“This is the way things are.”
Irony, Identity and Social Criticism in Janice Galloway’s *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*

Essi Vatilo
University of Tampere
School of Modern Languages
and Translation Studies
English Philology
Pro Gradu Thesis
Spring 2008

Tampereen Yliopisto
Englantilainen filologia
Kieli- ja käännöstieteiden laitos

Essi Vatilo: “This is the way things are.” Irony, Identity and Social Criticism in Janice Galloway’s *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*

Pro gradu -tutkielma, 94 sivua
Kevät 2008

Pro gradu -tutkielmani käsittelee ironiaa Janice Gallowayn teoksessa *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*. Tutkin minkälaista ironiaa teoksesta löytyy ja miten se suhteutuu yleiseen ironian teoriaan. Tämän lisäksi pohdin minkälaisia tavoitteita teoksen ironialla näyttää olevan ja minkälaisia viestejä se lähettää.

Lähtökohdaksi ironiaan otan kosmisen ironian, joka on suhteellisen marginaalinen alalaji ironiateoriassa vaikka sitäkin yleisempi kirjallisuudessa ja arkikielessä. Tällaista ironiaa havaitaan ihmisten aikeiden tai odotusten sekä elämän niille aiheuttamien mullistusten välisessä ristiriidassa. Sen sijaan, että kyse olisi sanotun ja ymmärretyn välisestä ristiriidasta, kosminen ironia pohjaa laajempiin kokonaisuuksiin ja vastakohdiksi asettuu tässä tapauksessa konteksti ja siinä tapahtuvat asiat tai siinä ilmenevät seikat. Toisena lähtökohtana ironiaan haastan siihen liitettävien affektien rajaamisen negatiivisiin asenteisiin ja vaikutteisiin. Etsin siis ironiaa, joka on osallistuvaa erottautuvan sijaan ja joka herättää ymmärrystä ja sympatiaa pilkan sijaan. Tämä näkökulma haastaa myös ironistin ylempiarvoisen aseman ja etääntymisen kohteestaan ja ironian perinteisen roolijaottelun.

Näistä lähtökohdista tutkin Gallowayn teoksen tematiikkaa ja yhteiskuntakritiikkiä sekä ironiaa kolmelta kannalta. Ensinnäkin pureudun etäisyyteen ja vieraannuttamiseen niin teemallisena kuin tekstuaalisena ilmiönä ja osoitan, että etäännyttäminen voi ilmetä läheisyyttä ja ymmärrystä rakentavana tekijänä. Toiseksi tarkastelen mielen ja kehon välistä ristiriitaa sekä ironian, satiirin ja huumorin välistä erottelua. Samalla kun teos kyseenalaistaa kartesiolaisen jaottelun, kyseenalaistuu myös ironian ja satiirin/huumorin välinen rajanveto, kun subjekti nähdään holistisempana kokonaisuutena. Kolmantena teemana käsittelen parodian ja toistamisen teorian pohjalta toistoa ja toisin toistamista ironian välineinä, sitä miten niitä voi käyttää stereotypioiden, institutionaalisten rakenteiden kritisointiin ja sitä miten toisto ilmenee arkipäivässä.

Näiden teemojen kautta rakennan käsitystä ironiasta merkitystasojen leikkikenttänä, josta ei ole löydettävissä yhtä ainoaa oikeaa tulkintaa, ironistin todellista intentiota, vaan jossa vastakohtaisetkin merkitykset ovat yhtä aikaa voimassa. Ironia syntyy juuri näiden merkitysten vastakkaisuuden ja yhtäaikaisen olemassaolon ristiriitaisuudesta. Samalla monet perinteisen ironiateorian jaottelut osoittautuvat liian rajoittuneiksi käsittelemään ironian koko kirjoa. Pyrin osoittamaan, että ironiaan voidaan liittää myös vahvasti positiivisia affekteja ja että perinteisen ironian määrittelemien työkalujen ja roolijaottelun rinnalle voidaan nostaa myös muita vaihtoehtoja ja silti voidaan puhua edelleen ironiasta.

Contents

1 Introduction

Janice Galloway published her first novel, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, in 1989. It won immediate critical acclaim[1] and was quickly adopted into the new Scottish literary canon. In an early review of the novel Robert Crawford even goes as far as to praise Galloway as "The Woman Novelist for Whom Scotland is Waiting."[2] The book has been hailed for its experimental style of writing, for the way it deals with feminist issues and how it addresses questions of Scottishness. In criticism these three aspects have received the most attention and they are seen as the novel's major themes. There is one more aspect which is often mentioned but rarely examined in full and it is on this aspect that this thesis proposes to focus. In Douglas Gifford's words "the novel is sometimes hilariously and embarrassingly funny, […] done with that mastery of comic horror found in few modern Scottish writers."[3] Although classified as a serious prose writer Galloway's novel has a strong sense of wit, comedy, irony, the absurd or dark humour – the label varies. The humour or irony of the novel balances its oppressive subject matter, but it is not there just for entertainment and easy laughs. On the contrary, it complements the more serious issues and much of Galloway's social criticism is conveyed through irony. It is precisely this combination of the serious and the comic, the balance between tragedy and humour that this thesis aims to look at. More specifically the purpose is to look at how these elements are related to the social criticism of the novel and how they clarify problems of identity?

The novel's subject matter is grave and even oppressive: the protagonist suffers from anorexia, bulimia and depression; her childhood was difficult with an abusive elder sister; her mother attempted suicide; she had a difficult relationship with a man and just as she found a

---

[1] *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* won the Scottish Arts Council Book Award and the Mind/Allan Lane Book Award and was shortlisted for the Whitbread First Novel Award and for Scottish First Book of the Year.
[2] Robert Crawford. Rev. of *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, by Janice Galloway. *Scottish Literary Journal* 33 (1990): 59-61, p. 60.
[3] *Scottish Literature in English and Scots.* Eds. Douglas Gifford, Sarah Dunnigan and Alan MacGillivray. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002, p. 939.

new love, he died; but to top it all off he was still married, so her grief has no place in society. And in addition to all her personal problems, forces beyond her control (society, culture and life in general) counter her efforts at every turn. Despite all these less than cheerful issues, Galloway writes with an unsuspected and poignant sense of humour, even the very name of the protagonist, Joy Stone, is not only self-contradictory but also ironic in view of all the tragedies Joy is faced with. The combination of tragic and comic explains why Gifford refers to the novel as "embarrassingly funny" or mentions "comic horror" – the reader feels uncomfortable finding such matters amusing. Galloway manages to bring humour into the most desperate situations without lessening their tragedy or seriousness in any way: if anything, the humour emphasises the tragedy. It brings the central issues into focus and at the same time it lightens the mood just enough so that "despair is kept at bay."[4]

The aim of this thesis is to look at the irony in the novel and ask why it is there and what it accomplishes. As irony is a thread that runs through the narrative, through Joy's anorexia, her obsessions about her body, her work and relationships all the way to the magazines she reads, this thesis will also touch on a number of these issues without confining itself to any one thematic aspect of the novel. The aim will be to form a more overall picture of Galloway's social criticism without restricting it solely to the situation of women or to Scottish mentality or to mental illness. Irony addresses all of these issues and at the same time it is irony that gives the novel a more general appeal: even if the story is set in a very particular environment and rooted in Scottish culture, this does not mean that it does not have meaning or significance outside that context. Thus, it is relevant, for example, to talk about how the novel is situated within the Scottish literary tradition, but the fact that it is strongly tied to it does not mean it is confined to it. Irony helps the novel overcome its specificity of location and aspect.

---

[4] Jennie Renton. "Janice Galloway" nls.uk. National Library of Scotland. <http://www.nls.uk/writestuff/galloway.html> Accessed March 2007

1.1 Duality and Irony in Scottish Literature

> Fuckin failures in a country ay failures. It's nae good blamin it oan the English for colonising us. Ah don't hate the English. They're just wankers. We are colonised by wankers. We can't even pick a decent, vibrant, healthy culture to be colonised by.[5]

The Trick is to Keep Breathing is distinctly Scottish in its setting, its use of language and grammar and its subject matter. In addition, Joy Stone, with her bag full of problems, is a typical Scottish protagonist, for, as Gavin Wallace argues, Scottish literary tradition holds a predilection for "the deranged, the desperate, the neurotic, the variously addicted" who are "rarely, if ever, fully in control of their existences, and morbidly aware of the fact."[6] Joy fits right in as the novel examines her attempts to regain control of her life (and body) and to come to terms with the traumatic experiences of her past. Wallace also highlights the fact that in Scottish literature these people are protagonists and narrators whereas in English literature they are usually only allowed a subsidiary role, an exception that proves the rule of normalcy. According to him, the troubled narrators exemplify Scotland's remarkable tradition of despair and feelings of inferiority and powerlessness.

The question of identity, or more to the point the question of a troubled identity, is at the heart of Scottish literature. A further peculiarity is the recurrence of dual, split or fractured personalities. They have been a persistent and frequent element of the nation's literary tradition since such early classics as James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of A Justified Sinner* (1824) and Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). Peter Kravitz sees Scottish literature as something of a precursor in writing about split personalities.[7] Douglas Gifford observes a trend in recent Scottish fiction that still uses the traditional dualisms but has transformed them to serve as parodic and intertextual

---

[5] Irvine Welsh. *Trainspotting*. 1993. London: Vintage, 2001, p. 78.
[6] Gavin Wallace. "Voices in Empty Houses: The Novel of Damaged Identity." *The Scottish Novel since the Seventies.* Eds. Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 217-8.
[7] Peter Kravitz. "As It Never Was." Introduction. *The Picador Book of Contemporary Scottish Literature.* Ed. Peter Kravitz. London: Picador, 1997. <http://www.galloway.1to1.org/Kravitz.html> Accessed January 2006.

references.[8] Peter Kravitz, on the other hand, thinks that in recent years the question of double identities has disappeared, or at least transformed more dramatically than Gifford's analysis would suggest. In the wake of Alasdair Gray's *Lanark* (1981) Scottish literature has witnessed a surge of new writing like it has not seen since the Scottish Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s.[9] In fact, very little was being published in the Scottish literary scene in the intervening years except anthologies and reprints of golden oldies, although both Glasgow and Edinburgh had a vibrant community of writers. The post-*Lanark* writers, according to Kravitz, have moved beyond the sense of doubleness, in the manner of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, that preoccupied so many of their predecessors.

Like Wallace, Kravitz sees this 'new renaissance' literature populated with protagonists who are damaged and struggling to survive or to recover, but in his opinion they are, nonetheless, whole personalities.[10] This would imply alienation from the values of society rather than themselves. There is a clear distinction between the kind of division that exists between Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and the type of identity crises modern protagonists of Scottish literature are faced with. In modern fiction their problems are more clearly articulated whereas before, the division was used metaphorically to express personal and national malaise. Joy's depression in *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, the drug addictions in Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* and Jennifer Wilson's lack of emotions in A. L. Kennedy's *So I Am Glad* are explored intimately in each novel, but to call them only symptoms of an alienation from the values of society would certainly be to oversimplify matters.

The modern protagonists are clearly not well nor in harmony with themselves. Wallace argues that modern novelists excel in "anatomising the introverted torments of self-inflicted

---

[8] Douglas Gifford. "Imagining Scotlands: The Return to Mythology in Modern Scottish Fiction." *Studies in Scottish Fiction: 1945 to the present*. Ed. Susanne Hagemann. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996, p. 36.
[9] The period is usually marked to begin with Gray's *Lanark*, but in fact James Kelman, the other lead figure of the new tradition, had already published collections of short stories in the USA, but these remained largely unnoticed in England and Scotland at the time.
[10] Kravitz.

silences"[11] as they search for a new way to define their Scottish identity. It might, therefore, be more accurate to say that the protagonists of recent literature are alienated both from the values of society and themselves. While they are better able to articulate their problems, they are far from being at peace with themselves. Furthermore, as Kravitz also points out, their attitude towards their country is often healthier than before.[12] For example, in *Trainspotting* Renton can openly berate and mock Scotland while still expressing a twisted sense of pride and belonging. The novelists have become increasingly confident in exploring issues of identity and nationalism more openly than before. They are finding new ways of articulating a modern Scottish identity (distinct from England) that they can be proud of and identify with. This trend is also reflected in criticism which, more often than not, measures Scottish fiction on the basis of its Scottishness.[13] There are problems in emphasising a cultural interpretation over others as Wallace too argues. Such a focus makes Margery Metzstein fear for the creation of "a misleading homogeneity" when a diverse collection of features are gathered unquestioned under the umbrella of Scottishness.[14]

Wallace suggests that the new preoccupation with identity and psychology is a way of breaking free of the restrictions of the past. According to him, it is a way to allow the protagonists to gain articulacy and self-esteem that they have failed to achieve in previous fiction.[15] Scotland's history as a stateless nation facing internal colonisation combined with strong Calvinism has left its mark on the Scottish mentality. Feelings of despair, guilt, anger and a sense of sin have characterised Scottish fiction as the protagonists struggle to survive and to deal with the restrictions imposed by the church and the government. Although the roots of these problems are far in the past, they are so ingrained that writers are still dealing

---

[11] Wallace, p. 218.
[12] Kravitz
[13] Wallace, p. 220.
[14] Margery Metzstein. "Of Myths and Men: Aspects of Gender in the Fiction of Janice Galloway." *The Scottish Novel since the Seventies.* Eds. Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p. 136.
[15] Wallace, p. 225.

with them. These are also feelings that *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* addresses, for example when Joy has to deal with the consequences of being a mistress, a title that comes with no rights in a conventional society. Wallace suggests that what releases Joy, at least in part, from the ghosts of the past is her own voice granting herself forgiveness. The future is still ambiguous, but the articulacy Joy gains at the end of the novel allows her to break free of "the silence of the solipsistic past."[16] The extreme focus on Joy's psychology through the mediation of even the smallest details of her life lets Galloway examine Joy's situation closely, but it also works as a textual device that gives Joy a voice even before she makes that voice her own.

Because problems of identity so typical in Scottish fiction have so often been approached through duality and fracture, Scottish literature is characterised by paradox and contradiction which also provide a fruitful basis for irony and humour. Incongruity is an essential part of both irony and humour and Scottish protagonists provide it both in their relation to society and within their fractured minds. Irony builds on contradictions between different levels of meaning and a fractured identity provides an abundance conflicting and competing facets while alienation provides irony with the necessary distance from its subject.

It is no wonder then that in addition to dualism and fragmentation, irony, too, is well established in the history of Scottish fiction as Gifford explains. He suggests that the failure to "sustain […] convincing serious projections of Scottish heroic identity"[17] and the very nature of Scottish society, the small social circles of a small country, inevitably led to ironic modes of expression in the 19th century. He lists two basic ways in which ambiguity and irony functioned in the "fiction of Scottish social degeneration" of the period: firstly as a parody of the insipid hero and secondly as "the contrast of two sets of cultural values, embodied in the confrontations of a traditional with a modern alienated protagonist, the two entangled in

[16] Wallace, p. 224.
[17] Douglas Gifford. "Myth, parody and dissociation: Scottish Fiction 1814–1914." *The History of Scottish Literature. Vol 3.* Ed. Douglas Gifford. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988, p. 236.

positions of mutual moral and social destruction."[18] The latter of these is in some ways still applicable to *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*. Joy's modern values are juxtaposed with a conventional society. In her struggle with herself and with society Joy comes close to destroying herself, but in some small way she also tries to change the society she sees so hostile to her. The irony in the novel is largely dependent on the contradiction between Joy and society and their incompatible values.

To sum up, ambiguity and irony are long-standing elements of Scottish fiction that have gone hand in hand with the Scottish exploration of the psyche. The ambiguous and alienated protagonists have created the basis for irony and ironic treatment has created distanced and self-contradictory protagonists. None of these preoccupations (alienation, contradiction or irony) are of course restricted to Scotland, but their frequency and combination have made them typical features in Scottish literature.

1.2 Cosmic Irony with a Twist of Sympathy

> A traffic jam when you're already late
> A no-smoking sign on your cigarette break
> It's like ten thousand spoons when all you need is a knife
> It's meeting the man of my dreams
> And then meeting his beautiful wife
> And isn't it ironic... don't you think[19]

The examples of irony in Alanis Morissette's song "Ironic" defy most definitions of irony. An example like: "It's a death row pardon two minutes too late" has nothing to do with the rhetorical device called irony whose different aspects and linguistic undertones have been studied since Socrates. The type of irony Morissette sings about has no ironist whose words imply other than what they say and hence there is no contrast between literal and implied meaning in the strict sense. Rather, the irony can be located in human efforts being thwarted by the greater scheme of life and the ironic double entendre is derived from the contrast

[18] Ibid, p. 240.
[19] Alanis Morissette. "Ironic" *Jagged Little Pill*. Maverick, 1995.

between human expectation of what should happen or would be desirable to happen and the way in which human plans are foiled by forces beyond our control.

In critical writing this kind of irony goes by many names: cosmic, dramatic or tragic irony; observable or situational irony; the irony of events, etc. It is often mentioned, but quickly passed over as not being sufficiently literary, although it is by no means non-existent in literary texts where it is even referred to as irony.[20] Claire Colebrook, for example, briefly lists two broad uses of irony in everyday contexts. The first she describes as being "relate[d] to cosmic irony and ha[ving] little to do with the play of language or figural speech"[21] which seem to be the prerequisites for irony of a literary quality. The other use revolves around dramatic irony where the audience knows what will happen to the character who is at the mercy of the plot or destiny.[22] This first type in her division bears resemblance to the irony Morissette sings about and is, therefore, the relevant one here. In Colebrook's definition it is an irony of existence or of situation which "refers to the limits of human meaning; we do not see the effects of what we do, the outcomes of our actions, or the forces that exceed our choices."[23]

D. C. Muecke also describes a similar type of irony that has no speaking ironist and therefore no underlying intended meaning as opposed to a literal meaning, but he reasons that "the name irony" was linked to this observable irony, or to situations like the ones in Morissette's song, through the personification of a supernatural agency such as Fate, Life or Fortune.[24] Although he does admit that we generally perceive irony in the robber being robbed, his wording makes it sound as though this kind of irony has acquired the status of irony through faulty attribution. Whether this is so or not, the term irony is well established in

---

[20] For example, Thomas Hardy's collection of short stories called *Life's Little Ironies* (1894) revolves around precisely this kind of irony.
[21] Claire Colebrook. *Irony*. London: Routledge, 2004, p. 13.
[22] Ibid, p. 14.
[23] Ibid.
[24] D. C. Muecke. *Irony and the Ironic*. 2nd ed. London: Methuen, 1982, p. 36.

contexts like these, at least in everyday speech. In opposition to Muecke's view of irony expanding its field beyond its definition, Candace Lang suggests that what we should in fact wonder is not how the trope came to be extended but rather how it became restricted to mean only a very specific rhetorical device.[25]

Colebrook distinguishes the everyday ironies from literal ironies in that instead of exhibiting a contradiction between literal meaning and implied meaning, like literary irony should, "[d]ramatic, cosmic and tragic irony are ways of thinking about the relation between human intent and contrary outcomes."[26] The way we understand the world and our lives, is thwarted by some power or meaning that is beyond our control, and the irony of situation is derived from the contrast. Colebrook sees that this type of irony still holds a meaning beyond intention, but rather than being implied by the ironist, the other meaning is provided by life or fate. The common denominator between literary and everyday irony is the existence of different levels of meaning.

In *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* there is no clear ironist whose words can be searched for implied meanings. Instead, the irony is born from the combination of events and situations, in the joining of incompatible elements such as the patient feeling guilty for failing the doctor in not getting better. The first person narration makes it more difficult to locate the ironist according to the traditional way of analysing the participants of irony: Joy is not the ironist although she is the only one whose voice appears in the novel. Galloway is the ironist, but the matter is complicated by the fact that she does not speak with her own voice, but through Joy's. She does not treat Joy ironically or set herself apart and above her, but rather reveals the irony of Joy's life. Consequently, what produces the irony of the novel, is the contrast between Joy's efforts and the many ways in which they are thwarted. Galloway presents a world of cosmic irony and is, therefore, responsible for the ironic contradictions

[25] Candace Lang. *Irony/Humour: Critical Paradigms*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988, p. 138.
[26] Colebrook, p. 15.

that are present in the novel. However, this does not in any way mean that the interpretation of the text should be limited what she may have intended, only that she is the source for the material in which irony can be observed, some of it intentional and some of it unintentional. In short, she is the ironist, but as such she defies most critical definitions of the role.

The second aspect of the novel's irony I want to examine has to do with affect. Traditionally the ironist has been seen as laughing from a superior and distanced position at the misfortunes of others. She observes others without being involved in their fall, whereas the irony in Galloway's novel seems to be very much involved in both the life and fate of the protagonist as well as in the society which she inhabits. Galloway treats Joy with tenderness and although there is a strong social criticism, there is also a sense of belonging to and an understanding of the criticised society. But how does this attitude fit in with the theory of irony that has, for the most part, only attributed irony with negative undertones from mocking to contempt and even aggression?

Linda Hutcheon approaches irony particularly from the point of view of its affective charges. For her the essential aspect of irony is that it "involves the attribution of an evaluative, even judgemental attitude,"[27] and therefore, causes emotional reactions of differing degrees. She refers to the massive tradition of seeing irony as disapproving, judgemental, derogatory, derisive, disparaging etc, but what is refreshing about her is her wish to expand the spectrum to allow room for a wider range of affects. Unfortunately, Hutcheon's reform, one that is long overdue, falls short of its potential. Though she criticises the narrow scope of negative attitudes attached to irony, she, too, limits the emotional involvement to range "from cool detachment to engaged hostility", but not to more positive feelings. She does admit that "*[o]nce in a while* commentators speak of the ironic attitude as one of

[27] Linda Hutcheon. *Irony's Edge*. New York, Routledge, 1994, p. 37.

sympathy and toleration," but clearly she disagrees and undermines the claim with the excuse that "the ironist and interpreter are part of a relatively homogenous discursive community."[28]

Hutcheon's diagram of the functions of irony allows a wider range of more positive interpretations. The model of irony's affective charges extends from the minimal affective charge to the maximal with each level containing both a positive and a negative evaluation of the function.[29] The recognition of irony's possible positive affective charges is a welcome change from most theorists of irony, but the diagram is not without its problems. First of all, the positive side of Hutcheon's continuum describes, for the most part, a distanced and intellectual function (e. g. offering a new perspective, demystifying, precise) rather than an emotional attitude or effect, a few of which can be found on the negative side (e. g. insulting and arrogant). Also, there are only two charges that imply any positive emotional bond between the ironist and the interpreter: the ludic (humorous, playful, teasing) and the aggregative (inclusionary, "amiable communities") charges.

On the whole, Hutcheon's scale strangely combines the type of functions (e. g. transgressive) irony can have and the kind of attitudes (e. g. indifferent) the ironist can adopt. It is also curious that she lists satiric as a positive function considering how wide the scale of satire's effects is. Although she admits that satiric and corrective irony have "a very wide tonal range […] from playfully teasing to the scornful and disdainful,"[30] she still lists it as a positive interpretation of the assailing function. Her approach to irony is centred on the interpreter, for her it is the interpreter who "makes irony happen", and yet she seems to overlook the fact that satiric and corrective irony can have a very negative effect on the interpreter. And so, considering the mismatch categorisations, it remains unclear what these functions and their suggested interpretations are supposed to express: the ways in which irony is used, the situations it occurs in or the way it is received?

[28] Ibid, p. 40, my emphasis.
[29] Ibid, p. 47.
[30] Ibid, p. 53.

Hutcheon's arguments deal with the relationship between the ironist and the interpreter with special focus on the interpreter's understanding of the irony. Although she does not want to speak about the ironist's intention, she cannot escape the question either. It still hovers in the background as a force that can be either understood or misinterpreted, whether she wants to acknowledge it or not. It is difficult, if not impossible, to avoid authorial intention when speaking about irony, and perhaps it is unnecessary to avoid it. What happens with cosmic irony where there is no ironist, but merely incongruity between elements? Does cosmic irony have similar affective charges as literary irony? Is there an attitude and if so is it in the interpreter, the ironist, or in the irony itself? *The Trick* contains cosmic irony and therefore, there is no ironist in the world of the narrative. However, as long as we are concerned with the cosmic irony within a work of fiction, there is always the author who articulates particular aspects of the world she creates in particular ways in order to create the irony. In this particular case the author does not comment on any of the events directly, but this does not diminish her influence over the events in any way, it only makes her appear like an invisible force behind the text rather than one that constantly has to remind the reader of her presence.

The separation of ironist, irony and interpreter may be a very artificial notion, but it is worth considering. Hutcheon believes the interpreter is ultimately "the one who decides whether the utterance is ironic (or not), and then what *particular* ironic meaning it might have."[31] One instance of irony can have differing effects and interpretations that do not necessarily correspond to what the ironist intended, if in fact anything was intended at all. In the cosmic irony that can be perceived in everyday life the lack of an ironist places the focus even more on the interpreter unless one wants to attribute irony itself with intention or attitude. On the other hand, when dealing with the cosmic irony of a literary text there is always the author who creates the conditions for the irony. It is, therefore, my opinion that in

[31] Ibid, p. 11, emphasis in the original.

both literary and cosmic irony there is something prior to the interpretation and though interpretations vary according to the interpreter and his connection to the irony or to the subject of irony, the interpretation is never completely free of the ironic situation or the utterance. In a similar vein Lang argues that a humorous text "organizes a number of linguistic elements into systems offering a variety of potential meanings to be actualized by the reader."[32] And those elements are inevitably organised by the author whose presence cannot be completely ignored. And so, it would seem to me that the production of irony requires the presence of more than one actant or element in order to exist.

The last aspect of irony to be addressed here is irony's supposed detachment and lack of involvement. Traditionally the ironist is said to hold a distanced position of emotional detachment towards her subject. Muecke claims that the ironist is free and uninvolved, whereas in contrast, the object of irony is trapped by his circumstances and because he is overwhelmed by his emotions, he is incapable of examining the situation with the cool objectivity of the ironist.[33] In other words, the ironist steps away from her object and observes him from a distance. The same applies to cosmic irony where the subject whose efforts are being thwarted, is unable to perceive the bigger picture, whereas the observer can do so from a distance. The distance in attitude is reflected in the gap between literal and implied meaning (or between human efforts and the greater scheme of life): the ironist steps away from the literal meaning, the interpreter sees that the literal interpretation is impossible and so concludes that another meaning must be implied.

Romantic irony refuses this idea of non-contradiction, which stipulates that a thing cannot be and not be at the same time: either it is snowing or it is not, but not both at the same time.[34] As a result, Colebrook explains that it is possible to claim both views at once and that this is

[32] Lang, p. 6. Lang uses the term humour when irony is used not as a rhetorical device but more as a philosophical attitude that defies easy and clear-cut interpretations.
[33] Muecke, p. 48.
[34] Colebrook, p. 55.

exactly what irony is.[35] Instead of being mere opposition, irony says one thing and at the same time allows for its contrary to be true as well. This liberates irony from being simple contradiction and allows multiple interpretations: the literal meaning may be true, its contrary may be true and the interpretation may contain a multitude of greys instead of a black and white opposition. But what happens to the distanced ironist, if both the literal and ironic meaning exist alongside one another? In a black and white opposition the ironist stands away from the literal meaning of his words but takes his place with the implied meaning. If there is truth in both stances, both valid at the same time, what is the ironist distanced from?

One explanation is that the ironist is distanced from clear and set meanings. She is distanced from any single interpretation of the irony rather than from the subject or object of the irony. With such an approach a closer affinity between the ironist and her subject becomes possible and, as a result, the ironist's position of superiority is revealed to be only one option among many. Galloway's narrative sympathises equally with good-hearted Ellen's efforts to make Joy feel better by feeding her and with the price Joy pays in letting her. There is an absurdity in both their behaviour, but there is also an affectionate understanding of them both. Such contradictions where there is something humane and identifiable on both sides of the coin, reveal the complexity of life where simple either/or interpretations are not satisfying.

In this thesis I will explore irony, not as a rhetorical tool, but as life's ability to upturn human efforts and expectations. I am in search of an irony that contains a good measure of sympathy and understanding while at the same time being critical of the various phenomena it explores. It challenges traditional views of irony's distance and detachment and does not offer fixed solutions or ready answers to the problems it presents. Instead it opens up possibilities of interpretation. It is a place where the literal and implied meanings coexist, as do irony's detachment and a close involvement between the ironist and her subject.

---

[35] Ibid, p. 56.

1.3 Unreliable Narrator?

> You have to be suspicious of everything.[36]

The Trick is to Keep Breathing is a first person, present tense narrative where the reader is only allowed to view the world through Joy's eyes and Joy's mind. The singular viewpoint raises the question of reliability while at the same time it also creates a strong intimacy with the protagonist. The text invites the reader to identify with the protagonist while presenting a biased and one-sided view of the opposing world. Joy's voice is the only one present, however the words and events are carefully chosen and presented in a manner that reveals she is editing something out. It is as if she was giving a guided tour of her own life, while being careful of what kind of an impression she gives of herself. So the question is: How far can the reader trust her to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

The narrative is heavily influenced by Joy's depression. On the one hand, Joy's judgement of events is hampered by the illness, and on the other, the focus on details caused by the depression provides acute observations. Especially in her evaluation of other people she is often completely baffled by their behaviour, but she is able to recount their words and actions in detail, even if is unable to give meaning to them. The reader understands more from reading in between the lines, but the interpretation is necessarily coloured by the lack of other points-of-view and the lack of access to other characters.

Joy's seemingly objective descriptions are far from it. It is obvious that the Health Visitor, the doctors, her boyfriends etc. often act in ways that are, in one way or another, questionable, but it is unclear whether the bleak picture Joy provides the reader with is very accurate either. Tony, for example, is depicted as a married sleazebag who smooth-talks his way into bed with other women and who takes advantage of Joy's vulnerability. Without a doubt his actions are morally dubious, at the very least, and some critics even accuse him of

---

[36] Janice Galloway. *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*. 1989. Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1994, p. 103

rape,[37] although the scene is ambiguous in this respect. A more charitable view sees his attentions as an attempt to make a sad woman feel better for a little while and in this case what he does is not that different from what David does, except for the fact that David and Joy are friends while Joy and Tony are not. This does not of course excuse Tony's actions, it is only to demonstrate that we only have Joy's biased description of who he is.

Joy's evaluation of herself is no less influenced by her depression. She is trying so hard to keep her grip on reality that it is impossible for her to consider her condition too closely or even to admit to herself how unwell she is. For example, she never mentions anorexia or bulimia, but instead makes the fact that she does not need to eat sound like a rational conclusion. On one occasion she confesses to "throw[ing] up silently for ten minutes", but only calls it an "emergency measure" and every girl has those (87). The reader is better able to read between the lines what Joy does not want to admit to herself.

Joy's best efforts of making the right impression to all included fills the narrative with near-truths and evasive movements that, on the one hand, make the protagonist's reliability susceptible and on the other reveal, rather than hide, far more to the reader than Joy intended. The reader is in the privileged position of being able to infer more than Joy even though he must at all times remain suspicious of what might be lurking behind the carefully chosen words. The narrative provides the ingredients from which the reader is able to see a wider perspective not available to Joy. She is too confined by her illness to see her life in the larger frame of things, and therefore, she is only able to give little in the way of meaning or value to the things she describes. As a result the gap between what is presented and what can be deciphered from the presented, provides the basis for an ironic interpretation of the text.

[37] For example: Mary McGlynn. "Janice Galloway." *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 21.2 (2001): 7–40, p. 23.

2 Intimacy through Alienation

The ironic point-of-view is one of detachment and distance. The ironist may "conceal[…] himself behind evasive, non-committal, self-depreciative masks,"[1] she hides her true meaning and can thus seem elusive and uninvolved. But what is she distanced from? Claire Colebrook suggests that to be ironic is to be "capable of maintaining a distance from any single definition or context."[2] In this case the ironist does not take distance or separate herself from the object of irony, but rather questions accustomed interpretations. She may put on an air of indifference, but it is mere pretence in order to focus attention on the topic. Cosmic irony, too, centres on the two levels of meaning and simple interpretations can be elusive. The contrast between human expectations and how life turns out creates a distance between what seems to be and what is, which makes the audience examine their assumptions. The distance is necessary in order to provide a larger perspective, but at the same time it lures the audience closer to the topic at hand. In *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* the reader needs to step away from Joy's frustration in order to fully appreciate the irony of the situation which in turn provokes sympathy for Joy and makes the reader identify with her.

D. C. Muecke warns that open irony and its ambiguity of interpretation may lead to a "galloping relativism,"[3] but this fear comes from his view of irony as a rhetorical device to be interpreted conclusively. Richard Rorty sees that this attitude comes from the division in the field of irony between, what he calls, metaphysicians and ironists and from their attitudes towards one another. In his division the metaphysicians are of the opinion that irony points to some ultimate truth whereas ironists see the truth as forever being in a state of flux which leads the metaphysicians to see the ironist's view as relativistic and unsatisfactory.[4] As much as the metaphysician may fear the uncertainty of the ironist's point of view, detachment from

[1] Muecke, p. 35.
[2] Colebrook, p. 3.
[3] Muecke, p. 50.
[4] Richard Rorty. *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 75.

accustomed meanings does not necessarily open endless possibilities of interpretation or cause arguments to fall hopelessly apart.

Socrates has been adopted as a champion for both strands of irony criticism, as someone who uses language as a rhetorical device to get to the bottom of things and also as someone who questions the meaning of concepts while his own standpoint remains elusive. Even if the second Socrates may appear relativistic because of his reluctance to provide answers, Colebrook suggests that, at the same time, he still insists that words and concepts must *mean* something and that the speaker should commit to that meaning.[5] This does not, however, mean that there is an ultimate truth to be discovered. While Socrates does not offer an alternative view, neither does his irony encourage a complete freedom of interpretation because his insistence on the commitment to one's words entails well-grounded opinions. The contrast between the said and the implied points out how important it is that we mean what we say and know the meaning of the concepts and ideas we use.

Colebrook argues that Socrates' irony reveals that when a concept is used as a mere rhetorical strategy the moral coherence and force attributed to the concept become undermined.[6] By revealing the rupture between what a concept is presumed to mean and how it is used, Socrates draws attention to "how the concept is misused or corrupted *and* what the concept seems required to mean."[7] Not only does Socrates take distance to the meaning of the concept under discussion but makes his interlocutors stand back from their own words. And so, while Socrates' irony may be distanced from the literal meaning, it also advocates a deeper commitment to any words spoken. He puts on a mask of ignorance in order to make his interlocutors become aware of how habit has led them to use a concept in ways that have caused the concept to lost the meaning they thought it had.

---

[5] Colebrook, p. 26.
[6] Ibid, p. 27.
[7] Ibid, p. 29. Emphasis in the original.

Instead of using irony as merely a rhetorical tool, Socrates' irony also has an ethical quality. Colebrook argues that by suggesting another moral meaning, rather than just implying the opposite, Socrates questions the meaning of concepts without imposing a contradictory view on the interlocutor, thus guiding the conversation towards reasoned definitions rather than received ones.[8] The opinion of the interlocutor is examined closely for all its meanings and nuances while Socrates leaves his own standpoint blank, which allows him to work with the ideas of his interlocutors in order to bring them to a realisation that their knowledge is not as uncomplicated as they thought. His irony puts conventional uses of language under the microscope and reveals that interpretations are never simple or unambiguous.

Janice Galloway's irony works in similar ways, only her emphasis is on conventions and on the contrast between how these are used and what they ought to signify rather than on concepts and ideas. She, too, insists on commitment to actions: instead of acting out of habit there ought to be a genuine intention, although even these tend to misfire in *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*. Nonetheless, the implication is that conventions do not live up to what they are supposed to and Galloway uses irony to show that rupture. Either intention and action do not go hand in hand (as when the doctors just go through the forms without commitment to what they do) or when they do, they still do not achieve the expected goal (as when Ellen's genuine attempt to help makes Joy feel worse). Socrates works with the thoughts of his interlocutors, whereas Galloway examines people's actions. The rupture between people's intentions and the effect of their words and actions invites the reader to consider what conventions are for, how they should work and what they ought to mean.

The detachment in *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* works on several levels. The narrative devices reflect Joy's illness and alienation from the world and provide space for the reader to see the rupture between what is and what seems to be. Joy is alienated from herself, from the

[8] Ibid, p. 28.

people around her and from the conventions of the world she inhabits, but despite, or perhaps because of, her situation in the world, she searches for meanings that are not so elusive and questions conventions that are repeated out of mere habit. The questions to ask are: How does the novel take advantage of irony's detachment? In what ways and on what levels does detachment or alienation appear? How does the novel express and advocate commitment?

2.1 Alienation in the Narrative

> The floor is littered with messages I can't read.
> There is no armour against the arbitrariness of things.[9]

Joy Stone is trapped in a world she cannot understand. She has lost the confidence in her own interpretation of cultural and social signs and is, therefore, left to struggle with discourses that have become alien to her. Cairns Craig suggests that for her "[t]he world has become a place where meanings […] and their causes have become separated" and she no longer has the tools to interpret it.[10] This results in the fact that, as Aileen Christianson points out, the language of the novel "disguises the truth as often as it expresses it,"[11] but what she does not notice is that often the disguise reveals far more than what is presented up-front. Still, as Craig argues, the reader faces the same problem as Joy in how to interpret a text/world when one does not have the key to decode it. He goes on to say that Joy "is trapped by the […] textual forms which she inhabits" and so becomes someone "who is being written into a series of roles by the texts by which she is surrounded."[12] In other words, the novel's narrative strategies become a metaphor for Joy's condition thus providing the reader with clues on how to interpret it.

The novel's layout looks unconventional as text spills into the margins, sentences are cut off in mid-flow and various handwritten notes, speech bubbles and lists make up a part of the

---

[9] Galloway, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, p. 77.
[10] Cairns Craig. *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh, 1999, p. 194.
[11] Aileen Christianson. "Lies, Notable Silences and Plastering the Cracks: The Fiction of A.L. Kennedy and Janice Galloway." *Gender and Scottish Society: Polities, Policies and Participation.* Ed. Alexandra Howson. Edinburgh: U. S. G. S., 1998, p. 137.
[12] Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel*, p. 193.

narrative.[13] These typographic devices contribute to the mood and tone of the narrative and become an essential ingredient of the story. They indicate when Joy is feeling vulnerable, threatened or about to fall to pieces. For example, the monotony of hospital life becomes apparent through the following list:

Notebook	Magazines	Needles	Wool	Notebook
Magazines	Needles	Wool	Notebook	Magazines
Needles	Wool	Notebook	Magazines	Needles
Wool	Notebook	Magazines	Needles	Wool

Spot the odd one out. (140)

The grid of repeated activities reflects the dull rhythm of the hospital and the ironic contradiction in the invitation to spot the odd one out emphasises the mood further as there is no disruption in the rhythm. The same activities are repeated according to the same pattern over and over again. Here the repetition of words and their setting on the page express the mood, not the actual meaning of the words. This is both tragic and ironic at the same time as Joy's inability to express what is wrong with her only allows her to talk about the little things around her that in the end express far more than their simple existence would suggest.

In a world whose meaning she cannot understand Joy clings to the concrete, tangible objects, and so her story is filled with lists and details such as the grid above. These details, insignificant by themselves, collect a deeper meaning through their sequence, combination and occurrence in context. The tiredness and melancholy Joy feels as she tries to persuade herself to get up and go to bed are mediated by the description of how each muscle tightens and clenches, how the weight shifts and how balance is adjusted, while the emotions themselves are never mentioned. This creates a distance between the act and the meaning of the act, the first of which is described and the second only implied. In other words, the focus on the material world creates a distance from the psychological one even if the first does express the latter.

[13] The layout varies between editions and Janice Galloway has commented that none of the editions turned out exactly the way they were supposed to, but that the American edition comes the closest to what she had in mind. Isobel Murray, ed. *Scottish Writers Talking 3*. Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 2006, p. 23.

The distance grows even greater as the material and psychological worlds start to blend together in unsuspected ways. Inanimate objects seem to be able to move out of their own volition, and Joy needs to be wary of "the carpet as it tries to nudge through the soles" (8). Inanimate objects can also be seen to be the source of human action, so that a phone conversation is not with another person, but with the phone itself. Such paradoxes challenge common sense and the natural order of things and momentarily make familiar things and phenomena seem strange, thereby distancing the reader from them. They reflect the arbitrariness and unpredictability of Joy's world and, as Craig puts it, this puts both the reader and Joy in the position of 'The Fool' in the face of "arbitrary forms which have nothing to do with the actualities of the world."[14]

However, it is precisely the disconnection between the different levels of meaning that puts detachment off balance and calls for a closer understanding of the matters at hand. The very fact that Joy does not describe her sorrow and depression, but shows how they affect her life, makes them more tangible. Even though the narrative contains a distanced aspect in that objects and actions are merely presented but not connected explicitly, thus leaving the meaning hovering in the background, the text simultaneously creates intimacy by making the reader play the part of the detective in connecting the dots. The text lures the reader to participate and thereby refuses her a detached position in regard to Joy's life and the social criticism implied by the text. Or in Glenda Norquay's words, Galloway writes in a way that "does not alienate or exclude readers but nevertheless 'activates' them: making us move and play in the spaces she has created."[15]

The novel opens with Joy sitting at home watching the room in the dim light of evening. The furniture reminds her of sunken ships and she compares the pattern on the carpet to

---

[14] Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel*, p. 194.
[15] Glenda Norquay. "The Fiction of Janice Galloway: 'Weaving a Route Through Chaos.'" *Space and Place: The Geographies of Literature.* Eds. Glenda Norquay and Gerry Smith. Liverpool: Liverpool John Moores University Press, 1997, p. 329.

seaweed. There is a patch of "[l]iquid black" sucking at the soles of her shoes as she sits in the strange glow of the streetlights. While these images describe the setting, their desolation, the threatening, dark waters and the references to shipwreck also set the tone for the scene and become metaphors to what is going on inside Joy's head: the dark waters of depression are threatening to pull her under. The fact that Michael drowned makes the watery imagery all the more significant. Joy does not need to, nor could she, describe what she is feeling, instead it becomes apparent through the mediation of the setting. The focus on external details told from a distanced position "from the corner of the room" (7) creates a detached tone, but it is the very detachment of the scene that best indicates Joy's inability to address her emotions which in turn shows the depth of her sorrow and evokes sympathy for her.

The seemingly insignificant surface level does not remain so because it is implicitly connected to larger issues. Because the first level is described and the latter only hinted at, a distance forms in regard to the latter. However, the two aspects are not arranged into oppositional positions, but rather exist alongside and complement one another. Gilles Deleuze talks about humour as a place where meanings are no longer opposed between right and wrong, but where sense and nonsense "enter into the co-presence of a static genesis – as the nonsense of the surface and the sense which hovers over it."[16] Similarly, the mere description of setting and its implication to Joy's mental state are not opposed, but instead co-exist and interact with each other seamlessly. Instead of focusing on deciphering the 'correct' meaning, Deleuze argues that paradox is "the affirmation of both senses or directions at the same time."[17] In this context, this means that the narrative can simultaneously convey both a feeling of detachment and attachment to Joy's state of mind and that the details in Joy's story can exist both for their mundane meaning and as an indication of larger matters.

---

[16] Gilles Deleuze. *The Logic of Sense*. Trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, ed. C. V. Boundas. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990, p. 141. In Deleuze's vocabulary humour is opposed to irony as a rhetorical device.
[17] Ibid, p. 1.

The focus on the material world is Joy's desperate attempt to make sense of her surroundings, while at the same time she is in danger of being overwhelmed by the details. Margery Metzstein claims that the focus on details "becomes a thing-in-itself for the reader"[18] and thus distracts him away from more important issues. However, in my opinion, the novel should not be blamed for putting the details at the foreground nor should the details and the larger issues be considered mutually exclusive. Details invite the reader to look beyond the surface and so the larger issues are accessed through them. Therefore, it is as it should be that the details occupy a central role in the mind of the reader. It is both necessary to concentrate on the details, but also to see beyond them, and to keep both aspects in mind simultaneously, even if it is a double-edged sword: the details both help and hamper both the reader and Joy.

A similar co-existence of seemingly incompatible aspects can be seen in the discourses within which Joy is trapped. As Cairns Craig says, they "are both her defence against the world and the cause of her illness, the medium of her survival and the imposition that thrusts any real self-expression out of the body."[19] Joy is constantly engaged to take part in discourses she cannot fully decipher and she feels doubly frustrated by them because wihtout being told the rules of the game she is still expected to know how to play. On the other hand, Joy too consciously uses familiar discourses to her own ends, mostly to prompt other people to behave in the way she wants them to. But, whether the discourses are forced on her or she chooses them willingly, they always have the double effect that Craig describes. The simultaneous existence of both aspects and the inherent contradiction of such a combination reveals the irony of the discourses and separates them from their accustomed meanings.

The bathing ritual, for example, contains a surprising combination of discourses. It is described as Joy prepares for a 'romantic' evening, but instead of conveying exited anticipation the attention centres on an odd mixture of physical pain, calculation and even

[18] Metzstein, p. 139.
[19] Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel*, p. 193.

grotesqueness. The bathwater must be scalding hot so it makes the flesh raw, the mirror cuts off the head and Joy dries herself so ferociously it hurts. The ritual becomes a method of self-punishment. After putting her body through the torment Joy puts on her armour, that is, her makeup. She masks herself to look inviting for the man: "I have to tint my face because I am pale in cold weather, powder blue. This is unappetising and nothing to kiss" (47). She does not use red lipstick because "red is too vivid and leaves marks, so may make him cautious" (48). Joy's analytical approach to the process seems completely out of place in the context.

Christie Leigh March claims that this ritual of getting prepared indicates Joy's submission to social pressures and to male culture's view of women as sexual objects.[20] It is true that Joy dresses herself according to what she thinks the man expects, and therefore, she may be seen confined to a prescribed role that eliminates self-expression, but this is an easy and rather limited interpretation. I would argue instead that Joy turns herself into somebody else. Once she is finished she "smile[s] at the woman in the mirror." She refers to her reflection in the third person and only criticises it for looking too much like her. Instead of succumbing, Joy uses the convention to her own ends, and so, it becomes a medium of her survival rather than an imposition. She thinks of David's opinion only in order to find the triggers that will make him play his part, but ultimately the preparations are an effort to hide the self and to shield the emotions. The make-up is both a mask and an armour. She does not feel required "to look sexually desirable despite her emotional emptiness"[21] as March claims, but in fact hides her emotional emptiness *under* the role of a sexual object. As the purpose of the evening is simply to have some physical intimacy without involving emotions with it, Joy chooses to take on the role in order to do what she wants, i.e. to have sex with David.

While Joy hides and protects her emotions in an avalanche of details, she also uses openness as a shield against intimacy. Whereas the disparity between context and details

[20] Christie Leigh March. *Rewriting Scotland*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002, p. 123.
[21] Ibid.

provides insight into Joy's mind, direct statements of her feelings and opinions, by contrast, create a distance to her thoughts. When Joy says something like "I've been afraid of Myra ever since I can remember" (59), she expresses her fear explicitly but leaves no room for vulnerability and instead tries to convey an impression of being in control of the emotion. Isolated in its surrounding, the remark sounds objective and disengaged, as if she was talking about someone else. It does not express the feeling of fear, only the knowledge of fear, and hence it contributes to the detached tone of the narrative. The statement is a protective wall that conceals the deeper scars within and keeps the reader at an arm's length. However, the carefully built façade keeps cracking under pressure, thereby showing what lurks beneath.

The neutral sounding description of Joy's fear arouses suspicion in view that it seems unlikely for child abuse to be written off so easily, especially by the victim. Therefore, the distance Joy tries to create turns back on her and the contrast between tone and context undermines her position of control over her emotions. This theory is reinforced when Joy describes Myra further: "Hands like shovels. Myra left marks. None of them show" (59). The sequence and successiveness of the sentences not only expresses that Myra used to hit Joy, but also the fact that though the physical bruises may fade, the mental ones last far longer. The shovel-like hands create a vivid mental impression – one that is much more frightening than a direct statement to the same effect – of a small child being beaten with hands the size of her head. The simile of Myra's hands collects extra meaning and significance and becomes a synecdoche for child abuse. Here immediacy follows from implication rather than from the direct comment.

The novel fluctuates between intimacy and detachment both of which can be the result of either directness or implication. In this light, irony's traditional formula of detachment and a sense of superiority caused by implication does not appear to hold water as a comprehensive model for irony. Paul de Man suggests that in irony "[s]uperiority and inferiority […] become

merely spatial metaphors to indicate a discontinuity and a plurality of levels within a subject that comes to know itself by an increasing differentiation from what is not."[22] In the same train of thought, I suggest that irony does not depend on the presence of either detachment or superiority, but that these can be used as tools to indicate the plurality of levels which creates irony, and although these particular tools recur frequently in instances that are recognised as irony, it does not mean that they are the only tools to achieve that goal.

The Trick is to Keep Breathing uses various tools to achieve the discontinuity and plurality of levels. What is crucial, therefore, is that the relation between tone and content, or the distance between levels, is not constant throughout. The façade is revealed to be a façade by wee fractures that undermine its consistency. This is achieved by the combination and sequence of events as in the example above, but also by more explicit textual clues. For example, in a dialogue between patient and doctor, the transformation of the former into **im**patient shows the overflow of the patient's frustration with herself and with the system. The added syllable indicates where the exercise of self-control falls apart and shows that the impression Joy wishes to give the doctor is only one facet of her. The impatient says what is on her mind and the social codes of behaviour the patient was practising disappear. The change indicates the point where what is presented up front is revealed to be merely the top layer that covers a great deal of bubbling underneath.

While distance and detachment are used in creating the ironic atmosphere of the novel, the effect on the reader need not reflect these attitudes. Neither does the surface level detachment necessarily indicate the level of involvement of either the ironist or the audience of irony. The ironist uses detachment to make a point because he finds that the best way to do so is by hiding his personal involvement. The reader, too, needs to become involved in the interpretation if she wishes to find some kind of resolution between the different levels of

[22] De Man, Paul. *Blindness and Insight. Essays in the Rhetoricof Contemporary Criticism*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 1983, p. 213.

meaning. Detachment alone does not create irony. Rather, irony is perceived in the ruptures and inconsistencies, in the interaction between different levels and surfaces, and distance may just be one method of making the multiplicity of levels more visible. And if detachment is just one tool, then irony does not rule out the possibility of attachment or intimacy.

2.2 Alienation as a Means of Coping

> Seemingly, most people have whole hordes of feelings all barrelling round inside them like tireless moles. […] They are taught that other people's livestock may be unpleasant and do their little charges harm.[23]

In addition to being a key to interpreting irony, detachment also works as a safety mechanism for both Joy and the reader. Joy cannot cope with all that is going on in her life and thus tries to distance herself from her problems. Similarly, the reader needs some distance in order not to be overwhelmed and so detachment becomes a necessary tool that allows the reader the sufficient space so that immediacy becomes possible for her. As Douglas Gifford writes, one of Galloway's aims "is to find ways of handling the unbearable,"[24] and this can be seen both in the content of the novel where Joy tries to find a way to come to terms with who she is and what has happened to her, but also in the way the reader is offered tools to cope with the oppressive contents of the story.

In an interview with Ruth Thomas, Galloway says she deliberately wanted to strip Joy of the support of close friends, to pile a whole collection of problems and society's attitudes on her and to explore how she would cope.[25] But despite making Joy's life as difficult as possible, Galloway writes in a way that helps the reader to cope with the story. Douglas Gifford argues that the reader is released from "the emotional claustrophobia" that "the very

---

[23] A. L. Kennedy. *So I Am Glad*. London: Vintage, 2001, pp. 5-6.
[24] Douglas Gifford. "Contemporary Fiction II: Seven Writers in Scotland." *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*. Ed. Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997, p. 609.
[25] Ruth Thomas. "Janice Galloway Interview." *Scottish Book Collector*, Volume 2. 6.
< http://textualities.net/writers/features-a-g/gallowayj02.php> Accessed March 2007.

intensity of [Joy's] confessions" create by the realisation that Joy is hiding something.[26] It is true that the multiple levels help the reader avoid emotional claustrophobia, but as Gifford expands his thought, he claims that the release comes from the reader being able to dismiss Joy's difficulties as symptoms of guilt for leaving Paul, for living with a married man etc. He also claims that when the reader realises the hidden level, she can stop feeling guilty about being annoyed with Joy and she is freed from emotional involvement with her.

However, I would argue instead that the effect is quite the contrary: far from invalidating the symptoms, the perception of the other level allows a deeper understanding of them. The distance does not undermine the significance of Joy's experience but simply presents it in a manner that allows the reader to absorb it without being suffocated by the grimness. It is a careful balance between intimacy and distance, sympathy and objectivity, tragedy and humour that allows the reader to fully appreciate the irony of Joy's life. Intimacy is necessary for the reader to feel for Joy and thus to perceive the irony of her situation, but without distance the story would become too overwhelming and the irony would be lost.

Because implication makes the reader privy to information that explicitly expressed, it also makes him part of the inner circle. However, the novel challenges such views that irony necessarily forms an in-group that understands its implication and an out-group that does not. The division is usually connected with a value judgement that indicates the superiority and the privileged position of the in-group over the excluded out-group.[27] In *The Trick*, implicitness does not aim for elitist exclusion, but rather allows the readers to see beneath the surface and evokes involvement and compassion. Therefore, the irony becomes, in Gary J. Handwerk's words, "the active effort to locate one's place in the human world, in the emerging system from which one as subject emerged."[28] And this applies both to the reader and Joy.

---

[26] Gifford, "Contemporary Fiction II", p. 608.
[27] See for example: Colebrook, p. 20, Hutcheon, p. 2, Muecke, pp. 35-6.
[28] Gary J. Handwerk. *Irony and ethics in Narrative: From Schlegel to Lacan*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985, pp. 15-6.

As I mention above, the distanced and analytical tone is a protective wall for Joy, a pretence that allows her to address her problems in more manageable units. While she knows she cannot ignore her problems or simply wish them away, they are also too heavy for her to bear constantly in mind. The protective measures Joy uses are largely unconscious and she is not as aware of them as the reader who has better access to the bigger picture. For example, she seems genuinely surprised when Ellen tells her that Marianne did not like to leave her, not when she is the way she is. Joy reacts as follows: "That surprised me. I wasn't like anything then. You couldn't tell there was anything wrong with me at all" (35). She is still so numb from Michael's death that she does not even realise she is so. Again the contrast between context and Joy's words undermines Joy's analysis of her emotional state.

In a conscious effort, Joy tries to put on the appearance of being functional so as to convince others she is coping just fine. This is the impression she wants to give the Health Visitor, in order to "get rid of her quicker" (21), but her objective and impassive remarks on the visits also put up a front for the reader, and even for herself. Joy uses the uninvolved tone to hide her frustration and to convince herself that she **can** cope. Although she openly admits that "[t]he first time was the worst" (22) or "I get more guilty as [the Health Visitor] waddles towards the door" (23), these comments are designed to indicate that she can handle the situation and her feelings calmly and rationally, although even the choice of the verb 'waddle' suggests otherwise. And so, the admissions create a sense of pretence despite their directness.

In contrast, the single swearword in: "This is the fourth time we have played this *fucking* game" (22, my emphasis), has a far greater effect as it shatters Joy's analytical approach by standing out in its detached surroundings. Joy loses control over her rational description and her emotions shine through more vividly than when she actually describes them. Only the one word is enough to reveal Joy's whole frustration. The contrast between the swearword and the overall tone exposes the façade of Joy's detached narrative and underlines the fact that there is

much going on beneath the surface. The slip into the different register lets the reader in on something that was supposed to remain hidden. A shared secret forms an intimacy that the uninvolved descriptions cannot manage, but without which the secret could not exist.

While Joy's traumas explain her detachment, she is not the only one keeping her distance. The other characters also regularly play a part in order to protect their 'moles' as becomes clear, for example, in the scene with the Health Visitor.

> HEALTH VISITOR Work. How are things at work? Coping?
> PATIENT Fine. [Pause] I have trouble getting in on time, but getting better.
>
> I throw her a little difficulty every so often so she feels I'm telling her the truth. I figure this will get rid of her quicker.
>
> HEALTH VISITOR [Intensifying] But what about the day-to-day? How are you coping?
> PATIENT OK. [Brave smile] I manage. (21)

The scene is partly set up like a playscript which intensifies the feeling that both characters are acting. Mary McGlynn argues that the dramatic form appears when Joy feels that the interaction relies on general definitions instead of specifics of her personality.[29] The script mode emphasises the impersonality because whereas a play tries to efface the aspect of pretence, in a script it becomes all the more explicit as characters' moods are conveyed by stage directions that disrupt the flow of the dialogue. Since both women have directions in square brackets, both are shown to inhabit a role that is expected of them and that they cannot deviate from. As Cairns Craig suggests, the form of the text "performs the performance in which Joy is entrapped."[30] The text becomes a metaphor for the role Joy is forced to play and expresses both Joy's entrapment within and her frustration with playing it.

Although Joy hides from her emotions, just as others do, she also rebels against empty formulas and demands more involvement in her interaction with other people. During the Health Visitor's first visit Joy attempts to cut through the pretence:

---

[29] McGlynn, "Janice Galloway", p. 20.
[30] Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel*, p. 193.

> The first time was worst. I went through the tea ceremony for five minutes then tried to get the thing opened up.
>
> What are you supposed to come here for? I said.
> She just looked.
> What's it for? What are we supposed to talk about?
> She said, I'm here to help you. To help you try to get better. I'm here to listen. (22)

Joy tries to open up the conversation in order to understand their relationship, but the Health Visitor can only repeat her job description in reply. Her genuine puzzlement suggests that she is unconscious of the effect of her behaviour which indicates that her lack of commitment to her job and patients is not emotional self-preservation. She continues: "You can tell me anything you like. I assure you it goes no further and I've heard it all before." The belittling remark makes Joy burst out in frustration, but she soon understands the futility of the outburst when confronted with the Health Visitor calmly dunking her biscuit, "getting the saturation just right" as if nothing was out of the ordinary. There is a grotesque description of the Health Visitor sucking the biscuit, "her tongue worming out for a dribble of tea. It missed. The dribble ran down to her chin and she coughed, giggling." When she finally answers Joy, her reply is tactless to say the least. She has read the doctor's notes and therefore knows exactly how Joy feels – this is repeated three times to emphasise its absurdness. All in all, the Health Visitor fails to realise the significance of Joy's concerns, and conversely the inappropriateness of her behaviour reveals the depth of Joy's exasperation.

The contrast between the expectation of confidence and the charade the Health Visitor and Joy are left with is a cause for irony – the ideal is thwarted by the force of reality. In theory, an intimacy should form between the two women, but Joy cannot open herself up to a stranger, especially after the Health Visitor sabotages her own definition. The finishing touch – "I've heard it all before" – undermines all significance from anything and everything Joy might say. Although the Health Visitor says many of the right phrases, they ring false because of their sequence and the contrast to her behaviour. Her inability to sense Joy's mood defies expectations concerning the role she occupies and emphasises how important it is to commit

to one's actions. The inconsistency in her behaviour shows that the mere repetition of the actions does not equal the "real thing", like a script does not equal a play, and so her performance lacks substance. She is merely the repetition of a role, and therefore she is only referred to by her job title, and never by name. The text does not criticise the existence of such a role, but rather the situation where it is simply acted out according to convention.

The two women's interpretations and expectations of the situation are so far apart that out of necessity their interaction becomes a play. According to McGlynn, this emphasises "[t]he facelessness of the players and the powerlessness of language" as nearly every phrase in the dialogue "is boilerplate and hence impotent."[31] However, while the meaning of these phrases stays virtually the same regardless of context, their effect in this instance does not stay as true to the original, but is in fact transformed dramatically. Consequently, the Health Visitor's charitable help turns into an imposition and her questions into a daunting interrogation:

HEALTH VISITOR	So, how are you/how's life/ what's been happening/ anything interesting to tell me/ what's new?	
PATIENT	Oh, fine/ nothing to speak of.	(21)

The different alternatives between slashes express the repetitiveness of the scene, but at the same time they also give the impression that Joy is being driven into a corner. The tempo of questions, one after the other, appears to be so fast that there is no time to reply and the polite questions become menacing and intruding. What in one context might be a thoughtful enquiry, here turns into an intimidating demand.

And so, the irony is not in the use of any single word or phrase, but rather in the style of writing and in the combination different elements within a context. In discussing Jane Austen, Claire Colebrook says that "Austen's use of free-indirect style is ironic; she speaks in the language of characters […], but she also allows a higher point of view through characters."[32] Similarly, Galloway speaks through Joy's voice while the other characters become

[31] McGlynn, "Janice Galloway", p. 21.
[32] Colebrook, p. 161.

caricatures, repetitions of a role that are mere voices, empty of substance. But even the shallowest characters can still provide insight to larger issues such as health care or social codes of behaviour. As McGlynn well points out, while Joy may have difficulties in articulating her thoughts, "the forms [Galloway] employs imbue her texts with emotional depth."[33] And so, the form of the text is able to give Joy a voice and express social criticism, even when the characters behave like marionettes.

However, the irony of the role-playing does not limit itself to the contrast between the mere repetition of a role and the expectations attached to the role. While the two women are trapped in convention like actors in a play, the tea ceremony is a language the Health Visitor understands and, therefore, as Margery Metzstein suggests, Joy can use it as a sign that she cope.[34] As real interaction between them is impossible, Joy resorts to cultural codes of behaviour and while she cannot stop the visits, convention at least offers her a means to survive them. She offers tea and biscuits, goes along with the how do you do's and tries not to rock the boat again. The tea ceremony regulates the visits and allows very little room for any breach in protocol, but it is also something that allows them to interact, even though that interaction is doomed to be superficial. And so, convention has a dual function: on the one hand it makes Joy feel claustrophobic, but on the other, it allows her to breath. Both these aspects are present at the same time and the combination of the opposites is a cause for irony.

Joy uses conventions in this manner to hide, not only from her antagonists, but also from her friends. Her relationship to David is close, but she does not want to let him too close.

> Don't you want to talk about the hospital?
> This is an effort to stop me asking questions about him.
> Boring. There isn't much to say.
> Oh?
> He doesn't know any more than I do how far to push, how far he doesn't want to know. Old pals is the best tactic I can come up with.
> You know me with strangers. (135)

[33] McGlynn, "Janice Galloway", p. 21.
[34] Metzstein, p. 139.

Joy lets David hold her when she screams after having sex with him, but she does not want to talk about her problems with him. She avoids his question by resorting to the 'old pals -tactic' which is another convention she can hide behind and also observes that neither of them knows what level of familiarity to adopt. Neither does she know how close an intimacy she could handle. She chooses strategies that she thinks will make David feel comfortable without allowing him too close emotionally. At the same time, however, she deliberately tries to tempt him to behave in particular ways: "I wait for a moment. I want to give him enough clues so he will feel sorry and touch me. I try to look stoic but hiding volumes" (136). Although Joy's behaviour could be said to be manipulating, a closer look reveals that Galloway is simply spelling out the usually unconscious mediation between different roles.

Douglas Gifford claims that Joy's interaction with other people reveals "a suffocating sense of [her] loss of will and direction."[35] However, I would argue that she has not so much lost her will, or her sense of who she is, but rather the confidence to believe in herself and in the power of her actions. After all, on a number of occasions she simply refuses to be treated in ways that are harmful or unjust to her. Even with the Health Visitor she has enough of a sense of self and enough self-respect not to settle for an unsatisfying arrangement without complaint. Her subsequent resignation to the charade demonstrates her way of making an inescapable situation bearable. Her sense of direction is off because she does not know where she is with herself and how she got to the point where she is. Therefore, she needs to take a little distance in order to find her bearing before she can be sure which way is up and which way is down, but at the same time she cannot work with her problems from a distance. And so, on the one hand, she fights against the blind repetition of conventions and empty phrases and against the distance that is forced on her, and on the other, she distances herself and uses conventions as a shield against the outside world in both the good and the bad it throws at her.

[35] Gifford, "Contemporary Fiction II", p. 608.

3 High and Low

Irony and satire/humour are often described as opposite tendencies. Arthur Pollard, for example, argues that irony focuses on principles and morals, and satire, in contrast, on man's attitude towards them.[1] Satire's focus on the human is usually taken even further so that one of its differentiating features is its recognition and description of the lowly animal that guides our ideas and decisions. In other words, irony and satire/humour are commonly distinguished through their subject matter: irony's attention is on examining abstract concepts and ideas, whereas satire concentrates on the actualities of life, on the body and on bodily desires.

This kind of distinction is in many ways an artificial one as irony, satire, parody and humour overlap and intermingle to the point where it is difficult to distinguish what is what. Nevertheless, the split articulates the basic tendencies associated with the two modes. The division between abstract and concrete, between rational and carnal, poses a curious problem for the analysis of *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* because of the novel's focus on bodily particularities and immediate senses without being a satire, albeit some parts of it may be read as satirical. *The Trick* is by no means unique in challenging such neat divisions. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, is satirical without focusing on the body. The novel's satire tackles value systems and morals, but does so without descending to the bodily particularities in the manner that, for example, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* does.

Although satire may deal with concepts and morals, its attitude towards them is different from the one irony takes. Colebrook argues that although satire may touch on morals they are not the object of the satire. Rather, the focus is on the human being and her ability to hypocritically disguise her desires by "a politics that presents itself as pure law."[2] So, whereas Socratic irony explores a concept, such as Justice, in search of its proper essence, satire shows how such lofty ideals help the individual to justify and achieve her more material needs and

[1] Arthur Pollard. *Satire*. London: Methuen, 1970, p. 21.
[2] Colebrook, p. 148.

desires. Colebrook even claims that, in order to be truly satirical, all elevated ideas need to be deflated and human desire needs to be shown as the real motivator behind any action.[3]

The contrast in the attitude towards concepts and the body is also reflected in the way irony and satire view the human subject. Colebrook specifies the difference as follows:

> Irony focuses on the *subject*, on the consciousness or power that lies above and beyond any specific character or utterance. Satire focuses on *man*: the human animal who may elevate himself through moral language but who, at bottom, is ultimately nothing more than a collection of desires and interests, a living and dynamic body rather than a timeless soul.[4]

In other words, irony sees the human subject as a rational being governed by moral laws and principles, whereas satire emphasises the body and desires as the chief denominators in human existence. While irony is in search of something larger than the individual, satire exposes the forces behind such assumptions and brings the subject back on the ground. Therefore, irony requires a subject who can view life from on high and has the "power to be other than the struggle of bodily existence."[5] The subject becomes an "absent ground that allows us to think" whereas satire's focus on man "shows the ways in which we do *not* author ourselves."[6] In contrast, although both Galloway and Joy become absent ground in the novel, the space that allows us to think and to see beyond the apparent comes from the exploration of all the ways in which Joy does not author herself. In this particular case we can, of course, make a distinction between Joy, whose life is all about her bodily existence and the concrete world around her, and the reader/author, who can look from on high at Joy's struggles without becoming involved in them. In addition, it should be taken into account that even though Joy's bodily existence is clearly present in the novel, it is also something she tries to deny as she tries to make sense of the world through the means of rational deduction.

What is common to irony and satire is that they can both judge life, although irony's judgement comes from its elevated position, whereas satire displays life in a manner that we

---

[3] Ibid, p. 141.
[4] Ibid, p. 139.
[5] Ibid, p. 143.
[6] Ibid, p. 141.

recognise as similar to our own.[7] Irony prescribes what life should be like and satire shows where life goes wrong. *The Trick* seems to do both: by showing where life goes wrong it implies what life should be like. It does not discuss ideas directly, but they become apparent through the mediation of the particulars. For example, the novel does not discuss the idea of feminism, but rather presents one particular woman, and from there critics have gone on to discuss women's situation in Scotland and in the western world in general.

One way out of the dilemma between irony and satire is to combine them into satirical irony which, according to Colebrook, differs from irony in that it allows no view that is beyond the human and reveals the failings of others while being fully aware of our own weaknesses.[8] She views *Pride and Prejudice* as an example of this category, for although the novel explores the silliness of human nature, at the same time it allows fulfilment for the characters only through reflecting on principles. The novel uses both satirical and ironic means as it questions moral laws and social codes. However, the irony does not ascend to any elevated position, but constantly remains aware of our own weaknesses and the satire does not deflate all the abstract ideas even if it does perceive the tendencies of human nature acutely.

There are also two movements within the theory of irony that make similar kinds of differences in regard to the body and to life as have been made between irony and satire. Candace Lang, for example, divides irony into two separate orientations which she refers to as irony and humour. The first signifies irony in the traditional sense as a rhetorical device and the second is irony as a more philosophical attitude where meanings are played against each other and interpretations become multiple.[9] Similarly to the different ideas of the human subject between irony and satire, Lang sees that the difference between irony and humour is also rooted in different ways of perceiving the subject. Irony presupposes a unified autonomous subject acting within a logically ordered universe, whereas humour sees the

[7] Ibid, p. 145.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Lang, pp. 37-8.

subject as a fragmented but dynamic entity navigating between multiple discourses that evade final, conclusive meanings.[10]

Gilles Deleuze also makes a distinction between irony and humour and argues that whereas traditional irony ascends to principles, as we have seen, humour descends to the everyday particularities of life[11] and concentrates on "bodies, particularities, noises and disruptions that are in excess of the system and law of speech."[12] Instead of trying to bring order into life, as irony does with its insistence on meaning, or to point to higher ideals, humour reveals the chaos of life and allows it to disrupt elevated values – it examines life in all its particularities and rejoices in the diversity of life.[13] This is in stark contrast with traditional irony that, according to Colebrook, limits human life with its elevated concepts that are not realised in life.[14] Again irony is seen as prescriptive whereas humour is more descriptive. This is precisely why Deleuze objects to traditional irony: in his opinion it "confine[s] the singularity within the limits of the individual or the person"[15] and eliminates all difference and confines life within its own specific limitations. Instead, Deleuze wants to focus on multiplicities and on life's capacity to become different and to question or reinforce concepts and ideas.[16] According to Colebrook, Deleuze's move from irony to humour steps away from the notion of irony's universality and detachment from any specific locations or time towards seeing life as infinite multiplicity without any point-of-view above or beyond life.[17] And so, Deleuze's humour becomes a play of surfaces and instead of moving along the axis of depth as irony does, it is a display of events on the level of the surface.[18] It becomes a negotiation of different discourses that exist simultaneously on the surface.

---

[10] Ibid, pp. 45, 48.
[11] Gilles Deleuze. *Difference and Repetition.* (1968) Trans. Paul Patton. London: The Athlone Press, 1994, p. 5.
[12] Colebrook, p. 132.
[13] Ibid, pp. 149-51.
[14] Ibid, p. 145.
[15] Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 139.
[16] Colebrook, p. 133.
[17] Ibid, p. 147.
[18] Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 9.

Deleuze sees that both irony and humour have the potential for overturning a moral law, but they use opposite means to achieve that end. Firstly, the law may be overturned by ascending towards principles, which shows the law to be inferior to an original force or power. Secondly, it may be overturned by descending towards its consequences which are examined in exaggeratedly meticulous detail.[19] However, Deleuze notes that both irony and humour result in an ultimately inhuman unity, but that humour is still preferred because, as Colebrook explains, irony "has always seen the ultimate unity of existence as an already given absolute within which we are located."[20] Humour, on the other hand, allows for more freedom in that it creates multiple selves and "descends to the depths of life, disclosing forces or powers that can never be exhausted by representation."[21]

3.1 Body and Mind

> My body knew he was dead before I did.
> It shouted and yelled and punched the nurse who came with the needle, thumped its fists off the walls and screamed to try and wake up.[22]

Joy's physical reality is often in contrast with the rational description of events she wants to present. Though she tries to hide from her psychological traumas and social problems the symptoms of these are seen on the body, for example, as anorexia, bulimia and a lack of menstruation. She may be able to avoid dealing with the problems to some degree on an intellectual level, but she cannot make the physical symptoms disappear. Like the scar on her thigh that only shows when she washes, the symptoms of her problems are also always there, "waiting to surface through the skin when [she] hit[s] the water, like invisible ink" (10). They have a tendency to surface on the body regardless of how hard Joy tries ignore their existence. As soon as her problems become too overwhelming, the body betrays her vulnerability.

---

[19] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition,* p. 5.
[20] Colebrook, p. 138.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Galloway, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, p. 195.

The body expresses emotions Joy cannot deal with in the form of tears, angry outbursts and even violence. Joy remains a detached spectator of these outbursts and the body is described almost as an independent and separate entity. Body and mind, rational thinking and emotions are constantly juxtaposed and made to play against one another as the novel explores, in the language of deleuzian humour, "the complex relation between the two surfaces."[23] The contrast reflects Joy's loss of understanding of herself and the world. It also makes apparent the discord between Joy's problems and society's ways (or lack of ways) of addressing them. Manifested on the body, the discord draws attention to Joy's individual problems, to the social institutions assigned to deal with those problems and to society's attitudes towards them. It also shows how equally impossible it is to confine the human being into the mould of either irony's rational subject or satire's desiring body. Joy needs both halves in order to heal.

As Joy is unable to deal with her depression, sorrow and all that goes with them, she tries to separate her rational self from the body and with it from emotions and senses. She equates the body with emotions and, because she cannot deal with the emotions, the body also becomes a danger zone that she needs to keep an eye on so that danger can be detected early enough. Her physical reality becomes something strange and separate, not just metaphorically since for Joy it seems a concrete reality that her body is no longer her own. She often describes her own physical being as literally separate from herself. She opens the novel with: "I watch myself from the corner of the room sitting in the armchair, at the foot of the stairwell" (7) as if she were physically split in two, one 'I' is sitting in the armchair, another 'I' is somewhere else in the room looking at the first one. Mind and body have almost become distinct entities for her. They can share the same location in space, but they do not need to. Of course Galloway does not suggest that the separation is real, it merely manifests and

[23] Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 248.

exemplifies Joy's alienation from herself. In her mind Joy has locked the rational and analytical part of herself into a safe corner barring all emotions outside.

Joy's doubleness of existence parallels the one between Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. Dr Jekyll's potion allows him to indulge in the passions of his darker side while Joy's separation from herself allows her rational side to have some peace from the torments of her emotions. Like Dr Jekyll who limits virtue and conscience out of the character of Mr Hyde to allow him to go about his business with no compunctions, Joy separates emotions out of her existence to as great an extent as possible in order to protect herself from them. Dr Jekyll's respectable life is disrupted by Mr Hyde's excursions, just as Joy's rational attitude is regularly undermined by her emotions. Joy has no potion to shift from one frame to another, but as happens to Dr Jekyll near the end of his life, Joy, too, is unable to keep the monster out at all times. Mr Hyde starts to take over the body of Dr Jekyll without his own volition, and so too does Joy's control keep failing her. Because she shuts her emotions out she loses control over the body. She cannot predict or is unwilling to admit it when the body is about to give out on her.

Unlike Dr Jekyll, Joy does not have two bodies for her two selves and so the two must inhabit the same body. The mind needs the body in order to function, but this also means that it regularly collides with the emotions that have a tendency to wash over the body and pull the rational mind under with them. This idea of one body with two drivers helps to explain why Joy's sense of her body varies from moment to moment. One minute she may refer to "**my** hands" (7, my emphasis) and in the next, while still talking about her own body she says: "**The** muscles in **the** thighs tightening as **the** feet push down", and again in the next moment she refers to "**my** knees" (8, my emphasis). The perspective shifts from Joy owning her body to observing it as if it were someone else. The fluctuation between the definite article and the possessive pronoun demonstrates the tension between the rational mind and emotional body. The balance Joy tries to maintain in the distance to her body is precarious and she is always in

danger of losing control. But what is she afraid of? The way she needs to concentrate on how to move her body demonstrates the danger she feels in calling it hers. Here, her hands and knees belong to her when they are merely objects she perceives, for then she can think of them rationally on her own terms. But when she has to move them, they lose the possessive pronoun and become tools she uses in order to achieve the desired goal and here the danger grows that the body might betray her and do something unsuspected while she is unable to escape it to the corner of the room.

Joy has reason to be careful of what she does with her body for it possesses a will of its own that Joy cannot control and does not always understand. She is aware that sometimes her body moves seemingly out of its own accord: "my hands and legs take me by surprise occasionally: I have to remind myself they are attached" (179). It is as if the different body parts were connected by mere coincidence and their behaviour was unpredictable. She comes across "less as an organised agent or organising subject and more as a collection of incongruous body parts" which is how Colebrook defines how the self appears in humour.[24] Because of Joy's lack of control over her body, she is far from Colebrook's organised agent or Lang's unified autonomous subject, but although her body acts in unsuspected ways, this does not produce comic humour. In slapstick comedy, for example, humour is derived from seeing someone else failing to control their body, not because they lack the ability, but because something outside them, such as a banana skin, disturbs the balance. The self of incongruous body parts, therefore, belongs to the one who is seen humorous but who also presents the humour. In contrast, irony (with the exception of self-irony) points elsewhere so that the part of the organised agent belongs not to the one who is being observed, but to the one observing. The relationship between body and self in *The Trick* is similar to the one in humour, but there is a crucial difference in the roles the self.

[24] Colebrook, p. 137.

The incongruity between body and mind and Joy's lack of control over the body becomes manifest, for example, in Joy's attitude towards crying. Crying is something alien that is made other by the way it is described: "Blisters. Little moon craters on the smooth paper. I push the magazine aside and let the tears drip onto the rug" (27-8). Tears are depicted in an indefinable and intangible way as Joy searches for metaphors. She seems to need a moment to realise that the blisters are tears and that they are hers. The rational part of her observes the crying, but seems to view it not as something that affects her but as something that happens to her. In other words, the unified autonomous subject is in denial of the fragmented body. She only talks about the symptoms, but never about the cause for that would entail admitting the emotions she tries to keep out. Therefore, only the consequences are worth a thought. The crying is like a nosebleed, it does not matter what caused the bleeding, only to stop it.

The emotional charge Joy affords to crying equals the comparison, it is as if she was used to having her nose bleed and knew there was nothing to prevent it from happening. The most she can feel is embarrassment and humiliation: "something like warm fingertips slither under my chin. They gather, cool and drip making dark spots on my trousers. This is unavoidable but still humiliating. I leak steadily over his nice chair" (53). March argues that in Galloway's fiction women overflow body boundaries as the bodies break open and bleed. She says that although initially appearing the women become socially and textually dangerous because of the potential chaos they might cause.[25] But while they may be a threat, this is not an empowering characteristic, but above all one of morbid humiliation and one that marginalises the women. For example in "Blood", a teenage girl, in addition to menstruating, is given a sanitary pad to stop her mouth bleeding after a visit to the dentist and is, therefore, doubly mortified of her body.[26] Joy also feels humiliated by her tears because they reveal her vulnerability and inability to cope, neither of which her rational mind can accept.

---

[25] March, *Rewriting Scotland*, p. 123, 125.
[26] Janice Galloway. *Blood*. 1991. London: Vintage, 1999.

The focus on symptoms separates cause and effect. Although Joy does not mention the cause of the tears or her emotions, both can be inferred from the context. There is always a reason for the tears, even if Joy is incapable of seeing it When relating her story to Dr One she explicitly denies any connection to the tears: "Cold spots dripped on my upturned palms but I didn't feel it was me crying. I could find no connection between these splashes and me" (105). The link between the story and the tears is only indicated by the two being placed successively in the text the explicit link between cause and effect is absent. The rupture between what makes her cry and the actual tears as well as Joy's attitude to both draws attention to Joy's disconnectedness and emphasises both the fact that she is crying and the reason for the tears.

The disruption of cause and effect is more often linked to humour rather than to irony. Colebrook argues that humour abandons 'before and after' relations and denies the possibility of seeing the world "in terms of causes and intentions, of intentions and consequents [*sic*]."[27] Joy's separation of body and mind means that causes and consequences are also separated. Her world is a place where meanings and causes have become disjoint and arbitrary forms distract away from the actualities of life.[28] It resembles Beckett's humour, where the order of time and explanation is disrupted which results in the confusion of logic and the order of sense. Causal relations suffer a similar fate as cause and consequence reverse order. Colebrook argues that Beckett's use of concepts does not merely suggest an unconventional meaning, but in fact destroys the convention of meaning.[29] In Joy's constant wonder at cause relations, meaning and intention become question marks as she focuses on the singularities of life that to her have no order. She cannot distinguish the important from the unimportant: "Now I remember everything all the time. You never know what you might need to recollect later, when the significance of the moment might appear" (6). And so, in a deleuzian sense the

[27] Colebrook, p. 136.
[28] Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel*, p. 194.
[29] Colebrook, pp. 136-7.

humour of the narrative falls "'down' from meaning and intention to the singularities of life that have no order, no high or low, no before or after"[30] as Joy tries to order her life according to these divisions that constantly fail her.

The disconnection between mind and body is not only a symptom of Joy's depression or a tool to create ambiguity, but it is also her saviour. Joy needs to keep an eye on the body in order to protect her mind, but she can also use the body to the same effect. When Dr One asks her to tell her story, it is not *Joy* who speaks. Not knowing where to begin she voluntarily gives control of the situation to the body and recedes to the background to see what happens:

> There was only one way out of this. My mouth knew more than the rest of me put together. I had to trust my mouth. I closed my eyes and the mouth said
>
> My mother walked into the sea.
>
> I remember the voice: chiselled as crystal. Cold as razor. I hadn't known it would start like this but then I was redundant. […] I let the story came [*sic*] out in this disembodied glass voice and listened, out of harm's way in the corner of the room. (103-4)

The mouth is in charge of what comes out of it, not Joy. She sees herself as unnecessary in the equation and lets the body act out of its own volition unaware of what it is going to do next. Even the voice is strange, like something she has never heard before. She needs to let go of her control in order to be able to articulate her problems, but she cannot remain with her body while the mouth tells the story. She, therefore, displaces herself and again moves to the safety of the corner of the room like at the beginning of the novel. The fact that she does not know where the story will begin emphasises the body's control over the mind, or the lack of control the mind is able to have over the emotions and, therefore, the body. But here the body is not something dangerous to be avoided at all cost, it is what saves her from a difficult situation. This shows that the relationship between body and mind is not as uncomplicated as it might seem, but rather it has both a positive and a negative function.

---

[30] Colebrook, p. 136.

The body reminds Joy of its existence in both good and bad, in making her suffer and in saving her from pain, and shows her that no matter how she tries, she cannot live without it or ignore its existence. By the end of the novel Joy has found a better balance with her body and she is able to recognise and own her voice as hers: "I hear it quite distinctly, my own voice in the empty house" (235). The voice is no longer something cold or alien. The familiarity of the voice suggests that the rift between mind and body is growing smaller. From this point of view, the novel becomes, not a meticulous description of "the solitude of the human mind and the oddity of inhabiting a body"[31] as Mary McGlynn suggests, but a negotiation to find a more unified self that incorporates both body and mind. In a similar vein Deleuze argues:

> As we then consider the perpetual entwining which constitutes the logic of sense, it seems that this final ordering recovers the voice of the heights of the primary process, but also that the secondary organization at the surface recovers something of the most profound noises, blocks, and elements for the Univocity of sense.[32]

So in the end, Deleuze's humour is neither irony nor humour but a combination of and a negotiation between the two, and this is also what Joy needs to achieve. She needs to move beyond the limiting conceptions of subjectivity that irony and satire present and find a mediation between the two that does not overlook either half of her existence.

3.2 The Empty Body

> I was still there. A black hole among the green stars.
> Empty space.[33]

Not only is Joy's body alien to her it is also described in some way empty or non-existent. The organised agent is challenged not only by the lack of authority over the body, but also by the suggestions that the subject is empty or even that it does not exist. Joy is denied any elevated position to the point that her very existence is negated by various authorities. Joy, too, contributes to her physical and metaphorical emptiness through anorexia and bulimia and

[31] McGlynn, "Janice Galloway", p. 15.
[32] Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 248.
[33] Galloway, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, p. 146.

she even seems to literally rub herself out of existence with her vigorous bathing ritual. The references to emptiness do not, however, become a lamentation for the loss of self, although this too is expressed, but are rather a sign of the subject's fragmentation and need for other people, or in Gary J. Handwerk's definition of ethical irony, a challenge to the coherence and integrity of the subject and an insistence "on the fundamental interdependence of subjects.[34]

Although *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* is a dark novel in its thorough concentration on Joy's traumas, it is not a book that wallows in self-pity, but is filled with stubbornness. In many ways the references to emptiness express Joy's loneliness, but despite her dysfunctional relationship to herself as well as to friends and authorities, she persistently tries to create a connection to other people. In Handwerk's definition irony is

> a form of discourse that insists upon the provisional and fragmentary nature of the individual subject and thus forces us to recognize our dependence upon some mode of intersubjectivity that exceeds the furthest extension of any individual subject.[35]

This is also something Joy is faced with. Her attempts to prove herself capable of coping are juxtaposed with her dependence on and need to participate in various social conventions, like going to Ellen's for tea or her relationship with David. What is more, Joy's friends believe that a part of her problem is her inability to rely on her friends for support. They see that she has a tendency to invest all her trust on her partner and when she is deprived of that relationship, she falls on nothing. This is probably why, in David's opinion, Joy should not be let to depend on any one person again. She has failed to understand the fundamental interdependence of individual subjects that Handwerk speaks about.

The most basic and concrete way in which Joy feeds her sense of emptiness, both physical and metaphorical, is through anorexia and bulimia. She keeps herself empty by not eating, and when she does have to eat she literally empties herself of what she has consumed. The details accompanying these methods defy irony's dissociation from the grotesque details

[34] Handwerk, pp. 2-3.
[35] Ibid, p. viii.

of everyday life: "I sit on Ellen's clean sofa and make small talk. My mouth feels rinsed with paintstripper and sometimes my gums bleed" (87). The juxtaposition to the clean normality of Ellen's world emphasises the after effects of throwing up. Although the illnesses point to a subject governed by her desires, namely the desire to be thin, Joy is never viewed aggressively or with contempt, or with any of the hallmark attitudes of satire, in relation to the illnesses. Neither are they made ridiculous in any way.

Anorexia and bulimia are linked to Joy's desire to be thin and to her obsession about her looks. This can be seen, for example, when she says: "The minute the bike was out of sight I rushed like hell inside straight upstairs to the mirror to check for signs of swelling. What's more, I could see them" (86-7). So, by not eating and by swallowing her hand after eating she tries to keep herself skinny. But this is only the surface level interpretation that hides volumes underneath. Even her realisation that she does need to eat, is an indication that all is not right. Joy's logic defies common sense, and therefore, acts as an indication to look deeper. As Mary McGlynn suggests, the decision is made possible by Joy's "anorexic logic" that is based on the separation of her sense of self from the physical body.[36] If the two are separated and the mind does not need the body, then the body need not be nourished.

McGlynn also claims that while the anorexic woman submits to conform with social expectations concerning her looks, she also "actively choos[es] anorexia as an effective yet dangerous means of asserting an identity."[37] Her choice of words is strange considering that Joy does not so much *choose* anorexia as decide that she does not need to eat. It may be that Joy feels more self-sufficient and independent in removing material needs from her existence as McGlynn suggests, [38] but to call it a conscious method of rebellion seems exaggerated. Although McGlynn is aware of the danger of seeing anorexia *only* as rebellion against

[36] Mary McGlynn. "'I didn't need to eat': Janice Galloway's anorexic text and the national body." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 49 (2008): 221-236, p. 226.
[37] Ibid, p. 224.
[38] Ibid, p. 225.

patriarchy, she does suggest that anorexia may be thought of as a way of finding or even constituting an identity.[39] While it seems highly unlikely that Joy becomes anorexic for these reasons, it may be that it still helps her in the process of self-discovery.

What is interesting about McGlynn's analysis is the connection of anorexia to the multiplicity of roles and to the Cartesian duality of body and mind. She quotes Helen Malson who argues that "[t]he thin female body signifies a multiplicity of femininities *and* a rejection of femininity."[40] This becomes apparent, for example, in the dual existence of conforming to expectations on appearances and the evasion of motherhood through a lack of menstruation. McGlynn argues that both these aspects reflect Cartesian duality and the inner struggle of male and female impulses within the anorexic. She again quotes Malson who says that anorexia should be understood "not as individual pathology but as the interpellation of the subject by a socially pervasive discourse of Cartesian dualism."[41]

In my opinion, McGlynn's treatment of Joy's anorexia suffers from an implied intentionality and from the implied allocation of social aims and consequences in the individual. Although anorexia demonstrates the duality of body and mind and challenges many social categorisations, these are not reasons for the individual to become or to be an anorexic. Therefore, I want to focus on more personal reasons for and consequences of Joy's illnesses, namely Michael's death and Joy's sorrow. McGlynn also sees the connection of Joy's dieting to control of her grief rather than to firmness.[42] More specifically, however, I would suggest that Joy transfers her mental malaise on her physical condition, and so, since she feels empty inside, she makes herself literally empty. Not only has she lost her lover, but also her best friend, one forever, the other temporarily and so, in addition to being emotionally empty, there is also a void where close companionship should be. Irrationally she

---

[39] Ibid, p. 224.
[40] Helen Malson, as quoted by Mary McGlynn, "'I didn't need to eat': Janice Galloway's anorexic text and the national body", p. 225
[41] Ibid.
[42] McGlynn, "Janice Galloway", p. 22.

blames herself for Michael's death and, therefore, punishes herself with the eating disorders. She thinks she has somehow caused Michael's death: "My mouth promised whatever I did wrong I'd never do it again. But it's hard when you don't know what it is you did wrong in the" (195). The thought is cut off in mid-sentence as she stops herself from following it any further. She torments the body and takes revenge on it for the pain it causes.

In addition to making her feelings of emptiness concrete, Joy also goes as far as to turn the perceived emptiness of others back on herself. When she catches herself thinking that Tony seems to be without real substance, she quickly corrects herself: "But I knew he was real. It was me who had no substance, nothing under the skin" (175). McGlynn sees this "textbook-anorexic language" as evidence of how Joy's anorexic logic affects all parts of her life.[43] But it also has to do with Joy's mission of self-punishment even if they are in the end the same thing. Joy automatically assumes that if something is wrong it is in her and makes her emptiness seem a physical reality. She sees Tony's shortcomings, but takes the blame for them on herself, thus punishing herself further for Michael's death and all her problems.

Joy's sense of emptiness is taken further when the doctor, worried that she might be pregnant, examines her. The relieved verdict is: "Much as I thought. Nothing there at all" (146). His words confirm to Joy that she is only an empty shell. The evidence becomes doubly tragic because of her newly born hope that the ultrasound might prove not only that she is not empty but also that she exists. Before she is faced with the empty space that is her she thinks: "We might be doing more than discovering I exist: someone else might exist in there too." The hope of her own existence is combined with the hope of another, but immediately the doctor destroys her momentary optimism on both scores. The diagnosis does more than confirm her emptiness, it also fails to prove that she exists. The final twist of irony is that the doctor smiles at her for the first time just as he crushes her hopes.

[43] McGlynn, "'I didn't need to eat': Janice Galloway's anorexic text and the national body", p. 232.

While being examined Joy reasons, in a Cartesian train of thought, “I make light on the screen therefore I am” (146). The thought again reflects her search for evidence of her existence. It is not just about whether she is pregnant or not, but the wish that science will indisputably prove that she exists and release her from guilt. Machines are never wrong, machines are not in the middle of a divorce, like Dr Two, and machines do not have migraines, like Dr Three and so she turns to science and machines where people have been unable to help her. She hopes to be absolved by proof that she is not an empty shell and therefore, cannot be held responsible for lacking some essence that caused her troubles. If so, the culprit must be someone or something else. But even science fails her. At first she thinks she is the green light on the monitor, but then she is brought to the realisation she is only “a black hole among the green stars. Empty space. I had nothing inside me” (146).

Michael’s funeral service enforces the point to the extreme as Joy is figuratively wiped into non-existence.

> Half-way into the silence for Norma Fisher, my arms were weightless. The rest came piecemeal as the moral started to compute.
>
> 1. The Rev Dogsbody had chosen this service to perform a miracle
> 2. He’d run time backwards, cleansed, absolved and got rid of the ground-in stain.
> 3. And the stain was me.
>
> I didn’t exist. The miracle had wiped me out. (79)

Here Joy is not merely empty, she understands the service as proof that she does not exist at all – she takes the negation of her role literally. Because Michael’s divorce was not yet final when he died, Joy was technically still his mistress and as such their relationship has no social validation and the service only acknowledges Michael’s marriage even though the marriage existed in name only. In Joy’s mind the symbolic negation becomes a physical one.

> I could hear breath in my ears, gagging with the salt taste
> and someone yelling.
>
> I knew it couldn’t be me.
> I didn’t exist.

Joy knows her body reacts, but her logic denies it. Because she does not exist, she cannot be the one making a scene. She is so lost in the indecipherable world of arbitrary codes that when the blow hits she believes in the reverend's "miracle", that with a few words he could wipe her out of existence. As the mind cannot cope with the grief, the symptoms are transferred to the body and when the shock is so great she probably wishes she did not exist. The feeling is so unbearable that the mind explains it away.

This scene is often cited as a reflecting different aspects of Joy's psyche and of the values of the society she lives in. Christie Leigh March, for example, claims that Joy's erasure marks her physical unimportance, and that this, coupled with the eating disorders, makes Joy feel vulnerable, fragile and physically displaced.[44] In her feminist reading, March sees this as one more example of how Joy succumbs to the norms of a patriarchal society. However, although Joy feels vulnerable and fragile, it is not because of incidents like this (even if they do feed the emotions), but because she is depressed and grieving. Because she is already feeling vulnerable, being wiped into non-existence affects her so cruelly and, therefore, she is unable to deal with the negation when it happens, but she is not about to accept nor to succumb.

It is, therefore, important to note that Joy does not surrender to the part of a victim. As Margery Metzstein says: "she does have enough of a sense of self to be a thorn in the flabby flesh of […] authorities" even when being wiped into symbolic non-existence.[45] Metzstein views Rev Dogsbody's service and Joy's erasure as indication of a woman who cannot be, or refuses to be defined: she does not fit the role of a mistress, but does not have the legitimacy of a wife either. Because she cannot be accommodated within the existing system of roles, her presence is merely ignored, although Metzstein points out that the roles of Joy and Norma Fisher are potentially interchangeable, one having the legitimisation of the relationship, the other being an embarrassing presence. However, it is not that Joy refuses categorisation, but

[44] March, *Rewriting Scotland*, pp. 123-4.
[45] Metzstein, p. 140.

that she is not allowed to define herself in relation to Michael. Joy's defiance comes later when she writes a letter to Rev Dogsbody which shows that although she may have lost the battle she is not about to give up the war. As a consequence she is summoned to the headmaster's office like a disobedient pupil and reproached for her unrealistic attitude towards Rev Dogcollar, as her boss refers to him. Both names reflect Joy's refusal to submit and her anger which she can in retrospect express with the derogatory names.

Alison Lumsden also argues that while Galloway's characters may seem fragile, it does not stop them from analysing the structures that bind them or reacting against them in anger.[46] She refers to "Fearless", a short story by Galloway, in which the protagonist exclaims: "The outrage is strong, and I kick like a mule."[47] In Lumsden's opinion this attitude characterises many of Galloway's protagonists and that from this anger against forced boundaries tentative and vigorous possibilities arise. These allow the women to find new ways "to affirm their lives and female subjectivities in a patriarchal, sometimes hostile Scottish society."[48] In "Fearless" the protagonist is a small girl who has not yet learned not to rebel, and is rebuked by her mother for doing so, whereas Joy is in the process of relearning how to do it. As mentioned above, Joy kicks back hard even if it takes her a little while to do so. And though she does not manage to change anything, it allows her to redefine herself.

Cairns Craig offers yet another angle to the funeral service. He sees that the service erases Joy from the script and from public acknowledgement and as such her story becomes "a series of typographic conventions which are simply the empty case of an absent life."[49] It is fair to say that the service effectively shuts Joy outside the community and denies her power to act as an agent of her own life, thus emphasising her exclusion and emptiness not just from

---

[46] Alison Lumsden. "Scottish Women's Short Stories: 'Repositories of Life Swiftly Apprehended'" Eds. Aileen Cristianson and Alison Lumsden. *Contemporary Scottish Women Writers.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000, p. 162.
[47] Galloway, *Blood*, p.115.
[48] Lumsden, p. 162.
[49] Craig, *Modern Scottish Novel*, pp. 193-4.

the community, but also as a person. The implication is that without a community one is nothing, which again reminds us of Handwerk's insistence on intersubjectivity. Although Joy is not offended by the fact that she is shut out of the community, but by the denial of her relationship to Michael, still the exclusion from the community leaves her completely stranded. And although the personal denial is more important to her than the social one, both exclusions deny her any manner of intersubjectivity.

4 The Power of Repetition

Irony is based on repetition. Something common is repeated in a strange context or something uncommon appears in a familiar context and the discrepancy in between is seen as ironic. Claire Colebrook argues that postmodern irony is based on endless quotations and a sense that there is no original. It falls on the spectator to decide between actions that are genuinely meant and actions that are "repeat[ed] and mime[d] only to expose their emptiness."[1] Janice Galloway uses conventions and familiar features of everyday life as material for her irony and criticism. She explores the most ordinary routines in a manner that defies their insignificance. In the interaction between Joy and other people, the attitudes and assumptions of others are exposed by being repeated in the context of Joy's life. Although they act according to convention, their behaviour is rendered hollow and insensitive. All this works to show how stereotypes of people and habits affect one's behaviour, mental state and sense of identity.

Gilles Deleuze also argues that repetition is a part of both humour and irony because it transgresses boundaries and reveals "a singularity opposed to the particulars subsumed by laws."[2] For Deleuze repetition concerns singularities that cannot be exchanged to or substituted for anything else, but that still express a universality inherent in the singular.[3] The transgression comes from the multiple and simultaneous oppositions inherent in repetition (a singularity vs. the general, a universality vs. the particular, a distinctive vs. the ordinary, etc.) and as a result, repetition "puts law into question, it denounces its nominal or general character in favour of a more profound and more artistic reality."[4] Repetition can, therefore, hold a subversive power over the law. Ironic repetition that directs the focus to the inner oppositions of that which is repeated, can reveal fundamental problems in the law and point to new ways of perceiving the world.

---

[1] Colebrook, p. 3.
[2] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 5.
[3] Ibid, p. 1.
[4] Ibid, pp. 2-3.

Judith Butler also talks of the subversive power of repetition. In *Gender Trouble* she argues that instead of gendered behaviour being an expression of some inner essence, gender is produced through the repetition of gender performance.[5] While the repetition of those acts and gestures which construct gender, reflects and establishes a social system of gender and gendered behaviour, repetition can also question the perception of both. According to Butler there is a socially established set of meanings that lies behind the acts, and the repetition of these acts re-enacts the meanings while at the same time it is also a re-experiencing of them.[6] However, there is also another side to the coin as Butler shows with her example on drag.

When repetition is taken outside its normal context, it no longer acts as a validation of the existing system, but rather overthrows what is taken for granted, or challenges "dominant habits of mind and expression," as Linda Hutcheon describes her transgressive irony.[7] Butler argues that drag "mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity" through the distinction between the anatomical gender and the gender identity of the performer, and the gender being performed.[8] The discontinuity between the different elements undermines the socially accepted meanings as false or at least inapplicable to the situation. By changing the context and combination of the performance drag draws attention to the set of meanings associated with gender. So while repetition maintains the system in most cases, it can also question it by reproducing a performance that is out of place. For Butler, drag is a parody of gender that by reproducing the very elements that are used to justify the existence of natural gender shows that it does not exist. In other words, it uses the same tools (repeated gestures) to arrive at an opposite conclusion about gender (natural vs. performative).[9]

---

[5] Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.* New York: Routledge, 1999, p. 178.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Hutcheon, p. 52.
[8] Butler, pp. 174-5.
[9] This is not to say that repeating differently is always irony or parody. For instance, transvestism is not parody even though it exhibits many of the same features of drag and similarly questions binary heterosexual ideas of gender and sexuality.

Here irony and parody are closely related in that both expose the emptiness of what they mimic. Especially when irony is seen as a play of surfaces it holds something similar to Butler's subversive parody. Façades are played against one another in order to reveal what in everyday life remains unnoticed. Indeed Deleuze argues that the "mask is the true subject of repetition," its constituent part.[10] According to him, repetition does not appear from beneath the masks, but it is formed in the interaction between masks. There is, therefore, no original pattern that is repeated nor can one be deciphered from the repetition. There is always some little variation between different instances of repetition, but instead of pointing to an original instance that is then repeated, these express "the differential mechanisms which belong to the essence and origin of that which is repeated."[11]

So, although Deleuze sees repetition as being without an original that is repeated, his approach is still quite different to Butler's who takes performativeness to the extreme by saying that there is nothing but the performance. In focusing on overthrowing the idea of natural gender Butler overlooks the influence of identity and makes the cultural and social environment seem like irrelevant external forces. Butler jumps from one extreme to the other and neglects to consider what might lie in between. She also forgets that the other extreme can be just as harmful as the first. After all, if gender and sexuality are only produced by performance and there is nothing inherent guiding the performance, could we not choose which actions to repeat or even what our sexuality is? But, in Janice Galloway's words, "sexuality doesn't work like that. Plenty of gay people would be largely heterosexual by now if it did."[12] I agree with Butler in that there is no original essence common to all, but that does not yet mean there is nothing prior to performance or nothing guiding it. Some acts we can choose to repeat and perform, some we can become conscious of and some are beyond our

[10] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, pp. 17-8.
[11] Ibid, p. 17.
[12] Christie Leigh March. "Interview with Janice Galloway." *Edinburgh Review 101*. <http://www.galloway.1to1.org/Leighmarch.html> Accessed March 2005

control. As Butler corrects herself in the preface for the 1999 edition of *Gender Trouble*: "Certainly, one can practice styles, but the styles that become available to you are not entirely a matter of choice."[13]

In trying to undo the connection between natural gender and the performance of gender, Butler concentrates her analysis on the relationship between the act and the social system, the first of which reflects and legitimates the latter. However, she does not dwell on how the discord between identity and social norm affects the individual or what the relationship between the spectator of the performance and the social system is. I believe there is much more at play in the social and cultural meanings than the enforcement of expressive, binary gender roles. For me the problem lies not in whether an original essence exists or not, but in the contrast between social expectation and one's own perception of one's identity, be it gender identity or some other aspect of it.

Therefore, the relevant issue here is not what lies beneath the performance, but how the socially established set of meanings, and thus social expectations, affects the individual. If society only accepts a binary, heterosexual system of gender and sexuality, there is a discord between society's expectations and the people outside this system. The social expectations, which may be founded on false premises as Butler suggests, fail to accommodate the variety that exists and also refuse to accept what is outside its context. This is a situation that faces not only those of sexual minorities, but also other people who are in one way or another different or marginal. The depressed, for example, can be seen as one such group, the illness being so abstract that it is easily dismissed as laziness, lack of effort, pretending or a number of other things. The social expectations of productivity and social activity are juxtaposed with an illness that weakens both without clearly visible or uniform symptoms.

[13] Butler, p. xviii. She also explains that she does not mean that gender is mere self-invention or that all aspects of gender are manifest on the surface.

While the repetition of certain social patterns excludes and alienates some, repetition can also have the power to heal. As Deleuze says: "If repetition makes us ill, it also heals us; if it enchains and destroys us, it also frees us."[14] Here he equates repetition with transference and argues that by authenticating the masks and roles we wear through repetition, we can be freed and healed. Being aware of a problem is not enough, repetition is needed for processing the matter. Although transference is used in psychoanalysis and in the healing process of an individual, the same issues can also be considered on a wider scale. The socially established set of meanings is upheld by repetition, but transformed by repeating differently. Therefore, repetition can be used to come to terms with personal traumas, but it can also be used in order to come to terms with and to transform the way things are more generally. It is not always necessary to be healed or freed from the masks one wears, but to be freed from the impact of the attitudes associated with them. Or, in other words, to be freed from the assumption that the role needs to be got rid of, when rather the attitudes towards that role should be changed, and this may be easier to accomplish from within the system rather than from outside it.

Finally, the meanings need to be considered not only in relation to the one repeating the acts and gestures, but also in relation to those observing the performance. If the set of meanings is socially established, then gendered behaviour must be culturally recognisable, and therefore it guides the interpretation of behaviour. So the performance needs to be repeated not only to produce the action of gender, but also to make it recognisable and understandable to spectators through the intermediary of a socially established set of meanings. A shared code of behaviour means a shared code for interpreting behaviour. It provides us with a sort of shorthand for expression and interpretation which is useful as long as the system does not become too rigid or a matter of either/or divisions.

[14] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 19.

4.1 How to be Good

> She's not the kind of girl
> Who likes to tell the world
> About the way she feels about herself
> She takes a little time in making up her mind
> She doesn't want to fight against the tide[15]

As Joy has lost the key to understanding the world and herself in it she resorts to playing roles in her interaction with other people. She navigates in a world of discourses and conventions, aware that something is expected of her but without knowing what. She looks for signs and clues to point her to the right direction, but unfortunately the discourses around her provide her with a number of different and conflicting ideals and models of behaviour. As Glenda Norquay points out, a "range of competing discourses jostle across her – all attempting to define her problems, her solutions, her femininity, her future."[16] Consciously, Joy repeats actions and conventions in the hope that they are the right ones, i. e. the ones that will allow her to fit in. She wants to be a good patient for Dr Stead, tries to be a surrogate daughter to Ellen, does not want to upset Tony by refusing to be an object of admiration to him, tries to be a good employee etc. But even if the roles and the demands of the discourses pull Joy in different directions with their conflicting demands, it seems to me she still genuinely wants to fulfil many of these roles and that this wish does not merely stem from a feeling that she is expected to do so. However, it also becomes clear that she cannot keep them up for that means compromising herself and this is where the real problem lies. There comes a time when the good patient snaps and becomes impatient, when the sexual object refuses Tony's advances and when the good employee defies the boss. The contrast between Joy's identity and society's expectations of her causes her to feel guilty, inadequate and inferior.

The glossy magazines Joy reads provide her with numerous criteria for the successful woman. Each headline proclaims not only a recipe for becoming the ideal woman, but also an

---

[15] Garbage. "The Trick is to Keep Breathing" *Version 2.0.* Almo Sounds, 1998.
[16] Glenda Norquay. "Janice Galloway's Novels: Fraudulent Mooching." *Contemporary Scottish Women Writers.* Eds. Aileen Christianson and Alison Lumsden. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000, p. 132.

implication that you are never good enough and that you continually have to improve yourself. While the magazines are full of promises of a better life, they become tragically ironic when juxtaposed with Joy's existence. They are full of articles about the "BEST EVER CHRISTMAS" while Joy recovers from attempted suicide, the advice on how to catch a man are tragic in view of Michael's death and the encouragement to be more self-sufficient and independent sounds hollow in contrast with Joy who can barely manage with her day-to-day life despite being both. Christie Leigh March claims that the contrast shows "how ineffective, and personally damaging, such guidelines for living are,"[17] whereas Mary McGlynn sees "their imperative grammar emphasizing their threatening push toward hegemony."[18]

March argues that because Joy cannot apply either of the roles promoted in the magazines, the sexy catch or the independent woman, to herself, they obstruct her recovery and remind her of the hostile world outside.[19] Certainly neither of the roles fit Joy, but this does not yet indicate a purely negative impact. Despite all their potential and actual negative effects, Joy derives pleasure from reading magazines and finds comfort in them. Although the adverts and articles give her unrealistic role models, there is excitement in her voice when she thinks about buying a new one: "There may be a new magazine: full of adverts and recipes, clothes and thin women. A new horoscope. I get exited when I see a new cover smiling" (25). For once she does not have to think about how to fill the long hours of the evening, she has a magazine and a large part of the enjoyment comes precisely from the presentation of the unrealistic role models. So, the role the magazines play, is by no means a simple case of good versus evil. Joy keeps on reading magazines even though she knows how damaging they can be. She is addicted to them: "No magazine. Gin *and* a magazine would make me spoilt" (76, emphasis in the original). To compensate for the anxiety the magazines cause, they also produce enjoyment even if, like with alcohol, that enjoyment may not be altogether healthy.

[17] March, *Rewriting Scotland*, p. 115.
[18] McGlynn, "Janice Galloway", p. 22.
[19] March, p. 115.

The repetition of the stereotypes in the glossy magazines juxtaposed with Joy's depression questions their validity in a similar manner to how drag, according to Butler, subverts stereotypes of gender by taking gendered behaviour over the top and displacing it into a new context. The contrast between Joy's illnesses and the images presented in magazines shows how stereotypes and their representation in the media can cause problems in the psyche As a result this undermines, or at least questions, the stereotypes and their use. However, the criticism of the ironic juxtaposition is not simply directed at women reading magazines nor even at the negative influence the contents of these magazines can have, but rather it challenges uncomplicated attitudes towards either of these aspects.

The juxtaposition between the headlines and Joy's life reveal how hollow the guidelines can sound, but also how comforting a magazine can be. It is like a close friend to Joy. Far from trying to trivialize magazines or to show them to be simply and only harmful, Galloway wanted to give this kind of "female concerns" the significance they have in women's lives.[20] Glenda Norquay argues that Galloway's writing 'deconstructs' gendered subjectivities in that she does not purely mirror women's lives or present an aesthetic challenge to 'patriarchal' writing and discourse, but rather that her writing searches for ways of living and of perceiving the world that are not necessarily determined by the old discourses.[21] The stress and significance Galloway gives to glossy magazines and other female concerns challenges all dismissive and uncomplicated perceptions of them. Yes, the magazines may be trivial, but that is not all they are. Galloway encourages to look beneath the surface and to see that such things have a function. In her own words, she writes "as though having a female perspective is *normal*" thereby challenging the view that women's issues are deviant, add-on or extra and therefore, not the proper material for serious literature.[22]

---

[20] Thomas.
[21] Norquay, "Janice Galloway's novels", pp. 133, 136.
[22] March, "Interview with Janice Galloway."

What is more, at the same time that Galloway shows the magazines to have a definite significance, she also shows that Joy is not silly enough to be blind to their negative effects, even when she freely chooses to follow their advice. After leaving Paul she takes solace in magazines as she searches for a new identity, but in the end following the magazines' advice only makes her feel anxious and oppressed:

> I would wake up and think this is my One Shot at Today. I'm Young, Dynamic, Today's Woman. I'm Multi-Orgasmic. I have to Live Life to the Full. I didn't know what this meant but thought it anyway. At the start of every day. It became pressing. I would get anxious if I hadn't done something new, discovered something, found a direction for my life. (193)

Living according to the guidance of the magazines becomes a thing-in-itself that must be achieved on a daily basis. As soon as the role models in the magazines are seen as the only way to be, they become prescriptive norms rather than examples of different ways to be. Joy starts to feel inadequate and forced to become someone she is not. At a difficult time when she needs to redefine herself, she looks to magazines for advice and chooses to try out their solutions. However, when the experiment begins to show negative impacts, she is at no loss as to the cause, although this does not mean she is much the wiser as to where she will find her solutions. As Paul de Man says: "the fallen philosopher […] is wiser still, but this does not in the least prevent him from stumbling again."[23] Similarly, after having tried out the magazines' suggestions, Joy too is wiser in knowing that they did not work for her, but the knowledge will not prevent her from stumbling again with her next experiment. And so, while Handwerk may be right in suggesting, in reference to Lacan, that "the subject's ironic incapacity to grasp itself arises from the multiple roles it is forced to play,"[24] the subject will also become increasingly aware of who she is by trying on a variety of roles.

Although the stereotypes can make Joy feel claustrophobic, she can also use the roles to her own benefit, sometimes successfully like in masking herself in preparation for David's

[23] De Man, p. 214.
[24] Handwerk,p. 16.

visits and sometimes less successfully as when trying to salvage her relationship with Paul. In the first instance Joy adopts a role that protects her from harm, in the second the actions she chooses to repeat fail to achieve the desired result. When things begin to go wrong, both Joy and Paul look for solutions in magazines. The only trouble is that the magazines tell them different things: "I thought the answer was soul-searching and he thought it was split-crotch knickers" (42). They both search for a blueprint on how to act, but they can merely repeat a prescribed remedy. Both their different methods fail because neither of them knows what they want apart from wanting their relationship to be better. In addition to showing how ineffective the guidance found in magazines can be, this one brief passage is enough to show that magazines are not merely a feminine concern and neither are the problems associated with them. In times of trouble, Paul, too, turns to magazines for advice and follows their counsel with unsuccessful results.

In all of the stereotypes and roles Galloway presents in the novel there are two sides to the coin or they are presented from unusual angles. Like the different textual forms that trap Joy, but that also work as her defence against the world, the roles both inhibit any real self-expression and protect the self from the world at the same time. As Deleuze says the repetition of roles is both "our loss *and* our salvation."[25] For instance, the role of the good housewife is not necessarily the opposite for or worse than the role of the "Young, Dynamic Today's Woman". The kitchen is not a place where Joy has been locked up, but a place where she finds refuge and solace. She finds baking, making preserves and sewing soothing. Rather than wishing to be liberated from these chores, she only grieves the fact that there is no one to benefit from them and refers to herself as a "good housewife going to waste" (41).

March claims that actually these chores "dysfunction as healing activities" and only remind Joy of her failure as a housewife "because she no longer acts within a domestic

[25] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 19. Emphasis in the original.

partnership."[26] McGlynn, on the other hand, argues that Joy's efforts at domestic duties reveal how closely home and female domesticity are linked together, and she sees that Joy both resists and enacts this model.[27] McGlynn seems to consider the two attitudes as incompatible, but it is not a question of enacting and resisting, but of enacting and subverting. In March's opinion, Joy cannot find comfort in the house because the house, too, engages her in meaningless roleplay. However, although the house does unsettle Joy, it is not because of these chores. Even without a man, baking is one of the few things she really enjoys to a degree that she even "read[s] the ingredients and the method out loud for the beautiful sound of the words" (41). These are hardly the words of a woman who deplores the fact that she is expected to cook and enjoy cooking simply because she is a woman. Joy enacts those parts of the role that she finds comfortable and discards the parts that would require her to compromise herself.

March sees Galloway's characters trapped between the expectation to submit to the roles prescribed them by the masculinist culture and the feminist expectation to fight against these roles. For her, Galloway's writing reveals that it is impossible to negotiate successfully between the extremes.[28] However, Galloway does not just show how incompatible the two expectations are, but she also subverts both expectations. Norquay analyses Galloway's writing through the term bricolage which she uses to mean the transformation or subversion of the original use of objects.[29] I would suggest that even more than subverting the original use of concepts and conventions, Galloway subverts our perception of these. She shows how harmful the categorisations of both the masculinist culture and feminist expectations can be, but also that there is something good in both of them. Beyond this Galloway tries to map out new possibilities that might not restricted by this dichotomy. And so, Joy can enjoy such

[26] March, *Rewriting Scotland*, p. 115.
[27] Mary McGlynn. "Janice Galloway's Alienated Spaces." *Scottish Studies Review* 4.2 (2003): 82-97, p. 84.
[28] March, p. 111.
[29] Norquay, "Janice Galloway's novels", p. 133.

things as baking, sewing, reading magazines and wearing pretty clothes without being inclined to submit to the roles the masculinist culture offers her. Galloway blends and combines the various roles, attitudes and expectations in ways that defy their placement in oppositional categorisations.

Even Joy's own attitude towards the various roles she attempts to play is dual. On the one hand, she is very critical of the roles society offers her, but on the other, she also longs for them. One of the roles she begins to question is the part of the 'good girl' and the myths surrounding it. She compares the qualities of the good girl to her own behaviour and realises that being good does not lead to a reward like she was lead to believe:

> I used to be so *good* all the time.
> [where **good = productive/hardworking/wouldn't say boo**]
> …
> [where **good = value for money**]
> …
> [where **good = not putting anyone out by feeling too much, blank, unobtrusive**]
> …
> [where **good = neat, acting in a credit-worthy manner**]
> …
> If I was a good [ie **patient, thoughtful, uncomplaining**] girl long enough I would reap the reward. (81-2, emphasis in the original)

She played the part of the good girl because she wanted to please others, because she thought it was a prerequisite for love and approval. She played the role because it was expected but also because she wanted to achieve something. But now she questions the myth and sees that there is no causal relation between being good and reaping the reward. Metzstein argues that a part of Joy's 'illness' is the fact that "the powers of constraint which used to operate through an internalised model of the 'good girl' no longer function successfully."[30] She becomes marginalised because she no longer plays along. She understands that the universe will always create ironic twists of fate that are not in her power to change and she begins to figure out new ways of being that will not confine her as previous models have.

[30] Metzstein, p. 141.

She is also conscious that being a good girl is ultimately a pretence. Echoing a nursery rhyme about little girls, she says:

> when I was good I was very very good but
> but
> there was more going on below the surface.
> There always is.

Being good is a role that can be donned, but it is never the whole story. Alison Smith proposes that in fact one of the novel's achievements is the suggestion that "there's a frightening, inescapable nihilism lurking beneath the acceptable construction of female identity."[31] There is always something more underneath the mask that is not necessarily compatible with it. Also, as an abstract stereotype the role is never equal to any of its repetitions or representations because when a stereotype is actualised it becomes something different. Stereotypes are always simplifications that cannot take into account the complexity of life. On the one hand, Galloway shows how unrealistic stereotypes can be when actualised in life, but on the other, she also shows how they can be used in order to survive life. She shows that there is a difference between aspiring to be like a stereotype and acting according to it for a specific ends. This is not to say that the novel encourages an individualistic exploitation of others. It is rather a difference between compromising oneself and navigating within social expectations while still maintaining a sincerity in one's actions.

Although Joy is critical of the good girl image, she holds fast to the roles people should play when going out. When a special night out is organised for her ward, Joy tries to back out at the last minute because:

> 1. No-one will dance with me.
> 2. No-one will take me home.
> 3. No-one will play footsie/ hold my hand beneath the table/kiss me goodnight.
> 4. I will make no-one's evening.
> 5. I hardly know these people. We have nothing in common. We share nothing except sadness/ illness/ neurosis. We don't choose to be together. None of the things people come together for will be there.
> 6. The food, christ, the food. (161)

[31] Alison Smith. "Four Success Stories." *Chapman* 74-75 (1993): 177-92, p. 178.

Just as the role of good girl loses meaning if one does not reap the reward, going out seems pointless to Joy without a date with whom she can do all that one is supposed to do on a date. The insistence on the stereotypical formula for an evening out becomes absurd when contrasted with the fact that they are all already marginalised outside society's expectations due to their illnesses. In the end their outing is not so different to Paul's works dances. The patients get ready with equal enthusiasm, they get drunk and talk about "sex, money, religion, family" (168). The only difference is that they are more aware of the fact that they are acting, like Ben with his cowboy look and the accent he fakes to a tee. They know each others' reality, they share the same doctors and they have seen each other in other moods. They know that when the clock strikes twelve the carriage will turn back into a pumpkin.

Where in one instance Joy fights against the "masculinist cultural expectations" and embraces a more feminist attitude in relation to being a good girl, in the other she does the opposite and insists on having gender roles clearly divided and adhered to. The difference being that the role of the good girl is an ideal for the kind of personality one should have, whereas the formula for dating has more to do with how to act in a specific situation. The first concerns a person's inner qualities and the second is about actions and practices. However, both examples reveal the stereotypes and the roles people play and show what makes them harmful, but also what makes them useful. Even though they can be an imposition against self-expression, they also help Joy navigate through the world of sneaky arbitrariness, and even self-expression can become an imposition when it becomes a criterion to be fulfilled.

4.2 Institutional Echoes

> Q. How many psychiatrists does it take to change a light bulb?
> A. One. But the light bulb must really want to change.[32]

[32] Galloway, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, p. 173.

Not only does Joy have to cope with all the contradictions between the roles she tries to perform and what people expect of her, but her own expectations are regularly thwarted when others do not play the roles she expected them to. This is the case mainly when she has to deal with different authorities: her boss, the reverend, the housing officials and the doctors. Occasionally this also happens in closer, personal relationships, for example with Paul whose will to control Joy resembles the attitudes of the authorities. Through the juxtaposition of the different institutions with Joy's reality the novel explores equally how the institutions manage with Joy and how Joy manages with the institutions.

Joy's frustration with the authorities is reflected in the names she furnishes them with. None of them have proper names, but are named after their occupation or some personal characteristic or a combination of both. Mr Dick and Rev. Dogsbody are the embodiments of their names. The impersonality of the changing doctors at the hospital is reflected in them being numbered rather than named. Dr Stead is the odd one out of the doctors. The name expresses the difference in the relationship between him and Joy as opposed to the doctors. The Health Visitor and the Boss are only referred to by their function in relation to Joy. The other names also have ironic or satiric elements (Joy Stone who is neither joyful nor made of stone, or Michael Fisher who drowns), but the names of the authorities appear to be Joy's deliberate jabs at the people who make her life difficult and her way of venting her frustration.

Joy is often faced with authorities that hide behind their statutes and try their best to avoid any kind of personal involvement with their clients or their problems. The tiny-minded Mr Dick from the Housing Authority clings to his regulations when it benefits him, but is willing to let things slip when money is brought to the table. His unwillingness to help Joy remain in Michael's house appears absurd considering that a quarter of the houses in the estate are vacant and that the area is not very lucrative to begin with. Although Mr Dick comes up with every possible excuse why he does not have to let Joy live in the house, he still

claims that they are “bending over backwards you know, bending over backwards” (18) to help her. He uses his position of authority over Joy to boost his own sense of power. Joy knows she should not have to pay for the missing dustbin or washing line and yet, in the end, she is forced to do so in order to keep her home.

Instead of looking at Joy’s situation and trying to find the best solution for the problem, Mr Dick refuses to come out from behind his regulations and instead sees it as a considerable concession that he is even talking to Joy in the first place, because “[s]trictly speaking, [they’re] under no obligation to house [her] at all, not when [she was] never registered as tenant” (18). Like the Health Visitor, Mr Dick only follows procedure, but does so without any commitment or adaptation. Where the Health Visitor is unable to understand how she should help, Mr Dick is simply unwilling to do so. Galloway makes Mr Dick speak a recognisable bureaucratic jargon in a context where it appears absurd in its pettiness, thus revealing the ridiculous inflexibility of institutions.

The health service is treated with more understanding, even if it is also burdened with bureaucracy and regulations that make it difficult for the doctors to actually treat their patients. The hospital receives the bulk of the criticism, but even Dr Stead cannot escape from ironic and satiric attacks completely. Despite her illness Joy is able to see problems in her treatment and in the way the system works and while her capacity to tackle these problems is diminished, she is by no means unaware of them. She knows perfectly well that the appointments are too short to accomplish anything and that the treatment is not helping her. In the mental exercise Joy goes through in preparation for her appointment she is able to come out and voice her complaints for the way the system works, or rather, does not work:

> IMPATIENT OK, let’s talk straight. You ask me to talk then you look at your watch. What am I supposed to take from that? This whole thing is ridiculous. Can’t you send me to someone who’s paid to have me waste their time? You don’t know what to do with me but you keep telling me to come back. And stop sending that woman to

see me. All it does is make me guilty and secretive.

DOCTOR Look, this is reactive depression. I don't see that sending you to a specialist will help things. (52-3)

Joy is able to spell out the ironic contradictions of the situation even though she might not be able to appreciate the irony herself. The invitation to talk is undermined by the concern for keeping to schedule. In addition, even the invitation to talk is hardly encouraging: "Don't tell me how to do my job. Relax. You can talk to me. I made a double appointment so we can have twenty minutes. Go ahead. I'm listening" (52). The line has all the right phrases, but when they are combined together in this context, they sound dismissive rather than reassuring.

In the mental exercise Joy caricatures the visits in order to prepare herself. By doing so she reveals more clearly the actual discrepancies between how the system works and what it is supposed to achieve in respect to the patients. Although the real Dr Stead comes across as more sympathetic than the imaginary one – he is smaller with wrinkles at his temples and bitten nails – it is still clear that he does not have the solutions for Joy's problems and neither does he have the resources to go into them properly. As a physician Dr Stead does not have the expertise to treat mental illnesses, but still he does not send her to a specialist. It remains unclear whether the refusal to do so has to do with the diagnosis or with political or financial reasons, but nonetheless, the expectation of help is defeated by the fact that both Joy and Dr Stead know there is nothing he can do for her. Dr Stead's role as doctor both puts him in a position to help Joy, but also limits his possibilities of doing so.

The situation with the doctors is even worse at the hospital and here Joy's imagined dystopia comes closer to reality. Not only does Joy get asked to relate the details of her current circumstances three times, a task that is very difficult for her, every time she has an appointment with a doctor, there is a different person behind the desk, and she has to start all over again. There is no continuity or plan in her treatment, if one can talk about treatment at all. The policy at the hospital is to keep the patients fed and drugged, that is how far the

treatment goes. When Joy asks after treatment Dr Three informs her that "You ask to see one of us when you feel a need to" (126) thereby effectively moving the responsibility away from the doctors and onto the patients. The reader can only hope that the lack of interest the doctors seem to take in their patients is due to a lack of resources rather than a lack of interest or professional ability. Whatever the case may be, the overturning of the roles has an ironic effect that indicates how a patient-doctor relationship should function, but also points out that very often reality is no match to the ideal.

Glenda Norquay argues that Joy's repeated joke about psychiatrists changing a light bulb is an ironic comment on the inadequacy of the treatment, although she does not elaborate on the subject.[33] In my opinion, the irony is not in the joke as such, but in its juxtaposition with Joy's situation where the change is not made difficult by the unwilling light bulb. Rather she is a light bulb desperately wanting to change, one that is surrounded by a swarm of psychiatrists who are either unable or unwilling to help her. There is a cosmic irony in the fact that Joy is surrounded by people whose job it is to help her and yet she is just as alone with her problems as before. The nursing staff only looks after the patients' immediate needs and the doctors seem far too preoccupied by other things.

Dr Three takes the passivity of the doctors to the extreme when, in reply to Joy's question about what kind of treatment he would recommend to her, he says: "Ah but that's the whole point. I'm not suggesting anything" (164). He seems to view the hospital as a hotel that provides drugs to its residents, if this is not enough for Joy then he suggests that she leave the place. He refuses to take any responsibility for the patients' welfare or recovery. He performs his duties by being there and by seeing the patients when they make appointments, but that is as far as he is willing to go. Even when Joy suggests possible courses of treatment

[33] Norquay, "Janice Galloway's novels", p. 135.

(counselling, analysis or ECT), he refuses to play along, he just replies: “Don’t be ridiculous.” He sabotages all attempts to drag him from his comfortable passivity.

Dr Three’s behaviour as a doctor defies Joy’s expectations. She comes to the hospital under the assumption that she will be helped there, but notices that she needs to seek out the help herself. The only way she knows how to do this is by making appointments with the doctors who do not play along according to the rules. They repeat elements of the role, but the overall result is always slightly off. Where drag takes performance over the top and thus parodies natural gender, here the superficial repetition of a formula is exaggerated in order to point out that it is not enough just to repeat, there also needs to be a commitment or a purpose to the repetition, even if it is an unconscious one. By following procedure, and only following procedure, the doctors appear indifferent to both their responsibilities and their patients.

However, the doctors are not merely projected as uncaring or unprofessional. Certainly their profession is criticised as is their surrender to the system, but they are also made human by their personal problems and characteristics. No matter how much frustration the appointments with Dr Stead cause, Joy likes the old, overworked doctor whom she believes to be only thinking of her best. And yet, despite Joy’s sympathy for the real Dr Stead who seems to genuinely care, Joy still leaves the surgery feeling “like a steamrollered cartoon: two-dimensions to start with then flattened some more till [she is] tissue” (51). On the other hand, Joy feels guilty for going to Dr Stead’s office too often and taking up his time. As a result, she tries to minimise her imposition, which is in itself ironic, by approaching her appointments like they were business meetings: she prepares herself and makes notes in order to appear efficient. Although she is frustrated by the way the system works, she also tries her best to help both herself and Dr Stead cope with the situation. Her attitude also works as an ironic comment on the western world where everything seems to be measured in money and efficiency at the expense of other qualities.

Despite the distant attitude of the doctors at the hospital, the image is softened by their personal problems. At the ward Ros explains Dr Three's hostile attitude: "He gets these headaches. Migraine or something. Apart from that he's a total pig" (127). The explanation lifts the doctor's coat off Dr Three and makes him more human as his performance as a doctor is shown to be influenced by his well-being as a person. Although Dr Two appears more sympathetic towards Joy, his professional performance is also deficient. His shortcomings are explained by the fact that he is in the middle of a divorce so his capacity to help others is diminished. But even though he is preoccupied with personal problems, his manner is not as dismissive as Dr Three's. Still, the result is that the doctors are just as unable to play their assigned parts as Joy is in her various relationships and, like Joy, they too have their personal traumas that affect their behaviour and interaction with other people.

Just as these doctors defy expectations, so does Joy's relationship with them. The tables get turned around to the extent that Joy starts to treat the doctors. When she has an appointment with Dr Two, they spend the half hour talking about his divorce rather than about her problems. Joy also manages to throw Dr Three off balance by asking him if he is ok. Norquay argues that this demonstrates the novel's refusal "to settle for fixed and oppositional categories": Joy's behaviour breaks down the patient/doctor dichotomy.[34] The roles blur and blend so that both the doctor and the patient take on characteristics of the other. While the doctors do not fulfil their criteria, Joy also fails to act out the part of the patient. Her preparations for the appointments, her disinclination to relinquish power and her concern for the welfare of the doctors are in contrast with that role. The novel's refusal to settle into the prescribed roles reveals how incompatible they are with the complexity of life, but also why the roles are necessary in order to achieve the goal, which in this case is to help the patient.

[34] Ibid, p. 134.

In the end, the biggest irony in the treatment Joy receives at the hospital is the fact that she finds the consolation and help she needs not from the doctors and nurses but from a self-help book Dr Two gives her. It is ironic that a book has so much more to offer her than people, but it is also ironic because Joy is better able to accept help from a book than she is from people, even if it is from an American publisher. She absorbs the book: "I read the book in two and a half hours and cry all the way through. Like watching Bambi" (172). It manages to trigger something in her that all the doctors have been unable to reach. It also comments on the individualistic nature of today's society: help can be offered and accepted only through the medium of magazines, books, films etc, but direct interaction between people fails.

However, it must be acknowledged, that despite all its deficiencies, the hospital is still a place that allows Joy to heal. By going to a place where people are paid to look after her, Joy is relieved of the guilt that she is a burden to her friends who are innocent of her present situation and should not be obliged to clear up the mess. Being at the hospital validates her illness and allows her to admit that she cannot cope on her own. By reducing some of the guilt and relieving her of some of the responsibility the hospital does help Joy to get better, despite all its problems and questionable treatment. It alleviates some of the emotional pressure she feels and, in Galloway's words, allows her "to sink into the dark bit, where she can feel, is this really what I want to do?"[35] Joy needs to hit the bottom before she can start climbing back up again, and the hospital provides her with a controlled environment where to do that. So while the doctors fail to help Joy and cause her additional stress, the hospital offers her a place where she can go inside herself, which is what she needs to do in order to heal.

In contrast to all the authorities that perform their duties with minimum effort, there is one occasion where the authorities respond to Joy even beyond her expectations. The first night she spends in Michael's house after his death, the doors rattle and she thinks she hears

[35] Murray, p. 27.

someone outside. She goes to report the incident to the police. Instead of belittling her concern as the other authorities do, the policeman looks right at her and listens to her "writing down when I spoke. As if I mattered" (25). The policeman pays attention and in addition to taking notes tries to reassure Joy and tells her to contact them whenever she feels a need to. The difference in the attitude of the police and in Joy's attitude towards the police is also seen in the way the policeman is made human. Whereas the doctors become individuals through their personal problems, the policeman has a name, a real name rather than an expression of what he is. He is called Graham. He treats Joy as a person rather than a case file, and so Joy, too, sees the person rather than the office.

But what makes the police different from the other authorities? Why does the policeman respond to Joy in a way that none of the other authorities do? Perhaps the difference is not in the type of authority, but in the type of the problem. Neither her depression nor her status in relation to Michael have complete social validity and, therefore, they suffer from being questioned as legitimate problems. In contrast, even though the imagined or real intruder is absent, and therefore abstract, the threat is considered concrete and valid and is treated with a severity that Joy's other problems are not. The idea of an evil man preying upon single women fits within society's framework of acknowledgeable problems, whereas depression and the changing relationship patterns have not yet acquired that status. Galloway's ironic treatment of the ways society works, challenges the outdated categorisations. In Norquay's words: "discourses of order are rendered ridiculous through over-use and juxtaposition."[36]

4.3 Banal Reality

The powers of repetition are not confined to the various roles people adopt or are expected to adopt in their interaction with others but also extend to the repetition of mundane habits.

[36] Norquay, "Janice Galloway's Novels", p. 132.

While the ironic repetition of roles exposes a lack or absence of something essential to the role, the repetition of the mundane challenges the dismissal of everyday life as subsidiary or unimportant. Glenda Norquay argues that in order to discover her own world, as opposed to one that is dictated for her, Joy needs "to create chaos, as the novel itself does, by listing cataloguing, quoting; the emptiness of such 'order' becomes evident."[37] But even when the repetition reveals the emptiness of such order, it also shows the power of everyday life and the strength that can be derived from daily chores. In the context of Joy's life the mundane activities become other: What is overlooked in everyday life becomes visible and in the process its easy dismissal as mere background is challenged. Janice Galloway has said that in writing the novel she "was taking the thin end of the wedge of women's lives, and making Joy the 'thick' end,"[38] and in her hands the banal reality that the novel is immersed in is no longer banal, accustomed or insignificant – that which is usually background scenery becomes the very essence of the novel and an important ingredient into interpreting Joy's character. The unusual combination of the details transforms them into metaphors that express larger issues, and thereby reveals and subverts our expectations.

For Joy, shopping for groceries, cleaning and bathing do not constitute the bare necessities of life that aim to take care of her basic needs so as to make 'real living' possible, where 'real living' is understood to contain dramatic events and to take place outside domestic routines and daily habits. While the emptiness of such chores becomes painfully evident in the context of her life, they are also revealed to be a source of stability that Joy needs in order to have the strength to process what is happening to her. The extensive baking, for example, appears meaningless in view of the fact that no one will eat the cakes within her domestic sphere. Without a spouse and with her anorexia the cakes end up being wrapped in silver foil to be given away as gifts.

---

[37] Ibid.
[38] Thomas.

However, for Joy the importance of baking is not in the outcome but in the actual act of baking. The simple enjoyment of making something shines through from her description, even if it also serves as an ironic comment on the role of a domestic goddess:

> The glass jars are polished every day, so the kitchen glitters. Muscatel, Lexia, pitted dates, candid peel, cherries and chocolate chips; quicksands of brown sugars. The powders make clouds: wholemeal, wheatmeal, strong plain white and brown, granary, rye and buckwheat for blinis. I am very adventurous. I fold and whisk and knead for hours among the jars, dropping blended mixes from spoons into the shining tins. (41)

For Joy, it is the baking process that matters, not how the cakes define her and her relationship to others. When the domestic chores are viewed, not from the point of view of outcome but of process, it becomes irrelevant whether Joy works within a domestic partnership or whether she will eat her own cakes. From this perspective, the chores become a crucial element of her healing process through the simple act of doing them. Joy repeats the motions of the good house wife, but instead of showing the emptiness of the chores, she shows the emptiness of the expectation that baking is performed only in the context of that role, where the consumption of the end product validates one's role in relation to others. While Joy's outward actions repeat a stereotype feminists have fought hard against, they also subvert expectations without making the actions themselves invalid or reprehensible.

Domestic routines such as this one make Joy feel more secure about herself. She can, therefore, let her mind wander and process her past and present, which is essential for her in order to come to terms with it all. In the midst of baking, for example, she thinks about the times when she was with Paul: how the relationship started, how it began to go wrong and why. It is easier for her to let her mind drift to the issues she needs to address while she is occupied with something else, rather than tackling the problems face on, although the chores also help her in the latter method. After baking Joy feels confident enough to consciously confront problems in the here and now: She can handle thinking about her appointment with

Dr Stead and so makes her list of things to say to him so as not to forget anything when the time comes.

Joy is fully aware that routines help her cope, but she also knows they are not the solution to her problems:

> I like routines. You can get cosy in a rut. You can pretend things are the same when they're not. Knowing I need to live with lies makes me more anxious, depressed and guilty. This way I need routines even more. (156)

She knows that routines help her overcome anxiety and help her occupy herself at a time when she is at a loss to understand her own place and reason in the world, but she also knows that the routines will not tell her how she might recover that understanding. Instead of defining her to a particular role and thereby defining her existence, the routines are a source of strength while she figures these out. Routines help her defend against the arbitrariness of the world by being a constant that she can rely on when all else seems to have lost its meaning. With everything else in her life Joy has to think and analyse constantly, but routines provide her a break from that. As she says: "it's a set routine so I don't need to think" (17). However, the routines are not just a means of escaping her problems as McGlynn suggests.[39] Even as the routines contribute significantly to Joy's mental balance, it would be unfair to limit their meaning for only that purpose and to ignore the pleasure she derives from them regardless of whether they alleviate her depression or not.

In describing Joy's everyday existence in such detail, Galloway follows in the footsteps of one of her main influences, James Kelman. Edwin Morgan argues that Kelman focuses on "the everyday texture of apparently *non*-dramatic details," and believes that a writer's main task lies precisely in the description of banal reality.[40] In Kelman's opinion the relevant part of the truth is revealed through looking at perfectly ordinary people doing everyday things,

---

[39] McGlynn, "Janice Galloway", p. 19.
[40] Edwin Morgan. "Tradition and Experiment in the Glasgow Novel." *The Scottish Novel since the Seventies.* Eds. Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993, p. 87.

not from making up exciting dramatic events.[41] Cairns Craig is also of the opinion that in Kelman's narratives, what happens is not as important as the context where it happens and what the characters think about it.[42] The similarity between Kelman's writing and Galloway's becomes clear. Galloway's narrative also concentrates on the non-dramatic and it is in the non-dramatic and in the context where the meaning of the novel lies.

Whereas Kelman aims "to convey the actual texture of life,"[43] Galloway's writing caricatures it to an extent. But while the presentation is somewhat off, it manages to pin down something essential to everyday life. Through the ironic juxtapositions of an anorexic baker, a broke grocery shopaholic or a drama teacher who is incapable of expressing herself, Galloway shows how tragically silly but also how true in their absurdity some of our expectations and categorisations are. While Kelman's concentration on the non-dramatic defies and subverts expectations of 'literature', Galloway questions our expectations of what kind of functions and meanings everyday life is, or should be, attributed with.

As another point of similarity between Kelman and Galloway, the focus on Joy's everyday life, rather than on dramatic events, shows that her troubles are a continuing condition. Craig describes Kelman's protagonists as being "in one way or another on the edge of mental breakdown" and whose crises "are not resolvable by action or event,"[44] and Joy, too, fits the definition. To summarise the novel as "one woman's experience of death and the devastating effect which this has on her personality,"[45] as Margery Metzstein does, is to simplify the novel greatly. Michael's death may have triggered the collapse, but Joy's problems are more deeply rooted than just this one trauma, no matter how devastating it is for her. It is the final drop, albeit a big one, that makes the glass spill over. So even if Joy's

---

[41] Ibid. pp. 93-4.
[42] Cairns Craig. "Resisting Arrest: James Kelman" *The Scottish Novel since the Seventies.* Eds. Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993, p. 104.
[43] Morgan, p. 94.
[44] Craig. "Resisting Arrest: James Kelman", p. 104.
[45] Metzstein, p. 138.

current state was instigated by a dramatic event, it is not one that can be resolved by a chain of dramatic events. Michael's death, along with all the other traumas and insecurities Joy is faced with, create a condition that is more complex.

Joy is not quite as trapped in her condition as are the heroes of Kelman's narratives where there is no hope of redemption. Craig suggests that redemption implies "the power of event, and therefore of narrative, to change the self or the world," and this kind of resolution is not possible for such heroes as Hines in *The Busconductor Hines* for whom busconducting is a terminal condition that cannot be escaped.[46] Craig goes on to say that the only future open for Kelman's characters is one of endless repetition where repetition is seen as a confining element. Like Hines, Joy is also trapped in her circumstances, but for her there is also hope for change. Where Hines is condemned to endless repetition without escape, in Joy's world repetition and the act of repeating differently are the methods for change and liberation.

The final pages hold an optimism unlike the rest of the novel even though very little has changed in Joy's activities: she cleans, washes clothes, reads a magazine and drinks vodka just as before and yet something is different. The claustrophobia is gone. Whereas before "[c]leaning is just a sham" and unidentifiable debris is simply pushed out of sight under the rug (92), by the end of the novel Joy even brushes the cobwebs from the ceiling and washes the windows until they shine. In the end the cleaning and washing are more than activities to do while lasting or chores that medicate her anxiety, now they also hold a prospect of tomorrow. The intense focus on the here and now starts to give way to plans for the future.

However, in line with the rest of the novel and with the focus on the mundane, the plans have nothing to do with dramatic events, but are still within the domain of the non-dramatic, banal reality. Joy buys herself a set of Christmas lights, cuts and dyes her hair, and decides to get her ears pierced. She breaks her routines in small ways and submits to chaos, like her

[46] Ibid, p. 105.

horoscope advises. But although she breaks the routines she still occupies her time with many of the same activities as before. The difference is more in her attitude than in the actual things she does. The intense concentration on not looking at the mess as she shifts dirt out of sight is replaced by an effort to get to the source of the uncleanliness. This change also reflects Joy's implicit decision to stop hiding from her problems and to start dealing with them instead.

Joy repeats the activities of her banal existence, but she repeats them differently. After Michael's death she uses them to find some order in a chaotic and undecipherable world. She is exaggeratedly analytical about what she chooses to repeat. The contexts where Joy repeats and the reasons she states are not in accordance with the repetition. Finally, as Joy begins to deal with her situation more actively, the need to please others or the need to fulfil a prescribed role lose their meaning. She starts to do things for herself, and therefore, it is no one else's business but hers if she cuts her hair spiky and dyes it purple. While for the most part of the novel she still agonises about expectations that seem to require her to adjust to the point she does not know who she is anymore, the ending of the novel sees her repeating differently, not in relation to expectations, but to her own earlier performance. She still repeats the same activities, but does so in a manner that does not require her to compromise herself.

5 Conclusion

Shrek: For your information, there's a lot more to ogres than people think.
Donkey: Example?
Shrek: Example? Okay, er... ogres... are... like onions.
Donkey: *[sniffs onion]* They stink?
Shrek: Yes...NO!
Donkey: Or they make you cry.
Shrek: No!
Donkey: Oh, you leave them out in the sun and they turn brown and start sproutin' little white hairs.
Shrek: NO! LAYERS! Onions have layers. OGRES have layers. Onions have layers... you get it. We both have layers.
Donkey: Oh, you both have layers. *[pause]* You know, not everybody likes onions. *[pause]* CAKES! Everybody loves cakes! Cakes have layers!
Shrek: *[restraining temper]* I don't care... what everyone likes. Ogres. Are not. Like cakes!
Donkey: You know what else everybody likes? Parfaits. Have you ever met a person, you say, "Let's get some parfait," they say, "Hell no, I don't like no parfait"? Parfaits are delicious.
Shrek: NOOO!!! YOU DENSE, IRRITATING, MINIATURE BEAST OF BURDEN! OGRES ARE LIKE ONIONS! END OF STORY! BYE BYE! *[whispers]* See you later!

It is a question of layers. Irony is built on layers that may stink like an onion, but that may, like a cake, also produce more pleasant effects. It is not just that irony has layers, but that it makes them visible, plays with the contrasts and contradictions between them and, thereby, exposes our expectations and attitudes. Where Shrek is upset about the fact that people only see his exterior without realising there is more to him, irony not only exposes the inner layers but by doing so also reveals the assumptions associated with the topmost layer. Ultimately all the different aspects of irony that I have explored in this thesis also have to do with layers: The multiplicity of levels can be observed in cosmic irony's contrast between expectations and reality, in the continuum between intimacy and detachment, in the artificial separation of body and mind as well as in the layers of similarity and difference produced by repetition.

But what are all these layers and their inherent inconsistencies for and what does the irony bring about? As Donkey well points out, not everybody likes onions, but equally not everybody likes cakes either, and similarly irony provokes a whole variety of reactions and interpretations. Linda Hutcheon argues that irony is such a volatile mode of expression because of its political nature. According to her, strong reactions to irony can be explained by the fact that it affects relations in communication (exclusion – inclusion, superiority –

inferiority), which help shape relations of power.[1] Because irony, along with humour, satire and parody, is subversive and transgressive, it is a threat to those in power. All these modes have a tendency to point out flaws and inconsistencies in the ruling hegemony and, therefore, they undermine its authority. Then again, Andrew Stott points out that despite this ability to subvert, none of them are necessarily effective in constructively suggesting alternatives for the dogma they criticise.[2]

In this chapter, I will by and large discuss the politics of irony through the politics of humour. While these are two different tropes, they often intermingle so that humour can be ironic and irony humorous, but what is more important, they "both involve complex power relations and both depend upon social and situational context for their very coming into being."[3] And so, although the two have their distinguishing features, in this discussion of the politics of irony, they are close enough so that what is said of one is also relevant for the other. Furthermore, as Galloway's irony mingles with dark humour, the theory of humour is not likely to go amiss in this context.

Having established irony and humour as subversive, we still need to consider to what aim they subvert and transgress boundaries. Stott argues that even humour that sharply criticises the politics and norms of the surrounding society, may, more often than not, function as a validation for the existing system rather than a challenge to it.[4] In such cases comedy's political relevance is secondary to its function as entertainment. Stott quotes Stephen Halliwell in establishing that humour's subversion does not necessarily evade society's standards, but is "rather an institutionalized and culturally sanctioned exemption of them."[5] Stott continues by deducing that this approach sees humour as politically impotent even if it is allowed a longer leash than is usually permissible. And so, in the end, humour is more often conservative than

[1] Hutcheon, p. 2.
[2] Andrew Stott. *Comedy*. London: Routledge, 2004, p. 126.
[3] Hutcheon, p. 26.
[4] Stott, p. 107.
[5] Stephen Halliwell, as quoted by Stott, p. 107.

liberal despite the criticism it expresses.[6] Hutcheon, too, affirms that irony has been used as a tool for both camps. It can, therefore, serve conservative purposes just as well as radical ones.[7]

Galloway's humour has occasionally been seen as conservative and *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* has been criticised, for example, for the way in which Joy succumbs to society's expectations and to roles dictated by the masculinist culture. Joy has even been questioned as role model. For example, when Moira Burgess evaluates her on the basis of her strength and confidence, there is an implication that these are the qualities that characterise a 'good' heroine.[8] These types of comments reflect the attitude that the way Galloway repeats stereotypes, reinforces and validates them and that whatever deviation the novel may express, all will, at the end of the day, return to status quo as is common for comedies. This type of reading would also see Joy as essentially the same throughout the novel, and her efforts at reinventing herself and her relationships as limited to the realisation that there is no viable alternative to "the way things are." In regard to the institutions, the novel's criticism would, in the end, be undermined by an acceptance that one cannot change the system, only survive it. Such a reading would find cleverness in the depiction of stereotypes and institutions, but would see the subject matter as a means for providing the cleverness, rather than seeing the cleverness as a way of shedding light on the subject.

However, humour may also work in the opposite direction, so that entertainment becomes secondary to its politics. Stott argues that while humour may reinforce prejudices by provoking intolerant laughter with their repetition, it can also use laughter to fight bigotry and this can help release people from prejudicial ideologies.[9] He goes on to say that this type of humour is redemptive and revelatory. Here laughter becomes, not the objective of humour, but its tool, something that provokes new ideas and new perceptions. As a result, Stott argues that

---

[6] Stott, pp. 105, 107.
[7] Hutcheon, p. 27.
[8] Moira Burgess. *Imagine a City: Glasgow in Fiction*. Argyll: Argyll Publishing, 1998, p. 294.
[9] Stott, p. 115.

> [c]omedy retrieves a suppressed truth, but not in purely Freudian terms as a means of keeping larger repressions in their proper place, but as a revolutionary force that liberates people from their fear, interrogates repression, and converts it into positive political energy. 'Most comics *feed* prejudices and fear and blinkered vision', he says, 'but the best ones, the best ones… illuminate them, make them clearer to see, easier to deal with' (Griffiths, 1979: 23).[10]

So, humour also has the power to heal and to transform. It is not simply condemned to repeat and revalidate what was before, but has the power to initiate change. Galloway's irony does this on two levels: firstly by aiding Joy find her truth, which will help her change her life, at least in attitude if nothing else, and secondly by illuminating the readers' prejudices, which may lead to a better understanding, not only of Joy's world, but of the one we live in. The laughter of the novel is aimed at habitual repetition and the blindness with which we usually approach it, both in connection to the private sphere and in the wider context of the institutions that are part of our daily lives. The irony illuminates and questions, rather than succumbs and conforms.

M. M. J. Fischer echoes Stott when he describes ironic humour as a "survival skill, a tool for acknowledging complexity, a means of exposing or subverting oppressive hegemonic ideologies, and an art for affirming life in the face of objective troubles.[11] All these aspects can be seen at work in *The Trick* as it helps Joy last the worst part out, as it brings social problems into light and as it makes the readers consider their prejudices and assumptions not only in regard to depression, but also in regard to normal day-to-day interaction and to the functioning of institutions. All these are addressed with kindness and understanding even when sharp criticism is also present. The attitude seems to align with what Hutcheon talks about as humorous irony which is disarming rather than ridiculing. Despite its name it may deal with serious issues and does not, therefore, have to be funny in a comic way.[12] She also points out that though this type of irony has a recorded history, it has often been overlooked in critical

---

[10] Stott, p. 116.
[11] Micheal M. J. Fischer. "Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory." *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Eds. James Clifford and George E. Marcus. Berkley: University of California Press, 1986, p. 224
[12] Hutcheon, p. 26

debate for the same reason the theory of humour has been slow to develop: it is easy to dismiss it as trivial or trivialising. However, Hutcheon underlines the fact that humorous irony can be deadly serious. I have tried to show that this is also the case with *The Trick*: its irony is humorous, but at the same time it is also very grave. It has the ability to elicit laughter, even if only the readers mind, but the laughter is always as tragic as it is comic.

Stott also argues that humour and serious matters are by no means incompatible. In fact, the ability to preserve a sense of humour in the grimmest situations can serve as a defence against tyranny. He quotes John Morreall who says that humour allows a person to preserve at least a measure of her freedom: She may not be able to escape her confines, but with a sense of humour her mind remains free.[13] Although Stott admits that there are circumstances where laughter fails to offer comfort, *The Trick* proves that humour can survive very oppressive conditions. The dark humour of the novel allows Joy to remain free in the face of the tyranny of the institutions even when her depression makes the burden all the more heavier. Although the incongruities she perceives in the institutions frustrate her, the viewpoint also helps her remain sane through her dealings with them.

Furthermore, Galloway's irony is "philanthropic not misanthropic, a bridge and not a wall"[14] as William Cook describes Alternative Comedy, which stands opposed to conservative humour. Galloway uses irony to create understanding, not only in irony's effort of implying in order to be understood, but as an effort to clarify the problems she addresses with the irony. She does not build a wall that excludes some and includes others. Such divisions are irrelevant to the aims of her irony. The philanthropic nature of her irony can also be seen in the way she treats her characters. Although the reader is encouraged to identify with Joy, even Tony the Sleazebag and Dr Three the Total Pig are never condemned as thoroughly bad. Their actions are criticised, but more often than not, mitigating circumstances are also offered. Galloway

[13] Stott, p. 104.
[14] William Cook, as quoted by Stott, p. 119

does not place herself or Joy in a consciously superior position in regard to the other characters, or the reader. As the ironist she, in Handwerk's words, "requests the involvement of the other as a way to supplement [her] own perspectives."[15] The irony, therefore, invites the readers to participate and reflect rather than to look down on.

The result is a type of irony that is characterised with complexity, involvement and affection. Unfortunately these are characteristics that most theories of irony do not connect with the trope at all, and when they do, it is only in passing, with great reluctance and with a defensive clause that lessens the type's ironic value and impact. With this thesis I hope to have demonstrated that even cosmic irony is sufficiently 'literary' to merit attention in serious critical writing. As I have tried to show, the theory based on the traditional, rhetorical model of irony cannot accommodate cases of cosmic irony, or many other types of irony for that matter. The philosophical approach to irony allows it a wider scope manifestations and interpretations, but it is still burdened with similar ideas of the ironist's position and with many of the same negative attitudes as irony as a rhetorical device. Linda Hutcheon moves in the right direction with her diagram, but in this thesis I have tried to expand the range of affects even further, to the positive side of the scale. Even this alone challenges traditional irony's detachment and superiority, these characteristics being traditionally viewed as necessary criteria for irony.

Therefore, I have also tried to undo some of the dichotomies associated with irony. Chapter 2 questioned the opposition of the superior ironist and inferior object of irony and showed other relationships to be possible between the two and showed the many ways detachment can be used for differing effects. As discussed in chapter 3, Galloway's ironic exaggeration of Cartesian duality advocates a more unified view of the subject and at the same questions, and even invalidates, the division between irony and satire on the basis of their view of the subject. Finally, chapter 4 replaced the opposition between literal and intended meaning

[15] Handwerk, p. 173.

with a demonstration of discrepancies between levels of meaning where the discrepancies are indicated by repetition.

In this thesis I have then analysed irony as a playground of surfaces and multiple levels along the lines of Gilles Deleuze's and Candace Lang's humour. In addition to this, I have allowed for the existence of not only detachment but also attachment, not only distance but also intimacy, not only scorn but also understanding and instead of the division of body and mind, a view that combines both while allowing the subject to be fragmented and constructed of layers. This is the kind of irony I perceive in Galloway's novel, one that I cannot find in the theory of irony, but where I think it rightly belongs.

While there is a shortage of critical writing on the type of irony Galloway uses, there is also a shortage in critical writing on Galloway's use of irony and humour. As I mention in the introduction, this is an aspect of her writing that is often mentioned but rarely explored. Therefore, my analysis often strays from the issues and passages that have previously been highlighted and discussed, but I hope to have provided new angles to and interpretations of the novel. The novel still offers a great deal more in its social criticism than I have been able to discuss here and while the novel's criticism has been approached extensively from the point of view of feminism and to a lesser extent from the point of view of Scottish identity, this scope should be broadened to incorporate other aspects as well.

Ultimately I believe that Galloway's irony works as a fierce challenge to the resignation to "the way things are", and I think this challenge can be linked both to the social criticism of the novel, but also to the theory of irony. It shows that Galloway's use of irony cannot be incorporated within the existing framework of the way things are within the field of irony. It is time that the theory of irony developed new categories and critical tools that reflect and help analyse the irony that is in use in literature and language today. What is needed is further study of what is out there and new models for those aspects that do not fit in the old framework.

Bibliography

Primary sources:

Galloway, Janice. *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*. 1989. Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1994.

Secondary sources:

Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*. 1813. New York: Bantam Classics, 1983.

Burgess, Moira. *Imagine a City: Glasgow in Fiction*. Argyll: Argyll Publishing, 1998.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.* New York: Routledge, 1999.

Christianson, Aileen. "Lies, Notable Silences and Plastering the Cracks: The Fiction of A.L. Kennedy and Janice Galloway." *Gender and Scottish Society: Polities, Policies and Participation.* Ed. Alexandra Howson. Edinburgh: U. S. G. S., 1998.

Cristianson, Aileen and Alison Lumsden, eds. *Contemporary Scottish Women Writers*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000.

Craig, Cairns. *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999.

-------. "Resisting Arrest: James Kelman." Wallace and Stevenson 99-114.

Crawford, Robert. Rev. of *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, by Janice Galloway. *Scottish Literary Journal* 33 (1990): 59-61, p. 60.

Colebrook, Claire. *Irony*. London: Routledge, 2004.

Deleuze, Gilles. *The Logic of Sense*. Trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, ed. C. V. Boundas. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Repetition and Difference*. Trans. Paul Patton. London: The Athlone Press, 1994.

De Man, Paul. *Blindness and Insight. Essays in the Rhetoricof Contemporary Criticism*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 1983.

Fischer, Michael M. J. "Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory." *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Eds. James Clifford and George E. Marcus. Berkley: University of California Press, 1986.

Galloway, Janice. *Blood*. 1991. London: Vintage, 1999.

Garbage. ”The Trick is to Keep Breathing” *Version 2.0.* Almo Sounds, 1998.

Gifford, Douglas. “Contemporary Fiction II: Seven writers in Scotland.” *A History of Scottish Women’s Writing*. Eds. Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997.

-------, ed. *The History of Scottish Literature, Vol. 3.* Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988.

-------. “Imagining Scotlands: The Return to Mythology in Modern Scottish Fiction.” *Studies in Scottish Fiction: 1945 to the present*. Ed. Susanne Hagemann. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996. 17-49.

-------. “Myth, Parody and Dissociation: Scottish Fiction 1814–1914.” Gifford, *The History of Scottish Literature* 217-59.

Gifford, Douglas, Sarah Dunnigan, and Alan MacGillivray, eds. *Scottish Literature In English and Scots.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002.

Gray, Alasdair. *Lanark: A Life in Four Books*. 1981. London: Panther Books, 1982.

Hardy, Thomas. *Life’s Little Ironies*. 1894. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Handwerk, Gary J. *Irony and ethics in Narrative: From Schlegel to Lacan*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.

Hogg, James. *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of A Justified Sinner*. 1824. Edinburgh: Canongate Press, 1991.

Hutcheon, Linda. *Irony’s Edge: The theory and politics of irony.* London: Routledge, 1994.

Kelman, James. *The Busconductor Hines*. 1984. London: Phoenix, 1992.

Kennedy, A. L. *So I Am Glad*. London: Vintage, 2001.

Kravitz, Peter. “As It Never Was.” Introduction. *The Picador Book of Contemporary Scottish Literature.* Ed. Peter Kravitz. London: Picador, 1997. Jan 2006 <http://www.galloway.1to1.org/Kravitz.html>

Lang, Candace. *Irony/Humour: Critical Paradigms*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1988.

Lumsden, Alison. “Scottish Women’s Short Stories: ‘Repositories of Life Swiftly Apprehended’” Christianson and Lumsden 156-69.

March, Christie L. *Rewriting Scotland*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002.

-------. ”Interview with Janice Galloway.” *Edinburgh Review 101*. <http://www.galloway.1to1.org/Leighmarch.html> Accessed March 2005

McGlynn, Mary. "'I didn't need to eat': Janice Galloway's anorexic text and the national body." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 49 (2008): 221-236.

-------. "Janice Galloway." *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 21.2 (2001): 7–40.

-------. "Janice Galloway's Alienated Spaces." *Scottish Studies Review* 4.2 (2003): 82-97.

Metzstein, Margery. "Of Myths and Men: Aspects of Gender in the fiction of Janice Galloway." Wallace and Stevenson 136-46.

Morgan, Edwin. "Tradition and experiment in the Glasgow Novel." Wallace and Stevenson 85-98.

Morissette, Alanis. "Ironic" *Jagged Little Pill*. Maverick, 1995.

Muecke, D. C. *Irony and the Ironic*. 2nd ed. London: Methuen, 1982.

Murray, Isobel, ed. *Scottish Writers Talking 3*. Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 2006.

Norquay, Glenda. "The Fiction of Janice Galloway: 'Weaving a Route Through Chaos.'" *Space and Place: The Geographies of Literature.* Eds. Glenda Norquay and Gerry Smith. Liverpool: Liverpool John Moores University Press, 1997.

-------. "Janice Galloway's Novels: Fraudulent Mooching." Christianson and Lumsden 131-43.

Pollard, Arthur. *Satire*. London: Methuen, 1997.

Renton, Jennie. "Janice Galloway" nls.uk. National Library of Scotland. <http://www.nls.uk/writestuff/galloway.html> Accessed March 2007

Rorty, Richard. *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth*. Ed. A. R. Braunmuller. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Shrek. Dir. Andrew Adamson and Vicky Jenson. Dreamworks, 2001.

Smith, Alison. "Four Success Stories." *Chapman* 74-75 (1993): 177-92.

Stevenson, Robert Louis. *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. 1886. London: Penguin Books, 1994.

Stott, Andrew. *Comedy*. London: Routledge, 2004.

Swift, Jonathan. *Gulliver's Travels*. 1726. London: Penguin Books, 2001.

Thomas, Ruth. "Janice Galloway Interview." *Scottish Book Collector*, Volume 2.6. <http://textualities.net/writers/features-a-g/gallowayj02.php> Accessed March 2007.

Wallace, Gavin. "Voices in Empty Houses: The Novel of Damaged Identity." Wallace and Stevenson 217-28.

Wallace, Gavin, and Randall Stevenson, eds. *The Scottish Novel since the Seventies.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993.

Welsh, Irvine. *Trainspotting*. 1993. London: Vintage, 2001.