



'& since it has been good since then to have some reasons for it & for getting up & breakfast & more of the same & another day again & since breakfast can actually I forgot taste & smell like really good'.

(Ali Smith, *Hotel World* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 218).

Examine the Challenge to Orthographic Conventions in Ali Smith's *Hotel World* and Janice Galloway's *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*.

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Janice Galloway and Ali Smith utilise non-standard orthography to challenge the conservatism associated with the standard literary aesthetic. During this essay, I aim to elicit how standard orthography as a prescriptive set of ideals in written language is inherently political; it disseminates and circulates the ideologies of the elite, denoting a relationship between orthographic and social conventions. Equally, both writers resist the male-dominated narratives of modern Scottish literature; they use Standard English to deviate from the non-standard, synthetic language which reflected the Scottish dialect. Glenda Norquay claims that *Trick* undermines 'master narratives' through formal experimentation which posits Galloway's work in Hélène Cixous's paradigm of 'écriture féminine'.¹ I will develop this reading by analysing how the use of indentations, staged dialogue and onomatopoeic neologisms in both novels produces a sense of subjectivity, which marks the move from the national, in contemporary Scottish literature, towards the body. Instead of being preoccupied with defining the state of the nation, both Galloway and Smith use non-standard orthography which interrogates and dismantles the oppressive social discourses upon women in Scotland in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries through the exploration of the body.

Firstly, I will discuss how standard orthographic conventions embody the power of the English literary establishment, a typically patriarchal institution that privileges the voice of the middle-class male. Standard orthographic conventions are not enforced; they are normalised through a long critical tradition, which elicits the indoctrination of dominant literary values. Roderick Watson denotes the utility of breaking from this tradition for nationalist purposes; by using a demotic, synthetic language which reflects Scottish dialect he argues it 'destabilises the cultural hegemony of Standard English'.² Here, Watson highlights the political bite in straying from Standard English; it is a subversion of both English literary tradition and the values held by the English state form. Moreover, using non-standard language creates an in-group identity, a diversion from the homogeneity imposed by Standard English; this is supported by Cairns Craig, who claims that the dialect voice 'maintains the possibility of communality in defiance of the class system'.³ It is therefore significant that Galloway and Smith use Standard English, a facet of standard orthography.

There is a tension in Galloway and Smith's work as they utilise Standard English but use non-standard orthography, seemingly forging allegiance with an institution that they simultaneously differentiate themselves from. Yet, in using Standard English, Galloway and Smith distinguish their voices from the prevalent masculine narratives in Scottish literature. Ester Breitenbach, Alice Brown and Fiona Myers have argued that, 'studies on Scottish society and culture have been gender blind', highlighting how women have occupied a peripheral place in Scottish society due to the dominance of male-dominated industrial and cultural practices.⁴ As Craig argued that the non-standard signals a communal identity, it could be argued that this is a male in-group, from which women are marginalised. Thus, in using Standard English both writers diverge from this masculine literary tradition, defining it as 'other' in form and the social experience it articulates.

Yet, Galloway and Smith subvert standard orthographic conventions through the experimental use of typography. Galloway often utilises indentations which fragment the narrative. This is seen in the use of indentations and marginalia in,

¹ Glenda Norquay, 'Janice Galloway's Novels: Fraudulent Mooching' in *Contemporary Scottish Women Writers*, ed. by Aileen Christianson and Alison Lumsden, (Edinburgh: EUP, 2000), pp. 131-143 (p. 135).

² Roderick Watson, 'Alien Voices from the Street: Demotic Modernism in Modern Scots Writing' in *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 25 (1995) 141-155 (p. 141).

³ Cairns Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (Edinburgh: EUP, 1999), p. 96.

⁴ Ester Breitenbach, Alice Brown and Fiona Myers, 'Understanding Women in Scotland', in *Feminist Review*, 58 (1998) 44-65 (p. 44).

'I tell him the story

sometime
déjà

He makes notes...'⁵

This feeling of brokenness achieved by indentations has been interpreted by Craig as a national allegory. Craig attributes the dislocation of the narrative to that of the nation after the failed referendum in 1979, reeling 'after its failure to be reborn'.⁶ However, this reading ascribes national allegory to a text that seeks to differentiate itself from the male-dominated national tradition in modern Scottish literature. This reading also ignores how the indentations and marginalia have a comic function. In the above quotation, Joy's thoughts are divided from the main body of the texts; the marginalia are sarcastic, 'déjà' denotes her dissatisfaction at the repetitive nature of the health appointments, musing that it is a *déjà vu*. This appropriation of Galloway's work is critiqued by Carole Jones, who argues that Craig forged Galloway's novel into 'a masculinist allegory of national crisis'.⁷ Here, Jones highlights how despite Galloway's attempt to mark her work from the male tradition, a masculine reading is still imposed.

Likewise, the fragmentation created by the indentations in Smith's novel is susceptible to national readings. The indentations in Else's chapter give a similar texture of disconnection as Joy's narrative in *Trick*,

'She is

(spr sm chn?)
sitting...'⁸

On a macro-level, the fragmented form of the above passage could symbolise Scotland's uncertainty of its official national identity post-devolution. However, the indentations in the above quotation have the same function as the quotation from *Trick*; they separate Else's actual speech from her thoughts, alluding to a division in what she feels and how she is perceived, a separation that I will debunk later in this essay. Thus, there are caveats to consider when interpreting the experimental form of Galloway and Smith. As both writers diverge from the 'placed narratives' of the modern Scottish male tradition, their use of non-standard orthography is not indicative of the affliction of the nation but of the individual, marking a shift from the objective to the subjective, from the national to the body.

The move from the objective (the nation), to the subjective (the body) necessitates micro, rather than macro analysis of non-standard orthography. I will use Roland Barthes's dichotomy of 'readerly' and 'writerly' texts and Hélène Cixous' principle of 'écriture féminine' to illustrate how both writers deviate from standard orthographic norms for deconstructive purposes. Barthes argues that a writer of a 'readerly text' must 'address themselves to him so that he may read them, but he is nothing to him except their address'.⁹ This corresponds to Cixous' critique of male writers that 'write to be read... to make laws and morals' and fundamentally 'intensify symbolic order'.¹⁰ Yet, Barthes claims that 'writerly texts' are ones that, 'attack canonical structures of language', identifying their deconstructive purposes.¹¹ Given Cixous' assertion that didactic patriarchal conventions are embedded in the symbolic order of language, I will argue that these 'canonical structures' of language can be read as synonymous with social norms. If *Trick* and *Hotel World* are intent on breaking orthographic conventions, then they are equally intent on deconstructing the social discourses that oppress the individual. Thus, the indentations effect a dual marginalisation: the way that the reader is alienated from the text mirrors how the protagonists are ostracised from society. To gloss over these subtleties and compare the dislocation in the text to that of the nation would be a crude generalisation. Thus, the shift from the national to the body is realised through non-standard orthography, it brings the reader into active dialogue with the text, necessitating a micro rather than macro mode of interpretation.

Rather than using indentations to allude to a separation vectoring across the nation in the aftermath of a failed referendum, Galloway uses indentations to mark Joy's division from her own body. This is seen in,

⁵ Janice Galloway, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (London: Vintage, 1989), p. 111.

⁶ Craig, *Modern Scottish Novel*, p. 199.

⁷ Carole Jones, 'Burying the Man that Was: Janice Galloway and Gender Disorientation' in *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: EUP, 1997), pp. 210-219 (p. 214).

⁸ Ali Smith, *Hotel World* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 38.

⁹ Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p. 5.

¹⁰ Helene Cixous, *White Ink* (Durham: Acumen Publishing, 2008), p. 53.

¹¹ Barthes, *Pleasure of Text*, p. 31.

'& since it has been good since then to have some reasons for it & for getting up & breakfast & more of the same & another day again & since breakfast can actually I forgot taste & smell like really good' (Ali Smith, *Hotel World* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 218).

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'I watch myself from the corner of the room
sitting in the armchair...' (p. 7)

Here, Galloway conforms to the definition of Barthes's 'writerly text'; she defies orthographic convention through deviating from standard punctuation and typography. Moreover, the indentation mimics the action of Joy watching herself, it establishes a distance and external perspective. This action is not narrated as it would be in a 'readerly text'; it is partially effected through non-standard typography. Additionally, this broken structure is a feature of 'écriture feminine'; it necessitates a physical reading process and is a way into conceiving the text as body. Furthermore, the indentations mark a separation which is perennial throughout the novel: the divide between who Joy is and who she thinks that she should be. Mark Sebba bridges the schism between orthographic and social conventions as he claims that standard orthographic practices embody 'how things should be'.¹² This notion of 'how things should be' is didactic; it imposes constraints upon the individual and ultimately causes Joy's mental illness in *Trick*. Reeling from the loss of her partner, Joy is torn between how she should behave and how she feels, a paradox which results in her disembodiment. Joy does not view or feel her body as a whole; her body parts are disconnected from each other, which is seen in her action of 'redistributing pieces of (herself)' (p. 8). Furthermore, the repetition of 'being good' in *Trick* highlights how Joy represses her true feeling in order to conform to social expectations of propriety, Joy is conditioned to be docile and passive. The use of the indentation to highlight Joy's separated self is seen at Michael's funeral,

'and there is someone
screaming...' (p. 80)

Here, the narrator is again viewing herself from an external perspective which is compounded by the use of 'someone'; Joy is a stranger to herself. Furthermore, the indentation mimics the separation, Joy does not recognise herself as she is not 'being good'; the act of screaming breaks social norms of dignified public mourning. Moreover, this division of self enacted through indentations is literalised when Joy sees her own reflection, 'it was like looking through the window at someone else' (p. 10). The misrecognition here of the self for a stranger is a concept explored by Jacques Lacan. Lacan claims that misrecognition occurs when infants first see their reflection; the 'symbolic self', the individual as a product of socially-oriented structures.¹³ Thus, Lacan's theory can be used to explain Joy's estrangement from her own body; Joy cannot see herself as part of society because she does not conform to social norms and is subsequently erased from it.

Similarly, the indentations in Lise's section in *Hotel World* signify a distance from her own body. This is seen in the repetitions of the isolated sentence,

'Lise was lying in bed' (p. 89).

The indentation of this sentence and the use of free indirect discourse throughout this section highlight a shift in perspective; Lise views herself from an external angle, which reflects Joy's outer-corporeal experience in *Trick*. The combination of free indirect discourse and indentations adheres to the features of Barthes's 'writerly text', there is no fixed narrator and the indentations mark this narrative distance on the page. Smith alienates the reader from the text through non-standard orthography to reflect the protagonist's isolation from her own body and society. Furthermore, Lise has similar conceptions as Joy regarding what kind of person she should be, 'I am polite to people...I am courteous...' (p. 87). Where Lise's section is mainly fragmented by indentations, the listing of all of the actions that characterise 'a nice person' is a substantial paragraph with little punctuation, alluding to the didactic male writing style discussed by Cixous. The way that Lise mechanically recites these social conventions outlines the indoctrination of patriarchal values of female docility and passivity upon the individual.

Similarly, in Else's section, indentations break her spoken dialogue, her pleas for money, from her narration to the reader. This is seen in,

¹² Mark Sebba, *Spelling and Society: The Culture and Politics of Orthography Around the World* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), p. 14.

¹³ Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience', in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 502-509 (p. 507).

'She's got
(spr sm chn?)
good schoolgirl written all over her face (p. 38).

This is an example of Barthes' 'writerly text' as it primes the reader to perceive Else in two separate ways: from an external perspective as a passer-by in the street and as an intimate reader who knows her story. Smith denotes how Else is divided by what people think of her as a beggar, and how people view her as an individual, critiquing how the homeless are stigmatised in society. Furthermore, this division is highlighted in a mirror scene, where Else, like Joy, does not recognise her own reflection, she claims she is 'a circus freak' (p. 71). Else is repulsed by her own image, 'circus freak' elicits how she is subject to ridicule from others and is perceived as subhuman due to living on the street. Here, Else sees herself how other people see her, which can again be interpreted using Lacan's theory of misrecognition. In essence, Else does not recognise her symbolic self as she has been completely displaced by the social structures that construct this image and her own identity is subordinated, she is now viewed as a beggar, rather than an individual. The brokenness achieved by indentations in both narratives is therefore much more complex than a reflection of national dislocation. Both texts correspond to Barthes's definition of a 'writerly text' and Cixous's 'écriture féminine'; they unpick the formality and logic of standard typographic norms and thus challenge the patriarchal literary institution. This physical, active reading process conditions the reader to focus on the personal, to deconstruct social discourses from a character-level, cementing the shift from the national to the body.

Galloway and Smith demonstrate how the characters are divided by didactic social and institutional discourses and their own sense of self through the embedding of staged dialogue, another subversion of orthographic convention. Staged dialogue is inserted when the individual comes into conflict with institutions. This is another example of the novels' function as 'writerly texts': the reader is distanced from the text through the use of staged dialogue, enacting the alienation of the protagonists from the homogenising institutional structures. In addition, the insertion of staged dialogue imposes structure upon the fragmented texts, alluding to Cixous's criticism of masculine writing as being 'organised' to buttress symbolic order.¹⁴ As the text is forced into a coherent, logical structure, the individuals are forced by the institutions to conform to social norms. Acting also highlights the distance from the self and explains the outer-corporeal experiences in both novels: acting is a false endeavour, denoting the constant suppression of the true self.

Joy's separation from herself is complete when she stages her own interactions with the doctor, an impersonal, distanced narrative technique. Joy loses her identity as she becomes the homogenous 'PATIENT' in dialogue with the equally faceless 'DOCTOR' (p. 50). Here, the capitalisation stresses the power of the institution to strip the individual of self; the doctor and Joy are defined by their roles rather than being named as individuals. Furthermore, Joy is not treated as an individual; she is a subject, a consumer and is further ostracised from society by the inadequate health provision. The dehumanising effect of these meetings is seen in, 'I come out like a steam-rollered cartoon' which reiterates how Joy is crushed by the ineffectual health system, a source for the brokenness and crises of selfhood discussed above. Galloway embeds staged dialogue into the novel several times which accentuates the importance of acting up to social norms; the individual is subject to systematic oppression by institutional discourses. Joy's mental illness is therefore not a direct consequence of the loss of her partner, a reading which is fostered by Gavin Miller, who claims that Joy's isolation stemmed from being denied the right to mourn publicly.¹⁵ This is merely a factor which further stifles Joy's emotions; she is in a constant battle with prescriptive social discourses which quell her individuality, a notion that is literalised through the use of staged dialogue, defining this opposition.

Similarly, the notion of acting is seen in Lise's section of *Hotel World*. Like Galloway, Smith embeds material which functions as stage directions, adhering to how public encounters are staged in both texts, reiterating the division between who the characters are and who they think they should be. Lise's workplace at the Global Hotel is depicted as a play; Lise has to act out her role to meet the demands of her job. Lise is the ideal actor, she is successful at her job because she is, 'emptied of self', identifying how her lack of individuality is an asset as she can fully conform to social norms (p. 112). This erasure of identity forced by her occupation is highlighted in, 'I am a () person', signifying how Lise is uncertain of her identity due to continually repressing her true self and playing out her role at work (p. 85). This concept of acting is further illustrated in her description of the hotel reception, '**where the guests stand**' resembles a stage direction (p. 111). The use of bold font and the embedding of stage directions impose order upon the text, and simultaneously indicate the pressures upon Lise to conform

¹⁴ Cixous, *White Ink*, p. 53.

¹⁵ Gavin Miller, 'The Democratic Psyche: Scotland's Philosophical Psychiatry' in *Irish Review*, 28 (2001) 108-124 (p. 121).

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to social expectations. Individuals are thus homogenised and depicted as actors playing their part in a performance, their deference to social conventions culminated in a loss of individuality and their subsequent disembodiment.

Finally, I will discuss how both writers utilise neologisms with onomatopoeic qualities to undermine the ordering principle of standard orthography. As Sebba proposes that 'orthographic practice is a social practice- a widespread and recurrent activity', I will demonstrate how Galloway and Smith break from orthographic conventions to undermine the social discourses that oppressed their protagonists.¹⁶ Both texts belong to Barthes's paradigm of the 'writerly text' as the use of onomatopoeia disrupts the arbitrary letter and phoneme correspondence of Standard English. Instead, onomatopoeia moves closer to the actual sound which is being conveyed, reiterating the subjective shift to the body enabled through non-standard orthographic practice. Where the formality of the staged dialogue construed the coldness of institutional discourses, the onomatopoeic neologisms emulate the physicality of the body; this conforms to Barthes's definition of a 'writerly text' as an 'articulation of the body, not that of meaning.'¹⁷ The body is therefore the site of resistance to orthographic and social conventions and becomes the locus of knowledge for the individuals. The writers reconnect with the body through onomatopoeia and the protagonists explore the body through the abject, signifying a duality to the shift from the realm of the symbolic, of propriety and order, to the semiotic, a site of desire and impulse. This indulgence in the body is a deconstructive feminist strategy advocated by Cixous, she argues 'anything to do with the body should be explored', denoting the utility of the semiotic to undermine symbolic order.¹⁸

In *Trick*, the text is divided by the neologism 'ooo' which is onomatopoeic, it mimics Joy's exhalation. Here, the word's meaning is not diluted by standard spelling; it is an unmediated articulation of the real sound. That 'ooo' enacts Joy's breathing is buttressed by the novel's title, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*; survival is a motif of the text as Joy repeats the concept of 'lasting' as a mantra to live by (p. 15). The frequent deployment of the 'ooo's outlines how the most basic bodily function is enshrined with importance: Joy reverts back to a primal state, breathing is her main focus. Rather than being preoccupied by modern social pressures, Joy's concerns have been stripped back as she simply reconnects with her body, an integral part of her healing process. As Galloway primes the reader to be receptive of the semiotic through onomatopoeia, the reader witnesses how Joy deconstructs her reality and reconnects with the Lacanian 'real'. Joy does not view herself through the symbolic, through socially-oriented structures; she simply resorts back to an infantile state, where her sole concern is survival, her aim is to breathe.

This shift to the body, to the semiotic, is also seen in Galloway's use of abject images. Julia Kristeva's theory of 'Abjection' has a deconstructive principle; it is a socially-oriented structure which conditions individuals to be repulsed when internal bodily fluids are externalised.¹⁹ The abject can be traced in Joy's bulimic tendencies, 'I threw up like an animal' (p. 100). Here, Joy is satisfied when she behaves 'like an animal' reiterating how she defies prescriptive social strictures and is instead receptive to animalistic impulse. This elucidates how Joy refuses to conform, she is not disgusted by abject substances and this visceral exploration of her body could signify the discovery of her own identity. The social discourses that caused her disembodiment earlier in the novel are undermined by Joy's indulgence in the abject, highlighting a healing process which is realised through the body. This reconnection with the body irrespective of social norms of propriety signifies the rejection of Lacan's 'symbolic', Joy rejects socially-oriented behavioural norms as she attempts to recover a sense of self through reconnecting with the uncultivated, untamed 'real'.

Likewise, Smith uses onomatopoeic neologisms for a deconstructive purpose. The neologism coined in Sara's section, 'woooooooo-hooooooo' recurs throughout the novel (p. 3). This is significant as Sara, as a dead narrator, is presented as the voice of reason for the novel; her section includes active reader address, highlighting its didactic bent. 'Wooooooo-hooooooo' mimics Sara's fatal fall, a tragic event which is given a light-hearted flavour through the use of onomatopoeia. The deployment of this utterance conveys a feeling of release, alluding to the liberty of writing independently from orthographic convention and acting independently from social norms. The physicality of this utterance ensures that the reader is invested in the sound and physical feeling of the narrative, a trope of Barthes's 'writerly text', reiterating the subjective shift to the body. The figurative disembodiment of the characters

¹⁶ Sebba, *Spelling and Society*, p. 31.

¹⁷ Barthes, *Pleasure of Text*, p. 66.

¹⁸ Cixous, *White Ink*, p. 66.

¹⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).

Joy, Lise and Else is literalised as Sara's fatal accident resulted in complete diremption: her mind is completely detached from her dismembered body. Yet, Sara's section is instructive, to remember her own story, she climbs into her corpse, a visceral and abject experience, 'I slipped into our old shape...pushing down into her arms through her splintery ribs' (p. 15). The notion of climbing into a dead body is a definitive rejection of the boundaries created by abjection, reiterating the deconstructive purpose of the text. This buttresses how the physical body, the semiotic, is a site of knowledge, reiterating the importance of deconstructing social discourses of propriety to achieve a sense of resolve and regain a sense of self.

Both writers use non-standard orthography and predominantly Standard English to deviate from the prevalent male tradition in modern Scottish literature: both narratives are 'placed' in the subjective, in the body, rather than the Scottish landscape. As both texts are identifiable as 'writerly texts', the live and visceral reading experience enabled by a move from the symbolic to semiotic realm has made it plausible to view text as body. Barthes claims that the purpose of 'writerly texts' is to present 'where the garment gapes', a bodily metaphor which defines the political potential of both texts. Here, Barthes addresses the concept of liminality; both writers reveal the fallibility of symbolic order as a prestigious writing system and uncontested social structure; they expose 'where the garment gapes' and embrace the semiotic. In doing so, Galloway and Smith liberate themselves from the constraints imposed by standard orthography and subsequently free their protagonists from the homogeneity and oppression of patriarchal social conventions. Ultimately, the use of non-standard orthography has marked an indisputable shift towards the body, signifying how the national, as a measurement of literary value has lost impetus in both novels.

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