoras escocesas que comenzaron a escribir en la década de los ochenta, y que incluye entre otras a Margaret Elphinstone, Alison Kennedy, Dilys Rose y Sian Hayton en novela, y Liz Lochhead, Kathleen Jamie, Carol Ann Duffy, y Jackie Kay en poesía, todas ellas con una visión transgresora hacia el papel tradicional de la mujer en Escocia. Tal y como explican Douglas Gifford, Dunningan and MacGillivray en *Scottish Literature* (2002) esta generación de escritoras pertenecen a la generación



literaria asociada a la decepción del referéndum que tuvo lugar el 1 de Marzo 1979 que de alguna manera ha obligado a la nueva generación de escritores a revisar y re-escribir formas de narrativa que no se correspondían con los cambios políticos y sociales de finales del siglo XX y principios del XXI. Estas escritoras representan por lo tanto una nueva forma de negociar el futuro, de abrir puertas a una nueva era, y una nueva forma mas creativa de enriquecer Escocia, como Gifford et al. sugieren “una sola agenda marcada por MacDiarmid, sino reconocimiento el derecho de otra gente a percibir Escocia de forma diferente, e imaginándola también de forma diferente (735). Señalan además que a pesar de este deseo que mueve a esta generación a de-construir un pasado que no es sostenible a finales del siglo XX, esta generación de escritoras intentan a la vez encontrar lazos de unión que les permiten mantener una cierta identidad dada “la tan común sentido internacional de la ausencia de un lugar y una historia, y la consecuencia falta de identidad” (736).

Janice Galloway nació en 1956 en Kilwinning, Scotland, pero creció en Saltcoats - Ayrshire - con su madre y su hermana mayor. En su libro de memorias *This is not About Me* publicado en 2008 recuerda su difícil niñez al lado de una madre a cargo de la manutención de la casa y de una hermana mayor con la que no tenía nada en común. Su interés en la literatura y la música fueron su refugio, y sus primeros años en el colegio tampoco fueron fáciles ante la actitud represora de su madre a que leyera novelas escritas por mujeres, una atracción a que le refiere constantemente en sus entrevistas. Cursó estudios de música e inglés en la Universidad de Glasgow que tuvo que abandonar durante un tiempo debido a una fuerte depresión; mientras tanto se

dedicó al trabajo social para luego volver a sus estudios universitarios donde continuó vinculada a proyectos a favor de la justicia social, una reclamación que sigue vigente en su vida y en obra literaria. Desde entonces ha escrito tres novelas: *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (Mind/Allan Lane Award, 1990), *Foreign Parts* ( McVitie's Prize, 1994) y *Clara* (Saltire Scottish Book of the Year, 2003), esta última inspirada en la vida de la celebrada concertista de piano Clara Schumann. En esta última novela, la mas larga y elaborada de las tres, Galloway escribe desde un escenario alejado del escenario urbano escocés, por lo tanto desde una perspectiva mas universal, y desde su interés por la música y las enfermedades mentales como la que sufría Robert Schumann.

Además de las tres novelas, Galloway ha publicado tres colecciones de relatos cortos: *Blood* (1991), *Where You Find it* (1996) y *Jellyfish*, publicada el verano de 2015. Mientras tanto, ha participado de forma activa en la vida literaria escocesa con diferentes contribuciones para revistas literarias como *The Edinburgh Review*, y como co-editora de otras como *New Writing Scotland*, que han ayudado a promocionar nuevos novelistas y poetas escoceses. En febrero de 2002 escribió un libreto para la opera *Monster*, comisionada por la Opera Escocesa y estrenada en teatro real de Glasgow. Dos años mas tarde escribió *Rosengarten*, en colaboración con la escultora Anne Bevan, un libro ilustrado sobre el tema de la obstetricia que combina sus palabras en prosa y poesía con las imágenes y esculturas de Bevan, y que simboliza la idea de venir a la vida como la experiencia mas intensa compartida por los seres humanos, y su vez devuelve a las mujeres lo que les pertenece, el momento de dar a luz a un nuevo ser en muchas ocasiones al borde de la tragedia. En el mejor momento de su carrera literaria

publicó dos novelas autobiográficas: la primera que ya hemos citado anteriormente *This is not About Me* (Scottish Non-fiction Book of the Year) publicada en 2008, y la secuela *All Made Up*, publicada en 2011 (SMIT Book of the Year, Creative Scotland Award). Asimismo, en 2008 participó con el relato “Fineday” en *Lights off the Quay*, un libro comisionado por el Festival de libro de Edimburgo, junto con tres de los escritores de su generación mas reconocidos internacionalmente : AL Kennedy, John Burnside y Don Paterson. Además, ha escrito y presentado numerosas series para la radio BBC Scotland y ha publicado un libro de poemas: *Boy Book See* (2002).

La escritura de Galloway surge de la desesperación por exorcizar las voces que han estado enterradas durante un largo tiempo bajo una fuerte tradición patriarcal, este dar voz a los grupos silenciados o marginalizados la convierte en una escritora con una voz femenina diferenciada en Escocia, y su trabajo y por tanto su voz sigue unida a la tradición escocesa de escritores del Renacimiento escocés de principios de siglo XX que como hemos visto centraron su atención en problemas reales de una Escocia desolada como reacción a una visión romántica representada en el periodo del Kailyard. En este sentido, muchos críticos han identificado a Galloway como una escritora del Grupo de Glasgow, un grupo de novelistas y poetas que sucedieron a los escritores de la década de los treinta preocupados por el proletariado y los problemas sociales contemporáneos de la depresión y el desempleo.

Por citar un ejemplo, en “Imagining Scotlands. The Return to Mythology in Modern Scottish Fiction,” Douglas Gifford sitúa a Galloway en la tradición de la novela de Glasgow, y resalta la influencia en su trabajo de las novelas *1982*, *Janine* (1984) de

Alasdair Gray, y *The Busconductor Hines* de James Kelman, publicada en el mismo año, no solamente por la narrativa experimental que emplean sino también por la representación de la vida de los personajes que luchan por sobrevivir en un Glasgow deprimido. Sin embargo, en diferentes entrevistas, Galloway rechaza ser etiquetada en el grupo de Glasgow porque aunque reconoce la valiosa influencia de Alasdair Gray y James Kelman, en su propia obra literaria y en la de escritoras y escritores de su generación, prefiere escribir desde una perspectiva femenina con un interés especial en lo que le ocurre a sus protagonistas femeninas en el día a día, penetrando su inconsciente para dar voz a sus silencios.

Esta preocupación por escribir sobre la experiencia femenina, de su consciente preocupación por escribir desde una tierra extraña donde experimenta una sensación de vacío la coloca de nuevo dentro de la filosofía de Hélène Cixous cuando escribe en “Coming to Writing”: “No legitimate place, no land, no fatherland, no history of my own (15). De ahí que en su colección de relatos *Blood* (1991), presente las relaciones de poder entre hombres y mujeres en entornos domésticos llenos de privaciones, en mundos de decadencia en los que las mujeres tienen dificultades para encontrar su lugar. La preocupación de Galloway por la vida humana pasa cuestiona inevitablemente el papel tradicional de la familia en la Escocia contemporánea, una familia que aparece representada en su trabajo como patriarcal, fundamentado en las estructuras de poder de una Escocia aún gobernada por el poder masculino que limita y reprime la voz de las mujeres.

Los relatos de Galloway conducen de nuevo a la filosofía de oposiciones

binarias que refiere Cixous en la que el hombre es el ser activo con absoluto control sobre la mujer, que es el ser pasivo. Los hombres no solo ejecutan su poder a someter sus cuerpos a la voluntad masculina sino también como herederos de una tradición posesora del poder fálico son los encargados de reproducir esa tradición de autoridad e omnipotencia sobre las mujeres, y en ocasiones el padre y su hijo luchan por crear una identidad escocesa en oposición al carácter femenino. En *Blood*, los cuerpos de las mujeres son algo que no cuenta porque sangran o pertenecen al territorio de los hombres, un territorio que delimitan para si mismos, como también ocurre en su otra colección *Where you Find it* (1996), donde sus protagonistas femeninas deben enfrentarse a su papel no solamente en el entorno familiar sino en sus relaciones con los hombres, con sentimientos de culpabilidad sobre sus cuerpos y su papel en la historia, una historia nacional cuyos efectos negativos perviven en las mujeres de la Escocia contemporánea.

En otras ocasiones, Galloway satiriza los arquetipos de pasividad como es el caso del relato “Fair Ellen and the Wanderer Returned,” en el que celebra el lenguaje femenino, parodiando el cuento de *The Sleeping Beauty*, con el papel protagonista de Ellen que reta su papel en la historia monolítica de la tradición masculina en la que la mujer leal y piadosa espera dormida a su destino, intocable, pasiva por el hombre que ama. Galloway propone un argumento diferente y presenta una Ellen en un contexto contemporáneo, universal sobre una mujer que despierta a la historia a la que estaba confinada. Después de diez años esperando por el hombre que le había prometido casarse con ella, diez años de soledad, silencio y duro trabajo en la granja de sus padres,

Ellen toma la decisión de casarse con otro hombre. Un día, cuando su amor anterior vuelve y se acerca a ella como aún su propietario, ella le habla mirándole a los ojos y su voz se convierte en lo que Cixous en su filosofía describe como “una voz que grita - la palabra que habla y que explota, demoliendo el discurso” (94). Ellen no está muerta ni pasiva. Se ha despertado de mundo de los muertos, de los bosques oscuros y es ahora visible, con una voz firme, una voz que habla desde la libertad: “Debes irte, irte y no volver [...] ¿Te has preguntado alguna vez que fue de mi? ¿ Y piensas ahora que quiero esperar de nuevo, cargar contigo después de tantos años esperando?” (75).

Esta liberación a través del lenguaje femenino, esta manera de devolver a la mujer a la vida, y de dar voz a su deseo o inconciente reprimido es precisamente lo que une a Janice Galloway con sus predecesoras Willa Muir y Jessie Kesson. Esta liberación está representada en su primera novela *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, en la cual explora el colapso psicológico de una joven que mantiene una lucha entre sus propios sentimientos y los que los demás esperan de ella en la Escocia contemporánea, y en este sentido Gavin Wallace compara la novela con la novela de Alasdair Gray *1982 Janine*, la primera en articular el infierno de la Escocia contemporánea a través de su protagonista, Jock, un hombre incapaz de dar expresión a lo que siente, en una Escocia que hereda los problemas culturales, económicos y políticos de la devastada ciudad industrial de Glasgow.

En su novela, Galloway habla desde su propia experiencia como mujer y como escritora en Escocia, y se posiciona claramente en la hipótesis de Cixous a la hora de dar voz a su protagonista cuyo cuerpo y voluntad han estado reprimidos por el poder

que esta regido por “LA IGLESIA, LA LEY y EL MATRIMONIO” (84), que son las fuerzas que simbolizan en poder en Escocia sustentado por los principios calvinistas que controlan la religión, la filosofía y el lenguaje de sus ciudadanos. Galloway escribe desde lo que Cixous denomina ‘La Muerte,’ y que Joy, la joven protagonista, llama “nada bajo la piel” (175), un lugar desde el cual se manifiesta a través de una narrativa fragmentada que narra la biografía de su cuerpo también fragmentado, estigmatizado mientras llora la muerte de su amante, un hombre casado que muere ahogado durante unas cortas vacaciones en España.

Joy es una mujer que Cairns Craig asocia con Escocia en *The Modern Scottish Novel*, como “la imagen no solamente de una mujer negada por una sociedad patriarcal sino de una sociedad consciente de sí misma como un vacío [...] Una sociedad que vive a finales de los años ochenta las consecuencias del fracaso de su vuelta a la vida (199).

“Me miro a mi misma desde la esquina de la habitación” (7) es la primera frase de su reconstrucción. Las páginas en blanco de la novela definen el vacío de Joy, físico y psicológico. Lucha con sobrevivir el día a día, estar viva en un mundo racional e incompatible con sus sentimientos, y trata de buscar el equilibrio entre la tristeza que siente y lo que su entorno espera de ella. Joy busca desesperadamente por su propio Yo, libre de la tradición cultural que amenaza con negarla, que la reprime creando en ella un sentimiento de confusión que la hace sentir un agujero negro: “Algo que hay en mí no le gusta a la gente. No soy una mujer convencional. Ya no menstruo. A veces creo que no existo” (105). Galloway se adentra en el inconsciente de Joy y crea un texto subversivo desde el que Joy puede articular, contar su experiencia, desafiar la

autoridad que intenta negarla mientras llora a su amante. La Iglesia, que Joy identifica con la autoridad moral que ejerce la Ley, juega un papel fundante en su dolorosa existencia. La educación en su infancia fue su primera experiencia calvinista que engendró un sentimiento de culpa en ella, porque para la doctrina calvinista la demostración del amor y las emociones son sinónimos de vergüenza, y la bondad se mide de acuerdo con la productividad y el valor económico de las personas, una filosofía que en *The Scottish Novel*, Francis Russell Hart señala como el carácter que ha construido el carácter nacional escocés durante siglos, siendo por tanto un tema recurrente en la literatura escocesa. Añade que estos mitos, estos comportamientos conservadores o represores basados en el miedo a Dios han sobrevivido en el tiempo aunque han sido constantemente puestos en duda.

Sin embargo, no es fácil para Galloway encontrar una voz para Joy porque cree que la ausencia de voz propia crea un profundo daño psicológico, y como consecuencia, una incapacidad para expresarse. Galloway vincula la ausencia de esta voz al sentimiento de inferioridad lingüística que crea una sensibilidad dividida que conlleva el hecho de expresarse en inglés o escocés, dado el abandono político de Escocia por “las fuerzas externas de la élite,” es decir los diferentes gobiernos ingleses que en su opinión han reprimido la voluntad y la voz escocesa. Por lo tanto, en *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* Galloway se une a la llamada de una subversión y cambio radical, a la construcción de un nuevo marco social y político para la escritura en Escocia, un espacio que no reprima la identidad nacional sino un espacio en el que puedan escucharse voces diferentes, un espacio que consecuentemente debe moverse



hacia una sensibilidad mas plural, mas femenina. Pero la voz femenina plural que Galloway proclama es problemática porque debe enfrentarse a la representación simbólica de la Iglesia y el Estado, ya que, según la filosofía de Cixous “no hay lugar para tus deseos en nuestros temas de Estado [...] porque nosotros, hombres, que hemos sido hechos para tener éxito, para ascender en la escala social, es una tentación que nos atrae, y alienta nuestras ambiciones [...] Vosotras mujeres, representáis la amenaza eterna, la anti-cultura para nosotros (67).

De hecho, los esfuerzos de Joy por articular sus recuerdos, por liberarse de sus pesadillas pasa inevitablemente por la articulación de la narrativa de su propio cuerpo, y para ello debe enfrentarse a las concepciones que están profundamente enraizadas en su familia y en todos aquellos para los que, como cita Cixous, su voz representa una amenaza ya que supone una transgresión: “Todas las mujeres han conocido la tortura de comenzar a hablar claro, con el corazón roto, en ocasiones perdidas en el lenguaje, porque cuando la mujer habla – incluso cuando simplemente abre la boca en publico, es una transgresión “ (92). Todo el mundo considera que Joy está trastornada. Su dolorosa existencia se ve inmersa en un mundo de médicos, y psiquiatras que ponen en cuestión su salud mental, e intentar corregir su 'enfermedad,' lo cual intensifica aún mas su desorientación. Su irreverencia hacia los discursos de poder de los psiquiatras se hace patente cuando son objeto del ridículo cambiando bombillas, lo cual sirve como comentario irónico sobre su tratamiento de los pacientes como objetos.

Galloway utiliza también la ironía para parodiar a los psiquiatras que tratan a los pacientes como objetos, y desafía también la autoridad de la Iglesia en la persona del

sacerdote, que la hace sentirse como la “mancha” de la comunidad que necesita ser “eliminada” (79). El hecho de que Joy culpe al sacerdote por no protegerla de todos aquellos que la critican puede entenderse como un reto al papel hegemónico de la Iglesia en Escocia, que tradicionalmente ha dictado los cánones de la familia y de lo que suponía la feminidad, y animaba a las mujeres a ser devotas esposas y madres según los principios calvinistas. Por eso, Joy se siente culpable por no cumplir las expectativas que se esperan de ella y agoniza en el esfuerzo de convertirse en una perfecta ama de casa, lucha por poner un poco de orden en el caos, por demostrar que ella es una mujer “adecuada” en un espacio familiar que daña su cuerpo.

A medida que la novela avanza, Joy se concienta de que no está loca sino simplemente desesperada por sobrepasar los límites de la “camisa de fuerza” (225) de su vida. Su deseo de “aprender a sucumbir al caos y no volver” (223) confirma que desea retar los diagnósticos de la autoridad moral que ha marcado los límites de su vida, y es ahora consciente de que “debe mirar a los cambios que seguramente están en el horizonte [...] no todos agradables pero atractivos” (222). Después de haber estado siempre reprimida por una cultura hegemónica e inalterable, predeterminada, Joy sabe ahora que tiene en su poder la capacidad de revisar su propia historia, el poder de reconciliarse con su propio sufrimiento, porque “la voz está aún allí” (235).

En su cuarta novela *Clara* (2002), Janice Galloway se aleja del contexto de la clase trabajadora en Escocia, y lo justifica en la entrevista con Leigh March: “Estaba empezando a sentirme algo varada con el tema de Escocia. *No importa lo que escribo siempre que sea urbano*. Al diablo con esa idea. Esta novela no es urbana. Va también

a lo esencial, pero no de la misma manera” (98). Por sus palabras deducimos que Galloway deseaba huir del tema escocés de sus novelas y relatos para involucrarse en lo que parece ser la raíz de su deseo por la escritura, el deseo de explorar verdades universales y dar voz a las mujeres cuya creatividad ha sido ignorada a lo largo de la historia. Parte de la atracción por escribir *Clara* era dejar que la protagonista hablara, desvelar lo que subyace bajo la concepción masculina de la verdad absoluta que coloca a las mujeres en una posición secundaria, y en muchas ocasiones olvidada.

Galloway relata que lo que atrajo más su atención sobre la vida de Clara Schumann fue su vida personal, su esfuerzo por mantener un equilibrio entre por un lado el hecho de ser una buena hija, esposa y madre, y por otro lado el hecho de continuar con su trayectoria artística. Esta fue la mayor lucha de Clara Schumann y una constante en su vida, tal y como cuenta Galloway: “Nunca fue considerada femenina [...] Creo que Clara era considerada un poco agresiva. Es extraordinario, cuando vas a Alemania hoy en día, aun te encuentras con personas que o bien la aman y creen que es una santa o que es una bruja.” El intenso trabajo que Galloway dedicó en escribir *Clara* procedía de su gran amor por la música, un gusto que ha colmado su vida desde que su director de colegio cuando era una niña Ken Hetherington, a quien dedica la novela, reemplazó todos sus miedos y represiones por tolerancia y comprensión, y la animó a componer. Pero aun más importante, *Clara* aúna su afinidad entre la música y la escritura, siendo en su opinión la música y el silencio más importantes que las palabras, porque éstos animan al lector a escuchar al texto: “La música del lenguaje, de como las palabras se balancean y resuenan en forma de frases, líneas rotas [...] Así es como la

prosa funciona para mi” (170).

La fascinación de Galloway por el ritmo, la musicalidad de las palabras en el texto coincide con el mensaje de Hélène Cixous cuando habla del lenguaje femenino, y la afinidad entre la escritura y la música, una unión esencial que convierte al texto en poético, tal y como ella misma explica en una entrevista con Blyth y Sellers, incluida en *Hélène Cixous. Live Theory*, en la que habla sobre el importante papel de la música en su escritura y de como “todo lo que escribo tiene un tipo de ritmo que lo hace heterogéneo, en ocasiones con silencios, en otras con largos párrafos, y otras con otros mas cortos [...] Y esto, lo se, es una forma de voz que puede encontrarse en las mujeres.” (100-1). Galloway abre la puerta al inconsciente de Clara, creando una novela llena de poesía que parte de los sentimientos reprimidos de clara, la musicalidad de su inconsciente, de las palabras no dichas, de sus silencios. Esto es lo que Cixous llama *jouissance*, la sensación de placer que Galloway revela cuando pone voz a Clara mas allá de la dureza que la vida le había impuesto. Es esta búsqueda mística por el amor de la madre y no por el amor del padre en la que Galloway encuentra el placer de escribir la novela, en una re-escritura de la génesis de Clara, o como Cixous aclara en “The Laugh of the Medusa”: “Un acto que está marcado por la ocasión de la mujer a hablar, de ahí su irrupción en la historia que siempre había estado basada en su *supresión* (250).

Galloway narra los recuerdos de la niñez de Clara a través del monólogo interior que nos permite escuchar las sensaciones y los sentimientos de una niña de cuatro años y su relación con un padre que despierta en su memoria como el maestro que enseña y

ordena mientras que “nunca preguntó lo que pensaba su madre [...] Marianne estaba llena de bondad y tenía un cuerpo que cuerpo con facilidad, una mente que absorbía como papel secante y la capacidad de cantar bien” (23). Galloway intensifica la relación de autoridad entre Friedrich Wieck y su hija y la presenta como una relación edipiana, con una madre silenciada, y un padre que separa su cuerpo de su madre y la obliga a entrar en su mundo de orden y autoridad en el que la hija es obligada a según su norma, la norma bajo la cual él aprendió y que desea transmitir a su hija, la norma de “Dios, la Religión y la Virtud” (235). No hay lugar para Marianne, la madre de Clara, en este mundo paternal, a causa de la relación artificial padre-hija que el padre ha creado para ella, en la que Friedrich se apropia de la posición de su madre porque se siente capaz de reemplazarla. Clara es incapaz de hablar porque fue enseñada por su padre a reprimir sus sentimientos. Él se encarga de enseñarle lecciones que no tienen para ella mucho que ver con lecciones de música sino con lecciones de moralidad y obligación. En su recuerdo es incapaz de distinguir su mano de la de su padre, un hombre enseña de una forma marcial toca siempre la misma música, mientras que Clara oye la voz de su madre que lo sobrepasa todo, una voz que desaparece físicamente cuando se divorcia de su padre y ella cuenta con solo ocho años, pero que inunda su memoria para siempre. La voz de la madre es lo que alimenta el sonido de su música, lo que mas le gusta, y mientras estudia, escribe y toca incesantemente bajo la mirada atenta del padre, ella piensa en el lenguaje, la música, y la poesía con la aparece su madre en su mente, cantando: “Madre. Lengua. Las dos palabras aparecen juntas en su mente y se da cuenta de lo bien que encajan” (42-3).

La madre de Clara está lejos, y con ella el mundo de las emociones. En el mundo de Friedrich, Clara se supone que abandona su amor por su madre y se somete al amor marcial de su padre que impone el único lenguaje que él conoce, el lenguaje que representa su autoridad. Incapaz de negociar directamente con su padre, y desesperada ante el futuro que ha diseñado para ella, escribe muchas más palabras de las que habla. Su padre solo le permite escribir notas a conocidos que no puedan interferir en su relación y la de su padre en su diario llamado *Diaries are Posterity's* que ella califica como “una versión autorizada, y esto, ni que decir tiene, es la autoridad establecida [...] entre la edad de siete y trece años, la edad preferida de los jesuitas” (62). Mientras tanto escribe cartas a su madre en las que le habla sobre su progreso en la música, y expresa su deseo que puedan verse pronto para “poder tocar muchas piezas con cuatro Manos contigo” (63). Este es un momento en el que Clara echa de menos cosas importantes que una madre puede dar a una hija. Clara necesita más que nunca la intensidad emocional del amor de una madre, la protección que solo una madre puede proporcionar, las vitaminas reparadoras para alimentar el ser que ha tenido que dar a tu padre.

En esta historia de padre e hija, Friedrich no solo tiene derecho a someter a su hija al aislamiento, a sus dictámenes, a su autoridad, sino que tiene derecho a elegir un hombre que sea como él, que le sustituya y mantenga su tradición, autoridad e omnipotencia sobre ella. Se da cuenta de que su hija está distraída con uno de sus estudiantes, Robert Schumann, que se enamora de ella cuando tiene solamente doce años, aunque ella siente que “Herr Schumann no era como su padre. Herr Schumann era

frívolo y hablador. Estaba escribiendo una novela, una opera, una obra de teatro, estaba siempre escribiendo algo” (84-5), y sobre todo le gustaba la poesía. La ceguera de Friedrich le impide ver que su hija está sedienta de conversaciones agradables, llenas de amor y de vida. El, sin embargo, considera que la poesía de Schumann no puede proporcionar un futuro adecuado de acuerdo con el que ha planeado para ella: “Schumann no tenía suficiente masculinidad para ese” (85). Para un hombre como Friedrich, un heredero de la tradición que mantiene lo masculino en oposición de lo femenino, lo activo en oposición de lo pasivo, el hombre que le sustituya debe ser un hombre que pueda competir con su masculinidad y autoridad, y que pueda desearla y poseerla de la manera que el lo hace.

Clara busca una relación con el mundo externo, que utilice un lenguaje que no hable desde la sumisión, sino desde la proximidad poética de las palabras de Schumann que escribe poesía y estudia a Beethoven, Goethe, Bach, Herder y Wenzel y que le aporta una nueva voz que reta el lenguaje del padre y le ofrece la posibilidad de transformarse en una nueva mujer con capacidad de amar. Galloway se sumerge en el inconsciente de Clara y da voz a sus pensamientos y sentimientos reprimidos durante su vida al lado de su marido Robert Schumann. Al lado de Schumann, Clara, como Willa Muir, pudo encontrar el verdadero amor, un amor sin límites por el Otro, el espacio femenino que les permitía compartir el espacio poético de la creación musical. Cuando Schumann muere, Galloway ofrece consuelo a Clara; su dolor se ve recompensado por placer ya que en ese momento el universo completo comienza para ella, un mundo que abre puertas y ventanas no solamente a todo el mundo sino también

a ella misma. Clara es ahora una mujer, una persona, un cuerpo que mira por la ventana con la esperanza de encontrar una nueva voz abierta al mundo de la música y de vida.

Puedo por tanto concluir que esta es la voz, el encuentro liberador del Self con el Otro que Janice Galloway, Jessie Kesson y Willa Muir proponen para sus heroínas en diferentes periodos y contextos sociales de la Escocia del siglo XX. Esta nueva voz de mujer surge entre el Self y el Otro es una voz llena de afirmación y de vida que podemos llamar ‘smeddum,’ el término escocés que el celebrado poeta Douglas Dunn utiliza para describir la voz poética que emerge en *The White Bird Passes*, “una voz llena de energía y vitalidad que podemos oír en las alas de ese pájaro metafórico que echa a volar.”