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**A FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL:  
DEPICTION OF CHILDHOOD IN SELECTED PROSE**

**Diplomová práce**

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V Olomouci dne .....

.....  
Soňa Vaníčková

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# 1 Introduction

Many characters across contemporary Scottish literature including children are depicted struggling with various aspects of their lives. It is children – fragile, vulnerable, and dependent on the support of their environment, with the threat of each step taken affecting their future – who are in the focal point of this thesis.

The objective of the thesis is to study the cases of depicted struggles faced by children, determine their causes, and organise them according to their nature into categories which would provide an insight to the motifs used in literary works in the context of Scottish children.

For the purpose of this study, a set of prose written by three contemporary Scottish women writers was selected as the primary sources. Furthermore, the thesis considers a child to be any individual character before the age of eighteen. In particular, the discussion involves those children who are depicted struggling in any way, from their surviving of birth, diseases, and harsh conditions to problematic relationships with themselves, their family or other authority figures. Concurrently, if a child is shown to experience difficulties fitting into society, being endangered, or abused by its members, they are also included among the subjects of the thesis.

Before the research is conducted, the literary works are put in context of Scottish literature both globally (from the perspective of Scotland as a part of the United Kingdom) and locally with regards to texts written by Scottish woman writers. The nature of the selected texts is specified with regards to their genre, provided that, whilst presenting children as their subject matter, they exclude fairy tales and can rather be described as Gothic fiction written for adult readers.

The research process itself will involve identifying motifs of any of the aforementioned problems faced by children in the selected texts, explore them and then propose a taxonomy based on the findings. To do that, textual analysis will be applied in the research part. Close reading of the literary works will mostly rely on the reader-response theory to be able to interpret those problems which are merely implied in the texts, while allowing the explicitly admitted problems to be exposed by each text.

## 2 Methodology

In this chapter, I will discuss the methodological approaches used in this thesis. After stating the general aims of the thesis, I will specify the research questions. Then, I will move on to the texts chosen for the purpose of this thesis, briefly explaining the selection. Finally, I will introduce the research method applied to the texts as well as the means of processing the acquired data.

In this thesis, I set myself the task of examining the lives of Scottish children depicted in contemporary Scottish literature, with focus on the motif of struggle faced by people in their childhood. I intend to determine the most prominent children's obstacles occurring in the selected literature by detecting various struggles in the primary texts. After that, I will attempt to determine the cause of those problems to establish a possible common source and – under the condition that a sufficient number of them is provided in the selected texts – I aim to propose their categorization. By doing so, I expect to be able to acquire a general idea of what contemporary Scottish literature provides as an illustration of childhood in Scotland along with children's predicaments.

I state the following as my research questions:

- 1) Does the selected prose depict any struggles that children must handle? If so, what are the depicted struggles?
- 2) If the selected texts prove to contain the motif of children's struggle, what can be determined as their cause? Can a unifying cause be established?
- 3) Provided a sufficient number of obstacles is found, can they be categorized? If so, what is the proposed categorization?

For this thesis, I decided to consider fiction written by contemporary Scottish women authors, specifically Kate Atkinson, Jenni Fagan, and A. L. Kennedy. In terms of the nature of the selected texts, I chose from the authors' novels as well as short stories in order to find as many instances of childhood struggles as possible. The reason for limiting the range of texts to these authors lies in the relatively recent boom of Scottish women writers in the 1990s, about which I speak in chapter 3.4.1. It is my belief that their texts have not yet been as thoroughly discussed as those of Scottish men writers, who have been prominent in the literary field until then. Moreover, due to Scottish women's experience of double

marginalization, about which I also write in chapter 3.4.1, I expect their description of marginalized people without voice, which children undeniably lack, to be accurate. Furthermore, the three authors whose prose I selected have all written at least one work based on the experience of children. The validity of their Scottishness will not be the subject of this thesis' discussion for the lack of any reliable established guidelines to defining a Scot (see chapter 3.2), and as John McKay explains, authors do not need to set the stories exclusively in Scotland to be considered Scottish writers.<sup>1</sup> For instance, Kate Atkinson is indisputably considered a Scottish author, yet sets some of her works such as *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* in York where she was born.

Since the stories are set in different time and settings, the concept of a child may vary – in “Genteel potatoes,” Grandmother is considered adult enough to go and work at the age of thirteen or less, while similar age is not enough for Grace in “The moving house” to be allowed to live on her own and be employed. Therefore, in this thesis, I consider a child anyone who is under the age of eighteen. At this age, children are also considered adult by institutions (for instance, Anais in *The Panopticon* knows she will be released from the state care system once she celebrates that birthday). It is also when the mental age of an individual seems to be properly developed to consider them an adult, having just recently surpassed the chaotic hormonal era of adolescence.

In order to acquire the instances of children struggling in the literary works, I must first analyse the texts to find the depicted obstacles, which I will subsequently study to determine their nature as well as their cause before categorizing them into a proposed taxonomy. While doing so, I will consider the texts through the lens of reader-response theory discussed in the following chapter. In this thesis, particularly in the theoretical part, I also take the view that literature possesses the ability to reflect the current state of the world in which it was produced.

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<sup>1</sup> John McKay, ‘The Banal Daily Drudge: Telling Stories in Scotland’, *eSharp, Special Issue: Spinning Scotland: Exploring Literary and Cultural Perspectives*, 2009, 97.

## 2.1 Reader-response theory

According to Cargi Tugrul Mart, reader-response theory belongs among one of the “six predominant approaches to literary analysis.”<sup>2</sup> In general, literary theories can be distinguished according to the amount of power ascribed to the reader or the text in terms of determining the textual meaning.

The idea that the text itself creates the meaning has been challenged by many approaches including Gestalt psychology or T. S. Kuhn’s philosophy which both “insisted that the perceiver is active and not passive in the act of perception [since it] is the reader who applies the code in which the message is written and in this way actualizes what would otherwise remain only potentially meaningful.”<sup>3</sup> In order for this to be the case, two cooperating agents are necessary to formulate the full meaning; the text can never self-formulate and for the meaning to be produced, the reader is required to be led by the text.<sup>4</sup> There are more extreme theories, which give each agent more or less power; some maintaining that “meaning is solely generated by the text, and can only be discovered by improved analytic skills,”<sup>5</sup> like New Criticism, and other claiming the reader’s “complete autonomy and power.”<sup>6</sup>

One of the ways of thinking which emphasizes the role of the reader in the process of meaning-making is called phenomenology. It views the reader as the main agent determining textual meaning due to their ability to perceive. In the philosophical field, this approach is strongly connected to Martin Heidegger who introduced the concept of ‘*dasein*’ which establishes that “our consciousness both *projects* the things of the world and at the same time is *subjected* to the world by the very nature of existence in the world.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, the way we think is influenced by the world while projecting the things we know from the world we live in. Our experience can thus also influence how we perceive literature and the meaning we find in texts.

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<sup>2</sup> Cargi Tugrul Mart, ‘Reader-Response Theory and Literature Discussions: A Springboard for Exploring Literary Texts’, *The New Educational Review* 56, no. 2 (June 2019): 78, <https://doi.org/DOI:10.15804/tner.2019.56.2.06>.

<sup>3</sup> Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson, and Peter Brooker, *A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, 5th ed (Harlow, England; New York: Pearson Longman, 2005), 45.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>6</sup> Amal Hassanein Sarhan Abu Saif, ‘Gender Reading and Reader Response Theory’, *Faculty of Arts Research Journal. Menoufia University* 30, no. 119 (1 October 2019): 2511–12, <https://doi.org/10.21608/sjam.2019.128030>.

<sup>7</sup> Selden, Widdowson, and Brooker, *A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, 50. Italics in the original.



It was Hans-George Gadamer who applied Heidegger's thinking to literature in his *Truth and Method* (1975), explaining that upon their publishing, literary texts do not emerge with their meaning fully formed, as the meaning is formed based on the reader's historical context.<sup>8</sup> Of course, the world in which the reader approaches the text is dependent on the time in which the text is read, as well as other crucial factors, such as the geopolitical one for instance. Hans Robert Jauss took this into consideration and proposed "horizon of expectations,"<sup>9</sup> a concept essentially claiming that the historical situation of the reader will help them approach a text in a certain way. As a result of this, a text would be approached differently in Victorian era and today, and while each approach may carry different results when it comes to meaning, neither can be ruled out as the right or wrong one. Terry Eagleton claims that "[w]e can only judge the world from within some kind of framework. But this does not necessarily mean that what is true from one viewpoint is false from another."<sup>10</sup>

Wolfgang Iser, who also drew on Gadamer's work, belongs among those literary critics who proposed that readers and texts need to cooperate in order to establish meaning.<sup>11</sup> His work contradicts that of Jauss as far as history and context of the reader and text are concerned.<sup>12</sup> He introduced the concepts of the implied and actual reader, applying them to explain his take on the discussion on interpretation regarding the power of reader and text.<sup>13</sup> In his key work *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (1978) he explains the equilibrium he believes to exist between the text and the reader's ability to determine meaning, noting that the text can lead the reader to decoding the meaning to a certain degree while the reader will complete the process by providing specific meaning according to their own experience.<sup>14</sup> According to Iser, text also consists of so-called text gaps which help engage the reader's imagination – in these parts of the text, the reader has the most power over determining the meaning. Another textual aspect supporting the reader-text cooperation in the meaning-determining process is negation, which in Iser's conception involves invoking certain collection of the reader's experience in order to negate them.<sup>15</sup> In this sense, it also guides the reader toward reaching some meaning.

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<sup>8</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed. (1989; repr., London; New York: Continuum, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Selden, Widdowson, and Brooker, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, 50.

<sup>10</sup> Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 107.

<sup>11</sup> Abu Saif, 'Gender Reading and Reader Response Theory', 2511.

<sup>12</sup> Selden, Widdowson, and Brooker, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, 52.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>14</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (1978; repr., Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

<sup>15</sup> Abu Saif, 'Gender Reading and Reader Response Theory', 2512.

### 3 Scotland and its Literature: The writing of a marginalized nation

The claim that Scotland is a land of paradoxes can hardly be contradicted. To begin with, it is a land inhabited by the Scottish nation but officially belonging under the United Kingdom; a nation of fierce invincible Caledonian warriors, who made the expanding Roman Empire turn from offence to defence and build protective walls, but despite this seeming invincibility, a nation which suffered through what verges an extermination of culture after the Jacobite rising under the English rule.

The struggle between England and Scotland over the territory manifested already when William the Conqueror invaded Alba in 1071 and forced Malcom III, who tied Scotland to England by marriage with English princess Margaret, to pay homage. English influence on Scottish history is ever-present since with Scotland's definite farewell to independence marked by the Union Act of 1707, when "Scotland embarked on a career as a colony in which life was increasingly determined by a 'signifying system' imposed by England."<sup>16</sup>

#### 3.1 Scotland's place in Britain

Although there is no doubt about Scotland being historically oppressed, there is room to question the level of oppression since, although Scotland experienced the life of an English colony, it actively engaged in English colonialism, too. The fact that Scotland is not only the victim of colonialism but also took part in it as the oppressors and exploiters of British colonies in the 19th century gives rise to an odd situation on its own. This paradox was observed by Professor Carla Sassi, who discusses "the ambiguous stance of a country fully and proudly involved in the building of the [British] Empire, and at the same time, culturally subordinated to England."<sup>17</sup> Colin Kidd and James Coleman provide an interesting insight to the minds of Scots of that time regarding their participation in extending the empire and its justification based on religion. They explain that "[a] presbyterian narrative of liberty

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<sup>16</sup> Marshall Walker, *Scottish Literature since 1707*, 1. publ, Longman Literature in English Series / General Ed.: David Carroll (London: Longman, 1996), 20.

<sup>17</sup> Carla Sassi, *Why Scottish Literature Matters* (Edinburgh: Saltire Society, 2005), 91.

[which] dominated Scottish popular historiography during the nineteenth century . . . told how Scots had contributed to the winning of Britain's glorious heritage of civil and religious freedom."<sup>18</sup>

These statements raise the question of Scottish status under English rule – are they a colony, truly? The answer may not be so simple considering that Scotland, as a part of the UK with England's self-appointed leading position, admittedly had different experience than colonies outside of the UK<sup>19</sup> especially since Scottish colonialist endeavours are also documented. Still, they experienced the pitfalls of being colonized, including the restrictions threatening to erase their culture after the Jacobite rebellion. It is this unique position of being both colonized as well as joining the colonizer in their quest, which make Scottish status so interesting.

The truth remains that Scotland cannot be only seen as a victim in the matter of colonization and Scots seem to be aware of this to some extent, as the colonialist behaviour is also portrayed in their own literature. For instance, James Robertson's *Joseph Knight* (2003)<sup>20</sup> depicts both the price the Jacobites, many of whom sought refuge in other countries, paid for their rebellion as well as "Scotland's bloodstained involvement in the slave trade"<sup>21</sup> with the Jamaican slaves' uprising against their owners, most of whom were the Jacobite exiles.<sup>22</sup>

So far, I established that Scotland is not an actual colony; it is not treated as such, nor has it behaved that way. However, certain differences arise when compared with other parts of the UK. If we put Scotland in contrast with, for instance, Northern Ireland, we find that there is a surprising lack of rebellions caused by Scots in recent history. Perhaps, it is that the English conquest of Scotland and the harsh restrictions imposed on it after the Jacobite uprising caused general capitulation on such intentions rather than any attempts for another violent rebellion. One could deduce that the restrictions had such negative impact on the Scottish spirit that they successfully undermined any violence for the foreseeable future. This is of course not the case of Northern Ireland which only relatively recently, in times when Scotland was attempting a rather peaceful revival of their culture

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<sup>18</sup> Kidd Colin and Coleman James, 'Mythical Scotland', in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Scottish History*, ed. T. M. Devine and Jenny Wormald (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 72.

<sup>19</sup> Sassi, *Why Scottish Literature Matters*, 5–6.

<sup>20</sup> James Robertson, *Joseph Knight* (London: Fourth Estate, 2004).

<sup>21</sup> Ian Brown, 'Entering the Twenty-First Century', in *Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature*, ed. Ian Brown and Alan Riach (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 221.

<sup>22</sup> Ian Brown and Alan Riach, introduction to *Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature*, ed. Ian Brown and Alan Riach (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 1–2.

known as the first Scottish Renaissance, saw the uprise of the IRA terrorism. It is therefore justifiable to state that “even though Scotland, since the Union of Parliaments in 1707, has experienced a process of marginalisation by an unsympathetic central Government, its response to this process seems to have differed quite substantially from that of many similarly threatened cultures.”<sup>23</sup>

If we consider the status of Scotland after the Union, it is thus essential to realize its uniqueness with respect to both England and the colonies. It is a position that is positive as far as the benefits of being a part of the UK are considered, and equally as much a negative one due a certain level of oppression which comes with being a part of the UK. Looking beyond the post-Jacobite restrictions, the ongoing suppression spans across multiple areas from culture to religion to even such a basic element of one’s identity that is language to the point where “[b]oth Gaelic and Scots were explicitly stigmatised in the Scottish education system under the 1872 Education (Scotland) Act’s influence.”<sup>24</sup>

Even after the devolution referendum, which came to be talked about as “the debacle of 1979”<sup>25</sup> or the “fiasco of 1979 when Scotland failed to deliver a conclusive result in the devolution referendum it had politicked to obtain from a reluctant central government,”<sup>26</sup> and the subsequent establishment of Scottish Parliament in 1999, Westminster retains certain powers including its power to decide which exact powers shall be granted to the Scottish Parliament. Scotland’s actual ability to manage its matters is therefore limited, leaving Scotland with a quiet voice, often unheard or overpowered by the English government. Some recent examples would include the Brexit or using the Scotland Act 1998 to block the Gender Recognition Reform Bill in January 2023. With such experience, it appears only logical to consider the establishment of the Scottish Parliament a mere act of attempting to calm Scotland’s calls for independence. The experience of Thatcherism from 1983 which admittedly had the greatest impact on the working class – not only in Scotland but in the Northern England as well as – also “served to underline the growing perception that Scotland was being ruled by an increasingly distant and essentially ‘alien’ political ideology.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Carla Sassi, *Why Scottish Literature Matters*, 4.

<sup>24</sup> Brown and Riach, introduction to *Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature*, 4.

<sup>25</sup> Matt McGuire, *Contemporary Scottish Literature*, ed. Nicolas Tredell, Readers’ Guides to Essential Criticism (Basingstoke [England]; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 9.

<sup>26</sup> Walker, *Scottish Literature since 1707*, 22–23.

<sup>27</sup> Duncan J. Petrie, *Contemporary Scottish Fictions: Film, Television and the Novel* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 3.

The marginalization that has been taking place in Scotland applies on several levels which may add to each other based on the demographic group one finds themselves in, from gender to social class to religion to ethnicity – ultimately, Scotland is diverse. Felix Gross discusses this fact and explains that “there are no states inhabited solely by one, single nationality or ethnic group . . . . Nineteenth Century has established many social myths – one of them was and is the national state, a territory inhabited by a single homogenous, racial or cultural nationality a kind of a tribe rather than a nation.”<sup>28</sup> Several issues arise from all the aforementioned paradoxes and marginalization, such as the problematics of identity, which is undoubtedly one of the most ardent ones.

### 3.2 The Question of Scottishness: Defining a Scot

The issue of Scottish identity is a matter which has occupied the mind of many scholars for quite some time now; after all, Scots themselves have struggled to deal with the subject matter, which has manifested also in culture. At the end of the day, one cannot really wonder why the topic is discussed to such considerable extent since, naturally, “the question of what constitutes Scottish cultural identity and artistic tradition will inevitably be asked and variously answered as long as there is a Scotland.”<sup>29</sup> The history of a nation that lost the hold of its land is strongly reflected in Scottish identity, their spirit, and the way they perceive themselves, as well as how they are perceived by others.

After unwillingly adapting to a shared nationality with England, it became simple to detect a sense of need to identify against England rather than as a part of it. Yet, as discussed in the previous chapter, Scots do not feel severe resentment against England. Instead, their attitude towards being in the UK is rather cold and differs from the immoderate idea of English superiority: “For the majority of English people Britain is England; for many Scots Britain is an English company with too many shares in Scotland.”<sup>30</sup> What manifests from this distance that they keep while attempting to push themselves away further – and what has been there all the time, long before the Union – is the spirit that can be perhaps the most simply described as Scottishness. As it will be further

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<sup>28</sup> Felix Gross, ‘Limits and Limitations of Pluralism’, *Il Politico* 52, no. 2 (1986): 215.

<sup>29</sup> Walker, *Scottish Literature since 1707*, 15.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

explored, Scottishness and what it stands for, similarly to Scots themselves, became a subject to English whim.

It is not difficult to imagine that Scotland started to lose touch with its identity once the two kingdoms became one: a new kingdom with little space for such individual spirit. Scots were thus facing the task of finding an identity suitable for the new arrangement. Ever since, Scotland has been bombarded with clichés, imprisoned in stereotypes which Scottishness has been reduced to: “With the rise of the British Empire, two things happened to Scotland: it became invisible, and it became internationally recognisable in stereotypes and caricatures.”<sup>31</sup> To understand this failure in obtaining an identity, we can make do with the following simplification: after the Union, Scotland was left with an empty space where identity once was which was required to be filled with something.

Myths became the reimbursement that, for the time being, was set to provide this fulfilment. Out of a number of myths, the most potent and vigorous is the Highlander myth. Colin Kidd and James Coleman share this opinion, claiming that “it is the highland myth of romance, formulated in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which has proved most enduring”<sup>32</sup> and that “[t]he cult of the Highlands has become one of the most hackneyed features of Scottish popular mythologizing, and, in turn, of cultural history”<sup>33</sup> when the restrictions imposed on post-Jacobite Scotland were finally lifted in the second half of the 18th century. Professor Marshall Walker further develops the Highlander romanticization with his commentary on this stereotype which became the world-wide characteristic imposed upon Scots: “The clichés are all too familiar: the Scot is tight-fisted, brutish, maudlin, canny, repressed, volatile, alcoholic, dourly religious, a complex barbarian worth exhibiting as one of the world's ethnic sideshows.”<sup>34</sup> Indeed, a rugged man wearing a kilt made of his native plaid walking in the moors, ideally with bagpipes over his shoulder, is a vision imprinted in most of our minds when we talk about Scotland, as I have already explored in my bachelor thesis along with its origins in Sir Walter Scott and Robert Burns’ literary works.<sup>35</sup> Scotland was always more than this simplification which only may have been true for a selected group of its inhabitants, i.e. those who happened to be male

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<sup>31</sup> Sassi, *Why Scottish Literature Matters*, 128.

<sup>32</sup> Colin and James, ‘Mythical Scotland’, 63.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>34</sup> Walker, *Scottish Literature since 1707*, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Soňa Vaničková, “Selected A. L. Kennedy’s short stories: Focus on Silence and the Unspoken” (Bc. thes., Palacký University Olomouc, 2021), 11.

Highlanders. In fact, this section completely overruled the rest of Scots who thus became invisible:

[I]f the nineteenth-century British empire, which in many ways as recent historians have observed was also a Scottish empire, had conferred the status of exaggerated Scottishness on the iconic images still globally recognised – tartan, kilt, bagpipes, whisky – it had simultaneously silenced the other voices – Gaelic voices, women, the brutalising ethos of industrial exploitation, the historical richness of Scotland’s cultural production over centuries.<sup>36</sup>

This image of Scotland thus became an imaginary blanket which covered the actual Scotland and its diversity.

It would not be correct to assume, nevertheless, that Scots were trapped in stereotypes against which they fought with their true identity – as discussed above, they themselves were yet to determine how they fitted into the new establishment of the UK. It is through the means of literature that this struggle with identity is observable, as literary works usually possess the capacity to reflect the context of its creation, them being what Walker calls “a cultural fact, produced in a context which includes the life of the author and the background relations of social, historical, geographical and political factors.”<sup>37</sup> It therefore comes as no surprise that a phenomenon of made-up identity, which the myths indisputably are, also appears in the sphere of Scottish literature:

The use of pen-names, which is certainly not an uncommon practice on 19th-century Scottish literature, intensifies remarkably, almost alarmingly, in the early 20th century . . . . As far as Scottish Gaelic writers are concerned, a ‘double name’ cannot be but the norm . . . . However, there is no doubt it is no less a source and a reflection of a problematic/problematised identity . . . .<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Brown and Riach, introduction to *Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature*, 1.

<sup>37</sup> Walker, *Scottish Literature since 1707*, 2.

<sup>38</sup> Sassi, *Why Scottish Literature Matters*, 146.

So, while the world accepted the Highlander myth as a characteristic by which it could identify Scots, Scots themselves were left to revive their sense of identity and prove its validity to everyone in order to overcome the stereotype. Myths, at the end of the day, are just that: myths, not reality. It goes without saying that their attempts were essentially a failure. The definition of Scottishness is still left undetermined and discussed, particularly by scholars focused on the subject matter, although (ironically) this can only result in simplifying the understanding of what cannot be simplified.

For the time being, scholars could be satisfied with what has been presented as a current (insufficient) variant of the definition of Scottish identity, which is that of a marginalized nation. And coming to terms with an identity of a margin as well as the inability to move beyond it are well documented as “Scots’ self-hatred for having been severed from their past and for not being able to stand up against England . . . becomes a *leitmotiv* in the second half of the 20th century.”<sup>39</sup>

What becomes a unifying pattern found almost in any Scottish contemporary literary work is thus a sense of defeatism and the sourness leaks through the pages as the struggles are exhibited in Scottish stories, which is well depicted for instance in Irvine Welsh’s *Trainspotting* (1993).<sup>40</sup> The post-Union burnout still manifests in the quest for identity not only in the 20th but also the 21st century across Scottish literature: “It has been clear that throughout Scottish literary history estimable works in all genres reflect a preoccupation with democracy and power which is probably even stronger than the more bruited preoccupations of the Presbyterian conscience with God and guilt.”<sup>41</sup> This focus on politics connected with the question of national identity as well as self-consciousness, Walker continues, has its roots traceable all the way to the issue of the dominion pushing Scotland to the margins.<sup>42</sup> Although marginalization is unquestionably a frequent motif in Scottish literature, it is not meant to be understood as the authors’ hint towards how Scotland should be identified. Instead, it should be considered as an engine that floods Scottish literature with unparalleled levels of creativity, which provided the authors with a vast number of stories to be told.

Since marginality does not serve as the definition of Scottishness, the search for a suitable definition does not seem to have come to a satisfactory end. For Scots, nevertheless,

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 119. Italics in the original.

<sup>40</sup> Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (London: Vintage, 2013).

<sup>41</sup> Walker, *Scottish Literature since 1707*, 16.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.



this task appears to have ended already, with quite an unexpected result, as “[a] pull away from ‘Scottishness’, or rather from any direct involvement in (re)definitions of Scottishness, indeed characterises many young Scottish writers today.”<sup>43</sup> Scots have been misidentified for far too long and what more, the attempts at defining them have always only presented more restrictions than the comfort of a well-fitted label.

Notwithstanding, there has never been anything like a unified Scotland – its demography has always been diverse. Any artificially made definition may thus result in more myth creation as it has before. Even the authors themselves oppose the tendency to put labels on their craft and identity – A. L. Kennedy, for instance, about whom I will talk in chapter 3.4.1.3, is famously countering any labels or categories with great passion. Alasdair Gray also demonstrated his dislike of the compulsion to define and made a stance against the notion of national character: “One of the things that is very irritating is that nowadays people are trying to set up conferences to discover what is the ‘Scottish character,’ the character of Scottish nation. That idea is utterly stupid.”<sup>44</sup>

As for potential future of this matter, Robert Crawford suggests “dedefining”<sup>45</sup> Scotland to repair the damage done. And the call for ridding Scotland of all the unsuitable definitions is also heard from the Renaissance authors themselves; eventually, it is the authors active in the 1908s and the 1990s who put the whole discussion to a brief halt. Alasdair Gray determined that Scottish nation may be finally defined based on location rather than any other unsteady, fluctuating characteristics dependent on a current political situation and indirectly offers a simple solution to the whole issue: “Landscape is what defines the most lasting nations.”<sup>46</sup>

His statement is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, it showcases his belief that Scots are meant to last, their determination not to be conquered by any other nation or to be suffocated by any myths or haphazard definitions. The second aspect that makes this quote so striking is how aptly it describes the relationship between a nation and the landscape it inhabits. I have already written about this connection and its reflection on literature in my bachelor thesis.<sup>47</sup> Gray has expressed himself on this subject in more than this single

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<sup>43</sup> Sassi, *Why Scottish Literature Matters*, 174.

<sup>44</sup> Alasdair Gray, James Kelman, and Tom Toremans, ‘An Interview with Alasdair Gray and James Kelman’, *Contemporary Literature* 44, no. 4 (2003): 581.

<sup>45</sup> Robert Crawford, ‘Dedefining Scotland’, in *Studying British Cultures*, ed. Susan Bassnett (London: Routledge, 1997), 96.

<sup>46</sup> Alasdair Gray, *Why Scots Should Rule Scotland: A Carnaptious History of Britain from Roman Times Until Now* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1997), 1.

<sup>47</sup> Vaničková, “Selected A. L. Kennedy’s short stories,” 13–14.

sentence: “I wrote this pamphlet called *Why the Scots Should Rule Scotland*, and I begin by defining a Scot as anyone who happens to live in Scotland and is able to vote.”<sup>48</sup>

Among scholars, the search for a sufficient definition has by large ended with the new millennium and was replaced by a new way of seeing the culture: “If England has managed to construct itself as an organic, cohesive culture, Scotland (which defines itself, by necessity, against England, and against England's perception of Scottishness) gradually constructs its 20th-century identity by revaluating that very duality (or plurality) which had been regarded a sign of cultural weakness.”<sup>49</sup> Instead, the idea began to be viewed as an asset that enriches Scotland and seems to provide a solution to the matter of identity. Furthermore, it became an opportunity to be freed from the burden of attempting to incorporate the diverse population into a single box. By the 21st century, plurality has mostly replaced the previous definitions. The concept of plurality as commonly encountered in discussions about the USA accepts cultural diversity of a group of people distinguished by ethnicity, race, religion, etc., and equalizes them “by consensus, or with a minimum of coercion.”<sup>50</sup> In this sense, plurality has not still been achieved in the USA, nor in Scotland marginalization continues to be a part of everyday life. Still, the move towards pluralism seems the most reasonable decision to have been made – after all, “differences in religion, in ideas and values are often even more difficult to reconcile in a single polity than the ethnic one.”<sup>51</sup> Historically, Scotland has been a place of conflict between religions and values, let alone ethnics. This deficiency then forms multiple levels of marginalization based on the number of minorities which one identifies as a part of, more of which can be experienced at once.

### 3.3 Establishing Scottish Literature

Along with Scottish identity, the focus was on Scottish literature and its potential ability to become a self-contained literary canon. Berthold Schoene lists several aspects that needed to be solved to reach an acceptable result:

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<sup>48</sup> Gray, Kelman, and Toremans, ‘An Interview with Alasdair Gray and James Kelman’, 581.

<sup>49</sup> Sassi, *Why Scottish Literature Matters*, 149.

<sup>50</sup> Gross, ‘Limits and Limitations’, 217.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

Throughout the twentieth century Scottish literary criticism has been deeply troubled by questions of national authenticity, such as (a) whether, despite Scotland's loss of statehood in the eighteenth century, it might still be possible to argue for the persistence of a coherent Scottish literary tradition, or (b) how truly and unmistakably 'Scottish' Scottish literature really is, and (c) if Scotland's literature is indeed marked by an essential difference, then what exactly might be the most salient attributes of this essence.<sup>52</sup>

The first question Schoene presents may be answered by another one: does a nation need a state for its culture to remain? It is my belief that the previous chapter has already proven that Scottish culture has managed to survive and blooms with quite the vigour even under the difficult conditions. The question concerning the level of Scottish literary authenticity is problematic insofar as the question of Scottish identity, this being the case since it remains true that "post-Union Scottish literature does indeed represent a journey through unsettled and unsettling identities."<sup>53</sup> John McKay, who explored the nature of Scottish short story and its origins, explains that while arising from "an oral tradition of storytelling"<sup>54</sup> as either ballads or tales, "these stories share a common sense of the social that manifests itself as a portrayal of the domestic or everyday."<sup>55</sup>

It is the fact that the literary works reflect the reality that makes it as Scottish as it can be, which is a point strongly advocated for by James Kelman, who "argues that it is precisely in dealing with the everyday texture of apparently non-dramatic details of life that the writer's main task lies."<sup>56</sup> Simultaneously, McKay touches upon the last point in Schoene's account – the level of sufficiency in terms of being distinguishable enough to earn its own place among world literary canons. While Scotland's literature may certainly not be the only to depict the everyday of its people, it is the depicted experience of living in Scotland that makes it essentially distinguishable from the rest.

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<sup>52</sup> Berthold Schoene, 'Going Cosmopolitan: Reconstituting "Scottishness" in Post-Devolution Criticism', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, ed. Berthold Schoene (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 8–9.

<sup>53</sup> Sassi, *Why Scottish Literature Matters*, 161.

<sup>54</sup> McKay, 'The Banal Daily Drudge', 107.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Edwin Morgan, 'Tradition and Experiment in the Glasgow Novel', in *The Scottish Novel since the Seventies: New Visions, Old Dreams* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 87.

The specifics of what it means to be a Scot have already been discussed in the previous chapter. It goes without saying that all its aspects are also reflected in literature. There can hardly be any arguments about the validity of literary works produced in Scotland in pre-romantic and romantic period – Burns’ or Scott’s works are still being anthologized among other world-famous classics, though hidden under the umbrella term ‘British literature.’ Yet the issue of having to prove worthy by being distinguishable enough has concerned contemporary literature. Schoene argues for its validity and points to the richness in themes: “Scotland’s distinguished literary tradition of vociferous dissent and opposition, radicalism, and scourging of the political establishment is as vibrant and sharp as it was in Burns’s time.”<sup>57</sup>

One such attribute characteristic to Scottish literature that makes the argument for an individual literary canon possible (known as Caledonian Antisyzygy) will be further developed upon in chapter 3.3.2. Another attribute has been mentioned throughout the text already – the experience of marginalization. However, this phenomenon did not become only a motif in the writing of Scottish authors. As Scottish culture slowly suffocated under the power of England, so did their writing and publishing. Scottish publishing suffered a great blow as it became centralized southwards and London became the centre of publishing, and a great deal of energy has been spent on reviving the Scottish tradition since.

First attempts at reviving it are recorded after the First World War with a shift in Scottish writing. For this shift to happen, it was necessary to reject the narratives of myths still held at the time. Indeed, around this era, previously written Scottish literature becomes rejected for its colonialist undertones and enabling the Highlander myth at the same time.<sup>58</sup> Hugh MacDiarmid’s name became the most sonorous at the time as his work became a major influence for the following decades, though there is no doubt that what he attempted became overly focused on politics. He and some other prominent figures of what is now often referred to as the first Scottish literary Renaissance, such as Catherine Carswell, believed that “the re-definition of Scottishness entailed a ‘revolution’ in thinking and not simply a redress of wrongs or a re-establishment of ancient cultural/political borders.”<sup>59</sup> This overly political direction could unfortunately hardly provide a sufficiently stable grounds for

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<sup>57</sup> Gavin Wallace, ‘Voyages of Intent: Literature and Cultural Politics in Post-Devolution Scotland’, in *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, ed. Berthold Schoene (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 17.

<sup>58</sup> Sassi, *Why Scottish Literature Matters*, 103.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

literary movement, let alone Scottish spirit, to survive or thrive on international level. Roderick Watson warns against believing the movement's success: "This is not to say these authors initiated the outward perspective nor even the Scottish revival of cultural confidence."<sup>60</sup> Accusations of the first Scottish literary Renaissance's triumph are thus rather baseless.

Although McDiarmid's attempts have not celebrated much success in neither literary nor political fields, his work's worth is undeniable. The impulse for reviving the Scottish literary tradition made it possible for the following movements to be formed and even celebrate more success. Looking beyond that essential attribute, he established space for other related burning issues – his infamous creation of Synthetic Scots, for instance, can be understood as another action from which Scottish literature benefited later. While his attempt to create an archaism-based language which "no one spoke"<sup>61</sup> was rather naïve considering there were other perfectly functional languages already, this gesture shifted focus more on how much space were the languages of Scotland other than English given in the pages.

Considering the historical stigmatization of the two languages spoken in Scotland prior to English (Gaelic and Scots) in schools,<sup>62</sup> it became quite a statement when they started to re-appear in Scottish literary works. Nowadays, the status of Scots is certainly stronger than it was before, and is even protected by law instead of denounced: "The Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act of 2005 and its implementation in the next year . . . marks high governmental and institutional priority given to sustaining the language."<sup>63</sup> In addition to that, "the webpage of the Scottish Parliament . . . is translated into several languages, including Scots"<sup>64</sup> proving that it is finally being treated more seriously, especially since in some places, it is only regarded as a mere dialect of English.

Thus, McDiarmid and others' work after the First World War still had positive impact, though largely unsuccessful in its proclaimed aims, if on nothing else than preparing the grounds for the next generation to succeed: "These germs [of a conception of nationhood] were largely neglected by later generations, to surface again, gradually, in the

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<sup>60</sup> Roderick Watson, 'The Modern Scottish Literary Renaissance', in *Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature*, ed. Ian Brown and Alan Riach (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 75.

<sup>61</sup> Michael Gardiner, *From Trocchi to Trainspotting: Scottish Critical Theory since 1960* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 20.

<sup>62</sup> Brown and Riach, introduction to *Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature*, 4.

<sup>63</sup> Brown, 'Entering the Twenty-First Century', 215.

<sup>64</sup> Sassi, *Why Scottish Literature Matters*, 4.

renewed political and cultural atmosphere of the late 1980s and 1990s.”<sup>65</sup> The next chapter will discuss this movement in greater detail. For now, suffice to say that the twentieth century was a period of such movements. Brown and Riach note that this time, particularly post-1945, was marked by the tendency to officially form various organisations as a reflection of “a general recognition of the responsibility of rediscovering and revitalising Scotland’s cultural history: the Saltire Society (1936–), the Association for Scottish Literary Studies (1970–) and others built on the example set by the writers of the 1920s and those that followed.”<sup>66</sup>

It can be noted that so far, these formally created groups were not called Renaissance, a term I used previously. This term did not come to use as a title of one such organisation, but rather became a reference to the movement. It is not uncommon to encounter different views on how many Renaissances there have been; while some scholars simply consider it one ongoing movement with a number of waves, others feel it right to consider those waves as individual events that are well distinguishable, separated by multiple attributes, and easily classified into a certain time range. Some may even disregard the rather unsuccessful first one, entwined in people’s minds with Hugh MacDiarmid’s attempts to accomplish his political mission, and only recognize the efforts of the late twentieth century, particularly since the 1980s, a proper Renaissance.

Still, the term may be a problematical point as among scholars, its use is an awkward matter. Even many authors have expressed their dislike of the term and objected to using it to represent what they do. Some of them, like Catherine Carswell, felt the term ties their unique work in a unique context to the experience of Ireland, which is a completely different case, and of course expressed their opposition to the idea.<sup>67</sup> Whether the term was commonly used or not, it remains the truth that it is tied with Scotland throughout history:

‘Renaissance’ may not be the key word in Scottish culture from the nineteenth until the twenty-first centuries, but it surely recurs. From Patrick Geddes’s heralding a ‘Renaissance’ in the 1890s, through the Scottish Literary Renaissance, however defined, in the 1920s, with Hugh MacDiarmid at its centre, through the late twentieth-century cliché of the Scottish theatrical renaissance, the concept of a Scotland,

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>66</sup> Brown and Riach, introduction to *Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature*, 7.

<sup>67</sup> Sassi, *Why Scottish Literature Matters*, 115.

or rather many Scotlands, rediscovering, reshaping, redefining and remaking itself, and themselves, is a constant refrain. And at the end of the century, through democratic referendum, the nation was in another sense reborn, remaking a parliament.<sup>68</sup>

Thanks to the first Scottish literary Renaissance equally as much as to the other above-listed movements and their attempts to provide space for Scottish cultural rebirth, it is possible to prove that Scottish literature truly does have a sufficient number of its unique characteristic attributes, the essential difference which Schoene sought. When Colin Donati discusses these attributes which make Scottish literature its own, canon-worthy one, he already determines their abundance from the past from which contemporary literature may profit, adding that any questions about the existence of Scottish literature are essentially pointless:

We possess a literary heritage that ranges back to include, among many other elements, a uniquely expressive and individualised corpus of medieval and renaissance poetry which still has an unusually intimate power to speak to the modern mind. . . . So nobody seriously denies that there is a Scottish literature. Yet the premise has not always been routinely assumed to hold.<sup>69</sup>

The heyday of Scottish literature awaited until after the Second World War. While Riach and Brown consider the period from early 1980s to the early 1990s “as significant for Scottish literary history as that from the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s [as it] reframed issues concerning the form of the canon and Scottish literature’s scope, purpose and autonomy,”<sup>70</sup> I will argue for the latter to be perhaps even more crucial and successful, considering the fact that it was this era which granted Scottish literature a characteristic tone from which it still draws today and by which it is primarily recognized.

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<sup>68</sup> Brown and Riach, introduction to *Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature*, 1.

<sup>69</sup> Colin Donati, introduction to *Why Scottish Literature Matters* (Edinburgh: Saltire Society, 2005) 1.

<sup>70</sup> Michael Gardiner, ‘Arcades – The 1980s and 1990s’, in *Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature*, ed. Ian Brown and Alan Riach (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 181.

### 3.3.1 Prime of Scottish Literature

The year 1979 represents a gloomy part of Scottish history. This is in equal parts due to the failed devolution referendum, which meant a “frustrating defeat of Scottish nationalist ambition,”<sup>71</sup> as well as the political power being held by a government “which made a virtue of deafness to national issue.”<sup>72</sup> Gross detects “resurgence of nationalism among small microethnic groups . . . in Wales, Scotland, among Basques or Catalans, even in Normandy”<sup>73</sup> after the Second World War. In Scotland, this was to a great deal due to “the new British prime minister Margaret Thatcher’s enduringly ominous rise to power, which seemed then to be cementing Scotland’s subnational status for good.”<sup>74</sup>

This environment proved to be an ideal background for the emergence of a new Literary Renaissance in Scotland, in spite of the inhospitable state in which it found itself:

The intellectual wasteland to which many believed Scotland had been reduced in 1979 was, however, not barren for long – if, in fact, it ever had been. . . . A movement of fictional innovation, led by the Glasgow writers Alasdair Gray and James Kelman, suddenly emerged, indebted to the parameters of working-class urban realism established in the preceding decades, but simultaneously transcending them.<sup>75</sup>

Such social and political context fed the authors’ creativity and offered them inspiration in the shape of topical themes of everyday Scottish experience, which seemed to just be waiting to be written down and published as a literary work. Through these stories, Scotland had an exceptional opportunity to represent itself and its reality, pointing to the lives of people who were overlooked, unheard, and seemingly forgotten.

Albeit thematically often bleak and pessimistic, in terms of quality and sheer volume post-1979 literature rapidly developed into a vibrant and characteristically unruly vehicle for Scottish self-representation. . . .

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<sup>71</sup> Schoene, ‘Going Cosmopolitan’, 7.

<sup>72</sup> Gardiner, ‘Arcades – The 1980s and 1990s’, 181.

<sup>73</sup> Gross, ‘Limits and Limitations of Pluralism’, 222.

<sup>74</sup> Schoene, ‘Going Cosmopolitan’, 7.

<sup>75</sup> Gavin Wallace, introduction to *The Scottish Novel since the Seventies: New Visions, Old Dreams*, ed. Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 3.



[Scotland's devolutionary literature] was always, of necessity, politically informed, or at least it was received and critiqued that way, and only considered a success if it made – or could be construed as making – some kind of case for Scotland.<sup>76</sup>

Although it is true that Scottish literature produced after the Union aptly reflected the uncertainty surrounding the question of Scottish identity, it is worth mentioning that the rather rapid changes in British society from the 1980s to the 1990s under Thatcher and New Labour were accompanied by the loss of literature's ability to reflect contemporary society as "the fiction that has emerged has been dead on the page, its contemporaneity transmuted into the *passé* in the short time between writing and publication."<sup>77</sup> However, Nick Rennison considers it important to mention that this does not necessarily mean that the contemporary novels have altogether ceased to depict the social and political subject matters.<sup>78</sup>

During the period of its flourishing, Glasgow became a key location for Scottish literature – starting already in the 1970s, when as early as in 1971 the Department of Scottish Literature was established under the auspices of the University of Glasgow opening the possibility of getting an honours degree in the subject.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, a group of writers was formed in Glasgow in the early 1970s, which came to be an essential contribution to Scottish literature as the basis on which the second Scottish literary Renaissance could grow. Matt McGuire observes: "[T]he Glasgow writers' group is often regarded as the point of origin for what would eventually become a remarkable literary flourishing. . . . They included Alasdair Gray, James Kelman, the poet Tom Leonard (born 1944), poet and dramatist Liz Lochhead (born 1947), and the Gaelic poet Aonghas MacNeacail (born 1942)."<sup>80</sup> It is worth to point out the inclusion of MacNeacail as a representative of authors writing in Gaelic among the rest in the Glasgow group as it demonstrates that this period was also productive in terms of literature written in this language. Brown and Riach go as far as describing the 1980s and 1990s as "a watershed period in the development of Scottish Gaelic literature."<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Schoene, 'Going Cosmopolitan', 7.

<sup>77</sup> Nick Rennison, preface to *Contemporary British Novelists: Routledge Key Guides* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2005), ix. Italics in the original.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

<sup>79</sup> McGuire, *Contemporary Scottish Literature*, 6.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>81</sup> Gardiner, 'Arcades – The 1980s and 1990s', 191.

Other than its significance, the Glasgow group of writers' characteristic feature was the tone of their work, which became prominent when *Lean Tales* (1985), an anthology of short stories, was published: "In 1985, Kelman and Gray were collected with Agnes Owens in *Lean Tales*, establishing a tone of spare Glasgow naturalism which stood (and was often over-imitated) throughout the period."<sup>82</sup> Of course, the major characteristic was the depiction of the city of Glasgow and its people, no matter the genre. Gradually, the need to depict the city became a common interest among other Scottish authors, too:

Stereotypes have been shaken in various ways in recent years, and I am thinking not only of the widely recognised Gray and Kelman, but also of a number of new approaches by a variety of writers who do not form a 'Glasgow school' as such but who seem to share a general feeling that the city ought to be presented, or used, from unexpected as well as familiar angles, and in experimental as well as straightforward styles. Women writers have helped to extend this range, straightforwardly with Agnes Owens, experimentally with Janice Galloway.<sup>83</sup>

Literature produced in Scotland thus began to flourish once again. According to Professor Duncan Petrie, this flood of authors joining this new source of creative energy *en masse* has been considered a proof of re-emerging confidence in terms of culture which, considering Scotland's deepening feelings of tension as a part of the UK, even further underlined the distinct national identities of Scotland and England.<sup>84</sup>

As Scots begun to assert themselves, so has it been for Scottish literature which managed to gain more ground for itself. To assume that it was thanks to the success of the second Scottish literary Renaissance that the national difference of Scots begun to be recognized would not be correct. Rather, it should be understood as a characteristic of that time to acknowledge the diversity of Britain in the spirit of pluralism, which I already discussed, which was projected into literature, too: "In the last twenty years the realization that Britain is a multicultural society has finally been fully acknowledged by the book industry and the publishing trade."<sup>85</sup> While Rennison notes this about the period from the

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>83</sup> Morgan, 'Tradition and Experiment in the Glasgow Novel', 90.

<sup>84</sup> Petrie, *Contemporary Scottish Fictions*, 1.

<sup>85</sup> Rennison, preface to *Contemporary British Novelists*, xii.

1980s to the new millennium, the acknowledgement of cultural diversity is still observable – if not even more strongly – even twenty years after the time span Rennison discussed.

He further notes that the political successes in the times of the second Scottish literary Renaissance were accompanied by successes in literature, too, specifically the achievement of freeing it from its centralization around London: “Some of the most exciting and challenging fiction in the last ten years, in particular, came not just from outside London but from outside England.”<sup>86</sup> Decentralizing publishing helped a great deal to Scottish literature, as, for one, Scottish authors were more likely to be published by a Scottish publishing house, thus providing their work more exposure. Moreover, this trend made it possible for some Scotland-based publishers to even become more attractive than some English ones: “Some writers, including Kennedy and Kelman, had emerged via the Edinburgh publisher Polygon, which by now looked more interesting than most London imprints.”<sup>87</sup> The second Scottish Renaissance was thus truly a movement worth deeming successful in reviving Scottish culture, certainly more so than the first attempts before the Second World War. This opinion was supported by some of the authors themselves, who admitted the influence of the first generation of writers like Gray or Kelman. For example, A. L. Kennedy believes that they “made [her] generation of writers possible.”<sup>88</sup>

As the first literary Renaissance saw Hugh MacDiarmid as its leader, the second one found its father figure in Alasdair Gray. When he published his novel *Lanark* (1981), it quickly became a work that set the tone to the following decades. It being the first to do so, it came to be considered an imaginary manifesto which provided a point of reference for the second Renaissance and its authors. “If the search was for an aesthetic which was neither defeatist-pragmatic (Muir, Massie) nor ethnic-revivalist (MacDiarmid, Akros), the most significant early advance was Alasdair Gray’s (1934–)<sup>89</sup> *Lanark* (1981). *Lanark* is partly negative critique, portraying Glasgow as ‘Unthank’, a non-space, a blank standing for a failure of Scottish ontology,”<sup>90</sup> explain Brown and Riach the uniqueness *Lanark* has for Scottish literature.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Gardiner, ‘Arcades – The 1980s and 1990s’, 188.

<sup>88</sup> Peter Kravitz, introduction to *The Picador Book of Contemporary Scottish Fiction*, ed. Peter Kravitz (London: MacMillan, 1997), xxiii.

<sup>89</sup> Alasdair Gray passed away in December 2019, at the age of 85.

<sup>90</sup> Gardiner, ‘Arcades – The 1980s and 1990s’, 182 Italics in the original.

Although its importance is indisputable, this is not to say that this literary work became a template for all literature produced since – after all, while the following literature did indeed go in the footsteps of Gray’s novel, the authors adopted their own writing style characteristic for their work. Walker states the following when talking about the works of the first generation of the second Renaissance authors: “Alasdair Gray and Janice Galloway experiment with form. A. L. Kennedy has developed an arrestingly spontaneous narrative voice combining delicacy, power and deceptive simplicity for expressing female sensibility with an immediacy which is particularly compelling in her first novel ... .”<sup>91</sup> In other words, many new authors took inspiration from the first-generation writers. For instance, Ali Smith’s writing closely resembles James Kelman experimental style in the way she narrates her stories without distinguishing the narrator’s voice and the character’s direct speech.<sup>92</sup> According to John McKay, her novel *Hotel World* (2001) builds on the breakthrough of Gray’s writing.<sup>93</sup> Thus, what *Lanark* gave Scottish literature (the unifying feature which is detectable in most works of Scottish contemporary authors) is its interest in depicting the everyday of Scots without glamourizing it, no matter the genre or author’s individual style. Brown and Riach add other features to the general post-Gray style noting that “characters are troubled by previous experiences that are muffled and difficult to voice. This early 1980s aesthetic can be described as Gothic, set against long shadows and empty warehouses, and presaging how hidden languages and experiences would haunt experience.”<sup>94</sup>

Naturally, the socio-political background will be to some degree projected in the literary works in the attempt to achieve a truthful depiction. Walker notes that some of the largest names in the beginnings of the second literary Renaissance come from Glasgow, deeply affected by the politics of that time as a “British region containing the greatest number of unemployed Scots in the world, the biggest store of nuclear weapons in Europe, and very large lovely tracts of depopulated wilderness.”<sup>95</sup> To what degree we should consider Scottish literature and politics together is not such a simple question.

Contrary to Walker’s explaining the direction of Scottish literature on the basis of the politics of that time, Gardiner states that “[o]ne dubious legacy of the 1990s boom ... was a resurgent tendency to nativise the canon, fixing Scottish literature to Scottish history,

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<sup>91</sup> Walker, *Scottish Literature since 1707*, 337.

<sup>92</sup> McKay, ‘The Banal Daily Drudge’, 99.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>94</sup> Gardiner, ‘Arcades – The 1980s and 1990s’, 183.

<sup>95</sup> James Kelman, Agnes Owens, Alasdair Gray, *Lean Tales* (London, 1985), book jacket.

preferring to be diagnostic about the origins of writers, or of characters.”<sup>96</sup> However, Schoene admits that in the late 1990s, the tendency to claim that contemporary Scottish literature caused (in great part) devolution by pressuring a change became truly popular: “There has been since 1997 a critical orthodoxy, subscribed to also by writers, that Scotland’s literature played a central role in articulating the pressures towards political change that led to devolution.”<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, Brown claims that it may not be easy to reject the thought, no matter how hackneyed, that the circumstances of producing Scottish literature were changed by the re-establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999.<sup>98</sup> While one can never truly decide to what extent it is appropriate to connect Scottish literature and politics at the time, let us consider them as connected matters at least to some extent.

There is one more aspect we need to remain aware of if we are to keep a realistic idea about the matter, and that is the coverage of Scottish literature in the media. There has been enough proof that, given enough attention, mass media can truly turn what is Scottish into a stereotyped vision that is less accurate – from the Highlander stereotype in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the depiction of Scots in *Outlander* (2014). Brown warns against the danger of the influence mass media have on the global recognition of Scotland:

One has to be cautious in reaching conclusions about the nature of Scottish, or any, literature under the impact of mass media, but one has to recognise that the mass media have transformed the context within and assumptions under which literature is shaped and made. The risk is that mass media’s impact sustains globalised visions, the broadly generic rather than the culturally specific, William Wallace in face-paint and antique kilting rather than a member of a Europe-facing military caste.<sup>99</sup>

Still, mass media were also one of the channels which kept raising the world’s awareness Scottish literature, as well as its growing quantity and publishing possibilities outside of London even at the beginning of the new millennium. By that time, the Edinburgh

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<sup>96</sup> Gardiner, ‘Arcades – The 1980s and 1990s’, 192.

<sup>97</sup> Wallace, ‘Voyages of Intent’, 24.

<sup>98</sup> Brown, ‘Entering the Twenty-First Century’, 214.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

International Book Festival first held only two years after *Lanark* was published was growing into one of the largest book festivals on the continent – and in 1984, a year after the first Edinburgh International Book Festival, “the Scottish Poetry Library was established, gathering important documents together,”<sup>100</sup> proving the growth of Scottish literature’s prominence and recognition. Furthermore, the city of Edinburgh was internationally voted the first in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, thus being called World City of Literature in 2004, about which Brown says the following: “Even to suggest that Edinburgh be nominated required an adjustment of self-assertion and security of identity that would have been unthinkable earlier in the last century. At the time of the proposal Scottish literati were to be heard explaining why really Dublin had a better case . . . .”<sup>101</sup>

Two years later, the National Theatre of Scotland was founded. Despite Scottish literati’s efforts to downgrade their own success, it is obvious that Scotland truly flourished at the beginning of the new millennium. Moreover, the years 2004 and 2005 are what Schoene calls a “high tide in the history of Glasgow literature”<sup>102</sup> with multiple books being published by authors who “hail from, or have written in or about, the city.”<sup>103</sup> Despite this obvious blossoming, Schoene remains sober about it, reminding us that even as far as in 2007, Scottish literary tradition still had not secured its place among others:

In the light of this baleful example of the power of corporate capitalism to elide rather than respect national boundaries and culture, it is clear that writing and publishing in Scotland [were in 2007] facing their biggest threat since the early twentieth-century collapse of its once-mighty publishing domain and the concentration of conglomerate publishing ownership from the late 1980s onwards. In fact, the present predicament is infinitely more acute, as the country’s literature has never had more to lose.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Gardiner, ‘Arcades – The 1980s and 1990s’, 185

<sup>101</sup> Brown, ‘Entering the Twenty-First Century’, 220.

<sup>102</sup> Alan Bissett, ‘The “New Weegies”: The Glasgow Novel in the Twenty-First Century’, in *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, ed. Berthold Schoene (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 59.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Wallace, ‘Voyages of Intent’, 24.

Nearly two decades later, the question of whether they succeeded in keeping progressing is difficult to answer. One thing is certain, however, and that is that Scottish literature has not stopped progressing and is in fact at least still as thriving as it was when Schoene voiced his worry. At least, the second literary Renaissance has not yet met the same end as the first one did.

### 3.3.2 Otherness in Scottish Literature

Despite the unsettled question of defining Scottish identity – and whether there should be any in the first place – one feature remains characteristic for Scotland. What has the text so far hinted at is the inevitability of contradictions when discussing Scottishness. If we look for something that can reliably describe Scottishness within its literature, we will stumble upon, as Sassi puts it, “one of the main distinguishing features of the Scottish tradition”<sup>105</sup> – a sort of dichotomy arising from the paradoxes that entwine Scotland and its people. In 1919, a Scottish literary scholar George Gregory Smith coined the term Caledonian Antisyzygy, which describes this phenomenon of contradicting elements existing together.<sup>106</sup> Smith goes on to explain this duality by stating that “the sharpest expressions of [Scottish life and culture to which he proposes it to be applied] are, first, a love of detailed realistic fact and, second, a love of fantasy and the grotesque.”<sup>107</sup> Caledonian Antisyzygy does not only apply to Scottish passion for fantasy and realism, though, but also to the contrasting essence of Highlands and Lowlands, the undeveloped and the civilized and, in terms of religion, also between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, as well as other substantial parts of Scotland.<sup>108</sup> Smith’s description of Caledonian Antisyzygy once again displays Scotland’s striking attraction to paradoxes.

In Scottish literature, this phenomenon of duality applied particularly to identity is well-observable for example in James Hogg’s *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, Susan Ferrier’s *Marriage*, or Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Dr Jekyll and Mr*

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<sup>105</sup> Sassi, *Why Scottish Literature Matters*, 148.

<sup>106</sup> See George Gregory Smith, *Scottish Literature, Character and Influence* (London: Macmillan and co., 1919).

<sup>107</sup> Walker, *Scottish Literature since 1707*, 14.

<sup>108</sup> Carol Margaret Davison and Monica Germanà, ‘Borderlands of Identity and the Aesthetics of Disjuncture: An Introduction to Scottish Gothic’, in *Scottish Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. Carol Margaret Davison and Carol Margaret Germanà (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 2.

*Hyde*.<sup>109</sup> With respect to the contrast between realism and fantasy which Smith discussed, Walker names Alan Sharp, Hugh C. Rae, William McIlvanney or James Kelman as examples of authors writing realistic Scottish literature,<sup>110</sup> while fantasy can be represented for instance by Ian M. Banks, Michael Scott Rohan, Hal Duncan or Alasdair Gray.

### 3.3.2.1 Children in Scottish Fairy Tales vs Gothic Tales

In literary works, Caledonian Antisyzygy is not only manifested through genres but often can take shape of a certain theme, such as childhood. Petrie maintains that a child is a crucial figure common in Scottish literature, which displays Caledonian Antisyzygy and can be understood as a metaphor for Scottishness: “The child represents a Scottish identity that is essentially immature and which has only two options available to it: to remain in a perpetual state of (rebellious) retardation or to take its place in the rational, mature and adult realm of British identity.”<sup>111</sup>

A child in Scottish fiction is however more than a codename for the nation and its politics, though they certainly have a lot in common. Children can be viewed as either innocent creatures yet unspoiled by experiencing the cruel world, or a gateway to fantasy.<sup>112</sup> With respect to the first option of innocence, children find themselves on the margins similarly to Scotland in the context of Britain. They are dependent on adults who make decisions for them, and thus children often lack voice to speak for themselves. Moreover, potential downfall of the adult in charge of them will result in downfall of the child, too, in spite of them not contributing to the circumstances preceding it. They are thus also affected by Scotland’s political situation but unlike adults, they cannot take action to change it. I will discuss portrayal of children in Scottish literature with respect to their innocence in closer detail in chapter 4.

Considering children as figures that lead to the world of fantasy in Scottish literature can be seen, in a certain way, as completely natural. After all, all things supernatural, magical, and unreal are common in fairy tales, which have a long tradition in Scotland.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Sassi, *Why Scottish Literature Matters*, 147-8.

<sup>110</sup> Walker, *Scottish Literature since 1707*, 324.

<sup>111</sup> Petrie, *Contemporary Scottish Fictions*, 162.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>113</sup> Fiona McCulloch, ‘A Key to the Future: Hybridity in Contemporary Children’s Fiction’, in *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, ed. Berthold Schoene (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 141.



Another feature of fairy tales is, nevertheless, that they also contain elements of danger against which children as the primary audience should be warned. Fairy tales thus lead into the world of fantasy, but also to a world of what may pose the ultimate threat to children – such as a stepmother turning into an evil witch, or a wolf in grandmother’s nightgown.

Thanks to such archetypal fairy tale characters, it is easy to express the evil in literature simply by using the archetype: “Popular media can hint at relationship issues or emotional motivations underlining a news story or fashion article; jealousy, vanity or greed can be alluded to with words (the mere mention of ‘stepmother’)”<sup>114</sup> which is exactly what some of the authors use in the stories soon to be analysed, e.g. Kate Atkinson’s Rachel in *Behind the Scenes at the Museum*, or Debbie – and in extension also aunt Vinny and the children’s grandmother – in *Human Croquet*. While none of the stories that are the focal point of this thesis are intended for children, they are about children or told through the point of view of a child, and the depicted themes which the child faces and must overcome are often not dissimilar to those in fairy tales. Those themes are often taboo subject matter; “murder, brutality or abuse in the home (‘Bluebeard,’ ‘Cinderella,’ ‘Rapunzel’), cannibalism (‘Hansel and Gretel,’ ‘Little Red Riding Hood,’ ‘Sleeping Beauty’) child abandonment (‘Hansel and Gretel,’ ‘Snow White’) and rape (‘Sleeping Beauty’).”<sup>115</sup> All these fairy tales were originally considerably dark and morbid but have undergone the process of “civilizing [and] mythicization”<sup>116</sup> to become presentable to children without such horror.

What the stories selected for this thesis differ in from common fairy tales is the recurring Gothic element, which according to Hubner “denies the final sanctuary of a ‘happily ever after’ resolution.”<sup>117</sup> Gothic tales have a long history in Scotland; Davison and Germanà find its beginning in the traditions of ballads and trace them all the way to contemporary writers such as A. L. Kennedy or John Burnside.<sup>118</sup> That gothic roots are entwined with Scotland can be demonstrated by two more points: depiction of everyday and Caledonian Antisyzygy.

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<sup>114</sup> Laura Hubner, *Fairy tale and Gothic Horror: Uncanny Transformations in Film* (Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 2018), 14.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 32–3.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>118</sup> Davison and Germanà, ‘Borderlands of Identity and the Aesthetics of Disjuncture’, 4.

Considering the former point, the Gothic and supernatural in Scottish literature is often merged with realism, too. Schoene sees a link between these three and explains it in terms of dealing with Scottish identity:

[T]he abundance of recent Scottish writing featuring the supernatural in some form or other clearly suggests that something about it continues to appeal irresistibly to the contemporary imagination . . . . By introducing something manifestly ‘unreal’ or supernatural into a realist context, writers challenge the metanarratives of ‘Scottishness’ that have come to be associated with realism as a mode of representation, portraying characters of all classes, genders and sexualities while maintaining a specific political position within a genre traditionally perceived as a form of escapism removed from real concerns.<sup>119</sup>

Hubner remarks that it is in everyday where gothic is the most powerful<sup>120</sup> – and it is portrayal of everyday that Scottish literature has recently been focused on, as established in previous chapters. Furthermore, Scullion does not consider the use of myths, supernatural, the Gothic, legends and unconsciousness an evidence of Scotland’s madness but rather a smart way of using the fantastic.<sup>121</sup> Regarding Caledonian Antisyzygy and the Gothic in Scottish literature, suffice to state that Davison and Germanà define Scottish Gothic as an “aesthetics of disjuncture, looking both inward to the nation’s own fragmented status as well as outward”<sup>122</sup> while Hubner declares that it is “the strain or precarious balance between disorder and order that keeps gothic vibrant.”<sup>123</sup> In other words, Caledonian Antisyzygy mediates the Gothic in Scottish literature.

It can be therefore claimed that Scottish literature offers a large number of literary works containing features of fairy tales as well as gothic tales, both characteristic for Scottish stories, and it is not uncommon for these works to be about or narrated by children. As I have explored, fairy tales which are targeted at children originally also featured taboo

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<sup>119</sup> Kirsty Macdonald, ‘Against Realism: Contemporary Scottish Literature and the Supernatural’, in *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, ed. Schoene Berthold (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 329.

<sup>120</sup> Hubner, *Fairytales and Gothic Horror*, 51.

<sup>121</sup> Adrienne Scullion, ‘Feminine Pleasures and Masculine Indignities: Gender and Community in Scottish Drama’, in Christopher Whyte (ed.), *Gendering the Nation: Studies in Modern Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 201.

<sup>122</sup> Davidson and Germanà, *Scottish Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, 7.

<sup>123</sup> Hubner, *Fairytales and Gothic Horror*, 67.

subject matters. While contemporary fairy tales became ‘civilized,’ Scottish literature plays with the original Gothic elements and in the realistic spirit of the second literary Renaissance uses them to point to various aspects of life in Scotland. While fairy tales are stories written particularly for children, the stories this thesis discusses take them as their subject matter and often contain mainly Gothic elements, though some of them may utilize elements of fairy tales, too.

### 3.4 When Women Write

In this chapter, I will discuss the issue of women writers who earned their place among their male counterparts, though this was a struggle that required a lot of effort and energy. It is not in my interest to question whether historically women wrote more or less than men; I shall only establish that indeed, women did write, too (it is the number of published women that would require the attention in this matter, which is inevitably tied with social status of women throughout history.) The question I consider worthy of discussion is whether it is truly necessary to canonize women writers simply based on their gender today since as I will explore, their works are diverse.

Beginnings of literature written by women are not grand or archaic; when we talk about first successful women writers in Britain, we think of women from the Romantic period, which is considerably later than, for instance, the era of Shakespeare’s glory. Even then, women faced pressure from society who deemed it scandalous for a lady to write, resulting in women hiding behind male pseudonyms (like the Brontë sisters). Anonymity was seen as virtue, claims Walker, and names Jane Elliot, Anne Bernard, Anne Grant, whose writing career became acceptable a source of income only after becoming a widow, and Susan Ferrier, whose stance on the matter sounds almost apologetic as she explains that writing her first novel presented a mere opportunity to engage herself in lonely moments, which she decided to publish convinced of guaranteed anonymity and low success.<sup>124</sup> Walker observes that even a woman who was accepted as a writer still could not enjoy the same privileges as her male colleagues: “The niceties of sexual hierarchy, however, demanded other artistic skills even in a woman who was admitted to literary circles in

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<sup>124</sup> Walker, *Scottish Literature since 1707*, 50–1.

Edinburgh or London, and serious writing doubtless appeared to be the province of the obvious male giants like Hume, Smith, Burns, Scott and Byron.”<sup>125</sup>

Women’s writing faces biased expectations to be of lesser quality than men’s, which is a concern dealt with already by Virginia Woolf.<sup>126</sup> Her commentary concerning the distinction between men and women’s writing naturally arising from the inevitability of experiencing wholly different lives in the same society is considered still relevant by Emma Parker, who notes that “‘feminine’ is still a pejorative term when used in relation to fiction.”<sup>127</sup> While women’s writing has been deemed dull for its common domestic subject matters, Parker explains that its legitimacy lies in the fact that it reflected the experience, adding:

Women do not all write, or only write, domestic fiction. During the last hundred years, women have entered the public sphere in vast numbers and this has undoubtedly changed their perspective on the world, a change that is reflected in the subject, style and form of their fiction. Nevertheless, the domestic sphere remains a central part of their lives of most women, and it thus remains a legitimate subject of fiction.<sup>128</sup>

In other words, what women write about often exhibits their truth, women’s experience in the male-dominated world. That women were living in men’s world is a claim that Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson, and Peter Brooker support with the philosophy of discourse: “If we accept Michel Foucault’s argument that what is ‘true’ depends on who controls discourse . . . , then it is apparent that men’s domination of discourse has trapped women inside a male ‘truth.’”<sup>129</sup> They summarize that what constitutes women’s writing is not one subject matter but rather multiple ones surrounding the mutually shared experience of a group of women: “Hence there is no one ‘grand narrative’ but many ‘petits récits’, grounded in specific cultural political needs and arenas – for example, of class, gender and race – and often in some degree of contention with each other.”<sup>130</sup> Carol Anderson agrees with them, stating: “It can also be argued that just because writers are female does not necessarily mean

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>126</sup> See Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (1929; repr., Lightning Source Inc, 2012).

<sup>127</sup> Emma Parker, ‘Introduction: “The Proper Stuff of Fiction”: Defending the Domestic, Reappraising the Parochial’, in *Contemporary British Women Writers* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 1.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>129</sup> Selden, Widdowson, and Brooker, *A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, 121.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 117.

they feel themselves to have anything much in common. Some writers are interested in femaleness, and write about women quite self-consciously.”<sup>131</sup> Ellen Rooney shuts down the discussion concerned with the ordinariness in women’s writing by simply announcing that “[f]eminist literary theory resists generalization,”<sup>132</sup> thus pointing out the fault of ignoring the variety of works written by women.

Elizabeth Weed establishes that the acceptance of women’s diversity – as both people and authors – came “in the mid- to late 1980s [when] feminist critical attention shifted from ‘woman’ to ‘women,’ thereby signaling a salutary correction of what had been a blindness to difference.”<sup>133</sup> Rooney agrees with the stance, noting that the tendency to limit the scope of the term ‘woman’ has been largely rejected in favour of a more inclusive attitude:

[T]he habitual definition or abstraction of “woman” by dominant white and middle-class feminist theorists in terms that excluded women of colour, women of the working classes, and women living outside the metropolitan centres has marked feminist theorizing in virtually all its forms. This theoretical exclusion has by now been “interrupted” . . . by many critiques.<sup>134</sup>

It was indeed feminism that made this shift in society possible – particularly the second wave which, in the theme of sexuality and women’s reproduction, pointed to the difference between a woman’s perception and emotions as well as the essential difference between men and women’s experience, interests, and opinions.<sup>135</sup> Clare Hanson celebrates the effect of the second wave, claiming that it provided women with more opportunities to decide for themselves in various fields, from finances to sexuality and reproduction – although the

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<sup>131</sup> Carol Anderson, ‘Listening to the Women Talk’, in *The Scottish Novel since the Seventies: New Visions, Old Dreams*, ed. Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), 170.

<sup>132</sup> Ellen Rooney, ‘Introduction’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, ed. Ellen Rooney (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1.

<sup>133</sup> Elizabeth Weed, ‘Feminist Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, ed. Ellen Rooney (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 275.

<sup>134</sup> Rooney, ‘Introduction’, 3.

<sup>135</sup> Selden, Widdowson, and Brooker, *A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, 120.

equality has not yet been fully reached.<sup>136</sup> In other words, women are finally entering men's world.

This change in society is detectable through literature, too, as our perception of the world will inevitably be reflected there, as Hanson observes: "Romantic love and marriage have long been intertwined, but now that marriage is being replaced by serial monogamy, our conception of romance also has to change."<sup>137</sup> Still, Imelda Whelehan maintains that the themes of marriage and relationships are centred around women: "Ideologically, women are still positioned as the makers of relationships, the people who need marriage and children-while men are the dysfunctional breakers of them – the so-called 'emotional fuck-wits' who must be deceived into the 'smug married' state."<sup>138</sup> While it is not my intention to disagree with this statement, I find it interesting since, as will be shown in the analysis of the literature in chapter 4, Scottish women writers acknowledge that mothers are often the cause of traumatic experiences, too. For instance, in *Human Croquet*, the Fairfax siblings struggle with the departure of the mother Eliza while it is their father Gordon who returns and, with respect to Whelehan's claim, it is the other way around with Gordon being eager to marry as soon as possible.

### 3.4.1 Zoomed in on the Double-Marginalized: Scottish Women Writers

While women in England have already been slowly accepted among literary circles and their works among classics, Scottish women had this task still awaiting them. Walker considers women's prime with respect to the nation, comparing the discrepancy of independence: "Scotland might have lost or misplaced its independence in 1707, but the majority of women still had to win theirs for the first time."<sup>139</sup> It can hardly come as a surprise, nevertheless, that women's cause was lower on the list of concerns than the whole nation – how could a minority, which women were reduced to, be dealt with when the whole was not secure? Anderson considers the emergence of women writers in a more convenient aspect when discussing the recent increase in successful women's works: "It is also

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<sup>136</sup> Clare Hanson, 'Fiction, Feminism and Femininity from the Eighties to the Noughties', in *Contemporary British Women Writers*, ed. Emma Parker, Essays and Studies 2004 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 17.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>138</sup> Imelda Whelehan, 'Sex and the Single Girl: Helen Fielding, Erica Jong and Helen Gurley Brown', in *Contemporary British Women Writers*, ed. Emma Parker, Essays and Studies 2004 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 37.

<sup>139</sup> Walker, *Scottish Literature since 1707*, 53.

significant that there has been recently in Scotland a burgeoning of female talent, although it would be false to see this as springing from nowhere: there have long been Scottish women writers, many of them very good indeed, if not always noticed and applauded by influential critics.”<sup>140</sup>

What the approaches of Walker and Anderson display is that women of Scotland did not face a simple marginalization; rather they experienced a sort of double marginalization caused by both their gender and nationality. This is what Matt McGuire recognizes as internal marginalization based on their identity, not to be confused with external marginalization defined by an overall lack of attention by critics both in and outside of Scotland.<sup>141</sup> In general, this distinction between internal and external isolation, he feels, truly exhibits the incompatibility of women’s and nation’s causes: “The implication is that in places like Scotland women's interests have tended to run contrary to the perceived national interest.”<sup>142</sup> As a result of that, literary criticism in Scotland begun to consider gender only recently, thanks to the increased interest in finding Scottishness. Janice Galloway explains the struggle that double marginalization presents for Scottish women, including the consequent emotional drainage caused by guilt for standing up for oneself:

Scottish women have their own particular complications with writing and definition, complications which derive from the general problems of being a colonised nation. Then, that wee extra touch. Their sex. There is coping with that guilt of taking time off the concerns of national politics to get concerned with the sexual sort: that creeping fear it’s somehow self-indulgent to be more concerned for one’s womanness instead of one’s Scottishness, one’s working class heritage or whatever.<sup>143</sup>

Women in Scotland – particularly in the Highlands – were assigned the role of storytellers only through the oral tradition in the form of stories and songs, which were later collected by Sir Walter Scott (who received the credit for them,) until the end of the 18th century.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Anderson, ‘Listening to the Women Talk’, 170.

<sup>141</sup> McGuire, *Contemporary Scottish Literature*, 65–6.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>143</sup> Janice Galloway, ‘Introduction’, in *Meantime: Looking Forward to the Millennium*, ed. Janice Galloway and Marion Sinclair (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991), 5–6.

<sup>144</sup> Walker, *Scottish Literature since 1707*, 46.

Once they began to exit the status of invisible storytellers and claim their space among other writers, they started to cause discomfort to male authors, who, until then, were free to represent women based on their own perception of them. Women simply started speaking their own truth: “Silenced or marginalised as authors well into the 20th century, represented in literary texts according to a male gaze, when they speak with their own voice they unsettle, consciously or unwittingly, established ideas on gender and/or national identity.”<sup>145</sup>

Despite such inconvenient environment, it is apparent that in Scotland, the challenge of being left on the margins has been turned into one which was accepted – and subsequently, it became “an unprecedented source of creative energy.”<sup>146</sup> Since Scottish women experienced twice the amount of marginality, double the amount of creativity surely cannot come as a surprise – especially since it provided more subject matters to write about. Still, even during the first Renaissance, women authors were massively stigmatized, though actively participating in forming of Scottish literature, due to stereotypes concerning their subject matter as discussed in the previous chapter. Sassi talks about “many women who were active both as writers and as promoters of the Renaissance [whose work] was often downrated by their male colleagues, and literary historians”<sup>147</sup> such as Hellen B. Cruickshank, Catherine Carswell.

While, as Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan complain, generations preceding those known for their revivalist actions were generally excluded from syllabi and anthologies (except for Mrs Oliphant, Susan Ferrier, and women writing during the Renaissances,)<sup>148</sup> the more contemporary ones have been more exposed. Still, it is not the case that the second Scottish literary Renaissance did not need to deal with this problem; on the contrary, Rennison believes that “[t]he much-touted renaissance in Scottish writing in the 1980s and 1990s often seemed a very masculine affair.”<sup>149</sup> What distinguishes this time from the other moments in the history of Scottish literature is the fact that this period saw a boom of women writers in Scotland who finally gained a well-deserved acknowledgement. Alison Lumsden and Aileen Christianson explain this change: “The

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<sup>145</sup> Sassi, *Why Scottish Literature Matters*, 133.

<sup>146</sup> Bill Asheroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989), 12.

<sup>147</sup> Sassi, *Why Scottish Literature Matters*, 105.

<sup>148</sup> Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan, ‘Introduction’ in *A History of Scottish Women’s Writing*, ed. Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), ix.

<sup>149</sup> Rennison, *Contemporary British Novelists*, 98.



1990s have seen the addition of many new Scottish women writing from a more confident assumption that being female and being Scottish are linked and culturally positive.”<sup>150</sup>

One can name Liz Lochhead as the pioneer who was followed by more; Muriel Spark, Janice Galloway, Ali Smith, Val McDermid, A. L. Kennedy, Alice Thompson, Kate Atkinson, Louise Welsh or Jenni Fagan as representants of authors of prose alone – there are many more women enjoying the same spotlight, nevertheless. Moreover, many women became successful poets, journalists or dramatists, and most of them have proven that their talent does not only lie in one of the fields; for instance, Jenni Fagan is a poet and screenwriter in addition to writing novels, A. L. Kennedy is a prolific author of novels, dramas, children’s books, screenwriter, and comedian, etc. With the emergence of Scottish women writers, many anthologies were published to make up for the delay in previous decades; for instance, *The Other Voice: Scottish Women's Writing Since 1808* (1987), *An Anthology of Scottish Women Poets* (1991) and *Modern Scottish Women Poets* (2003).<sup>151</sup> This has been also accompanied by the establishment of the Women’s Prize for Fiction, also known as the Orange Prize, which was first awarded in 1996 and awards novels published in the UK, as a result of which more attention was paid to British women’s writing.<sup>152</sup>

What is more, some women authors have been active even before the publication of *Trainspotting*, so thematically essential for the generation, in the 1990s – in particular, “Janice Galloway and A. L. Kennedy had begun to raise and integrate distinctly female voices within a largely androcentric literary canon.”<sup>153</sup> Galloway, whose writing focuses on the question of women, described the period of the second Renaissance, when she published “one of the most important pieces of women's fiction of this period,”<sup>154</sup> *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (1989), as “overwhelmingly male.”<sup>155</sup> A. L. Kennedy then focuses on giving voice to those who find themselves in a harmful situation in which they cannot clearly communicate their needs and are often abused – women and children as well as men.

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<sup>150</sup> Alison Lumsden and Aileen Christianson, ‘Introduction’, in *Contemporary Scottish Women Writers* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 1.

<sup>151</sup> McGuire, *Contemporary Scottish Literature*, 64.

<sup>152</sup> Parker, ‘Introduction: “The Proper Stuff of Fiction”’, 2–4.

<sup>153</sup> Kirstin Innes and Berthold Schoene, ‘Mark Renton’s Bairns: Identity and Language in the Post-Trainspotting Novel’, in *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 305.

<sup>154</sup> McGuire, *Contemporary Scottish Literature*, 65.

<sup>155</sup> Carole Jones, ‘Burying the Man That Was: Janice Galloway and Gender Disorientation’, in *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, ed. Berthold Schoene (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 210.

Therefore, it is apparent that the 1980s and 1990s were truly a time for women writers to prosper. And by the time the new millennium arrived, Scottish women writers found themselves in the lead of Scottish literature: “What is also new about the wave of noughties’ writers is that it is spearheaded by women; never before have so many female Glaswegian novelists simultaneously achieved such prominence.”<sup>156</sup> Bissett considers Louise Welsh as the one among women who became the most prominent,<sup>157</sup> while Walker believes that the “assertive portrayals of contemporary Scottish women’s experience by Liz Lochhead, Janice Galloway and A. L. Kennedy represent a ferment of cultural health, a maturing beyond the inferiorist reflex.”<sup>158</sup> Whoever we deem the most essential for this period amongst Scottish women writers, it remains the truth that all of them contributed to the richness of literary works written in Scotland as well as to works by women.

In terms of genres, women writers often find a unifying essence. For instance, in Gothic and horror fiction, Gina Wisker finds that “[m]ost terrifying is an event that threatens or breaches the boundaries of the home, the body or property. This last includes the partner whose controlled loyalty, sexuality and dependability must be taken as given for our own sense of safety.”<sup>159</sup> What truly becomes the core of the Gothic in women’s fiction is what usually poses a nightmare in women’s everyday experience according to Wisker: “Power, oppression, silencing and repression are the stuff of horror, deriving from our essential fears of being forced, denied, controlled, displaced out of ourselves, into constraining roles and constricting places, unable to resist or refuse.”<sup>160</sup>

Furthermore, what unifies Contemporary British women writers of horror is the interest in restricting environment, roles and mythic characters such as witches or female vampires<sup>161</sup> and thus, some of the archetypal figures from fairy tales mentioned in the previous chapter are reworked. For instance, the witch is no longer presented as a negative character but “emerges from her text not only as a signifier of female independence and marriage resistance but also as a Cultural construct that patriarchal culture seeks to project upon women who refuse to conform to its conventions, and that the latter, by means of a strategy of parodic reworking, seek simultaneously to resist and exploit.”<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Bissett, ‘The “New Weegies”: The Glasgow Novel in the Twenty-First Century’, 60.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Walker, *Scottish Literature since 1707*, 23.

<sup>159</sup> Gina Wisker, ‘Demisting the Mirror: Contemporary British Women’s Horror’, in *Contemporary British Women Writers*, ed. Emma Parker, Essays and Studies 2004 (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 157.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Paulina Palmer, ‘Lesbian Transformations of Gothic and Fairy Tale’, in *Contemporary British Women Writers*, ed. Emma Parker, Essays and Studies 2004 (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 144.

That Scottishness leaks through contemporary British women's gothic fiction is indisputable since their work "celebrates Otherness, reinvestigates the magical, finds the devil in the everyday, the witch in ourselves, debunks the myths, revalues the roles seen as threatening"<sup>163</sup> according to Wisker. It is the otherness and depiction of the everyday that should by now immediately remind the reader of Scotland. Furthermore – and most importantly – female Gothic is central for expressing the experience of the double-marginalized: "As the fluid lines of the Scottish landscape form an illegible text, and the spectral woman escapes the frame of the male gaze, these novels reveal the dual critical intention of Scottish Female Gothic, which, while decentring authorial control, pushes the story of the Other – female, Scottish – from the narrative margins to the centre."<sup>164</sup>

For all that I have discussed in this chapter, I consider fiction written by Scottish women writers the most exceptional in terms of expressing the everyday struggles of being a woman in the world dominated by men; marginalization on both the level of nation and gender as well as the consequent suffocating invisibility.

#### 3.4.1.1 Kate Atkinson

Born in 1951, Kate Atkinson is rightfully listed among one of the most famous Scottish women writers. As the only child of a descendant of coal miners and railway workers, she grew up in home above her parent's surgical supplies shop<sup>165</sup> similarly to her character Ruby. Although her parents were in a relationship, they were not married due to her mother being unable to get divorced from her previous marriage.<sup>166</sup> Her evasiveness is well known – the fact that she prefers a quiet life and writing to social gatherings and partying (as well as "distaste for literary biography"<sup>167</sup>) is characteristic to her, too.

Despite publishing her first novel only at the age of 44, her passion for literature manifested already when she started to study English Literature at Dundee University. After

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<sup>163</sup> Wisker, 'Demisting the Mirror: Contemporary British Women's Horror', 168-9.

<sup>164</sup> Monica Germanà, 'Authorship, "Ghost-Filled" Islands and the Haunting Feminine: Contemporary Scottish Female Gothic', in *Scottish Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. Carol Margaret Davison and Monica Germanà (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 234.

<sup>165</sup> Emma Parker, *Kate Atkinson's Behind the Scenes at the Museum: A Reader's Guide*, Continuum Contemporaries (New York: Continuum, 2002), 11.

<sup>166</sup> Lisa Allardice, 'Kate Atkinson: "I Live to Entertain. I Don't Live to Teach or Preach or to Be Political"', *The Guardian*, 15 June 2019, sec. Books, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/jun/15/kate-atkinson-interview-i-live-to-entertain>.

<sup>167</sup> Parker, *Kate Atkinson's Behind the Scenes at the Museum*, 11.

graduating in 1974 with a master's degree, she decided to continue with a postgraduate doctorate on postmodern literature, this time American. Eventually, she did not acquire her PhD and later worked in a number of jobs "including legal secretary, welfare benefits administrator, home help, creative writing tutor on a community education program"<sup>168</sup> to finally also work as a teacher at her alma mater. While working on her postgraduate research, she was also raising her first daughter Eve, whom she had with her first husband. Her second daughter Helen she had with her second husband, a Scottish teacher, whom she later divorced, too. Although born in York, where she likes to set her works (as she herself said, "Yorkshire will be written on [her] heart for ever,")<sup>169</sup> she also has lived in, Whitby, and Dundee to settle in Edinburgh where she now lives with her daughters and grandchildren and where she spent most of her life as an author. After being refused a PhD, she started to write short stories in 1981, first as a form of distraction from the academic failure,<sup>170</sup> and later for women's magazines as she discovered her passion for writing when she won the Women's Own short story competition.<sup>171</sup> In the 1990s, she started to publish her novels, which brought her incredible success and placed her among other famous Scottish writers.

Atkinson's writing debut, a novel titled *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* (1995) won the Costa Book of the Year Award (previously known as the Whitbread Book Award) along with two more novels; *Life After Life* (2013) and an accompanying book *A God in Ruins* (2015). *Life After Life* also won the South Bank Sky Arts Literature Prize in 2014 and appeared on the shortlist of the Women's Prize for Fiction. Her greatest success came with her series of novels about an ex-detective Jackson Brodie: *Case Histories* (2004), *One Good Turn* (2006), *When Will There Be Good News?* (2008), *Started Early, Took My Dog* (2010), and *Big Sky* (2019). The former four of the Jackson Brodie series were transformed into a BBC TV crime series titled after the first novel, *Case Histories*, in 2011. Kate Atkinson also adapted her *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* for television as well as theatre and radio, and *Life After Life* was also adapted as a BBC drama and broadcasted under the same title in 2022. In 2011, Atkinson became a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in that year's Queen's Birthday Honours List for her services to literature. She is also a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>169</sup> Allardice, 'Kate Atkinson: "I Live to Entertain."'

<sup>170</sup> Parker, *Kate Atkinson's Behind the Scenes at the Museum*, 12.

<sup>171</sup> Allardice, 'Kate Atkinson: "I Live to Entertain."'

When it comes to her writing style, Kate Atkinson is indisputably distinguished for the characteristic originality and playfulness that seeps through her texts. Rennison discusses the way Atkinson structures her works in a seemingly random order of events only to reveal the reason behind each and every comment or sign which previously appeared to have less if no meaning.<sup>172</sup> Despite the jumping back and forth in time, the works retain their readability and remain to keep readers' attention to the very end. And when it comes to her ability to imitate, Atkinson proves her writing genius to be real – for instance, the perfectly replicated thoughts of a child learning to read (including all the struggles associated with it) in *Behind the Scenes at the Museum*, when Ruby tries to leave her aunt and return to her family.<sup>173</sup>

At the time of this thesis being written, Kate Atkinson has written twelve novels including the 5-piece Jackson Brodie series, two plays written for the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh – *Nice* (1996) and *Abandonment* (2000) – and has one short story collection titled *Not the End of the World* under her belt. However, a new addition to the Brodie series has already been announced; a novel titled *The Line of Sight*.

#### 3.4.1.2 Jenni Fagan

The name of Jenni Fagan may not be as repeated in Scottish anthologies as those of A. L. Kennedy, Ali Smith, Janice Galloway or Kate Atkinson, but it certainly is a name belonging to a prolific author; thus far, Fagan has written four novels of fiction (though there may be elements of semi-autobiography), five poetry collections, and her memoir *Ootlin* concerning her experience of growing up in state care is to be released in June 2024. She has also written several screenplays and is an artist – her art will be exhibited in Autumn 2023<sup>174</sup> and her bone sculptures made during her Gavin Wallace Fellowship are displayed at Summerhall in Edinburgh, where she resided during the fellowship.

Fagan was born in 1977 in a psychiatric hospital near Edinburgh – the only two facts she knows about the event.<sup>175</sup> She spent her childhood in the Scottish care system under

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<sup>172</sup> Nick Rennison, *Contemporary British Novelists*, 12.

<sup>173</sup> Kate Atkinson, *Behind the Scenes at the Museum*, Ed. reissued (Reprint, London: Black Swan, 2020), 144–64.

<sup>174</sup> 'About', Jenni Fagan, accessed 1 April 2024, <https://www.jennifagan.com/about>.

<sup>175</sup> Claire Armitstead, 'Jenni Fagan: 'I Understand Crisis. I Grew up in a Very, Very Extreme Way'', *The Guardian*, 9 January 2021, sec. Books, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/jan/09/jenni-fagan-i-understand-crisis-i-grew-up-in-a-very-very-extreme-way>.

four different names over the 16 years she spent in it. This experience included moving multiple times – according to her official webpage, it was “over forty-six times”<sup>176</sup> – an experience reflected in the life of Anais, the protagonist of her first novel *The Panopticon* (2012). Not much is known about her early life due to this fact, but it can be expected that with the publication of *Ootlin*, more about her life will be revealed. For now, what Fagan revealed about herself is only that in her teenage years as well as early twenties, she was “playing in punk and then grunge bands.”<sup>177</sup> It is also known that after leaving the state care system, Fagan lived in accommodation for homeless people for some time. Despite her early life, she acquired academic education, studying first at the University of Greenwich thanks to a bursary, then getting a scholarship for an MA at Royal Holloway<sup>178</sup> and finally acquiring a PhD in Humanities from the University of Edinburgh in 2020.<sup>179</sup> Her thesis topic concerned Franz Kafka.

She does not attempt to hide her love for writing which began early in her life – she started writing poems already in the care system, when others decided about her:

And I realised that words have incredible power. They are how we build our legal systems. They’re how we sell everything. They’re how we marry each other. They’re how we bury each other, every single thing in society is built upon words. And so when I wrote poems, and saw my own words written down, I could look back at them and see that my voice was still there. And it was such a powerful, extraordinary thing to me.<sup>180</sup>

Her success as an author was a journey with a slow start and a sudden arrival. While living in London with a new-born son, Jenni, who had already published some poetry collections, became essentially an overnight sensation to agents after winning several competitions and worked on her first novel with the encouragement from Ali Smith’s support.<sup>181</sup>

Since its publishing in 2012, *The Panopticon* became a success; it was selected among the best fiction debuts in Waterstone Eleven and won Fagan a Granta Best of Young

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<sup>176</sup> ‘About’, Jenni Fagan.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Armitstead, ‘Jenni Fagan: ‘I Understand Crisis.’’

<sup>179</sup> ‘About’, Jenni Fagan.

<sup>180</sup> Armitstead, ‘Jenni Fagan: ‘I Understand Crisis.’’

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

British Novelists. Together with her second novel, *The Sunlight Pilgrims* (2016), for which she won Author of the Year, *The Panopticon* appeared on the front cover of *The New York Times Book Review*. Being published in multiple languages across the world, *The Panopticon* was also adapted into a play by Fagan. The play was sold out when played in National Theatre of Scotland,<sup>182</sup> and is currently in the process of adaptation for a film by Sixteen Films<sup>183</sup> (with Fagan as the screenwriter) as well as a TV series for which the author herself also writes the screenplay. She also worked on a screenplay of her fourth novel, *Luckenbooth* (2021). This novel received great praise, among others by Irvine Welsh who even compared it to Alasdair Gray's *Lanark*: "If Alasdair Gray's *Lanark* was a masterly imagining of Glasgow, then this is the quintessential novel of Edinburgh at its darkest."<sup>184</sup> Fagan further published a short novel *Hex* (2022), and poetry collections *The Dead Queen of Bohemia* (2010), *There's a Witch in the Word Machine* (2018), and more recently also *The Bone Library* (2022). She has also written for *The New York Times*, *The Independent*, *Marie Claire* and BBC Radio 4.

Apart from screenwriting, Fagan also made a short film titled *Bangour Village Hospital (or) Edinburgh District Asylum* (2017), which is the psychiatric hospital in which she was born, documenting its decline in both film and poetry. She revisited the building's history in a short programme on BBC Radio Scotland, *Graves of the Asylum* (aired in 2018), concerned with the unmarked graves of the patients who died there. She also wrote an aria titled *The Narcissistic Fish* which was made into a short film, too. Furthermore, Fagan directed her script titled *Heart of Glass* for BBC4 and is currently working on adapting Irvine Welsh's *The Blade Artist* into a six-part TV series.

Her poetry has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize twice and Fagan won the Poetry of the Year by *3:AM* magazine for her collection *The Dead Queen of Bohemia*, which was enlarged and published again in 2016.<sup>185</sup> Apart from the Pushcart Prize, she was listed for many other awards, including the Sunday Times Short Story Award or the BBC International Short Story Prize, the Desmond Elliott Prize or the oldest literary award in Britain, the James Tait Black Prize.

Fagan spent some time in France; she was in Grez as a Robert Louis Stevenson Fellow and has lived in Paris where she wrote a number of her poems. Her love for the city

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<sup>182</sup> 'About', Jenni Fagan.

<sup>183</sup> 'Jenni Fagan - Literature', accessed 11 April 2024, <https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/jenni-fagan>.

<sup>184</sup> Irvine Welsh, back cover of Jenni Fagan, *Luckenbooth* (London: William Heinemann, 2021).

<sup>185</sup> 'Jenni Fagan - Literature.'

is reflected in the dreams and aspirations of Anais in *The Panopticon*. Other than being a Poet in Residence at Summerhall, her activity on the British grounds includes being a Writer in Residence at University of Edinburgh, Poetry Lecturer at Strathclyde University and Arvon tutor together with A. L. Kennedy and Ali Smith. Fagan has also been in the board at Dewar Arts Awards and has worked with people in prison, and other generally vulnerable groups of people such as the youth. Currently, Jenni Fagan lives in a village on the coast of Scotland and works on multiple projects from *Ootlin* to other film and theatre related projects.

### 3.4.1.3 A. L. Kennedy

A. L. (Alison Louise) Kennedy belongs among the most famous authors in contemporary Scottish literature. Rennison describes her as “one of the most distinctive and wholly original voices in Scottish writing, indeed in British writing, over the last twenty years”<sup>186</sup> while Gardiner announces that she is “[o]ne of the era’s strongest voices since her collection *Night Geometry and the Garscadden Trains* (1990).”<sup>187</sup> Yet she is a very complicated person who, as I will discuss, makes any attempts at writing her biographies a difficult (and, if possible, as unpleasant as possible) task. Kennedy tends to keep herself in a fog of mystery and unfortunately, the world is at her mercy when it comes to the factual reliability of what she reveals about herself. This gate-keeping of her privacy even results in “[h]er Wikipedia entry [being] increasingly unreliable”<sup>188</sup> as she states on her official webpage. I wrote about the avatar she creates to present to the world, as well as her infamous opposition to labels and categorization in my bachelor thesis<sup>189</sup> and shall therefore not spend more space repeating myself.

Kennedy was born in 1965 in Dundee to a teaching couple; her parents who worked as a university lecturer and a primary school teacher were from England and Wales and Kennedy grew up speaking Received Pronunciation at home. She attended an infant school in which she was allegedly bullied and when she was a young teenager, her parents got divorced, which had a greatly negative impact on Kennedy, who later described the process

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<sup>186</sup> Rennison, *Contemporary British Novelists*, 98.

<sup>187</sup> Gardiner, ‘Arcades – The 1980s and 1990s’, 188.

<sup>188</sup> ‘A. L. Kennedy – Writer and Performer’, accessed 1 April 2024, <https://www.a-l-kennedy.co.uk/>.

<sup>189</sup> Vaníčková, “Selected A. L. Kennedy’s short stories”, 17–23.



and the following years she spent with her mother as “turmoil unspeakable.”<sup>190</sup> Despite this childhood trauma, she managed to move on and in 1986, she graduated from University of Warwick with a BA in Theatre Studies and Drama. Apart from writing, she worked for charity Project Ability<sup>191</sup> and has been an associate professor of creative writing at her alma mater. For almost thirty years, she lived in Glasgow, which effectively put her in the Glasgow group of writers, though currently she lives in North Essex. She started writing short stories and gradually added novels, non-fiction, children’s literature, screenplays for both films and theatre, and articles to her repertoire. She is also a stand-up comedian and wrote multiple works for radio.

Her first short story collection titled *Night Geometry and the Garscadden Trains* (1990) won the Saltire Prize and the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize. Since then, she has published seven more short story collections; *Now That You’re Back* (1994), *Tea and Biscuits* (1996), *Original Bliss* (1997), *Indelible Acts* (2002), *What Becomes* (2009), *All the Rage* (2014) and *We Are Attempting to Survive Our Time* (2020). The list of the nine novels written by her thus far includes her first novel *Looking for the Possible Dance* (1993), *So I Am Glad* (1995), *Everything You Need* (1999), or *Day* (2007), for which she won the Costa Book of the Year Award in two categories. The books for children are the *Uncle Shawn and Bill trilogy* published annually from 2017, two of which she narrated as audiobooks together with *The Little Snake* (2018). She was among the Granta Best of Young British Novelists twice in 1993 and then a decade later, and among a number of other awards she also won the Heinrich Heine Preis Award or the Somerset Maugham Award.

Kennedy’s writing stresses “human vulnerability, miscommunication and aggression within relationships,”<sup>192</sup> and particularly her short stories can be read as “case studies in despair and isolation; minor epiphanies afford the characters some limited insight into their condition, but never sufficient to enable them to change or move beyond it.”<sup>193</sup> Borthwick summarizes her fiction and the recurrent theme of abuse of vulnerable people: “Abusive behaviour has always been present in Kennedy’s fiction and especially, if not

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<sup>190</sup> A. L. Kennedy, *The Life and Death of Coloner Blimp* (London: BFI Publications, 1997), 16.

<sup>191</sup> Rennison, *Contemporary British Novelists*, 98.

<sup>192</sup> Eluned Summers-Bremner, “‘Fiction with a Thread of Scottishness in Its Truth’: The Paradox of the National in A. L. Kennedy”, in *Contemporary British Women Writers*, ed. Emma Parker (D.S. Brewer, 2004), 124.

<sup>193</sup> David Borthwick, ‘A. L. Kennedy’s Dysphoric Fictions’, in *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, ed. Berthold Schoene (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 268.

exclusively, in her short stories; in particular, psychological abuse wreaked on children is a theme to which she returns time and again.”<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 269.

## 4 Childhood in Scotland and the obstacles it presents

In this section of the thesis, I will deal with selected literary works which contain the depiction of childhood and analyse the problems children in these works are facing. Although Petrie claims that “in the Scottish context the vast majority of child-centred narratives are ‘authored’ by male film-makers and writers and are fundamentally concerned with questions of masculinity,”<sup>195</sup> women writers have focused on children in their works, too. While their narratives are not necessarily all dealing with masculinity as their primary subject matter, the “overt masculinisation of Scottish culture and its over-emphasis on physical and emotional hardness, brutality, and aggression”<sup>196</sup> about which Petrie talks are still detectable in these stories, though the level of stress on it seems to be lesser. This suggests that the motif of difficult childhood is a common one across Scottish literature, irrespective of the gender of the author. My decision to focus on works authored by women is based on two reasons; firstly, my belief that women’s writing in this respect has not yet been explored – at least to the same extent as that of male writers’ works, and secondly, the amount of works to be analysed, should I not limit myself in any way, would require space hardly offered by the limitations of a diploma thesis. It is my belief that even narratives on this topic written by women provide enough data to exceed the required length.

I have already determined that children can be depicted as the embodiment of innocence in chapter 3.3.2.1. Such a child is often confronted with the opposite – wicked adults and corrupt environment in which the child lives. The ways in which a child may be disappointed by the environment in which they live are both physical and emotional. Innocent children find themselves highly dependent on their families and their economic and social status; a child born into a loving family can still be not provided for enough and, conversely, a child born into wealth and prosperity can suffer from the lack of emotional connection or absence of the parents.

In Scottish environment, the former seems to be the case: “While Scottish working-class families tended to be tightly knit and historically larger than their English counterparts, they were also vulnerable to a variety of inter-related economic and social problems, including unemployment, poverty, bad housing, poor health and delinquency, particularly in urban areas.”<sup>197</sup> Thatcherism impacted the society of Scotland greatly; with the rising

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<sup>195</sup> Petrie, *Contemporary Scottish Fictions*, 164.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 162–3.

numbers of unemployed people, “the 1980s witnessed a significant increase in matrimonial break-up and divorce and in the number of children born out of wedlock.”<sup>198</sup> Clare Hanson takes Esther Freud’s novel *The Wild* (2000) to explain her point on the subject of breaking of a family in contemporary literature, stating that it “demonstrates that while the rules and laws governing kinship may be arbitrary, the breakdown of these rules in a period of rapid social change puts an enormous degree of pressure on individual parents and children.”<sup>199</sup> Furthermore, she maintains that divorce and consequent single parenthood can mean a move down in social hierarchy and negative consequences for both the parent and the child, as is seen in Irvine Welsh’s *Glue* (2001) or Jenni Fagan’s *The Panopticon* (2012):

Whereas high-earning couples can afford to pay for childcare, even a highly-paid single parent will struggle to do this, and may be forced out of the full-time job market when a relationship breaks down. Whether it is through taking on the sole cost of childcare or through loss of full-time employment, the move to single parenthood will carry a heavy financial penalty. For those who already work part-time, with all the disadvantages this entails, relationship breakdown and the loss of a shared income will have even more disastrous consequences.<sup>200</sup>

In the literature that will be analysed in this thesis, the subject matter is a child, however none of the stories are written with the intent to be read by children. Rather, the author is talking to the “(adult) audience through the point of view of the child [which is] frequently motivated by an autobiographical impulse.”<sup>201</sup> It can be thus expected that the stories will also show the influence of Thatcherism which all the selected authors experienced first-hand along with all that it entailed for the families and particularly for the children. In their works, the children are depicted in situations in which they have no choice but to fight for survival in the conditions of contemporary Scotland.

In this thesis, I have discussed the experience of Scotland as a nation without its land and the negative consequences on the Scottish spirit. Although some may see the motif

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>199</sup> Hanson, ‘Fiction, Feminism and Femininity’, 22.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>201</sup> Petrie, *Contemporary Scottish Fictions*, 163.

of troublesome childhood as a metaphor (according to Petrie, “the metaphorical problem posed by the recurring figure of the child, or of the Orphan, in Scottish fiction has been the absence of an independent nation-state,”) <sup>202</sup> my stance is that – whether this metaphor is applicable or not – the situation of Scotland could rather be a factor influencing the overall experience of the children in question and should thus be understood as an underlying background influence rather than a clearly formulated reason for their struggles.

#### 4.1 Analysis of selected texts depicting childhood

In the following chapters, individual selected texts will be analysed. The aim of the analysis is to detect the depicted obstacles presented to children in said stories and determine their nature to find possible similarities and differences among them for their consequent categorization. It can be expected that certain struggles will be reoccurring across the stories, while other detected obstacles may be the only representative of its kind in the limited number of stories, however, the possibility of them appearing in stories out of the scope of this thesis cannot be fully dismissed.

##### 4.1.1 *Human Croquet*

*Human Croquet* is a novel written mostly from the perspective of Isobel Fairfax, a teenager from an ancient family which is according to a legend cursed by a mysterious lady. She is said to have appeared in front of their mansion in the sixteenth century, given birth to Sir Francis Fairfax’s son (the details of the birth veiled in mystery as well), and disappeared in the woods with a curse on her lips, leaving her son in the mansion to his fate.

As it is revealed, the theme of emotionally unavailable mother continued in their family, as her grandmother Charlotte was only able to love her third child, Isobel’s father Gordon: “Gordon had introduced Charlotte to a new emotion . . . the overwhelming love she felt for him.” <sup>203</sup> The novel comprises also the narratives of other women: the patient with whom Izzy lies in the hospital room telling her the story of Izzy’s mother Eliza: “She

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 181.

<sup>203</sup> Kate Atkinson, *Human Croquet* (London: Black Swan, 1998), 20.

is my own Scheherazade, she knows everything, she must be the storyteller from the end of the world. But how does it begin? Why it begins, as it must, she says, with the arrival of the baby,<sup>204</sup> as well as the mysterious Lady Fairfax, the author of the curse.

Isobel's narratives present various realities of her experience, mixing the present and the past, which sometimes reaches beyond the limits of her own life. These parts are tied by parallels, such as the mysterious birth with horrifying element or various relics appearing at different time, such as Eliza's belongings found later by her children and destroyed by her in-laws, which closely resembles the narrative style of Ruby Lennox in *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* (1995).

Izzy's birth is of similar nature to that of the son of Sir Francis – Eliza locked herself alone in a room, not letting the Widow or Vinny in, and bit off the cord herself: “A thrill of horror, like invisible electricity, jolted the Widow's flat body. ‘Gnawed,’ she whispered to Vinny . . . .”<sup>205</sup> Childbirth and pregnancy are a repeated motif in the novel, and usually it tells of the struggles the children are facing, from miscarriages to premature birth. Mrs Baxter, Isobel's neighbour, has gone through multiple miscarriages: “Mrs Baxter always looks sad when babies are mentioned, perhaps because she's lost several babies herself”<sup>206</sup> and in one of the realities, her daughter Audrey suffers one, too. Izzy and her older brother Charles are believed to be born early, though at least in Charles' case this is a lie as Eliza does not admit he was conceived before she met her husband, Gordon.

Birth is not the only encounter with death the children of the novel need to deal with. Izzy and Charles face death more than once in the course of their childhood as they first find the corpse of their murdered mother in the woods:

[T]ogether they stood and looked. At Eliza. She was lolled against the trunk of a big oak tree, like a carelessly abandoned doll or a broken bird. Her head had flopped against her shoulder, stretching her thin white neck like a swan or a stalk about to snap. . . . It was hard to know what to do with this sleeping mother who refused to wake up. She looked very peaceful, her long lashes closed, the speck of mascara still visible. Only the dark red ribbons of blood in her black curls hinted at the way

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 309.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 69.

her skull might have been smashed against the trunk of the tree and broken open like a beech-nut or an acorn.<sup>207</sup>

In the circumstances they find themselves, abandoned and lost in the woods, they cuddle to the deceased Eliza before kissing her goodbye, burying her in leaves and going to look for help.<sup>208</sup> Still, they are yet to witness the death of their grandmother, the Widow, as she falls from the stairs: “The screaming stopped when the Widow reached the foot of the stairs.”<sup>209</sup> As they have by now experienced the hostile life with the Widow and Vinny, they act as if they do not know anything about the event, afraid of the consequences. Concurrently, Audrey Baxter is said to have found her abusive father’s body after he kills himself: “Audrey and Mrs Baxter discovered his body in his study and are, as you might expect, subdued in their narrative of events.”<sup>210</sup>

Another struggle awaiting the children depicted in the novel is sexual violence and harassment. While Izzy manages to escape from two rape attempts, others are less lucky. As Lady Fairfax reveals, Sir Francis Fairfax has been abusing Lady Margaret: “I came upon my lord and his so-called ward in a position which did not suggest consanguinity, unless it was customary practice in that country for an ‘uncle’ to be so familiar with his ‘niece’ . . . Yet I was a harsh judge of her for she was barely sixteen, nothing but a child, and was as much prisoner as I myself was.”<sup>211</sup> The fact that this was not a single instance event is later admitted by his victim herself: “My Lady Margaret was with child. This was obvious to all. . . . Her childhood had been stolen from her. ‘My lord has had me since a child,’ she said. She meant in every way.”<sup>212</sup> If rape was not enough, she also finds the proof of the violence of her husband on Lady Margaret’s body in form of bruises of multiple colours: “. . . and covered over all, as a map of the world, with a vast expanse of black continent – here and there shaded in yellow or purple.”<sup>213</sup>

Another record of raping a child from the narratives of the past is that of Eliza, whose experience resembles that of Grace from “The moving house.” The husband of Maude, who stole her as a baby, attempts to discourage her from telling on him to anyone

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<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 128-9.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 347.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 360.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 362.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 361.

by threatening with violence.<sup>214</sup> Unlike Grace, Eliza's torment is discovered by the wife – however, she does not step in to protect the fourteen-year-old girl but blames and punishes her instead of the true perpetrator: “‘Why, Vi? Why?’ Mrs Potter whined poetically. ‘Why have we been given such a wicked monster for a child?’ overlooking the fact that Violet Angela was not given but taken. ‘I’m not a monster,’ Violet Angela sneered.”<sup>215</sup>

Mr Rice, who rents a room in the Fairfax's house, seems to be another example of a perpetrator, as he seems to be oddly comfortable and barely manages to act embarrassed when he reveals himself to Izzy: “Once or twice I've encountered him coming out of the bathroom in the morning, with his dressing-gown hanging open and something slack, like a pale fungus, flopping out from its lair. ‘Oops,’ Mr Rice says with a leering grin.”<sup>216</sup> He does not, nevertheless, take his kink as far as his neighbour, Mr Baxter, does.

Despite multiple narratives of what was going on at Baxters', the general story pertains – the violent father took advantage of his daughter, at least once, and may have gotten her pregnant (“It is obvious when you see them together, I suppose – they actually look quite alike, not just the hair and the small features, but the whey-faced expression of misery they both tend to wear,”) <sup>217</sup> because of which she suffers mentally. While this may be the fruit of Izzie's imagination, she seems to have a compelling reason to believe this to be true. Mr Baxter displays possessive behaviour towards his only daughter, being overly interested in her sex life:

‘Daddy,’ Audrey says when Mrs Baxter's left the room, and then stops, apparently incapable of saying anything else. ‘Is in a bit of a stushie?’ I prompt helpfully. She takes the baby and cradles it protectively, resting her chin on the top of its red-gold floss. Her eyes fill up with tears and she makes a tremendous effort to stop them spilling over on to the baby.

‘Boys,’ she manages to say.

‘Boys? He thinks you've ...?’

‘He's convinced I've been with a boy,’ she whispers.

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 326.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 327.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 281–282.



‘And have you?’ (She must have surely, how else can we account for the phenomenon of baby Jodi? Although if anyone’s a candidate for immaculate conception then it’s Audrey.)<sup>218</sup>

In some instances, Mr Baxter, unable to shake the question of Audrey’s partner’s identity away from his mind, does not hesitate to question Izzy about the topic either: “He puts his own face a few inches away from mine, a bully’s stance, and says, ‘Well, Isobel, who’s Audrey been messing about with? Some boy’s had her, who is it?’”<sup>219</sup> Eventually, after attacking Audrey who still holds the baby who is most likely theirs, he manages to shake the answer out of her – a painful and terrifying confession: “‘But, Daddy, it was you.’”<sup>220</sup> More striking is the fact that Mrs Baxter, although horrified and ashamed for failing her daughter, is eventually not even as surprised by the turn of events: “At first Mrs Baxter couldn’t take it in, how could Daddy do such a thing? But then something in her, a little voice, a tiny whisper, said – yes, this is just what Daddy would do.”<sup>221</sup> Izzy believes that Mr Baxter did not kill himself but was instead killed by his wife once she realized what he had done after finding Audrey miscarrying.

Mr Baxter’s violence does not only manifest behind the closed doors of his home. His practices as the headmaster of the Primary school are well known. Even Charles often witnesses (and later suffers) Mr Baxter’s behavioural which make him afraid of going to school:

‘I don’t want to go to school, Mummy.’

. . .

Rowan Street Primary was a dark cramped place . . . . An extraordinary amount of physical violence took place within its brick walls – Charles came home with reports of daily floggings, canings and whippings (thankfully on other boys so far) perpetrated by the headmaster, Mr Baxter.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 279.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 348.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 107–8.

Although the children seem to have been reporting the violence of Mr Baxter, his behaviour is allowed to continue even after he unleashes his aggression to the point where he causes major injuries to a young student: “There has been some heavily suppressed scandal at Rowan Street Primary to do with a small boy who had to be hospitalized after one of Mr Baxter’s routine punishment sessions.”<sup>223</sup> Charles himself does not manage to avoid this barbaric abuse as he performs poorly in school due to a severe ear infection requiring surgical treatment: “Unfortunately, this didn’t help him read any better and Mr Baxter still had to bounce wooden rulers off the palms of Charles’ hands to help him make out the words on the page.”<sup>224</sup>

Eliza also experienced unreasonable amount of beating as a child by Maude: “Maude tried to beat the sin out of Violet Angela. ‘This is for your own good,’ she huffed and puffed up the stairs with ‘Father’s’ leather belt. How could this be right, Violet Angela wondered? To be beaten half to death by your parents? Weren’t they supposed to love and protect you?”<sup>225</sup> While poor Eliza does not realize is that the people abusing her are not her parents, her disbelief in the fact that those who the child relies on the most can act so cruelly is still relevant.

The most noticeable struggle in the book is that of a missing parent. Isobel and Charles must deal with losing both their mother and father at a very young age. At first, after their mother’s mysterious disappearance, the circumstances of which they seem to have repressed, they are abandoned by Gordon and left in the hostile care of his mother and sister: “Gordon didn’t seem to realize that in the seven intervening years we’d become underground children, living in a dark place where the sun never shone.”<sup>226</sup> While Izzy struggles to believe their mother would simply leave them, she tries to reason with logical explanations: “Perhaps it was a fit of absent-mindedness, perhaps she meant to come back but couldn’t find the way. Stranger things have happened; our own father for example, himself went missing after our mother disappeared and when he came back seven years later claimed amnesia as his excuse.”<sup>227</sup> Unlike Gordon who returns after seven years, Eliza remains missing, despite the children’s attempts to revive her and never-ending belief in her return just like Gordon’s: “Absence of Eliza has shaped our lives. . . . We have waited nearly all our lives for the sound of her foot on the path, her key in the door, waited for her

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 326.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 28.

walking back into our lives (*I'm home, darling!*) as if nothing has happened. It wouldn't be the first time."<sup>228</sup>

Izzy misses Eliza greatly, bewailing her throughout the novel: "It's like being a child again, feeling her absence paralysing me until all emotion is reduced to one mantra, *I want my mother, I want my mother, I want my mother.*"<sup>229</sup> She feels betrayed, knowing how much she misses together with Eliza – all the experience and moments of the mother-daughter relationship she is aware should have happened had Eliza not been gone. She also knows that all she is left with is the imagination of a mother she does not have: "There are things I don't know about – good skin care, how to write a thank-you letter – because she was never there to teach me. More important things – how to be a wife, how to be a mother. How to be a woman. If only I didn't have to keep on inventing Eliza (rook-hair, milk-skin, blood-lips)."<sup>230</sup> Izzy makes bitter remarks concerning the fact that both of their parents have failed them: "The important thing about the disappearing trick – something that Eliza and Gordon seemed to have failed to grasp – is that the real skill was coming back again after you'd vanished."<sup>231</sup> And when she is running away to save herself from the second attempt at raping her by her peers, she laments the fact that she is left alone to care for herself, something that every child deserves: "Why do I have no protector in this world, someone watching over me?"<sup>232</sup>

While Izzy mourns her lost mother quietly and deals with her disappearance internally, her older brother Charles deals with it in his own way – that is, refusing the possibility of their mother leaving willingly altogether: "Mysterious disappearances are his speciality."<sup>233</sup> Instead, he chooses to believe a stronger power beyond the limits of imagination played a role in her disappearance and that his mother still loves him and wishes to return, even when he is eighteen years old:

‘What if our mother didn't run off,’ Charles muses, sitting on the end of my bed now and staring out at the blue square of window-sky. ‘What if she had simply dematerialized?’ I point out to him that ‘simply’ might be the wrong word here, but I know what he means – then she wouldn't

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid., Italics in the original.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 147. Italics in the original.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 262.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 32.

have voluntarily abandoned her own children (us), leaving them to fend for themselves in a cold, cruel world. And so on.<sup>234</sup>

Charles has spent his childhood searching for relics of his mother's existence to get closer to her – any talisman would do, be it her powder-compact<sup>235</sup>, her handkerchief<sup>236</sup>, her shoe<sup>237</sup> or a lock of her hair.<sup>238</sup> He then proudly presents his findings to Izzy to share the discovered way to get closer to their mom: “Charles sniffs at the inside of the shoe like a bloodhound, he lays the brown suede against his cheek and closes his eyes like a clairvoyant. ‘Hers,’ he says decisively, ‘definitely.’”<sup>239</sup> His quest for finding bits and pieces of his mother to perhaps eventually build her again from them is usually conquered by his custodians, the Widow who lies about the existence of Eliza's photographs: “Charles asked to see photographs of her and the Widow said there weren't any, which seemed strange . . . ,”<sup>240</sup> and Vinny who promptly destroys any evidence found: “The new-found shoe has disappeared back into obscurity. When closely questioned, Vinny . . . admits to having barbecued it.”<sup>241</sup>

Charles and Isobel's ways of dealing with the loss are contradictory, which sometimes results in arguments: “‘She could be dead for all we know, Charles.’ Charles looks as if he'd like to attack me with the shoe. ‘Don't you ever think about her?’ he says angrily. But there isn't a day goes by when I don't think about her. I carry Eliza around inside me, like a bowl of emptiness.”<sup>242</sup> While Charles keeps searching for the material proof of Eliza's life, Izzie knows that this will not help, and can only cause more pain to them since “looking for Eliza is a heart-breaking and thankless task. We have done it all our lives, we should know.”<sup>243</sup>

Both children also need to face the betrayal of their father leaving them – Izzy herself is haunted by the sense of abandonment in her dreams, where her father fails to protect her and keep her safe when she is falling, proving that he no longer provides the comfort of feeling security as a parent:

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 34–5.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 141–2.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 142.

Isobel lay in bed at night, imagining him walking off into a wall of white fog, fog like cotton wool wrapping his body, cotton-wool-fog filling his lungs and choking him. Sometimes in dreams he walked back out from the fog wall, walked towards her, lifting her up and tossing her towards the sky, but when she floated back down to earth Gordon had disappeared and she was alone in the middle of a vast dark wilderness of trees.<sup>244</sup>

This nightmare seems to be related to her traumatic experience in which, closely before Eliza's tragic departure, the parents left both of their children in the middle of the woods:

The sun had disappeared from the trees, except for one little pool at the corner of the rug. . . . They sat on the rug together, holding hands, waiting for some other noise to take the place of the dying echo of the scream, waiting for the sound of Gordon's and Eliza's voices, . . . of anything except the absolute stillness of the wood. . . . Isobel could feel fear, like hot liquid, in her stomach. Something was very, very wrong.<sup>245</sup>

This event had the greatest impact on little Charles, who, in the situation the oldest, is forced to stand up and substitute an adult for himself and his little sister despite them both being petrified. He needs to make decisions for both of them to get them out of the woods while simultaneously keeping in mind that little Isobel is probably more scared than himself. Therefore, he needs to deliver the news to her in such a way as not to disturb her even more than she already is: "Eventually he said, 'Come on, let's go and find everybody,' and dragged Isobel up from the rug by her hand. 'They're just playing Hide-and-Seek probably,' he said, but his whey-face and the wobble in his voice betrayed his real feelings. Being the grown-up in charge was taking its toll on him."<sup>246</sup>

Considering that he himself has a long time before he actually becomes a grown-up, this is a massive request which he has no other choice than to comply to if he wants

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 126–7.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 127.

them both to survive. The situation virtually ended his childhood and forced him to become an adult who needs to suddenly think of all the possible dangers and ways to avoid them while, again, keeping his little sister calm: “‘It’s not the owls we have to worry about,’ Charles muttered grimly, ‘it’s the wolves,’ and then, remembering that he was supposed to be the man in charge of this woeful expedition, added, ‘Joke, Izzie – forget I said that.’”<sup>247</sup> Even Izzy notices how much of strength this requires as she observes the difference in her brother overnight: “Charles looked careworn, as if on the inside he’d aged several decades since yesterday.”<sup>248</sup>

Of course, the novel depicts more parents physically absent from their children’s lives – Eliza herself was first bought in Paris only to be stolen from her adoptive parents: “Of course, she wasn’t really the de Brevilles’ daughter. . . . He would probably have lived to regret corrupting the de Breville bloodline, but then he didn’t have to, it was taken out of his hands, Esme was taken out of his hands. He bought her in Paris. You can always buy children.”<sup>249</sup> One can thus make the claim that she is missing twice as many parents. Eliza gives birth to another boy before she meets Gordon – a boy that her partner, the father of the baby gives up for adoption without giving her a chance to decide this together. The boy would later turn out to be Isobel’s crush, Malcom: “Dickie took him from the hospital and when she asked what he’d done with him, Dickie lit a cigar and laughed. ‘Sold him back to the baby shop, sweetheart,’ he said and when he saw the grimace on Eliza’s face he patted her hand . . . and said reassuringly, ‘Very respectable couple, a doctor and his wife, Dr Lovat.’”<sup>250</sup> Isobel is only aware of the fact that her love interest is adopted, however: “Malcolm is adopted. The Lovats were quite old when they adopted him. ‘I don’t think they knew what to do with me when they got me,’ Malcolm says, ‘I didn’t drink gin and I didn’t play bridge.’ He has learnt to do both.”<sup>251</sup>

Charles himself, without ever knowing it, suffers from not having his real father around his entire life as he was only present to conceive his offspring. The truth about his bloodline is suggested only via the unique colour of their hair which they share. When Eliza is with her partner, Charles’ father, she notices the colour: “In the flickering light she saw ginger hair, pale gold eyelashes and russet freckles that charted his unscarred skin.”<sup>252</sup> And

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 341.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 331–2.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 334.

when Charles is born, the colour of his hair does not remain uncommented by Vinny: “‘Red hair!’ Vinny said gleefully to Gordon. ‘I wonder where he got that from?’”<sup>253</sup>

Finally, the baby which mysteriously appears at the doorstep of the Fairfax’s house is destined to grow up without its parents.<sup>254</sup> If it is true that the baby is truly the result of Audrey’s rape by Mr Baxter, the father is dead and the mother can never admit the truth, only finding comfort in having her child nearby, being able to watch as it grows.

While some parents are absent physically, others may be present but not in spirit. The children then must deal with lack of emotional connection to said parents. While Eliza was still alive, she showered with love both Charles: “Charles, sadly, was rather ugly. . . . Eliza, however (naturally, being his mother), declared that he was the most beautiful baby that ever existed”<sup>255</sup> as well as Isobel: “*Look*, said Eliza softly, pulling back the shawl from the sooty head, *isn’t she perfect?*”<sup>256</sup>

Gordon, on the other hand, seems to be rather distant – especially since returning to his family after seven years. After Izzy and Charles are rescued, only to suffer for seven years with the Widow and Vinny, they struggle to recognize the man who returns as their father – not that his appearance would change but his personality has – Gordon is detached from them and appears to be a shell of himself. The children may have gotten their father back but not their dad: “When they thought of Gordon they thought of the man in the silver-framed photograph – the RAF uniform, the cheerful smile, the wavy hair. This Gordon – ghost or impostor – had short cropped hair, lightened by the sun and what smile he could muster was far from cheerful.”<sup>257</sup> What they are now to live with is an emotionally distant man who used to be their “Daddy,”<sup>258</sup> as they used to call him – now, he is referred to by his first name.

Before his arrival, the children are suffering in a household lacking any love. The Widow refuses to see them as anything other than spoiled since they are the children of their mother – a woman passionately despised by the Widow. Eventually, she turns to the archetype evil stepmother: “The Widow tried to be nice to them, but the strain began to show after a while. ‘You’re such *naughty* children,’ she sighed in exasperation. ‘That’s what happens to naughty children,’ the Widow said, as she locked them in their attic

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 100. Italics in the original.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

bedroom . . . .”<sup>259</sup> Vinny follows the Widow’s footsteps and blames the children for their mother’s disappearance with which as she knows they have nothing to do: “‘Maybe it’s because you’re such naughty children that she left you.’”<sup>260</sup> In addition, Vinny seems to blame them for any minor inconvenience, including the fact that she must now look after them: “‘Vinny used to have her own house, a dingy little terrace on Willow Road, but when our parents disappeared so thoughtlessly she had to give it up and come and live with us. She’s never forgiven us.’”<sup>261</sup>

The torment they experience in addition to being constantly lied to about the fate of their parents soon shows on them: “‘Charles sought refuge in bad behaviour . . . . When Vinny told him off he stood with his hands on his hips and laughed like a rocking automaton – *ha-ha-ha* – and Vinny had to slap his face to make him stop. He wet the bed nearly every night . . . .’”<sup>262</sup> The fact that they are first led to believe that their dead mother is alive but abandoned them while their living father is first said to be gone on a business trip, then dead, only to appear alive after seven years leaves Izzy bitter. She comments on the negative effect it left in them, having to comply to the ever-changing news: “‘This seems a little harsh, your mother only dies once after all (unless you were unlucky and she took it into her head to defy the laws of physics).’”<sup>263</sup>

Izzy further faces an internal struggle. She suffers from visions which overpower her; during her episodes, she travels through time, sees the past and the future, and is unable to stop it. According to her friend Eunice, this is her body’s response to repressed trauma – which seems to be the experience of her mother’s death: “‘Perhaps,’ Eunice says airily, ‘some deep-seated terror in your past is coming back to revisit you.’”<sup>264</sup> Izzy however believes she is going mad. “‘Are there other people who are dropping in and out of the past and not bothering to mention it in everyday conversation (as you wouldn’t)? But let’s face it, if it comes right down to it, which is more likely – a disruption in the space-time continuum or some form of madness?’”<sup>265</sup> This belief resembles Anais from *The Panopticon* (2012), however, in Anais’ case, the source seems to be not as much of a traumatic experience as her use of drugs. Another thing that ties the two protagonists is their vision

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 174. Italics in the original.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 185. Italics in the original.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 79.



of faceless people, something that Anais calls the experiment – in Izzy’s case, they however turn out to be just doctors and nurses:

People loom in and out of focus, they seem to be aliens, white and fuzzy – spacemen without faces. They are experimenting on me, poking me with needles and sticking tubes in and out of me, probing me to discover my secrets. . . . Soon they all have faces and then they lose their alien nature and turn into nurses in blue-and-white stripes and frilled caps, serious doctors with coats and stethoscopes who swim in and out of focus.<sup>266</sup>

A common feature in the novel in terms of parent-child relationship is physical abuse. Vinny and the Widow seemed to be open to hitting the children in the name of behavioural correction to meet their expectations, but they are not alone. Isobel’s friend comes from a very violent family: “. . . the McDades are liable to such casual violence that even the friendliest exchange with them is liable to result in injury – a box on the ear, a punch in the stomach. ‘Yeah,’ Carmen says, cracking gum like a whip, ‘it’s not nice, is it?’”<sup>267</sup> Audrey’s family also suffers from an aggressor – her father who beats his wife and possibly also Audrey herself, resulting in her quiet nature: “And poor Audrey, so quiet and self-effacing, so frightened of the blackhearted presence of Mr Baxter, that sometimes you have to look twice to make sure Audrey’s still there. . . . ‘What’s wrong with Audrey?’ Mr Baxter keeps snapping as if she’s making herself ill just to annoy him.”<sup>268</sup>

Absence of voice seems to be another thing the children in *Human Croquet* face. Audrey chooses to be silent not to catch her abusive father’s attention, while Vinny decides to literally give Charles away to get rid of him without first asking him whether he would like to go to another family.<sup>269</sup> The scene of his departure, when he realizes that he will travel alone without his sister, is later described as kidnapping and suggests the way the children are attended to is cruel: “A week after he was kidnapped by the Croslands, Charles reappeared in a sudden unexpected rasping of gravel. The rear door of the car opened and – surprise! – Charles spilled out on to the ground so quickly that you would have almost

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 307.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 42–3.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 194–7.

thought he'd been pushed. The car door slammed again and the window was rolled down."<sup>270</sup>

Finally, the children also need to deal with the fact that society has failed them. This includes having to resort to prostitution, like when Eliza runs away from her kidnappers at the age of sixteen and has no other way of surviving.<sup>271</sup> Furthermore, they face the consequences of other crime, particularly murder. In a weaker moment, Gordon even admits to his sin to Izzy: "Instead I can feel his gaze through the gloom as he says in a flat voice, 'I killed your mother.'"<sup>272</sup> Although he later attempts to hide behind his lie again ("'What I mean is I killed her spirit.' He shrugs. 'I wanted her for what she was, but when I got her I wanted her to change,'"")<sup>273</sup> the evidence of his crime in the form of Eliza's remains is eventually discovered not only by his children but by others too, though it happens years later:

A woman who died a long time ago, they said, too long for them to be able to say how she died . . . . 'To *EF* with all my love, *G*' and that that made her feel very sad somehow. I believe my mother had such a ring but I knew she couldn't be the forgotten body in the wood for I never thought of her as dead, and anyway she had made herself manifest to me not long before.<sup>274</sup>

Izzy is however not able to believe that is her mother despite the quite compelling evidence, perhaps because she, as an adult by now, is too tired to learn the truth and too hurt to accept it.

#### 4.1.2 *Behind The Scenes at the Museum*

In Kate Atkinson's *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* (1995), Ruby Lennox tells the story of her life and discovers her identity through her female lineage which includes her great-grandmother Alice, grandmother Nell, and mother Bunty. While doing so, she tells their

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 330.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 374–5. Italics in the original.

story from childhood to death and explores the fate of other relatives, too. The fragments of the past are triggered by encountering various items owned by the family and elaborated on in the footnotes at the end of each chapter. As Ruby realizes she has repressed her twin sister Pearl's death at the end of the novel, the reader realizes the unreliability of her as a narrator. Parker notes that "[t]he 'scenes' of the novel's title point to the partial nature of history and suggest that, like Ruby's memory, history contains gaps and never tells the whole story."<sup>275</sup> Ruby being an unreliable narrator however does not impede since it is not as much the truth of what happened as Ruby's internal struggle with her interpretation of the situations that is the focal point of this analysis. In other words, though Ruby is unaware of the objective truth, her experience is still valid for the analysis as it is her subjective perception of the reality she must handle.

Of course, in the four generations, the novel offers numerous obstacles faced by children. Regarding the most elemental, drastic one a child must survive, i.e. childbirth, Ruby herself, though emerging victorious, stresses the cruelty of the process from a rarely ever considered perspective of the child itself: "My frail little skeleton is being crushed like a thin-shelled walnut. My tender skin, as yet untouched by any earthly atmosphere, is being chafed raw by this sausage-making process."<sup>276</sup> There are, nevertheless, also children who lose their fight for survival: "The loss of children is a reoccurring motif"<sup>277</sup> tormenting all the respective generations, and despite only some of them suffer their child's death, it is not difficult to encounter a child's passing in *Behind the Scenes*. Alice's son William fails to survive as he succumbs to "some unknown fever at three months."<sup>278</sup>

His twin, Ada, manages to outlive him by twelve years before she dies of diphtheria: "Ada could hear the rattling sound in her throat, which may as well have been her death rattle, for she knew that when you heard that it meant you weren't going to get better. The sister of a schoolfriend had died of diphtheria last winter so she knew what happened."<sup>279</sup> Ada dies soon after her half-brother Samuel, who is already born ready to die. While both Ada and Samuel's deaths are to be expected, Rachel seems to refuse to accept Samuel's: "The baby had only been dead an hour but already it seemed to have shrivelled into a deflated thing, yet Rachel nursed her corpse child as if it were still alive."<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> Parker, *Kate Atkinson's Behind the Scenes at the Museum*, 44.

<sup>276</sup> Atkinson, *Behind the Scenes*, 52.

<sup>277</sup> Parker, *Kate Atkinson's Behind the Scenes at the Museum*, 47.

<sup>278</sup> Atkinson, *Behind the Scenes*, 41.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

The flashbacks cover the period of the world wars too, in which obviously many children lost their lives. The narrative contains the death of a few children, small or on the edge of childhood. One of them is Dick Carter, who lost his father in World War I and “was just the right age to be killed [in World War II].”<sup>281</sup> Dick, whose age is not specified, can be seen as a mere representative of the young men, some of them barely adult, who lost their lives on the fronts. While Alice’s son Albert also dies on the front, he is already an adult, and thus his death is not considered here. Still, I deem it fair to include Dick for the possibility of him enlisting before being legally adult. Those were, however, not the only children whose lives war claimed. We also need to consider those too young to fight, who were killed during air raids – for instance, Bunty’s neighbour infant dies with his mother as “an even louder *BANG!!* . . . turned out to be Ena and Spencer making the ultimate sacrifice.”<sup>282</sup> Their death is announced with a dryness of a person with experience of such tragedy.

The present narrative sees two of the four Lennox girls dead. Gillian, the second oldest sister, dies on Christmas Eve after a collision with a car, aged eleven. Ruby’s narrative approaches this event dryly with a remark concerning how, despite Gillian’s rough and untamed character, she is the apple of the Lennox’s eye: “. . . our Gillian, the promise of the future. (Not much of a future as it turned out, as she gets run over by a pale blue Hillman Husky in 1959 but how are any of us to know this? As a family we are genetically predisposed towards having accidents – being run over and blown up are the two most common.)”<sup>283</sup> Ruby also, in true Scottish nature, comments on the coincidence of her sister’s death on such a date with a tinge of irony: “It’s Christmas Eve when Gillian pays the price of all those golden-blond curls, so there’ll never be much chance of forgetting the anniversary of her death.”<sup>284</sup>

Finally, the most essential death of a child in Ruby’s narrative is that of Pearl despite her not acknowledging it for most of the novel. Pearl’s death is an accident, though Gillian, who is most at fault, blames Ruby in fear of facing the consequences. As such, Pearl’s death reflects the most primal failure of environment that children must overcome, i.e. hostility of nature, as Pearl drowns after falling through ice of a duck pond at the age of four.<sup>285</sup> Since Ruby witnesses the whole scene, including Patricia diving after her sister to

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid., 132. Italics in the original.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 429–33.

rescue her (unsuccessfully), she is understandably traumatised. Her trauma manifests in the shape of her fear of water, exhibited for instance on a family vacation to Scotland, where she tends to keep a substantial distance from lakes if possible: “It creates a feeling of unease in me and if I get too near the edge I begin to think it’s trying to suck me into its endless blackness. It reminds me of something, but what?”<sup>286</sup>

When forced to overcome her fear of water and board a boat with everyone else, she feels uneasy even before they are caught in a storm, which makes even the rest feel uneasy, Ruby is unable to bear her trauma anymore and breaks down into a fit nearing hysteria:

And then – and this is dreadful – suddenly I begin to scream, a fearful scream of despair that rises up from the bottomless loch deep inside me, a place with neither name, number nor end. ‘The water,’ I sob into Patricia’s neck, ‘the water!’ and she does her best, given the circumstances, to soothe me. ‘I know, Ruby...’ she shouts, but the wind carries away the rest of her words.<sup>287</sup>

The seeming inexplicability of Ruby’s fear of water can be interpreted as her repressing the traumatic experience. Until she is explicitly reminded of Pearl, she is only haunted by a sense of something missing, something abstract she cannot quite grip and concretise. The accident is thus only hinted at throughout most of the novel, for instance when she watches a frozen river with Patricia: “. . . a curious feeling rises up inside me, a feeling of something long forgotten. It has something to do with the cold and the ice and something to do with the water too. I try to concentrate on the feeling, to bring it to life, but as soon as I do it evaporates from my brain.”<sup>288</sup>

Atkinson has Ruby deal with most of uncomfortable situations with sarcasm and humour, which may be a successful coping strategy for minor inconvenience but fails to provide a sufficient and lasting solution to healing from the major traumatic experience. *Behind the Scenes* generally emphasizes the pitfalls of being in denial or repressing trauma not only in Ruby’s but also her mother Bunty’s case.<sup>289</sup> While Bunty is simply traumatised by the experience of being left behind on a train station as a child<sup>290</sup> resulting in her need

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<sup>286</sup> Ibid., 336.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid., 339.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 294.

<sup>289</sup> Parker, *Kate Atkinson’s Behind the Scenes at the Museum*, 41.

<sup>290</sup> Atkinson, *Behind the Scenes*, 247–55.

to be on time even in adult life (and states of panic when failing to do so), Ruby's trauma seems to have deeper consequences. She attempts to protect her well-being by means humour wherever possible – and where it is not, she forgets. She struggles to battle repression even when directly confronted by Mr Belling: “I have had a terrible scene with Mr Belling,”<sup>291</sup> implying both the argument but also her mind's resistance to remember Pearl. The symptoms of her repression are scattered across the whole novel, including complete blackouts, e.g., she does not remember being sent to Auntie Babs directly after Pearl died since, due to her physical similarity to Pearl, Bunty cannot bear looking at her: “But how I got here or why I am here – these are mysteries, for I remember nothing about the journey.”<sup>292</sup>

Although she encounters the acknowledgement of Pearl's existence multiple times during her childhood, she is lost at deciphering the meaning of the name as signified by uncapitalized initial letter in the text: “Sometimes you could hear Bunty crying to the night, ‘My Gillian, my pearl,’ which I thought was very odd, because I'd never heard her call her that when she was alive. And anyway, surely it's me that's the jewel of the family?”<sup>293</sup> Still, the name of her passed sister haunts Ruby either in the form of the initial uttered but cut off immediately by others,<sup>294</sup> miracles in church,<sup>295</sup> or Ruby herself, who, though unaware, spells the name in the process of learning to write: “One afternoon, Auntie Babs comes into the living-room and finds Teddy and me sitting on the magic carpet in tears – in front of us a ouija-board of letters spelling the mysterious word P-E-A-R-L. Auntie Babs' face is pinched in fury so that she resembles a Picasso portrait. She picks up the letters and throws them on the fire.”<sup>296</sup> This suggests that perhaps Ruby received some help in forgetting about her sister whatsoever.

Ruby's trauma manifests itself in more than just forgetting. She suffers from nightmares filled with the imagined horrors of what Pearl must have endured: “The worst things of all are the nightmares – terrible dreams of drowning, of falling, of being trapped, of flying.”<sup>297</sup> During those dreams, Ruby not only faces all the ways she could be harmed, but also attempts to avoid “the Unnamed Dread lurking on the landings,”<sup>298</sup> which, though

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<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 414.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

not identified more closely, can be read as Ruby's interpretation of death or the Grim Reaper. Not only does she struggle in her mind when she sleeps, but she also starts to sleepwalk: "My night-time perambulations do not stop when I'm home and Bunty often wakes me from my parlous state in order to tell me how annoyed she is at being woken by my ghostly odysseys."<sup>299</sup>

From the very beginning, Ruby also works with her imagination as reality, announcing that Above the Shop, where they live, is haunted by ghosts. Whether this is simply a manifestation of her awareness of her ancestors that passed that lead her through life as a part of who she is, or functions as a coping mechanism (the result of Pearl's death) is debatable. It is notable though that she also senses other supernatural beings at her aunts' where she is sent directly after Pearl died. Perhaps due to how recent the incident was, Ruby feels these ghosts are worse than the friendly ghosts at home: "The amiable ghosts Above the Shop have been replaced by something that crackles with evil."<sup>300</sup> Ruby's imagination-driven fear of a four-year-old continues to flourish as she acknowledges the existence of monsters under her camp bed, the safest place in the whole house as far as Ruby is concerned, which are lurking and waiting to attack her: "But one thing is certain – all the things that live under the bed, named, or unnamed, have teeth. Teeth that will snap vulnerable little ankles when they try to get into bed."<sup>301</sup>

Considering all the factors listed and yet to be discussed, Ruby finds herself a deeply depressed, lonely, and traumatized teenager: "I'm fourteen and already I've 'had enough'. Bunty was nearly twice my age before she started saying that."<sup>302</sup> Worse than the depression itself is her anguish caused by the striking indifference of those who should care. Being the only Lennox child left, she still feels overlooked by her parents, which makes her turmoil even more unbearable, especially considering her traumatic responses: "Why does nobody notice how unhappy I am? Why does nobody comment on my bizarre behaviour – the recurring bouts of sleepwalking that still erupt from time to time. . . ."<sup>303</sup> Finally, in addition to struggling with her mind in her sleep, she begins to suffer even in her wake state after George's funeral: "Worst of all is the panic . . . , I've lost count of how many times I've had to run from cinemas, theatres, libraries, buses, dinner queues, department stores."<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid., 360.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid., 408.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 409.

It takes her two more years before her depression reaches the ultimate state and she attempts suicide multiple times. Her first attempt seems to be deliberately chosen to resemble Pearl's passing; despite her fear of water, Ruby decides to drown herself in a river. Admittedly, this unusual choice may be supported by the fact that the water level is too low:

Lacking pebbles, not to mention cardigan pockets to put them in, I had to resort to clutching a brick, discovered amongst the maze of tree roots along the bank. Could a person drown in such shallow water? Ever the optimist, I tried to squat down on the muddy river-bed and force myself to drown – but, as luck would have it, a noisy, enthusiastic spaniel upset this plan.<sup>305</sup>

Ruby does not seem to be too eager to return. Instead, she finds another way to escape her misery, without even originally intending to do so. The sudden need to kill herself seems to overpower her: “And then a curious thing happens – I keep on banging on the glass, very hard with the side of my hand because what I want to do – what I have a sudden, overwhelming urge to do – is to smash the glass and saw my wrist against the broken edge, backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards . . . until the blood pumps out . . . .”<sup>306</sup> Contrary to her first unsuccessful attempt, Ruby does not let herself being disturbed by the arrival of Bunty and her boyfriend, who eventually manage to stop her.

*Behind the Scenes* explores the toxic environment a family presents to a child – most often rooted in an unhappy marriage which directly affects the well-being of the children. Most importantly it focuses on the mother–daughter relationship, displaying “the pain of feeling unmothered or inadequately mothered”<sup>307</sup> felt by nearly every child in the family across the generations. The phenomenon of a missing parent seems to be frequent in Scottish literature, and in the novel, it is not different– most children who feel unmothered are those whose mother is not in their lives: Alice, to begin with, runs away with a photographer to escape her miserable life with gambling Frederick, leaving behind all of her small children: “Lillian hasn't celebrated her first birthday yet and just succeeds in

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<sup>305</sup> Ibid., 405.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., 408.

<sup>307</sup> Parker, *Kate Atkinson's Behind the Scenes at the Museum*, 18.



slipping it in before her mother disappears from her life for ever.”<sup>308</sup> The next day, the children wake to the news of their mother’s sudden death – a situation completely opposite to that in *Human Croquet*, where the mother dies but is pronounced simply eloped. However, even then a parallel can be read in a son refusing to believe the tale concerning his mother and waiting for her return. In Alice’s case, it is her son Albert, who “didn’t really believe in death. The dead had just gone away somewhere and were going to come back sooner or later . . . .”<sup>309</sup> Alice, dearly missed by her children during Rachel’s tyranny, still loves her children and even attempts to regain charge of them. After returning to an empty cottage, she spends her life searching for her children who live in complete oblivion of the fact.

In her mother’s absence, Ada is forced by the circumstances and the cruelty of Rachel’s idea of upbringing to accept the motherly role for her siblings. Her forced adulthood starts immediately after she wakes up on the fateful day: “The next morning Frederick gathered them round the kitchen table and told them their mother was dead and Ada was left to make the oatmeal while Frederick went into the village to try and find a wet-nurse for baby Nellie, . . . .”<sup>310</sup> Her motherhood becomes even more juxtaposed when she is put in contrast with Rachel, the one who is supposed to act as their mother instead, especially after Samuel is born: “Sometimes Ada would hold Nell in her arms like a baby and Ada and her stepmother would face each other across the kitchen like rival queens.”<sup>311</sup> Still, while Rachel only focuses on one baby, Ada has to provide the emotional support for all of her siblings, thus winning the imaginary fight.

The novel draws parallels between the generations on multiple occasions – a mother eloping to escape the unbearable pressure in the family is one of them. While Alice disappears only from her husband, Bunty admits in her note to George that her reasons are his infidelity as well as Pearl’s death.<sup>312</sup> In her absence, the role of the mother should fall on Patricia since George proves himself utterly lost in parental responsibilities: “This is all too much for George who lurches out of bed in a daze, picks up the clock by the side of the bed, stares at it uncomprehendingly, stares at the empty space on the other side of the double bed where Bunty should be and then flops back into bed and mutters, ‘Go and find your

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<sup>308</sup> Atkinson, *Behind the Scenes*, 49.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

mother.”<sup>313</sup> Unlike Ada, however, Patricia originally rejects this role, only taking care of herself in the emergency situation: “Patricia shrugs, ‘*I don’t know,*’ she says scathingly. ‘It’s nothing to do with me – anyway you’re nearly ten years old, surely you can get yourself to school?’ and with that slight on Gillian’s maturity she slings her satchel over her back and disappears.”<sup>314</sup> Ruby and Gillian are thus left at home without anyone to worry about their attendance.

It is only after Gillian’s death that Patricia accepts the forced adulthood and takes care of both Ruby and slowly expiring Nell, while Bunty and George are at the hospital at first and then vanish until New Year’s Eve when, to Ruby’s content, “[t]hey had the decency to ring the front door bell and look a little shamefaced, aware that they had somewhat abrogated parental responsibility.”<sup>315</sup> Ruby is aware of the sacrifice Patricia made when she accepted the responsibilities for her parents during the holidays at such young age, as well as how much she lost while doing so: “Good old Patricia. It must have been doubly difficult for her to undertake this role, for although she’s thirteen years old and arguably the most grown-up member of the family, it is Patricia more than anyone who mourns the way magic has drained from our world.”<sup>316</sup> Ruby also mourns the childhood they both lost after the incident, implying she may have felt she also was forced to grow up, while sourly noting they never really were allowed to be children: “Our childhood is over, yet we’re still waiting for it to begin.”<sup>317</sup> Once Patricia accepts the role of an adult, she continues doing all that is expected for Ruby, including the Tooth Fairy ritual: “Patricia very kindly exchanges the teeth for three sixpences . . . .”<sup>318</sup>

Ruby, unlike Patricia, has experienced the sense of abandonment even prior to Gillian’s death and Bunty disappearing. This was during her stay at Auntie Babs’ where she had to endure the uncertainty of her faith, only having her Teddy with her: “I try to find the secret spell that will take us out of our mysterious exile and back home. How long have we been imprisoned in Mirthroyd Road? A year? Five years? Two and a half weeks really, but it seems like a hundred years.”<sup>319</sup>

Next to mothers missing physically from children’s lives, fathers are often absent too, only this is not caused by them abandoning the children as much as dying: Bunty’s

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<sup>313</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid., 190. Italics in the original.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., 297.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 160.

father Frank was killed during war by a bomb,<sup>320</sup> Nell's nephew Edmund only lives with his mother Lillian as his anonymous father died in war: "Lillian wouldn't say who the father was, even when Rachel tried, unsuccessfully, to throw her out of the house."<sup>321</sup> And finally, George, who together with Bunty abandoned Patricia and Ruby after Gillian died, was not present even before – he, for instance, missed Ruby and Pearl's birth. Although Ruby is only an infant, her adult narrative comments on this flaw with naïve hope: "My absent father, in case you're wondering, is in the Dog and Hare in Doncaster where he's just had a very satisfactory day at the races. He has a pint of bitter in front of him and is just telling a woman in an emerald green dress and a 'D' cup, that he's not married. He has no idea that I've arrived or he would be here. Wouldn't he?"<sup>322</sup> He also misses the last four years of Ruby's childhood as he dies in front of Ruby while sleeping with a waitress at Ted's wedding.<sup>323</sup> Ruby is fourteen at the time and this even sends her mental health spiralling as discussed above.

While children are often not mothered due to the mother being physically gone, a more recurrent problem depicted in *Behind the Scenes* is being mothered insufficiently. Again, the earliest sign is Alice who experiences dissociation episodes while looking after her children,<sup>324</sup> which are caused by living a life significantly worse than which she was born into. Although she loves her children, she despises the life she has in the cottage, wishing for something more. Bunty herself experienced first-hand the lack of care from Nell – and Frank equally – as she failed to secure a role significant enough to catch her parents' attention, unlike her siblings: "Babs had managed to gain a little prestige within the family from being the eldest girl and from being a no-nonsense, practical sort and Betty had found a place as Frank's baby, but poor Bunty was stuck right in the middle with nothing to mark her out as special."<sup>325</sup>

Ruby feels horribly emotionally neglected by Bunty and laments her lack of motherly behaviour repeatedly, starting already before being born: "Bunty's name will be 'Mummy' for a few years yet, of course, but after a while there won't be a single maternal noun (mummy, mum, mam, ma, mama, mom, marmee) that seems appropriate and I more or less give up calling her anything."<sup>326</sup> The lack of emotional connection may be detected

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<sup>320</sup> Ibid., 138–9.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid., 383–4.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid., 44–5.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 14.

in Bunty's explicit wish not to have any more children with George, which Ruby appears to be aware of as a fetus: "*And as for babies, well . . . the broken nights, the power struggles . . . the labour pains! . . . At least **that's** all over with . . . (Surprise!)*"<sup>327</sup> Ruby cannot help but wonder whether she is lucky enough to be born to a loving woman, and eventually begins to doubt it: "Is this a good mother?"<sup>328</sup> Her suspicion turns to be right immediately after being born when she does not receive the commonly expected heartfelt welcome from Bunty but is met with a cold indifference: "She takes a quick glance and pronounces her judgement. 'Looks like a piece of meat. Take it away,' she adds, waving her hand dismissively."<sup>329</sup> Gradually, Ruby develops an evil step-mother theory and believes that her real, kind and loving mother is elsewhere, waiting for her: "I've been given the wrong mother and am in danger of embarking on the wrong life but I trust it will all be sorted out and I will be reunited with my real mother . . . . Meanwhile I make do with Bunty."<sup>330</sup>

Similarly to Rosemary in *Case Histories*, Bunty displays indifference in remembering Ruby's name, having to go through the whole list before reaching it. Ruby comments on this with resignation signalling her being used to being the last on Bunty's mind, though it still hurts her and she wishes for a mother that would remember her: "Bunty has to run through all our names before she comes to the right one and I'm always at the end of the list – *Patricia, Gillian, P— Ruby, what's your name?* Perhaps if Bunty doesn't come back we can have a new mother, Auntie Doreen for preference, a mother that will remember my name."<sup>331</sup>

Another feature common for Rosemary and Bunty is having a favourite child. Unlike Olivia, who was adored not only by Rosemary but the whole family for her angelic character, Gillian, Bunty's favourite, in Ruby's record resembles an unhinged demon with only her own agenda on mind. This preference is so crucial in the family's structure that it translates into the lexical choices made to refer to the two daughters – George refers to Ruby in the most generic way: "the child can do that"<sup>332</sup> which does not escape Ruby's attention. When she is expected to work on Christmas Eve unlike Gillian, she mocks the references while stressing the unfairness of the situation: "You see? I'm supposed to be 'doing something' but 'Our Gillian' isn't."<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>327</sup> Ibid., 17. Italics and emphasis in the original.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid., 57–8.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid., 207. Italics in the original.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid., 226.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid., 229.

Ruby incorporates the phrases into her own vocabulary, referring to Gillian as “our Gillian”<sup>334</sup> while talking about herself in a belittling way since she is *just* Ruby for Bunty: “She catches sight of my reflection walking past and gives a start as if she’s just seen a ghost. But when she twists round to look she says, ‘Oh it’s only you,’ in a flattened sort of voice. ‘It’s just me! Just Ruby!’ I sing out in an inanely cheerful way as I hammer on Patricia’s door.”<sup>335</sup> While this account is essential for understanding Ruby’s mental state, it also feels noteworthy that in this case, Bunty does not mean to imply Ruby’s worthlessness, but is confused by her resemblance to Pearl, which Ruby does not realize. Still, being “just Ruby” harms Ruby’s sense of self-worth and continues to struggle with it even as an adult when she keeps announcing herself this way.

Bunty’s clear preference of Gillian to Ruby is visible also in the way she treats the girls. When Gillian in a fit of anger attacks Ruby who was playing with her toy called Mobo and they both hurt themselves, it is Gillian who steals all their mother’s attention for a scratch clearly less dangerous than Ruby hitting her head on the concrete floor:

Gillian’s grief-stricken response almost elicits sympathy from Bunty. ‘You should be more careful,’ she tells her – which may not sound very sympathetic, but it’s about the nearest she can get. . . . and off they go . . . while Mobo and I are left to the ministrations of Dandy who licks and cleans us up as best he can with his hot, slobbery dog’s breath that smells vaguely of stolen sausage-rolls.<sup>336</sup>

Bunty’s emotional neglect transforms into obsession after Gillian dies and Above the Shop burns out. Since this is her second daughter’s death, it can be understandable. Nevertheless, Ruby does not seem to believe the attention to be sincere after such a long time of being overlooked: “. . . we are continually reassured of her maternal care for us by the stream of warnings that issue from her mouth – *Be careful with that knife! You’ll poke your eye out with that pencil! Hold onto the banister! Watch that umbrella!* so that the world appears to be populated by objects intent on attacking us.”<sup>337</sup> These warnings seem ridiculous to Ruby,

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid., 268–9.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid., 114–5.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 265. Italics in the original.

especially considering that Bunty did not bother warning her about such obvious dangers for all the years before, when they certainly may have been more useful.

A possible explanation of why the sudden care from Bunty seems to rather annoy Ruby can be read in the preceding incident in which the remains of the family must evacuate from their burning house. While Patricia in her newly acquired motherly role orders Ruby to stay where she is while she runs for help, her parents do not appear in her room to save her, and she only sees them, together with Patricia, as she is being rescued by the firefighters: “I realize with a little frisson of excitement that if everyone is down there, then I have been alone in a burning building!”<sup>338</sup> If Bunty did not run to Ruby’s room to get her own daughter from a burning building, an anxious warning when she holds a pencil truly seems almost insulting.

Essentially, Ruby must substitute for her parents’ love and affection – which she barely receives from Patricia (on the other hand, Patricia may have her hands full providing these emotional necessities for herself). Being thus neglected, it can hardly be surprising that she sought the psychological stability elsewhere – in a toy which cannot reject her and is always with her: “. . . and I have a teddy bear (‘Teddy’) that is closer to me than a relative.”<sup>339</sup> She must even act as her own parent in the sense of showing pride in her own successes, though she still desperately tries to receive any sort of acknowledgement or praise: “. . . I get a splendid end-of-term report, *Ruby works hard and is a pleasure to have in class*, which I wave first at Bunty, then George and finally Patricia, none of whom show any interest, even when I sellotape it to the outside of my bedroom door.”<sup>340</sup>

When she gives up trying to hear her parents express any sort of affection towards her, she still secretly hopes for things to change, even in the most impossible times when George is already dead. As she and Bunty regularly receive phone calls with nobody responding at the other end, Ruby likes to imagine it is the people she lost, and thus picks up, still waiting for George to become an actively participating parent: “. . . when I lifted the receiver in the hall I knew it would be George and I sat down on the stairs with the phone cradled against my neck, and waited for him to say all the things he’d never said. I waited for the longest time.”<sup>341</sup> The last sentence can be read as both her undying patience

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 277.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid., 310–1.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid., 386.

during the phone call and as a painful lament on how long she has been waiting for George to act as not only a father but also a dad.

Ruby knows emotional connection has been tragically missing in her family. Eventually, she stops being sorry for her and her feelings transform into anger expressed in bitter retort to Mr Belling who appears to enjoy getting into heated conversations with Ruby: “. . . he said, ‘You’re going to get what’s coming to you, one of these days, Ruby Lennox,’ and I said, ‘Oh, yeah, what’s that love and affection?’”<sup>342</sup> Being overlooked for so long makes Ruby stop thinking about her own predicament. It is only when she finally seeks therapy when it is revealed to her that she also, truly, deserves sympathy as she pities all the people in her life but herself:

‘And so,’ Dr Herzmark says with a smile, ‘shall we go through every person in the world, dead or alive, and say “poor so and so” and “poor so and so” and will we ever come to “poor Ruby”?’

And I try the words out to feel how they fit, ‘Poor Ruby’, but hardly have they formed in my mouth before I am crying and crying until I almost drown in my own pool of tears.<sup>343</sup>

Another symptom of a troubled parent-child relationship is that of child abuse. This is most pronounced in the oldest generation when Alice leaves and the children are left to the evil stepmother’s will. She robs the children of artefacts reminding them of their mother’s existence by force<sup>344</sup> for no other apparent reason than an irrational imaginary battle over the position of the lady of the house, leaving the children heartbroken and lonely. What’s worse, she holds this position by using violence as she seems to be threatened in her newly acquired position by Ada, who rushes to help her abused siblings whenever she can and opposes Rachel with strong determination, reminding her that she is only a replacement. For instance, when Rachel lets the little children cry and ties Albert to stairs as a punishment, Ada refuses to let her continue in this barbaric treatment, which Rachel solves with an inadequately brute physical attack: “. . . Rachel picked up a discarded clog and bowled it overarm so that it bounced off Ada’s shorn curls. Even that didn’t stop [Ada], and she stood there with a heavy Albert hoisted awkwardly in her arms, a patch of blood no

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<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 415.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid., 434.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid., 50.

bigger than a button staining her hair and her face white with shock, and screamed hysterically, ‘Tha’s not Mother!’”<sup>345</sup>

This treatment only results in the children passionately hating Rachel, who continues to use physical punishments to forcefully bend them to her will. The level of terror is emphasized by the fact that she even has the punishing instrument displayed in plain sight for the children to fear, and to be in reach lest she needs to strengthen her power in case of disobedience or rebellion:

Rachel reached for the leather strap that was hung on a peg behind the door and measured its weight in her hand. ‘Are you going to do as I say? Or do I have to make you?’ . . . He couldn’t get away from her because the first thwack from the strap knocked him off his feet and it was all he could do to lie there screaming with his arms over his head and if Ada hadn’t sent Tom running for the pump to draw a bucket of water to throw over their stepmother she probably wouldn’t have stopped until he was unconscious, even dead maybe.<sup>346</sup>

The children must endure the physical abuse as all of this is happening with their father’s blessing: “Frederick locked Lawrence and Tom in one of the outbuildings for two whole days and nights without food or water to teach them a lesson for [standing up for themselves and revolting Rachel’s abuse] . . . .”<sup>347</sup> It also shows that this torment is unbearable – at least not without the loving care of Ada after she passes away. Rather than suffer Rachel’s cruelty, “Lawrence disappeared two years [after Ada’s death], slipping out of the house one summer morning to run away to sea.”<sup>348</sup>

Compared to Rachel, Ruby’s version of stepmother appears to be less evil. When left by George to his mistress after Bunty’s disappearance, Ruby remarks the striking differences between this lady and Bunty: “Auntie Doreen does not resort to the physical abuse with which Bunty normally placates us. . . . Unlike Bunty, Auntie Doreen listens to these girlish aspirations with real interest. . . . The contrast with Bunty is unavoidable. There are many other areas where a comparison with Bunty can only work in Auntie Doreen’s

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<sup>345</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid., 173–4.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 183.



favour.”<sup>349</sup> The difference is striking. From this comparison, it is not difficult to deduce that Auntie Doreen possesses more maternal characteristics than Ruby’s own mother, who in contrast seems to pose as the archetypal evil stepmother. Bunty also does not hesitate to vocalize her lack of emotional connection to her children and uses it to stop any annoying complaints, clearly aware of (yet not bothered about) the emotional damage her reply may cause:

‘I don’t like porridge,’ Patricia says, looking more doubtful now.  
As fast as a snake, Bunty hisses back, ‘Well I don’t like children, so  
that’s too bad for you, isn’t it?’<sup>350</sup>

Children in *Behind the Scenes* also fight with the lack of voice. Forced by the situation, orphaned Alice worked as a teacher by the time she was 18, which she loathed dearly. Even then, her experience shows more children who cannot attend school because their help and work were deemed more important than their education: “The children were culled from the local farms, most of their parents were farm hands and attendance was poor as the children were often needed to work on the land.”<sup>351</sup> This closely resembles the fate of the Grandmother in “Genteel potatoes” who was forced to quit school and become employed without her having a say in the decision.

One generation later, this struggle pertains; Nell and Lillian are forced to get a job to earn money: “Lillian was fifteen now and Nelly fourteen and both were working.”<sup>352</sup> In their case, the decision to work is further supported by their desperate need to secure the basic needs, such as clothing, which Rachel denies them until they comply to her conditions, no matter the seriousness of their situation: “. . . they needed new boots so desperately and Rachel said they couldn’t have any until Lillian was bringing in a wage again. Their old boots were worn right through so that they could feel the pavement through their stocking-feet.”<sup>353</sup> And unsurprisingly, still neither of the girls were allowed to be in charge of the money they made themselves as “both girls had to hand over every penny of their wages to Rachel every week when she grudgingly gave them a few coppers back.”<sup>354</sup>

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<sup>349</sup> Ibid., 202–3.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid., 313.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid., 313–4.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid., 314.

Children lack voice even when it comes to teenage pregnancy and the decision made about the future of an unborn baby. Patricia is sent to give birth to her child elsewhere and give the baby to adoption, her change of spirit suggesting that her opinion was hardly taken into consideration: “Patricia got a second holiday that year, staying in Clacton in a Methodist mother-and-baby home. When she came back, a mother-and-no-baby, she was a different person somehow.”<sup>355</sup> The forceful adoption hurt Patricia so much that she chose to escape the life in which she could not even be in control of the future of her own child, giving up everything and running as far as possible, seeking refuge in Australia: “Patricia never went back to school, never took her A Levels, and she was so full of darkness that in some awful way it was quite a relief when she walked out one bright May morning and never came home again.”<sup>356</sup>

Teenage pregnancy does not only concern Patricia but also Doreen O’Doherty, whose baby’s father died in war. Moreover, she is expecting a child born out of the wedlock. Adoption is the only socially acceptable option, then. Doreen convinces herself that she makes this sacrifice for her child’s wellbeing – the ultimate goal of any parent, though it is breaking her heart: “When the woman from the adoption agency came to the maternity-home in York to pick up Doreen’s child, Doreen consoled herself with the thought that it was the best thing for the baby. . . .”<sup>357</sup>

Only Lucy-Vida manages to stand her ground as she refuses to get her child adopted when she finds that she is “only bloody knocked-up.”<sup>358</sup> When inquired by Ruby about the possibility of also being forced to give her baby up for adoption, “[s]he clutches her stomach protectively, and says fiercely, ‘Not bloody likely!’ and [Ruby] experience[s] a little pang of jealousy towards Lucy-Vida’s unborn offspring.”<sup>359</sup> Ruby, exemplarily neglected, envies the obvious affection a mother can apparently feel towards her child – something Ruby never seems to have felt from Bunty.

Together with “Dissonance,” *Behind the Scenes* is one of the few literary works selected for this thesis which also stresses the importance of obligatory exams and scholarly success which poses an incredible amount of stress on children. These obligatory tests present unrealistic expectations of the child who must at very young age face this obstacle, which will determine their future lives: “The remaining female Lennoxes are teetering

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<sup>355</sup> Ibid., 343.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid., 344.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid., 356.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid., 373.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 374.

between the two worlds of innocence and experience. For me, this is symbolized by the Eleven Plus exam which I am about to sit and which will decide my fate for ever.”<sup>360</sup> Ruby confides in Patricia about her anxiety regarding this test when they talk about swans, commenting on its absurdity: “‘Well, I would change places with them anytime,’ I respond gloomily. ‘At least the rest of their lives doesn’t depend on whether they can do mental arithmetic.’”<sup>361</sup> What is more, Ruby also aptly points out how the children’s performance during these fate-determining exams relies solely on the teacher, regardless of how qualified or competent they are:

But my future is still as promising as railway tracks. I don’t know that I am doomed by Janet Sheriff, our history teacher who fell in love at the beginning of our A-Level History course and forgot to teach us large chunks of the European syllabus. Only when we were sitting our exam did we discover that there had been terrible battles and bloody revolutions of which we knew nothing.<sup>362</sup>

Although the children are hardly to blame for such failure, they will certainly face the consequences of the responsible adult’s fault.

The novel does not really focus much on sexual violence, harassment, and paedophilia. The dangers waiting for children outside are only briefly mentioned when Ruby notes that their school has established a safety measure, indicating they are aware of this problem and expect it: “. . . Janice Potter has persuaded me to sign out with her (you can only leave school in pairs and you’re supposed to stick like glue to each other in case you’re raped, robbed or lost) . . .”<sup>363</sup> Nevertheless, the fact that they only must leave school in pairs and then evidently go each their own separate ways proves the insufficiency of this precaution.

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<sup>360</sup> Ibid., 287.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid., 294.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid., 455.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid., 360.

#### 4.1.3 “Dissonance”

In “Dissonance,” the struggle between a mother and her two teenage children is displayed. The mother’s speech seems so deeply rooted in the children’s mind that what she says as well as what they imagine her saying in certain situations is simply marked by italics, not as a direct speech in quotation marks. Unfortunately, what the mother tends to say seems to be mostly negative remarks and annoying nagging to the children: “*Shoes don’t live in the kitchen, Simon. If you spill something, do you think you could wipe it up, Simon? Do you know what a dishwasher’s for, Simon? He knew what would go on her bloody headstone as well. I’ve just cleaned that, Simon.*”<sup>364</sup>

Although the mother is systematically portrayed as the sole trouble of both of the children, be it for her remarks and comments, or her high expectations and the seeming general failure that pairs with the predicament of mothering teenagers, it seems that it is her best intention to raise her children, provide them with opportunities and step up for the father who seems to have lost interest in his already living children as he has a new one on the way with his new partner: “*Just because your father doesn’t live with us anymore doesn’t mean he can abdicate his responsibilities . . . . Dad wasn’t interested in them anymore anyway. He had Jenny now.*”<sup>365</sup> What more, because the mother now acts as the villain as she struggles to raise the children – particularly Simon who appears to be the most affected by his father’s leaving, the children seem to be more in favour of Jenny than their mother despite the father’s lack of interest: “Rebecca quite liked Jenny.”<sup>366</sup>

This may be perhaps caused by the fact that Jenny, not responsible or interested in the future of the kids, does not treat them in a bossy approach contrary to the mother. Eventually, the children seem to have grown so sensitive to whatever their mother has to say that they react irritably simply out of habit, even if what she utters are just sighs: “She sighed as she came into the kitchen. Her mother had a huge lexicon of sighs. A sigh for every occasion. . . . *You didn’t think to ask if I wanted any hot chocolate then?* her mother said, adding a *no one in this house ever thinks about me* sigh.”<sup>367</sup> As a result, the younger child, Simon, refuses to talk to his mother and only offers short, mean-sounding sentences or is straight-up unbridled: “*Where are you going, Simon? ‘Out.’ We haven’t finished.* ‘I

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<sup>364</sup> Kate Atkinson, ‘Dissonance’, in *Not the End of the World* (2002; repr., London: Black Swan, 2003), 97  
Italics in the original.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.*, 98. Italics in the original.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*, 104. Italics in the original.

have.’ *I thought we agreed you were grounded. ‘You agreed.’ What are you going to be doing, Simon? Are you meeting Jake and Angus? Simon, can you hear me? ‘Oh, shut the fuck up, will you.’*”<sup>368</sup>

Now, this behaviour cannot be deemed a result of a lost voice on the side of the child –quite on the contrary, in fact. What it displays, however, is the obviously harsh dynamics in the family since the father’s departure. Although the mother attempts to find a replacement, it does not have great results in the children’s book – no man could replace their father, and certainly not Beardy Brian, a social worker who looks after children in state care system. The mother seems to commiserate with the children placed in the care system: “*Oh, it’s not even a case of investment—although it is, of course—it’s more to do with imagination, these kids have been abandoned by society and then people condemn them for asocial behavior— . . . Exclusion’s all very well, but how do you get them back into education?*”<sup>369</sup> Yet she fails to realize that despite her efforts, her own children are condemned for bad behaviour, too: “The old people shuffled more agitatedly, one or two of them muttered about Simon’s language, about Rebecca’s queue jumping.”<sup>370</sup>

Still, the mother seems to attempt to correct the behaviour and lead the children; Simon is being scolded for his bad behaviour and his linguistic choices aimed at his sister.<sup>371</sup> Since Rebecca is beyond Simon’s rebellion, she finds herself mainly accepted by her mother due to appearing as a generally well-behaved child at first sight. However, this can be deemed mainly a result of her acting as an adult; from her self-imposed restrictions and time-management (“She checked the clock. 21:43. At ten o’clock she’d make hot chocolate. . . . 22:00. Rebecca removed her headphones . . .”<sup>372</sup>) to working (“She had enough money, she’d worked as soon as she could get a job—down at the Alldays, in the video shop—now she worked in Superdrug on Saturdays and holidays”<sup>373</sup>) to doing the household chores (“Rebecca did her own washing.”)<sup>374</sup>

Rebecca feels the need to grow up and become independent as soon as she can – she does not wish to depend on her father’s alimony (“her own money, not guilty paternal handouts,”)<sup>375</sup> nor her mother’s care. In fact, she seems to believe her role in the family has

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<sup>368</sup> Ibid., 111. Italics in the original.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid., 106. Italics in the original.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid., 99.

turned from that of the daughter to that of the mother; she tells off Simon for his behaviour and helps her mother in the household: “Rebecca cleared away the dishes from the table. She hated the way her mother looked so pathetically grateful for this act.”<sup>376</sup> While her age is not specified, her urge to grow up is so blatantly obvious that even Simon notices it: “His sister actually believed she was a grown-up.”<sup>377</sup>

This need to become adult can be the result of the high expectations held by the mother, though. Rebecca is set to become a doctor – a career which is clearly desirable, if not required, and mainly agreed upon by the mother, who already discusses which university is best for her to become a doctor: “*But Edinburgh has an excellent reputation for medicine—then you could live at home.*”<sup>378</sup> Rebecca herself does not feel this career calling her – rather she seems reconciled with it as she works on her study results. Although she has enough knowledge about saving a life to eventually save one (“‘I’ve got a pulse,’ the paramedic said, glancing up at Rebecca. ‘Well done,’”<sup>379</sup>) she realizes that the future her mother envisioned for her is not her real path, and the idea of having so much responsibility frankly petrifies her:

She thought she was giving him the gift of life but now it felt as if it was the other way round. And anyway she wasn’t sure she wanted the gift of life. Or the gift of death. She didn’t want that kind of power, she didn’t want to be like a god. What the fuck would she do with that kind of responsibility? She walked quickly, the tears rolling down her face, unchecked.<sup>380</sup>

That high expectations are held for both of the children is seen also in the mother requiring them to learn Latin – a skill always useful for future doctors: “Their mother never stopped telling them how lucky they were to do Latin. *In my day everyone did it. Now you only get taught it if you go to expensive schools like yours. What about my poor kids, don’t they deserve the choice?* But they had never had Latin on the curriculum at the scheme school her mother taught at and she knew it.”<sup>381</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid., 100. Italics in the original.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid., 100. Italics in the original.

Simon, angry at the world – and his mother – makes choices which are in accordance with his emotions but against the instinct of self-preservation when he does not wear protective gear while skateboarding with his friends and falls, though his primary motivation is not being mocked: “Simon didn’t have pads or a helmet; no way was he going to wear that stuff where people could see him.”<sup>382</sup> The self-destructive decision not to protect himself, while presented as adolescent pride, still suggests his willingness, if not tendency, to risk harming himself. Simon struggles a lot from his father’s absence. He clearly needs someone strong enough to hold his behaviour on a leash, and the mother lacks this strength. On the other hand, he seems to respect his father and fears him knowing about Simon’s troubles: “She was going to tell his father. *Shoplifting, Simon. That’s theft, pure and simple.* Like the shops weren’t ripping him off in the first place.”<sup>383</sup>

At the end of the day, while Rebecca struggles the most with the high expectations placed on her shoulders by herself and her mother, Simon suffers from his father leaving and starting anew with Jenny. The rebellion seems to be his way of coping with his disappointment and anger held towards the father – only he cannot direct it the right way, so he uses the closest person; the mother. Still, when he suffers the horrible injury (“Dislocated jaw, broken nose, fractured left cheekbone, hairline fracture to the skull, front teeth gone, bit of your tongue gone—nasty one,”)<sup>384</sup> his mother is the one he asks his friends to call, showing that he still needs her: “‘Speed dial one?’ Simon grunted. Speed-dial 1. ‘MUM,’ it said on the screen.”<sup>385</sup> Not only is the mother still his number one on the speed-dial, she is also present when her son needs her, ready to act upon her motherly duties and provides comfort: “*Don’t try to talk, darling.* Cool hand stroking his forehead, hot tears rolling down the sides of his face, pooling in his ears. *Everything’s all right. Don’t talk.* He held his mother’s hand. *Hush.*”<sup>386</sup>

#### 4.1.4 “Sheer Big Waste of Love”

“Sheer Big Waste of Love” provides multiple obstacles with which little Addison struggles – and a few more in addition, which he only witnesses as an adult working as a police

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<sup>382</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid., 98. Italics in the original.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid., 120. Italics in the original.

officer, mostly including children dying or fighting death (“his first fatal VA six years ago—three children from the backseat of a Nissan scattered all over the M90 thanks to a whisky-sodden accountant in a Mercedes. One of the children was still alive when Addison peeled her off the tarmac”)<sup>387</sup> and his own son nearly not surviving his own birth: “They nearly lost the baby, then they nearly lost Clare.”<sup>388</sup> However, Addison himself has been through a number of struggles in his childhood – all caused by his parents’ identity, and before he reaches his eighteenth birthday, he already has quite a story to tell:

[H]e had been illegitimate (a fact borne out by his birth certificate), his mother died the week before his eighth birthday, when no one came forward to claim him he had been sent to a vicious Catholic orphanage where he had stayed until his sixteenth birthday. At the age of twenty he decided he had a choice between following a life of crime or becoming a policeman, and had chosen the latter.<sup>389</sup>

The final sentence suggests one of the aspects of childhood which the story does not truly focus on, but still proves that children placed in any sort of care system feel to be destined to find their path of crime, just like children in *The Panopticon* (2012) do. Before he is placed in the orphanage, he finds himself dependent on his single mother, Shirley, who struggles to financially support them. His father, Bill Addison, after whom Addison is named, clearly rejects his fatherhood and refuses to help Shirley support their child: “Bill Addison refused to have anything to do with his unlooked-for son”<sup>390</sup> and “Addison met his father only once, when he was seven years old—an encounter so traumatic . . . that Addison lost any further desire to be acquainted with his reluctant father.”<sup>391</sup> Although the fact that Shirley earns money as a prostitute is not hidden, the reason Addison exists seems to be more gruesome and telling of his father’s violent nature: “Then his mother screamed, ‘Fucking rapist!’ and Bill Addison began to hit Shirley.”<sup>392</sup>

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<sup>387</sup> Kate Atkinson, ‘Sheer Big Waste of Love’, in *Not the End of the World* (2002; repr., London: Black Swan, 2003), 152.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.



As a result of his problematic relations to his parents, Addison feels lonely: “It struck him that he knew absolutely nothing about family life.”<sup>393</sup> He is sour about his father rejecting him and not being there for him as he thinks about the “truly remarkable absence of relatives”<sup>394</sup> which bothers him so much that he lies to his wife that he is an orphan rather than admitting to having been rejected: “No one, he assured her. Which was a lie, but it was so much easier than the truth.”<sup>395</sup> When still living with his mother, Addison misses his father. Knowing he has one but not knowing anything about him, Addison finds comfort in his imagination. He wants to believe, as any child, that his father is a hero who has a good reason to be absent and misses him, too:

In the absence of any real facts from Shirley, Addison developed his own version of his father. A handsome war hero—Addison knew the type from comics—still fighting a war somewhere (despite the Rotary Club dinners) and thus unable to return to his loving wife and son. Addison imagined him high in the clouds, like a god in his chariot, overseeing all his son did.<sup>396</sup>

However, when he finally meets him, he is let down by Bill’s true identity because “he didn’t seem awfully heroic to Addison.”<sup>397</sup>

While Shirley keeps Addison for as long as she can, she clearly struggles with her situation. She regularly meets with a friend who comes to “help Shirley work her way down to the bottom of a bottle of gin”<sup>398</sup> and on top of being poor and with a child dependent on her, her health is getting progressively worse: “She was a drinker, of course, and, although the drink didn’t kill her, it didn’t help to stop the cancer already racing round her body on that summer Sunday morning.”<sup>399</sup> Although he lives in an environment clearly not suitable for a small child, Addison is loved by Shirley who tries to find him a secure place for when she is no longer there: “Only with hindsight did Addison understand the reason for his one and only visit to his father. His mother must have known she was dying and she had been

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<sup>393</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid., 131–2.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid., 137.

trying to find another home for her only child.”<sup>400</sup> She is determined to try and take care of her son despite knowing how uncomfortable the attempt will be, hence her taking time to gain the required strength before entering Bill’s property.<sup>401</sup>

Despite her love, Shirley could not provide for her son as much as he would need:

Addison was very hungry. Addison was always hungry. Shirley’s idea of breakfast was a slice hacked off a white loaf, scraped with margarine and sprinkled with sugar. Sometimes she didn’t even remember that, and Addison had to make do with the small bottle of playground milk at school break . . . . If Shirley forgot to feed him at the weekend or in the school holidays, then Addison could go hungry all day . . . .”<sup>402</sup>

Compared to Shirley, Addison sees Marjorie Addison, Bill’s wife, as a true archetypical mother: “Marjorie Addison was holding aloft, she struck an imperious maternal figure. Addison feared that Shirley would stand little chance of victory in any contest with her.”<sup>403</sup> When he finally sees the life he could have had, the life which his half-siblings are provided and he is not, he realizes how unfair his life has been to him: “There were children racing around the garden, playing a high-spirited game of catch. A boy held a toy airplane aloft as he ran and Addison watched its metal wings flashing in the sunshine and wondered if he would be allowed to join in. . . . more than anything he had ever known, Addison wanted to step into that divine world and be a part of it.”<sup>404</sup>

What Addison has no way of knowing at that point is that his father is a tyrant who does not hesitate to cause harm. He only has to utter two syllables to find out, though:

“‘Father,’ he said, hearing how tinny and useless his voice sounded. Before he had a chance to compose anything else Bill Addison unleashed a blow like a thunderbolt . . . and he found himself sprawled, full-length, on the lawn. . . . Blood ran down his face from his nose and

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<sup>400</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid., 141–2.

dripped onto the grass and when he tried to turn his head a spasm of hot pain shot through it.”<sup>405</sup>

The brutality of Bill’s attack seems completely uncalled for, let alone the victim is a small child which he apparently fails to realize or care about. When of Bill’s children attend his funeral years later, Addison notices that, although his siblings were provided for materially, they had to endure something Addison desperately wanted; their father’s presence: “Douglas and Andrew looked relieved, as if they couldn’t wait to get on with their lives now.”<sup>406</sup> Most telling of their childhood is, however, Susan’s record: “She was a lawyer. He knew this from an article she’d written in the Scotsman about domestic abuse and the law.”<sup>407</sup> The claim that the horrors she lived through inspired her to choose this career and specialization is of course only my interpretation. It however seems very convenient, particularly as she confesses to hate the polite lies about their father, suggesting that not only was Bill hitting his children, but there is a chance that he also was a sexual predator assaulting his own daughter:

“Are they all going on about how wonderful he was?” Susan asked.

. . .

„I hated him,” she said simply.

“Oh?” Addison said.

“He was a bully and a drinker. And a philanderer. I think he abused my sister, but she won’t talk about it. He had no idea how to love. Love’s the most important thing, you know.”<sup>408</sup>

The environment in which Addison grew up causes him to face prejudice from the society. He was illegitimate, though not by his choice, and in addition to that, a son of a prostitute, though he did not blame her, being aware that she clearly did not have many other options. Still, he expects judgement and chooses not to reveal this truth to his wife: “Shirley had been a prostitute. He didn’t tell Clare this, not because he was ashamed, Addison knew no woman walked the streets from anything less than dire necessity, but because he thought it

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<sup>405</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid., 152–3.

was no one's business other than Shirley's."<sup>409</sup> Perhaps, he decided to protect his late mother's privacy because of what he has been told by the nuns who took care of him after Shirley died and Bill rejected him: "There seemed to be a consensus amongst the nuns in the orphanage that Addison's mother was in hell, an idea so horrifying that Addison tried never to think about it."<sup>410</sup>

#### 4.1.5 "Unseen Translation"

Eight-year-old Arthur had the bad luck to be born to famous parents. While this means that his family does not struggle financially, his fate presents him a different challenge. He is handed from one nanny to another, with neither of his parents showing any interest in their child – and his mother Romney already making plans to get rid of another one she is only expecting. The current nanny, Missy, is introduced as a woman with the reputation of Marry Poppins among parents who hire her: "They expected her to drop in from the skies on the end of an umbrella, like a parachutist floating into a country in the middle of a civil war, and rescue their children from bad behaviour."<sup>411</sup>

However, Arthur is a different case. His behaviour cannot be condemned, he does not need to be corrected or fixed. In fact, he rarely behaves in any way that would be naturally expected from a child of his age – on the contrary, his manners often resemble those of a distinguished English gentleman rather than a young boy, to Missy's delight: "Arthur looked at Missy with absolutely no expression on his face. Missy liked a child who kept his own counsel."<sup>412</sup> In general, Missy seems to have very specific requirements not only for the parents who hire her, but mainly in terms of the child's desired behaviour. She found a child that is perfect without her input in Arthur: "Missy knew for certain that Arthur was a superior version of an eight-year-old boy."<sup>413</sup> He is calm and fulfils all her great expectations, such as using words that are simply too complicated for a child of his age, e.g., "subdivide,"<sup>414</sup> because "Missy believe[s] in using long words with children whenever

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<sup>409</sup> Ibid., 133–4.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>411</sup> Kate Atkinson, 'Unseen Translation', in *Not the End of the World* (2002; repr., London: Black Swan, 2003), 162.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid., 159.

possible.”<sup>415</sup> Still, Arthur needs to ask for clarifications to understand the ways of the world according to Missy:

Arthur yawned.

“I’ve noticed you’re very suggestible, Arthur.”

“Is that bad?”

“No, it’s a good thing, it makes my job much easier.”<sup>416</sup>

Arthur seems to not struggle to comply with Missy’s beliefs and opinions: “Missy was pleased at this—she liked to see a self-sufficient child and had nothing against baked beans.”<sup>417</sup> He behaves accordingly and does not complain when she drags him out of the comfort zone of his parents’ wealth and travels with him by public transport, since “[s]he believe[s] stoicism was a virtue that was badly in need of reviving.”<sup>418</sup> Missy’s expectations are not stopped even when it comes to the child’s birth – a subject admittedly outside of the child’s control – and is strongly opinionated on the subject although she herself has not given birth: “Missy favoured natural childbirth whenever possible. She thought it was character forming for a child to have to fight its way into existence.”<sup>419</sup> Instead of condemning a mother for choosing to schedule a C-section rather than wait for the child to be born in its due time, Missy’s feelings on the matter are negative because it will, as she believes, impact how much works she will have later in the future. She does not distinguish between medical emergencies done to save the mother or the child’s life, and what Romney has done: simply distancing herself from the inconvenience of giving birth naturally because she is allowed the choice. Missy simply has an opinion on giving birth in general.

The reason for Missy to look after Arthur is not his behaviour, but the fact that neither of his parents are present nor willing to do it themselves. Romney distances herself emotionally from her children to the point where her considering her children only means hiring a nanny (a popular one with good reputation, if possible) for a child that is not even born yet. When asked by Missy, Arthur himself admits that he had about five nannies already, although he is not completely sure.<sup>420</sup> Romney’s parenting ends with giving birth

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<sup>415</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid., 167–8.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid., 167.

and finding someone else to take care of her children. Doing this herself does not cross her mind and she is prepared to hand the child away as soon as possible, in fact, she hires Missy “two weeks before the birth of her second child,”<sup>421</sup> just to be ready.

Romney is a single mother. Artur’s father is a member of a band which is constantly touring. He sometimes travels with his son, although Artur seems to have little say in when this happens:

Romney suddenly announced that Arthur was going to visit his father for half-term.

“They have joint custody,” Arthur explained over a boiled-egg tea down in the huge basement kitchen.

“And when did you last see him?”

Arthur thought for a long time. “Two years ago, I think. . . . [H]e’s on tour.”<sup>422</sup>

Arthur’s experience of traveling with his father is clearly not a positive one, as it seems that he does not adapt to having a small child with him on the road. When asked by Missy about what she should expect from such travel, since she is required to accompany Arthur on this journey, he takes some time to look for a word to describe his experience to finally pronounce it “extreme.”<sup>423</sup> The father does not show any interest in his child – he does not even make sure that they are taken care of, as per previous agreement: “There was no car to collect them at the airport, as promised . . . . The Bayerischer Hof had no record of any reservation.”<sup>424</sup> Arthur and Missy, already in Germany where they are set to meet and join him for a week, only learn that his concert was cancelled from a poster:

“*Entfällt.*”

“I think that means cancelled,” Arthur said . . . .”<sup>425</sup>

Arthur thus finds himself completely abandoned by his parents. Although Missy was given a credit card to pay for Arthur’s expenses, it is useless: “She offered the brand-new gold

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<sup>421</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid., 177. Italics in the original.

credit card Romney had given her before they left. A few minutes later the hotel manager returned it to her and said in a low murmur that he was very sorry but the card was ‘not acceptable.’”<sup>426</sup> Neither Romney nor Arthur’s father can be contacted by their phones and neither seems to be interested in their son’s safe arrival and wellbeing: “Lulu and Romney remained unreachable by all means.”<sup>427</sup>

It is not only Arthur whose father is not present for his child. His new-born sister China is rejected by her father even before being unborn: “[T]he Swiss financier had found himself in a backstage dressing-room toilet having frantic sex with Romney—a fact which he subsequently vehemently denied when it became tabloid knowledge.”<sup>428</sup>

Romney’s lack of care for her children leaves great impact on Arthur. Since she is primarily interested in her fame, Arthur does not really feel connected to her: “Arthur gazed at the photographs of his mother as if she was an interesting stranger.”<sup>429</sup> Aware of the distance, he learns to listen to Missy rather than to his mother as there is a shared understanding of the fact that his situation is not ideal. When Missy warns him not to let anyone else influence him, “[t]he words ‘like your mother’ remained unspoken, but understood, between them.”<sup>430</sup>

Romney does not get pregnant to provide love and care to her children. She is too self-centred to do so but does not hesitate to use them as an income in the form of child support: “The father of Romney’s baby was a multimillionaire . . . Romney was now looking forward to the DNA tests to see just how wealthy Otto’s seed would prove.”<sup>431</sup> She promptly finds one more use of her children as magnets for media coverage, although this is only temporary immediately after birth. Arthur’s existence is acknowledged by the titles of articles more than by his own mother: “Missy did actually know about Arthur’s existence, as she had checked out Romney’s (entirely tabloid) cuttings file (‘My Love for My Little Boy,’ ‘My Single-Parent Hell,’ and so on) before arriving at Romney’s Primrose Hill house.”<sup>432</sup> When China is born, Arthur and Missy observe the titles of articles where Romney poses and lies about her affection towards China, though she is in fact ready to give to a nanny so she no longer needs to be bothered by parental responsibilities:

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<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>427</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>428</sup> *Ibid.*, 166–7.

<sup>429</sup> *Ibid.*, 168–9.

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.*, 166–7.

<sup>432</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

‘Look,’ he said, pointing to the rack of tabloids beneath the naked women. Nearly every newspaper had a photograph of Romney Wright on the front, posing in her hospital bed—‘Romney’s Bundle of Joy,’ ‘Love-Rat Leaves Romney Holding the Baby,’ ‘Romney Keeping Mum about Dad’ (which was hardly true). Romney had managed to adopt a pose similar to the models in the pornographic magazines—her huge, milk-swollen breasts offered to the camera like gifts. The baby itself seemed incidental, almost invisible inside its shawl cocoon. Arthur skimmed the text. ‘They don’t mention me,’ he said.”<sup>433</sup>

The children are not the point of Romney’s interest, but she does care about the way they will be portrayed in media. Arthur knows he fails to be medially attractive enough according to his mother’s standards, as she complains about him wearing glasses, insulting him, but finding comfort in the fact that these days, it is “cool, like because of Harry Potter”<sup>434</sup> to promptly turn the topic to herself again. The children name is also used as part of Romney’s image. She does not hide her disappointment in Arthur not being called Zeus, not even considering leaving her opinion to herself in front of little Arthur – and while she is at it, she does not forget to use his father to boast of her famous acquaintance, whom she manages to insult in front of their son at the same time: “‘It’s a bit old-fashioned though, isn’t it?’ Romney frowned. ‘I mean “Arthur Wright” sounds like your granddad or something. But that was his dad all over, thought it was funny. His dad’s Campbell Wright? Lead singer with Boak? Useless piece of Scottish string. Completely debauched, the lot of them.”<sup>435</sup> Aware of the fact that his mother cares more about the name than the person named, Arthur wonders about the future of his sister: “‘What do you think she’ll call the baby? . . . I bet it’s something stupid.”<sup>436</sup>

In the lack of mother’s affection, Arthur finds a replacement for his mother in his nannies, Missy in particular, who is the only one that seems to care about his development and takes care of him, though she is paid to do so. He has had multiple nannies who eventually quit, leaving him feeling completely abandoned and unwanted. Therefore, at the very young age, he already feels that all people leave him and develops trust issues, not

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<sup>433</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid., 166.



believing that Missy would be any different. When he opens up about this fact to Missy, he is unable to control his emotions anymore and breaks down:

‘Left. She said she wouldn’t leave and she did. And I liked her.’ Arthur stuck his hands in his pockets and angrily kicked an imaginary stone on the ground. ‘I liked her and she promised she wouldn’t leave and she did. And you’ll leave.’ His face began to quiver and he kicked the ground harder. . . . Missy tried to touch the small shoulders, heaving with suppressed tears, but Arthur grew suddenly hysterical and shook her off.

‘You’ll leave just like she did,’ he screamed. ‘You’ll leave me and I hate you! I hate you, I hate you, I hate you!’

‘Arthur—’

‘Shut up, shut up, shut up!’ he yelled, so wound up now that he could hardly breathe, and several passers-by regarded with curiosity the small English boy struggling furiously to escape his mother’s grip.<sup>437</sup>

He does feel guilty later and apologizes to Missy, admitting that he loves her, while “clutching onto Missy’s hand”<sup>438</sup> as if afraid she could actually leave him after his breakdown.

Arthur eventually sees a goddess in Missy as she decides to run away with Arthur, promising him that he will never have to return home (““So many places that you need never come back to where you started from””)<sup>439</sup> and thus accepting the mother role. In fact, he considers her Artemis, the only Greek goddess Missy told him “had any sense:”<sup>440</sup>

For a few dizzy seconds Arthur saw the quiver of silver arrows on Missy’s back, gleaming with moonshine. He saw her green, wolfish eyes light up with amusement as she shouted, “Come on, Arthur, hurry up,” while a pack of hounds bayed and boiled around her silver-sandaled feet, eager for the chase.<sup>441</sup>

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<sup>437</sup> Ibid., 179-80.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid., 183.

Arthur truly displays an unusual behaviour for an eight-year-old. He often behaves like an adult, not only in the way he speaks and thinks, but also in the way that he takes care of himself: “Arthur wandered into the room at that moment and asked Romney if anyone was going to make his tea or should he heat up some baked beans?”<sup>442</sup> This behaviour seems to have been forced upon him by the lack of care by those who should have provided it in the first place, because they were not there for him either physically or emotionally.

#### 4.1.6 “The Bodies Vest”

In this short story, both parents are absent from Vincent’s life as they both died tragically. Vincent’s father, Billy, died while trying to clean windows when Vincent was six years old. What is more, little Vincent was unfortunate enough to witness the accident: “Vincent had a good view of his father’s final moments”<sup>443</sup> with a commentary from a neighbour Mrs Anderson, who was just feeding Vincent, stating: ““There he goes again.””<sup>444</sup> This simple sentence however suggests that it was not unusual for the father and only leaves the reader wondering whether Billy has attempted suicide by jumping out of a window ever before.

This experience leaves a mark on Vincent along the fact that he saw his father’s remains on the pavement: “Vincent had expected to look out of the window and see Billy laughing and dusting himself off and was surprised when all he saw was a crumpled heap, not immediately recognizable as his father.”<sup>445</sup> Later, when he lives with his grandparents, Vincent ponders about the height from which his father fell, unable to shake the memory away: “Vincent’s little bedroom was four stories up so that he was able to get a good idea of how far Billy himself had fallen on his final day. Sometimes Vincent viewed it from the other way round—standing on the pavement looking up and trying to imagine what the expression on his father’s face must have been when he found himself plunging to earth . . . .”<sup>446</sup> He finds comfort in believing, that at the moment of his father’s death, he

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<sup>442</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>443</sup> Kate Atkinson, ‘The Bodies Vest’, in *Not the End of the World* (2002; repr., London: Black Swan, 2003), 245.

<sup>444</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid., 253.

was happy as a person fast approaching their death is automatically brought to their happiest possible place:

Vincent had formed a theory—at the moment of death, he believed, a person would be doing the very thing that would have made him happiest in life. He hadn't known Billy well enough to be sure what that might have been but decided, in the absence of proof otherwise, that Billy flew off to his end on the seat of a 1952 Royal Enfield Bullet, a smile of bliss transforming his peaky face.<sup>447</sup>

After Billy's death, Vincent becomes completely orphaned. His mother Georgie died when he was two, and he does not remember her so "what he felt was her absence rather than her loss."<sup>448</sup> Although he does not have a mother, Vincent has a vision of her which paints her in the best possible way, similarly to Addison in "Sheer Big Waste of Love." He dreams of feeling the mother's love and homeliness, contrary to who Georgie actually was: "It involved living in a warm house and eating fruit and grilled chops, wearing clean, ironed pyjamas, and sitting in front of a blazing coal fire while Georgie read out loud to him from the Dandy. Both Billy and Mrs. Anderson implied, in their own ways, that it wouldn't necessarily be like that if Georgie was still around."<sup>449</sup>

Although Vincent knows his mother is gone, he does not know what happened to her. Billy's explanation of the missing parent resembles that of Gordon and Vinnie's reasoning behind Eliza's disappearance in *Human Croquet*: "No one ever really discovered what happened to Georgie, of course. The way Billy told it she went out one evening and never came back—a simple narrative that explained nothing."<sup>450</sup> On the contrary, Mrs. Anderson's account is closer to what Isobel and Charles found in the forest while looking for their parents, as she explains Vincent that "his mother had gone out for a drink with some friends, she was a 'very friendly' girl apparently, and had been found in a close the next morning by a milkman, strangled with one of her own stockings."<sup>451</sup>

Only when Vincent himself dies does he learn the truth, revealed to the reader by the narrator: "Georgie herself, since you ask, was spinning round on the waltzer when her

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<sup>447</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid.

soul took flight, forever sixteen and all her life ahead of her.”<sup>452</sup> Although Vincent learns that running away was one of his mother’s habits (“It seemed disappearing was more of a personality trait than a consequence for Vincent’s mother”)<sup>453</sup> she is the one he meets in his afterlife, showing that she was what he missed all his life: “When Vincent entered into the world of light he was in the company of Georgie, exquisitely real and vivid in a way she never had been for him before.”<sup>454</sup> Indeed, all Vincent ever wished for as a child was to have the same experience as others, having parents and living with them: “Vincent observed the family life he had always been denied.”<sup>455</sup>

Although his parents have little space to make any errors, it is crucial to realize that they themselves became parents as children. Vincent himself realizes that only after analysing their wedding photograph with Mrs. Anderson, who also reveals that Georgie was already pregnant with Vincent at the time. Observing the picture, Vincent notices that they are “looking far too young to make solemn vows about anything, let alone the rest of their lives. Billy was eighteen, Georgie sixteen.”<sup>456</sup> He further contemplates how young they were when they died: “Even their names hinted at a childishness they would never grow out of.”<sup>457</sup>

Georgie’s pregnancy is the reason she ran away from her parents to live with Billy and have Vincent. It is suggested that when it came to her relationship with her parents, she had little voice in the decisions about what would happen with her baby similarly to Patricia in *Behind the Scenes*: “‘She didn’t have to do that,’ Mrs. Shaw told Vincent irritably. ‘We would have stood by her. Someone would have adopted you.’”<sup>458</sup> Unlike Patricia, Georgie ran away before the final decision was made for her. Mrs. Shaw, Georgie’s mother, does not consider keeping Vincent an option, providing a clear insight into what pushed Georgie to get married to Billy.

However, Georgie’s choice meant societal prejudice. After her death, even Mrs. Anderson does not even attempt to hide her judgement in front of Vincent, telling him that Georgie did not deserve to be murdered “in a way that suggested his mother might have deserved other bad things that fell only slightly short of murder by persons unknown.”<sup>459</sup>

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<sup>452</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>454</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid., 253.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid.

<sup>458</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>459</sup> Ibid., 248.

Georgie was also born early, fighting for her life as a baby, only to die a few years later: “Georgie’s progress from premature birth but stopped slightly short of her premature death.”<sup>460</sup>

When Vincent is brought to Georgie’s parents to be taken care of, he is not provided the home he dreams of. Instead, he struggles with his grandparents rejecting to emotionally connect with him as they blame him for their daughter running away. They keep distance from Vincent and make it clear that he is not truly welcome there: “(It was with some difficulty that Mrs. Shaw finally settled on ‘Grandmother’ as an acceptable epithet.) . . . They accepted Vincent into their lives with considerable reluctance.”<sup>461</sup> Vincent is expected to only eat leftovers and his new home is limited to a “small attic room”<sup>462</sup> to put him aside, and because “[t]he Shaws liked Vincent best when he was quiet, so he spent the rest of his childhood keeping out of the way,”<sup>463</sup> trying to mimic his absence in an attempt to be accepted. His only true friend seems to be Lorna who shows remote interest and compassion for him as she “slipped Vincent forbidden chocolate digestives when Mrs. Shaw wasn’t looking. Vincent and Lorna ate together in the kitchen at odd hours in between the gong, dining on toast and marmalade . . . .”<sup>464</sup> However, he loses Lorna too when she is found sleeping with Mr. Shaw by Mrs. Shaw, and promptly fired.<sup>465</sup>

Although he lives in his mother’s childhood home, he is still detached from it as he cannot play with her dolls, something tangible with his mother’s essence in it that remained after her, as “the Shaws had developed a fear that his puny body and pale adenoidal countenance put him at risk of turning into a ‘fairy’—a fate that sounded infinitely more attractive to Vincent than one where he was harried and bullied at school and largely overlooked at home . . . .”<sup>466</sup> The dolls are a relic of Georgie’s life which her child is denied access to, similarly to those in *Human Croquet*. Vincent patiently waits to grow up and leave the grandparents, never to look back. His adult life is also ended prematurely, just like his parents’ (only his death is caused by cancer and not a tragic accident.) He leaves “two headstrong angry teenagers quite cowed by his illness”<sup>467</sup> and just like his parents, he dies before his children grow up.

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<sup>460</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid., 253.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid., 252–3.

<sup>466</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid., 263.

#### 4.1.7 *Case Histories*

Kate Atkinson's *Case Histories* is the first novel in her Jackson Brodie detective stories. In this novel, Atkinson presents three cases which the detective must solve – all of them left in the past. While two of the cases, which prove to be interconnected, merely brush upon problems related to children, my focus will be on the third for its relevance to children is indeed major. This shall not exclude the former two cases altogether, nevertheless.

First of the two interconnected cases does not provide many obstacles related to children. Theo's daughter was murdered at the age of eighteen, making it virtually irrelevant for my thesis as she has already crossed the border of childhood established for the purpose of this thesis (see chapter 2). However, this storyline offers some insights into her and her sister's childhood which I shall discuss here due to their relevance. Firstly, Theo's daughters lost their mother at the age of seven and two<sup>468</sup> and thus spent most of their childhood without her. The motif of missing mother seems recurrent across most of the selected works discussed here. Another motif detected in this case is the obvious – and admitted – parental preference of one child over the other: “. . . he didn't worry about Jennifer and he pretended (to himself, to Laura) it was because Jennifer's life was invisible to him in London, but the truth was that he simply didn't love her as much as he loved Laura.”<sup>469</sup> This does not mean – as far as it is disclosed by Theo – that he would be emotionally disconnected from Jennifer. Rather, it seems he simply felt more affection to Laura, which Jennifer can be expected to have noticed, Theo's narrative however does not provide any further insight into her experience and one can thus only speculate how reliable Theo is as a narrator and how honest he is to himself.

The second case may be discussed in greater detail than the former since the affected child, which incidentally connects these two cases, reappears later in the novel with a new identity and a list of new problems on their account. Furthermore, this child's mother, who works as a headmistress years after the incident, displays her awareness of most of the problems children are facing in contemporary Scotland and applies this knowledge to the children in her school: “The kids were sweet, nice country children – just one mild case of attention deficit, a couple of scabby kids, one wee shit, and statistically there should be at least one abused kid in there, but so far Caroline hadn't identified him or her.”<sup>470</sup>

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<sup>468</sup> Kate Atkinson, *Case Histories*, Nachdr. (London: Black Swan, 2005), 27-8.

<sup>469</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

Caroline's real name is Michelle, but she changed it to start afresh after being released from jail. She uses the identity of a child whose grave she saw:

She could have got a passport, she had a birth certificate – in the name of Caroline Edith Edwards. . . . 'Caroline Edwards' was six years younger than Caroline, although, of course, she had never reached Caroline's age. She was dead by the time she was five years old, 'taken by an angel,' according to her gravestone, although her death certificate claimed it was a more prosaic leukemia that had carried her off.<sup>471</sup>

Caroline's new identity thus reveals another child's death due to illness.

Despite changing her name and starting new life elsewhere, Caroline is still haunted by the incident she was sentenced to jail for (allegedly killing her husband Keith in front their daughter Tanya in a fit of madness.) She is aware that witnessing the scene must have traumatised Tanya and is unable to stop thinking about the last time she saw her directly after the murder: “. . . and there you would see that little bug lying on the floor, the little bug that had cried itself into the oblivion of sleep.”<sup>472</sup>

Although calling baby Tanya the little bug seems to reflect Caroline's resentment most possibly caused by post-partum depression according to her sister Shirley, it is eventually revealed that Caroline loved her child dearly and the nickname is rather a result of her affection. Nevertheless, she exhibits disconnection before the incident which can be interpreted as a symptom of an ongoing postpartum depression:

The baby was a parcel delivered to the wrong address, with no way of sending it back or getting it redelivered. (“Call her by her name,” Keith said to her all the time. “Call her Tanya, not ‘it.’”) Michelle had only just left her own (unsatisfactory) childhood behind, so how was she supposed to be in charge of someone else's? . . . She hadn't “bonded” with the baby, instead she was shackled by it.<sup>473</sup>

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<sup>471</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>473</sup> Ibid., 42.

This quote also reveals that Caroline's own childhood involved some traumatic experiences due to being born to two drunkards.<sup>474</sup> Like Carmen in *Human Croquet*, she escapes this environment by means of marriage and attempts to create a perfect home she did not have as a child – an exhausting goal she becomes obsessed with. As Caroline started a new life with Keith, Shirley, at the time fifteen years old, is left with their parents in a violent household, where “at least [their mom] didn't get violent”<sup>475</sup> insinuating the father did. While Shirley's age at the date of the murder is not disclosed, it is highly probable that she was still a child and with most probability, her instinct to kill Keith was a result of her fight-or-flight response to yet another violent argument in her family.

Eventually, Shirley is revealed as the one who killed and Catherine taking the blame to protect her sister. Although both sisters keep their quiet about the way things truly happened, Shirley's record of the scene may not be completely made up: “Tanya was in her playpen and she was screaming, really screaming, I've never heard a baby cry like that before or since. . . . She was filthy, God knows when she'd last been changed, and there was blood spattered all over her.”<sup>476</sup> Again, given this record is true, it may prove Catherine's neglect due to exhaustion and/or depression. Either way it serves as a proof of the scene that could hardly not traumatise a child.

Tanya's negative experience was far from being over, unfortunately. Though Carol loves her, she was absent through her entire childhood. Shirley was asked to take care of Tanya<sup>477</sup> but eventually her grandparents took her under their care, which proved to be horrible soon: “When she was twelve, Tanya started running away from home. When she was fifteen, she stopped coming back. ‘I've looked for her everywhere,’ Shirley said, ‘but she seems to have slipped through the cracks.’”<sup>478</sup> Tanya herself later describes her background as “profoundly dysfunctional.”<sup>479</sup>

Once she runs away, Tanya's life resembles that of Anais' from *The Panopticon*; she changes her name to Lily-Rose and is about to follow the path of a child who would be placed in the Panopticon based on Jackson's summary of the few years: “She had a history of running away from home, of drug abuse, petty theft, prostitution, although she seemed clean of everything for now. Her mother had murdered her father and she was brought up

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<sup>474</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>476</sup> Ibid., 258–9.

<sup>477</sup> Ibid., 292.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid., 296.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid., 380.



by her grandparents, who sounded just as bad as her own parents ([Jackson] suspected abuse).”<sup>480</sup> A major difference between Tanya and Anais is, nevertheless, that Jackson believes in Tanya and does not let her appearance and history determine his opinion of her: “Close up, she didn’t look so much like a druggie, more a victim of neglect and malnutrition.”<sup>481</sup>

The last case contains the most depictions of struggling children. This is the case of a family whose three-year-old Olivia mysteriously disappeared (was kidnapped as her sisters believe) in 1970. The family consisted of the father Victor, the mother Rosemary, and their four children, Olivia, Julia, Amelia, and the oldest, thirteen-year-old Sylvia. Before Olivia’s disappearance, it is known that Rosemary expected another child, later named Anabelle.

The case is revived when Julia and Amelia discover Olivia’s beloved plushie locked in Victor’s drawer after his death, understandably raising suspicion.<sup>482</sup> While only Olivia went missing, the remaining children were not spared from other kinds of trauma which haunts them even in their adult life.

When they were children, Rosemary exhibited an exceptional example of emotional distance from the three oldest children, which often resembles attitude of Bunty in *Behind the Scenes*. The only exception to this is Olivia, whom she loves dearly. This is not a unique example of parental preference in the book as Theo admitted to the same problem – and just like Theo, Rosemary is also aware of it: “Olivia was the only one she loved, although God knows she tried her best with the others. Everything was from duty, nothing from love.”<sup>483</sup> Rosemary can also resemble Eliza from *Human Croquet* in the way her overwhelming love is shown through the need to bite her child: “Sometimes she wanted to eat Olivia, to bite into a tender forearm or a soft calf muscle, even to devour her whole like a snake and take her back inside her where she would be safe.”<sup>484</sup> Unlike Theo, however, Rosemary did not refrain from voicing her preference in front of the other children: “Rosemary . . . said that she wished Olivia could stay at this age forever because she was so *lovable*. They had never heard her use that word to describe any of them. They had not

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<sup>480</sup> Ibid.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid., 303.

<sup>482</sup> Ibid., 101–2.

<sup>483</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid., 22–3.

even realized that such a word existed in her vocabulary, which was usually restricted to tedious commands: *come here, go away, be quiet*, and - most frequent of all - *stop that*.<sup>485</sup>

While one can try to explain this obsession with Olivia by pointing out that she is simply the youngest, Rosemary does not feel the same affection towards her unborn child whom she treats with the same distance as the three oldest daughters and not-so-lovingly refers to it as an “*afterthought*.”<sup>486</sup> Not only does she not love this child, she knowingly takes pills that can harm the foetus<sup>487</sup> and hopes it will not be born at all: “Maybe she would lose the baby. What a relief that would be.”<sup>488</sup> One can only wonder whether the real reason of her wishing for a miscarriage is, in reality, based in her awareness of what Victor does to Sylvia, hoping she would not provide him with more material to harm, as it is never disclosed whether she knew about his misconduct and decided not to act upon it.

Whatever the reason for her wishes may have been, her prayers are fulfilled as Anabelle is unable to survive her birth due to a tumour:

She had shown no tenacity for it at all when she discovered that the baby girl she was carrying when Olivia disappeared had a twin, not Victor’s longed-for son, but a tumorous changeling that grew and swelled inside her unchallenged. By the time anyone realized it signalled a life ending rather than a life beginning, it was too late. Annabelle lived for only a few hours and her cancerous counterpart was removed, but Rosemary was dead within six months.<sup>489</sup>

Thus, it is also revealed that soon after Olivia’s disappearance, the surviving children lost not only another sibling (or two), but with them also their mother. They are left with an indifferent father to whom they only present a disappointment caused by their unwise decision to be born as daughters instead of sons. The lack of emotional connection to Victor is ever-present as it is admitted that the afterthought “was probably their father’s last-ditch attempt to acquire a son. He was not a father who doted on daughters, he showed no real fondness for any of them, only Sylvia occasionally winning his respect because she was

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<sup>485</sup> Ibid., 2. Italics in the original.

<sup>486</sup> Ibid., 3. Italics in the original.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>488</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid., 88–9.

‘good at maths.’ . . . he spent hardly any time with them . . . .”<sup>490</sup> In fact, to the daughters, Victor presents more of “an absence than a presence.”<sup>491</sup> Of course, as it later turns out, his indifference was rather a blessing in disguise as once he started to pay attention to some of his daughters, they were cursed.

The emotional distance from the parents affects Amelia the most. Rosemary admits to being aware of it and even feels sorry for the girl: “[I]t made her feel worse when Amelia said, ‘Are you alright, Mummy?’ because Amelia was the most neglected of all of them.”<sup>492</sup> The fact that she was overlooked the most transcribes into her persona as she grows into an adult who “might as well have had ‘unloved’ tattooed on her forehead.”<sup>493</sup> The loneliness represents who Amelia is and affects her mental well-being even years after she stopped being a child. According to Amelia, the father loving math problems more than his own daughters was only one of the downfalls of their childhood: “What an appalling childhood they’d had.”<sup>494</sup>

While Victor turns out to be an awful threat to his daughters, his absence may be tracked to his own childhood. At the age of four, he was told his mother was taken to “a lunatic asylum”<sup>495</sup> but “it was only much later in his life that he discovered that his mother had not ‘gone insane’ (the family’s term for it) but had suffered a severe postpartum depression after giving birth to a stillborn baby and . . . lived sadly and solitarily in a room decorated with photographs of Victor, until she died of tuberculosis when Victor was ten.”<sup>496</sup> It is possible to detect parallels with *The Panopticon* also featuring a mother in an asylum as well as *Human Croquet*, where the family lies about the whereabouts of a parent to their child.

While his mother is missing physically, Victor’s father Oswald provides no emotional safety while having high expectations from Victor, whom he sent to a boarding school, and dies in a tragic accident. Due to his aloofness as well as difficult requirements imposed on his son, the news do not affect Victor much: “Victor received the news calmly and returned to the particularly difficult mathematical puzzle he had been working on . . . rather glad that he would no longer have to live up to the heroic image of Oswald Land and

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<sup>490</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>491</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>492</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>493</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>494</sup> Ibid., 312.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>496</sup> Ibid., 8.

could become great in his own, less valiant, field.”<sup>497</sup> Victor’s childhood story thus contains three quite common obstacles, i.e. the struggle to survive in Victor’s sibling, a mother removed and missing from a child’s life and emotionally distant father. Those problems however cannot excuse his later actions.

Sylvia, like Simon in “Dissonance,” faces prejudice from others for her adolescent appearance: “Well-meaning people called her an ‘ugly duckling’ (said to her face, as if it were a compliment, which was certainly not how it was taken by Sylvia.)”<sup>498</sup> Her biggest problem is Victor who rapes her, and Rosemary who fails to save her due to her indifference. Sylvia exhibits psychosomatic problems in the form of fainting, which rather than alarms only annoys Rosemary who “decided to ignore the fainting fits as well. They were probably just Sylvia’s way of getting attention.”<sup>499</sup> The trauma does not only translate into her physical health but her mental health too; she develops a habit of speaking to saints as her coping mechanism: “Sylvia was nuts, of course. She’d told Amelia that God (not to mention Joan of Arc) had spoken to her.”<sup>500</sup>

Although “Amelia had caught [Victor] once with Sylvia”<sup>501</sup> only, Sylvia suffered through this way more than only once. In fact, her belief that God speaks to her is her way of dissociating which helps her to get through those moments: “And he always spoke to her when she was in Victor’s study. That was when he said to her, ‘Suffer the little children,’ because she was still, after all, a child.”<sup>502</sup> The holy voice turns out to relate to her fainting fits as well: “And sometimes she felt so transformed by the holy light that she simply swooned away. . . . Once (perhaps more than once), she had swooned in Daddy’s study – blacking out and crumpling to the floor like a tortured saint.”<sup>503</sup> Thus, it becomes apparent that the majority – if not all – Sylvia’s problems are rooted in Victor’s twisted acts.

Her hallucinations may have overreached a healthy boundary of coping mechanism as she believes her suffering is a part of God’s plan. When she kills Olivia, she deems her “[a] sacrifice. . . . Pure and holy. She was pure and holy and safe. She couldn’t be touched. She would never have to go into Daddy’s study, she would never have to choke on Daddy’s stinky thing in her mouth, never feel his huge hands on her body making her impure and

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<sup>497</sup> Ibid.

<sup>498</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>500</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid., 408.

<sup>503</sup> Ibid., 406.

unholy.”<sup>504</sup> Sylvia believes that by killing Olivia, she saves her from the same torment she must endure. This is further supported by the fact that she even tries to warn Olivia before killing her: ““You mustn’t do everything Mummy and Daddy tell you. Especially Daddy.””<sup>505</sup> The feeling of unsafety lasts even in Sylvia’s adult life. She adopts a greyhound to feel protected<sup>506</sup> and locks herself in a convent to battle the fear and sense of danger caused by trauma which the convent cannot replicate due to its nature.

Worryingly, Rosemary could have noticed warning signs about Victor’s deviancy, such as the fact that she married him at eighteen years of age, only five years older than Sylvia at the time of Olivia’s death, when she already has been fainting. Rosemary even blames her parents for not stopping her as she believes they “should have pointed out that she was a mere child and he was a thirty-six-year-old man.”<sup>507</sup> One can only wonder why Victor longed for a son and whether his tendencies would also affect this potential son or whether he wished for one so that he would finally not see his child as a sexual object.

The book also offers more cases of paedophilia in the form of Jackson’s deformation by his job, as he fears for his daughter Marlee’s safety:

Jesus, she was dressed like a hooker. What did Josie think, letting her go out looking like a pedophile’s dream? She even had lipstick on. He thought of JonBenet Ramsey. Another lost girl. When he was in Bliss earlier, a girl had come in, a friend of the receptionist (Milanda – had she made her name up?), and made an appointment for a “Brazilian,” and Milanda said, “Yeah?” and the girl said, “My boyfriend wants me to get one. He wants to pretend he’s making love with a young girl,” and Milanda said, “Yeah?” as if that were a good reason.<sup>508</sup>

What is even more painful is to observe Amelia battling her ongoing feeling of loneliness which continued even after Rosemary’s death, and her desperate attempts to get at least her father’s attention: “She wanted to show her teachers and Victor – mainly Victor – that she was clever enough.”<sup>509</sup> She saw Sylvia in Victor’s study, but only as an adult she dares to

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<sup>504</sup> Ibid., 409.

<sup>505</sup> Ibid., 405.

<sup>506</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>507</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>508</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid., 170.

ask Julia if Victor ever did the same thing to her.<sup>510</sup> Julia's admitting that he tried but she screamed makes Amelia feel horrible – not because of Julia but because this makes her feel even more rejected and unloved: “No one had ever found her attractive, no one had ever wanted her, even Victor hadn't wanted her, her own rather had found her too ugly to seduce.”<sup>511</sup> Worst of all, her being so deprived of attention, she would even welcome his assault: “That would be Julia, she would scream. Amelia would simply have let him do it. Only he didn't, he'd never tried to do anything with her.”<sup>512</sup> The feelings of misery eventually accumulate and result in her attempting suicide.<sup>513</sup>

Despite the three cases being in the focal point of the book, Jackson's own story also reveals childhood trauma, while at first only hinted at by revealing that at the age of twelve, he was in counselling.<sup>514</sup> Later the allusions become more specific: “Jackson knew that the dead never came back. Ever.”<sup>515</sup> He finally reveals the cause of his trauma to be his sister Niamh's death. Incidentally, it is on the anniversary of her death that he started smoking again, suggesting his trauma pertaining:

“Must have been a big one,” Kim Strachan said.

Jackson laughed humourlessly “No, it wasn't. A thirty-third, that's not a significant one, is it? Thirty-three years since my sister died.”<sup>516</sup>

Jackson and his siblings lost their mother when Jackson was not even a teenager yet, while Niamh being sixteen and their older brother eighteen at the time. The mother's death forced Niamh into a role of an adult as she had to take care of the household and look after her family: “She took Fidelma's death worse than anyone. . . . By that time Niamh was already doing all the cooking and cleaning as well as going to Wakefield every day . . . .”<sup>517</sup> A few months later, shortly after Jackson's twelfth birthday, Niamh was raped and murdered, which made Jackson's brother feel so guilty for not picking her up that he kills himself. Jackson sees both of his siblings' corpses as he finds his brother<sup>518</sup> and, as if that was not enough for a twelve-year-old, “[h]e had watched the police dragging the canal and had seen

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<sup>510</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>511</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>512</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid., 367.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>515</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>516</sup> Ibid., 330.

<sup>517</sup> Ibid., 340.

<sup>518</sup> Ibid., 346–7.

them lifting out his sister's body, sluicy with mud and water."<sup>519</sup> In his adult life, he sees many more such cases: "Photographs, always photographs. All those poignant images of girls that had gone. The Kerry-Annes and the Olivias and the Lauras, all of them precious, all of them lost forever."<sup>520</sup> That children are often raped and murdered has will also be shown in *The Panopticon*, but unlike there, Jackson never judges the children or blames them for their misery: "[T]here were some unspoken assumptions that [a girl victim] had somehow invited what had happened to her. Not on Jackson's team. If he'd thought that any of his officers thought that, he would have hung them out to dry."<sup>521</sup>

#### 4.1.8 *The Panopticon*

Jenni Fagan's semi-autobiographical novel *The Panopticon* (2012) unfolds the story of a fifteen-year-old Anais Henricks' short stay in the Panopticon, a house for young offenders who are deemed unfit for life in society. While Anais herself has faced many troubles in her short life, many of the other young people fight their own demons.

The most prevalent obstacle all the children face is prejudice held against them by society. This includes adults and children alike which lead a normal life unrelated to the world of those living in the Panopticon, but also the social workers who are in charge of the young offenders. Anais' social worker Helen, who is supposed to help her find the right path, blatantly lacks faith in her too. Moreover, she does not even attempt to hide her judgement of children in state care system, considering those in the Panopticon a lost cause – and for that matter, she merges them with people who are either in jail or mental hospitals: "My social worker said they were gonnae make all the nuthouses and prisons like this, once."<sup>522</sup>

From Anais' perspective, the whole society fails to support troubled children or any people in need whatsoever, be it addicts, mentally impaired people, or those who are suicidal. She recalls an instance in which she witnessed a crowd pushing a woman to complete her attempted suicide:

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<sup>519</sup> Ibid., 362.

<sup>520</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>521</sup> Ibid., 148–9.

<sup>522</sup> Jenni Fagan, *The Panopticon* (London: Windmill Books, 2013), 10–1.

Last week a wifie was gonnae jump off North Bridge, but she got stuck. Either she changed her mind or she just froze. She was there for two days, on this wee ledge – freaking out. I came out of a club and my skin was still all soaking from dancing, and I was right up – then I hear all these people shouting Jump, jump, jump! That’s sick, ay. It’s sick to shout at a suicidal person – Jump, jump, jump!<sup>523</sup>

The only exception to this seems to be one of the Panopticon’s social workers, Angus, who exhibits understanding and acceptance of the children in his care and is unique in his willingness believe and to fight for them. Anais, who has lost faith in people as nearly everyone she knew let her down or hurt her in some way, is thus surprised when Angus treats her nicely and shows that he wants her to be safe:

‘I’m not being funny, Anais, I am being deadly serious. You have tae have someone tae watch your back, and despite what the police are saying about you being a big bad lassie, I think you’ve nae bad in you at all.’

I feel – shocked.<sup>524</sup>

The children living in the Panopticon appear to have internalized the prejudice held against them by society. Their perception of themselves is revealed in Angus’ notes which discuss the children’s stance on how they should be referred to by the social workers, considering they despise the term ‘Cared-for Young People’ as they do not feel being cared for or about by anyone:

*Several Panopticon residents refer to themselves as Inmates. They say this because they believe they are in training for the ‘proper jail’ (their words). While this may seem like negative or dramatic terminology, the reality is that up to seventy per cent of residents leaving care do end up either in prison, or prostitution, mentally ill or dead. . . . The term Anais used was ‘Lifer’. The young people who refer to themselves as ‘Lifers’ do so because they have always been in (care) and/or adopted (with*

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<sup>523</sup> Ibid., 28–9.

<sup>524</sup> Ibid., 144.



*subsequent adoption breakdowns) and they now think they will be in care for the remainder of their upbringing.*<sup>525</sup>

While Angus notes these truths in a matter-of-fact way, the novel does not hide that most of the inhabitants of the Panopticon are already expected to end up for prison, are selling themselves, are suffering from mental illnesses, or, indeed, die before they reach the age of eighteen, when they must leave the care system.

The Panopticon's children all managed to survive the early stages of childhood, though an infant death is implied by Pauline when Anais visits her: "[Rape] was not as bad as losing my firstborn . . . ."<sup>526</sup> Isla's babies – and Isla herself, for that matter – got HIV, which is untreatable, and their life expectancy is unsure. Although it was caught quite early for the babies, it is unsure how long Isla was infected before she found out: "They didnae find out until Isla took them for their first immunisations. That's how she found out she had it. Next thing she's hauled in, her ma's hauled in, then her da comes back – says he knew he had it the whole fucking time."<sup>527</sup> Isla feels great amount of guilt for transferring the virus to her twins through breastfeeding after their birth<sup>528</sup> since she was unaware at the time. Although she tried to behave maternally, she feels like she put her own children's life at risk, not really caring that she herself may die, too.

Though the young offenders reached their teenage years, many do not survive their mental illnesses or addictions. This sad truth is represented by Isla, who, feeling guilty for infecting her twin babies with HIV, cuts herself until she accidentally kills herself and is found by Anais.<sup>529</sup> Anais herself mentions multiple times that she does not consider surviving a certainty: "Pretty soon, I'll be sixteen, or dead."<sup>530</sup> It is noteworthy that although she slept in numerous curious places such as graveyards, charred ruins of a car, or a runabout in winter<sup>531</sup> in the course of her childhood, she seems to be more on edge when entering a building of a state care: ". . . I trail along them, turning around once, twice, looking at every single detail – it's important to place where everything is. So nobody can walk up behind you."<sup>532</sup> This demonstrates her distrust in such establishments, suggesting

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<sup>525</sup> Ibid., 220. Italics in the original.

<sup>526</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>527</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>528</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>529</sup> Ibid., 260–1.

<sup>530</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>531</sup> Ibid., 279.

<sup>532</sup> Ibid., 9–10.

a negative experience and perhaps assault. Thus, despite her having to survive the harshness of Scottish nature while on the run, it is society that seems to alert her more than the violence of nature.

Anais struggles mentally throughout the novel. Perhaps the most peculiar feature of her experience is the experiment, described simply as “men in suits with no faces”<sup>533</sup> whose nature is never truly revealed. With high probability, these are hallucinations caused by her excessive drug use but they seem to gradually leak into her mind even when she is not under the influence. This makes her believe that she is being watched, mocked, and expected to cause herself or others in her surrounding some sort of harm: “The experiment are watching. You can feel them, ay. In the quiet. In the room. . . . They want me to hurt myself. They’re sick like that. What they really want is me dead.”<sup>534</sup> She also happens to identify herself as an experiment, which is being observed by the experiment as she states in the preword: “*I’m an experiment. I always have been. It’s a given, a liberty, a fact. They watch me. Not just in school or social-work reviews, court or police cells – they watch me everywhere. . . . They watch me, I know it, and I can’t find anywhere any more – where they can’t see.*”<sup>535</sup>

While the possible cause of Anais living in fear of the experiment is most probably drug use, it seems that it can be something she acquired from Pauline and developed its form by her fear. When Anais complains to Pauline about the state care system’s lack of trust in her, Pauline provides the experiment, which until now was only presented as Anais’ secret, as an explanation:

‘Aye. They think I’m bad.’

‘That’s what the experiment want them to think.’<sup>536</sup>

Anais decides not to pay much attention to this initially, believing Pauline “must be off her meds”<sup>537</sup> but is still shocked when Teresa is mentioned in relation to relationship, too:

‘Teresa always knew they’d come for you,’ she says, draining her drink.

‘Who?’

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<sup>533</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>534</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>535</sup> Ibid., 1. Italics in the original.

<sup>536</sup> Ibid., 226.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid., 227.

‘The experiment.’<sup>538</sup>

Another possible explanation for the occurrence of the experiment is Anais’ trauma. There is no doubt that in her fifteen years of life, she has been through more than most people dare to experience in their entire life. What seems to have the greatest impact on her mental wellbeing, however, is her adoptive mother Teresa’s murder and finding the body.<sup>539</sup> Ever since, Anais is haunted by death disguised as the experiment – she even keeps score, which after Tash’s disappearance and Isla’s death raises to “*EXPRIMENT – 2. Us – 0.*”<sup>540</sup> Unable to escape the deadly predicament, she is often attacked by macabre ideas: “I bet a body kept in here would take years tae decay.”<sup>541</sup>

Her trauma is, nevertheless, not taken seriously by the social workers. When she is treated miserably by one, who spits at her for throwing a cigarette butt in water – an unthinkable behaviour a social worker should clearly never diminish to – she finds the other social workers to take his side and pretend he did not just treat her like less than human:

‘He was traumatised!’

‘I’m traumatised.’

‘But he was really traumatised.’

‘How – did he find his ma dead?’

They didnae like that.<sup>542</sup>

Despite being right about the double standards and the misuse of the word trauma, Anais gets into trouble for standing up for herself when she “hooked him.”<sup>543</sup> Worst of all, the social worker’s alleged trauma is presented as more serious than hers. Conversely to the social worker’s ego being hurt, Anais is clearly still traumatised from Teresa’s death. She cannot keep herself from reacting to Helen’s mention of the tragedy while getting irate:

‘It was taken in with the rest of Teresa’s documents when they were investigating her murder.’

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<sup>538</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>539</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>540</sup> Ibid., 262. Italics in the original.

<sup>541</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>542</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>543</sup> Ibid., 93.

I flinch at the word. And now all I can see is Teresa's kimono on the floor in our bathroom. I could slap Helen sideways.<sup>544</sup>

Being the one who also found the corpse of Isla after she cut herself seems to only make things worse for Anais. It awakes her trauma and she is suddenly drawn back to fragments of the first crime scene, feeling the urge to escape it by means of getting drunk: "I keep imagining Isla and Tash, petals in their hair – kissing on the island. Laughing. Till death do us part. Then her hand, just open like that. And somehow now all I can see is Teresa, an empty bath, her kimono on the floor, and I really need tae drink until I cannae see anything anymore."<sup>545</sup>

Anais knows little about her biological family. The only certainty is her mother about whom she also knows nothing with the exception that, given such person truly existed, she was suffered from mental disorders. If she accepts that she was truly born to a person, Anais must also accept the possibility of inheriting those, making her perception of the world unrelatable. This would involve the experiment as the result of her psychosis: "What if this is it and I've gone psycho, just like bio-mum? Clinical psychosis. Schizoid visions. Permanent insanity or suicide? What do you do? Stay permanently crazy or just fucking jump? . . . And those faces in the walls: spies, the lot, sent straight from experiment headquarters."<sup>546</sup> Due to her unclear origins, Anais often imagines that the experiment created her in a Petri dish for the sole purpose of their vicious game of watching her struggle, which seems to be an attempt to explain her mother abandoning her in such a cruel world alone.

In fact, Anais is deciding between multiple possible ways she came to life: the experiment creating her or being born and abandoned in an asylum to a schizophrenic as the two most likely ones. How can she truly know herself without the knowledge of her origins? Her identity crisis is often discussed throughout the book. She is flooded by diagnoses and medications (which are just a tip of the iceberg in terms of her addiction). Seemingly, it has not occurred to anyone in charge of her that the girl may simply just be traumatised and alone. Everyone seems to be giving her pills to fix the symptoms without treating the real cause of her problems.

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<sup>544</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>545</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid., 108.

It is worth emphasizing that in the state of mind that Anais is at the time of her stay in the Panopticon, she is highly unreliable as narrator. Still, she recalls when she received the diagnosis of identity crisis after suffering a panic attack described as feelings of shrinking:

I shouted about the shrinking – at a panel of social workers a few years ago. That started a great big ball of shit. Antipsychotics. Post-traumatic stress disorder. Flowcharts. Borderline personality. Hooroo-kooroo. Fucking murk! That’s when the social work started.

‘We think you have a borderline personality, Anais.’

‘It’s better than no personality.’

Wrong. Apparently – no personality is the correct answer. . . . Identity problem. Funny that. Fifty odd moves, three different names, born in a nuthouse to a nobody that was never seen again. Identity *problem*? I dinnae have an identity problem – I dinnae have an identity, just reflex reactions and a disappearing veil between this world and the next. . . . I wonder what my mum, or dad, would look like?<sup>547</sup>

Her record of lacking identity to begin with is further supported by the fact that she was not really named after being born, and her name being changed multiple times: “7652.4 – Section 48 was my first name. . . . I hate the first name they gave me after that one; I wouldnae even tell anyone it, ever. It was shit. At least Teresa picked something better: Anais – she named me after one of her favourite writers.”<sup>548</sup>

The cause of her panic attacks is never truly discussed nor is it ever treated as such. The panel of social workers, perhaps due to their prejudice, did not consider them being just what they are and saw something more behind them, though one of the discussed options, PTSD, could be traced to Teresa’s death. Nevertheless, the panic is not treated successfully as Anais keeps experiencing the attacks: “Shivery, shivery, shrinking, shrinking. The light hums. I’m gonnae have a whitey. No, I’m not. No, I’m not. Don’t panic. Don’t freak out. Fuck, fuck, fuck! Sweating. Shit, here it comes, fuck, I cannae breathe, I’m gonnae be sick. Shit!”<sup>549</sup> It is also possible that the social workers never truly reveal the full

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<sup>547</sup> Ibid., 99. Italics in the original.

<sup>548</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>549</sup> Ibid., 107–8.

depth of her trauma, as only Anais seems to know all she has been through. She offers a glimpse of what she had to endure while stating that her reoccurring nightmare of shrinking is worse than the actual panic attacks: “It’s worse than back-to-back panic attacks. It’s worse than psychosis. It’s worse than getting fucked after you said no, and it’s worse than not knowing anything about who you are or where you’re from. It’s worse than the polis fucking with you just for fun, or cos they see you as a nothing, a no mark, easy meat – just like all the other freaks do.”<sup>550</sup> This suggests that as a child, she suffers not only from mental disorders but also has been raped in addition to her identity crisis and the police abusing their power.

Mental instability and disorders are not the only obstacle that reside within the children themselves. For instance, Isla is displayed inflicting harm to herself many times. The reason is discussed among the other children along with the notable resentment from the personnel: ““She needs tae stop cutting herself, and have you seen Mullet? He won’t go near her if she’s cut; she doesnae let anyone but the doctor touch her, like, but Mullet really makes it obvious. I think she’s trying tae cut the virus out, ay. She feels so fucking bad that the twins have got it, she cannae take it.””<sup>551</sup>

Isla is not the only one who is depicted hurting herself. In a candid moment, Anais admits to Shortie: ““I used tae bite myself.””<sup>552</sup> She is also shown restricting her food intake to control her body weight, suggesting eating disorder. After being deceived by Jay and raped by five men, Anais makes the conscious decision to change drastically: “This is what’s different from yesterday – I’ve got my hair cut into a bob, I dinnae want to smoke, I dinnae want food, but I will eat, and not just chocolate. I will eat soup, and bread, and cheese, and I will stop having a day on and a day off tae stay skinny. I will comb my hair, and brush my teeth and learn how tae be nice to me.””<sup>553</sup> From this short record, it is apparent that Anais is done with harming herself in all the ways she used to – from smoking to not eating to not taking care of her. In a certain way, she reckons her old self is dead after being raped: “It’s funny: Pat reckoned rape cannae kill you, but she is wrong.””<sup>554</sup>

The most frequent internal struggle the children in *The Panopticon* must overcome is use of drugs. Anais but also Shortie are shown numerous times using drugs – from marihuana to various pills, no matter what sort they are, mostly unrecognized or simply

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<sup>550</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>551</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>552</sup> Ibid., 234.

<sup>553</sup> Ibid., 299.

<sup>554</sup> Ibid., 301.

described by a colour, unless it is a widely recognized drug with a well-established name. It is common for the rest of the children to take drugs, too. For instance, Isla got HIV because “her old man’s a smackhead, he used tae tie her tae the bed when they went out tae score, so she took a shot of his gear one night when he was nodding.”<sup>555</sup> In addition, Anais along with others are smokers. In Anais’ case, this is said to have started in her early childhood – the reader learns that she has been smoking (cigarettes as well as joints) at the age of eleven already.<sup>556</sup> Again, she only puts stop to this after the rape: “I’ve cried every night since I got out of the safe-house. I keep having nightmares about it, but I umnay blocking it out. Not with grass, or pills, or anything.”<sup>557</sup>

*The Panopticon* reveals the fate of children who are all abandoned by their parents in a way. Anais is left by her mother in an asylum while John’s parent is serving their sentence in jail. Others are left in the state care for their own good – Isla admits to Anais that her mother decided to give her up to care to keep her safe from her own father: “‘There’s soul-stealers out there, Anais. My old man’s like that, even before the Aids, he’d sell my mum. He once sold her tae the guy upstairs. He would have sold me; that’s why she wanted me in care, it’s safer.’”<sup>558</sup> However, by wanting her in state care, Isla’s mother caused her to be separated from her little twins – they miss each other dearly, but only are allowed to see each other by the authorities occasionally. In this sense, Isla also left her children although not by her choice.

Of course, the greatest sense of abandonment is shown by Anais whose thoughts are served to the reader. She often wonders whether her biological family misses her or acknowledges her existence: “I wonder if my biological mum thinks of me on my real birthday?”<sup>559</sup> It is apparent that she struggles with the notion that she virtually has no one to remember her, and her loneliness and sense of abandonment leaks through her sentimental remarks on the lack of family: “If they fried out my memories it’d be like I never existed, cos there isnae a sister, or aunty, or da who’s gonae say: oh remember when Anais broke her ankle? Remember when she cried on her birthday? Remember when she ate a whole cake and was sick at the back of the bus!”<sup>560</sup> The unfulfilled need of family is so strong that eventually even the frightening and dangerous experiment she sees suddenly

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<sup>555</sup> Ibid., 159–60.

<sup>556</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>557</sup> Ibid., 314–5.

<sup>558</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>559</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>560</sup> Ibid., 78.

gains an added value: “What if there was no experiment? What if my life was so worthless that it was of absolutely no importance to anyone?”<sup>561</sup> While Anais is persistently haunted by the experiment, at least, she feels, they care about her so much to follow and watch her everywhere. At least, she matters to them. The depth of the hurt from being left alone is only implied but reveals how much Anais mourns not having a family during crucial milestones in which parents should play an important part. For instance, when she is scanned by the night nurse, Anais notes that “[s]he sees the first thing you ever stole. And the time your baby-teeth fell out and the tooth-fairy didnae fucking come.”<sup>562</sup>

The feeling of not belonging causes Anais to consider herself a failure responsible for her loneliness. Unable to remain placed within a foster home, Anais has been handed over fifty times but still has not found a home.<sup>563</sup> Once she finally got adopted by Teresa and is given not only a mum but also home, the offered life is lost with Teresa’s death. Despite Teresa being murdered, Anais cannot help but feel responsible for her predicament again:

There’s something fundamentally wrong with me.

It’s why nobody kept me. Except Teresa and she got murdered, and whose fault was that? The therapist said it wasnae mine, but I could have checked on her, I could have made her come through for lunch.<sup>564</sup>

At the end of the day, Anais is certain – in true Scottish nature – that whatever good comes her way she will somehow manage to ruin. The sense of doom haunts her just like the experiment: “I feel hollow just now. Hollow where a heart should be. Like when you know someone loves you, but you urnay good enough – that it will go. That you’ll make it go, it’s only a matter of time.”<sup>565</sup>

Anais solves her loneliness by a game of imagination, the birthday game. In this game, she daydreams the various lives she could have had was she born “so perfect and cool and lucky”<sup>566</sup> to a loving family instead. The ideal seems to be Paris, a place she was planning to visit with Teresa before their time was cut short. She finally manages to bring

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<sup>561</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>562</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>563</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>564</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>565</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>566</sup> Ibid., 32.



her birthday game to life once she escapes the Panopticon: she buys a one-way ticket to Paris as Francis after she says goodbye to her old identity along with all the women she lost by letting lilies float down a river, “[o]ne for Teresa, one for Tash, one for Isla, one for Anais.”<sup>567</sup>

While most children miss their parents, they have an authority in their foster parents or social workers, often also the police. These are often depicted abusing their power over the children and treating them with prejudice discussed above. When Anais plays one of her birthday games, she imagines better sibling than those she had in the foster families. Indeed, the bar is low according to her record of their nature, which she seems to have learned during her many experiences: “. . . he was vastly preferable tae real-life foster-brothers. Pain in the arse, they are. They either want tae fight you, fuck you or pimp you out tae their pals, and sometimes all three – in that order.”<sup>568</sup>

Although the social workers are meant to protect the children placed in state care and act as a sort of substitution for their parents, very often they fail in their role. In Anais’ case, Helen acts as a catalyst for her sense of being essentially broken. As Anais maintains, Helen’s interest is not Anais’ well-being as much as the thrill of the case of a lost soul as well as enhancing her image: “She wanted a case that was more rough-looking. More authentic, so she could take me for meetings at that bistro near hers, where her posh pals would see and think she was dead cutting-edge and that.”<sup>569</sup> Anais is ideal for this purpose, as it is perfectly clear to her that Helen does not see any hope for her: “She doesnae think I’m getting out – she thinks I’m in the system now, all the fucking way. Foster care. Homes. Young Offenders. Jail.”<sup>570</sup> Anais’ awareness of this truth does not stand on baseless presumptions but rather on the empirical observation of the help she is receiving – or rather not receiving – from her: “I’ve seen her four times since she’s been back, but she is still doing less than fuck-all to help me prove I didnae kosh PC Craig. She thinks I did. That’s the fucking thing.”<sup>571</sup>

Helen also attempts to impose her overly positive approach to misery upon Anais, unaware or not interested enough to realize that such approach feels naïve and mocking when applied to what the girl has experienced and, in fact, only causes more harm. In this sense, Helen is toying with Anais’ well-being and reduces her to a trifle. It takes Anais

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<sup>567</sup> Ibid., 321.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>570</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>571</sup> Ibid., 231.

some time to oppose this image and realize that she is far more than what most people see in her, and she deserves better: “I am not a stupid joke, or a trippy game, or an experiment. . . . Today, one finds one is not, in actual fact, a social experiment. One is a real person.”<sup>572</sup>

The police is depicted abusing the power the most. They mistreat Anais horribly as is shown in their behaviour towards her as well as the semantic choices they make while referring to her: “‘Aye, you’re no gonnae be the smart cunt in there!’ the policeman says.”<sup>573</sup> While they seem not to struggle to use such insults to talk to a fifteen-year-old girl, they also attempt to belittle and intimidate her by such speech. Their attitude does not evolve whatsoever throughout the book as Anais is continuously verbally assaulted and vilified, particularly by PC Craig, whom she allegedly attacked and caused her to fall into a coma. In the flashbacks, Anais gets strip-searched without anyone in charge of her present, with PC Craig with her in the room, leaving plethora of space to abuse Anais both mentally and physically:

‘What makes you think you’re so special, Anais? D’ye think you’re above the same rules as everyone else, is that it?’

She stops in front of me, runs her finger under my bra, then she pulls my knickers out and takes a long look tae see what’s down there. She lets the elastic snap back.

I stare through her. I have perfected this, staring through people. I have been here, all the fucking time lately. Thursday, 12.02, me on a come-down, middle of the cell, stripped. Sunday, 22.17, me with a black eye, to the side of the cell, partially stripped. Wednesday 3.14 a.m., bent over. Monday, 13.10, me with a coldsore, too thin and too frazzled, with bruises on my arms and cut marks on the inside of my thighs and a total inability to conceal my hate.

‘Take off the bra, Anais.’

‘Fuck off!’

‘What did you say?’

‘I said fuck off.’

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<sup>572</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>573</sup> Ibid., 7.

‘I dinnae think so, Anais – fuck off is the wrong answer. You just say Yes in here. Yes, PC Craig. *Thank you, PC Craig.*<sup>574</sup>

Anais seems used to this sort of behaviour as well as the suspicious searches. She is searched without evident belief she would possess anything dangerous or illegal, nor a reason to conduct such search for the purpose of arrests. In fact, as it is later suggested, these searches are truly routine and done for crimes such as stealing a car.<sup>575</sup> One may thus only wonder what PC Craig is trying to find in a fifteen-year-old’s underwear. Not only do those searches sound illegal without any social worker present to ensure proper treatment of the minor, but the quote also suggests physical harm caused to Anais. It is therefore no wonder that she loses any trust in police: “Authority figures are broken, and they’re always bullies as well.”<sup>576</sup>

She can then hardly be surprised when they display disbelief in her and are eager to prove her guilt because of their prejudice and hate of children in the Panopticon: “The pigs dinnae give a fuck if I did it or not; they just want me locked up and that’s that, they dinnae care what it is they put me away for.”<sup>577</sup> Even after she is raped, she sees no point in seeking help from them, firstly because she experienced a milder form of such abuse from at least one of them and secondly because she believes that “[n]obody’s gonnae catch those guys, and the polis fucking hate [her] anyway.”<sup>578</sup> Anais is thus completely alone in her misery.

Perhaps also because of this negative experience, Anais knows she cannot speak for herself for she will not be heard. She finds herself in situations in which she loses voice multiple times and with multiple authorities. Unsurprisingly, she seems to have lost it during police interrogations:

He leans over the table into my face and his breath stinks of curry.  
Dinnae breathe. Just remember what the wishes look like, down the  
woods in summer. Wee silver orbs. Totally magical.  
‘Speak!’ the policeman roars.  
Wipe the spittle off my face. I’m done answering now.

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<sup>574</sup> Ibid., 109–10.

<sup>575</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>577</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>578</sup> Ibid., 296–7.

Say nothing. Just stare. The pigs' nerves begin tae fray. They get angry. They get calm. They offer me a smoke. They try bullying, threats, bribes.<sup>579</sup>

Instead of speaking, Anais appears to dissociate from the situation and thinks of positive memories. She seems to know already what is going to happen, suggesting the same scenario has repeated many times before. And she knows that speaking will only make things worse. For now, then, she can only wait in silence for the interrogation to be over.

The police are not the only ones who take Anais' voice, nevertheless. Helen is shown doing the very same by seemingly asking her for permission without actually being interested in the answer and immediately acting upon her will: "‘Is that okay, Anais? We’ll come and get you soon.’ Helen doesnae wait for an answer . . . ."<sup>580</sup> In addition, another social worker lets her hatred and prejudice win and, after shamelessly announcing her opinion about Anais and bullying both Anais and Angus, a similar scenario to the one during the police interrogation unfolds:

The Chairwoman stares. Fuck off, cunt-pus. Your mind is made up, and I’ve got absolutely fuck-all to say. I’ve so much nothing to say that I can feel my throat closing up. It happens like that sometimes. Once when I was four I stopped speaking for six weeks. They said it was a protest but it wasnae.<sup>581</sup>

In this case, however, Anais does not speak because she knows that whatever she would say could never change the Chairwoman's mind whereas during the interrogation, her silence seemed to be caused by intimidation. What is also noteworthy is the fact that Anais seems to be familiar with such situations from as early as four years of age. Even then, the actual reason for her silence was misinterpreted in accordance with the general villanization of the little girl, suggesting the prejudice was held against her even then.

Throughout the novel, Anais drops hints at being sexually assaulted by multiple men: "I hate it when a guy makes you feel cheap. It's like that in fights. It's like that when you say no and they do it anyway. I've not let that happen for a long time, I learnt – the

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<sup>579</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>580</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>581</sup> Ibid., 175.

worst way.”<sup>582</sup> At one point she even openly admits to it to her friends when playing truth or dare and she is asked about the number of times she has had sex: “‘About nine,’ I kick in before Tash batters Shortie. ‘I was up for about half, two were debatable, two were out-and-out wrong.’”<sup>583</sup>

While it is not clear exactly how many men assaulted her, there is one clearly prominent molester, her so-called boyfriend Jay, an adult around 30 years of age, who was apparently imprisoned not for his paedophilic tendencies but for owning money. While the reader may be disgusted by his attitude to a minor (“*Text me a photo of your tits,*”)<sup>584</sup> it is even more shocking that his behaviour deteriorates because Anais grows older: “He’s getting pissed off cos I’m not like what I was at eleven, or twelve.”<sup>585</sup> After Teresa’s death, Jay saw an opportunity in Anais at a highly vulnerable place of a child in desperate need of an adult who would take care of her. Instead of providing safety, he used the girl’s situation to molest her. Once Anais gained space from him, she became aware of this: “I dinnae know how tae tell him that, since I’ve been away from him, I see things differently. All the times he – I dunno, it’s like he manipulated.”<sup>586</sup>

Indeed, the manipulative methods grew more visible with every text message he sends Anais:

‘You’re just a wee fucking dirty from a fucking kids’ home, hen, ay?’

...

‘Who the fuck d’ye think you are?’ I say.

‘Come on! I’m only kidding – you’re too over-sensitive, nae sense of humour, that’s your fucking problem.’

‘What do you want, Jay?’

‘I want you back. D’ye not want me back, Anais?’

‘I need tae be on my own.’

‘Aye, that’s not what you used tae say all the times you came tae get wasted, when your old dear fucking died, ay? Who took you in, Anais?’<sup>587</sup>

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<sup>582</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>583</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>584</sup> Ibid., 82. Italics in the original.

<sup>585</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>586</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>587</sup> Ibid., 136.

Clearly, Jay is rather fluent in gaslighting Anais by now. He is also good at quickly changing his attitude from rude and offensive to kind and loving in such a way as to get exactly what he wants from Anais. Jay does not shy away from jumping from proposals to threats: “*Part your legs. . . . You are the most beautiful girl I’ve ever seen. Marry me. . . . In about three weeks, meet me at the safe-house? You better fucking come! . . . I love you.*”<sup>588</sup> Although he does not receive any photographs from Anais who attempts to keep the distance between them, he manages to manipulate her into his lie about leaving jail and wooing her into the false feeling of safety she may have felt with him years ago.

It is by his mean tactics that he entices her into a trap with five men and a webcam who brutally rape her to pay off his debt.<sup>589</sup> This final betrayal finally sets Anais free from Jay’s spell and she can move on: “Jay. I hope someone kills him.”<sup>590</sup> Having lost faith in police, she is determined to seek revenge herself and, truly, be the first one who addresses the striking problem of Jay’s paedophilia. She wants to make sure he will pay for what he did to her: “I have a letter in my pocket. I addressed it to the head of Jay’s prison. I have another one for the guy in Jay’s cell – he told me his name was Rod. . . . I don’t know if his cellmate will get it. I hope so, though. They don’t like paedos in jail.”<sup>591</sup>

Still, not everyone who attempted to sexually assault her are punished. As it becomes apparent from *The Panopticon*, the world is full of people ready to take advantage of young girls. For instance, in one of her flashbacks, Anais reveals that when she was thirteen, a drug dealer locked her in a dungeon and forced her to dance in bikini while throwing her clothes out so she has nothing to change back into.<sup>592</sup> After they give her drugs and make her obey their commands, they proceed to voice their desires in a way similar to Jay:

‘You are unbelievably fuckable,’ he says.

‘Really?’

‘Really. You’re so fucking . . . wasted, look at you! I think I love you.’<sup>593</sup>

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<sup>588</sup> Ibid., 124–5. Italics in the original.

<sup>589</sup> Ibid., 287–91.

<sup>590</sup> Ibid., 294.

<sup>591</sup> Ibid., 300.

<sup>592</sup> Ibid., 48–9.

<sup>593</sup> Ibid., 48.

Anais is not the only girl who is molested. In fact, she recalls that both Pauline and Teresa complained about young girls stealing their jobs when Tash claims that a lot of men have paedophilic preferences:

‘I couldnae count how many – a lot, though; they like it underage, ay,’  
Tash says.  
‘That’s true. My adopted ma was always saying the wee lassies were taking all the clients,’ I say.<sup>594</sup>

Most probably, Tash is one of the girls Teresa was complaining about as she does sell her body to finance herself. This makes Anais uncomfortable due to her traumatic experience with Teresa. Afraid of losing her too, she even attempts to stop Tash by offering to give her the money she has in hope that she may save her. Being unsuccessful in this attempt wakes her trauma again:

‘You dinnae want tae go,’ I say, and for some reason I’m almost crying.  
I dinnae know what the fuck is wrong with me. Even as I’m saying it, I feel like an arse. Tash is just looking at me.  
‘We could play Monopoly?’  
‘Anais, calm fucking down – the staff are looking.’  
Tash tucks my hair behind my ear and I give her a kiss on the cheek.  
‘Sorry. I’m just . . . I dunno. Are you taking down the registrations?’ I ask Isla.  
‘Always.’ She lifts a pad.<sup>595</sup>

When she cannot stop the girls from going, she at least makes sure that while they risk their life, they remember the cars to prevent kidnapping. This technique seems to ensure Anais that the girl will return safely since she did the same when she lived with Teresa: “I memorise every number in every car I get in. I memorise nameplates. I did it on the docks for Mary when she went on the game, and Mary never went missing on my shift, not fucking

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<sup>594</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>595</sup> Ibid., 231.

once.”<sup>596</sup> Anais however does not say that Mary never went missing and rather suggests that this, in fact, happened, only not on her shift.

Unfortunately, the strategy of writing down the registration plates proves insufficient for Tash who does not return from that night.<sup>597</sup> As far as Anais is aware, Tash was kidnapped by a man who presumably murdered her (and all the girls seem to fear what else happened to her) since she is not found. Other children are victims of kidnapping and homicide in *The Panopticon*, though. Anais gets furious after reading a title in a newspaper which shows how unsupportive the environment is for children in Scotland:

**Nobody Could Prevent Child’s Murder.**

. . . How can someone do that, ay? And how can someone say – on the front of a fucking newspaper – that there was nothing they could do to stop it?

Seriously. How not? How can you not stop it? If you take a kid who is in danger out of a place where it’s gonnae be tortured tae death – well, that kid would not be murdered then. Fact. It was a head social worker said that headline. What kind of message is that to send out to baby-murderers? What kind of apology, or acknowledgement of responsibility, is that?

It’s not an apology. It’s not an explanation. It’s a fucking insult, that’s what it is.

It’d be different if it was their baby.<sup>598</sup>

Not only does Anais feel unsupported, but she also feels lost. She feels the injustice of not having a parent since, as she feels, the children with parents are truly cared for. If a parentless child is lost, people do not bother trying to save them. This excerpt displays her frustration caused by the lack of care and support she and her friends deserve, be it from the police, social workers, or the parents.

*The Panopticon* is a treasure chest in terms of obstacles children are depicted facing. From dying from natural causes to facing the cruel Scottish nature to fighting their own demons to, finally, having to face the demons in their own family and prejudiced society.

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<sup>596</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>597</sup> Ibid., 237–8.

<sup>598</sup> Ibid., 183–4. Emphasis in the original.



#### 4.1.9 “A Perfect Possession”

This short story is narrated by the parents of a young boy of unspecified age, though it is revealed that he is yet not attending school: “It is so important he should have good eating manners when he goes to school.”<sup>599</sup> In this narrative, the reader learns of the parents’ approach to upbringing their son, which is terribly twisted by their faith. When Duncan Petrie spoke of seeing a child in fiction either as innocent or a gateway to fantasy, he also discussed “the contradictory ideas of the innocent child as a *tabula rasa* on which experience leaves its, usually corrupting, mark, and of the imaginative child as – in certain puritan scenarios such as the ‘God-fearing’ tradition of Calvinism – corrupted by original sin and therefore to be subject to discipline and punishment.”<sup>600</sup>

In this story, Kennedy focuses on just that. The parents are well aware of the fact that their son is a living proof of their sin necessary to conceive; the embodiment of sin in urgent need of being purified. Luckily, they know how to remedy the situation: “Sometimes we have to ask ourselves if he is a judgement on us for our part in his conception. Children come from sin, they are the immediate flower of sin and there is sin in him. It would be idle to consider why this should be so and we believe only that, though him, we may find an opportunity to conquer sin again and again.”<sup>601</sup> And conquer their son they do, indeed.

Their cruel abandonment of their son’s needs (both social and physical) as well as their forbidding his biological processes is not caused by their lack of care for him – on the contrary, they claim to love him but cannot be helped since “[i]t hurts when we love somebody, because loving is a painful thing.”<sup>602</sup> They provide for him as they see fit, arguing that they are there for their child whenever he needs them: “[W]e would catch him if he ran and fell, we would bandage him if he were bleeding and now we can measure his actions and think ahead on his behalf.”<sup>603</sup> The way they show their love for him, however, is frighteningly horrible.

What they describe as love rather resembles just compassion and acceptance – despite their claims, they see him as a little annoying animal rather than human: “When he was so noisy and smelly and dirty, so very difficult to hold, we didn’t abandon him. We

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<sup>599</sup> A. L. Kennedy, ‘A Perfect Possession’, in *Now That You’re Back* (1994; repr., London: Vintage, 1995), 5.

<sup>600</sup> Petrie, *Contemporary Scottish Fictions*, 163. Italics in the original.

<sup>601</sup> Kennedy, ‘A Perfect Possession’, 8.

<sup>602</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>603</sup> *Ibid.*, 3–4.

knew he was a baby, not just some troublesome pet, and we kept him with us.”<sup>604</sup> To boast to keep one’s baby seems almost ridiculous, and yet, this note also depicts their high expectations for him. The moment they refer to in the quote seems to be the moment right after birth and what they complain about seems to be him crying and being ugly, the first being a noise most parents cherish as their child takes their first breaths, the latter being completely outside of his control.

The expectation to remain silent still pertains along with more requirements; the parents are flabbergasted each time their little boy breaks the rules they so carefully set and which he is still to learn: “We don’t know how many times we’ve asked him if he would like to be trusted not to break anything else, or to disturb us. Always he refuses the privilege, which we suppose shows that he knows his limitations: he is still dreadfully clumsy for his age.”<sup>605</sup> This seems to be a requirement that is rather complex to demand from a child who is not yet five years old, especially when considering that his misbehaviour is in the form of “glasses he drops and the stains he makes in the tablecloth.”<sup>606</sup> This fact does not stop the parents from wondering how he still cannot understand the simple rules of their house: “We don’t know where he gets it from, his terrible lack of thought, he simply isn’t one but like us.”<sup>607</sup>

Their proclaimed love for their son is shown in their pursue of keeping him safe – this must be done by first putting bars on the window of his room, and then, since he still opens it to smell the rain as he likes,<sup>608</sup> screwing it down. The protection does not stop there, however: “[S]till we had to fret because a fire could easily trap him in his room, what with his door being locked the way it must. . . . His spite didn’t stop us saying that if he ever were in difficulties, or a fire did occur, he could bang on his door the way he does now and we would certainly let him out.”<sup>609</sup> Essentially, what they have created is a perfectly built jail for a pre-school child. Although he is banging on the door at the moment of the narrative, they keep him there. They nevertheless cannot be certain that he indeed is fine. This fact also raises suspicion as to their capability to truly save him should such an emergency situation occur.

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<sup>604</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>606</sup> Ibid.

<sup>607</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>608</sup> Ibid.

<sup>609</sup> Ibid., 4–5.

The problem of him opening a window at such young age may be understandable, however, as the story progresses, one needs to wonder whether his attempt was not just to smell the rain but perhaps also to breathe at least a bit of fresh air and get a touch of the outside world and its rottenness, from which his parents so devotedly keep him away: “As it is, we are almost afraid to go out. He never goes out without us, of course, we can’t trust him to strangers. This means we must be with him always . . . .”<sup>610</sup> They also keep him from “filthy music and filthy talk, filthy actions,”<sup>611</sup> which embody the dangers of television. In order to keep him in an appropriate environment supporting the growth into a proper human, they even “sing him hymns to keep the air sweet in [their] rooms. It’s such a pity [they] can’t take him out to church.”<sup>612</sup>

Still, to their dismay, he keeps showing his “ingratitude and forgetfulness,”<sup>613</sup> even when at one point they “give him material things, . . . wholesome gifts for a boy”<sup>614</sup> which he “broke . . . , dirtied . . . , or pushed them aside.”<sup>615</sup> In the parents’ eyes, those actions are worthy of a reaction to discipline him – taking the things away.

The carefulness not to grow greed in their son goes as far as being horrified when the little boy asks for “something he could hug on to in the night”<sup>616</sup> since, according to them, this is nothing but “a warning. We had to take his pillow away because he would sleep alongside of it, in spite of what we told him, and that was dirty, that was more of the filth we constantly fight to save him from.”<sup>617</sup> All turned out well, luckily, once they “persuaded [him] to pray with [them],”<sup>618</sup> ignoring how lonely and deprived of company he is.

In fact, their obsession goes as far as checking the boy in his sleep for signs of sin: “Many times at night, we examine him for signs of filthiness, wetness of every kind, and often we are given cause for concern, or rather, we are challenged by sin. He has bad seed in him and it comes out. Evil cannot help but flaunt itself and in the darkness it is most free to manifest. . . . Rubber sheet is not enough, an alarm is not enough.”<sup>619</sup> This tactic resembles the Victorian habit of controlling pureness of boys’ purity of thoughts in sleep

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<sup>610</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>611</sup> Ibid.

<sup>612</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>613</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>614</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>615</sup> Ibid., 6–7.

<sup>616</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>617</sup> Ibid.

<sup>618</sup> Ibid.

<sup>619</sup> Ibid., 8.

by setting intricate traps to alarm the guardian in case of erection. It feels difficult to be shocked when such constant observations, which by far overreach the practices even in the Panopticon based on Jeremy Bentham's concept, the little boy finds himself traumatised to the point of wetting the bed at night.

At the moment of the parents' narration, their son "is spending this evening in his room where [they] don't see him."<sup>620</sup> Clearly, he is being disciplined for misbehaving, though what exactly he has done to earn such punishment the reader will not learn. The only record of his offense the reader gets from the parents along with their determination to improve him is the following:

Our child has sinned today. He has summoned an evil under our roof. What sin, what evil, need not be mentioned, we will not dignify it with a name. We need only say that he is ugly with sin and now we must call upon our God-given love to claim him for beauty so that good may triumph in all our hearts. We will release him from himself and hear him thank us. We must. Time after time and time out of time, we will purify him for the coming world . . . .<sup>621</sup>

This promise sounds almost frightening from the fanatically obsessed religious parent of a toddler. Yet, they consider their actions a way to save him from actual prison (and if possible, also make him as saint as the conditions will allow): "Today we all suffer at the hands of criminals created by sloppy care. . . . Upbringing has to be just that – bringing up from the animal level to something higher, better, closer to God."<sup>622</sup> Indeed, they appear to consider their child an animal, a tabula rasa they must affect in a correct way.

The purification process they mention brings its fruit although, as they admit, "he seems so pale and thin, perhaps as an angel may be. His whole body is almost white which is clean, but not natural. No matter what we do, what methods we apply, he turns back to white again within days or hours, even minutes."<sup>623</sup> The parable to an angel, though possibly pleasing to the parents and their aim, threatens with the possibility of illness and soon death caused by their unrelenting purification. One also needs to question the methods

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<sup>620</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>621</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>622</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>623</sup> Ibid., 7–8.

they claim to apply – whether they are supposed to help his medical state or are simply another of their ways to rid him of filth, which illness surely is too.

There cannot even be a discussion about the boy having a voice or not, firstly for he is too young and secondly, because even at this young age, his parents have demolished his spirit to happily observe that “overjoyed to see that he is already much quieter than he ever has been.”<sup>624</sup> How much he lacks voice is showcased by the fact that the whole story is narrated by the parents despite their son being the subject matter of the text.

#### 4.1.10 “The moving house”

This short story presents Grace, a young girl who struggles to overpower her own memory in hopes to find – even if only momentarily – peace in her predicament. While at first, the most striking struggle is not clear, throughout the story, it is revealed that she is a victim of sexual assault committed by her mother’s partner Charlie, who lives with them in her mother’s house and is alone with her regularly:

‘Been out tonight, Gracie? Had a nice time? Is your mother back?’

‘No, she’s not.’

‘So mummy’s out on the town as well, uh hu?’

. . . ‘I came home to see you.’

. . . As she went upstairs, he took her arm. Grace was glad it happened in their room not her own. Not her bed.<sup>625</sup>

What more, this traumatic experience is not a one-time matter as Charlie rapes her repeatedly: “[T]he dream is sharp in her mind, as if it had happened again in sleep and she had seen what she always did see – a door, opened smoothly on a room with the curtains drawn. The familiar dream.”<sup>626</sup>

Grace’s father is no longer present – in fact, he has never truly played any significant role as a parent in her life as he left her and her mother early in Grace’s life never to return:

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<sup>624</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>625</sup> A. L. Kennedy, ‘The moving house’, in *Night Geometry and the Garscadden Trains* (London: Phoenix, 1993), 40.

<sup>626</sup> Ibid., 35.

“Grace’s father went away when she was small and didn’t write letters, or a postcard, or come back.”<sup>627</sup> The reason for his leaving is unclear, perhaps because Grace was too young to realize or notice it. Her father thus remains nothing but a bitter-sweet memory – in fact, “[t]here is only one memory she has of him; the first she has of anything, full stop.”<sup>628</sup> While it is unfortunate that her only memory of her father is that of him leaving her, it is also possible to detect hints of assault from his side – him carrying her out of her bed,<sup>629</sup> noting her memory of him is “[t]he first thing she knows that happened to her”<sup>630</sup> and the aloof statement that when she woke up after falling asleep on his chest, “it was finished.”<sup>631</sup> Nevertheless, because of Kennedy’s writing style based predominantly on saying as little as possible, these implications can only be left for discussion. It is my interpretation that what she refers to by these sentences was her being abandoned by her dad who made her feel safe and calm enough to fall asleep on him: “He sat with her on his lap, in the armchair and the skin of his face was rough but not rough. . . . Her hand in his was good, surrounded, and Grace fell asleep by the rise and fall of his chest.”<sup>632</sup>

The sense of abandonment deepened when she realized that her visiting her Great Aunt Ivy was, in fact, her mother sending her there: “She just went away to Aunt Ivy’s, took a wee case, and slowly, other things of hers would follow. The day they bought a bed for her she knew that she would stay.”<sup>633</sup> Grace’s mother is not given much space in the narrative, that is, in Grace’s attempts to think of good things in order to fight off the recent memory of rape. If this was not telling enough, Grace admits that after Ivy’s death, she would probably not return to her mother were the decision up to her: “Why did you come here, back to your mother? They said you were going home, but it never was home and you grew up into you somewhere else. If you’d been older, if you could have left the school.”<sup>634</sup> This shows the distance between the mother and her child – Grace kept no feelings towards her mother and her house, and her mother is more of a stranger to Grace, which may be why Grace does not seem to even think of confiding in her mother.

Still, Grace is too young to be legally employable and to her ultimate disappointment, she is brought back to her mother’s. Even at such clearly young age, Grace

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<sup>627</sup> Ibid.

<sup>628</sup> Ibid.

<sup>629</sup> Ibid.

<sup>630</sup> Ibid.

<sup>631</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>632</sup> Ibid.

<sup>633</sup> Ibid.

<sup>634</sup> Ibid., 38.

realizes the hopelessness of the state of her country when it comes to employment: “With a job, they would have let you stay away, but nobody gets jobs now . . . .”<sup>635</sup> It may be not disclosed when the short story is taking place, but this quote suggests a crisis resembling the rising unemployment of Thatcherian Britain. Grace finds herself in a situation without hope when she realizes she is choosing between homelessness or staying at a house which is not home, a place where she means so little even to her mother: “You’ll be out on the street, or stuck here for life. Whichever way, you’ll be nothing. You won’t be anything.”<sup>636</sup>

The mother figure in Grace’s love was replaced by Ivy, who agreed to take care of her and together, they created a home with habits and insight jokes:

And Ivy would have been a great aunt, anyway; That was their joke. If  
Grace ever wanted something, she only had to say  
Please, Great Aunt  
And the skin across Ivy’s nose would redden . . . .<sup>637</sup>

However, when Ivy eventually dies, Grace is left on her own again, losing the home she found, leaving her feeling betrayed once more: “She’d been expecting it, because you shouldn’t trust old people, they always die, and as soon as she opened the door, she knew.”<sup>638</sup> This event leaves a mark on Grace, who finds herself lonely in the world: “People out there, you could tell, there was something about them, making them hard. You were only safe with old folk, the ones with other lessons learned.”<sup>639</sup> However, the provided safety expires along with the people and Grace must thus face the harshness of the Scottish environment.

Due to Ivy’s slowly approaching death Grace must take on more tasks than she probably would had she been growing with a parent: “Not that she’d really wanted to be by herself, but Ivy had started shrinking away, long before she was ill. There came a lightness in her movements that frightened Grace.”<sup>640</sup> Although Grace is in a way forced into her adulthood by Ivy’s condition and must gradually take more and more care of them both, she still prefers this to a life with her mother and is thankful to Ivy, for whom she is very

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<sup>635</sup> Ibid.

<sup>636</sup> Ibid.

<sup>637</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>638</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>639</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>640</sup> Ibid.

affectionate. She displays her thankfulness to Ivy in taking care of her but also, from the beginning of her staying there, she is trying to be as little of an inconvenience as possible. For instance, she convinces Ivy not to hide her decorative China dishes: “I promised, I won’t [break them]. They’re better out. You like them like that”<sup>641</sup> and politely rejecting a neighbour to take care of her before Ivy returns from work: “But Grace said, very nicely, that she wanted to learn how to cook and she asked for a key of her own to Aunt Ivy’s flat.”<sup>642</sup> Grace waves a final goodbye to her childhood when she is raped: “She goes to put on her uniform. It has stayed the same, a children’s thing, it should be that it no longer fits.”<sup>643</sup>

This experience makes her realize she is voiceless in the situation, she cannot fight for herself nor can she seek help as she is intimidated into silence:

‘Please, Grace, don’t. You’re a good girl. Don’t tell her. If you tell her, she’ll be angry. She’ll be sad. Nobody has to know, Grace, please. . . . Please, Grace. Grace. Fuckun say it. You won’t tell. You don even think about it. Stupid cunt. Nobody’s gonny believe you. Who are you? You’re fuckun nothun. See if they do believe you; they’ll say it was your fault. . . . Think I couldn make it worse? You do not fuckun tell . . . .’<sup>644</sup>

Charlie attempts to delude her into giving in by promising less pain – while also announcing the intent for future torment: “I’ll be good to you. Don’t worry, honey, the next time, it won’t hurt.”<sup>645</sup> By now, Grace who suffers the painful consequences of yet another encounter with Charlie knows this was a lie. She seems to truly start to believe that she would be blamed for it based on her previous experience with the environment fearing she would be judged: “Grace sits on the toilet and the pain seems suddenly fresh. She sees the blood, is sick, cold after. Don’t stay here. Get out. You mustn’t be late. They’ll ask why, if you’re late.”<sup>646</sup> Furthermore, she feels like by taking her, Charlie has taken her voice on

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<sup>641</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>642</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>643</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>644</sup> Ibid., 40–1.

<sup>645</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>646</sup> Ibid., 38.



physical level, too: “She could hear that he was crying. As if he had taken everything now; even the sounds she would make.”<sup>647</sup>

While she lived with Ivy, Grace had an opportunity to be independent and make decision that would be heard (for instance, when she made Ivy leave the dishes on display), and while alone and waiting for Ivy her life resembled that of an adult:

“She would turn on the television set in the kitchen and go and do her homework in her room, with the sound of other voices at her back. Then she would change and go stay in the kitchen with the talking and the fire, make a cup of tea and have a snack, nothing much. The meal would always wait until her aunt was back and, unless the bus was late, Grace would have it ready, just right.”<sup>648</sup>

This freedom is over when she returns to her mother – she is not even allowed to go and speak with Mr Taylor, Ivy’s friend she came to know, at Ivy’s funeral: “Grace had wanted to speak to him afterwards, but Charlie and her mother took her away.”<sup>649</sup>

Hunted by Charlie’s promise to repeat his actions, Grace escapes to a safe, happy place in her mind, her good memories. While she cannot yet run away, she knows that very soon, once she gathers enough strength, she will: “She doesn’t have to catch the [a bus] to school. There are buses to take her anywhere. Away: Dumbarton, Balloch, Oban, just away. . . . It’s the bus that takes her home she wouldn’t catch.”<sup>650</sup> For now, Grace only has the energy to dream of the day to come.

#### 4.1.11 “Genteel potatoes”

In “Genteel potatoes,” the unknown narrator tells a story of their Grandmother’s experience with work. Interestingly, the narrator seems similarly aware of the female lineage of their family as Ruby Lennox in *Behind the Scenes*: “Time divides me from my mother and her mother and beyond them there are lines and lines of women who are nothing more than

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<sup>647</sup> Ibid., 40–1.

<sup>648</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>649</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>650</sup> Ibid., 40.

shadows in my bones.”<sup>651</sup> Though working may have been seen as nothing extravagant at the time, the fact that Grandmother begins her work before she is fourteen could be seen as a form of forcing adult life upon her.

Her tale begins around the beginning of Grandmother’s adolescence, her exact age being uncertain: “Grandmother’s age in this story is unclear. She is no younger than then and no older than thirteen and is one of her parent’s very many children.”<sup>652</sup> Still, the narrator offers a glimpse of her adult life. It is implied that in terms of social hierarchy, Grandmother belongs to a lower class. The narrator’s description of her – “all skin and bone”<sup>653</sup> suggests a life in poverty. The number of Grandmother’s siblings, which is so high that Grandmother “doesn’t know them all that well,”<sup>654</sup> also seems a characteristic more common in lower classes. Finally, the clearly defined distinctions between her as a servant and the “genteel family”<sup>655</sup> are what implies her social status the most. This social distance is mostly projected on the potatoes they are supposed to eat, the family for which Grandmother works, held in high regards by Grandmother’s family, having “middle class”<sup>656</sup> potatoes and reserving rotten, oozing “proletarian”<sup>657</sup> ones to Grandmother.

Not only does Grandmother deal with the prejudice and restrictions of belonging to a lower class, but she also faces the problems presented by the time she lives in: “In these days suitable topics for conversation among young girls were rather restricted and the restrictions rather vigorously applied.” Had she in any way differed from the expected norm of behaviour, she would be harshly judged in society. At home, her punishment only takes the form of physical punishment: the narrator offers an example of Grandmother’s mother who “once chased Grandmother all round the house with a riding crop for acknowledging the sex of the household cat, or for saying a pregnant lady was going to have a child. Possibly both.”<sup>658</sup>

As expected from the time in which Grandmother grew, death of children was not an uncommon event. In fact, a child growing into an adult could truly be seen as an accomplishment, and the narrator proudly announces that at the time of Grandmother’s start of working life, her siblings were rather vital, though they admit that their condition may

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<sup>651</sup> A. L. Kennedy, ‘Genteel potatoes’, in *Night Geometry and the Garscadden Trains* (London: Phoenix, 1993), 42.

<sup>652</sup> Ibid.

<sup>653</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>654</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>655</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>656</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>657</sup> Ibid.

<sup>658</sup> Ibid., 43.

not have been as glamorous: “So far only one of them has died. . . . Edgar, though only a boy, is bald-headed, stout and troubled very much with sciatica.”<sup>659</sup>

Though Grandmother is seen old enough to start earning money, she is not allowed to make decisions for herself, starting with the very essential one for the story – getting employed. Grandmother is only presented with the results of the executive decision made about her for her and is left with only one option of dealing with it, which is acceptance: “It had been decided that Grandmother’s schooling had come to an end and now she would go into service and bring back a wage. . . . A great many tears were shed in the process and when, despite her best efforts, she did not get hopelessly lost, but arrived at her new employer’s, safe and sound, she must have been a pitiable sight.”<sup>660</sup>

The pressure of social status is another factor that takes Grandmother’s voice. She feels unable to stand up to herself when she feels injustice upon her person; although she originally did not want to go to work and would probably prefer to keep studying, she does not mind hard work. Despite apparently being a diligent employee, she has a sense of self-worth that is being compromised when working for the “genteel lady.”<sup>661</sup> The fact that she does not stand up for herself is with high probability caused by her awareness of her status, which makes her feel even more shame: “What seemed to trouble Grandmother was that she had one idea of service and the genteel lady seemed to have another. Grandmother was ashamed for being too hesitant to point out that difference.”<sup>662</sup>

It is only as she is reaching her eighteenth year and grows into an adult that she finds the courage to speak for herself: “Grandmother is now fast approaching her eighteenth year and yet she has never once, in all of that time, cooked an edible meal. . . . She is appalled by all these potatoes and appalled, more than anything else, by the potatoes which were set aside for her.”<sup>663</sup> Finally, she speaks for herself and resigns. However, her victory in which she finally claims her voice from her employer is very short. At home, even at the end of her childhood (if her parents considered her grown enough around five years ago, she is certainly adult now), she finds herself still with no voice. Her attempt at gaining it only results in punishment and subsequent terrible adulthood experience. Apart from another physical punishment (“Grandmother’s mother will see her arriving home, hours too early, and go fetch the riding crop. Grandmother’s explanation will only make things worse and

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<sup>659</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>660</sup> Ibid., 43–4.

<sup>661</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>662</sup> Ibid.

<sup>663</sup> Ibid., 44–5.

she will go to bed hungry, turn her back on her sister in bed and cry”<sup>664</sup>), she gets “apprenticed to an old french polisher”<sup>665</sup> who is cruel and presents a large contrast to the genteel family.

## 4.2 Categorization of detected obstacles

In the previous chapter, I set my task at inspecting the selected literary works in order to find depictions of struggles faced by children. The above detected obstacles are now to be studied to determine their possible causes, after which I will discuss the existence of a possible unifying cause. The obstacles will thus be categorized into a proposed taxonomy based on this primary classification.

Children across the selected works are facing various struggles, the most elemental one being simply to survive. Whether this regards the unescapable quest of being born alive or having to avoid all the subsequent pitfalls lurking all around the child, waiting for their chance to grasp the unsuspected victim and take their life. These common perils of mortality cover a wide range of dangers, from more natural ones such as not surviving birth (like Willem, Mrs Baker’s children, or Pat’s child) or various illnesses and diseases slowly taking the child’s strength (Ada’s, for instance), to those emerging from their unawareness of possible lethality of otherwise common daily objects, e.g., a car in Gillian’s case. While the ever-present fight for survival affects everyone irrespective of age, adults successfully overcame these dangers in their young age, and it thus seems reasonable to consider them safe from dying a tragic death caused by not looking when crossing the street – safer than a child anyway. A grown adult is also considerably less fragile than a small child who is threatened to succumb to the after-effects.

An aspect which feels like it deserves to be considered is Scottish nature. With its infamous harshness, children in Scotland must endure the difficult conditions and survive in them. While Anais must find a way to survive sleeping outside during cold winter nights and not die of hypothermia, Pearl fails to win her battle when the ice breaks under her feet though it previously managed to hold Gillian’s weight.

A lot of the children are portrayed suffering from various mental disorders. These can either be manifested as depressive episodes or panic attacks (e.g., teenage Ruby after

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<sup>664</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>665</sup> Ibid.

George's funeral or Anais, who suffers from it throughout the whole novel) or as responses to traumatic experience resulting in showing signs of madness and/or delusional perception. This is the case, among other, of Sylvia, who is certain she hears the voice of God and Joan of Arc as a result of sexual abuse by her father, due to which she also kills Olivia to save her from the same misery.

Other children may cope with their difficult situation by releasing their tension by means of self-harm. Self-inflicted violence is a form of escapism for depressed Ruby as well as Isla's self-imposed punishment for being infected with HIV, and Simon's projection of his desperate frustration.

Addiction was also not a unique struggle. In the detected cases, the children who are addicted to drug use were abandoned by their parents, betrayed by their support system and the addiction seems to be the least of their current problems. Instead, it appears to be another form of coping with the hard situation in which they find themselves. Anais considers drugs to be almost fun and fearlessly takes just about anything she is offered. Tanya's relationship to drugs is not elaborated, but the effect it has on her body is apparent.

During the analysis, it became obvious that many of the children's problems are rooted in their family. Specifically, it is the parent – or rather the lack of – who causes most struggles. Missing parents are a recurring theme which often results in adulthood forced upon the children and/or parentified children who must act like the parent themselves due to the parent's insufficient ability to fulfil this role. This theme can be divided into two kinds of absence – physical and emotional. I shall therefore elaborate on both in the following examples, after which problems caused by other parents' presence will be discussed.

A parent can be physically absent from a child's life for different reasons. Among the analysed literary works, the reasons for a parent to be missing varied between their death and pursuit of other personal interests ranging from career to love affairs to healing their trauma to complete rejection of the child to search for a stepparent after the original one's death.

Parents with their primary focus on career are Campbell Wright and sometimes also George Lennox, who avoids his parental responsibilities by departing to the Shop, with Victor who hides in his study to work on his math problems. He also very often fails to be present for his daughters as he spends time with his numerous lovers. Alice abandons her children completely as she runs away to live with a photographer never to see her children again, while Anais' mother leaves her in an asylum, her father forever remaining unknown.

Just like Otto Kraut, Bill Addison refuses to acknowledge his fatherhood to Addison, though Bill is present in the life of his other children. Similarly, Simon and Rebecca's father has shifted his focus on his new family with Jenny, leaving the first two children to their mother. Bunty Lennox leaves her children as she struggles after Pearl's death, and for the second time after Gillian's death she disappears shortly with George, too. In *Human Croquet*, Gordon disappears soon after Eliza's death, only to return with a motherly supplement seven years later, though this time spent searching for a new mother for his children was more likely an attempt to flee from justice after killing Eliza. Furthermore, John and Tanya's parents are missing physically since they are serving their time in jail.

The parents who died are for instance Eliza (although Gordon was also said to have died in order to prevent Isobel and Charles from expecting his return similarly to Alice who is also pronounced dead to cover her abandonment), George, Shirley, Keith, or Rosemary. Teresa and Aunt Ivy, who pose as parental figures in Anais and Grace's life more than their actual parents, also die and leave the children feeling lonely.

Although some parents are physically present in their children's lives, they do not cover their lack of emotional connection is striking. This problem was shown to sometimes result in compromised sense of self-worth lasting to the child's adult life as in the case of Amelia or Ruby, while other children mirror this emotional distancing when they become parents themselves, as seen in the cases of Victor and Bunty.

When Gordon finally returns after his seven-year break from parenthood, he is only a shell of his former self, and the children barely even consider him a parent worthy of respect. Growing up, Bunty felt the least parental love compared to her siblings and the indifference she felt from Nell transcribes to her relationship with her own children, resulting in Patricia's fleeing from home and Ruby's broken self-esteem. Her lack of interest in her children is painfully similar to Rosemary's, after whose death her children experience the same disinterest from Victor, whose father exercised the same philosophy regarding child's upbringing. Romney is only interested in her children as long as alimony is involved, and she can use them as a tool to gain more media attention. Orphaned Vincent faces his grandparent's displeasure from his existence, let alone having to take care of him, and the parents in "A Perfect Possession" are more focused on their quest of purifying their son rather than loving him – he is more of a task than their child. Furthermore, Theo, Rosemary and Bunty all display strong emotional preferences of one of their child over the others, who are left behind their adored sibling.

If the child does not miss their parent, their relationship often suffers from some kind of other problem. For the purpose of this thesis, these problems can be divided into four subcategories: physical and mental abuse of the child, absence of voice, possessive parenthood, and unrealistic expectations from the child.

In many cases, the troubled parent-child relationship grows into mental or physical abuse of the child. The list of physical abusers includes the Widow and Vinny, Bill Addison, the parents from “A Perfect Possession,” whose care seems to bring their son to the brink of death, Grandmother’s parents from “Genteel potatoes” and Rachel who beat the children in case of disobedience. Physical neglect is also covered in this category – for example, both Anais and Addison lived in an environment clearly unsuitable for children and Addison was often not provided enough food. In addition, mental abuse (which often accompanied physical) can be found in *Behind the Scenes* (e.g., Rachel but also Bunty both make the children feel unloved and/or alone and worthless), and although the parents in “A Perfect Possession” explain their actions in their own way as unreliable narrators, certain parts of their account can be interpreted as traces of mental abuse. In *The Panopticon*, it is the police who, as the one in charge of Anais, verbally assault her multiple times, although most social workers abuse their power over Anais, too.

Frequently, the children find themselves in an environment where they lack voice and are completely reliant on the mercy of those in charge. This category would include the following texts: *The Panopticon* (most of the children in the novel) *Human Croquet* (particularly during the Widow and Vinny’s care), *Behind the Scenes* (during the war, Lilian and Nell are forced to work and give their earnings to Rachel) and “Genteel potatoes” (similarly, Grandmother cannot continue her education as she must start to earn money to support her family). This struggle is also once briefly mentioned in *Case Histories* as Caroline’s students are forced to essentially the same fate. A lot of girls who found themselves pregnant were robbed of their voice when it came to the decision about the future of their children, too (this is the case of Patricia and Georgie who are pushed by their parents to give the child up for adoption, with only Georgie managing to stand her ground by running away before her parents can force her to do so.) Vincent and Grace find themselves unable to make decisions about who they wish to live with – Vincent being sent to his unloving grandparents and Grace being forced to move back to her mother and thus being essentially served to her mother’s boyfriend’s lust. While Grace is planning to run away soon, Anais has done so multiple times in various placements which proved to be equally unwelcoming and dangerous for her. Finally, the striking lack of voice of the son

in “A Perfect Possession” is juxtaposed by his fate being narrated by his parents, despite him being the subject matter of the short story.

The next proposed category is that of possessive parenthood. This category contains two detected examples – that of the parents in “A Perfect Possession,” since the son is truly more of a toy at the parents’ mercy, and Mr Baxter with his toxic possessive behaviour exercised over Audrey and her sexuality.

Finally, the category of unrealistic expectations will be discussed. While at first glance this category may seem unnecessary, upon closer examination, it becomes apparent how toxic such problem can be in certain cases. In “Dissonance” and “Unseen Translation,” these expectations root in the adult idealizing the child and their abilities, and thus forcing the child to act upon them. Both Rebecca and Simon must learn Latin and Rebecca is expected to pursue studying medicine whether she truly considers it her calling or not, while Arthur is seen by Missy as an exceptionally gifted child who fulfils all her (often ridiculously specific) likes and preferences. Both “Dissonance” and *Behind the Scenes* also discuss the high expectations imposed upon children when it comes to exams both in classroom and those obligatory as established by the education system. It is particularly the exams determining the child’s future which make the child terrified of the results even long before they actually sit for the exam (in Ruby’s case, this starts with the eleven-plus exam.) *Human Croquet*, *Case Histories*, “The Bodies Vest,” and “A Perfect Possession” then depict the adults having unrealistic expectations regarding the behaviour of (particularly young) children. In all these cases, the children are expected to be quiet (even crying after being just born is frowned upon in “A Perfect Possession). The Widow with Vinny, Mr and Mrs Shaw as well as Victor all require the children to alter their behaviour in such a way supressing the nature of a happy child and promote the behaviour of a tired, angry adult. Only Victor possesses the additional requirement for all his daughters to excel at mathematics and the parents in “A Perfect Possession” simply need their son to be just good, whatever this wish means in their minds.

Multiple works depict children becoming victims of crime, including homicide, stalking, and kidnapping. Eliza is kidnapped as a baby from a pram. Tash, who is eventually assumed murdered, is kidnapped too. Anais’ account also hints at other girls facing Tash’s fate. Jackson Brodie experienced many children killed and is haunted by these memories, the most painful one being that of his sister, who was raped and killed (the same thing which happened Georgie). Also in *Case Histories*, Olivia is strangled by her sister and Laura is



struggling with a stalker, Kim's neighbour Stuart Lappin, before losing her life in a homicidal attack.

Prejudice is a prevalent struggle children must deal with. While sometimes, this may seem superficial, particularly when teenagers are judged for their pubescent appearance (Simon, for instance,) they can also be judged for their behaviour (like Rebecca when she cuts the line.) In "Genteel potatoes," Grandmother must overcome the prejudice based on distinct social class, Addison faces prejudice for being an illegitimate child of a sex worker and must endure contempt aimed at his mother in the orphanage. The most striking prejudice is directed towards children with problematic social backgrounds; essentially all residents of the Panopticon are judged harshly by people outside of the state care system and inside, too. Similarly, Tanya is judged after she runs away from her grandparents. Georgie's sex life is judged by Vincent's neighbour who blames her for her own murder. Having established her environment as hard and judging, Grace fights her pain in fear of being asked about the reason for being late, unable to trust that she would receive help.

Paedophilic sexual advances are not uncommon. I have decided to divide this category into two subsections: prostitution being the first, and sexual violence and harassment the second. It is because of being a sex worker that Tash is exposed to this danger. She is not the only girl who sees this as the last resort in her situation: there are several unnamed girls mentioned only in *The Panopticon*, and Eliza and Tanya decide to go this route too once they manage to escape from an unhappy situation at their replacement homes.

As Eliza grows up with her assumed parents, she is forced to comply with her assumed father's sexual compulsion, for which she is later punished and blamed. Grace and Sylvia are also raped by their father figures, though these transgressions are not yet discovered at the time of the narratives. Although it is never explicitly stated, it is also possible that Bill Addison is guilty of the same act. Anais maintains many men in placement families also tried the same (and possibly also succeeded). Furthermore, girls are raped by men outside of the family – Anais, who is brutally raped by five men when Jay, who took advantage of her many times before, tricks and sells her, is the only one who survives the attack. Both Georgie and Niamh are killed after unknown aggressors rape them when they are sixteen and eighteen years old. Finally, Tash, is assumed to have met the same fate.

Although in some of the cases, sexual assaults are committed by family members, it is my belief that this category is still best placed together with other societal problems. After all, these assaults are never truly shown to be punished and the society rather seems

to let the offenders slide from its attention. Mostly, society's critique and judgement is aimed at the victim, ignoring their suffering. Hardly ever are the offenders truly portrayed paying for their crime – for instance, Victor never faces the consequences of his actions while Sylvia is the one judged for her coping strategies, and neither are Charlie or Eliza's offender. Jay's upcoming punishment is only implied as Anais, who sent letters accusing him of what he has done, expects – or rather wishes for – justice to be served. Whether any action actually takes place is, nevertheless, not disclosed and (considering the amount of prejudice against Anais and other children from state care displayed in the novel) it appears more likely that it never will.

#### 4.2.1 Unifying Cause of the Detected Obstacles

Upon examining the detected causes of problems which children are facing in the selected prose, it became apparent that in search for a single unifying cause, one may only conclude one thing.

All children, regardless of what specific struggles they must overcome, are living in an environment which failed them in some way. It is this hostility that can be established as a single universal failure which results in all the obstacles detected. Nevertheless, the environments which fail the children can still be sorted into four major sections. Therefore, it can be argued that there is not a single cause but, in fact, four of them.

These four sections based on various failing aspects of a child's life are: hostility of nature, of self, of family, and of society. The detected causes of obstacles thus arise from errors in these four environments. Hostility of nature is the most elemental one, since the child must first survive all the pitfalls of nature to be able to face the others. The two causes of problems which belong to this environment are common perils of mortality and natural violence.

On the second rank are hostility of self and family. The reason for them being ranked equally is that a child can only face struggles from one or the other section without it affecting the other. Some children can thus struggle with mental health and addictions but have no problems in terms of family, or face problems caused by family members without being paralyzed by problems of their own mind. Still, while these two sections do not necessarily correlate, causality cannot be fully discarded due to the possibility of hostile family environment causing hostility of mind. The section of hostility towards oneself is

occupied with the categories of mental disorders, addictions, and self-harm. Hostility of family then represents the category of missing parents with its subcategories of lacking emotional connection, and physically missing parents and forced adulthood, together with the category of troubled parent-child relationship, further divided into physical and mental abuse, absence of voice, possessive parenthood, and great expectations or idealizing of the child.

Finally, hostility of society covers the categories of sexual advances, crime (including homicide, stalking, and kidnapping,) and prejudice. The reason for the category of sexual advances being placed in this section is that paedophilia occurs outside of familial bonds, too, just like the following two categories. I place this error in environment as the last since most often, children are not in a situation where such dangers could affect them without first struggling with problems rooted in their family or themselves. As seen in the table below, stories containing depictions of social hostility always also contain problems either in the family or one's mind. However, hostility of self and family are not conditioned by the existence of hostile society (see *Behind the Scenes*, "Unseen Translation," "A Perfect Possession," and "Genteel potatoes.")

In this sense, the four kinds of hostility can be envisioned in a three-level pyramid which showcases the relation between them. On the basis, the natural hostility serves as the prerequisite for the remaining two levels since a child which succumbs to death does not naturally face any other problems. Next on the pyramid, one can find two kinds of hostility sharing the second level: hostility of self and family. Since these types both depend on hostility of nature being overcome by the child but are not mutually exclusive, they can be placed equally on this level. Furthermore, considering that a novel can depict obstacles rooted in both types simultaneously, the border between them is fuzzy. Finally, hostility of society can be found on the top level of the pyramid, where it is supported by all the previous hostilities, not being the base for any of other types of failure in a child's environment.

		<i>Human Croquet</i>	<i>Behind the Scenes</i>	“Dissonance”	“Sheer Big Waste of Love”	“Unseen Translation”	“The Bodies Vest”	<i>Case Histories</i>	<i>The Panopticon</i>	“A Perfect Possession”	“The moving house”	“Genteel potatoes”	
<b>HOSTILITY OF NATURE</b>	Common perils of mortality	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	
	Violence of nature	✓	✓						✓				
<b>HOSTILITY OF SELF</b>	Mental disorders, trauma-caused delusions	✓	✓					✓	✓				
	Self-inflicted violence		✓	✓				✓	✓				
	Addictions							✓	✓				
<b>HOSTILITY OF FAMILY</b>	Missing parent	Physical abandonment and forced adulthood	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		
		Lack of emotional connection	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓		
	Troubled parent-child relationship	Physical and Mental abuse	✓	✓		✓				✓	✓		✓
		Absence of voice	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
		Possessive parenthood	✓								✓		
		Unrealistic expectations	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		
<b>HOSTILITY OF SOCIETY</b>	Crime (stalking, homicide, kidnapping)		✓						✓	✓			
	Prejudice				✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
	Sexual advances	Prostitution	✓						✓	✓			
		Sexual violence and harassment	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	

**Tab. 1.** Categorization of detected childhood obstacles and their causes

## 5 Discussion

The outcome of the study was a categorization of identified problems present in childhood as portrayed in selected literary works of A. L. Kennedy, Kate Atkinson, and Jenni Fagan. It proposes four kinds of hostility as the cause of the identified problems, and establishes a notional three-level pyramid, on which these kinds of hostilities reside building on one another. The lowest level, hostility of nature, serves as a basis of the pyramid, with hostility of self and family taking the second level and hostility of society being on top supported by the previous types.

The results of the study show that in the selected text, a single failure of support system such as family or struggling with their mental health can lead to the child's struggles to fit into society, given the child survives many dangers lurking around, trying to take the child's life. It furthermore shows that in contemporary Scottish Gothic fiction, children are often depicted facing various struggles with no certainty of a happy end as expected in fairy tales.

Some scholars may also draw a parallel between the results and Duncan Petrie's suggestion that a child in these literary works serves as a metaphor for Scottishness in the world of adults who force upon them their own identity – the British, or more specifically, English one. It is particularly the lack of voice which seems to be strikingly similar for children's characters and Scotland within the United Kingdom. Other categories can nevertheless also be interpreted in such a way to make the argument for Scotland's political situation. While, admittedly, such interpretation is possible, the thesis' aim was to work with literature rather than politics (the first literary Renaissance has proven attempts of merging these unsuccessful as stated in chapter 3.3.)

Still, the study bore some remarkable results. To my knowledge, very little has been written so far on contemporary Scottish women writers and their work in comparison with other authors (their double marginalization was discussed in chapter 3.4.1), and even less was found on the motif of childhood struggles. This thesis can thus act as a catalyst inciting further research of the subject matter, which could broaden its horizons – a goal certainly achievable considering how fruitful this theme appears to be in today's Scottish fiction.

The categorization proposed in this thesis has its limitations, of course. Being structured for the purpose of this thesis and based on the analysed texts only, it is reductive in nature. It is also not advisable to use the results of this thesis to draw conclusions about the real state of living conditions of children in Scotland due to the thesis being based on

fiction, though semi-autobiographical at times. The results are thus to be taken with reservations while still acknowledging their validity considering some of the analysed works are known to be based on true experiences of the authors. Furthermore, the fact that the struggles detected were never unique but recurrent (they appeared in at least two of the selected texts) suggests that the problems depicted are not complete fiction but rather have some solid basis in real life. However, the scope of this thesis does not exceed the literary sphere and another research of different nature would be required to enable commentary on this subject. Still, the question concerning the validity of the selected texts reflecting on the state of children's lives in Scotland – do they tell of autobiographical experience and true stories to make a point or are they simply a fiction with no intended message? – would fit into the discourse of redefining Scottish literature that is so popular since the first literary Renaissance (see chapter 3.2.)

Considering the limits of this thesis, it would be interesting to conduct further studies covering a larger scope of texts by other authors too. Such studies could test the plausibility of categorization proposed in this thesis by applying it to other texts. The subject of childhood obstacles written by other contemporary Scottish women writers could thus be broadened and perhaps other studies could even delve into childhood depictions by men writers. Such literary works could be added among the texts analysed here, or the approach taken by men writers and the authors discussed in this thesis could be compared to see whether any substantial difference can be found between them considering women writers' double marginalization.

## 6 Conclusion

The thesis studied the motif of childhood struggles as depicted in the selected contemporary Scottish prose written by Scottish women authors, namely A. L. Kennedy, Jenni Fagan, and Kate Atkinson.

In the theoretical part of the thesis, the selected fiction as well as its authors were first contextualized with regards to contemporary Scottish literature, its position in British canon and its predominant features, and the reason for selecting contemporary women authors was addressed.

The research was subsequently conducted, in which the primary texts were analysed in order to identify the depicted motifs of children overcoming various obstacles. Multiple struggles were detected, which made the second step of the process possible, and the obstacles were categorized according to the causes. The identified problems were the following: common perils of mortality, violence of nature, mental disorders involving trauma-caused delusion and actual mental illnesses, self-harm, addictions, a parent missing either physically or emotionally in a child's life, troubled parent-child relationship which could manifest as either abuse, be it mental or physical, absence of child's voice, possessive parental behaviour, or unrealistic expectations and idealizing of the child, prejudice held against the child by society, paedophilic advances ranging from feeling forced to prostitution to rape, and finally, criminal actions performed on children, from stalking to kidnapping to murder.

In search for a unifying pattern, it was established that all the children characters discussed experienced a failure of support required from their environment to ensure their safety and emotional stability. This evident hostility of a child's environment was found to have clearly distinguishable traits which led to final categorization, resulting in four kinds of hostility; of nature, self, family and society.

The final categorization also proved that these four major groups are interconnected. All the children must first survive various pitfalls of life in order to be able to face any other problems. Hostility of nature was thus pronounced the most essential. Furthermore, hostility of self and of family were determined as independent on one another, as a child can struggle with problems of one hostility without it necessarily causing problems in the other. It became apparent that while these kinds of hostility are not mutually exclusive, they appear to be a prerequisite for hostility of society, which was only found in texts also presenting at least one of the previous two hostilities, but not vice versa. That is, not a single

of the selected texts depicted hostility of society towards a child who would not primarily deal with problems in their family or their own mind.

The study provided an insight into the way children's lives are portrayed in contemporary Scottish literary works written by women authors. The results suggest that most problems children have with society, from prejudice to more serious cases of criminal offenses, are connected with problems in family or their mental state.



## 7 Resumé

Diplomová práce se zabývá vyobrazení motivu dětského utrpení ve vybraných dílech současné skotské literatury v kontextu skotské historie a politiky, konkrétně v povídkách a románech autorek Kate Atkinsonové, A. L. Kennedyové a Jenni Faganové. Dále si klade za cíl prozkoumat jeho možné rozčlenění v rámci příčin vyobrazeného utrpení.

Před samotnou analýzou textů práce představuje vybrané autorky a rozebírá pozici skotské literatury v rámci britského kánonu, její historii provázanou s politikou Skotska a snahy o její vyčlenění. K tomuto osamostatnění dochází teprve od osmdesátých let a projí se s hnutím Skotské literární renesance. Za účelem pochopení rysů charakteristických pro současnou skotskou literaturu (experimentální stylistika, popisování každodennosti či snaha postav přežít další den) je také část teoretické sekce věnována otázce definování skotského charakteru a marginalizaci skotských autorek na základě pohlaví a národnosti. Díky výraznému nárůstu úspěchů skotských autorek v devadesátých letech se také stává častým téma ženské životní zkušenosti. Zároveň je stanoveno, že vybrané texty jsou ve své povaze gotickými povídkami s dětmi jakožto narativními prostředky a často mohou využívat také prvků pohádek, jako jsou například archetypy postav.

V praktické části diplomová práce analyzuje vybrané texty a potvrzuje opakující se motiv dětí čelících různým překážkám. Komparací textů práce zjišťuje, že tyto překážky jsou různé povahy od samotného boje o přežití až po boj s uznáním, načež byly tyto překážky rozděleny do skupin dle společných příčin. Diplomová práce nachází čtyři základní druhy nepřátelskosti prostředí způsobující dítěti potíže: nepřátelskost přírody, sebe sama, rodiny a společnosti.

Finální analýza výsledků kategorizace prokázala možnost provázanost těchto čtyř druhů nepřátelskosti, přičemž za základní je považována všudypřítomná nepřátelskost přírody zahrnující i samotný boj o přežití, na niž navazují ne nutně na sobě závislé nepřátelskosti rodiny a sebe sama, které tvoří druhý stupeň pomyslné pyramidy potíží. Analýza výsledků kategorizace zjistila, že třetí stupeň zastoupený nepřátelskostí společnosti je podmíněn alespoň jednou z předchozích dvou nepřátelskostí.

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## 9 Annotation

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**Number of pages:** 161  
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**Language:** English

### **Abstract:**

The thesis deals with the motif of childhood struggles depicted in selected literary works of contemporary Scottish women authors, namely Kate Atkinson, Jenni Fagan, and A. L. Kennedy. The aim is to map the described lives of Scottish children and the struggles of growing up in Scotland by analysing said texts and identifying depicted obstacles as well as their causes.

After contextualising the authors and their work, the selected texts are compared, and the obstacles are categorized based on their causes. The categories are subsequently divided into four sections according to the type of environment in which the child faces given struggles.

### **Key words:**

childhood struggles, Scottish literature, contemporary literature, Scottish Renaissance, women writers, literary analysis, categorization



## 10 Anotace

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**Katedra:** Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky  
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**Název práce:** Boj o přežití: vyobrazení dětství ve vybrané próze skotských autorek  
**Počet stran:** 161  
**Počet znaků:** 328 322  
**Jazyk práce:** angličtina

### **Abstrakt:**

Práce se zabývá motivem dětí potýkajících se s různými problémy ve vybraných dílech současné skotské literatury psané ženami, konkrétně Kate Atkinsonovou, Jenni Faganovou a A. L. Kennedyovou. Cílem je zmapovat popsané životy skotských dětí a problémy spojené s vyrůstáním ve Skotsku. Toho je dosaženo analýzou textů a následnou identifikací vyobrazených potíží a jejich příčin.

Po uvedení děl i autorek do kontextu skotské literatury jsou jejich vybraná díla komparována a nalezené potíže jsou kategorizovány dle typu jejich příčin. Následně jsou tyto kategorie rozděleny do čtyř sekcí na základě toho, ve které oblasti života se dítě s problémy potýká.

### **Klíčová slova:**

potíže v dětství, skotská literatura, současná literatura, Skotská renesance, autorky, literární analýza, kategorizace