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Playing Tricks: An analysis of Janice Galloway

Analýza tvorby Janice Galloway

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ABSTRACT

Novels by Scottish author Janice Galloway belong to the most influential works in contemporary Scottish women's writing and her female characters often offer a stunning insight into the minds of women, who are stricken by various forms of emotional or existential distress. The aim of this thesis is to discuss and closely examine the main character Joy Stone in Galloway's most famous novel *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, in order to analyse the position of a woman in contemporary Scottish society and underline the importance of work such as this one.

The first aspect that attracts attention is its unusual and experimental form apparent from the very first sight by the mere flicking through the book. The text seems to be living its own life, often changing form, breaking down into lists, signs or play-like dialogues, and some words even partly disappear off the pages. This fragmentation is one of the main focuses of the novel and it is expressed in two levels. One of them is the fragmentation of the text which mirrors the second one, the mental breakdown of the main character Joy Stone. This study is going to concentrate on both of these aspects, firstly it will deal with disintegration of the mind of Joy and the world around her, and subsequently it will proceed onto the form of the novel and look at it from a more technical point of view.

The paper itself will be divided into three chapters. The first one is going to serve as an introductory chapter, presenting the methodology of the thesis and its theoretical background. The second chapter will focus mainly on the heroine, Joy Stone and will attempt to deal with the questions concerning the process of grieving Joy is going through and how it is influencing the issues of gender, effacement and her lack of identity. All of these elements contribute to the fragmented state of Joy's mind, and by analysing them the thesis will attempt to trace their connection to stereotypes imposed

on women. In the last, third, part the focus will move onto examining the means Joy uses to challenge the patriarchal system of oppression that surrounds her. The fragmentation of the text, which is a direct reflexion of Joy's inner distress, incorporates a variety of discourses and various typographical means of expressing Joy's inner world and internal collapse of character. One aspect of the chapter will be devoted to the effects that this narrative strategy has on the reader. Necessarily included in this section will also be brief account of the ways Galloway works with humour and irony.

ABSTRAKT

Romány skotské autorky Janice Galloway patří k těm nejvýznamnějším dílům současné skotské ženské literární scény a její hrdinky často skýtají dech beroucí proniknutí do podvědomí žen trpících nejrůznějšími formami emocionálních či existenčních problémů. Cílem této práce je rozebrat a analyzovat postavu Joy Stone, hlavní hrdinku nejznámějšího románu z pera Galloway *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, za účelem vyzdvižení významu literárních děl jako je toto.

První věcí, která na románu zaujme čtenářovu pozornost, je jeho experimentální podoba, které je možné si všimnout již při prvním zalistování v knize. Text jako žil svým vlastním životem, často mění tvar a formu, rozpadá se v seznamy, nápisy či divadelní dialogy a občas některé slova dokonce i částečně utíkají ze stránek. Roztříštěnost je jeden z hlavních znaků toho románu a je patrný hned na dvou rovinách. Jednou z nich je fragmentace textu, která přímo zrcadlí tu druhou, kterou je nervové zhroucení hlavní hrdinky. Tato práce se bude zabývat oběma rovinami – nejdříve se bude soustředit na rozklad duševního zdraví Joy a světa, který ji obklopuje a následně plynuje přejde na analýzu psané formy románu a rozebere ji z technického hlediska.

Bakalářská práce jako taková bude rozdělena do tří kapitol. První z nich bude sloužit jako úvod, představí plánovaný postup a poskytne teoretické pozadí k tématu. Druhá kapitola se zaměří především na hlavní hrdinku Joy Stone a pokusí se odpovědět na otázky týkající se průběhu truchlení, kterým si teď Joy prochází a jaký to má vliv na problematiku řešící rozdíly mezi pohlavími a ztrátu identity. Všechny tyto prvky přispívají k disintegraci duševního zdraví Joy a jejich identifikací se tato práce pokusí vysledovat jejich spojení se stereotypy vnucované ženám. V poslední, třetí části, se pozornost přesune na analýzu prostředků, jež Joy využívá ke zpochybňování utiskujícího patriarchálního systému, který ji obklopuje. Roztříštěnost textu, která odráží utrpení Joy,

využívá širokou škálu prostředků a typografických pomůcek k tomu aby vyjádřila vnitřní rozpad její osobnosti. Jeden z aspektů poslední kapitoly bude věnován účinku, který má tato vyprávěcí strategie na čtenáře. Nezbytně zakomponovaný do této sekce bude i krátký komentář týkající se způsobu jakým Galloway pracuje s humorem a ironií.

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Maybe

Maybe I could learn to swim.
(Janice Galloway)

1, THESIS INTRODUCTION

Janice Galloway undeniably belongs to the most prominent authors of Scottish postmodern literature of today. From the very beginning of her career, being a female author automatically set her off to an uneasy journey into the predominantly male world of literature. Indeed, women authors tend to be somewhat overlooked by the reading public and very few of them are fortunate enough to be included in the basic school reading lists. What is more, as Pam Morris points out in her book *Literature and Feminism*, those authors which make it to the list, cannot be fully appreciated when pulled out of the context of other female writers.¹ This however, does not mean that women writers are less valuable or even less important. Quite on the contrary, they represent an indispensable component in the literary genre that would otherwise be missing. For who could be more qualified to approach the female part of the audience than female authors themselves?

In the past, women struggled to express their inner thoughts and failed to comment upon their position in the society the way they felt it. Today, however, they obtained a powerful weapon represented by the rise of postmodernism. Unlike modernism which sought stable aesthetic and moral values, postmodernism questions already established truths and rethinks what would otherwise be taken as undeniable facts. In other words, "the radical task of postmodernism [...] is to dismantle dominant ideas and cultural forms and hegemonic system of thought."²

¹ Pam Morris, *Literatura Feminismu*, translated by M. Siedloczek (Praha: Host, 2000) 71.

² Janet Wolff, "Postmodern Theory and Feminism Art Practise," *Postmodernism and Society* (London: Macmilland LTD, 1990) 190.

Yet, what makes it such an effective tool in the fight against authoritative patriarchal mechanisms? Postmodernism is closely related to poststructuralist feminism which concentrates on more specific literary and social methods of analysis. It was discussed by Susan Watkins in her book *Twentieth Century Women Authors*, where she says that post-structuralism is a direct reaction to structuralism, which “explains concepts in terms of fundamentally stable structures.”³ Poststructuralist feminism rejects these strategies, for, as Watkins points out, structuralists claimed that human behaviour works as a system of ‘binary oppositions’ which “consist of a pair of terms which are dependent on each other to make sense.”⁴ She further claims that in a hierarchy, one of the terms is always more valued than the other and thus in the example of the terms masculine / feminine, the ‘masculine’ is always the more valued one and thus comes first.⁵ Therefore, the women writers need a way to disrupt and decompose this system in order to undermine ‘the masculine superiority’ within the society.

Postmodernism works with similar theories, but in a broader context, as it describes the whole new philosophy. It could be said that “postmodernism has precipitated a crisis in modern conceptions of representation.”⁶ Watkins explains that this crisis is caused by the fact that “the signs, or words, we use to represent things are not naturally and automatically related to those things but are attached to the arbitrarily, by convention and agreement.”⁷ Therefore, the main focus of deconstructive strategies moves onto the use of language and exposes its unstable and ambiguous features. That is how contemporary women’s writes can attempt to

³ Susan Watkins, *Twentieth – Century Women Novelists* (New York: Palgrave, 2001) 97.

⁴ Watkins, 97.

⁵ Watkins, 97.

⁶ Watkins, 128.

⁷ Watkins, 129.

break the pattern of today's male-controlled social structure in order to manage to solve the questions of gender and lack of identity.

Such a tool was exactly what Janice Galloway needed for her work, for she is not only a woman writer but also Scottish on the top of that, therefore she has two different deeply-rooted identities to challenge. Her first major success came with her first novel *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* which quickly joined the most important and influential works of contemporary Scottish literature. This thesis will attempt to find and analyse the means that Galloway uses to demonstrate the uneasy position of woman in the contemporary society through the eyes of the main character Joy Stone. The matter will be discussed in two main chapters, each of which will be divided into several subchapters.

The first chapter will examine the issue from a more theoretical point of view, concentrating mainly on Joy's interaction within society, her relationship with men and dealing with authorities, in order to prove the methods of discrimination against her used on everyday basis. It will follow the disintegration of her mind while going through the mental breakdown and her spilt between public and private self. The aim will be to discover and describe the way in which Joy tries to break the prejudice held against women. As principal arguments the chapter will discuss the role of institutions that are supposed to establish social stability, but in fact are far from being neutral and fair. The second chapter will continue in analysis the aspect of fragmentation but this time it will concentrate on various postmodern techniques and discourses Galloway uses and how does she use them to reflect and emphasize Joy's state of mind, which will be analysed in the previous chapter. One subchapter will also deal with the use of humour, such as irony and parody in the novel and its effects on undermined and challenging

various authorities. Where the examples from *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* will not be sufficient enough the thesis will use extracts from another novel by Janice Galloway, *Foreign Parts*.

2. ANALYSIS OF THE MAIN CHARACTER JOY STONE

2.1 – Introducing *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*

The Trick is to Keep Breathing offers a unique insight into the life of one young Scottish woman, Joy Stone. The plot of the story is rather simple; Joy and her lover Michael go on holiday to Spain, where Michael tragically drowns in a swimming pool. The story actually begins when Joy returns to Scotland and starts to live her own life, desperately trying to recover from the loss of a loved one.

The accident itself is being told in a retrospective voice and thus the reader only slowly figures out what had actually happened. The first notion of the accident can be found at the very beginning of the book in the short paragraph written in italics, while the rest of the text remains recorded in a normal form. This pattern is followed throughout the whole novel; whenever Joy recalls the tragic events it is always captured in italics. The novel shows the reader through the mental breakdown Joy experiences all the way from the very beginning after Michael's death to the point where she finally starts to come back to live her own life again. This transformation Joy goes through is the main focus of the novel, for it is not a simple story of a life tale of one young woman, but rather a social criticism delivered through her.

Joy Stone is an ordinary middle-class woman who works as a drama teacher in her local school. She is not particularly smart or beautiful, nor is her life exciting in any way. In other words, she more or less represents a female prototype which most of the women can identify with. Joy is placed within the society based on her interaction with a dominant world of institutions controlled mainly by men. She is never fully in control of her own fate and she constantly feels the pressure to

subdue herself to the system and become what can be classified as a “normal” or “good” citizen. Analysing Joy’s struggle for preserving at least some of her own self-awareness is going to be the main focus of this chapter.

Devastated by the death of her lover, Joy is evidently not able to cope with the reality of everyday life, which is apparent from the first page where she introduces herself with: “I watch myself from the corner of the room sitting in the armchair.”⁸ This sentence indicates the surreal point of view of herself as an outsider, which Joy preserves throughout the whole novel. This ability to see things from the outside, and therefore the objective side, rather than from the subjective point of view, leaves the novel with more realistic impression on the reader. Joy often makes unemotional remarks and observations, which makes her character more universal, and her experience more believable. Due to this technique Galloway shows the readers how difficult it is to be in Joy’s position and how absurd and pointless are most of the procedures she goes through.

2.2 The Process of Mourning

As stated above, Joy’s attempt to overcome her grief is a crucial theme of the novel. Judith Butler discusses this topic in her book *Precautious Life* as follows:

Mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation the result of which one cannot know in advance. [...]We may simply feel that we are undergoing something temporary, that mourning will be over and some restoration of prior order will be achieved.⁹

⁸ Janice Galloway, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing*, (London: Vintage Books, 1999) 7.

⁹Judith Butler, *Precautious Life, The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004) 21-22.

That is, in theory, what Joy should be experiencing. However, instead of being given the possibility to come to terms with her new situation and go through the whole process of mourning, Joy is denied any rights to grieve, for she has no legal claim to Michael, who was married to another woman at the time of his death which leaves Joy a position of a mere mistress. Moreover, it is not even possible to restore former order for her, as Butler suggests, because her social existence was bound to Michael and with his death it de facto ceased to exist, therefore she needs to seek a whole new order that would give her life new meaning again. In addition, Butler sees such prohibition of public mourning as a contribution to a certain state of melancholia and derealisation of loss, or its erasing,¹⁰ which is where the reader finds Joy. She cannot fully understand and accept her loss, for she is not able to publicly admit it.

Butler further claims that “the prohibition on certain forms of public grieving itself constitutes the public sphere on the basis of such a prohibition. Public will be created on the condition that certain images do not appear [openly].¹¹ In other words, by choosing which images the public is allowed to see, those who control this outcome have the power to create an illusion of truth in any shape they wish to. In the case of Joy, by not giving her any chance to grieve and express her connection to Michael, her existence is technically erased and the public is left with the image of Michael as a loving husband and a family man. In contemporary institutionalised society any image can be twisted and turned into either negative or positive concept – whichever is required for the time being. This is clearly visible in the scene with Michael’s funeral, when a reverend, under the patronage of the Church, performs the ceremony addressing only Michael’s wife

¹⁰Butler, 37.

¹¹Butler, 37 – 38.

and family, while Joy is completely ignored. Therefore, after losing Michael, she at the same time loses ties which defined her and assigned her a certain place in her life. With these strings so abruptly cut, she does not know who she is anymore and what is she supposed to do. Her only friend, Marianne, is going away to the United States, which leaves Joy completely abandoned. The only way out she can now see is to try and regain her position as an independent woman by not letting the system to overcome her. She has to last, remain persistent, let the time pass and wait for things to get better. Hence her ultimate cry throughout the whole novel: "What will I do while I'm lasting, Marianne? What will I do?"¹²

In the meantime, Joy does not realise that recovering from the loss "cannot be charted or planned"¹³, therefore she fills her days by lists of things to do, endless series of routines and she basically tries to schedule her every move. Why exactly does she do that? As it was already stated, she has no right to mourn, and therefore needs to keep on going, keep on breathing. She is desperately trying to restore some kind of order in her life. However, as Butler suggests, in the state of mourning one is captured by something larger than oneself and cannot really influence where will the grieving take them.¹⁴ Joy should yield to its pressure and wait for her suffering to gradually get better. Nevertheless, she is not capable to let go and thus, everything she does in order to get back some control over her life is completely empty of any meaning and the whole concept of time is losing its significance. In other words, she literally is only 'lasting'.

The motif of emptiness can be found in various places in the novel. First of all, there is the already mentioned omnipresent emptiness of Joy's actions, which

¹²Galloway, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* 15.

¹³Butler, 21.

¹⁴Butler, 21.

leads to the point in the book where she realizes that there is no point for her to eat. What follows is a brilliant insight into the mind of a woman suffering from mental anorexia. Joy knows she needs to keep pretending to eat when she is accompanied by other people, like her regular visits at Marianne's mother's house:

Health Update: Ultimate Diet

[.....] avoiding food is harder than you'd think. Repeated refusing starts to look rude and thoughtless. You know it's important that they shouldn't see the deliberateness of your choice. [...] If they persist, avoid them in future. [...] You know it'll all be worth it in the end.¹⁵

Therefore, every time she eats something she forces herself to throw up and to empty her stomach. She describes it as a normal part of her life: "The first time was kind of messy. Now I'm better. I go into Ellen's bathroom and throw up silently for ten minutes."¹⁶ Another example is her visit to the doctor's caused by an irregularity in her menstruation cycle. The doctor suggests she might be pregnant and does an ultrasound scan of her stomach. Unfortunately, the only thing he can see on the monitor is "a black hole among the green stars. Empty space. I had nothing inside me."¹⁷ Here Galloway suggests that Joy herself is an empty space which directly echoes her loss of identity among the society. Being pregnant would give her life a purpose and a sense of direction but again, the only thing that is left is emptiness. In a way, everything Joy does is in order to get back her balance, so she could keep going until the phase of mourning is over.

¹⁵ Galloway, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* 85.

¹⁶ Galloway, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* 87.

¹⁷ Galloway, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* 146.

2.3 – Struggle for Identity

Politics and Society in Scotland describes identity as “the expression of objective (and measurable) differences between social groups, whether they are based on class, gender, age or ethnicity.”¹⁸ Of the four identity factors, two seem crucial for analysis the character of Joy, and that is gender and ethnicity. The concept of identity in *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* works with two layers. One of them deals with the notion of Scottishness. The second one concentrates on Joy’s sense of belonging as a woman in a predominantly male society. While the first one is only implied, and not explicitly treated, the latter one plays a very important role and raises many questions concerning gender issues. Questions such as: What is Joy’s role in the society and how does she fit in? What defines her own self? Contemporary society changes so quickly that no fixed or assumed identity is possible. In the past people used to identify themselves based on the social class they belonged to. In other words, they were defined by the environment they came from and people they interacted with. However, according to Hall “class cannot serve as a discursive device or mobilising category through which all the diverse social interests and identities of people can be reconciled and represented.”¹⁹ What, in his opinion, replaced the politics of class identity is “a politics of difference – defined by new social movements.”²⁰ Feminism is without any doubts one of these movements and, therefore, features in identity shaping.

The question of identity is very important for Joy, because the death of her married lover puts her into a very difficult position. Although she and

¹⁸Alice Brown et al., *Politics and Society in Scotland* (London: Macmillan Press LTD, 1996) 206.

¹⁹Brown et al., 203

²⁰Brown et al., 203

Michael were living together as a couple, the fact that he was not yet divorced at the time of his death leaves no legitimate place for Joy to mourn. This is clearly visible in the scene with Michael's funeral where the priest smoothly erased any presence of Joy in Michael's life when during the ceremony he dedicated "[their] sympathies, [their] hearts and [their] love, especially their love to [Michael's] wife and family," who were seated in the front row whereas Joy was appointed to sit at the back.²¹ As Margery Metzstein puts it, she has no rightful claim, as she is neither wife, nor mother and, therefore, "the smooth machinery of legitimised institutions judders into action and operates to negate and label Joy."²² Suddenly, Joy experiences the complete loss of identity, there is no space left for her now other than becoming a disgrace of the society, a mere mistress of the married man, practically degraded to a prostitute:

1. Rev Dogsboddy 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.²³

This shows how conservative today's society is, and that no mistakes will be tolerated. By deconstructing the individual incidents in the book, similar to the one mentioned above, Galloway tries to outline the nature of identity of women in

²¹ Galloway, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* 79.

²² Margery Metzstein, "Of Myths and Men: Aspects of Gender in the Fiction of Janice Galloway," *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies*, Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson eds. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993) 139.

²³ Galloway, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* 79.

contemporary Scotland. In other words, through Joy, readers can see what kind of emotions she feels and realize how uneasy it is to be a woman in such a position.

In *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* Galloway tries to break down the pattern traditionally ascribed to women in terms of their roles in the society by underlining its meaninglessness and absurdity. For instance, in the scene with Joy's break up with her former boyfriend Paul, Joy observes their collapsing relationship which is now loveless and all that remains is the urge to preserve some kind of false sense of security and belonging which this relationships gives her and which helps Joy to define her meaning. As she says, the only thing she needs Paul himself for, is "his car, to supervise [her] mother's dying," because hospitals are always build too far away from people.²⁴ In the final moment of the break up when Paul tells her he does not need her for a thing, she tries to play on the one thing she is expected to fulfil and where her role is supposedly indispensable: "You need me because you can't cook."²⁵ This desperate exclamation is her last chance to bind her man to her. However, at the same time she is giving up her own self in order to submit to the social standards. Nonetheless, even though she did was she thought was expected from her, it failed her:

[Paul] went out slamming the door. [...] He came back an hour later with a carrier bag. A Chinese take-away. He ate it without looking at me but I heard the message loud and clear.

SHOVE YOUR FOOD

It took me a month to find somewhere else to live. He was right. He didn't need me for a thing.²⁶

²⁴ Galloway, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* 43.

²⁵ Galloway, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* 43.

²⁶ Galloway, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* 43.

If she cannot possess the one thing she is predetermined to be, what is there to hold on to? This is not the only example of the failure of Joy's femininity. The generally accepted idea is that a dominant area of a woman is a household, where she is expected to maintain order and well-being. However, Joy repeatedly fails to do so, be it in her relationship with Paul or later when she lives on her own. Moreover, the house she lives in now is not technically hers, as it was written in Michael's name, and thus, with his death, she lost a rightful place to fulfil her social purpose. When she decides to fight for her own home, she meets with an impenetrable wall represented by Mr Dick from the Housing Authority, who senses her vulnerability and feels the need to demonstrate his power over her, not letting her forget the outcast she has become:

Try to be a little more cooperative. We're bending over backwards. You're not helping yourself, creating difficulties. Strictly speaking, we're under no obligation to house you at all, not when you were never registered as tenant. We needn't do anything at all, strictly speaking. There has to be a bit of give and take. We're bending over backwards you know, bending over backwards.²⁷

As Joy points out, "they have to make a fuss so you know who's boss."²⁸ This clearly demonstrates that authority can be created through an image of benevolence and aims to provoke in the receiver an attitude of guilt for not submitting. Furthermore, even when she manages to get the house back, she is still not capable of taking care of it. She tells herself that it is too big for her and the whole place is covered with dust.

²⁷ Galloway, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* 18.

²⁸ Galloway, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* 18.

How is this, however, relevant to Joy's identity? She is clearly trapped in an uneasy situation for she has to struggle with a deeply rooted concept of traditional Enlightenment values where, according to Patricia Waugh, "public/private" [splits] which consigns women to the 'private' realm of feeling, domesticity, the body, in order to clarify a 'public' realm of reason as masculine."²⁹ In *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* Galloway cleverly breaks down this pattern to expose it to the eyes of the readers by articulating Joy's definition of the word 'good,' and thus demonstrating that the general sense of the word as understood by public is something that is expected from women by the society, although Joy's explanations uncover how shallow they are:

I used to be so good all the time. [where **good = productive/hardworking/wouldn't say boo**]
[...]

I was very good at my mother's funeral though largely by default.
[where **good = not putting anyone out by feeling too much, blank, unobtrusive**].
[...]

Michael's was my first burial. I was tasteful because I wanted people's approval. Good girls reap rewards. [where **good = neat, acting in a credit worthy manner**]

I knew the routine. Like everybody, I wanted to be loved.³⁰

Although, technically, she neither breaks any laws nor does anything wrong, she still has to hide her true feelings and live in a lie and pretence, otherwise she would be morally unacceptable as a member of the society. When Marianne is leaving

²⁹Patricia Waugh, *Postmodernism: Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 189.

³⁰Galloway, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* 83.

Scotland, she says “she [doesn’t] want to leave, really. Not when [Joy] is like this.”³¹ This statement surprises Joy, because as she claims, “[she] wasn’t like anything then. You couldn’t tell there was anything wrong with [her] at all.”³² This shows her attempt to act normal. Therefore, the novel develops two levels of Joy’s personality; the outer level, which she shows to the world around her and where she tries to act as any ‘good’ woman is expected to, and the inner one, where the reader discovers what really goes on in her mind and how she truly feels. Galloway keeps these two levels strictly separated from each other, which offers remarkable insight into issues of gender and identity of contemporary society.

The analysis of this twoness of Joy’s personality requires going back to her illness, anorexia, and looking more closely at its origin. As a result of Joy representing a stain of the society being wiped out, then consequently her sense of being nothing reflects also in her mental state. She sees herself as a mere empty space and thus she behaves accordingly. As it was said earlier in this chapter, the face Joy exposes to the public eye is only a mask of false pretence which she feels she is expected to wear, but what exactly is her true self like on a private level? Anorexia is, in fact, the state of her inner self, which means that while on the outside, she is false to the society, on the inside she is not any better. She is empty both of meaning and physically. Therefore, it could be said that Joy’s attitude towards housekeeping is a metaphor of her own life, to what she pretends to be and to what she really is inside. Although she keeps it clean on the surface to make it look neat, she does not pay attention to the messy spaces hidden away from sight as if they would not matter.

³¹ Galloway, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* 35.

³² Galloway, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* 35.

Zygmunt Bauman claims that one can construct their own identity: "Tell me what and where you buy it and I'll tell you who you are."³³ Therefore, one can be identified according to things they use or buy, which suggests that in the contemporary society it does not matter that much what one is like inside, for he is defined by the way they are perceived by other people based on their actions. However, it is obvious that Joy proves to be unsuccessful in persuading her surroundings about her sanity. What does it signify? Does the fact that she is not capable of meeting feminine social standards make her less of a woman? This leads to a question of whether contemporary social standards are set in the right ways when they result in making Joy identify herself as an empty space within society, not only in the perception of the public, but what is worse, in her own eyes as well. Pointing this out and making Joy face and deal with all these problems, Galloway shows how ridiculous and unequal some of the traditional values are.

Another level of identity mentioned above is the national identity. In *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* this notion is only implied, notably in the dialect Galloway sometimes uses or in the settings which places the novel in Glasgow. There are also few cultural references to national stereotypes such as: "Love/Emotion = embarrassment: Scots equation. Exceptions are when roaring drunk or watching football. Men do rather better out of this loophole."³⁴ What reflects Scottishness the most is the duality which spreads throughout the whole book expressed in the character of Joy. Gender issues and nationality share common features. It is apparent that Scottishness is usually represented by male characteristics; therefore, Scottish national identity is viewed as masculine. How does Joy, as a woman, fit in? To some extent, she can be considered as a

³³Brown et al., 203.

³⁴ Galloway, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* 82.

representation of Scottishness itself. She, as a woman, has to face discrimination by the opposite sex, while Scotland as such encounters similar kind of treatment as a minority nation within Great Britain.

Galloway concentrated on this topic more closely in her other novel, *Foreign Parts*, which follows the story of two middle-aged Scottish women, Rona and Cassie, on their holiday in France. It is an example of a clash between two completely different cultures, intensified by the fact that it is two female travellers dealing with gender issues as well. Alice Brown describes national identity in these words: "Discrete groups of people generate their own distinctive cultures in geographical and social isolation before encountering alternative and competing ones."³⁵ This can be applied to both, Scotland's interaction within Great Britain and to its relationship with the rest of the world. A study published in *Politics and Society in Scotland* proves that the majority of Scottish people consider their identity to be Scottish, rather than British.³⁶ Consequently, their behaviour corresponds with this result, whether it involves politics, social life or representation abroad. The same can be observed with English and Welsh people. Also Rona and Cassie take themselves as Scottish when they say: "Coming from a wee country you forget how big other places can be. [...] We take hours to cover inches."³⁷

2.4 – Joy's relationship with men

As a consequence of Joy's problems with identity and her sense of non-existence, she encounters many difficulties when interacting with the rest of the

³⁵Brown et al., 205.

³⁶Brown et al., 210-213.

³⁷Janice Galloway, *Foreign Parts* (London: Random House, 1994) 63.

society. The major communication problem Joy has seems to be when dealing with men. She is never at ease while talking to them and she always feels their need to prove themselves stronger and more powerful than she is. The most significant male character in the book is, clearly, Joy's dead lover Michael. Although the story begins after his death and, therefore, he technically never appears on the scene, he is the one that has the biggest influence on what is happening in Joy's life. For her, it has not only personal consequences but also social, as it was already discussed earlier on in the previous chapter. Butler meditates on why loss can have such a strong influence on certain groups of people such as women and other minorities:

Each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability, as a site of desire and physical vulnerability, as a site of publicity at once assertive and exposed. Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure.³⁸

In other words, the position in which Joy finds herself now is that of a vulnerable woman trying to regain her own stability and independence, however, given her current social status, she encounters many obstacles. Her relationship with men reflects this struggle. This theme does not occur only in *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* but also frequently appears in other Galloway's work such the novel *Foreign Parts* or her collection of short stories.

Galloway's inspiration in this area most probably comes from her own life experience which she described in the book *This is Not About Me*. Her father left

³⁸Butler, 20.

her, her sister and her mother in her early childhood for another woman, and thus Galloway was raised mainly by her mother and older sister. Due to her mother's struggle for supporting the family as a single mother, she was a great, real-life model for Galloway's future heroines. She too became vulnerable and dependent on various men that appeared in their life.

The best example of this element is Joy's second workplace among men and mainly the character of Tony, her superior, who plays an extra-friendly boss, but in fact only takes her as his potential lover. Again Joy as a woman is in charge of making coffee for the men and there is always certain tension between Joy and the customers, who are also male. They are not sure how to act in front of her: "They get shy, smile and joke to cover up. They are reassured by my ringing up wrong numbers."³⁹ Reassured about their superiority, knowing they do not need to be threatened by her presence. When Joy's co-worker Allan starts telling her jokes, they are about whores and it never occurs to him that Joy might find them offensive. At one point, Joy observes that "his face lights up when he tells these jokes. Any other way, he looks wrong,"⁴⁰ which suggests that this is the only way he can entertain himself and people around him – by making sexist jokes. Again, for Allan this is a way of reassuring himself that he as a man is more powerful than women as he in his jokes assigns them a role which is generally considered one of the lowest in the social hierarchy.

Kathy Caprino in her book *Breakdown, Breakthrough* explores the mind of women suffering from various forms of breakdown and offers an interesting theory which might explain Joy's incapability to resist the oppression from men:

³⁹ Galloway, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* 32.

⁴⁰ Galloway, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* 31.

[Women] experience a persistent longing for acceptance and validation from others. They view themselves as small, ineffective, and unworthy—as hapless victims of circumstance incapable of charting their own course with a commanding hand or voice.⁴¹

Joy feels the need to conform to the stereotypes about women in order to fit in and be accepted to the community. However, as it is not her true nature, she often becomes confused as to what exactly she is supposed to do. Especially, when she comes to a close contact with Tony and he tries to touch her or get himself an invitation to her house. He is obviously using his position and his power over her and she is desperately looking for some means to refuse him without causing any sense of disfavour from his side, as she simply cannot afford that with her social status.

Very similar treatment Joy experiences with Mr. Dick from the Housing Authority. Again she has no other option than to submit to his will, for he represents the 'Authority' and without consent of this authority she might be denied even such a basic thing as her home. Also another form of power comes from men – doctors, who take care after Joy when she suffers from a nervous breakdown. By concentrating on this topic in her work Galloway tries to challenge the system of patriarchy and stress the oppression women who often suffer within it. After all, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* is not the only novel where Galloway explores the relationship between men and women. In *Foreign Parts* the main characters Rona and Cassie also have to deal with their share of interacting with members of the opposite sex. Although they are in a similar vulnerable position as

⁴¹Kathy Caprino, "Breakdown, Breakthrough: The Professional Woman's Guide to Claiming a Life of Passion, Power, and Purpose," *Berrett-Koehler Publishers*, 2009, May 2011
<http://www.bkconnection.com/static/breakdown_breakthrough_excerpt.pdf>

Joy, being middle aged and still single their life journey is rather different. On their holiday in France they encounter another level of loneliness, by being on their own in a foreign country restricted by the language barrier and, therefore, separated from everything they know which makes them even more insecure. Cassie is left broken by the relationship with her ex-boyfriend Chris and throughout the book she recalls numerous holidays abroad they spent together. As the story moves forward, their relationship become more and more surreal as they start to become alienated from each other. Chris' attitude towards women is described on several occasions, such as once on their holiday: "[He] said his favourite the Harem. He went to Harem every day to see the mosaic. I said I hadn't wanted to go there. Not the Harem. [...] I'd keep thinking of wee girls not able to leave and wanting their mothers."⁴² However, Chris is not able to understand why Cassie does not want to come in and he finds nothing strange about women forced to spend their lives in harem: "He just kept shaking his head. The harem is only women's quarters. Where the women played music and sang, they talked. Harem. The special place for women. They have the best mosaics."⁴³ He simply cannot see how this could be seen as oppression towards women, quite like Allan, who does not understand why his jokes about women might be considered rude. Therefore Cassie is, in a way, trapped in the world ruled by men as well as Joy.

In another part of the book Galloway again criticised the system of patriarchy, when Cassie wonders, how little she actually knows about presence of women in Scottish history: "Macbeth. St Columba. [...] Robert the Bruce. Kings and generals, Men of Letters. [...] Women didn't come into reckoning at all."⁴⁴That is the

⁴² Galloway, *Foreign Parts* 177.

⁴³ Galloway, *Foreign Parts* 177.

⁴⁴ Galloway, *Foreign Parts* 165.

reason why women get so little recognition. Their assigned role of housewives and companions in the shadow of men is rooted so deeply in general consciousness that people like Chris find it absolutely natural.

2.5 – Caught Up in Between Institutions

Relationship with men is not Joy's only problem she has to face on an everyday basis. She knows what is expected from her, what she is supposed to feel and how she should behave, but what she does not know is how to achieve it within the given background. Since she is a highly self-aware woman, she is capable of seeing through institutionalized methods trying to trick her mind and impose on her socially acceptable sense of belonging. Which is partly lucky, because no matter how grief-stricken and unable to function on a normal level she is, she still sees the need to pretend to be normal in order to 'be loved' by others. That is probably the one thing that keeps her from a complete mental breakdown. As mentioned above, it is mainly a complex tangle of institutions where everyone has different rules all of which must be obeyed that forces Joy to keep going.

One of the examples of Joy's everyday routines is her job:

This is where I earn my definition, the place that tells me what I am.

[...] I work in a school. I teach children.

I teach them :

1. Routine
2. When to keep their mouths shut
3. How to put up with boredom and unfairness
4. How to sublime anger politely

5. Not to go into teaching

That isn't true. And then again, it is.⁴⁵

By the term 'definition' Joy again touches the question of empty and false sense of identity assigned to her by what she does. The fact that this is where Joy looks for her identification partly explains, why she sees herself as an empty, meaningless entity. Furthermore, with this list Galloway uncovers that even such a seemingly honourable profession as a school teacher is just one of the first steps into the grey world of sameness and ordinariness. The list is actually a metaphor to the whole society as it represents everything that one is expected to know and to follow in order to fit in. It is interesting to note that most of the points on the list are negative or consist of restrictions, for these are the institutionalised methods of how to create and subsequently shape the ideology within the society. The fact that it is taught to children since their early youth shows how deeply rooted this system is.

This concept is further developed later in the book, when Joy encounters more and more institutionalised behaviour being applied in every possible aspect of her interaction with the outside world. It literally controls her life and puts together all the little pieces of her actions to form an agreeable adult person. It could be said that Joy is a mere actress, trying to follow a script given to her by someone else. While stricken by the grief she is going through, she is doing her best to be good at it and to convince everybody that this is what she truly is. Butler describes this emotional state as follows:

⁴⁵ Galloway, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* 11-12.

Something is larger than your own deliberate plan, your own project, your own knowing. Something takes hold of you, and what sense does this make? What is it that claims us at such moments, such that we are not the masters of ourselves? To what are we tied? And by what are we seized?⁴⁶

Is the manner of Joy's behaviour a result of the process of mourning she is experiencing, or rather one of the negative effects the Scottish male culture has on women?⁴⁷ Since Joy does not really know, what result she should aim for, she is not very successful in her efforts. For instance, in the extract cited above, Joy claims that her workplace is what defines who she is. As a part of a teaching staff she has to behave accordingly and try not to deviate from the norm. Her work was one of the first places that denied her role in Michael's life, when her boss informed her that they will have to invite Michael's wife to the memorial service held in school, making it clear that her place will be among the rest of the ordinary teachers. Thus, Joy's statement was not completely true. Her workplace did not define who she is, but rather who she is not. Again, there is some higher authority publicly trying to impose on Joy an identity which would be acceptable. Unlike in the previous example at Michael's funeral, where the reverend completely denied Joy any existence at all, her boss recognises her position, however, even by his definition she still loses all her rights to Michael. This is another great example of the smooth machinery by which authorities control and adjust public perception.

A similar pattern appears with most of the institutions Joy deals with. When she finally admits she needs help and is sent to hospital for treatment, she ponders upon how meaningless being hospitalised actually is. Although at first doctors

⁴⁶Butler, 21.

⁴⁷ Metzstein, 145.

showed interest in her case and were enthusiastic to cure her, they soon gave up when she did not get better and started to prescribe her gradually more and more pills instead. The period of Joy's stay in the hospital is described very chaotically, as she became more uncertain and confused than ever. She thought that in the hands of doctors she would find out what is wrong with her and get better. However, instantly she hits the wall of indifference and neglect:

DR THREE [Sitting] Well?

PATIENT [Mesmerised] Well what? I thought you would start.

DR THREE Start what? Start what? You asked to see me. You are the one who knows what this is about.

PATIENT I've been here nearly a week.

DR THREE Yes. So what can I do for you?

PATIENT [Confused. Has forgotten and is trying to remember.]
Treatment. I

want to know about treatment.

DR THREE [Leans back with an ominous creak] I don't know what sort of thing you expected. There's no set procedure for these things.⁴⁸

Therefore even though Joy tried and sought professional help, the bureaucratic machinery made it so ineffective that the actual recovery of the patients became of less priority than observing rules and regulations restricting the run of the hospital. To point out the absurdity of this system, Joy uses impersonal names for doctors, such as Dr One, Dr Two, etc., and she herself appears simply as a 'patient'. This indicates the distance doctors keep from their patients and lack of interest as

⁴⁸ Galloway, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* 126.

they use the same pattern for every appointment, regardless the case. The fact that all the conversations with the doctors are recorded as dialogues in a play enables Joy to gain a perspective as a mere spectator and thus she sees and describes things more objectively. When Joy enters the hospital, she is given a new doctor, who begins to ask the same questions all over again, even though Joy already went through this process with Dr One: "Look, I did all this. I told all this to Dr One just three days ago. I did all this for Dr One. Maybe there are some notes." However, the only reply she gets is: "That may be so but this is different. This is for records. For records."⁴⁹ The process turns into an endless circle of appointments and paperwork with no visible result. Nonetheless, she is now in the hospital and thus, officially, she is getting help.

Linda Hutcheon stated that in the post-modern society 'truth' is not as much illusory, as it is institutional.⁵⁰ She continues developing this theory by saying that "ideology both constructs and is constructed by the way in which we live our role in the social totality."⁵¹ Which is exactly what Galloway is trying to say in her novels. In Joy's case, her separation from the society given by the loss of her place within it does no longer agree with the above mentioned 'institutionalised truth' and thus there is the initiation of Joy's 'illness'. She is not ill in the real sense of the word; she only deviated from the routine behaviour structure. She acts unpredictably, does not cooperate and asks questions, while expected to be obedient to people who do, or who think they do have certain power over her.

The fact that all people demonstrating their power over Joy mentioned so far were men, might signify that these institutions are represented always by men,

⁴⁹ Galloway, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* 111.

⁵⁰Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism, History, Theory, Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2000) 178.

⁵¹Hutcheon, 178.

however, the health visitor who appears at the beginning of the book and is sent to watch over Joy, is a woman. The outcome of their meetings is quite the same as Joy's appointments with doctors. She knows they are pointless but plays along anyway: "I get flustered at these times, but I know I'll manage if I try harder. These visits are good for me. Dr. Stead sends this woman out of love."⁵² Their conversation is again fragmented into a play-like pattern to show how unnatural it is to Joy.

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.

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.⁵³

Joy does not want the health visitor to be there and the health visitor knows it. She is also deliberately lying about her condition and the health visitor knows that too. What is more, Joy knows the health visitor can see through all this and still they both carry on pretending that everything is the way it should be, which makes the situation completely absurd. Suddenly, the expression 'health visitor' gains an ironic touch of nonsensicality as it does not have to do anything with health in the first place. Therefore, is the fact that this example shows a female representative of

⁵² Galloway, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* 20.

⁵³ Galloway, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* 21.

the otherwise patriarchal authority any different from the male representatives? Does it mean that, as it is a woman-to-woman conversation, it would have a more positive effect on Joy? It is, after all, a situation which should make her less afraid and more relaxed. However, because the health visitor comes on the behalf of a superior authority, she suddenly loses all her femininity and all that remains is the same empty ritual of attempts to impose agreeable identity on Joy. Thus it does not matter, whether the representatives of the authority are male or female, as long as they are the representatives of the authority.

Another factor influencing women in the contemporary society and telling them how to behave is the presence of women's magazines, which advertise an ideal but highly unrealistic woman and, therefore, contribute to the image emphasizing their appearance over their real value. Reading magazines is one of the activities Joy has to pass the time while she is 'lasting' and her magazines are full of headlines empty of meaning, such as: "Baked Alaska – new style", "7 Meals that make in Minutes", "Diet for a firmer new you!", or "Converting a Victorian schoolhouse into a des res!".⁵⁴ All of these lines are somehow related to the traditional role ascribed to women which is either taking care of the household, cooking or improving their looks. Slogans like this tell one nothing about a real woman; it is a reflection of how one-dimensional and shallow the image of modern feminine essence within the society is. Joy is a good example of how confusing and pressing this can be:

⁵⁴ Galloway, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* 26-27.

Magazines told me to work on my awareness. 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 it meant but I thought it anyway.⁵⁵

She feels obliged to do something new and worthy every day; otherwise she thinks she would not be living her life properly. In the end she discovers that the only way she will be able to fight this institutionalised system is to stop trying to conform to its structure and create chaos which would help her to keep her sanity.

I want to be ready for surprises.

I have to learn to submit to terrifying chaos and not revert.⁵⁶

This is the breaking point in the novel, where Joy finally finds a way of how to live her own life again and begins to get over her nervous breakdown.

⁵⁵ Galloway, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* 193.

⁵⁶ Galloway, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* 222-223.

3. TECHNIQUE

3.1 - Introduction

The experimental form of *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* is apparent from the very first sight. Galloway uses this technique, which clearly reflects postmodernist strategies, to expose dominant ideologies in contemporary Scotland. By analysing this technique it is possible to detect which deconstructive methods Galloway uses and how exactly do they help her to express current discourses.

As Linda Hutcheon points out, “postmodernism exists to challenge, but not deny.”⁵⁷ In other words, postmodernism questions the very basic mechanisms of our society and by employing different perspectives on the history it re-thinks and re-evaluates our past. Hutcheon continues by saying that, unlike modernism for example, postmodernism “refuses to posit any structure or [...] master narrative.”⁵⁸ It is as if even the mere form of postmodern novel would try to break the mechanisms imposed on the society. However, this does not mean that postmodernist art would lose its meaning or even that it would not contain any valuable knowledge. It only signifies that postmodernism concentrates on different aspects of knowledge than artists did before this era. Thus it could be said that although postmodernism still installs the order of humanist separation of art and life, “⁵⁹ it then uses it to demystify our everyday processes of structuring chaos, of imparting or assigning meaning.” *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* is a great example of this technique, for it takes the image of seemingly normal, functioning society and through the eyes of one ordinary woman it completely remodels its meaning and values.

⁵⁷ Hutcheon, 6.

⁵⁸ Hutcheon, 6.

⁵⁹ Hutcheon, 7.

What exactly is it that makes *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* a postmodern text? From the analysis of the main character, Joy Stone, in the previous chapter, it is clear that the novel challenges institutions and social structure by investigating the relationships between Joy and her surroundings. It is mainly the way Galloway questions these issues by playfully decomposing events from its protagonist's everyday life that has been considered truly postmodernist and was praised by many critics. Jean-Jacques Lecercle claims that "'postmodern revolution' is an effect of the explosion of communication techniques"⁶⁰ and *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* indeed can serve as a great example. It is a tangle of lists, signs, letters, newspaper articles, unfinished sentences or even blank spaces. All of these fragments put together melt into a certain form bricolage, which then mirrors not only postmodern style of writing, but also the state of mind of the main character. Moreover, Galloway employs the powerful weapon of parody and irony.

3.2 - Bricolage

Bricolage really is the main feature of the novel as it consists of various elements put in one piece in the process of creating the narration. For instance, a similar technique is used for another one of Galloway's novels, *Foreign Parts*, which shapes the story-line by applying fragments of old letters, photographs, snatches from guide books or memories of the two protagonists. In a way, both novels deals with women in distress and in both cases, the text recounting their hardships closely accompanies their recovery, and thus it could be said that the narrative structure is parallel to their lives. At the beginning, the narration is broken down into pieces; the fragments are being decentred, dislocated, re-

⁶⁰ Jean Jacques Lecercle, "Postmodernism and Language", *Postmodernism and Society* (London: Macmilland LTD, 1990)

evaluated and subsequently carefully reconstructed again, towards the better ending.

The primary function of bricolage in the text is to engage the reader's attention. It plays with their imagination which makes them more involved in the plot than they would usually be by a standard text. To do so, Galloway uses numerous communication techniques. One of them is projecting Joy's own thoughts directly into typography of the novel, which helps to stress the heroine's inner state of consciousness and makes the whole process of her thinking much more real and trustworthy. Following extract from the appointment with the Health Visitor, while Joy tries to behave like a good housewife and serves the tea, demonstrates this strategy:

I tell her to sit in the livingroom so I can have time to think.

Tray

jug

sweeteners

plates

cups and sauces

another spoon

christ

the biscuits

the biscuits⁶¹

Readers can see exactly what is going on in Joy's mind at the given time, and by arranging the individual acts of preparing refreshments one by one, as in the example above, they are literally forced to experience the same train of thoughts as

⁶¹ Galloway, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* 20.

Joy. Another example of this tactic is Michael's funeral where Galloway uses one side of the page to capture reverend's speech and the other side is filled with Joy's own perception, giving out her immediate feelings and emotions, unspoiled by any additional phrases that would be trying to smooth the text to make it fluent.

WE ARE HERE TODAY TO MOURN THE LOSS OF A DEAR
COLLEAGUE

[...]

THIS SERVICE HAS BEEN ONE OF
JOY AND CELEBRATION AS
WELL AS SORROW

I noticed he rolled his eyes unpleasantly

[...]

LET US EXTEND OUR SYMPATHIES, OUR
HEARTS AND OUR LOVE

the arms stretching further like Jesus
commanding Lazarus

ESPECIALLY OUR LOVE

a split second awareness that
something terrible was about to
happen⁶²

TO HIS WIFE AND FAMILY

The text is not only split in two halves but the two parts are also graphically differentiated from each other, as Reverend's speech is recorded in capital letters to imply both, the fact that he's speaking publicly and in the raised voice, and possibly also stresses that he is a representative of the Church, therefore an institution and thus it demonstrates his power. On the other hand, Joy's thoughts are captured in lower-case letters, for they interpret what is going on inside her mind only. The fragmented roughness of this testimony penetrates into the mind of a mentally unstable person with a stunning accuracy, hardly accessible to any other literary genre.

Slightly different tools for breaking down the narrative are various lists, signs and magazine articles. As McHale calls it, this 'lexical exhibitionism' in his

⁶² Galloway, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* 78 – 79.

own words “[strews] obstacles in the path that leads from text continuum to reconstructed world, making the process of reconstruction more difficult, hence more highly visible.”⁶³ These methods indeed emphasize Joy’s struggle within society and, in a way, they represent the empty shell of institutionalised behaviour by which she is trapped and that she needs to break free from.

As the novel keeps on moving forwards, Joy’s consciousness needs to be completely disassembled so it could be recovered in order for her to get better. This inevitably means that first she has to undergo the process of nervous breakdown, which is directly being reflected in the text. She is not able to control her thoughts and hold them together, which results in words appearing on the pages without any apparent order:

It
 Starts
 again
 especially for his *wife*
 especially his wife
 when you’re in
 love with a beautiful woman *sometimes i get that feeling of*
 your cheating heart
 will tell on
 you⁶⁴

She is clearly confused and by mixing the words written in italics, which Joy uses when she recalls her past and Michael’s tragic accident, with the words written in a standard way, this nicely demonstrates that she is not capable to distinguish what is real and what is only a part of her own imagination.

Another interesting element Galloway employs in the novel is the use of language. First of all, names of some characters are not random but they reflect

⁶³ Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1991) 156.

⁶⁴ Galloway, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* 186.

certain features of their bearers. For instance, the name of the protagonist Joy Stone represents oxymoron, or two opposing elements which mirror the struggle between her public and private sides. Also the first doctor mentioned in the book, Dr Stead, has got a name which corresponds with the role he plays in the social scheme. Throughout the story he gives a steady impression, seemingly stable and unchangeable. All his conversations with Joy are very passive and not helpful by any means, which is an exact reflection of the whole health institution. Furthermore, an extensive use of details in descriptions helps to make the whole experience of the main character much more realistic:

I rub out the creases on the chairs where we have been sitting then take the crockery through and crash it into the sink. One of the red cups has a hairline crack along the rim, fine but deep enough to cut if it wanted.⁶⁵

Through that, it is possible to trace exactly how does Joy's mind work and what kind of things she notices and concentrates on. As a person going through nervous breakdown it is noteworthy to see that she ponder over the fact that the cup could 'cut if it wanted,' suggesting that somewhere deep in her consciousness she might be considering hurting herself.

⁶⁵ Galloway, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* 24.

3.3 – Use of Humour

Humour usually plays a very important role in all Galloway's novels and *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* is no exception. Funny twists and constant punning brilliantly point out rigid and old fashioned traditions and thus draw them to readers' attention. The most frequent tools Galloway uses to do so are irony and parody. Hutcheon claims that "parody is a perfect postmodern form, in some senses, for it paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which parodies."⁶⁶ Why it is that parody becomes such an effective way of challenging and questioning the social structure and its values? Hutcheon explains that "parody brings about a direct confrontation with the problem"⁶⁷, which is why the result is so striking when Joy uses this method of description. A very good example of such strategy can be spotted any time Joy has a conversation with doctors and she uses play-like dialogues to interpret what is being said. The outcome is usually extremely absurd, as doctors usually use the same shallow patterns without really noting any difference from one patient to another. When Joy tried to break this pattern and swapped the roles, the doctor became so confused that he was not able to react in any other way than sending Joy away.

PATIENT [Inspiration] Dr Three? Are you OK?
DR THREE What? What? [Looks as though he's just lost something]
PATIENT Are you OK? How's your head?
DR THREE How's what? [He look childlike with confusion.]⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Hutcheon, 11.

⁶⁷ Hutcheon, 22.

⁶⁸ Galloway, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* 165.

This clearly demonstrates, how dependable the doctor is on his everyday routines and by this parodic role exchange Joy easily breaks his system into pieces and serves them to the readers so they could see through the haze of false pretence. In addition, what is also characteristic for Joy is her use of dark humour. It could be said that she uses it as a form of self-defence against authorities and helps to come to terms with injustice often done to her by people around her. For instance, when she is at the mental hospital and she becomes frustrated by zero effects the treatment and lack of interest on the doctors' side:

Q. How many psychiatrists does it take to change a light bulb?

A. One. But the light bulb must really want to change.⁶⁹

By this joke Joy exposes her desperation; she expected to get professional help in order to get better, but in fact, as she learns from the doctors, she is the one who has to change and no one else will do it for her.

While in *Trick is to Keep Breathing* humour serves mainly to expose and undermine the power of authorities, Galloway also uses it in the sense of parodic relation to the history and past events. As Hutcheon points out, in postmodernism "the past as referent is not bracketed or effaced [...], it is incorporated and modified, given different life and meaning."⁷⁰ This is probably much more noticeable in *Foreign Parts*, where Rona and Cassie travel around France and while doing sightseeing they encounter various signs advertising historic monuments and points of interest: "DON'T MISS AZAY-LE-RIDEAU, one of the most elegant and

⁶⁹ Galloway, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* 183.

⁷⁰ Hutcheon, 24.

inspiring chateaux in France.”⁷¹ These places are publicised as a ‘must-see’, and thus even though Rona and Cassie have absolutely no connection to them, all the more so as it is not part of their own national history, the institutionalised system forces them to feel somehow obliged to admire them and even evokes the sense of guilt when they find it uninteresting, not to mention boring. Hence the irony of Cassie’s belief that when it is considered a ‘must-see’, then it is undoubtedly important, regardless the fact that she cannot see why. This suggests that people are pressured to honour the kind of history they are told to be authorised and widely accepted, rather than admire those elements they deem relevant themselves.

⁷¹ Galloway, *Foreign Parts* 109.

4. CONCLUSION

Even though Joy Stone never did anything to deserve to be treated as a less valuable member of the society, current social standards are set in ways that, in her case, do not allow any other option. The thesis proved how easy it is for people to lose their sense of identity, especially when they are part of any group or minority. The reason for that is the fact that they are tied to their surrounding which makes them dependable. When they lose these ties it becomes very hard to figure out where one belongs to. It is obvious that the perception of identity shifted in the past decades and is no longer assigned according to the background one was born into. However today's classification by allegiance to various groups or minorities often tend create false conclusions based on how people look or who they are associated with rather than on what they really are like or how to they behave.

When Joy decides to fight the system of official authorities and attempts to get back her status of independent woman she, therefore, breaks the rules by which everyone is supposed to be playing and is instantly punished by the sense of guilt and inappropriateness that forces her to see herself as a hollow, empty human being with no sense of meaning. She thus sets of to seek help in order to get better but she only encounters the same routine procedures that do not see her as an individual but apply endless homogenous pattern which they use for every patient with even slightly similar diagnosis. Therefore, it seems almost impossible to battle against the structure of contemporary institutionalised society. Joy always appear to hit the impenetrable wall created by institutions, usually controlled by men, that relentlessly demonstrate their power over her by producing their own

artificial ideologies and then forcing her to accept them. How can a woman like Joy free herself from being imposed by such shallow and false stereotypes?

Books by women's authors like Janice Galloway certainly do contribute to the improvement of the situation. By analysing their female characters she uncovers flaws in the current social structure and brings them to the attention of the reader. Using deconstructive methods of postmodernism enhances the effects of such exposures and makes them even more powerful.

In the end, Joy figures out that the only means of preserving her sanity is fighting the system by creating chaos and irregularities. She has to stop trying to fit into the structure which is trying to subdue her and deny who she is, and find her own place herself. Finally, she survives by imagining herself as a swimmer, who should only remember that the 'trick is to keep breathing,' and not giving up.

Maybe

Maybe I could learn to swim.⁷²

⁷² Galloway, *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* 235.

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