



## Re-visiting Balladic Self-referential Narratives in Elspeth Barker's and Jessie Kesson's Novels

Dr. Lin, Hsin-Ying

Associate Professor, Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, National Chung Cheng University,  
Chia-Yi, Taiwan

**\*Corresponding Author:** Dr. Lin, Hsin-Ying, Associate Professor, Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, National Chung Cheng University, Chia-Yi, Taiwan

**Abstract:** *Elspeth Barker's O Caledonia (1991) and Jessie Kesson's The White Bird Passes (1958), the representation of landscape in north-eastern Scotland, aligns with the female protagonists' identification with lost maternal love. Barker and Kesson draw attention in the two novels to the abjection of those social disciplines that represent the notion of virginity (symbolic maternal), by describing the main female characters' separation from her social activities and her tendency to immerse herself in the imagination and in interactions with untamed wild nature. I propose that Barker and Kesson employ ballads as a way for female protagonists to utter their criticism of patriarchal institutions in their rural communities; nevertheless, the two writers ultimately satirise the tone of these literary references in order to demonstrate the oppressed person's psychological revelation. Barker and Kesson weave complex self-referential narratives in their novels while at the same time building ambiguities which undermine the very fabric of the ballad and its emotional messages. The two writers call for the enlightenment of those women with the psychic complex of feminine abjection, and hope, by their writing, to render a mental freedom for the opposed.*

**Keywords:** *ballad, symbolic maternal, self-referential, gender*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper, will demonstrate the ways by which the authors appropriate certain forms of oral literature, particularly the ballad tradition as it illustrates that these female protagonists have rejected an image of themselves perpetuated by patriarchy: the image of an idealised virgin as invented by men but then internalised by women. By using ballads to define the mental state of their female protagonists, these two writers effectively call for the recognition of what constitutes reality: the emotions of rejection and of unconscious internalisation—in short, of the two-sidedness of things. When discussing the difference between one's oral statements about life and one's written fiction, Rosalind Brackenbury indicates that, 'just as our actions and decisions create our literature, so in turn we are recreated by that literature, given back a new reflection of ourselves in the portraits of other women, united by what we perceive we have in common'.<sup>1</sup> This difference between life and literature can be specifically discerned through each author's intentional inclusion of ballad quotations: these textual quotations show each author's desire that attention be paid to the mental state of oppressed women.

The ballad tradition of north-eastern Scotland is used in both Barker's *O Caledonia* and in Kesson's *The White Bird Passes*. By this inclusion, each author recognises the ballads characteristic to certain

<sup>1</sup> Brackenbury, Rosalind. 'Women and Fiction: How We Present Ourselves and Others'. *Cenchrastus* (1984): 12-14. p. 12.

geographical locations while acknowledging that the ballad tradition can be adopted and reinterpreted by individuals. I plan to explore each author's poetic register of balladic language in order to account for both the female protagonist's abjection of patriarchal ideal of virginity and for the mental contradictions brought about by this abjection. I will demonstrate this mental contradiction by appealing to a linguistic and grammatical analysis of balladic language as presented in the composite of ballad fragments. Mary Orr suggests that textual quotation offers a literary device, 'an authority, or a complex shorthand which also counters authenticating functions by means of parody, counter-example or ironic questioning'.<sup>2</sup> Quotation, a variant of intertextuality, therefore invites both contextual interpretations and criticisms of oral literature.

Based on a gesture of locating traditional oral literature in the context of twentieth-century culture, the interpretation of oral literary motifs may change from the linguistic denotative to the contextually connotative. I propose that Barker's and Kesson's uses of direct and indirect quotations, taken from traditional Scottish ballads and from children's rhymes, provides an ironic view of hegemonic society in their fictional depiction of social and cultural conditions after two World Wars. They do this in order to discredit the view that balladry emerges only as a realistic inscription of folk life: their method of combining balladic fragments does not record the life of the character, but rather reflects the character's psychic attitude toward his/her own life. Barker's and Kesson's quotations of ballads particularly marks their own Scottish identification and distinctiveness.

On the one hand, Barker and Kesson praise the Scottish way of life and Scottish attitudes and values; on the other hand, the authors launch a critical perspective on the limitation of these same attitudes and values. The North-east is communicated to readers through the lens of 'cultural ambivalence',<sup>3</sup> existing as it does in the tension between cultural uniqueness and a criticism of its own limitations. An ambivalence towards either cultural identification or renunciation becomes a feature of north-eastern Scottish balladry, particularly when a standing convention needs to be re-examined. This feature of north-eastern ballads, self-styling and self-mocking, adds a critical perspective to a regional literature. The two authors celebrate regional balladic voices while satirising them by positioning them in different contexts. Although the two novels indeed portray those who are trying to invest dignity into a difficult life with dignity, what the novels appear to focus upon are the psychological effects of specific social conventions on the individual. In both novels, the excitement and vividness of childhood as described by each author, encourages readers to forget the hard facts. This is evidenced through the fantastic as it appears in the balladic chants of the protagonists and in the way that both writers try to soften the perceived reality at the end of their novels.

This paper contributes to an analysis of the connection between Kristeva's theoretical view of intertextuality and the duality of oral literature. I shall explain why Kristeva's theoretical assumption of another voice residing in the semiotic (style) drive in the symbolic (lexical) language shares an affinity with the inherent doubleness embedded in oral tradition. I shall analyse the semiotic disposition<sup>4</sup> of oral literature's language to show its semiotic (bodily) drive in these two novels.

I propose that an authorial awareness of *closure* in their lives of women—women trapped in a patriarchal society—is articulated by locating balladic fragments and the fragments of childhood rhymes in symbolic (lexical), cultural contexts. The effect of these two novels resides in the fact that the semiotic dimension (or the style) of oral literary language calls the reader's attention to *enclosure* as created by the protagonists themselves. While examining particular historical ages after two World Wars, the two authors appropriate both ballads and childhood rhymes in order to invoke the reader's awareness of each character's self-enclosure.

## 2. THE SCOTTISH ORAL TRADITION, WOMEN AND GENDER

Ballads, childhood rhymes, and folk songs as adapted from literary materials and myth, are all variants of oral literature. Let us first look at interpretative alternatives in the ballad's oral tradition so

---

<sup>2</sup> Orr, Mary. *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), pp. 130-151 (130).

<sup>3</sup> Murison's phrase (193). He claims that Scottish ballads, particularly those characteristic of north-eastern origins, on the one hand preserve a regional tradition, but on the other hand often fall into 'stock-in-trade'. He explains that 'in modern jargon, there is a lack of empathy between the creator and the created'. Murison, David. 'Appendix: Northeast Scots as a Literary Language'. *Grampian Hairst: an anthology of Northeast prose*. Eds. William Donaldson and Douglas Young. (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1981), pp. 187-195.

<sup>4</sup> In Kristeva's view of intertextuality, it refers to the generative grammar or speech acts in genotext. It is the emergence of the semiotic in the symbolic, or the genotext in the phenotext, such as rhythm, ambiguity and over-symbolicity, the switches and multiple locutionary position. See Kristeva, Julia. *Desire in Language* (1980), and *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984).

that we can acknowledge the role that the ballad, as a largely artistic form of oral literature, plays as a cultural milieu for asserting Scotland's unique national literature. When discussing the ballad as a combination of homogenous cultural identity and diverse individuality, David Atkinson proposes three dimensions of traditional balladry: critical and aesthetic appreciation, historical transmission, and ideological commitment.<sup>5</sup> He argues that Francis James Child's monumental corpus of *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1857) provides scholars with paradigms for studying temporal changes of balladic features, and that singers vary their repertoires with different shades of material that reflect their own artistic instincts.<sup>6</sup> From the perspective of paradigmatic consultation and artistic innovation, we may then say that, tinged with the historical continuum of the folksong and artistic creation of repertoires, the ballad maker's ideological commitment becomes a direct medium for both historical inheritance and individual artistic innovation.

To the extent that artistic creativity grows, the extent of ideological commitment can also be measured. Artistic innovation of the ballad may de-stabilise the ballad maker's ideological commitment either by altering historical inheritance across time or by interrogating cultural expectation in one place. The ballad tradition, in this sense, seems for modern ballad-makers to be diachronically and synchronically unalterable, and remains for the singer a background for negotiation rather than a paradigm for modeling. Atkinson also confirms this function of the ballad tradition by affirming that it is 'located in an individual, conscious, volitional, affective engagement in a relationship with people, but also with cultural forms, across time'.<sup>7</sup> Each ballad-maker, writer as well as singer, may negotiate balladic tradition in his/her relationship with cultural expectations and thereby create a personal expression. The balladic tradition in this way may change with reinterpretation (this may be trans-cultural) as each ballad maker's newly created interpretation affords greater scope than preceding expressions.

Atkinson contends that 'tradition is essentially [a] cognitive function of individuals and groups of people situated in time and space', and that 'tradition is a symbolic, rather than a natural, relationship across time (or space); it is characterised by discontinuity as well as by continuity'.<sup>8</sup> If the ballad tradition essentially changes with the ballad creator's relationship with his/her preceding traditions, we may say then that we observe this relationship through the ways the ballad-maker modifies the preceding thematic traditions by his/her cultural interpretation, because these alterations 'disclose the cultural concerns and cultural statements that inform the long-lived genre'.<sup>9</sup> This long-lived genre (the ballad itself) carries inherent cultural statements which are revised across time and location. Regarding the ballad's inheritance of traditional themes and his own personal revision of them, Atkinson also confirms that 'the traditional referentiality inherent in ballads at large can be incorporated into localised expressions of tradition'.<sup>10</sup> He also contends that 'traditional referentiality does not *compel* interpretation within its horizon of expectations; rather, it helps map the interpretive options that belong to balladry at large'.<sup>11</sup> David Buchan also confirms the view of literary creation of oral composition, indicating that it is significant 'to see oral composition not as a debased or primitive form of written literary composition but as a sometimes sophisticated autonomous method of literary creation'.<sup>12</sup> This 'sophisticated autonomous method of literary creation' resides in the transcultural intertextuality that is specifically seen in the ballads and hymns used in these two novels. This creation lies in the traditional referentiality of 'female topics' (the predicaments of women in a given cultural context), and maps alternative options of interpretation through the ironic employment of traditional manners and styles: personal and societal interactions; and cognitive and affective associations.

We may then ask how women might have been characterised in the ballad tradition and how this characterisation allows possibilities for alternative interpretations through the individual questioning of dominant social values. This is the question on which this chapter focuses as it examines the oral tradition both textually and contextually. As regards the significance of ballads and songs to women,

---

<sup>5</sup> Atkinson, David. *The English Traditional Ballad: theory, method, and practice*. (England: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 1-38.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Buchan, David. *The Ballad and the Folk*. (East Lothian: Tuckwell Press, 1972), p. 55.

Mary Ellen Brown indicates that women select the genre of ballad in order to illuminate an awareness of gender conditions in society.<sup>13</sup> If the ballad form reveals women's gendered social experience, we may find that the negative aspects of female life are displayed more often than the positive. The female characters that appear in the many ballads sung by women often appear to be weak, helpless, or evil. Women had a collective interest in crafting ballads that related to the roles women were presumed to play in hegemonic society. How then are these examples positively adapted through modern interpretations of the ballad tradition? Catherine Kerrigan, in her Introduction to *An Anthology of Scottish Women Poets*, contends that 'the ballad tradition is primarily a women's tradition, what these women were rediscovering (however unconsciously) was the female voice of the ballad tradition'.<sup>14</sup> She finds that the themes modern female poets employ, such as the failure of love, the rearing of children, the fear of growing old, can also be found in the traditional ballad. (This thematic representation of women will be illustrated in the following discussion concerning balladic fragments in these novels.) The modern female voices, however, are now confident in the subjects they handle and carry an ability to investigate the psychic truth as presented in traditional ballads with similar themes.<sup>15</sup>

The pre-existing codes of the genre are brought into play and different interpretations are created in a conversation between the old and new, the traditional and the innovative. While we investigate the relationships between the work in question and its reinterpretations, it remains the case that the reinterpretation of gendered balladic performance is not quite like any other since gender relationships are often revised and are frequently based upon the ballad's previous status. As regards the purpose behind adapting traditional themes of the gender relationship, Kirsteen McCue argues that while some writers absorbed traditional songs which 'contained invaluable messages from previous generations', most writers grasped those as 'templates which were to be altered and improved in order to educate the present generations'.<sup>16</sup> She asserts that 'under the auspices of this simple and "genuine" form' lie the messages 'which set moral standards and laid down accepted patterns of behaviour'.<sup>17</sup> The old lessons generated new moral visions. As concerns the quotation of traditional ballads in these two novels, we may see that the vivid preoccupation with preceding moral standards and accepted patterns of behaviour are satirised in the form of alternate ego and are embedded in the styles of balladic language. Each author's complication of balladic citations is essentially political, in terms of both thematic and linguistic selection.

As the Scottish ballad's feature resides in the dramatisation of female anxiety over marriage destiny, the loss of virginity, and death, so does the tendency of 'lived' experience substantially develop in other forms of oral literature. Children's rhymes, for instance, deal with images of fear while folk songs borrow chorus dialogues (from noted dramas) that contain images of death. That is to say, the twin fates of marriage and death, or the unlocked destiny of human pleasure and murder, readily pervade the song culture of Scotland. Evidently, we may discern this feature in the poetic pursuits of oral literature in the twentieth century.<sup>18</sup> Particularly Barker's *O Caledonia* and Kesson's *The White Bird Passes* select children's rhymes that deal with images of infanticide; the use of dramatic asides from Shakespeare's work also carry the image of revengeful blood.

We may wonder whether or not these facts—that children's rhymes are intensified with fear of harm and that folk songs are easily associated with the bloody scenes from noted dramas—characterise an 'authentic' Scottishness for oral literature? If the impact of this negative characterisation is constructive, what does this negative inclination bring about? As concerns the relationship between childhood and the formalism of the Scottish ballad, Ann Rowland, taking 'Lamkin' in *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* for an example, argues for two purposes behind the Scottish ballad's use of child murder: on the one hand, the horror of infanticide models how the Scottish nation can thereby still claim a cultural continuity with the past; on the other hand, those mothers and nurses who murder

---

<sup>13</sup> Mary Ellen Brown. 'Old Singing Women and the Canons of Scottish Balladry and Song'. *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*. Eds. Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), pp. 44-57 (51).

<sup>14</sup> Kerrigan, Catherine ed. *An Anthology of Scottish Women Poets*. Gaelic Translation by Meg Bateman. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), pp. 1-11 (8).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-11.

<sup>16</sup> McCue, Kirsteen. 'Women and Song 1750-1850'. *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*. Eds. Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), pp. 58-70 (67).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Besides two novels in this paper, a good example is Muriel Spark's *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* (1960).

their children easily transgress the role of domestic femininity and thereby challenge social restrictions on motherhood.<sup>19</sup> The first perspective exists within a nationalist frame, while the absence of any horror in killing their children exists within a feminist project. We must note here that both purposes enforce the relationship between childhood and Scottish culture; both emphasise the significance of virtue and the preservation of cultural heritage.

We may see the preservation of cultural identity through the image of childhood by deciphering Barker's and Kesson's uses of oral tradition and drama (a kind of oral, musical literature when presented) in their novels. Besides using some well-known balladic fragments, Barker and Kesson also borrow some children's rhymes tinged with innocent sorrow, and some dramatic asides (characterised by revengeful murder) taken from Shakespeare's work. Both authors juxtapose moments of nostalgia with instants of sickening violence during the childhood of the two female protagonists. In their fictions, it is through the female child's recitation of ballads, folk songs, and dramatic asides that readers may discover an artistic touch. Even though the idiomatic dialogue in their surroundings is harsh, the unpalatable facts of cruelty to women can be translated into rhythmically delicate 'narratives' via the quotations from oral literature. These 'narratives', however, are not an overt depiction of spontaneous joy in childhood but are instead an articulation of helplessness as it characterises the young girl's transition from innocence to experience.

### 3. DUAL READING IN THE ORAL TRADITION

Now that thematic interpretation in oral literature may contextually vary across place and time, we may want to speculate about how the interpretative process operates. This gesture shares an affinity with Kristeva's notion of intertextuality—which she understands as an alter ego embedded in the semiotic (style) drive of symbolic (lexical) language—the two axes of language as defined in the Introduction. The linguistic view of contrasted doubles precisely aligns with the psychological analysis of the creators or performers of oral literature. The self has withdrawn from its relationship with the other into a self-enclosed and self-divisive identity.

The kind of engagement with this self-divisive identity therefore emerges as a critical perspective on Scottish oral tradition. The mapping of the divisive mind of modern women is combined with a fictional experimentation in balladic form and language. Both authors discussed in this chapter are particularly impressive in their creative use of colloquialisms and the Scottish north-eastern landscape. Quotations from ballads and songs are used to elicit particular contextual effects from the protagonist's mental world of action, tension, overwhelming passion, defiant challenge, and desperate fighting; together, these quotes paint what seems a more hostile world than that in which traditional ballads were first known to have appeared. Unfortunately, this world does not bring about a released self but builds up an enclosed self which is psychologically haunted by its repelled Other.

In many ballads, the notions of the self have enforced a sense of ego and have illuminated false unity, such that the ballad narrator becomes an identifying spectator rather than a participant in society. In other words, ballad performers engage in the supernatural apart from the empirical world in order to create imaginary, emotional satisfaction, with a view to redressing the emotional imbalance that surrounds any discomfort resulting from social injustice. This split self, oscillating between the supernatural fantasy and the empirical reality, forms a primary feature in the world of Scottish ballads. Elphinstone indicates that 'Scottish literature not only developed the marriage of the supernatural with a pragmatic realism from the ballads onward, but that it also produced the historical novel, out of a philosophy of history that was fully aware that historical accounts are merely points of view'.<sup>20</sup> If balladic fantasy provides different critical perspectives from the more conventional historical accounts of folk-life, then the supernatural celebration of sinister images and the fantastic inversions of feminine human nature must reflectively satirise a Scottish societal emotional imbalance in the mockery of social injustice.

As regards the reductive power of a societal self, Manlove observes that Scottish fantasy often reserves things by a reductive power: 'backward process is often mirrored in a habit [of] turning

---

<sup>19</sup> Rowland, Ann Wierda. "'The fause nourice sang': childhood, child murder, and the formalism of the Scottish ballad revival'. *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism*. Eds. Leith Davis, Ian Duncan and Janet Sorensen. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 225-244 (226-227).

<sup>20</sup> Elphinstone, Margaret. 'Contemporary Feminist Fantasy in the Scottish Literary Tradition'. *Tea & Leg-Iron: New Feminist Readings from Scotland*. Ed. Gonda, Caroline. (London: Open Letters, 1992), pp. 45-59 (47).

things upside-down', such as names, opposite selves, and inverted places.<sup>21</sup> This reductive power involves an examining eye into 'the deepest levels of the spirit', 'rather than a diversion or an escape from the real world'.<sup>22</sup> This Scottish balladic fantasy in these two novels accords with a postmodern clinical spirit: the divided self is characterised by the self in relation to its Other and is precisely the result of the self's failure to confront its own Otherness. No longer prepared to play serving-maid to their male counter-parts or play the role of dangerous women, the writers of the two novels arouse in twentieth-century Scottish women, a new awareness for the gender relationship through their mocking play of the defying tones against patriarchy appearing in oral literature's tradition.

#### 4. DEFAMILIARISATION OF ORAL LITERATURE'S LANGUAGE

Ballad creators are constantly reinterpreting traditional ballad themes. Thus, we need to continue with an analytical task that aims to delimit the boundaries of the system (what is to be excluded and what, in turn, is to be included; what is the denotative and what, the connotative). I want to demonstrate that the abjection of the ideal of virginity (as expressed in the quoted ballads in these two novels) remains logistically sensible in patriarchal society but ontologically problematic for psychological stability. In the two novels, the codes of this abjection remain in the linguistic styles as the protagonists' hidden emotions as well as the authors' subtextual messages to the readers. These codes provide the emotive function of language and they defamiliarise the language of ballads. As regards linguistic intertexts, Kristeva refers to texts in terms of two axes: a horizontal axis connecting the author and reader of a text, and a vertical axis, which connects the text to other texts.<sup>23</sup> According to Kristeva, uniting these two axes are shared codes: every reading of a text depends on prior codes which constitute the 'structuration' of text (how the structure came into being).<sup>24</sup>

In the two novels, it is these prior codes of the appropriated ballads that need examination. I contend that the two authors reveal the self-divisive identities of their female protagonists through their readings of linguistic structures in the ballad form. They combine balladic fragments in order to applaud the traditional ballad's narrative commitment to the rage of oppressed women and with a view to satirising a verbally cynical but psychologically damaged self. They hold the view that the imprisonment of their female protagonists comes primarily from the unconscious internalisation of abjection and from an intentional indulgence in the ballad's fantastic world. Although the symbolic meaning of texts shows the singer's lamentation of a life *closed* by society, we may observe in balladic language and in children's rhymes that the attitude of the protagonists against the idea of womanhood alienates them to the point of self-*enclosure*.

#### 5. CALVINISM AND GENDER RESISTANCE

Barker's use of metrical rhythms and rhymes, evident in the appropriated fragments from ballads, literary drama, and mythical tales, indicates that there are certain contrasts that reveal Janet's internal struggle (dating from her restricted girlhood to her defiant womanhood) for freedom in a family heavily impacted by Calvinism. In *O Caledonia*, Elspeth Barker demonstrates her narrative skill by blending tragic pathos with black humour, particularly through her ironic mockery of the rigid Calvinist's life. Janet's struggles with encroaching womanhood constitute an ironic and comical reading, despite a dark, underlying sense of doom. This comic reading exists in those selected ballad fragments that together narrate and effectively satirise the protagonist's abjection of a Calvinist culture that prescribes ideal womanhood. This innovative method of appropriating and combining traditional balladic fragments and children's rhymes, aims to reveal the protagonist's hostile tone of maternal abjection as effected in various, highly-pinched oral narratives.

The rigorous Calvinism that surrounds female characters has its counter-point in the seemingly joyful recitation of folk song. Before we analyse how the contents of these folk songs emerges in ironic contrast to the Calvinist context, we must first look at the impact of Calvinist culture on north-eastern Scotland during the period after World War Two. I must note here that the way I am discussing Calvinism has more to do with social response, rather than the actuality of beliefs. Willa Muir in *Living with Ballads* (1965) argues for a traditionally negative view of Calvinism's effect on Scottish culture. In the case of Scottish balladry, she believes that the feminist voices predominate within the

---

<sup>21</sup> Manlove, Colin. *An Anthology of Scottish Fantasy Literature*. (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996), p. 14.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17, 18.

<sup>23</sup> Kristeva, Julia. *Desire in Language*. Ed. Leon Roudiez. Trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon Roudiez. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 69.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

fantastic imagination in the ballads before the Calvinist Reformation.<sup>25</sup> For Muir, 'the Ballad World was an enemy' to the Calvinist world because Calvinism forbade the fulfillment of certain human needs such as the need for passion and the need for play.<sup>26</sup> Although Muir may hold too negative an attitude towards the Calvinist treatment of individual desires, the protesting voices against Calvinist cultural treatment have been authentically expressed in folksongs that reflect the discomforts of individual lives. Thus, the Scottish women's balladic world has been built on the catharsis afforded by the passionate abhorrence of patriarchal maltreatment and has been enacted through imaginative folklore and fantastic legend. This emotional satisfaction from artistic freedom, though far removed from actual life, opposes the emotional constraint of artistic creativity as prescribed by the Calvinist world. For Calvinists, the development of art may threaten the standard of morality, and may thus trigger sin.<sup>27</sup>

Nevertheless, we may ask if the female voices in pre-Reformation ballad tradition can be entirely curbed by the Calvinist distrust of imagination. If the reinterpretation of the ballad's thematic tradition halts with the change of culture, this culture must be entirely devoid of its opposing force. However, this is not the case for the actual influence of Calvinism on the artistic development of Scotland. In discussing the relationship between art and Calvinism, Norquay claims that although the influence of Calvinism is widely treated as a negative art-denying force, the negative voices of Calvinism paradoxically emphasise the extent of artistic power; they enable a generative power that counters theological thoughts.<sup>28</sup> In other words, the oppressive power that is imposed upon artistic creativity becomes a source of artistic inspiration. Ramsay also asserts the effects of this counter-point, indicating that while Calvinist theology prohibited representational art, the artistic impulse was contradictorily nurtured in a contradictory fashion such that 'the architecture and decorative art thereby received an additional stimulus'.<sup>29</sup>

While Muir holds a negative attitude towards Calvinism's oppression upon artistic freedom, Norquay adopts a more neutral opinion, affirming Calvinism's counter effect in generating artistic creativity. Personally, I would like to take a side-effect view that the more taboos a religious society imposes upon literary or imaginative creativity, the more a social desire for emancipation will then burst out in the achievement of that creativity. We may infer that the restrictive patriarchal institutions in the Calvinist world may give birth to *more* revolutionary female voices through artistic creation in the form of ballads, rather than putting an end to the artistic fertility of this genre. This fact is particularly evident through Scottish balladic fantasy in which ballad singers struggle with a certain set of metaphysical assumptions by alluding to legendary supernatural powers that counter the 'absence',<sup>30</sup> of the Calvinist world. The interrogating spirit towards morality, celebrated by the supernatural in balladry, combats the abiding spirit as is preached by the 'absence' (the unknown predestination) of the Calvinist world.

When considering the impact of Calvinism on Scottish writing, what we should attend to is the relationship between religious habitual feelings and their influence on inward experience. Faith is a faculty that is not acquired solely by the self. We should impartially examine what it can do for the

---

<sup>25</sup> Muir, Willa. *Living with Ballads*. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1965), p. 139.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 139 & 197.

<sup>27</sup> Douglas indicates that Calvin did not prohibit any divinely given instinct of arts, but rather considered arts as the given for our comforts. In Scotland during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century (the prime time of Calvinism), however, there is certainly a notable absence of mysticism in Scottish literature. He asserts that 'to win a livelihood called for endurance and perseverance, it was somehow fitting that Scots should embrace a religious system with an austere code of worship and duty'. In this religious system, people distrust beauty and suspect leisure. This phenomenon still persists in some Scottish remnant churches. See, Douglas, J. D. 'Calvinism's Contribution to Scotland'. *John Calvin: His Influence in the Western World*. Ed. W. Stanford Reid. (Michigan: The Zondervan Corporation, 1982), pp. 217-237 (231-232).

<sup>28</sup> Norquay, Glenda. *Moral Absolutism in the Novels of Robert Louis Stevenson, Robin Jenkins and Muriel Spark*. Ph.D. Thesis. (University of Edinburgh, 1985), p. 432. Norquay mentions that Calvinists, imposing their own ideals of what Scotland should be, expend their social powers of analysis in discussing absences instead of presences within their culture. p. 18.

<sup>29</sup> Ramsay, M. P. *Calvin and Art: considered in relation to Scotland*. (Edinburgh & London: The Moray Press, 1938), p. 9.

<sup>30</sup> I mean here that 'the absence' in Calvinists' world is the omnipotent God, who forbids human emotional desires, even the desires of creativity of art, in lest that these amoral aesthetic forms may arouse human motives of sin.

welfare of our living environment—for both community and nation. Cairns Craig's claims that if Scots need a sense of tradition, then 'this route to a theoretically nonessentialist, intellectual fluid identity' may emerge as a practice of border crossings in early modern Scottish women's writing.<sup>31</sup> Craig's argument for multiplicity however is criticised by Caroline McCracken-Flesher as an unconscious reduction of a particular culture's conflicting patterns, those which overemphasises 'a dynamic between the fearful and the fearsome, those comprising the community and those asserting themselves against it', ignorant of its engagement with other worlds.<sup>32</sup> McCracken-Flesher's view ignores a universal cultural fact that it is the growth of new regionalist and national concerns corresponding to particular psychological awarenesses that best enliven and characterise national imaginings. The identification with and the repudiation of 'fearful selves'<sup>33</sup> constitutes Scottish fictional distinctiveness as seen, for example, in James Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824). The philosophical apprehension of Calvinism and its counter-voices forms a foundation for a post-structuralist analysis of the modern Scottish novel with a specific focus on 'fearful selves'. In other words, we may say that the contradictory effects of Scottish Calvinism generate suspicions towards coherence in the external world. This causes an individual to fear his/her own desire to defy external rules and internal voices. The self is contradictorily split into two 'fearful selves', and oscillates between a 'masked' reality (the external world) and a 'true' illusion (the internal world).

The appropriated balladic fragments in these two novels are suffused with imaginative creativity and question hegemonic thinking. In Barker's *O Caledonia*, the contrast between Janet's moral code of pagan nobility and the civilised suspicion of the imaginary is particularly apparent. A magical world of savagery fights against the severity of civilisation and the conventional maltreatment of imaginative creativity; a ballad breaks into the text, for example, when the boarding school's education, (suggesting a principle of civilisation), suppresses Janet's passion for balladry:

I leant my back unto an aik  
I thought it was a trusty tree,  
But first it bowed and then it brake . . . (*O Caledonia*, 48)

The first stanza comes from an old Scottish song, 'Waly, waly, but Love be bonny', which depicts a maiden's distress over her abandonment after she has surrendered her whole being to her lover.<sup>34</sup> The 'trusty tree' represents a picture of vegetation and humanity. But this is complicated as it 'brake' after its first 'bow'. The tree looks trusty but is in fact untrustworthy; the mockery has been underlined within the ironic contrast between man's promise and woman's easy reliance upon the words.

As applied to the social situation of women, a woman's destiny is controlled by a man's 'bowing' and 'braking' of love. This natural reference underlies Barker's poignant call for attention to the deep paths of female passive position. Positioned in a distinct social class within a disapproving Calvinist society, Janet is often disturbed by her the pursuit and mockery of her male peers. This song mirrors Janet's emotional whirl. Barker then borrows an excerpt from 'Twa Corbies'<sup>35</sup>, in order to foreshadow Janet's motive for conspiring to murder in a night void of light.

Ye'll set upon his white hausbane  
And I'll peck out his bonny blue e'en (48)

'White' and 'blue' are contrasting colours that signify innocent joy and gloomy groans. The feeling of anger deepens:

I hacked him in pieces sma' (48)

---

<sup>31</sup> Dunnigan, Sarah M. 'Undoing the double tress: Scotland, early modern women's writing, and the location of critical desires'. *Feminist Studies*. (Summer 2003): 299-319 (306).

<sup>32</sup> McCracken-Flesher, Caroline. 'Back to the Scottish future?' *Novel*. (Summer 2000): 419-423 (420, 422).

<sup>33</sup> It is the motif which underlies Craig's treatment of Scottish fiction as experimental with the problems of form and history. Craig, Cairns. *The Modern Scottish Novel: narrative and the national imagination*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 37-74.

<sup>34</sup> Murray, J. Clark. *The Ballads and Songs of Scotland: in view of their influence on the character of the people*. (London: Macmillan And Co., 1874), pp. 62-63.

<sup>35</sup> Lyle, Emily, ed. *Scottish Ballads*. (Edinburgh: Canongate Press, 1994), p. 263.



This refers to 'Fair Helen of Kirconnell' in Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*<sup>36</sup>, and involves a woman falling a victim in the vengeful wars between two male lovers. Janet's vengeful mood here climaxes when she is bothered by her male peers.

It was mirk mirk night  
There was nae starlight  
We waded through red blood to the knee  
For all the blood that's shed on earth  
Runs through the springs of that country. (48)

The possessive passion of women and the cowardly character of men climaxes in the fourth stanza with an excerpt from 'Thomas the Rhymer'<sup>37</sup>; this alludes to how Thomas becomes enthralled by the Fairy Queen for seven years after he kisses her and gives himself to be the Queen's passive and helpless captive. The metaphor of blooded earth is emphasised through alliteration: a 'mirk mirk' night without starlight. The springs that contain the energetic power of life are ruined by the blood spilt on the earth.

Last night I dreamed a dreary dream  
Beyond the Isle of Skye  
I saw a dead man win a fight  
And I think that man was I . . . (48)

The shift in the fifth stanza, which includes an excerpt from the ballad 'Battle of Otterbourne'<sup>38</sup>, drives the passion for Scottish victory into the heroic vanity of triumph. Although the speaker imagines winning the battle for life 'beyond the Isle of Skye', it is actually the case that the fighter, after victory, has sacrificed his life for afterlife. The alliteration of 'dreamed a dreary dream' stresses the obscure borderline between life and death: the victory of the battle must be realised by death, by the afterlife's world.

This tragic passion for sacrifice echoes Janet's initial desire for the courage to challenge destiny: 'Chewing gum, chewing gum sent me to my grave. / My mother told me not to, but I disobeyed' (1). The humorous but sarcastic repetition of 'chewing gum, chewing gum' again arouses her defying spirit to defeat danger, even at the price of life. The vernacular expression of this children's rhyme maintains a naïve passion as well as the satirical violation of life rules.

Positioned in the tension between an unfettered highland life and a disciplined lowland schooling, the protagonist is torn between the lands of high romance and the bleak world of education, of making do and of commerce. An intense involvement with repressive lowland schooling and gender-discriminatory highland life makes Janet a social outcast from the human world. Janet recognises herself as an outsider and thus indulges herself in the fantasy of hearing a mermaid's voice on the sea wind:

Lady, weeping at the crossroads  
Would you meet your love  
In the twilight with his greyhounds  
And his hawk on his glove? (55)

This is a folk song imitating the motif associated with that of 'Sir Patrick Spens'. It reveals a maiden's yearning for but love also warns against any love that is too ready to trust in men.<sup>39</sup> Even when wandering 'at the crossroads' and hoping for a real lover to emerge from 'the twilight' of nature, Janet is still suspicious of the lover's 'greyhounds' and of the 'his hawk on his glove'. The metrical rhyming

---

<sup>36</sup> Scott, Walter, collected. *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. (London: Ward, Lock, & Co., Warwick House, 1883). pp. 290-292 (292).

<sup>37</sup> Lyle, Emily, ed. *Scottish Ballads*. (Edinburgh: Canongate Press, 1994), p. 134.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* p. 29.

<sup>39</sup> Lyle, Emily, ed. *Scottish Ballads*. (Edinburgh: Canongate Press, 1994), pp. 53-54.

of 'crossroads' and 'greyhounds' opposes that of 'love' and 'glove', deepening the sense of Janet's insecurity. The assonance of 'hawk' and 'glove', suggestive of hunting, warns the readers of the danger lurking under the sweet gift of love.

Janet then imagines a mermaid comforting her about her own incompatibility with society:

Then up rose the mermaiden  
Wi' a comb and glass in her hand  
Here's a health to you my merrie young men  
For you never will see dry land. (55)

Associated with the broken ship on the stormy sea of 'Sir Patrick Spens' again<sup>40</sup>, Janet identifies herself with the mermaid in terms of their half-human nature. Janet's mirror-like alter ego precisely symbolises her internal alienation from the world. Nature, in this sense, does not serve as a shelter into which she can escape, but instead projects itself onto her imagination as an active listener for the inner conversation she holds with herself. The pun of 'dry land' refers to Janet's external discriminating world and also to her internal closed world. For Janet, the matter of Spring in this dry land carries with it a pang of longing, because she feels that this season brings out the worst in women due to the deterioration of love:

Spring, the sweet spring, is the year's pleasant king;  
Then blooms each thing, then maids dance in a ring. (98)

This excerpt from Thomas Nashe's *Summer's Last Will and Testament* reveals the worsening qualities of Spring, textually implying the singer's gradual distrust of love.

As a form of pentameter, the sound structure of this couplet presents a mirthful celebration of the season. The alliteration of 'sweet spring' stresses the mirth of a pleasant season, while the assonance of 'thing' and 'ring' implies dancing in a doomed cycle of destiny. However, the tone quickly changes as Janet thinks with grim satisfaction:

It was a lover and his lass  
With a hey and a ho and ney nonny no . . .

And accompanied by:

When birds do sing hey ding a dong ding . . . (99)

This is a sort of generic ballad in Shakespeare's comedy *As You Like It*, and is adopted by Matthew Harris in his fourteen *Shakespeare Songs*.<sup>41</sup> The song in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* takes place when the figure of Second Page implies that lovers, just like two gipsies on a horse, must catch pleasure in the moment, as there is nothing more important in the world. Readers might think that it is too far-fetched to suggest Barker's use of a careless lyric singer; this device, however, permits emotional leaps through metrical effect. The literary reference, with alliteration of 'lover' and 'lass', of 'hey' and 'ho', of 'nonny no', of 'ding, dong ding', ruins the metrical harmony presented in the preceding couplet, and stresses the sense of the fragile relationship of love even in love's heyday, the prime of life. This breaking of an established pattern of metrical lines aims to foreground a disruptive female voice in the text: a presumed anticipation and thereby internal frustration, and then repudiation of love.

The half-human nature invigorates Janet's greater desire for destruction and she continues to associate with the legend of the Scottish Cannibal<sup>42</sup>:

---

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

<sup>41</sup> [http://www.chicagoacappella.org/about\\_us/prg-shakespeare.htm](http://www.chicagoacappella.org/about_us/prg-shakespeare.htm) pp. 1-14 (3). March 31th, 2005. Shakespeare, William. *As You Like It*. Act V, Scene III. From *The Works of Shakespeare*. Vol. II. Part 10. Ed. W. E. Henley. (Printed at Edinburgh for London: Grant Richards, 1901), p. 362.

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/Scotland-History/SawneyBean.htm> pp. 1-2. March 31th, 2005.

Rise again Sawney Bean, Sawney Bean, Sawney Bean,  
Rise again Sawney Bean, come from your cave and eat me (56)

Janet's desire for destroying others and herself climaxes with her wish that one of Sawney's man-traps might gape open in the road and that her car might plummet into it. The cave, in the outside world, represents a woman-trap set by men, but is also a self-trap set by Janet. The repetitive invocation of the patriarchal Sawney, who leads the family tribe of Beans to live on the profits of robbery by ambushing travelers on lonely narrow roads, reveals Janet's passion for male devastating power. This association foreshadows the dark doom that awaits her. Later, Janet feels deeply satisfied when given the part of Lady Macbeth in her reading lessons:

Where they most breed and haunt I have observe  
The air is delicate (61)

Although this is not an excerpt from metrical folksong, it is a dramatic part of an episode that shows Banquo's chants as predicting Macbeth's sinister motives before Macbeth's castle.<sup>43</sup> It is borrowed from Barker to build an alerting signal (it contains a useful, metrical rhythm). This literary favour of the gloomy evil atmosphere shows Janet's emotional partiality to Lady Macbeth's conspiracy<sup>44</sup>:

The multitudinous seas incarnadine  
Making the green one red (61)

The words indicating colour—'incarnadine', 'green', 'red'—all describe Macbeth's sinister motives and become a literary hymn that is appropriated by Barker in order to create the sound effects of poetry through flesh and blood images. Ruminating on Macbeth's murder of Duncan in Shakespeare's play, Janet favours the 'seasincarnadine', or flesh-coloured. This bears the etymological sense of the verb 'incardinate'—'given a bodily form'. Janet's aspiration towards the murder conspiracy conceals a desire not merely to damage others but also to destroy her female body and to await rebirth. Janet's literary favour towards Macbeth's assassination of the Scottish King, implies how the Scottish exile clamours for liberty while mistakenly becoming another tyrannical usurper. Readers know that the irony lies in the discrepancy between the liberty Janet desires to reach and the enclosure that is induced by her abjection of femininity.

Janet remains aloof from the world of affection except for her love for her jackdaw, because she identifies herself with the bird unconsciously, murmuring complaints about the imprisoned world. She writes in a book, unlocking her heart to the male bird and saying that this love can detach her from earthly worries. Irony soon follows, however, with a reference to Medea's distress over love. The literary reference here recalls the ending lines of *Medea*:

Many are the Fates which Zeus in Olympus dispenses;  
Many matters the Gods bring to surprising ends.  
The things we thought would happen do not happen . . . (135)

Although this appropriation of the mythical tale does not come from balladry, the dramatic lyre involves metrical rhythm and is musically performed by theatres today; it thus bears some resemblance to dramatised love affairs as made apparent in oral literature. The expectation of blessed love, such as 'many fates' 'dispensed' and 'many matters' to 'ends', has been truncated through heavenly providence. This allusion to Medea's lamentation articulates a female insecurity in love and reveals a more masculine 'playful' attitude towards love as well; this is a typical paradigm for romantic love in Greek mythology. The recurring theme of female power again shows the problem of a woman's physical and psychological displacement. Intending to redress her sinful love or ensnarement by Jason, Medea becomes enraged, using her powers as a witch and insisting upon the rejuvenation of the heart itself.

However, this rejuvenation is impossible because the abjection of self-love has been internalised by

---

<sup>43</sup> Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth*. Act I, Scene VI. From *The Works of Shakespeare*. Vol. III. Part 31. Ed. W. E. Henley. (Printed at Edinburgh for London: Grant Richards, 1901), p. 91.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, Act II, Scene II. p. 98.

her vengeful mind. Medea loses confidence both in her feminine beauty and in the loyalty of love after Jason abandons her. Knowing a woman's destiny to be like that of Zeus's women—those who were passionately owned and ruthlessly forsaken—Janet believes that her love for her jackdaw must be unearthly, that it must be not of the flesh but of a passionate spirit. The literary reference employs the metaphor of a demon lover that is powerful but insubstantial. Similarly, Janet's love for her male bird does not result from ownership but from an illusory distance from the earth; to her, love loses tangibility and it becomes insubstantial.

This disowned but expectant love finds another parallel in an allusion to the relationship between Orpheus and Eurydice. Janet lets her jackdaw fly outside giving him freedom but expecting him to return back to her side. She repeats the choral lines:

Shine clear and bright, Moon goddess . . .  
O crystal, bring my beloved to my home . . .  
Think, dear goddess of my love and how it came about . . .  
Bring him hither, bring him home . . .  
Shine clear, shine bright Moon goddess . . .  
What is life to me without thee,  
What is left if thou art gone . . .  
. . . what is life without my love? (151)

Quoting Orpheus' grief-stricken voice after Eurydice descends into Hell, Barker borrows the metrical rhythms of assonance as well as a storyline of beauty and tragedy in order to mock Janet's gradual loss of hope. The repetition of 'home' implicitly deepens Janet's sense of lost love just as Orpheus laments his loss of Eurydice. However, what involves a referential irony here is that Janet fantastically models Orpheus' risk-taking in searching for his love; she falls towards the roar of the waters of Avernus. When Janet is 'crazed and joyful' (152), she is 'flung . . . passionately at the dark figure' (152), foreshadowing her eventual murder by Jim. The end that Janet is stabbed by Jim's 'rabbit-skinning knife' (152) draws an ultimate tragedy to Janet's self-enclosure and her society's male blindness that accompanies the pathetic withdrawing wild wind to the far north, leaving only 'the sigh of the sea in the shell' (152). There exists a sharp contrast between Orpheus (a loyal male in pursuit of his lost love by descending into Hell) and Janet (a hostile female in pursuit of an ever-innocent but abused love, using her gardener to defy her internal Other). Readers know that Janet's favour in Orpheus' invocation produces an ironic effect in her quest for emotional consolation.

Barker's use of metrical rhythms and rhymes, as is evidenced by those appropriated fragments taken from ballads, literary dramas, and mythical tales, creates certain effects that embellish Janet's emotional progress out of restrictive girlhood to defiant young womanhood. The linguistic reading of the split self (as it resides in the fantasies of borrowed excerpts from oral literature in *O Caledonia*), reflects maternally-abject speaker through the contextual revelation of a Calvinist society. Barker's experiment with balladic appropriation offers a socially defiant character with instable emotions, someone who differs from the characterisation of a harmonious self as would be demonstrated by more traditional interpretations.

## 6. CLASS CONFLICT AND THE ELUSIVE SELF

Differing quite markedly from Janet's obsessive engagement with nature and with her intentional alienation from society in *O Caledonia*, Janie's internal distancing from the world grows more gradually as she recognises gendered social experiences in *The White Bird Passes*. The novel is set in Elgin (the Lady's Lane), 1926, and explores Janie's illegitimate status when she is handed over to charity care in her childhood. The girlhood fantasies that are contained in the oral literature of these two novels demonstrate an abject self that refuses to confront the social positioning of women. However, the fantasy of Scottish songs and children's rhymes in *The White Bird Passes* does not show a revengeful self as it does for Janet in *O Caledonia*. Rather, it illustrates an elusive self that is constantly escaping to her own imaginative world. We see the life of both slum and country through the lens of an innocent child. Duncan asserts that "the focus on childhood provides a new variant of the familiar motif of the Caledonian "antisygyny", with the schizophrenic national subject [being]

reconfigured in the split between child and adult'.<sup>45</sup> He considers the Scottish child as a fictional image of the orphanage, 'detached from its familial roots and ties and unable to fully recognise itself as an adult subject without adopting an alternative identity'.<sup>46</sup> If the fascination with childhood in Scottish novels implies the elusive discomforts of a national subject, then childhood should be investigated through sociological factors in Scottish novels.

Janie's knowledge about men during her childhood comes mostly from her mother's impression of men:

Sae rantingly, sae wantonly, sae dauntingly  
Gaed he.  
He played a spring and danced it round,  
Beneath the Gallow Tree. (66)

This quotation comes from the song about the noted robber Macpherson who is lamenting the pleasures of life.<sup>47</sup> Like Robin Hood, Macpherson robs from the rich to give to the poor. Such 'altruism', however, is lacking in the Lady's Lane. The men who surround Janie in her childhood, men such as the Cruelty Inspector and the Sanitary Man, are generally manipulating the political and economic conditions of the Lady's Lane. The positive words of this song become ironic chants that characterise Janie's living conditions and that effectively contrast the different types of men who are ingrained in Janie's mind. The pleasant imaginings of Janie's childhood, however, are eventually displaced by lamentation—by chants that capture the necessity for leaving Lady's Lane. She chants:

The summer's gone  
And all the flowers are dying. (102)  
For I'll be there  
When summer's in the meadows.  
Or when the valley's hushed  
And white with snow. (103)

This children's hymn is an excerpt from 'Danny Boy'<sup>48</sup>, and delivers a message from a woman to a man. Although the pleasure of summer fades, Janie still anticipates a coming bliss with the arrival of bright 'white . . . snow' abundant in the valley. The colour white may represent Janet's nostalgic passion for 'untainted', post-war Scotland, for Scotland, as it existed before the arrival of an overwhelming industrialisation.

The division of labour deepens the gap between social classes and increases economic discrimination. Later, when Janie faces her new orphanage home in Aberdeenshire, her mother consoles her:

O for the crags that are wild and majestic.  
I sigh for the valley of dark Lochnagar. (107)

This hymn comes from 'Dark Lochnagar' made by George Byron.<sup>49</sup> As a half-Scot by birth, Byron is known as a romantic outcast and spent his early childhood in Aberdeen. The irregular 'crags' of Aberdeen may symbolise the untamed power of nature as well as the rebellious will of a social outcast; although this nature's force is 'wild', it is quite 'majestic' in spirit. The valley of dark Lochnagar implies the depths of humanity and the social demand for introspection and revolution.

---

<sup>45</sup> Petrie, Duncan. *Contemporary Scottish Fictions: Film, Television and the Novel*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 162.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> An excerpt from 'Macpherson's Rant'. Buchan, Norman, selected. *101 Scottish Songs*. (Glasgow and London: Collins, 1962), pp. 96-97.

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.thewildgeese.com/pages/dannyboy.html> pp. 1-2 (1). May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2006.

<sup>49</sup> [http://www.scotsindependent.org/features/singasang/dark\\_lochnagar.htm](http://www.scotsindependent.org/features/singasang/dark_lochnagar.htm) pp. 1-2 (2).

May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2006. See also the Audiovisual, Coulter, Phil. *Scottish Tranquility [sound recording]*. (Watford, Hertfordshire: Music Collection International, 1992). 1 sound disc (53:56 min.): 4 3/4 in.

It was not until she was sent to the orphanage of Skeyne, that Janie began to 'learn a bit of them' (105), and to become aware of the necessity for constrained social behaviour among women.

I must not talk about my food,  
Nor fret if I don't think it good. (111)

This quotation comes from 'Table Rules for Little Folk'.<sup>50</sup> While Mrs. Thane's table manners reveal the denial of individuality within a community of dependent orphans, Janie's complaint about the maltreatment of children leads her to mock the overpowering individuality of the orphanage staff:

Pease brose, Pease brose,  
Pease brose again, Chris,  
They feed us a' like blackbirds.  
And that's a bloody shame, Chris. (114)

This is a rhyme from 'Pease Brose Again Mither'.<sup>51</sup> Janie imagines the children as blackbirds being fed pease meal by orphanage staff; she satirises the inadequacy of worldly provisions using nature's inauspicious blackbirds and using the parentless and solitary children at the orphanage. This children's rhyme softens Janie's hostility as it distracts her through natural fascination.

Janie's girl's-eye view of life is exposed largely through what she says as well as through what she does. Her awareness of the denial of a happy life in the Cairngorm Mountains gradually distances her from the stern world of the orphanage.

O Cairngorms, sae heich and blue  
I'd see the warld  
Were't na for you! (121)

The address to the Cairngorms highlights Janie's sense of being to her 'heich and blue' (mountainous but fantastic) world. This separation from her societal self proves her 'ootlin', an outsider unfit to the orphanage. Thus she escapes into a natural world that is totally different from her society.

O say what it is that thing called light  
Which I can ne'er enjoy.  
What are the blessings of the sight? (129)

This address again discloses Janie's yearning for another world filled with 'blessings of the sight'. This hymn comes from Colley Cibber's poem, 'The Blind Boy', and meditates between different truths invoked by visual worlds.<sup>52</sup> When contrasted with the mirthful period spent in overcrowded slum life, the natural highland setting of the Cairngorms provides, to Janie's view, an imaginative space that divorces itself from rigid life in the orphanage. The sound of a ladybird ticking and humming across the boxwood in a blind, mechanical panic, effectively soothes Janie:

Fly away home.  
Your house is on fire.  
Your children all gone. (120)

This melody comes from 'Lady, Bird Lady, Bird Fly Away Home'.<sup>53</sup> Janie identifies her position with that of the ladybird's. The fire image evokes such a sense of homelessness for Janie that Mrs. Thane keeps puzzling about what would become of her when she 'got out into the world' (120) of imagination.

---

<sup>50</sup> By anonymous poet. [http://writersalmanac.publicradio.org/docs/02\\_10\\_14.htm](http://writersalmanac.publicradio.org/docs/02_10_14.htm) pp. 1-10 (7-8). April 5th, 2005.

<sup>51</sup> <http://sniff.numachi.com/~rickheit/dtrad/pages/tiBROSMITH.html> February 10th, 2005.

<sup>52</sup> <http://litcal.yasuda-u.ac.jp/ml/litcal/200012/msg00002.html> pp. 1-3 (2). April 5th, 2005.

<sup>53</sup> <http://ingeb.org/songs/ladybird.html> February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2005.

Janie's disobedient spirit gradually grows when Mannie asks her name and inquires as to whether or not she can sing. Without replying, Janie strides down the furrow and sings out to him:

There was a wee cooper  
Wha lived in Fife  
Nicketty. Nacketty. Noo, Noo, Noo. (135)

This traditional Scottish song, 'The Wee Cooper O'Fife', depicts a cultural phenomenon that was once acceptable in society: to 'beat ...your wife so that she does the housework'.<sup>54</sup> Janie remains indifferent to Mannie's friendly inquiry. Her reaction goes too far, although the children were in disgrace with Mannie's wife. Despite her reaction, Mannie as a kind man is different from those in the slum and he has been a comfort to Janie. Mannie's role serves to enhance Janie's growth and seals Janie's prejudice towards man's customary treatment of young girls. We may discern this while Mannie sings:

For the Minister kissed the fiddler's wife.  
And he couldna' sleep for thinkin' o't. (137)

This song is an excerpt from Robert Burns's 'My Love She's But A Lassie Yet'.<sup>55</sup> The Minister's kissing is spontaneous and stainless in mind, but this gender relationship is a complete reverse of what Janie perceives in the Lady's Lane. Mannie's singing highlights Janie's imaginative escape from psychological pain as it results from economic and gendered societal discrimination.

When asked whether she wants to leave the orphanage for advanced education (as based upon her past outstanding academic performance), Janie ridicules a Trustee for doing nothing more than dodging Mrs. Thane's diagnosis of Janie's 'disintegrated personality' (143). Janie steadies her thoughts against them:

Of his bones are coral made . . .  
Nothing of him that doth fade. (147)  
But doth suffer a sea change  
Into something rich and strange. (148)

This poem, 'Full Fathom Five', is adapted from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*<sup>56</sup> and depicts how a drowned man is transformed into treasures of the sea, and mermaids ring funeral bells for him. Janie mourns over the unbreakable chain of female destiny that is stressed by the consistent rhyme of 'made', 'fade', 'change', and 'strange'. This masculine rhyme with its four stressed vowels--/e/--signifies the tension and pressure surrounding a woman's restrictive destiny. The last line underscores Janie's unconscious emotional self-enclosure. If women want to alter their fate, they cannot escape a fate filled with rich adversity and strangeness to themselves. The ellipsis after 'coral made' illustrates Janie's sentimental overstatement and the retrospective anger that stems from her social position as an underprivileged child. The Trustees of the Home, misunderstanding her entirely, suggest various careers that they deem appropriate for Janie's future; Janie, however, proposes to stand on her own feet.

This narrative report of a thought-act, as demonstrated through Shakespearian reference, builds a statement not only of defiance and independence but also of vigilance and the ability to speak about silent abuse and self-enclosure. Janie is aware that both she and the landscape stand aching, waiting for release:

Guard us, we pray  
Throughout the coming night. (156)

---

<sup>54</sup>[http://www.rampantscotland.com/songs/blsongs\\_cooper.htm](http://www.rampantscotland.com/songs/blsongs_cooper.htm) pp. 1-2 (1). February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2005.

<sup>55</sup><http://celtic-lyrics.com/lyrics/343> February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2005. See also, *The Canongate Burns*. Eds. Andrew Noble and Patrick Scott Hogg. (Edinburgh: Canongate Books Limited, 2001), pp. 328-329.

<sup>56</sup>[http://www.chicagoacappella.org/about\\_us/prg-shakespeare.htm](http://www.chicagoacappella.org/about_us/prg-shakespeare.htm) pp. 1-14 (8). March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2005. Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest*. Act I, Scene II. From *The Works of Shakespeare*. Vol. I. Part 1. Ed. W. E. Henley. (Printed at Edinburgh for London: Grant Richards, 1901), p. 29.

This hymn highlights Janie's fear regarding the potentially adverse future. It suggests that the heroine grows indistinct, as she becomes part of the landscape in which she moves. This ambiguous concluding tone in *The White Bird Passes* reveals an imaginatively hopeful but practically naïve self in her distrusting, repressive life.

Kesson's use of balladic fragments creates a pathway for distracting the female protagonist from her discomforts about societal discrimination. Through her imagination—with its power to capture landscape, with its passion for the domestic land, and with its religious inclination towards legendary folktale—Janie escapes the psychological pain of her innocent but ignored childhood to become an enlightened but melancholy orphanage girl. Kesson borrows balladic fragments and literary poems from Shakespeare's plays in order to achieve a parallel between nature's solitary but wild power and the individual's abjection of being an Other through the civilised world's maltreatment of economically marginalised groups of people, particularly women.

### 7. CONCLUSION

The use of oral literature in these two novels prompts linguistic investigation into how women appropriate the 'female topics' of oral tradition in order to offer a woman's psychological insight towards her gender relationships in different cultural contexts. Charles Duffin claims that 'by examining a text we can look not only at the information itself but at the way in which that information is presented'.<sup>57</sup> Barker's and Kesson's appropriation of fantasy as practiced by Scottish oral literature, not only functions as a response to social oppressive forces at the conscious level of aesthetic sensibility, but also serves as a vehicle for contextualising interpretative effects on a psychological, reflexive level.

We see both protagonists' circumscribed social conditions both through their girlhood eyes gifted with imaginative association with natural wild power and then through their melancholy entry into womanhood. Janet and Janie both have strong appetites for imagination. This leads them to create a state of mind wherein they might temporarily escape the social maltreatment of women. Nevertheless, their nourishment of the abjection of the maternal, an ambition that might help them transcend the misfortunes of their circumstances, does not lead to their growth or to their maturity, but instead brings about a tense conflict within their society. The linguistic reading of appropriated oral fragments reveals an authorial intention to articulate the mental conditions of their female protagonists through different cultural contexts. These novelists appropriate ballads and songs from oral literature in order to foreground an alternate interpretation for traditional balladic themes that are unique to women.

### REFERENCES

- Atkinson, David. *The English Traditional Ballad: theory, method, and practice*. England: Ashgate, 2002.
- Barker, Elspeth. *O Caledonia*. London: Penguin, 1992 [1991].
- Brackenbury, Rosalind. 'Women and Fiction: How We Present Ourselves and Others'. *Cenchrastus* (1984): 12-14.
- Brown, Mary Ellen. 'Old Singing Women and the Canons of Scottish Balladry and Song'. *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*. Eds. Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997. 44-57.
- Buchan, David. *The Ballad and the Folk*. East Lothian: Tuckwell Press, 1972. ---, selected. *101 Scottish Songs*. Glasgow and London: Collins, 1962.
- Craig, Cairns. 'Peripheries'. *The Modern Scottish Novel: narrative and the national imagination*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999.
- Douglas, J. D. *John Calvin: his influence in the western world*. Ed. W. Stanford Reid. Michigan: The Zondervan Corporation, 1982.
- Duffin, Charles. 'Fixing Tradition: Making History from Ballad Texts'. *The Ballad in Scottish History*. Ed. Edward J. Cowan. East Lothian: Tuckwell Press, 2000. 19-35.

---

<sup>57</sup> Duffin, Charles. 'Fixing Tradition: Making History from Ballad Texts'. *The Ballad in Scottish History*. Ed. Edward J. Cowan. (East Lothian: Tuckwell Press, 2000), pp. 19-35 (21).



- Dunnigan, Sarah M. 'Undoing the double tress: Scotland, early modern women's writing, and the location of critical desires'. *Feminist Studies*. (Summer 2003): 299-319 (306).
- Elphinstone, Margaret. 'Contemporary Feminist Fantasy in the Scottish Literary Tradition'. *Tea and Leg Irons: new feminist readings from Scotland*. Ed. Caroline Gonda. London: Open Letters, 1992. 45-59.
- Kerrigan, Catherine, ed. *An Anthology of Scottish Women Poets*. Gaelic Translation by Meg Bateman. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991.
- Kesson, Jessie. *The White Bird Passes*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1958.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Desire in Language*. Ed. Leon S. Roudiez. Trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980.
- Lyle, Emily, ed. *Scottish Ballads*. Edinburgh: Canongate Press, 1994.
- Manlove, Colin. *An Anthology of Scottish Fantasy Literature*. Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996.
- McCracken-Flesher, Caroline. 'Back to the Scottish future?' *Novel*. (Summer 2000):419-423.
- McCue, Kirsteen. 'Women and Song 1750-1850'. *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*. Eds. Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997. 58-70.
- Muir, Willa. *Living with Ballads*. London: The Hogarth Press, 1965.
- Murison, David. 'Appendix: Northeast Scots as a Literary Language'. *Grampian Hairst: an anthology of Northeast prose*. Eds. William Donaldson and Douglas Young. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1981. 187-195.
- Murray, J. Clark. *The Ballads and Songs of Scotland: in view of their influence on the character of the people*. London: Macmillan And Co., 1874.
- Norquay, Glenda. *Moral Absolutism in the Novels of Robert Louis Stevenson, Robin Jenkins and Muriel Spark*. Ph.D. Thesis. University of Edinburgh, 1985.
- Orr, Mary. *Intertextuality: debates and contexts*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003.
- Petrie, Duncan. *Contemporary Scottish Fictions: film, television and the novel*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004.
- Ramsay, M. P. *Calvin and Art: considered in relation to Scotland*. Edinburgh and London: The Moray Press, 1938.
- Rowland, Ann Wierda. "'The fause nourice sang": childhood, child murder, and the formalism of the Scottish ballad revival'. *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism*. Eds. Leith Davis, Ian Duncan and Janet Sorensen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 225-244.
- Scott, Walter, collected. *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. London: Ward, Lock, & Co., Warwick House, 1883.
- Shakespeare, William. *As You Like It*. From *The Works of Shakespeare*. Vol. II. Part 10. Ed. W. E. Henley. Printed at Edinburgh for London: Grant Richard, 1901. [http://www.chicagoacappella.org/about\\_us/prg-shakespeare.htm](http://www.chicagoacappella.org/about_us/prg-shakespeare.htm) pp. 1-14. March 31th, 2005.
- . *Macbeth*. From *The Works of Shakespeare*. Vol. III. Part 31. Ed. W. E. Henley. Printed at Edinburgh for London: Grant Richard, 1901.
- . *The Tempest*. From *The Works of Shakespeare*. Vol. I. Part 1. Ed. W. E. Henley. Printed at Edinburgh for London: Grant Richard, 1901. [http://www.chicagoacappella.org/about\\_us/prg-shakespeare.htm](http://www.chicagoacappella.org/about_us/prg-shakespeare.htm) pp. 1-14. March 31th, 2005.

## INTERNET WEBSITES

'Danny Boy'

<http://www.thewildgeese.com/pages/dannyboy.html> pp. 1-2. May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2006.

'Dark Lochnagar'

[http://www.scotsindependent.org/features/singasang/dark\\_lochnagar.htm](http://www.scotsindependent.org/features/singasang/dark_lochnagar.htm) pp. 1-2. May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2006.

'Lady, Bird Lady, Bird Fly Away Home'

<http://ingeb.org/songs/ladybird.html> February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2005.

'Pease Brose Again Mither'

<http://sniff.numachi.com/~rickheit/dtrad/pages/tiBROSMITH.html> February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2005.

'Scottish Cannibal'

<http://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/Scotland-History/SawneyBean.html> pp. 1-2. March 31<sup>th</sup>, 2005.

'Table Rules for Little Folk'

[http://writersalmanac.publicradio.org/docs/02\\_10\\_14.htm](http://writersalmanac.publicradio.org/docs/02_10_14.htm) pp. 1-10. April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2005.

'The Blind Boy'

<http://litcal.yasuda-u.ac.jp/ml/litcal/200012/msg00002.html> pp. 1-3. April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2005.

'The Wee Cooper O'Fife'

[http://www.rampantscotland.com/songs/blsongs\\_cooper.htm](http://www.rampantscotland.com/songs/blsongs_cooper.htm) pp. 1-2. February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2005.

**Citation:** Dr. Lin, Hsin-Ying. "Re-visiting Balladic Self-referential Narratives in Elspeth Barker's and Jessie Kesson's Novels" *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL)*, vol 9, no.7, 2021, pp. 62-79. doi: <https://doi.org/10.20431/2347-3134.0907005>.

**Copyright:** © 2021 Authors. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.