WRITING ON THE POVERTY LINE

WORKING-CLASS FICTION BY BRITISH WOMEN WRITERS, 1974-2008

Dissertation

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Contents

INTRODUCTION **1**

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND **6**

- Subalternity and the Silencing of the Working Classes 6
- The Subaltern as a Split Subject 10
- Division and Alienation 11
- The Dynamics between Historical and Literary Representation of the Working Classes and the Issue of "Authentic" Representation 13
- Literary Working-Class Characters as Split Selves 17

2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF BRITISH WORKING-CLASS FICTION BY WOMEN **20**

- Late Nineteenth Century - End of World-War II 20
- The Post-War Years 33
- The Nineteen-Sixties 41
- Introducing Post-Colonialism to Women's Working-Class Writing 45
- The Thatcher Era 50
- Late Twentieth Century and Early Twenty-First Century 54

TEXT ANALYSES **62**

3. THE REPRESENTATION OF CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS **62**

- Livi Michael: *Under a Thin Moon* (1992) 68
- Bethan Roberts: *The Good Plain Cook* (2008) 84
- Andrea Levy: *Never Far From Nowhere* (1996) 91
- Yasmin Hai: *The Making of Mr. Hai's Daughter* (2008) 104

4. THE MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP **110**

- Valerie Mason-John: *The Banana Kid* (2005) 115
- Carolyn Steedman: *Landscape for a Good Woman* (1986) 129
- Joyce Storey: *The House in South Road* (2004) 136

5. RAPE, BATTERING, TRAUMA **145**

5.1 RAPE AND TRAUMA **145**

- Andrea Ashworth: *Once in a House on Fire* (1992) 153
- Rachel Trezise: *In and Out of The Goldfish Bowl* (2000) 160
- Pat Barker: *Union Street* (1982) *(Kelly Brown)* 170

5.2 Battering and Trauma **178**
- Buchi Emecheta: *Second-Class Citizen* (1974) 183
- Pat Barker: *Union Street* (1982) *(Lisa Goddard*) 192
- Trezza Azzopardi: *The Hiding Place (2000)* 196

6. Conclusion **202**

7. Works cited **208**

Introduction

"With a brilliant eye for the comic in the tragic [...] Joyce Storey charts the ordinary story of an extra-ordinary working-class woman's life" (Pat Thorne). These lines, written on the back cover of Joyce Storey's *The House in South Road* (2004), attracted my attention to this novel; which I discovered at a second-hand book store situated in London's East End. It was shelved in a section labelled "Women's Literature" and it admittedly surprised me to encounter a working-class narrative literally placed right next to Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949). During my degree studies, I have been focussing on reportages of the industrial, "masculine" working-class world by a German male author and was oblivious to the fact that there are numerous British women writing about working-class life. Joyce Storey's *The House in South Road* proved to be just one out of many contemporary novels of the kind. Likewise, there are scholars, predominantly women, who endeavoured to tackle this field of research. Relevant examinations on British working-class writers are Mary Ashraf's *Introduction to Working-Class Literature in Great Britain* (1978), Pamela Fox's *Class Fictions* (1994), Merlyn Cherry's *Towards a Recognition of Working-Class Women Writers* (1994), Gustav Klaus' *The Socialist Novel in Britain* (1982), as well as his essays *The Literature of Labour* (1986) and *To Hell with Culture* (2005); and certain excerpts of Ian Haywood's *From Chartism to Trainspotting* (1998). In their examinations on working-class writing, these critics largely focus on novels. This is the literary form I shall be concerned with in this thesis. Merlyn Cherry remarks:

> In the course of my degree studies it became apparent that there was little historical evidence of British working-class women writers. This led me to the question whether such women actually wrote or whether it was the case that their writing was not deemed good enough for publication. (Cherry 75)

In her essay entitled *Towards a Recognition of Working-Class Women Writers,* Cherry discusses the omission of these writers within British literary studies. She asserts that their (supposed) underrepresentation is not only a matter of publication, but is due to the fact that these authors have largely been ignored by literary critics (115-118). The text corpus of working-class fiction is clearly male-dominated, both in terms of male authorship and the depiction of working-men characters and their living

environments in the novels. Yet there is evidence of women writing about the working classes. These authors, who frequently produce(d) female pendants to the working-men characters, have fallen into oblivion. Cherry argues that

> there has been a tendency to bracket 'working women with working-class men as too 'marginal to literary consideration. [...] The notion that literature has been constructed with middle-class values and ideologies is frequently underlined. Gagnier states that 'individualist aesthetics have been used to disqualify women's and worker's lifewriting.' (quoted in: Cherry 84)

Hence women writing about the working classes face(d) a double discrimination: first, in terms of a selection and canonisation along middle-class ideologies and second, in terms of gender. Cherry names some of those writers whose work will be discussed in this thesis; however she does not specify what is to be understood by "British women's working-class writers". Various questions arise at this point. What are the distinctive features of a contemporary working-class novel written by a woman author? Which narrative strategies are employed to create the literary working-class world of female characters? What type of work is being performed by such characters in the story? The difficulty of finding answers to these questions lies in the attempt of determining a typology of such novels.

Ian Haywood, for instance, ignores three significant Welsh women writers of this category, even though his anthology entitled *Working-Class Fiction, From Chartism to Trainspotting* (1998) focuses on British writers. Gustav Klaus, however, identifies these authors as working-class writers in his examinations cited above. Uncovering these female writers and demonstrating the development of their fiction will be part of this thesis. Subsequent to the first chapter *(Theoretical Background),* where I discuss the intricate matter of representing the working classes mainly from Gayatri Spivak's point of view[1], I will provide a literary history of British women writing about the working classes. This chapter, entitled *The Development of British Working-Class Fiction by Women Writers*, shall form a basis to approach a typology. Each traceable author of the kind shall be mentioned in chronological order. The developments of

1 She presents her viewpoint in an essay called *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988).

themes and also narrative form shall be described in depth – up to the year of publication 1974[2], which is the starting point of novels I include in the text analyses.

It will be become clear that the contemporary women's working-class novel emerged out of a "patchwork" of different writing traditions; and that the typology which I endeavour to establish in this thesis cannot be based on common characterisations. None of the characters in my anthology can be labelled a "prototype", since the characterisations vary greatly across the novels. So, I have to find an approach different to characterisations to find a typology. Tony Shaw, specialist on working-class fiction by male authors, argues on his homepage *British Working-Class Fiction and Lionel Britton's Place in It,* that the essence of working-class fiction can most effectively be "carved out" via a categorisation of common topics. He declares: "I describe this literature as a sub-genre because it is operating within the framework of the dominant bourgeois novel and shares many features with it; the essential differences are thematic, and therefore I deal with the texts thematically" (Shaw: "British Working-Class Fiction"). Although I share Shaw's *modus operandi* of finding common topics, I do not agree with the label "sub-genre". In this respect I suggest to concur with Mary Ashraf, whose research work on women working-class writings is geared towards a recognition of these as part of the literary mainstream; rather than being a deviation from it (cf. Ashraf 17). This thought shall also be discussed in the framework of my thesis.

The three main topics which predominantly appear across the novels are: women's class consciousness, the mother-daughter relationship and trauma caused by sexual abuse and battering. These topics respectively occur in the twelve novels which I will examine in the section *Text Analyses*. This section constitutes the largest part of this thesis. Thus, in addition to demonstrating the development of women writing about the working classes, I work towards a typology via a detailed text analysis according to these topics. Hereby, I raise no claim to completeness. I have chosen twelve texts which I consider to be representative; and I will proceed like the literary critic Gustav Klaus, who argued in his anthology entitled *The Socialist Novel in Britain*: "I have chosen to introduce many writers, limiting myself, however, to the discussion of one

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2 Why I have chosen this year of publication as a starting point to analyse the texts will become clear later in this introduction, when I come to explain the choice of my texts.

work each. This approach can best disclose the breadth and variety of fictional devices" (Klaus 1). My "selection procedure" is, at one point, yet more restrictive than Klaus' way of proceeding. In addition to limiting myself to one work per author, I have selected one novel out of two very similar texts: I have chosen Buchi Emechta's *Second Class Citizen* (1974) over Jean Riley's *The Unbelonging* (1985) for the text analyses. Both novels are centred on a Black working-class woman character who migrates to London; and both main characters fall victim to battering and rape enacted by a male family member. Emecheta's novel was published nine years before *The Unbelonging* and it was the first novel dealing with sexual abuse against a Black woman (cf. Maroula Jannou 147). Particularly against the background that the text was written during the years of the Second-Wave Feminism, which was "spearheaded by white middle-class women" (Lois Weis 246), Emecheta is a pioneer writer; and her novel can be considered a remarkable step towards an involvement of a Black working-class perspective into this feminist discourse.

This is the reason why I have chosen the year of 1974 as the starting point of analysing the twelve novels: it signifies the introduction of Black women's working-class fiction to the British literary scene of working-class aesthetics. Five out of the twelve novels to be analysed are labelled "post-colonial". Through these texts, British working-class fiction became significantly enriched by a British-Nigerian, British-Jamaican, a Welsh-Maltese and British-Pakistani point of view. My aim is to show why the texts written by these authors from various ethnic backgrounds offer innovative insights into the realm of contemporary women's working-class fiction. It will be shown how they can help us understand a particular phenomenon in these texts. With the introduction of post-colonial fiction, new narrative forms and voices and various culturally determined characterisations came on the literary scene. Out of this body of writing developed a considerable phenomenon. In addition to the fact that, as in the "White" British texts, a "perspective of poverty" is also apparent in these postcolonial writings, a principle of post-colonial theory manifests itself in these texts: Frantz Fanon's concept of the "schizophrenia of identity". This is largely embodied by the characters in the texts: the Black-British, Maltese-Welsh and Asian-British appear to be split subjects and they struggle to come to terms with their ethnic identity in twentieth and twenty-first-century metropolitan Britain.

The “schizophrenia”, which is enacted via the powerful imposition of the dominant culture’s values onto the colonised subject, can, in fact, also be detected as an underlying theme in the “White” British working-class novels under discussion. The three common main topics which appear across the twelve novels to be analysed illustrate that this “schizophrenia” is a central textual element in all novels under discussion. The female working class-character becomes a split self in various ways. This division is, for instance, also caused by the male gaze and the violation of the female body, the character’s upward mobility and the consequent conflict of class identity. The idea of “schizophrenic” female working-class characters has – tentatively – been raised by the literary critic Pamela Fox. In her essay *Class Fictions,* she demonstrates how the white women characters are torn between the shame about their working-class background and the resistance to adjust to the cultural codes of the middle and upper classes.

In the framework of this thesis, I will elucidate the concept of “division” and illustrate why it functions as an effective reading strategy to analyse the fictional texts. By deepening the idea of the split female subject against the background of gender, class and ethnicity, I endeauvour to develop a “three-dimensional”, contemporary approach towards the typology of these texts. Also, it shall be discussed if and how the idea of schizophrenia can perhaps be understood as a continuation of the most essential division in the context of working-class life: the division of labour. This task shall be accomplished with the assistance of theorems on schizophrenia of identity framed by leading post-colonial critics and psychologists and literary critics such as Gayatri Spivak, bell hooks, and Homi Bhabha, Jaques Lacan, Pamela Fox and of course Frantz Fanon. Yet also Karl Marx’s *Capital* shall be cited*,* since this work is profoundly concerned with the matter of the division of the working-class subject. This will lead to a discussion if Marx’s idea of alienation, which is closely connected to the concept of “division”, can be transferred to the contemporary texts.

More significantly, it will be demonstrated how the characters in the novels under discussion react to and act upon the “dividing force” enacted by the dominant culture. The female characters are, by no means, passive victims of political and patriarchal domination, but they perform moves of resistance against their oppressors. They are “[w]omen who have coped. Women who have survived. Women who are getting ready to fight back” (June Burnett 203).

1. Theoretical Background

Subalternity and the Silencing of the Working Classes

"Can the subaltern speak?" This question, posed and discussed by the Indian post-colonial critic Gayatri Spivak in an essay of the same title, has provoked various debates within literary theory and cultural studies (Miriam Nandi 12). The essay was originally published in Cary Nelson's and Lawrence Grossberg's *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (1988). It illustrates Spivak's concern whether Western intellectuals who seek to expose and deconstruct imperialist practices such as economic exploitation, political domination and cultural erasure actually reproduce and re-inscribe imperialist discourses into their representation of the subaltern. "Can the subaltern speak?" is, in fact, a rhetorical question: Spivak points out how the subaltern is silenced within academic discourse. Here, the question arises how Spivak's critique ties in with the topic under discussion. Can today's Western working classes be labelled "subaltern"? How are they silenced by the dominant culture, particularly in times of worker's unions and the increase in working-class studies? (cf. Hito Steyerl 10). And, above all, how is the subaltern silenced in literary representations of women's working-class lives? These questions shall be answered step by step within this chapter.

Since the term "subaltern" describes a social and political position outside of hegemonic power structures, it is often used as a term to describe the working classes (cf. 4). Yet the word subaltern cannot implicitly be used interchangeably with "working classes". A clarification of terminology is required at this point. The etymology of the word subaltern is rather intricate. This is due to Antonio Gramsci, who used the term to replace it with "proletarian" in his *Prison Diaries* (1934-35), for the latter term was censored in fascist Italy at the time. Originally, the word subaltern was used to describe a low rank in the military (cf. Steyerl 10). It is only through this "involuntary translation" in Gramsci's *Prison Diaries* that subalternity comes to be understood as a description of the proletariat. Thereby it found its way into political and literary theory. To elucidate the similarities and differences between the terms "proletariat" and "working class", it can be said that the sociologist Rosemary Crompton, for instance, does not explicitly differentiate between the two. In her

analyses, however, the term “proletariat” is exclusively used in the context of Marx’s contemplations on class (cf. Crompton 29, 30, 146). It is, obviously, a Marxist term – as opposed to “working class”, which is a more contemporary denotation. “Proletariat” is associated with an organised class struggle that Marx called for[3], whereas the concept of today’s working classes has the notion of a more heterogeneous group.

Many different definitions of “working class” exist, such that determining which is the most relevant to this thesis proved to be a challenging task. It can be said that in the standard works *The Making of the English Working Class* by E.P Thompson (1963), Richard Hogart’s *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) and Eric Hopkin’s *The Rise and Decline of the English Working Classes* (1991), as well as in social sciences, the key criterion for a definition of “working class” is the individual’s “low-level” occupation such as manual work and service jobs.[4] The problem with such definitions is that, even though they transcend Marxist analyses, they also often focus on the white male worker only. Spivak, although claiming to adhere to Marxism, is highly critical of this. She has significantly enriched Marxist theory by filling out its “blind spot”: the female worker. Additionally, Spivak describes the female body as a “place of production” in itself due to its capacity to bear children, that is, potential workers (cf. Miriam Nandi 90). Poignantly, she also points out that a woman’s body is abused as an industrial sector in terms of prostitution and trafficking, which is connected to capitalist interests and thus is a matter of class (90).

“Class” is hence much more than a category determined by occupation alone. This argument will be extended when I come to speak about a Black feminist’s – bell hook’s – contemplation on the Black working classes. Thus, as opposed to “proletariat”, which remains a fixed Marxist term, the expression “working class”,

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3 This is very much reflected in the famous slogan “Proletarians of the world, unite!”

4 To give at least one example, I would like to quote Lockwood, who “used a comprehensive Weberian approach to define the differences between clerical workers and manual workers in terms of three factors: work situation, market situation and status position, and concluded that as soon as the term class situation is understood to cover not only market but also work situation, it is clear that clerk and manual worker do not, in most cases, share the same class situation (quoted in: Tom Bottomore 43). The three factors comprise the worker’s income, the degree of job security and the opportunity for upward mobility (Crompton 48); the “position in the division of labour” (48) and the worker’s position in “the hierarchy of prestige” within society (ibid).

which comprises the aspects of gender and ethnicity as well, is semantically closer to the term subaltern: Spivak discusses the matter of subaltern representation on the basis of “third-world” lower-caste women. As will be repeatedly shown in the course of this thesis, the concepts of gender, class and ethnicity intersect:

> Like ‘gender’ and ‘race’, the concept of class intersects in important ways with the cultural implications of colonial domination. It is clear that economic control was of significant, if not primary importance of imperialism, and that economic control involved a reconstruction of the economic and social resources of colonized societies. Consequently, class was an important factor in colonialism, firstly in constructing the attitudes of the colonizers towards different groups and categories of the colonized (‘natives’), and they began to employ colonial cultural discourse to describe the changing nature of their own society. [...] It is clear that in many ways the idea of binarism between a proletarian and an owning class was a model for the centre’s perception and treatment of the margin, and a model for the way in which imperial authority exercised its power within the colonies. (Ashcroft 37-38)

Spivak’s concept of subalternity is, nevertheless, rooted in Gramsci’s “involuntary translation”. Gramsci used the term “subaltern” to describe Italian farmers living in the south of the country who were not recognised as part of the Italian nation (cf. Steyerl 8-9). According to Gramsci, their subalternity was mainly created by the fact that they did not speak the language of the dominant culture. This also meant that they were excluded from any form of representation of what was considered the “Italian nation”. The most important aspect in Gramsci’s analysis is that the subaltern is silenced within the dominant discourses.

A contemporary example of silencing mechanisms exercised by the dominant culture is described by Hito Steyerl in her introduction to Spivak’s text *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Steyerl describes the French film *Tout Va Bien* by Jean Luc Godard and Jean-Pierro Gorin, in which a reporter interviews a female worker in a sausage factory. Strikingly, the audience can only see and not hear this scene; the woman worker remains silent. However, an interior monologue is inserted into a thought bubble which is attached to the actress. The thought bubble reveals her ideas about the uselessness of this interview, which she thinks will merely reproduce stereotypes about workers (cf. Steyerl 7). It becomes clear how the working woman is silenced: even though the reporter endeavours to let the interviewee speak, the worker’s voice is smothered by the dominant discourses and existing clichés about female factory workers (cf. 8). The reporter is presented as a “knowing” instance that

functions as a mouthpiece, a helper of the oppressed worker, creating the impression that the latter could never gain a voice by herself. The reporter, who *per definitionem* already knows about the worker's plight (otherwise there would not be a need for an interview in the first place), has a different socio-economic position. The aspect of difference, which is already fixed in terms of their very different jobs (factory worker versus reporter), is most crucial here. By "benevolently" trying to let the subaltern speak, the reporting instance is positioned to an elevated vantage point. Thus instead of the subaltern, it is – in fact – the "knowing instance" that rises to speak. The working woman in the sausage factory is hence created and constructed via the difference to the "Other". The "Other", with a capital "O", is a concept developed by Jacques Lacan. It is the "Grand-Autre", through whose gaze a subject gains an identity (cf. James Mellard 19).

Spivak insistently argues that speaking in aid of the oppressed may, in fact, silence them. For this, she provides a historical example of her home country India, where the British colonial law of 1830 banned the practice of widow-burning called *Sati* (English*: Suttee).* This is a ritual whereby a woman's mourning for her dead husband is practised by her own death through burning. Spivak does not justify this practice, rather she points out that this is an example of the imperialist's justification for colonising the country which works along a principle of "white men saving brown women from brown men" (47). This way, the women are silenced in a twofold way: whereas the Brahmanical ideology has fixed the idea that the widows wish to die to express their mourning, the British claimed that the women do not wish to do so and instead need to be saved. The Suttee ritual was used to blame the colonised for their "barbaric behaviour" and hence to put colonisation in a positive light. The woman's voice plays no role in these two conflicting discourses: she is silenced and becomes a split subject in terms of these two discourses. Against this background, Spivak strongly contradicts Foucault who, for instance, conceives the workers' and students' revolt of May 1968 in Paris as an indicator that workers can speak for themselves. She points out that, in this example, too, "the worker" is mistakenly understood to be a "self-identical subject", that is, not a divided subject (cf. 41). She suggests that in terms of such political struggles, the subaltern subjects are wrongly viewed as a transparent, homogeneous group who speaks for itself. Spivak retorts that it is dangerous to use universal terms like "the worker". One needs to consider the

historical and ethnic background when talking about “the worker” or the “oppressed” – and, significantly, one needs to consider gender: she criticises the fact that women workers are predominantly unheard of in the context of the labour movement.[5]

The Subaltern as a Split Subject

Since the representation of the subaltern works via a differentiation, it is often based on essentialist ideas on “the worker”. When showing that the subaltern cannot speak, that is: is silenced due to essentialist discourses, Spivak draws upon Derrida’s reading strategy of deconstruction. She applies it to post-colonial criticism to demonstrate the consequences of a universal representation of “the subaltern”. Just like deconstruction looks for the hidden and the silenced other within the language of Western philosophers, Spivak also uses this reading strategy as a key to unravel ambivalences in this language and – additionally – searches for traces of the silenced history of “the other”. To highlight the issue of representing the working classes, Spivak contemplates a passage in Karl Marx’s essay *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,* where he states that

> the small peasant proprietors cannot represent themselves; they must be represented. Their representative must appear simultaneously as their master, as an authority over them, as unrestricted governmental power that protects them from the other classes and sends them rain and sunshine from above. (quoted in: Spivak 30)

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5 She names a further example, which demonstrates that a woman’s political statement is not heard, that she is silenced. It is the story of Spivak’s distant relative, to whom she refers as Bhubaneswari Bhaduri. During India’s struggle for independence, this politically active woman was commissioned to assassinate the enemies. Since she felt loyal to the anti-colonial combatants, yet did not want to kill people, this dilemma led her to hang herself. Bhubaneswari purposely committed suicide whilst she was menstruating, so that it would become clear that she did not kill herself because of an illegitimate pregnancy, but because of a political dilemma. However, her action was misinterpreted and understood as the “gendered” reaction to the consequences of extramarital sex. The female voice is hence overpowered and silenced by male-dominated discourses. Spivak’s conclusion that the subaltern cannot speak / is not heard appears pessimistic; the more so as the subaltern cannot be represented either; since the “speaker”, the so-called “native informant”, cannot represent the subaltern: “My point is that the subject position of the native informant, crucial yet foreclosed, is also historically and therefore geographically inscribed,” argues Spivak (31).

The representation of the "small peasant proprietors" works on two levels: first as a depiction of the peasant's plight and, second, the peasant's "representative" functions as a mediator who speaks for them. As Spivak puts it, the term representation means both a "portrait and a proxy" (cf. Spivak 30). In this context, the aspect of a division, of the subaltern subject's "splitting apart", becomes relevant again: "My point is that Marx is not working to create an undivided subject where desire and interests coincide. [...] Marx is obliged to construct models of a divided and dislocated subject whose parts are not continuous or coherent with each other", argues Spivak (29). The division takes place in terms of desire and interests, as the subaltern's interests are interpreted and represented by an "authority". This division is hence created by the representation of the working classes. As pointed out in the introduction, the concept of "division" is a central phenomenon in women's working-class fiction. The female working-class characters are – symbolically – divided into various levels. I will now discuss whether and how this "splitting apart" may perhaps be understood as a continuation of the "original" most essential division with the context of the working classes: the division of labour.

Division and Alienation

At this point, I need to resort to Marx again, since his work *Capital* is deeply concerned with the matter of division in a capitalist system. The term "separation" is also used in this context of wage labour. This term literally highlights the fact that not only the production process is split up into sub-processes – the worker is also separated from his[6] product. First, the product he partly produces does not belong to him, but to the proprietor. The labouring process he performs is not a purposeful, lifeserving[7] action but a controlled, monotonous, isolated task. Since the worker is forced to "sell" his productive force in exchange for wages, Marx speaks of a transformation of the worker into a commodity; and of commodity fetishism in a capitalist system. Herein lays the origin of the term commodification, to which I will frequently refer within this thesis. The transformation of the worker into a commodity

6 I refer to "the worker" as a male, since Marx's analysis ignores the female worker.
7 Marx points out that the "original" form of work is men's appropriation of nature in order to survive. Hence the term "life-serving".

stands in direct contrast to what is termed the "active existence of a human being and his appropriation of nature" (quoted in: Bertell Ollman 33). Ollmann states :

> What requires explanation is not the unity of living and active human beings with [...] nature and the appropriation of nature, nor is this the result of a historical process. What we must explain is the *separation* of this active existence, which is only fully completed in the relation between wage labour and capital. (133)

Being separated from this "natural active existence", the wage-labourer is alienated (202). The phenomenon of alienation is said to comprise four different dimensions. According to the sociologist Heidrun Friedel-Howe, the following dimensions are described in Marx's *Capital*:

- alienation from the production process[8]
- alienation from the product
- alienation from self
- alienation from others

Alienation from the production process automatically brings about the alienation from the product (Friedel-Howe 22). Furthermore, Friedel-Howe emphasises the fact that the transformation of the worker into a commodity alienates him from himself as a human being and, consequently, from his fellow men (22-23). This means that workers may no longer conceive of themselves as human beings, but as objects/commodities (23). The proprietor, on the contrary, is then perceived as the "Great Other" through whom the worker gains his identity as an "object/commodity". Thus, the two latter dimensions (alienation from self and alienation from others) comply with the mechanism of othering that I have described above. Friedel-Howe's approach to dimensionalise the phenomenon of alienation proves to be helpful: it obviously ties in with the matter of differentiation/othering in a hierarchical society (cf. example of the film *Tout Va Bien)*. Furthermore, the idea of alienation from self and other human beings in a capitalist system provides sufficient basis to understand the antagonistic relationship between the owning classes and the working classes.

8 which is intensified by the fact that that working tools do not belong to the worker, either.

It highlights which mechanisms are at work here – and it illustrates that the overall key factor is “division”.

The split becomes even “deeper” when the female working-class subject comes on the scene (cf. also *Tout Va Bien)*. In terms of the hierarchical, patriarchal society, she is positioned even lower than her male counterpart, hence the difference and the consequential alienation from a male proprietor/capitalist is larger and more intense. Secondly, the fact that Marx concentrated on the male worker points to another division: the gendered division of labour. Women were largely erased from the context of wage labour. How this separation additionally alienates women will be shown in the following section.

The Dynamics between Historical and Literary Representation of the Working Classes and the Issue of “Authentic” Representation

Taking a closer look at Spivak’s critique, it becomes clear that she does not claim that the subaltern woman is forever silenced. In fact, Spivak means that the subaltern cannot be represented *adequately* by the dominant discourses (cf. Miriam Nandi 115). The question arises whether and how the working-class writers in my anthology create female characters that represent British working-class women adequately – particularly against the background that the authors are not obliged to do so: this is fiction, anything is possible and “allowed”. The question is, then, if the texts have the potential to make the subaltern speak. After all, the authors represent working-class women and therefore – in Spivak’s sense – run the risk of silencing the “real”, extra-literary working classes. The author’s working-class backgrounds do not save them from this risk, as their representations – told from the perspective of a “native informant”– induces a certain difference through knowledge that necessarily evolves when describing something. This descriptive distance through difference, which necessarily creates an elevated vantage point, then means that the “informant’s” perspective cannot be identical with the voices of the subaltern.

The relationship between history and literature needs to be considered when referring Spivak’s theory to the novels under discussion. In her essay *A Literary Representation of the Subaltern,* the critic tackles exactly this issue when stating that:

> The difference between cases of historical and literary events will always be there as a differential moment in terms of what is called 'the effect of the real'. What is called history will always seem more real to us than what is called literature. Our very uses of the two separate words guarantee that. This difference can never be exhaustingly systematized. [...] The historian's resistance to fiction relates to the fact that the writing of history and literature has a social connotation even when these activities do not resemble what we understand by them today. (Spivak 94-95)

Following this argument, it becomes clear that history cannot be declared a "one-to-one" account of reality, but is a matter of representation as well – just like literature. Both disciplines are concerned with representing "the social". Even though history generally strikes us as a more "objective" depiction of such, both disciplines are representations of social circumstances and hence both are in danger of silencing certain societal groups. Here it becomes clear that the question whether the subaltern can speak is indeed very relevant to literary studies. More importantly, this also means that the author's working-class background does not guarantee an "adequate" representation. Once again, the mediation between the working-class world and readership is created by a narrating instance, which, through its knowledge, "others" the working-class subject as a "different entity".

Contrary to this, the Black Feminist bell hooks argues that particularly black women with a working-class background have a stronger potential to represent appropriately. As opposed to their "white privileged-class sisters" (hooks 104), they are said to hold "voices of experience" (104). Those who can draw upon their experience understand that

> [c]lass is much more than Marx's definition of the relationship to the means of production. Class involves your behaviour, your basic assumption, how are you taught to behave, what you expect from yourself and from others, your concept of a future, how you understand problems and solve them, how you think, feel, act. (hooks 103)

She claims that this deeper, broader idea of what it means to have grown up in working-class conditions enables writers to picture these more effectively: "One way to honor this working-class world [is] to write about it in a way that would shed a more *authentic* light on our reality. I felt that writing about the constructive values and beliefs of the world act as an intervention challenging stereotypes" (147). [my emphasis] Although I partly agree with this statement, I find the term "authentic" rather problematic. What does it mean to be authentic? How can we "measure" and

observe authenticity? The use of this term creates many delicate questions, especially against the background of Spivak's warnings against using universal terms like "the worker". How shall we understand an "authentic working-class condition" if gender and ethnicity – and therewith a variety of cultural aspects – is to be discussed in the class context. Gender presents a huge challenge to "authenticity": what *is* working-class femininity/masculinity, what *was* it like, say a hundred years ago, and how are these roles "defined" and understood across different ethnicities?

Feminist theory instantly reminds us that the concepts of femininity and masculinity are socially constructed; that "females and males are born, but women and men are products of enculturation" (Bonvillian 1). On this, Ingeborg Breines argues that "we socialise women for a culture of peace (to be caring, sharing, flexible and communicative) and men for a culture of violence and war (to be tough, over-decisive, forceful and aggressive)" (Breines 34). Furthermore, the concept of the "male gaze" in feminist studies intensifies the matter of identities being constructed by a patriarchal perspective. The male gaze is said to cause the objectification of the female, which leads to a male-defined construction of femininity: women come to "watch themselves being watched by men. They turn themselves into objects because femininity itself is defined by being gazed upon by men," (Ania Loomba 162). Marxist feminists claim that women's role in society is defined by men. Their critique ties in with the concept of alienation: being forced and restricted to the role of a housewife (Romen Selden et al. 125), women are separated from their "active existence". Hence it can be said that they are alienated by this gendered division of labour (cf. previous sub-chapter). So, the matter of authenticity also becomes highly complicated in the context of a capitalist system.

It can be argued that bell hook's statement is a contradiction in itself, since Black Feminism and the arising debate about ethnicity and hybridity intensify the intricateness of the authenticity question even further. Post-colonial feminists have objected to the representation of all non-white females as an oppressed collective, since the experience of colonialism and its consequences vary greatly between different ethnicities. It is therefore important to consider the divergence in experiences among Black women, Asian women and those of a mixed heritage – and each ethnic group may be heterogeneous in itself. In addition to the aspect of ethnicity, the authenticity question gains an even deeper dimension against the

background of the consequences of imperial practices: the "schizophrenia of identity" that has been described by Frantz Fanon. In his essay *Black Skin, White Masks,* Fanon states: "When the Blacks make contact with the white world a certain sensitizing action takes place. The black man stops behaving as an *actional* person. His actions are destined for 'the Other' (in the guise of the white man) since only the Other can enhance his status" (Frantz Fanon 132). In this context, Fanon speaks of the "schizophrenia in the case of the black experience" (132). With regard to the split colonial subject, the discussion of what is authentic becomes truly fathomless.

Finally, the thought that "only a native can know the scene" is also clearly negated by Spivak:

> The position that only the subaltern can know the subaltern, only women can know women, cannot be held as a theoretical presupposition either, for its predicates the possibility of knowledge on identity. Whatever the political necessity for holding the position, and whatever the advisability of attempting to "identify" (with) the other as a subject in order to know her, knowledge is made possible for and is sustained by irreducible difference, not identity. [...] Knowledge is never adequate to its object. The theoretical model of the ideal knower in the embattled position we are discussing is that of the person identical with her predicament. This is actually the figure of the impossibility and non-necessity of knowledge. Here the relationship between the practical – need for claiming subaltern identity – and the theoretical – no program of knowledge production can presuppose identity, as origin – is, once again, of an interruption that persistently brings each term to crises. (Spivak 11)

In the same vein, Spivak takes the intricateness of this matter to a peak when provokingly asking if men can theorise feminism, if whites can theorise racism and if the bourgeois can theorise the revolution (cf. Spivak 11). She then concludes that "it is only when *only* the former group theorise that the situation is politically intolerable" (11). Ultimately, these two respective groups are not diametrically opposed to each other in terms of the representation of the working classes: the latter groups participate in the knowledge about themselves and therefore "they must have some share in some of the structures of privilege that contaminate the first group. [...] Therefore Gramsci speaks of the subaltern's rise into hegemony" (11). This is evidently not denied by hooks; rather she emphasises the issue of the upward movement of the working-class female when theorising her family background. This she terms "crossing class boundaries" in her book entitled *Where We Stand: Class Matters;* and she speaks of the "frightening" aspect of the female's entry into the

dominant culture to the remaining members of a working-class family (143). This aspect will, in particular, be taken up in the chapter *The Mother-Daughter Plot.* Crossing class boundaries implies the idea of difference which I have described above; and it also bears the notion of a division between working-class identity and a turning to the middle classes. Nonetheless, hooks speaks of an "authentic representation". Thus, it is essentially division and change that negate the concept of authenticity.

Literary Working-Class Characters as Split Selves

As mentioned above, the female working-class character is presented as a split subject at various levels. With the assistance of theories developed by feminist, literary and post-colonial critics and psychologists such as Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, Pamela Fox and Jacques Lacan, I will demonstrate how the characters are affected by division/schizophrenia along the lines of gender, class and ethnicity. It shall be examined how the splitting apart is imposed onto the female working-class characters and, more importantly, I will illustrate how the authors make their characters act upon this powerful imposition of the dominant culture. It is crucial to stress that the women writers in my anthology – through their characters – oppose various forms of domination via both speech and actions which they make their characters perform. I will categorise the character's (re)actions via four different types: resistance (to the dominant culture), escape (from the working classes), return (to the working classes), and destruction (of self). Resistance is the most significant plot device and it works on both levels of speech and action, whereas the remaining categories are largely restricted to action.

In the context of resistant speech, I would like to take up bell hook's statement about challenging stereotypes through writing again. She states: "One way to honor this working-class world [is] to write about it. [...] I felt that writing about the constructive values and beliefs of the world act as an intervention challenging stereotypes" (hooks 147). Referring this to contemporary women's working-class fiction again, I would like to claim that the novels under discussion, in their depth of description, do challenge stereotypes. Foremost, the texts under examination do not

depict the female characters as pure victims who are unable or not "educated enough" to express sophisticated thoughts about their situation. Often the opposite is the case: despite their victimisation and exploitation, the abuse and violence against them and the rape of their bodies, these characters rise to speak. This is initiated already by the author's choice of narrative technique: the first-person perspective and various interior monologues – which are apparent in most novels under examination. In a way, this technique allows a principle of "letting the sufferer speak" and is hence a form of resistance. (To give an example, in the chapter *Rape, Battering, Trauma* I have termed this the resistance against a "phallocentric perspective" on rape). Also, metaphors of resistance are employed, which will also be demonstrated in the text analyses.

To emphasise my point about the first-person mode of presentation and the matter of "letting the oppressed speak", it can be said that there is no "native informant", the victim has her own voice. I am aware that, according to Spivak's concerns, it is the author who functions as the "native informant" and who hence runs the risk of misrepresenting and silencing the "real" working classes. Nevertheless, I endeavour to find a way to draw links between Spivak and hooks. A compromise or crossover between the two critics could be a thought such as: although the author – despite her working-class background – may misrepresent the working-class woman (cf. Nandi 115) and hence silence her, the act of writing may have the potential to "challenge stereotypes" by making the fictionalised oppressed speak via a first-person or multiple-perspective narration.

As previously mentioned, the concept of speaking alone is insufficient for the following text analyses. The female working-class characters perform resistant action, too. Here, the narrator "steps back" and reports the protagonist's actions via a fly-on-the-wall technique. Generally, there is a tendency towards a third-person narration when the heroine performs resistant action. Rarely is resistant action such as stealing, hitting and damaging told from a first-person perspective. Also, the novels – by trend – lack dialogue. All these features will be examined.

On a more abstract level, the term resistance is, according to Pamela Fox, bound to the dichotomy of "margin and centre", which is another significant dualism in subaltern studies. In her book, significantly entitled *From Margin to Centre,* bell hooks argues that:

> To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body. As Black Americans living in a small Kentucky town, the railroad tracks were a daily reminder of our marginality. Across those tracks were paved streets, stores we could not enter, restaurants we could not eat in, and people we could not directly look in the face. [...] Living as we did – on the edge – we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. [...] Our survival depended on an ongoing public awareness of the separation between margin and center and an ongoing private acknowledgement that we were a necessary, vital part of that whole. (hooks 1)

Applying the centre/margin dichotomy to social class, the centre stands for the dominant culture, the middle and upper classes; or, as Althusser puts it, the "Absolute Subject" that suggests what is to be desired. The desire to identify with the Absolute Subject is the will to socially conform. The greater the distance from the margin to the centre, from the self to the ego-ideal, the more intense is the desire and the subject's experience of lacking (cf. Pann Moris 9). Thus, "class identity depends upon the power to exclude and marginalise" (9). Having said that, the literary theorist Bill Ashcroft states that marginalisation cannot be understood as being a universal, one-dimensional consequence of power structures. He emphasises that "structures of power that are described in terms of 'centre' and 'margin' operate, in reality, in a diffuse and multifaceted way, [as] marginal groups do not necessarily endorse the notion of a fixed centre" (Ashcroft 135). The opposite of "endorsing" the centre is signified as "resistance". Resistance, in its various forms, can be understood as a force that works against the splitting caused by the dominant culture/the "centre". It can be understood as a "move" to become an integral, emancipatory, that is "wholesome", subject. The working-class woman "gains a voice" and challenges stereotypes when demonstrating resistance.

Resistance is not only directed at the dominant culture, but is also employed by the respective authors to resist a literary representation of the working-class woman as a broken, utterly schizophrenic and alienated, helpless and silenced victim. Those characters that do not perform resistant moves fall into the remaining category of either return, escape or destruction. "Return" has been described by hooks, who states: "We could enter that world but we could not live in there. We had always to return to the margin. [...] There were laws to ensure our return. To not return was to risk being punished" (hooks 1). The remaining terms "escape" and "destruction" can,

in this thesis, be taken quite literally. Those characters whose action I labelled "return" or "destruction" actually run away or destroy themselves in terms of self-harm and suicide. These terms are, in the context in which I use them, not bound to theoretical approaches, as is the case for "resistance" and "escape". It will be shown in analyses of the selected novels how the categories resistance, return, escape and destruction are spread across the novels. The following chapter, which describes the literary history of women writing about the working classes, will illustrate how these categories already sporadically appear in the novels written before 1974.

2. The Development of British Working-Class Fiction by Women

Late Nineteenth Century – End of World-War II

According to Bethany Schaffer and Deborah Epstein-Nord, women's working-class fiction was brought into being with **Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848),** subtitled ***A Tale of Manchester Life*** (cf. Epstein-Nord 142-143, Schaffer: "Elizabeth Gaskell"). The researcher and writer for the Centre of Working-Class Studies[9] Schaffer argues that with the publication of *Mary Barton,* Gaskell "took a genre that was never looked at seriously, and made it respectable, and in the process, she helped make the working class more visible" (Schaffer). Elizabeth Gaskell grew up in middle-class surroundings. However, after her wedding with William Gaskell, a Unitarian minister and charity worker for working-class people, she became immersed into working-class life. Schaffer points out that she began both doing charity work to support the impoverished workers as well as writing about their lives.

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9 The Center for Working-Class in the U.S Studies (CWCS) at Youngstown State University (YSU) was the first academic program to focus on issues of work and class. CWCS members focus on "new working-class studies," which is an international movement that brings together academics, artists, activists, students, and others who are interested in the history, experiences, stories, and politics of the working class. Started in 1996, the CWCS is housed in YSU's College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences and closely affiliated with the American Studies Program (cf. Schaffer: "Center for Working-Class Studies").

Most significantly, her protagonist in *Mary Barton* is a female. In that respect, the novel is groundbreaking. Helena Bergmann states that

> when the novel appeared in 1848, it both shocked and gained approval, the factory owners in Manchester being the category of readers who took the greatest offence. [...] The main characters are working-class people suffering from increasing poverty and nursing a hatred for the oppressive class. (Helena Bergmann 30)

Contrary to this, Martha Vicinus claims that Gaskell cannot be understood as pioneer writer in the realm of women's working-class fiction, since she held a "perspective from above" (quoted in Gabriele Hußmann 13). As pointed out earlier, I cannot entirely solve the dispute of what is the "real" working-class fiction: Spivak's essay *Can the Subaltern Speak* creates such depth to this matter that there cannot be a simple, twofold differentiation between working-class novels written "from above" or, "from within". Although the opinions on Gaskell's contribution to this category of text are drifting apart, I still find it necessary to discuss this author and her work; after all she invented themes that are evidently very relevant to the novels under examination and their literary history. As the title suggests, the novel is centred on the female character Mary Barton, the daughter of a factory worker and Chartist activist John Barton. It is told through the eyes of a third-person narrator. After the mother's death, Mary is left with her father John, who becomes her only attachment figure during Mary's teenage-hood. Mary is depicted as a beautiful, eligible young woman and happens to be desired by both Jem Wilson, a working-class man, and the rich Harry Carson, the son of a wealthy mill owner. Although Mary is equally attracted to Jem Wilson, she rejects him.[10] She hopes to marry Harry in order to secure a better life for herself and her father (cf. Bergmann 112). Likewise, John Barton tries to protect his daughter from the harshness of the working world: "My Mary shall not work in a factory that I'm determined on"[11] (Gaskell 9) he asserts. This is due to his experiences with the factory owners, the "rich", who

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10 I am aware that my description may create the impression that I am providing detailed summaries of the novels discussed in this chapter. Yet this is not what I intend to do. I will dwell on the stories' content only if it is relevant to the development of topics. The storyline of Gaskell's *Mary Barton* is described in a more detailed way than other novels in this chapter, since it is very relevant to the literary history of women writing about the working classes.

11 This excerpt is commented on by the publisher as follows: "It witnesses to official inquiries cited by Engels: 'A witness in Leicester said that he would rather let his daughter beg than go into a factory; that they are the perfect gates to hell" (cf. Daly McDonald 397).

> know nothing of the trials of the poor. [...] We're their slaves as long as we can work; we pile up their fortunes with the sweat of our brows, and yet were are to live as separate as if we are in two worlds; ay, as separate as Dives and Lazarus[12,] with a great gulf between us. (Gaskell 11)

Class conflict in terms of a binary distinction between the ruling and the working classes – or to put it in Karl Marx's terms – the conflict between bourgeoisie and proletariat is at the novel's centre. I refer to Marx here, since Gaskell often broaches the issue of communism in the context of class struggle; as in: "Barton became a Chartist, a Communist, all that is commonly called visionary. Ay! But being visionary is something. It shows a soul" (170). The author highlights the concepts of communism and Chartism as forms of strong political movements against the ruling classes. She uses the terms synonymously, although they are not identical: as opposed to Chartism[13], Communism had no organisational existence in England until the Communist league established its Central Committee at the 1847 congress in London, which mandated Marx and Engels to write the *Communist Manifesto* (cf. McDonald 15). Gaskell confuses the reader by sometimes using the terms synonymously; and sometimes contrasting them. Hereby, she creates impulses to question and investigate the political concepts. Both are themes in *Mary Barton,* whereby Chartism outweighs communism since John Barton becomes a Chartist activist in the course of the story. His political commitment highlights the class struggle that is pervading the novel. Class struggle is also mirrored in the triangle relationship between Mary, poor Jem and rich Henry. When Jem proposes marriage to her, the rivalry between the two men intensifies. Mary rejects Jem's offer; and a little later, Harry Carson is shot dead. Jem is arrested on suspicion. As it turns out, it is not Jem who killed him: Mary's father John is the murderer – he shot Carson as part of his Chartist activism. As a consequence, John Barton's guilt towards Mary symbolically also "kills" – that is emotionally kills – John Barton. His deed against the capitalist eventually makes him a victim again. He passes away shortly after the

12 The editor's notes reveal that the "great gulf" between Dives and Lazarus is the gulf between heaven, where Lazarus is at peace, and hell, where Dives is tormented. Their differing fates reflect the economic gulf while they were alive between the rich man Dives and the beggar Lazarus (cf. McDonald 398).

13 The Chartist Convention was a working-class organisation that was founded in London in 1839. It was, roughly speaking, striving for improvements on the worker's wage. The Charter was rejected by the Parliament at that time (cf. McDonald 404).

incident. Daly McDonald argues that this storyline stands for the idea of "social murder", which has been described by Friedrich Engels[14] (cf. McDonald 22).

Untying the bond to her father, Mary suddenly realises that she actually loves Jem Wilson. The two get married after all eventually and, striving for better wages, they plan on leaving England to go to Canada. In the meantime, Mary has become a dressmaker, yet it is not indicated that she takes up her profession at their new home in Canada. The phrase "at the door of the house, looking towards town, stands Mary, watching the return of her husband from daily work" (Gaskell 347) suggests that she has become a housewife. In this respect, the character Mary Barton serves as a model to many working-class texts to be created: as will be shown, the characters in many novels to be discussed are housewives; which highlights the gendered division of labour in a capitalist system. *Mary Barton* ends on this scene. Helena Bergman explains that the heroine has a crucial function to the story of class struggle. She points out that Mary makes the topics of class activism, political commitment and the critique of capitalist domination more accessible and "smooth":

> Avoiding propaganda, Mrs Gaskell makes her point by illustrating in her female characters the social wrongs of contemporary society instead of making them explicitly attack its causes like John Barton. This non-committed role of women, far removed from the world of Chartist activity, is an important aspect of their function as communicators of social messages in the novels. The fact that politics were considered outside women's sphere has enabled the author to express social criticism in oblique terms less offensive to a middle-class reader. This is a major achievement of Mary Barton, and not surprisingly a young girl, Bessy Higgins, has a similar function in Mrs Gaskell's later novel *North and South*. (Bergmann 36)

Hence, Bergmann argues that concepts of femininity, often associated with peacefulness (cf. chapter 1, *Theoretical Background*), allow the author to demonstrate class injustice without being too aggressive and propagandistic. By creating a likeable character like Mary; being "noble, graceful and beautiful" (38) to embody class injustice, the presentation of this issue becomes more effective: the

14 Friedrich Engels states: "When one individual inflicts bodily harm upon another, such injury that death results, we call the deed manslaughter; when the assailant knew in advance that the injury would be fatal, we call it murder. But society places hundreds of proletarians in such a position that they inevitably meet a too early and an unnatural death, one which is quite as much a death as by violence as that by the sword or bullet; when it deprives thousands of the necessaries of life, places them under conditions in which they cannot live [...]." (quoted in: McDonald 22).

reader is likely to develop sympathy for the character and becomes immersed in the narrative of poverty and the iniquitous distribution of wealth.

Aina Rubenius notes that Mary's bond and her dependency on her father in the first part of the novel – which is expressed through her wish to warrant him a wealthier life – is a phenomenon of nineteenth century fiction. In her essay *The Woman Question in Mrs Gaskell's Life and Works,* Rubenius states that "the problem to women in the Victorian age [...] occasioned by the authority of fathers over their daughters" (39). Demonstrating the virtuous Mary's strong ties to her father; who turns out to be a murderer, Gaskell questions male dominance and the glorification of the father. In this respect, *Mary Barton* can be understood as a groundbreaking, if not revolutionary piece of work in a way, as many successive women working-class authors were to deconstruct male dominance. I would also like to briefly introduce her second work, ***North and South* (1854),** which also highlights the unjust distribution of wealth. The novel depicts the contrast between the industrial north and the wealthier south of England. It is also told by a third-person narrator. The middle-class protagonist Margaret Hale moves with her family up north to Milton, where her father takes up a job as a teacher. In this text it becomes very clear that for Great Britain, in accordance with its socio-economic reality, its northern part is often represented as the more impoverished half of the country. Likewise, Barton's previous novel is set in the northern city Manchester. This geographical distribution of rich and poor places throughout Britain is a significant factor in this literary history and is also mirrored in contemporary novels. The later novels tend to focus on London and they depict its urban social geography often via a binary distinction of poor and rich, which is organised in a topography of North and South or East and West. Margaret befriends the industrial worker Nicholas Higgins and his daughter Bessy. The central theme is Margaret's and Betty's bonding and the story is organised around the heroine's growing affinity to the working classes: "Margaret is considered an unusual young woman as she defies the middle-class ideals of female conduct and seeks company among the poor" states Helena Bergmann (36). Despite the unity between a middle-class and a working-class woman, the matter of class conflict between them is still apparent: Bergmann argues that in the context of the social inequality Bessy's role is to call forth conscience, as she constantly reminds Margaret of her middle-class privileges (36). Simultaneously, Bessy harshly symbolises the condition of the poor:

she dies of the trade disease pneumoconiosis, leaving Margaret devastated. As in *Mary Barton,* the plight of the victims of factory work is tied to a virtuous and attractive female character. The strategy of using female characters to make the topic of class struggle in its various facets more "attractive" is an interesting device that I will bear in mind whilst analysing the texts. Having discussed Gaskell's fiction, I am, chronologically speaking, approaching the turn of the century. Interestingly, for end-nineteenth century fiction, the author's social status seems to be a criterion for working-class fiction – at least in Janet Batseeler's opinion:

> From the end of the nineteenth century until the Second World War, the term 'working-class writing was used to describe a variety of texts written by amateur or initially amateur writers from an industrial working-class background. The term 'proletarian writing' was also widely used in the same way. [...] Interest in working-class writing was largely confined to sections of the labour movement and the intelligentsia. It remained marginal to the literary traditions defined by professional critics in the universities. (Batseeler 42)

According to Batseeler, there were no publishing female working-class writers in the period between the turn of the century and World War II:

> Publishing working-class writing was almost exclusively the work of men. Not only were women usually burdened with the dual role of wage-earner and house-wife and mother, but strongly held attitudes to women's role effectively prevented their active participation in political and intellectual life. There was better representation of the writing in journals which suggests that material constraints made it easier for them to write short pieces. (Batseeler 44)

Her contemplations on this issue end with this statement. Batseeler obviously chooses "the easy way out" of the matter of women writing about the working classes. In fact, her argument is incorrect: there were evidently four novel-producing female working-class writers in exactly this period: First, **Ethel Carnie Holdsworth,** whose novel ***This Slavery*** was released in **1925**; followed by **Ellen Wilkison's** novel ***Clash*** **(1929)**, Kate Robert's ***Traed Mewn Cyffion*** **(1936)***,* which was translated into English as ***Feet in Chains*** and **Flora Thompson's** novel ***Lark Rise*** **(1939)**. *This Slavery* is set in a milling town in the North of England. It is also told from the third-person point-of-view and it deals with two working-class sisters and millworkers Rachel and Hester Martin. Rachel is presented as a painstaking worker and also a working-class intellectual: she is a "radical autodidact" (Haywood 46), who spends her time away from the mill reading Karl Marx. Hester, on the contrary, does not show

any interests in socialist literature. Hester marries a local yarn agent to warrant her mother a wealthier life – and thereby is reminiscent of *Mary Barton.* Yet to her working-class community, she becomes an “ambassadress of Capital” (Holdsworth 139). Through the character’s “marrying up”, the plot device of a cross-class romance is employed here. This story pattern, which is an “eroticisation of class difference” (Dale Kramer 132) has a long tradition in the history of literature. Its most obvious source is the fairy tale *Cinderella.* Also, this plot device has, for instance, been employed by the canonical writer Thomas Hardy. His unpublished novel *The Poor Man and the Lady* is, as the title suggests, about the love across the strata of society. However, cross-class romances are, by trend, rather about an impoverished women “marrying up” and thus being “saved” by the rich men, as in Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion.* According to Dale Kramer, this is a story pattern of eroticising class difference[15], in which the

> otherness of the other class is conceived through a kind of melancholic desire. That this cross-class desire is not simply a transposition onto other terms of social ambition is evident, because it appears to be the difference and not the class position in itself that carries the erotic charge. (Kramer 132)

A cross-class romance can also be understood as a form of escape from the working-class background, since the romantic heroine attempts to “marry up”. However; in *This Slavery*, the relationship between Hester and the yarn agent is represented as “class betrayal” (Haywood 46), as the working-class community perceives their marriage as such. “But Hester keeps some of the reader’s sympathies, as it is clear she has exchanged one form of servitude to another, more genteel version, and that her motives for marrying were swayed by wanting to provide for her mother”, argues Haywood (46). In order to re-bond with the working-class community and to help “her

15 According to Steve J. Ross, the cross-class romance within representations of the working classes is a major device that emerged in Hollywood films: “Hollywood continued to deal with class issues throughout the 1920s, but it presented its class visions in the form of cross-class fantasies rather than riskier labour-capital features. Like working-class films of the pre-war era, cross-class fantasy films cut across established genres and included comedies, dramas and melodramas [...] Often a working-class character, usually female, would be introduced into an upper-class society by some twist of fate. This allowed the film-makers to demonstrate the moral superiority of the working-class while lavishing attention on the glamorous lifestyles of the wealthy (Steve J. Ross 98).

people" rebel against the mill owners, Hester begins to spy on her husband. Their relationship breaks apart. According to Pamela Fox, the disruption of the romantic plot is a crucial element of working-class fiction. She asserts that

> while the cinema and popular novels encouraged their diverse female audiences to identify with an array of romantic heroines, working-class mothers made sure their daughters understood that romance was purely a fantasy with little relevance to their lives and that marriage was primarily an economic relation, rather than fulfillment of love. Unlike their middle- and upper-class counterparts, who frequently suffocated at the hands of fathers, brothers, guardians, and mothers while playing out the real-life role of romance heroine, working-class women suffered chastisement or ridicule within their communities if they merely made attempts to try the role on. (149)

Romance is deemed to be "a yardstick of bourgeois values",

> *thus becomes a forbidden category not only for working-class women who operate generally as female subjects within a specific class culture, but also for those who are producers of class-conscious narratives.* When the working-class writer makes use of the private realm, she finally works to re-appropriate the master narrative of protest in this body of work by allowing a more self-conscious critique of gender-relations. (Fox 149) [my emphasis] (Fox 149)

Hester's actions not only conform to Fox's explanation of a failing romantic heroine; her betrayal to her husband has an additional function: by spying on him, she declares class war on him. Finally, she dies a "martyr death for her people" (cf. Fox 165) when shot by the police during a mill-worker's riot. Her solidarity with the working classes is similar to Gaskell's characters Mary and Margaret, however Holdsworth's protagonists are obviously far more radical and politically active. Fox remarks:

> The novelist's trademark independent women are strong-minded about the 'right' issue: class warfare. Sisters Hester and Rachel Martin may respond differently to the pressures of working-class life, but both emerge as the novel's most committed worker-rebels. Carnie's manipulation of the romance plot, however, continues to interrogate, as well as facilitate, her class conscious[16] agenda. In this text, cross-class romance represents an in-and-out betrayal of working-class values. (Fox 163)

Furthermore, a new significant textual pattern is introduced with *This Slavery*: working-class women's education and intellectualism. As previously mentioned, Rachel Martin is deeply immersed in Marxist literature and demonstrates intellectual

16 The term class consciousness will be thoroughly discussed in Chapter 3.

ambitions, however cannot manage to “rise” from her mill-work to become a scholar – due to social stratification. Even though the character cannot act upon her intellectualism, she clearly marks the beginning of what is to become a very common theme in female working-class fiction: the protagonist’s upward mobility. This is also a sign of “escape” from the working-class background, which is a phenomenon of contemporary women’s working-class fiction (cf. *Theoretical Background).* Ellen Wilkison’s novel *Clash* (1929) deals with exactly this topic, too. Like Holdsworth, Wilkinson had a working-class background; she was the daughter of a factory worker. She had an extremely successful career and became a Labour. MP for Middlesborough East 1923. She was the only female Labour MP for the Left in the House of Commons (Gustav Klaus 89). Klaus states:

> Writing in May 1926, Ellen Wilkinson [...] contrasted a collection of newly translated Russian tales with the average English short story. The crucial difference, she found, was apparent in the attitude of everyday life of the common people. Whereas the Western stories were governed by one single obsession – sex – the Russians had succeeded in creating ‘a literature of the job’. [...] ‘Where is the literature of the British workers to answer this new note struck by Russia?’ she asked, and while admitting to some modest beginnings in poetry and drama she noted a lacuna in the field of fiction. (Klaus 89)

Wilkinson then became a labour journalist during the ten-day-General Strike in 1926 in the United Kingdom, which was organised by the General Council of the Trades Union Congress. It was an attempt to force the government to prevent wage reduction and to improve the working conditions for coal miners, which turned out to be unsuccessful. According to Ian Haywood, her novel is a fictionalisation of the strike (47). At the story’s centre is a young woman called Joan who is a committed Trade Union organiser during the strike. Joan is depicted through the eyes of a third-person narrator. The development of her career in politics goes hand in hand with the choice of two lovers which “will test her class loyalties” (47), as the two courting males are polarised characters: Tony, member of the London Bloomsbury literary “bohemian” (47) who wants her to stop working and stay at home with him; and Gerry, a socialist who proposes marriage to her. Joan chooses the former. However, the protagonist soon faces the difficulties of this cross-class romance. Pamela Fox argues that

> [the] politics surrounding Joan's romantic choice, however, go well beyond the testing of class loyalty. Ultimately her crisis with Tony rests on his need to split her private position as a woman from her "public" position as organiser/leader – to transform her from hero to heroine. [...] Her decision to run for a vacant Parliament seat lead him to issue a familiar ultimatum, career versus love, offering to set her up a flat in exchange for her undivided attention. (Fox 171)

Joan eventually leaves Tony, decides to get married to socialist Gerry and also to go ahead with her career in politics in Great Britain's northern part. Thus, gender and the question of the division of labour come to the fore here: Wilkinson makes a start to deconstruct traditional gender roles in terms of the sexual division of labour. In this context, the cross-class romance also fails and the protagonist's political activism is hindered by a triangle relationship. Male domination presents a threat to women's intellectualism and is, as in Mary Barton, exposed and criticised.

The Welsh novel *Traed Mewn Cyffion* (*Feet in Chains)* is distinctly different from its processor *Clash*. The author Kate Roberts was born into an exclusively Welsh-speaking slate quarrying town called Rhosgadfan. According to Stephen Knight, her novel

> shows the capacity of a powerful and skillful woman writer to handle the industrial context as a formative element of the modern experience.[...] Derec Llyod Morgan comments that Roberts has produced some of the most powerful social criticism made in Welsh Literature in the twentieth century. (Knight 166)

Set in 1880, *Feet in Chains* initially presents an atmospheric picture of a mining community in seemingly unchanging, traditional Wales; which is also a third-person narration. It is indicated that World War I will befall the community; nonetheless the inhabitants seem oblivious to the threat of the war in the novel's opening scenes. Katie Gramisch argues that, initially, the war of the Empire is clearly of no interest to the Welsh characters, who symbolise resistance against the English imperialists. Significantly, the aspect of resistance against colonial domination comes onto the scene here (cf. *Theoretical Background).* By seeming indifferent to the war, the Welsh community is presented as unaware of their own stake in the colonial enterprise, argues Gramisch (cf. 93). "However, the novel demonstrates how an awareness of subjection begins to grow in the general consciousness, and it is the war which, unexpectedly, effects this political awakening" (93). This is reflected in the following passage:

> They began to ask the meaning of it all, they did not believe at all now that the war was being fought to save the smaller nations, or that it was a war to end all wars. They began to realise that, in every country, there were people who regarded war as a good thing, and were taking advantage of their sons to promote their own interests. These were "The Ruling Class", the same who oppressed them in the quarry, who sucked their blood and turned it into gold for themselves. Deep down, they believed by this time that people were making money out of the war just as they had made money out of the bodies of the men in the quarries, an these were the people who wished to prolong the war. (Roberts 144)

The concepts of class and colonialism are connected here, which is highlighted by alluding to the schemes of the ruling classes during the war. It can be argued that this powerful combination of those concepts open up a new dimension to working-class fiction by women. In addition to the combination of class and gender; imperialism is linked to "classed" fiction here. This is, so to say, the first connection drawn between class and colonialism in my anthology. I will watch this development closely within my examination. The fact that Wales was a colony of England plays a crucial role in *Feet in Chains* and is often expressed via the clash of the languages Welsh and standard English, as in:

> Now here was a generation of young people learning to read English and getting to know about people who were beginning to tire of Liberalism, maintain that the great battle of the future would be between Capitalism and Labour, and that Liberalism was only another name for Capitalism. (78)

The coloniser's language is used synonymously with signs of wealth and, in this way, the conflict between Welsh and English is translated into the class conflict. This is highlighted in a scene in which the main character Jane Gruffyd receives an official letter in English to inform her that her son Twn, the soldier, has been shot at a battle zone. A shopkeeper translates the news to her. When, years after her son's death, an officer enters Jane's house, she gives rein to her hatred of militaries and attacks him with a clothes brush. Katie Gramisch commentes: "Kate Robert's novel is an eloquent expression of political protest. Emblematically, as we have seen, the archetypical Welsh mum takes up her brush, not to scrub and scour, but to attack the representative of the British state" (Gramisch 96). Towards the end of the novel, the ruling classes, who "made money out of the war" (Roberts 43), are sharply criticised again. Once again, forms of resistance against the dominant culture are introduced here that become intensified and refined in the development of this type of fiction. The relationship between language usage and dominant culture is also a significant

factor in the following analysis, which will become clear in the chapter *The Representation of Class Consciousness* (chapter 3).

Three years after the publication of Robert's novel, Flora Thompson's novel *Lark Rise to Candleford* (1945) was released. In 1937 Thompson began to write a sequence of sketches about her childhood in *The* Lady and *The Fortnightly Review* which later partly formed her autobiographical trilogy: *Lark Rise* (1939), *Over to Candleford* (1941), and *Candleford Green* (1943), published together as *Lark Rise to Candleford* (1945). Narrated by Laura, the autobiographical storyteller, her memories of childhood and youth are interwoven with observations of pre-industrial rural midlands of England with its gradually vanishing crafts and traditions. This narrative peculiarity of interweaving historical observations into the text is, approximately forty years later, taken up by Carolyn Steedman (cf. subchapter, *The Thatcher Era)*. The story's mode of presentation is indeed noteworthy here: all previous novels described are told from a third-person point of view – so that *Lark Rise* seems to be the onset of the autobiographical text in my anthology. This shift in perspective is significant against the background of Gayatri Spivak's and bell hook's analyses (cf. *Theoretical Background*); perhaps it can be understood as a first attempt to "let the oppressed speak". Thompson's novel is centred on social change: "the novel forms a history of the social, economic, and cultural change that took place at the end of the nineteenth century" ("Flora Thompson Biography"). Thompson depicts the technical advancements of the time, the gradual industrial automation in agriculture and its consequences for the farmers. The change becomes manifest through the character Sally, an old lady in the narrative, who is said to have had a much wealthier and happier childhood without industrialisation escalating throughout the country. These changes caused by industrialisation are blatantly apparent: the independence of the country is gone, the rough heat that the inhabitants of Juniper Hill formerly used as their own, is now divided up into fields which belong to the local landowner. The country crafts are disappearing, the householders no longer bake their own bread and brew their own beer, machine-made shoddy objects are replacing the old country-made pieces of furniture (cf. Gillian Avery 102). The divided fields and the division of the labour processes recall the concept of the splitting that I have discussed in the theoretical chapter. This is a powerful "splitting apart" that, with the

advent of industrialisation, appears to encroach upon the working-class subjects over and over again.

The character Sally incorporates resistance against these changes, since she is described as a hard-working, tough, "hands-on" woman who believes in manual production:

> Sally was tall and broad, not fat, but massive, and her large, good-natured face, with its well-defined moustache and tight, coal-black curls bobbing over each ear, was framed in a white cap frill; for Sally, though still strong and active, was over eighty. [...] The apple crop was stored on racks suspended beneath the ceiling and bunches of herbs dangled below. In one corner stood the big brewing copper in which Sally still brewed with good malts and hops. (Thompson 76-79).

In this way, resistance against sociopolitical domination, which has been introduced by Thompson's predecessor Wilkinson in the previously described novel, is intensified. Thompson's Sally and her living environment function as a contrast to the rapid alterations in rural life. The story tells that in the 1890s,

> the market town of Candleford is swallowing up the village of Candleford Green where Laura works, and shopkeepers are replacing the country-bred inhabitants. [...] The rural population is pouring into the towns, and the country will soon be occupied in large numbers by the town-dweller who values it for its clean and open spaces, but who is certainly not prepared to work there. (Gillian Avery 105)

Education is also a topic in *Lark Rise to Candleford,* as the autobiographical narrator also demonstrates a deep interest in writing and publishing; which is always put in contrast to her rural origin and her family's working-class jobs. This narrative pattern thus also is apparent here. Like "Rachel" in *This Slavery,* she attempts to "escape", yet cannot move upwards due to social stratification.

To sum up the novels written between the end of the nineteenth century and the end of World War II, their common major themes are – listed in terms of frequency of occurrence: class conflict in terms of Chartism, communism and Trade Unions, anti-capitalist critique, working-class women's intellectualism, the World War I, industrialisation. Two significant narrative patterns are the failed-cross class romance and the murder mystery story. The mode of presentation is, as we have seen, a third-person narration followed by an autobiographical text. The work roles that the characters perform are the following: "Mary" in *Mary Barton* is a dressmaker and housewife; "Margaret" in *North and South* is a schoolgirl, "Rachel" and "Hester" in *This Slavery* are mill-workers, Rachel with a thirst for education who cannot move

upward; “Joan” in *Clash* is a Trade Union organiser; “Jane” in *Feet in Chains* is a housewife, “Laura” in *Lark Rise* is a farming girl – also with a thirst for education.

The Post-War Years

The period since 1945 has been marked by the collapse of consensus politics, the decline of the Empire, the rise of immigration from the former colonies and a shift from a regional industrial to a global post-industrial economy. In terms of the new peak level of industrialisation, an intensification of “splitting apart” can be expected. After the war, a radical social transformation in terms of gender, class, ethnicity and sexuality took place – which, for most of the changes, was long and tedious processes. I will come back to these changes in the course of this chapter. With regards to the working classes and the colonies, however, the changes came quickly: Labour politician Clement Richard Attlee was elected as the Prime Minister in 1945. He enforced the decolonisation of India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka that obtained independence from the United Kingdom in the late 1940s. For the working classes, his election raised hope for a brighter future:

> The mood of post-war optimism was built partly on hope, of course, and this hopeful projection is not reproduced in the novel. This should give little cause for surprise, since the task of serious fiction is not to collude with the prevailing popular view, but rather offer an alternative perspective, to locate those areas that might generate a sense of concern about history and society. (Head 14)

In how far this enforces another “division” will become clear in the context of post-colonial fiction. **Margaret Penn’s *Manchester Fourteen Miles*** was published in **1946** and was written during the final years of the war. Penn’s text has an important feature which indicates that the author is integrating the aftermaths of the war: it is the trope of death that is described over and over again. Coming to terms with war traumas appears to have influenced the writing. Margaret Penn was brought up in Hollins Green, a village fourteen miles from Manchester. She was born illegitimate and her mother gave her away to a farmer’s family, where she grew up with her stepparents and three half-siblings. Her semi-autobiographical text *Manchester Fourteen Miles* depicts the working-class life in Lancashire. It is centred around Hilda, the firstperson-narrator.

Due to Hilda's interests in languages, arts and science, it is said, that between her and her half-brother Jim, who was not interested in any of these fields, "there was a continual strife. With her book-learning she could always get the better of him in argument" (Penn 13). The narrator's studiousness runs like a thread through the narrative. She struggles to rise from the "uneducated" farming family. She begins to learn French and also "longed passionately to be able to play the piano, an accomplishment which would set a social seal upon her and mark her out for the distinction in whatever society she might find herself" (184). In this respect, the text is obviously about the thirst for education and thereby sequels the theme of the female's social mobility in the previous era. The protagonist begins a career as a dressmaker and she eventually moves to London to stay with some distant relatives and to find work in the city. Again, it appears that Gaskell's *Mary Barton*, who is saved from factory work and becomes a dressmaker, serves as a model to women working class writers. Hilda's new home in the city is presented as the highlight of her advancements, since her London relatives are regarded as well-off and "influential". Here, London works as symbol for wealth and upward mobility; which is an interesting device, as this is to change dramatically in this realm of fiction.

With her rising self-awareness about her intellectual capacity – compared to her "uneducated" farmer-parents, Hilda begins to question her heritage. A neighbour once has revealed to her that the farmers are not her real parents and "ever since Mrs Dumbell had told her that her father was a 'gentleman born', Hilda had secretly romanced about herself" (148). Herewith, another significant narrative pattern comes on the scene: the family romance. The concept of the family romance was coined by Sigmund Freud, who termed this story pattern according to a psychoanalytical idea: the family romance is a conscious fantasy, in which a child imagines that his or her parents are not biological but adoptive parents, or that their birth was the outcome of maternal infidelity. Typically, the fantasy parents are of noble lineage, or of a higher social class than the real parents (cf. Marianne Hirsch 9; High Beam Research: "Family Romance"). Hence

> the family romance is an imaginary interrogation of origins, an interrogation which embeds the engenderment of narrative with the experience of family. Through fantasy, the developing individual liberates himself [herself] from the constraints of family. The essence of the Freudian family romance is the imaginative act of replacing the parent withanother, superior figure.[...] It is a structure of fantasy – the imaginary construction of plots to principles of wish fulfillment. [...] Although Freud defines a particular shape of the

> family romance as universal, I find biases, both andocentric and ethnocentric, in his definition. I argue that patterns of family romance can and do vary, for male and female writers, during different periods and for different cultural traditions. (Hirsch 10)

The family romance also signifies an “escape” form the working-class background. Finally, Hilda tells her farming foster parents that she is glad they are not their real ones (220). Her utterance leads to another striking scene: her stepfather is infuriated by Hilda’s comment and becomes violent towards the child, “smacking her savagely” (220). With this scene, the issue of domestic violence finds its way into the fiction under discussion. It is an extremely frequent topic in the texts being analysed within this thesis; therefore I composed a chapter entitled *Battering and Trauma* (Chapter 5.2). *Manchester Fourteen Miles* comprises a variety of important features and story patterns and topics which are very relevant to this thesis.

Evidently, there were three further writers of the kind in this period. Two Welsh women writers, Menna Gallie and Margot Heinemann, who published a few years later and who, according to Stephen Knight, have fallen into oblivion because the majority of their texts are written in Welsh; some of them have not been translated into English. And there was Catherine Cookson, whom I will come back to at a later point in this chapter. **Menna Gallie’s *The Small Mine* (1962)**[17] is also set in a small mining community in Cilhendre, Wales. It is told from the third-person perspective. The narration time is not clearly indicated, however there are many hints that it is set after World War II. The adjective “small” in the novel’s title is rather significant. It points to the mining policy after the war, which is crucial to the narrative’s action. The British Coal Board was nationalised in 1947, and “small mines”, such as the one in the novel, were regarded unprofitable. Just before these mines were closed, they were sometimes run without nationally controlled safety precautions. This is the case in Gallie’s narrative; and as a consequence, the protagonist Joe Jenkins has a fatal accident in the mine. As a reaction to the accident, the mine is shut down, causing unemployment in town. I would like to suggest that the protagonist’s death also works as an illustration of the bitter consequences of the war. Moreover, the way Joe dies points to a particular scheme during the war: he dies during an explosion, and

17 Chronologically speaking, this novel should be discussed in the chapter “The Nineteen- Sixties”; however, thematically, is belongs to the post-war era, since it deals with the aftermaths of the war. Therefore I discuss this novel in the chapter “The Post-War Years”.

combined with previous comments from the miners, it can be argued that Gallie hints at the explosion of nuclear bombs at the end of the war. Particular war-memories are expressed by one of the miners: "'This bloody bomb has changed everything, mun. It's put us back right in the middle ages [...]. My father said we'll all be blown to hell in five years, it's no good saving'" [...] (Gallie 28, 47). The issue of nuclear bombs is further debated amongst the miners; and here, it is clearly put in the context of the Cold War:

> 'If the Americans make bombs, Russia has got to defend herself, hasn't she? See the State Department letting the Communist State get on his feet if Russia didn't have bombs to threaten back with'. 'But Russia's aggressive, though, see? I'm the last man, God knows, to speak for the capitalist class, but Russia's at it all the time, mun. Won't leave anyone in peace.'(Gallie 20).

The soviet power is discussed controversially and the Cold War is at the centre of this debate. "The anti-nuclear theme runs like a recurring refrain throughout the text", argues Jane Aaron (3).

Additionally, the sexual division of labour is an important theme in *The Small Mine.* The domestic role is repeatedly being described and compared to mining, as in this scene that describes two male characters: "They were both good colliers, taking pride in their roofing and in the proper organisation of their stall, as a housewife is proud of a well-organised, uncluttered kitchen" (Gallie 28). This comment is used to highlight the gender roles, yet in the course of the narrative, it becomes clear – more so by the character's actions rather than comments – that these roles have an oppressing effect on the women. According to Aaron, "the women of Chilhendre are devastated by their subordination to the working conditions of their men folk, and by the strength of the social expectation that they should so subordinate themselves in order to make those conditions endurable" (Aaron 3). Gallie illustrates a clear inside/outside topography that refers to the men's public's sphere (the mine) and the women's domestic sphere (the house) to underline this issue. This changes only slightly when unemployment hits the workers towards the end of the novel. This then ultimately shows that these roles are not inherent, but due to capitalist working conditions. Gender and class are powerfully combined here on the basis of the sexual division of labour.

Margot Heinemann's novel ***The Adventures*** **(1960)18** also describes a mining community in Wales. Heinemann is not a working-class Welsh; however was working together with working-class representatives on Trade Union issues (Elizabeth Maslen 140). *The Adventurers* is a third-person narration. The first part of the novel is also set in a small mining community; the narrated period of time stretches from the end of World War II to the late nineteen-fifties. The central character is Dan, the son of the miners' lead worker. As opposed to the other miner's sons in town, Dan refuses to work in the pit. Instead, he attends a college specific to working-class students. Dan plans on becoming a journalist in order to promulgate and defend the miner's interests. This is reminiscent of the concept of the "native informant" described in the chapter *Theoretical Background*. Soon it becomes clear that communism is an important issue at his college and that some of its members support the communist party in Britain. It is also indicated that the Cold War is an underlying theme. At the narrative's centre, however, is Dan's love affair with the university teacher Leni. Leni[19] is a political working-class writer and as active in politics as Wilkinson's female protagonist in her novel *Clash:* this is another politically active, intellectual female character.

It becomes clear that the miners become more and more disappointed in communism, which they formerly admired. This is illustrated via their reaction to Nikita Khrushchev's speech of 1956, in which he denounced Stalin's crimes. This speech is reflected in the novel: "The Russians have done some bad things, some stupid things – we've all known that a long time. If you and Griff Jones and Dai James, ay, and your Russian pals hadn't been trying so bloody hard to do something, get us somewhere, now, you mightn't have made so many mistakes", complains a miner to a journalist who is known to write in favour of communism (313). Communism previously was the miner's only hope to eventually bring down the exploitive capitalist schemes. Towards the end of the novel, the miners remain disillusioned and frustrated. The novel ends on a rather depressing tone: again, a miner criticises a communist party-intellectual, telling him: "You middle-class comrades always do wobble when anything like this happens. You've no experience

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18 cf. comment on *The Small Mine.*

19 This name is supposedly a reference to Lenin.

of the struggle, then. Of course it's tough and hard – always been tough and hard- and you've got to be hard yourself. Workers realise that, they know what a fight is. The whole life is a fight, for us" (304). Likewise, Dan is perceived as a traitor, which overshadows his success as a journalist.

Stephen Knight states that Heinemann "stands outside the heroics of industrial male fiction and sees clearly the competition and compromise of male careerism" (160). Knight concludes that all Welsh writers mentioned "have all produced alternatives to the traditional ways of telling the Welsh industrial story, alternatives which include not only gender politics but also a range of forces and values wider than the simple and male-imagined worker and capitalist" (179). I would like to zstress again that, so far, four texts of the kind have been released in the post-war era.

According to Ian Haywood's chronology of both male and female working-class writers from 1832-1977, *From Chartism to Trainspotting*, there have been no female writers in the post-war era (cf. Haywood 1-4). He ignores the Welsh women; Margaret Penn also falls into oblivion. Furthermore, he is omitting another writer, who actually produced novels "like a clockwork": 17 in number between 1950 and 1963 and 101 novels in total: **Catherine Cookson**. I would like to label Catherine Cookson a "special case" in women's working-class writing, as she is known as a "publishing phenomenon" (K.D.M Snell 172*);* and also because she does not quite fit into this body of writing. Yet she still requires to be mentioned, since she is said to have drawn on her working-class experience as a source of inspiration (Cathy Hardey 116). Catherine Cookson was born illegitimate in 1906 in North England to Kate Mc Mullen. As a child, she believed her grandparents to be her parents and her mother Kate to be her sister. She left school at the age of thirteen and went into domestic service, followed by a laundry job at a workhouse. Cookson started her writing career in her forties, two decades after her marriage to schoolmaster Tom Cookson. Her first semi-autobiographical novel ***Kate Hannigan*** was published in **1950**; after which she produced 94 further novels (cf. Snell 172). Snell argues that "all but one [are] set in the North East and nearly all of them follow the Hannigan way" (Snell 172). She has sold over one hundred million copies; she won the Royal Society of Literature Winifred Holtby Prize for the best Regional Novel in 1968 and received an Honorary Doctorate from Sunderland Polytechnic in 1991. Several of her novels were made into films or series and there is even a "Catherine Cookson Country" tourist trail in

South Tyneside. In 1993 she became a Dame of the British Empire (Snell 172). Despite her success, Cookson is often ignored in academic discourse (cf. 74). Most of the secondary literature I have used for this chapter, including Dominic Head's *Modern British Fiction 1950-2000* and Maroula Jannou's *Contemporary Women's Writing* and even Pamela Fox's *Class Fictions,* completely ignores Catherine Cookson. This might be due to the highly trivialised storyline in her novels like *Kate Hannigan:* This text is centred on a girl born out of wedlock to an impoverished mother called Kate, who has fallen pregnant by an anonymous "gentleman". The child is also brought up by Kate's parents and she believes them to be her real parents, and Kate to be her sister. The family lives in poverty and is struggling to feed their child. Often supported by the country doctor Rodney, Kate eventually falls in love with him and the feeling becomes mutual when Rodney discovers her strength, sensuality and intelligence. Hence, the plot device of a cross-class romance forms the basis of the story. In addition to that, the protagonist enters a love triangle, as Dr. Rodney is married to a "blue-blooded" upper-class lady. As typical for functioning cross-class romances, the man's love for the impoverished woman is stronger; they end up together and "live happily ever after". Obviously the storyline is trivial; and it is indeed the fulfilled cross-class romance that differentiates Catherine Cookson's writing from the other women working class-writers; who systematically make this type of relationship fail. Since Cookson's protagonists mainly are almost exclusively romantic heroines (as previously mentioned, nearly all of them "follow the Hannigan way"), I was wondering if Cookson should be mentioned in this chapter at all. After all, it is exactly the failing cross-class romance that works as a category-forming criterion. I only included her, as her autobiography *Our Kate* (1969) is about a poverty-stricken childhood, youth and adulthood, resulting in fear and illness – that is not suddenly resolved by a "gentleman". This makes her life story comparable to the other novels. I will briefly mention *Our Kate* in the following subchapter (*The Nineteen-Sixties*), where it chronologically belongs to.

Despite Cookson's problematic role in my anthology, it is noteworthy that most of her novels are set in England's North-East. Cookson resumes the presentation of the North as the more impoverished part of the country and hence also adheres to a socio-economic reality in her texts. According to Kathryn and Philip Dodd, literary representations of the "impoverished" north are also coined by

> [t]hree historical moments in which the working class and the north became synonymous: the late nineteenth century, during which the north was associated with industry and the 'southlands' came to be associated with finance; the 1930s, when middle-class 'anthropological' writers and artists, such as Humphrey Spender, George Orwell, L.S. Lowry, as well as Mass Observation, identified the working class as unemployed and northern, flat capped and muffled; and the 1950s, when a generation of northern writers, such as Richard Hoggart, David Storey and Stan Barstow, seemed in their own person to confirm the 'commonsense' that the working class belonged to the north. (Dodd & Dodd 117).

To summarise the post-war period, it can be said that newly introduced themes are coming to terms with the aftermaths of World War II and domestic violence. Also, the Cold War plays a role in women's working-class fiction of this era and so does illegitimacy. Previous topics resumed are communism and women's intellectualism. Story patterns employed are the cross-class romance and the family romance. In this phase, most of the novels are also presented from a third-person perspective. Only one working-class autobiography was written in this era (that is: two, if Catherine Cookson's *Kate Hannigan* counts). The following job roles are distributed among the characters: "Hilda" in *Manchester Fourteen Miles* is a dressmaker with a thirst for education; the women-characters in *A Small Mine* are all housewives and mothers; "Leni" in *The Adventurers* is a university teacher; "Kate" in *Kate Hannigan* is a housewife.

Already the beginning of the post-war era is marked by an increase of women working-class writers, which steadily rose from this point onwards. This is probably connected to the improvement of educational opportunities in Britain. Sociologist even speak of an "educational explosion" in the nineteen-fifties and nineteen-sixties :

> Indeed, the decades immediately following the Second World War saw such a rapid increase in educational provision – in the USA, and many countries of Western and Eastern Europe, as well as in Britain – that some writers refer to the 'educational explosion' of the 1950s and 1960s. The minimum school-leaving age was extended from 14 to 15 years (in 1947) and raised to 16 (in 1971-2), but the proportion of people choosing to pursue their studies beyond this age hurtled upward; by 1971, 30 per cent of 17- year-olds were in full-time education in schools or colleges, compared with 2 per cent in 1902, 4 per cent in 1938, 18 per cent in 1961 and 22 per cent in 1966. The Robbins Report (1963) undermined the view that there was a finite pool of ability – a limited number of people who could benefit from advanced education – and provided ammunition for the expansion of higher education. (Tony Bilton et al. 381)

It could be argued that this trend is mirrored by women's upward mobility in the texts of the post-war era.

The Nineteen-Sixties

"The decade in which post-war change is felt to have been concentrated is the 1960s," states Dominic Head (24). Particularly significant were the emergence of a youth culture and hippie ideals, establishing new forms of youth art and striving to reintegrate society and nature. Furthermore, this era was marked by a movement towards sexual freedom. Head notes that "the 'long sixties' in particular have attracted the critical eye of the novelist: [...] the notion that sexual permissiveness led to a new frankness, openness, and indeed honesty in personal relationships and modes of expressions" (Head 26). Strikingly, Haywood asserts, again, that there were no women writing about the working classes in this period. Whilst specifying seventeen male writers, there are literally no women on his "list".[20] According to him, not only the nineteen-fifties but also the early nineteen-sixties were a time

> which most people associated with working-class fiction. The postwar renaissance of proletarian art, called "northern passion" and "kitchen sink realism" has gained cultural status". [...] *Regrettably in this period, even more than others, there is a dearth of working-class women writers. Shelagh Delaney wrote plays, and Nell Dunn can only be described as an honorary proletarian.* (Ian Haywood 95) [my emphasis]

Against the backdrop of all the producing authors in exactly this period, Hayswood's statement about the absence of women working-class writers seems almost ironic. According to three of the scholars cited in this thesis, **Nell Dunn** definitely belongs to these writers (cf. Maroula Jannou 8, Dominic Head 90, Ingrid von Rosenberg 449). Therefore I find it necessary to mention her in this thesis, particularly because her novel also clearly recalls the issue of Spivak's critique. ***Up the Junction*** **(1963**) is, generally speaking, about sexual freedom amongst working-class female characters. I have purposely placed this text in the 1960s-section rather than the after-war era of

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20 For the sake of completeness and in order to show the relative high number of male authors who are introduced by Haywood, all male authors shall be listed here. These were Ralp Bates, Walter Brierely, James Barke, John Sommerfield, George Orwell, Willy Goldman, Lewis Jones, Sid Chaplin, Len Doherty, John Osborne, John Braine, Richard Hoggart, Sam Selvon, Alan Sillitoe, Stan Barstow, David Storey.

writing that reach into the 1960s, as Dunn's texts are both thematically and stylistically massively different from the novels described in the previous chapter. Nell Dunn became popular for her documentary-style fiction about the lives of working-class women in London, as it is described in *Up the Junction.* Her early work formed part of an

> investigative naturalistic cultural movement which focused on working-class life. It was associated by some with the so-called 'angry young men' school, a group which was disowned by most of those whom the media associated with it. Nell Dunn, however, continued to find new uses for social realism and reportage after the end of the 1960s and 70s. (Cambridge Orlando Project: "Nell Dunn")

The term "investigative" implies that she is an outsider to; and an "intruder" into working-class life. Her narrator hence functions as a "reporter" (cf. *Theoretical Background).* Dunn, the granddaughter of the man who broke the bank at the Monte Carlo casino (cf. Maroula Jannou 8), actually moved from Chelsea, a distinctly upper-class part of London to Battersea – which used to be a working-class area when she wrote her debut novel. The aspect of London's social geography in binary terms of rich and poor comes on the scene here again. The role of an upper-class observer of a lower-class community is embodied by the first-person narrator in *Up the Junction,* who is called the "heiress from Chelsea" by the Battersea women (Dunn 10). Dominic Head argues that then

> position of an external observer, writing across the class barrier, produced a fictional mode that is problematic. The narrator (a fictionalised Nell Dunn) [...] remains anonymous, her motivation inscrutable. She participates in the life without passion. (Head 90).

The issue of representing the working classes in Spivak's and hook's sense becomes relevant in this context. Maroula Jannou argues that the fact of having a "middle-class outsider" as a storyteller is also problematic, as, representing Battersea women's lives from an external point of view, the narrating instance appears "highly selective" about working-class life (cf. Jannou 68). Jannou states that certain aspects of working-class life, such as (labour-) politics and social mobility, are omitted from the novel (ibid). The question arises if working-class authors writing "from within" are

not “highly selective”: of course they are selective in their representations[21] and it, once again, becomes clear that this issue of what is “real” working-class fiction is a fathomless question. Dunn focuses on the communality and neighborhood life and on women’s sexuality. In *Up the Junction,* her protagonists are both sexually and economically independent: they are constantly moving between relationships and jobs. Yet they are not upwardly mobile – they stay in their manual factory jobs.

According to Head, the novel relates to the women’s liberation movement and the aspirations towards sexual freedom in the 1960s, as well as pointing to the economic upgrowth in this era. However, along with the descriptions of sexual liberation follow representations of its downsides, namely of unwanted pregnancies. Dunn describes an illegal abortion in a detailed way, which may strike the reader as a literary horror-scenario:

> The baby was born alive, five months old. It moved, it breathed, its heart beat. [...] Finally, the ambulance arrived. They took Rube away, but they left behind the baby, which had now grown cold. Later Sylvie took him wrapped in the *Daily Mirror,* and threw him down the toilet. (Nell Dunn 75)

Again, it becomes clear that the narrative is a product of its time: abortion was illegal until 1967 in Britain and was heavily debated by feminists. Strikingly, an almost identical scene of an illegal abortion is described a few years later in Pat Barker’s *Union Street* (cf. chapter 5). As opposed to the liberating impulses in *Up the Junction,* Nell Dunn’s second novel ***Poor Cow*** **(1967)** signifies sexual oppression. Its protagonist Joyce, wife of a petty criminal, fulfills all her partner’s erotic desires unopposed and tolerates his violence during sex. Furthermore, she earns her living as a nude model, using her body as a tool to survive. Here, gender and class are powerfully interconnected. Also, the concept of the male gaze comes on the scene here. As will be shown later in the text analyses, the gaze causes the splitting apart of the female subject (cf. Chapter 1, *Theoretical Background).* So, another form of division, along the lines of gender, is introduced here. In *Poor Cow*, the protagonist is not a symbol of liberation, but rather of a woman who needs to be liberated (cf.

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21 For instance, working-class autobiographies are highly selective: the authors choose which incidents they present, how the present them, and which incidents they do not describe etc.

Margaret Drabble 4). The first part of the novel presents Joyce as a wife who, without profession or job, is totally dependent on her husband Tom to steal the goods. He later is sent to prison. Whilst being with Tom, who is depicted as a cold, unloving husband, Joyce's feelings of sadness and her craving for warmth are frequently revealed. This, according to Georg Festerling, challenges a stereotype of working-class life: the woman questions her marriage, as the mere supply of goods that the husband fulfills at the novel's beginning is not satisfactory for her. She desperately seeks for emotional bonding, companionship and understanding in him. This shows that Joyce's marriage is not materialistically motivated. Hence, a common "motive" of working-class women – getting married in order to secure their lives[22] – is thereby deconstructed. Georg Festerling speaks of Dunn's harsh critique of marital life, that, as Joyce demonstrates, does not always lead to security; but may end up in loneliness and financial disaster. After all, her husband is imprisoned. The critique of marriage is a new aspect in female working-class fiction and it is to be repeated (see below). Although major aspects about patriarchal ideology – to be precise, the male-dominated marriage – and the concept of the man as the breadwinner is criticised, since the protagonist Joyce remains subject to male sexual oppression throughout the novel. This is even intensified when she splits up with Tom and moves in with her new boyfriend Dave, who appears on the scene in the novel's second part: Joyce is subjected to his even more violent sexual practice.[23] She now lives in the South-Western part of London, as opposed to its more impoverished North.

To come back to Catherine Cookson, it is important to stress that her autobiography *Our Kate* (1969) is not a "live happily ever after" story at all. Although the autobiographical narrator does "marry up" and, after years of domestic or laundry work begins her writing career with the assistance of her husband, the schoolmaster Tom Cookson[24], her memoir predominately deals with illegitimacy, her alcoholic mother Kate, grinding poverty and her nervous breakdown after her fourth

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22 As it is the case in Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) and Holdsworth's *This Slavery* (1925).

23 With the novel ***My Silver Shoes*** **(1996)** in *Poor Cow,* the Joyce in *Poor Cow* is being resurrected. This novel differs greatly from the works in my anthology, therefore I will only comment on it in this footnote. Joyce now lives in Putney (West London) in a council flat; next door to her mother Gladys. The setting suggests that the protagonist's living situation has slightly improved; although living in a council flat, Putney is (also traditionally) known as a rather well-off part of London.

24 Her so-to-say „real-life"cross-class romance.

miscarriage. Illegitimacy is at the narrative's centre. Due to Cookson's uncertain role in women's working-class fiction, the discussion on her shall be discontinued from this point.

New topics in this era are women's sexual liberation and, at the same time, sexual oppression, nude modeling, theft and dysfunctional married life. An old theme being resumed is illegitimacy. A story pattern taken up is the cross-class romance and features of a family romance. In terms of narrative perspective, this era brings about a new form of story-telling: a documentary-style narrative. It is also still marked by the third-person narration. Cookson employs the narrative form of an autobiography. The job roles distributed among the novels are the following: the women characters in *Up the Junction* are non-mobile factory workers, "Joyce" in *Poor Cow* is a nude model; "Catherine" in *Our Kate* is a factory worker and becomes a writer.

Introducing Post-Colonialism to Women's Working-Class Writing

By the end of the 1960s, many nations including Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Uganda, Zambia and Cyprus were no longer colonies. Jamaica and India had gained independence in 1944 and 1947. With the immigration waves in Britain in the middle of the twentieth century, a new literary discourse had emerged. Jana Gohrisch states:

> Since their [the immigrants'] arrival they face widespread discrimination in housing, employment, education and the provision of services, as well as growing police harassment. In addition to that African and Afro-Caribbean women share the subordination of the woman and domestic violence and therefore the "need to fight sexism within a broader struggle against racism and imperialism. [...] It is in this context we have to place the voices of immigrant women who give [the] literary discourse its unmistakably international accent. (Gohrisch 115)

To outline the beginning of post-colonial women's writing, Maroula Jannou introduces the most influential writers Jean Rhys, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala and **Buchi Emecheta.** This does not mean, however, that these authors and their works are similar to each other: Rhys (alias Ella Gwendolen Rees Williams) was of Welsh-Caribbean descent and lived in England; whereas Jhabvala was born to Polish-Jewish parents and came to Britain as a refugee in 1939. Jhabvala married an Indian architect and moved to New Delhi. Emecheta immigrated from Nigeria to England and she is the

only black woman in this "trio" of postcolonial writers. Susan Stanford Friedman terms texts written by Rhys and Jhabvala "cultural narratives of relational positionality" (Susan Stanford Friedman 19), meaning narratives in which situational identities shift with a changing context dependent always on a point of reference so that "power and powerlessness, privilege and oppression can be understood differently according to the vantage point of their formation and function" (19). Buchi Emecheta, on the contrary, is said to draw on "first-hand experience" of colonial domination (Jannou 146) to create post-colonial representation (Jannou 146). Again, according to Spivak, the concept of first-hand experience is problematic. Nonetheless, the three novels *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) by Rhys; *Heat and Dust* (1976) by Jhabvala and Emecheta's ***Second-Class Citizen*** **(1974)** are, content wise, fairly similar. Jannou states:

> what these three *texts reveal is a close relationship between women, dispossession, struggle and resistance to patriarchal authority, which cannot be understood only in relation to gender, race and class* – the heroines of *Wide Sargasso Sea,* and *Heat and Dust* are white, middle-class and privileged – but which places the experiences of women within a context of social injustice and exclusion in Britain, *and a history of exploitation of the poor by the rich across the world. The experience of exile and the importance of place and displacement is ubiquitous* in *Wide Sargasso Sea, Second-Class Citizen* and *Heat and Dust.* (Jannou 147) [my emphasis]

Jannou's statement seems rather confusing, as she asserts that "the exploitation of the poor by the rich across the world" cannot be explained through gender, race and class. It appears that she is inferring to the "universal" imbalance of power in multiple facets that cannot be due to race, class and gender only. Yet what exactly these other factors are does not become clear in her statement. However, her argument that class cannot be a reliable factor in post-colonial writings needs to be stressed. This is why I included Rhys and Jhabvala; to emphasise, although this probably goes without saying, that post-colonial novels cannot *per se* be associated with lower-class writing. Particularly Rhys is frequently mentioned when explaining the rise of women's post-colonial writings and therefore needs to be put in the context of these "new narratives". Furthermore, Jannou is talking about the "experience and the importance of place and displacement" which – and I agree with her at this point – cannot be entirely understood with the assistance of the concepts gender, class and

ethnicity, but rather is a personal story that may vary dramatically across the immigrant histories and policies of the respective cultures.

"Displacement" is also a major topic in Buchi Emecheta's early novels. Emecheta was born in Lagos, Nigeria. At the age of 16, she married her Igbo husband Sylvester Onwordi who immigrated to London shortly after their marriage to study Law; and she followed him a year later. Her *Observations of the London Poor* were published in the *New Statesman Magazine* in 1971. The novels ***In the Ditch*** **(1972)** and *Second-Class Citizen* (1974) are based on this article and both texts were published as *Adah's Story* in 1983 and these texts bear many similarities ("Contemporary Literary Criticism: Buchi Emecheta"). The dislocation represented in these novels is obviously based on skin colour discrimination; however, the theme of poverty seems to dominate both narratives. In *In the Ditch,* for instance, Emecheta's third-person narrator insistently describes the protagonist's neighbourhood in the multicultural "Pussy Cat Mansion" as a poverty-trap set in Finchley, North London, in which single mothers are forced to stay unmarried in order not to lose their dole money (cf. Dominic Head 169). The poverty described here transcends racism, as also women with various cultural backgrounds are presented as part of the "London poor". *In the Ditch* shows how even British women live in the ditch," argues Romanus Muaneke (Muaneke 61). Head argues that

> Emecheta seems more interested in the basic spirit of community that emerges in the extremes of poverty. It is this spirit that cuts across racial difference, and that mounts a challenge to the systematic preservation of inequality. This is not, however, presented as a solution to social fragmentation, rather, the solidarity is merely an expedient measure. (Head 169)

To highlight the aspect of solidarity amongst the poor I would like to quote an excerpt of *In The Ditch:* "The little groups talked, gossiped and laughed, all were happy. They found joy in the communal sorrow. Adah [...] felt like a human being again, with a definite role to perform – even though the role was in no other place but the ditch" (Emecheta 61). Thus, the novel evokes the idea of universal sisterhood, a concept that is, only a little later than the publication of this novel, to be challenged greatly by predominately Black feminists (cf. Nima Naghibi 2). Being subject to "a double burden of oppression" (Steve Padley 175), Black women argued that their experiences cannot be compared to those of their white counterparts, thus they

cannot always solidarise completely with one another. Here it becomes clear that, with the rise of post-colonialism, the concept of gender becomes revised, re-questioned and re-defined in a new context. *Second-Class Citizen* is also set in London's northern part – Camden – and it is presented from the viewpoint of a third-person narrator, yet the text is characterised by a significant occurrence of interior monologues. With *Second-Class Citizen,* the issue of marital abuse, both battering and sexual abuse is newly introduced into working-class fiction by women. This makes Emecheta a pioneer amongst her fellow female authors. She is evidently the first black working-class writer to grasp the atmosphere and debates of the second-wave feminist movement.

Proclaiming that "the personal is political"[25], the activists encouraged battered women to consider the violence against them as a societal phenomenon based on systematic oppression rather than being a "personal problem" (Hanisch: "The Personal is Political"). Nonetheless, this movement was, as mentioned before,

> spearheaded by and aimed at a white middle-class audience, at women who would be able to support themselves if they so chose to. [...] Certainly feminist language has reached deeply within the white working-class in some ways, but the sense of a collective movement was not (and is not) lodged within this class fraction. [...] It can be argued that its very "middle-classness" caused working-class women to reject the women's movement in the same way that some black women have rejected the women's movement because it was seen as white. (Lois Weis 246)

Black and working-class women did – by trend – not take part in this movement as they neither felt represented by nor spoken to by the white and economically privileged revolting females. Against this background it is a huge, vanguard move of Emecheta to broach the issue of domestic violence in a working-class novel. Starting with Emecheta's introduction of domestic violence into the literary working-class world, it appears that an entire avant-garde of writers who focused on this issue

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25 This phrase was created by the editors Shulie Firestone and Anne Koedt who published Carol Hanisches' article on domestic abuse in the magazine *Women's Liberation* in *1970;* the term "political" was used here in the broad sense of the word as having to do with power relationships, not the narrow sense of electoral politics" (cf. Carol Hanisch: "The Personal is Political").

gradually came to the fore: numerous narratives dealing with battering and sexual abuse are to follow from here onwards. Furthermore, a massively important aspect is introduced here: Fanon's concept of the "schizophrenia of identity", which is to be the basis of the majority of post-colonial texts (cf. *Theoretical Background).* Also, resistance against this schizophrenia caused by the dominant culture's values onto the colonised subject is a central textual element in this novel. It is the resistance against both white and male dominance. So, as opposed to the earlier novels in which male dominance is questioned only, the Black author additionally employs narrative strategies that signify resistance against skin color stratification.

Following in Emecheta's "footprints", the next fictional text dealing with sexual abuse is **Joan Riley's *The Unbelonging* (1985).** It is told from a third-person narrator and entails fewer interior monologues than Emecheta's text. Since this novel is strikingly similar to *Second-Class Citizen,* it will not be part of my analysis (cf. introduction). Joan Riley is a Jamaican novelist. *The Unbelonging* is a third-person narrative that tells the story about Hyacinth, a Jamaican girl who, living in extreme poverty in her home country, is sent to England to live with her father, who also immigrated to England. Against her expectations, Hyacinth enters poverty again as soon as she sets foot on England: she moves to the country's northern part. (No reference is being made in which particular city the novel is set). Furthermore, the issue of sexual violations also become apparent here through the father who sexualises and abuses his daughter.

> The Unbelonging challenges the canon of British literary tradition in different ways. By interrogating the cultural implications of generic boundaries, by plotting gender in relation to tradition and in conjunction to other categories such as race and class and by letting the multicultural condition emerge and address the so-called post-colonial situation. (Beate Neumeier 294)

The issue of class is also organised in terms of upward mobility. Despite a childhood marked by violence and educational deprivation, Hyacinth manages to succeed in university and she wins a scholarship that eventually brings her home to the Kingston University in Jamaica.

As we have seen, a whole range of new topics come onto the literary scene, which are: racism, domestic abuse including battering, marital rape, child sexual abuse; and cultural displacement. Old topics taken up are women's intellectualism and

dysfunctional marital life. Interestingly, both story patterns of the cross-class romance and family romance do not occur. This is a clear sign that new authors from a different tradition – the postcolonial writing tradition – join into women's working-class writing. The third-person perspective prevails; however, there is a tendency towards the interior monologue. It is rather interesting which jobs the characters perform: "Adah" in *Second-Class Citizen* is a librarian; "Hyacinth" in *The Unbelonging* is a university student. Both Black characters are upwardly mobile. The characters in *In the Ditch,* however, are mainly housewives. Schizophrenia of identity emerges as a new topos in these literary texts (cf. *Theoretical Background)*. Thus, post-colonial fiction brings another dimension of "division" into working-class literature.

Since my text analyses begin with the introduction of postcolonial fiction, I shall stop describing the novels in detail. The relevant text written between 1974 and 2008 will, from this point onwards, merely be described with regard to their function and meaning for the development of women's working-class fiction. I will bring them in context and elucidate their historical background, but shall not dwell on them in terms of their storylines. This I will leave to the section "text analyses".

The Thatcher Era

The election of Margaret Thatcher is said to have been marked by the definite and complete ending to the post-war census, bringing about privatisation, the crushing of trade union power as a reform in trade union law and a virulent anti-communism (cf. Head 30). It created dramatic changes to the British society and its culture, "generating a spirit either of adventurous entrepreneurship or deplorable avarice, depending on the point of view. Novelists tended to take the latter view, lamenting the imminent collapse of the welfare state, and a new era of inequality and *social division*" (Head 30). [my emphasis] Head points to a further splitting between rich and poor in this era.

The first woman working-class novel published in this era is **Pat Barker's *Union Street* (1982).** The novel is set in Thornaby-on-Tees, a town in England's North East, which Maroula Jannou describes as a "potent symbol of Britain's industrial decline" (Jannou 75). *Union Street* consists of seven different parts, each dedicated to a female living in Union Street. The stories are mainly isolated from each other. With

these multiple narrative strands that are only sporadically connected, a new kind of narration comes on the scene. It can be argued that the concept of division is already established by the narrative form. Dominic Head argues that: "The title makes ironically reference to class solidarity and community spirit, for the action is largely a catalogue of narrow-mindedness, poverty, and brutality, especially which stems from male oppression and violence" (Head 68). These aspects imply a division at various levels, in terms of the division of labour (the female characters are housewives), the male gaze (in terms of rape), and trauma. Therefore, the text will be discussed in the chapter *Rape, Battering and Trauma.* Interestingly, upward mobility is not a topic at all *in Union Street*; neither are politics, let alone sexual liberation. As we will see, the novel is a complex of severe oppression that overshadows other aspects of working-class experience.

Very different to this text is the work of Barker's contemporary **Jeannette Winterson**, whose novel ***Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*** **(1989)** is about sexual liberation in lower-class life. I will not include this text in my anaylses, since the aspect of lesbianism opens up a whole new dimension to the women's working-class fiction. Since my focus is not women's sexual orientation, I will only briefly describe Winterson's text in this subchapter. Furthermore, I have not been able to discover more novels dealing with lesbianism. The only text of this kind, Maureen Duffy's *That's How It Was* (1962), is an Irish novel. Hence *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* does not contribute to my attempt of finding a typology. Nonetheless, it needs to be mentioned. Ian Haywood, for instance argues that autobiographical character Jeannette, being a working-class lesbian, is an "incredibly rare literary phenomenon" (148). Winterson's autobiographical novel tells the story of the girl Jeannette growing up in a working-class town in the North of England, where she is being raised by strongly evangelic adoptive parents. Jeannette also is an active member of the church and eventually becomes a youth preacher. As a fourteen-year-old, she meets Melanie, with whom she falls in love and begins a lesbian relationship. The protagonist eventually enters another lesbian relationship and decides to leave church. Dogmatic faith in a working-class community, clashing with lesbianism, is the novel's central theme. Jeannette's religious mother forces her adoptive daughter to leave home and, in order to make ends meet, Jeannette sells ice-cream in a funeral parlour before she eventually begins to work in a mental hospital. Male characters

are marginalised in this text. Jeannette's father appears only sporadically and if so he is presented a tired, quiet man, exhausted from his shift-work. The marginalisation of the father-character makes this novel a mother-daughter story. So is **Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman* (1986)**[26] a mother-daughter story. This text is, again, very different from the novels described previously. *Landscape for a Good Woman* is labelled a hybrid text form, consisting of Carolyn Steedman's memoirs, a biography of her mother's life and discussions of theoretical accounts on working-class life. She combines autobiographical and analytical perspectives on class (Sally Munt 123, Splendore 190); which is an extraordinary form of writing. Only Flora Thompson's *Lark Rise* features elements of this narrative style (cf. subchapter *The Post-War Years).* The text is indeed exclusively about the autobiographical narrator and particularly about her mother, and their relationship. It is a mother-daughter story told from the perspective of the daughter (cf. *The Mother-Daughter Plot).* Therefore, I have chosen to closely examine *Landscape for a Good Woman* in the following analysis. **Joyce Storey's *The House in South Road* (2004)**, consisting of three volumes of autobiography *Our Joyce* (1991), *Joyce's War* (1992) and *Joyce's Dream* (1992) is a mother-daughter story, too. The three volumes were edited by Storey's daughter Pat Thorne in 2004. *The House in South Road* is concentrated on the autobiographical narrator's relationship to her mother. It is similar to Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman* in many ways and will be analysed in the same chapter.By the end of the 1980s, the term "underclass" was established in journalistic and academic discourse to describe a group hit by post-industrialism in Britain (cf. Childs & Storry 424; Head 73). The term was coined by the American sociologist Charles Murray, who was hosted in Britain by the *Sunday Times* in 1990 (a Thatcherite newspaper at that time). He stated that "the British underclass was emerging" (cf. Ken Roberts 112). It is said that this was due to Thatcher's policy (ibid). Features of this stratum, which is understood of being yet more impoverished than the working

26 Here, I do not adhere strictly to chronology, as I found it more relevant to point out the development and interconnection of themes more relevant.

classes, are unemployment, criminality and prostitution. Head argues that the term "servant class" also belongs to the concept of the underclass: "it designates the army of cleaners and menial service workers, paid a pittance, often only working a few hours here and there, cash-in-hand, no question asked, ministering to the worlds above in its homes, offices, hospitals and schools" (73). This development was hence marked by a dramatic decrease of manual work that is industrial automation. According to Murray, the British underclass mainly consisted of white native-born people, who were concentrated in housing estates mainly in Liverpool, Glasgow, Manchester, Newcastle and London – as opposed to the American that he calls "a Black phenomenon" (cf. Ken Roberts 112, Robert McDonald 9). It is evident that the "servant class" rose because of the increasing wealth of the middle classes; which created an even deeper gap between the lower, middle and upper classes. To bridge between these socio-economic circumstances and fiction, I would like to quote Dominic Head again. He states that

> the rise of the underclass in the 1980s and 1990s, then, installs new levels of inequality, and a potentially more damaging kind of social disjunction. A writer who has responded fully to this development is Livi Michael: she has produced a narrative form that encapsulates the broader social failure to re-think community. Her first novel *Under A Thin Moon* (1992).(73)

Livi Michael's first novel ***Under a Thin Moon*** **(1992)** "is a novel of Thatcherism as experienced from below, set among the underclass" (Contemporary Writers: "Livi Michael"). Ian Haywood validates O'Brien's statements about this novel representing "everyday life in Britain's underclass" (Haywood 150). *Under a Thin Moon* tells the stories of two main and five minor female working-class characters who struggle to survive on their low-paying jobs or on welfare aid. The action alternates between these characters and it jumps back and forth in time and space. All episodes are told through the perspective of a third-person limited-omniscient narrator. The two main characters are Laurie and Wanda; the former being a university literature student and, as she does not have an income, she simultaneously operates as a grocery thief. Both "escape" from the working-class background and "resistance" to the dominant culture are apparent here. Wanda, a single mother who struggles to get by on her benefit payments, almost enters prostitution and eventually kills herself. The remaining characters, an alcoholic mother and her daughter who also begins a university career, a physically abused woman and her violent husband; and a young

couple with severe financial problems only come to the fore sporadically. In this text analysis the themes and factors of the underclass are indeed clearly mirrored; and it will be shown that this contributes to the characters' class consciousness. Hence *Under a Thin Moon* will be analysed in the chapter *The Representation of Class Consciousness.* Similar to *Union Street,* the variety of characters provides a multiple perspective on North England's underclass.

A new theme in this era is lesbianism and the mother-daughter relationship. Previous themes taken up are domestic violence, women's intellectualism, the illegal abortion, theft and illegitimacy. A story pattern repeated is the failed cross-class romance. Narratives told through multiple perspectives appear on the literary horizon of women writing the working classes; an autobiographical text is also apparent. In this era, there is a variety of jobs to be observed: the characters in *Union Street* are mainly housewives, one of them also is an illegal abortionist; "Jeannette" in *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* first is a youth preacher and then becomes an ice-cream seller and thereby is – in a way – "downwardly" mobile; "Carolyn" in *Landscape for a Good Woman* is a historian and therefore upwardly mobile.

Late Twentieth Century and Early Twenty-First Century

Great Britain and London in particular, had become a highly heterogeneous place. According to Dominic Head, the multifaceted society is mirrored in the literary world of the late 1990s and the fiction beyond 2000. New forms of experimentalist writings came to the fore. These emerged mainly due to the exploration of identities, which were (and still are) shattered, questioned and to be re-defined in the post-colonial British culture. This is also the case in **Andrea Levy's** second novel ***Never far from Nowhere* (1996), Valerie Mason-John's *The Banana Kid* (2005)** and **Yasmin Hai's *The Making of Mr. Hai's Daughter* (2008**). Andrea Levy was born in England to Jamaican parents of the "Windrush"[27] generation. "Black British identity is what interests me", says Levy during an interview (The Guardian Profile: " Andrea Levy").

27 The term "Windrush" generation is named after the "Empire Windrush", a troop ship that sailed from Jamaica to Britain in 1948, ferrying hundreds of West Indian migrants.

However, she points out that none of her books is exclusively about black British-born people. It is the combination of a second-generation immigrant and a British working-class perspective that made Levy comparable to writers such as Meera Syal, Hanif Kureishi and Zadie Smith; and also to the "working-class icon" Roddy Doyle. *Never far from Nowhere* is centred on two teenage girls – each of them telling their story individually – who were born in London to Jamaican working-class parents in the 1960s. The setting is, again, a London north-eastern council called Islington. The narrative focuses on the character's striving for constructing their identities in twentieth-century Britain. The multifaceted imagery that the text offers lies already in the protagonists' ethnic backgrounds:

> the Caribbean has some of the earliest and richest elaborations of cultural hybridity. [...] As an archipelago whose culture was forged in the crucible of colonialism and slavery [...], discourses of hybridity have been central to the Caribbean's political culture. For the Caribbean has had to negotiate its identities in relation to Native America; to Africa and Asia, from where the most surviving inhabitants came; to Europe, from where its colonising settlers came; and to the United States, its imperial neighbour. (Shalini Puri 12)

Lawrence Phillips notes that Olive and Vivien experience London very differently, although they grow up in the same place, with their working-class parents in a council estate. Vivien is a high achiever at school and "soon prepares to enter middle-class spaces" (Phillips 206). It is indicated that Olive is less successful at school due to skin colour stratification and that she develops an understanding that her sister has advantages due to her lighter complexion. Having different lifestyles and "careers", the sisters each develop a particular class consciousness. *Never far from Nowhere* will be analysed in chapter 3 (*The Representation of Class Consciousness).* As will be shown, gender, class and ethnicity are powerfully interconnected in this novel.

So too is *Banana Kid* a story about cultural diversity. It tells the story of Pauline, a Nigerian girl who is conceived through rape. It is told from the perspective of Pauline. The girl's mother Wumni, who immigrates to England whilst pregnant, gives her away to white foster parents. These submit her to a wealthy children's "village" in Essex called Dr. Bernado's. When Pauline is six years old, her mother appears and demands to see her. It is soon decided that the girl is to move to North London with her biological mother, who works as a newspaper distributer and lives in an impoverished flat. The novel will be analysed in chapter 4 (*The Mother-Daughter Relationship). The Banana Kid* is the only text in my anthology that works with magic

realism. Herewith Mason-John follows a trend of both black and non-black British fiction in the 1980s and 90s, which none of the remaining working-class authors employed in their narratives. These decades were

> marked by a gradual movement away from classical realist representation, under the influence of international postmodernism, magic realism, meta-fiction, and a renewed interest in the traditions of fantasy and pre-nineteenth century novelistic discourse. [...] Realistic writing came under attack for failing to question, or for mendaciously concealing, its own artistic strategies and ideological agendas. Consequently, writing that rejected traditional methods of representations was perceived subversive, liberating, and free from the oppressive grip of the enlightenment West. [28] [...] Valerie Mason-John is preoccupied with the subject of the body-spirit relationship. Pauline, the main character converses with a dead childhood companion (Annabel), becomes possessed by spirits – both mischievous (Sparky) and menacing (Snake). [...] The result is a novelistic exploration of childhood trauma that maps the inner life of its protagonist with nuance and depth unavailable to more traditional fictional modes. (Magdalena Maczynska 137-146)

With the assistance of magic realism, an imaginary mother is created in this text: the "Angel Annabel" functions as a substitute mother for Pauline. The next novel "on my list" is not so much a mother-daughter story, but – surprisingly – rather a father-daughter story: Yasmin Hai's *The Making of Mr. Hai's Daughter* (2008). It is the only novel in this anthology that foregrounds a father-character. As it will become clear in the text analysis, the father-character functions as an embodiment of the aftermaths of colonisation.Yasmin Hai was born in London in 1971 to Pakistani parents. According to Emma Parker, British-Pakistani writers have been marginalised in literary studies and fell into oblivion, as the attention has recently been directed towards British-Indian writers. Yet, she retorts that although Indian British literature remains dominant, fiction by British of Pakistani descent has also benefited from the 'postmodern fetishization of otherness'. The work of profilic writers such as Turiq Ali, Hanif Kureishi, Kamila Shamsie not only belies the hitherto narrow conception of South Asian British literature, but also demonstrates the heterogeneity of Pakistani migrants. (Parker 85)

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28 Magdalena Maczynska retorts that this "view of realistic aesthetics is obviously partial and ideologically driven. Many Black authors have successfully used traditional fictional methods to subversive ends. Moreover, the rigid distinction between "realist" and "experimental" narrative strategies has its limitations" (146).

The term heterogeneity needs to be stressed here, as there is a tendency to use the general term "Asians" for all people of South-Asian descent; ignoring the fact that there is a variety of Indian, Bangladeshi, and Pakistani immigrants living in Britain. Each of those Indian/Bangladeshi/Pakistani citizens has his or her very own personal story of migration or immigration. These differences need to be kept in mind when discussing their literary texts. For instance, sociologists differentiate between "push" and "pull" factors in the context of migration. They argue that economic migration, the prospects of higher wages and better living standards, or migrating to join family members in the respective country is a "pull factor". Life-threatening circumstances like war, political or religious persecution, starvation and natural disasters force people to migrate to other countries fall under the "push" factor.

Yasmin Hai tells her father's life story as an Asian exile in Britain and she reveals how his attitudes and lifestyle shaped her Asian-British identity in twentieth-century London. She grew up in "working-class Wembley". The subtitle of her book is *Becoming British* and two chapters are called *Operation Immigrant* and *Operation Middle-Class.* These two processes, that, as the term operation suggests, imply the concept of effort or even hard work, are presented as simultaneous developments. Hence class and colonialism are combined. The autobiographical narrator is becoming a British-Pakistani middle-class journalist and along this "journey", she develops a cultural awareness about the differences of her British life and her Pakistani roots; as well as a strong class consciousness in terms of working class versus middle-class lifestyles. This is a central theme in her text, which will thus be analysed in the chapter *The Representation of Class Consciousness.* Division takes place in terms of "schizophrenic" ethnic identity and a split class identity.

Simultaneously, a particular trend was realised by women working-class writers in this era: trauma narratives, entailing scenes of rape and battering. This is the case for **Andrea Ashworth's *Once in a House on Fire* (1998), Trezza Azzopardi's *The Hiding Place* (2000)** and **Rachel Trezise's *In and Out Of the Goldfish Bowl* (2000).** These texts will be analysed in chapter 5 (*Rape, Battering, Trauma)*. *Once in a House On Fire* is an autobiography, which tells the story about a violent childhood in Manchester in the 1970s. In the *The Observer* the text is reviewed as follows:

> The real tragedy of Ashworth's childhood begins when stepfather number one moves into their lives, later to be replaced by stepfather number two. Both men beat Andrea's mother until her youth and beauty die behind black eyes and sleeping tablets and years of marital rows that leave Andrea with a terror of home but a talent for excelling in every other aspect of her life: 'My fear of our house made everything else a breeze.' Listening to the thin-voiced Ashworth recount the horrors of her childhood seems the most natural thing in the world. She is neither arrogant about her achievements nor self-pitying in describing the hours spent at her mother's bedside when she was too 'tired' to get up and make the children's tea. (Kim Bunce: "Once in a House on Fire by Andrea Asworth")

It is not only her mother who is violated in *Once in a House on Fire,* the autobiographical character Andrea and her sisters are also subject to the stepfather's abusive behaviour. The story was turned into a play called *Hitting Home,* which was shown throughout England in 2008 as an educational piece to raise awareness about domestic violence (cf. ibid). It will be analysed in the chapter *Rape, Battering, Trauma.* Two years later, **Trezza Azzopardi** released a – thematically – very similar novel called ***The Hiding Place* (2000)**.This Welsh novel, set in Cardiff, was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 2000. Richard Bradford notes that this novel, "as an exercise in unapologetic documentary realism, with notions of benevolent working-class solidarity ruthlessly overturned, is deserving of the praise it received" (220). The youngest daughter Dol narrates about the hardship of having an unemployed, violent father, a mother who works nightshifts in a bakery and of sharing a room with her mother and five sisters.According to Robert Adams,

> the novel seems to be largely about the subjectivity of memory and the pain of an adult trying to lay to rest the ghosts of the past as she confronts all the memories she has constructed. Hers is a story that unfolds with almost unrelenting grimness, with all the calamites stemming from the flawed character of one man [her father]. (Adams 23)

Also in 2000, a strikingly similar Welsh novel appeared: Rachel Trezise's *In and Out Of the Goldfish Bowl,* which is labelled an autobiographical novel. The novel is set in Rhondda Valley, an impoverished place in South Wales and it depicts a childhood and youth of poverty and abuse. The heroine Rebecca is repeatedly raped by her stepfather from the age of eleven onwards. Katie Gramisch names this novel in the same vein with Azzopardi's *The Hiding Place* (Gramisch 187)*.* In fact, these novels do have a great deal in common. They are both set in a Welsh working-class area in the 1990s; and they both deal with a violent father and the aftermaths of abuse. Each of them is told from the perspective of the victims and entails images of entrapment.

As opposed to *The Hiding Place,* however, Trezise's novel additionally deals with child sexual abuse. The protagonist Rebecca runs away from home as a 16-year old, and for the best part of the novel, the reader follows her on her journeys of drug taking, petty crime and suicide attempts. Her death wish is central to the plot and it only comes to an end through Rebecca's conversations with her grandmother. Rebecca then suddenly realises that she wants to exist in order to write up her devastating story. Jane Aaron confirms that it is the protagonist's grandmother who leads her to the decision to not only preserve her own life, but also to preserve her experience in the form of an autobiography:

> It is through her relation to this woman, still undefeated in old age, that Rebecca gains sufficient sense of self-worth to want to live and to write her account of her struggle. Her grandmother 'gave me the person who is writing this sentence', she tells the reader: 'She gave me treasured stories and examples and standards to live by, reasons to fight my way to where I want to go. Reasons to get up in the morning and make the day a success.' For all that, there seems little to hope or plan for in the 1990s Rhondda Valley, in which 'more than half the population are living dead, walking wounded', yet 'the memory of my Grandmother pinches my arm and it's back to the fight. (Jane Aaron 94)

Trezise is the only author in my anthology that invents a grandmother-character. Rebecca presents her grandmother as a "strong woman" (177) , which she explains as follows: "Born in Carmarthen, she left for London at fourteen to nanny. She worked through the war, driving buses, driving troops around Britain. [...] She moved to Rhondda when she met my Grandfather, and she cleaned every pub in Treorchy" (Trezise 177). Here, personal strength is defined by amount of work, type of work and working ethos; and this strength is presented as an example for the abused girl to survive. The hardship of work is depicted here as a source of hope, magnitude and reason to keep going, to survive. This is the most interesting device in working-class fiction I have come across so far: the working-class background is suddenly not presented as a detriment, stressor or disadvantage to a person's success and well-being; but rather as a factor that teaches how to survive and thereby strengthens the lower-class subject. Therefore, I would like to state that *In And Out of the Goldfish Bowl* is an exceptional novel; it clearly stands out due to the creation of a working-class world full of hope and fortitude.

With **Bethan Robert's *The Good Plain Cook* (2008**), I have reached the final novel in my anthology. *The Good Plain Cook* is her second novel that appeared in 2008. It is set in 1936 in Sussex, the wealthy South and tells the story of the 19-year-

old working-class girl Kitty Allen, who applies for a position as a “good plain cook” for an extremely wealthy, bohemian household. She is accepted for the job and begins to work for middle-aged Ellen Steinberg – an American artist, who lives with her boyfriend George Crane, a communist poet: Kitty, who grew up in grinding poverty and with manual worker’s parents, experiences a deep cultural shock caused by the unconventional lifestyle of her employers. Mrs. Steinberg’s boyfriend is drawn to Kitty and claims to feel solidarity with her that she appreciates. *A Good Plain Cook* is about class consciousness; and it will be analysed within the chapter that deals with this topic (chapter 3, *The Representation of Class Consciousness*). As in *Under a Thin Moon*, the action disembogues into a cross-class romance, that – in compliance with the criteria of women’s working class fiction – fails in the end. It is important to note that the issue of communism resurfaces in Robert’s novel. Overlooking the development of women writing the working classes, this theme had clearly fallen into oblivion from the 1960s. This is probably due to the fact that most novel’s narrated time complies with the time of narration. *The Good Plain Cook,* on the contrary, reflects the inter-war years, when the issue of communism played a different role to what it did in late twentieth-century and early twenty-first century in Britain.

This is the final summary of themes in the last phase of women writing the working classes: traditional themes taken up are domestic abuse, the mother-daughter relationship, women’s intellectualism, and theft. New topics are women’s drug taking, cultural hybridity and Trezise’s “revolutionary” presentation of working-class upbringing as a source of strength. This shows that there is a convention of themes; many topics are consistently taken up and rearranged – which constitutes a typology of women’s working-class writing. Story pattern being repeated are the cross-class romance and the family romance. One theme taken up again in the last phase is communism, yet none of the characters is politically active like “Joan” in *Clash* or “Leni” in *The Adventurers*. Two themes disappear in the course of this literary development: industrialisation and murder caused by class conflict between bourgeoisie and proletariat. In a way, this complies with Ingrid von Rosenberg’s statement that contemporary working-class fiction is marked by a trend towards “retreat to the private sphere” (434). On the other hand, it has been pointed out that “the personal is political”. In this respect, topics like domestic violence and women’s

sexuality do not mark the end of political themes. Rather, it can be stressed that there is an emphasis on psychological issues, traumatic experiences in particular.
As regards narrative perspective, there is a tendency towards the autobiography, the occurrence of third- person narration stays consistent as well. Yet there is a tendency towards a multiple perspective.

A variety of jobs is apparent in this phase of working-class writing again: "Andrea" in *Once in a House on Fire* is a university student; and so is "Vivien" in *Never Far From Nowhere* whereas her sister "Olive" is a housewife, "Dol's" occupation in *The Hiding Place* is never mentioned, yet her parents both have low-level service jobs; in *The Banana Kid* "Pauline's" job is not mentioned either. Her mother is a news-paper distributer. "Yasmin" in *The Making of Mr. Hai's daughter* is a university student. Kitty in *A Plain Good Cook* is a housemaid. It is striking that Dol is not attributed with a job, after all the novel entails representations of her adult life; Pauline's story ends with a scene in her teenage-life and therefore work is not a theme in the protagonist's life.

To finally present the outcome of these analyses, it can be stated that the themes with the highest frequency of occurrence out of the 27 novels between 1848 and 2008 described are women's intellectualism (occurring in nine novels) and domestic violence (occurring in five novels), including marital rape, battering and sexual abuse. Three of these survivor stories[29] feature representations of trauma – which is a trend from the late twentieth century onwards. The third most frequent theme is the mother-daughter relationship. So, out of these most prevalent themes emerge the three chapters for the text analysis: first, women's intellectualism, which coincides with the frequency of the upwardly mobile characters and their jobs (see below). This evokes the matter of women's class consciousness – as the characters come to compare themselves to their middle-class counterparts. The cross-class romance ties in with the representation of class consciousness. The narrative perspective varies here. Second, the matter mother-daughter relationship also coincides with a story pattern, namely the family romance. There is a tendency towards the autobiography here; yet

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29 The term "survivor" is frequently being used when talking about victims of sexual abuse (cf. Degun-Martha 2).

no particular job role is typical. Third, as regards violence against women, none of the "traditional" story patterns occurs. The stories are coined by images of trauma; and it appears that this "sabotages" traditional story patterns: these are narratives of scattered, broken, or – on the contrary – strongly resistant subjects.

Text Analyses

3. The Representation of Class Consciousness

Do women have a class consciousness? How does it differ from men's? How does it manifest itself within women's writing? These questions are virtually neglected in literary studies (cf. Pamela Fox 3), hence they inspired me to examine the representations of class consciousness in women's working-class fiction. The novels under discussions are Livi Michael's *Under a Thin Moon*; Berthan Robert's *The Good Plain Cook*; Andrea Levy's *Never far from Nowhere*; and finally Yasmin Hai's *The Making of Mr. Hai's Daughter*. It may appear confusing that I have chosen, for instance, narratives of invisibility to explicate women's class consciousness. Yet, all the novels under discussion – ranging from representations of invisibility to stories of food and cooking, to an autobiography that deals with fashion, teenage-hood and girl gangs – are essentially based on a particular phenomenon. Pamela Fox terms this phenomenon the "dynamic of shame and resistance"[30] (Fox 15). Shame and resistance, as will be shown, are the central aspects of class consciousness (cf. Doreatha Mbalia 55; Pamela Fox 15).

Before I begin to analyse the narratives, it is necessary to elucidate the theoretical background of the intricate term class consciousness. Its development into the contemporary idea of class consciousness as a manifestation of shame and resistance will be illustrated. Class consciousness, according to Georg Lukács, cannot be sufficiently described with a psychological conception of consciousness (Lukács 47). In psychology, consciousness is understood as the psyche's instrument of processing and evaluating information (cf. Simeon Locke 2; Susan Schneider 3). Class consciousness, however, is understood as an "achievement" rather than a

30 The terms will be defined at a later point in this introduction.

component of the human brain (cf. Lukács 51). It is achieved when a subject comes to understand that class relations are due to historical processes as opposed to being an “unhistorical, natural and rigid” social order (52). This means that the subject conceives its own position in society as historically determined. In that respect, Lukács’ considerations are closely related to Marx’s theory of historical materialism.[31] Within the framework of this analysis, I will only touch on Marx’s critique briefly, as a more intense study of his work would go beyond the scope of this thesis. Above all, it is Lukács, not Marx, who predominately coined the term class consciousness. Also, as previously mentioned, Marxism is frequently criticised for its “gender blindness”, since scholars such as Marx, Engels and Lukács prevalently focused on the male worker only (cf. Jeff Hearn 2-3, Tina Chanter 29). I will therefore draw on more contemporary and predominately feminist scholars to approach the topic under discussion. Nonetheless, the sociologist John Goldthorpe needs to be quoted at this point, as he, following and expanding Lucáks’ ideas, elaborates different constituent criteria that are essential to “achieve” class consciousness. Goldthorpe states that “class consciousness exists when three characteristics are present” (quoted in Bulmer 5):

> A sharp awareness of being in a similar situation to other workers and hence of having interests in common.

> The sharing of a definition of these interests as basically in conflict with the interests of another class.

> The perception of class conflicts as pervading all social relationships and containing within them the germs of a future social order (cf. Bulmer 5).

These “interests” that form the basis of class conflicts are rooted in the economic conditions of the respective class. Goldthorpe states that the subject’s “occupational status” within the labour market is crucial to its interests – and those economical interests can ultimately lead to class consciousness (cf. Stephen Edgell 27). David Lockwood also claims that a subject’s employment status determines his or her class

[31] The term describes the materialist conception of history. Historical materialism examines the causes of developments and changes in society in the means by which humans produce commodities. Materialism is seen as a determinant of peoples’ positions in society (cf. Friedel-Howe 3).

identity (cf. Crompton 48). And here it becomes clear that the women's question is neglected: how can those women who are restricted to the domestic sphere[32] – as opposed to performing work in a public environment – develop a class consciousness? Marilyn Porter, who interviewed 25 working-class males and females in order to find out if "the class consciousness of working-class women differed from that of working-class men" (Porter 4), discovered that:

> Women do not have the same experience of society as men do – even those who work outside home and, a fortiori, women who are primarily occupied at home with young children do not have the same experiences as their husbands at work, and certainly they do not have direct experience of his work.[...] Working-class men share their homes with working-class women, and those women cannot expected to be silent, passive or without social experience of their own. If imagery and consciousness arise from social experience, then, in so far as their social experience differs from the men's, so will their class consciousness. (5)

Porter emphasises the relationship between social experience and class consciousness. In that respect her analysis clearly recalls Marx, whom I shall revert to once more at this point. His famous proposition "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness" (Marx 4) can be applied to Porter's findings. Obviously Marx's phrase entails sexist exclusivity[33], however, when translating it into a gender-aware understanding of class consciousness, it essentially subsumes what Porter observes in her survey. The feminist Pauline Hunt agrees with Porter that "women's confinement to a narrow domestic sphere [...] affects their social consciousness" (Hunt 2-3). Like Porter, Pauline Hunt points out that the widespread working-class women's exclusions from labour politics like trade union meetings (particularly in the first half of the twentieth century) contributes hugely to these differences (Porter 165). In turn, it intensifies their "gender consciousness" (165) as women who are denied access to the public sphere (cf. Hunt 97-99, Porter 165-167). However, Hunt states that changes in society need to be considered when examining women's class

32 Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, for instance, explains that even though educational opportunities for women were increasing at the end of the twentieth century, "many of these reforms have made little difference to working-class women [...] who still spent their lives performing unpaid caring or domestic work" (Zweiniger-Bargielowska 13).

33 I am aware that "men" is another expression for "human beings". However, throughout his *Critique of Political Economy*, Marx always refers to "man, men, mankind" and actually does not consider the female worker.

consciousness and that scholars must not restrict their analyses to the gendered division of labour (15). A major social change in Great Britain, according to Thomas Edward Walker, is the emergence of consumerism in Western societies. Walker explains that, before the beginning of the twentieth century, “workers knew who they were as a class” (Walker 2), which changed dramatically at the end of the nineteenth century.

> By the turn of the 20th century, worker identity became increasingly measured by standards set for the socialization process of formal and modern bureaucratic institutions, technology and urbanization. Educational institutions, structures of capital formations, governmental policy, and commercial communication networks all lent their anatomies of power to the manipulations of traditional community structures to address the needs of an industrial-based society. In such an environment, the transformation of class consciousness was affected. The relationship between formal institutions, and the creation of social identities grew to include a new cultural phenomenon as well: consumerism. The industrial need to break with preindustrial notions of social organization and individual identities was at the forefront of this modern cultural identity. New forms of mass entertainment with industrial and “progressive” notions for satisfying emotional needs in this transformation setting assisted in the emerge of a new consumer culture. (Thomas Walker 1-2)

Further on, Walker explains how the advertising media in the twentieth century influenced the worker’s class consciousness: by encouraging workers to use more products, “their social group identity come to be defined less by class and more by a consumptive group that the advertisement had created, molded and targeted” (2). Therefore, Walker terms this process the “Blurring of Working-Class Consciousness in Modern Western Culture” – which is the title of his book. Consumerism in the twentieth century, argues Walker, affected both men and women; although less involved in the public life, women were still exposed to the advertising media that produced gender-tailored and targeted commercial images of lifestyle and fashion (3). As in most advertising, the addressee encounters the product through the mediation of another subject (cf. Richard Keller Simon 88). Therefore, advertising has the potential to create class distinctions, as it entails a binary distinction between an “owner” that suggests the necessity of the product onto the “unpropertied addressee” (88). The “owner” determines the benchmark for cultural norms, it forms the so-called “centre” – which marginalises the “unpropertied other” (cf. 89). As described in the chapter *Theoretical Background,* the dichotomy centre/margin is a significant concept in Black feminism and working-class studies (cf. Bill Ashcroft 135, bell hooks 2) and it explains mechanisms of discrimination and oppression. I have shown that this

dualism can be translated into the concept of social class, thus also into the issue of consumerism. It shall be repeated here that the centre stands for the middle and upper classes and that “class identity depends upon the power to exclude and marginalise” (Moris 9). I have also shown that the opposite of “endorsing” the centre is signified as “resistance” (Cf. *Theoretical Background)*. With the term resistance, I have finally reached the core of contemporary ideas on class consciousness.

Resistance to the dominant culture, argues Pamela Fox, is a “working-class tool” and a main element of class consciousness (10). “But resistance to what?” she interrogates to emphasise the need of concretising the matter. To be able to answer this question, the other constituent of class consciousness, namely “class shame”, must be described. Shame, she recollects, is associated with feelings of embarrassment, humiliation or disgrace and can be described with the feeling of being “inappropriate” (10). Fox argues that “those most likely to feel shame are those made to feel ‘inappropriate’ by dominant culture norms. Examples are often (though not exclusively) class-based, ranging from table manners to dress to a school child’s meagre lunch” (13). Although shame is associated with submissiveness, it can lead to a form of resistance: Fox explains that the revelation of shame bears an emancipatory aspect, as by demonstrating one’s feelings of inappropriateness, often one is exposing oppressive societal norms and values as well (16). Representations of shame and resistance are the central aspects of class-conscious working-class writing:

> While often directly challenging dominant ideology through theme (and sometimes form), the novels evoke highly complicated and conflicting forms of protest. Class shame, it seems to me, emerges like a strikingly powerful counterforce in this body of writing as a whole to shape the presentation of working-class experience. (Fox 2)

Even though this dynamic is the central narrative plot device of the novels being analysed, it does not manifest itself in the same way or to the same extent across the novels. The characters constantly oscillate between shame and resistance. They are moving along a continuum of class shame and refusal to adapt to the dominant culture. There are two concepts closely related to the contemporary thoughts on class consciousness, which, in fact, also determine the texts under discussion. It concerns the terms “recognition” and “commodification” which are repeatedly mentioned in the shame/resistance, margin/centre context (cf. Judith Butler 97-101,

Pamela Fox 81). Recognition is defined as a moral category that describes the subject's need for respect and self-esteem (Bert van de Brink & David Owen 3). Alex Honneth's essay *Struggles for Recognition* is deemed to be one of the most significant contemporary accounts on this issue (Butler 97):

> For Honneth struggles for recognition are social processes in which certain groups of society contest the predominant and, in their eyes, demeaning social standards of expectations and evaluations that ascribe to different members of society certain "appropriate rules", statuses or characteristics We can think here both of officially sanctioned forms of unequal treatment of citizens (apartheid, sexism) and more informal forms of non-recognition in everyday interaction, concerning, for instance, the treatment of cultural minorities, the relations between the sexes, class difference and so on. (Owen & Van de Brink 4)

The struggle for recognition is interwoven in the character's class shame and resistance. It will be shown that, for instance, in Hai's *The Making of Mr. Hai's Daughter* and Levy's *Never far from Nowhere,* the autobiographical character literally struggles for recognition from her white middle-class peers. Livi Michael also employs the concept of recognition in terms of illustrating its opposite: one of the main characters in *Under a Thin Moon*, who represents a literature student from a working-class background, suffers from non-recognition in an academic environment. Here, the idea of non-recognition is presented through a powerful literary motif: it is depicted by the character's invisibility to higher class individuals. Non-recognition is also demonstrated through another central character in Michael's novel: a homeless unemployed female clearly incorporates the idea of not being recognised by the dominant culture. Bethan Robert's novel *The Good Plain Cook* deals with recognition in terms of representing commodification which, according to Axel Honneth, is a "distortion of recognition" – as commodification describes the "treatment of persons as instrumentalised objects" (Butler 98). In the text, this is often realised in the form of personifications. "The literary technique of personification", argues Bill Mullen, "conveys both the extinction of social relations and the objectification of the human under capital" (Mullen 35). This state is created by commodification, which will be specified at this point. He states that the starting point for the theory of commodification:

> is a classic Marxian observation; *capital is both material object (commodity, a machine) and a centre for the crystallisaton of human relationships.* [...] The interhuman, relational character and therefore the historically transitory, and relative (dialectial) nature of capitalist categories, is hidden by the materiality of capital, which gives them the mistaken

> appearance of a natural phenomenon. *Similarly, the worker in the capitalist system is faced with his products of his own activity which, having acquired a "phantom substantiality" (gespenstige Gegenständlichkeit) crush him just as a natural power would do (quoted in* Jospeh Gabel 146) [my emphasis].

Commodification, as pointed out in the chapter *Theoretical Background*, causes alienation. In how far this relates to "shame and resistance" will be shown in the following analysis. I will begin with Levi Michael's *Under a Thin Moon.*

Livi Michael: *Under a Thin Moon* (1992)

Livi Michael was born in Manchester, England in 1960 and grew up on a council estate in Ashton-under-Lyne. She teaches English and Creative Writing at Sheffield Hallam University and runs reading groups on *Twentieth Century Women's Fiction* in Manchester. Michael is the author of four novels for adults and several children's books. *Under a Thin Moon* is her first novel. According to Dominic Head, the novel "cultivates a *self-conscious* documentary feel in its depiction of life in a council estate in the 1980s. [...] Several of *the characters have a perception of the distinction between middle and working class*" (Head 74). [my emphasis] Interestingly, Head combines the terms "perception" and "self-conscious" in the context of class distinctions. The adjective "self-conscious" bears a double connotation. It is defined as: "with full awareness about one's situation and one's actions" on the one hand and "nervous or awkward because unduly aware of oneself" on the other (cf. "Oxford Dictionary Online"). This twofold meaning is mirrored through the characters in Micheal's narrative*:* The main characters Laurie and Wanda appear to be particularly "self-conscious" about their class backgrounds. The term is reminiscent of the concept of "class shame". Shame, as explained above, is closely related to resistance. Indeed, Laurie and Wanda alternate between shame and resistance on their path of developing class consciousness. I will begin with Laurie's story, which is divided into two different plots – for Laurie has two "social occupations" (Michael 15). She is both a university student and a grocery thief. The two storylines shall be analysed one after another.

Laurie as a University Student

Laurie is a white, British 19-year old woman. She is introduced as a first-semester literature student, who has just moved out of her working-class parents' home. During her first days at university, Laurie meets Shelagh, another working-class woman whom she befriends straight away. Being familiarised with the rules and regulations of the institution, Laurie and Shelagh "become serious, almost moody about the whole thing; their place in university, the number of essays they have to write, their prospects of advancement within this particular system" (37). The narrator does not specify their "places and prospects", yet the indication of negative feelings foreshadows the difficulties the women will face during their studies. Suspense is created by the outlook on their university career as a "rocky road": will they, despite their working-class background, manage to be successful at university? This is the conflict created at the beginning of the narrative. Academic world and working-class background are presented as oppositional forces, as two extremes that cause class conflict. Livi Michael employs this conflict as a plot device and, as will be shown, class consciousness is directly involved in this "clash" between working-class background and middle-class institution.

Following the women through seminars and coffee breaks in their first study days , the focus is directed at Laurie's perception of university life: the reader gains constant insight into her inner life mainly through a stream-of- consciousness technique, whereas Shelagh's thoughts and feelings are only sporadically presented via direct speech. I will therefore refer to Laurie as the main character. It soon becomes clear that Laurie perceives herself as rather dislocated: struggling to use the scientific terminology required in the seminars, she indeed becomes "self-conscious“, that is, ashamed about her "non-academic working-class manner of speaking“(cf. 37) and begins to feel inadequate (cf. Michael 36-37). Her emotional state is depicted by the concept of invisibility: Laurie feels indiscernible to the "high-class" university staff (110). Her (perceived) invisibility is created by the feeling of not being recognised by her tutor. She is convinced that because of her inexpertness in using scientific terminology, that is, in expressing herself in the language of the dominant culture, her academic work will always be ignored and deemed not "worth looking at". I will term this aspect of invisibility "non-recognition" (cf. preliminary notes). The idea of non-

recognition is directly linked to language usage: Laurie tries very hard to “imitate his [her tutor’s] style” and becomes obsessed” (111) with the idea of impressing him with her essays. The narrator comments on Laurie’s state as follows:

> The desire to be recognised by him, for her tutor to be the one to lift the thick veil of invisibility surrounding her and make her feel real is so intense and consuming she is losing contact with the world around her. (111)

Laurie is presented as a victim, desperately in need of approval from a higher positioned male member of staff. Her helplessness is expressed by both form and content. The staff member is represented by a *nomen agentis* (“tutor”), thus is the subject of the phrase; whereas Laurie, referred to as “her” twice, is mainly represented by the object. The sentence structure symbolises the polarised power positions between the male senior member of staff and the female first-year student. This is reinforced by the choice of words: expressions like “surrounded by”, “consuming” and “losing contact” make her appear dominated by an unseizable, omnipresent power. The terms “desire” and “intense” point to the severity of her distress. Furthermore, this word choice bears a sexual connotation that shall be discussed further at a later point.

Contrary to Laurie’s victimisation, the tutor is depicted as the one who controls her feelings. The metaphorical expression “the one to lift the thick veil of invisibility” makes him appear as a magical, almost fairytale-like “prince-type” figure who can “rescue” her: He is portrayed as a magnificent, almighty person. Laurie, in turn, remains “in his shadow”, which leaves her helpless and unimpressive. Hence, this imagery emphasises the concept of invisibility in a figurative sense. Invisibility stands for shame: Laurie is “disappearing” to the margin and remains unseen by the dominant culture (the centre). The subject-object dichotomy employed here is linked to the concept of class: it recalls the binary distinction of centre and margin (see above). Furthermore, the text passage entails strongly polarised gender stereotypes: Laurie is presented as being “anxious and passive”, whereas he appears “active and strong”. According to Jennifer Grove and Stuart Watt, these are stereotypical characteristics attached to women and men (Grove & Watt 45). These differences reinforce the main character’s feeling of inferiority. Out of her subordinated position,

she looks up to the higher-classed male and romanticises him. The tutor embodies the visible centre.

Nonetheless, the tutor remains a nameless figure that is not even given a voice; he is only presented from the outside through the comments of other characters. His anonymity has a crucial function: it shows that Laurie's "desire to be made real" by him (Michael 111) is arbitrary and illusionary. Accordingly, he appears unaware of Laurie's class-background and her anguish of non-recognition. Hereby, Michael raises the question if Laurie's "inadequateness" is due to her perception rather than being targeted discrimination exercised by the tutor. The reader is challenged to make sense of the conflict that underlies the narrative: is the clash between the "oppositional forces" (academy versus working-class home) a determinable societal phenomenon or is it rather an internal conflict? Evidently, the complete excerpt quoted above can be labelled internal action – it clearly takes place in the character's consciousness only. Her view on different power positions that are based on language usage, causing feelings of inadequacy and creating a desire to belong to the "centre", can be understood as a sign of her class consciousness. Class consciousness manifests itself in an even clearer form when Shelagh, her working-class friend, ridicules Laurie's romanticised, gender-constrained view on her "princelike" tutor:

> I think this crush-on-a-tutor-crap *is a kind of pitfall dug especially for the working-class students* by the intelligentsia of the country. [...] You're taken in by him. All his posh speeches, that suave manner, *typical middle-class manner and you're taken in by it. It's nothing to him and you think it's marvelous. It's natural to him like swearing is to me, only I don't get any brownie points for* it. (111) [my emphasis]

This comment entails a significant imagery of class divisions, which is essentially created by a topography of "above" and "below". The idea of working-class students falling into a "pitfall dug" positions them deep down below ground, where they are trapped, thus entirely passive and powerless. This metaphoric corresponds, in its dichotomy, to the "subject/object" relation employed in the previously quoted text passage. Moreover, it alludes to the concept of invisibility in another figurative sense: the working-class students, being "underground", are depicted as "hidden in the dark", "out of eye line": invisible and thus shameful. Another upstairs/downstairs image in terms of a social ladder is created by the term "brownie points":

> Brownie points in modern (21st century) usage are a hypothetical social currency, which can be accrued by doing good deeds or earning favour in the eyes of another, often one's superior. The origin of the term is from the steam railroading era in North America. 'Brownie points,' or 'brownies' for short, describes general demerits earned by causing unsafe conditions, hazards to the public, or potential damage to equipment. [...] Railroad managements had differing numbers of 'brownies' awarded for certain behaviors, along with concurrently different amounts required for dismissal, and differing lengths of time for their expiration or forgiveness. (The Phrase Finder: "Brownie Points")

The reference to the railroad context conjures up images of working-class labour which, being purely manual work is in direct contrast to the academic world. This comment is a sarcastic inversion of the idea of upward social mobility: as opposed to the tutor, this female character cannot gain a higher position by means of her manners – instead, her "working-class manners", namely "swearing", keep her at the lower strata of society. The sarcastic tone is emphasised by the fact that academic discourses are exposed as merely being a "way of speaking" and thus are devaluated, reduced to absurdity and presented as only being a tool to gain a higher position in society. Thereby, Shelagh demonstrates her resistance: instead of desiring the dominant culture, she ridicules it.[34] Furthermore, the term "natural" in the context of language usage is rather striking, for it signifies a person's language usage as an innate, immutable characteristic of class identity. The two "modes of speaking" are presented as mutually exclusive class factors. This poignant description of "middle-class manners" functions as a mockery of Laurie's glorification of her tutor; thus Shelagh encourages her friend to look at class divisions in a humorous way to help her cope with feelings of inferiority.

Having said that, Shelagh's comment still shows that language does play an important role in terms of class distinctions. Historically speaking, language usage in terms of writing and holding speeches was mainly a privilege of upper-class males, who were deemed to be the literate, "civilised" men, possessing the powerful "tool" language to dominate the lower classes. At the same time, the lower classes were often denied access to education, also in early-twentieth century Britain (cf. Jonathan

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34 "Laughing – in spite of crying" is a principle that was (and is) utilised by, for example, Black people to overcome inferiority feelings. In the 1960s, for instance, the comedian and civil rights leader Dick Gregory encouraged Black people to establish resistance against racism through mockery of racist white people.

Rose 223). This had a powerful political function: by keeping them illiterate, they were prevented from reading educational, revolutionary texts that question the rigid class structure, proclaiming resistance and change. Jonathan Rose validates the fact that "vocabulary was a class barrier" (Rose 223). He also observes that

> [i]t is sometimes argued that the working-class pursuit of education was an accommodation of middle-class values, a capitulation to bourgeois cultural hegemony. Actually, it represented the return of the repressed. "Knowledge is Power" may strike us as a naive Victorian slogan, but it was embraced passionately by generations of working-class radicals who were denied both. (23)

This also is reminiscent of Spivak's thoughts on the silencing of the working classes. Language usage plays a vital part in Laurie's story and the main character remains feeling ashamed and unrecognised – hence invisible when it comes to the dominant culture's discourses:

> 'I'm right proud of you', Laurie's mother says. Laurie remembers these words as she struggles to find the right words for her essays, or to describe to her mother what it is really like, the experience of being a very small speck of sand on a very large beach. In tutorials she struggles to find the right words to express her thoughts. [...] 'You don't know you're born', says her mother proudly, referring to the hours of Laurie's work. Though in fact Laurie puts in a lot of hours trying to adapt her language into a suitable mould. She is impressed with the eloquence of her tutor. It is as if he takes her stumbling thoughts and turns them effortlessly into something exceptional and exact. (109-110)

This excerpt serves as an example of the "stream of-consciousness" technique as it "represents the inner workings of a character's mind [...] in a chaotic flow of half-formed and discontinuous thoughts, memories, sense impressions, random associations, images, feelings and reflections that constitute the character's 'consciousness´" (Morner & Rausch 212). Accordingly, the character's inner life is presented in the form of several hypotaxes, which indicates this technique.

Another metaphor expressing inferiority is employed in this consciousness stream. Here, the author makes use of the concept of size, that is, the opposites "very small and very large". This imagery can also be translated into the trope of invisibility: Laurie, being "very small" is likely to be "overseen". And it is connected to language usage: Her "stumbling thoughts" are "effortlessly turned into something exceptional and exact" by her "eloquent" tutor. The blatant alliteration depicts the tutor's fluency and articulateness whereas Laurie struggles to "adapt her language" to the dominant

speech that still appears to be a foreign language to her. Yet, Laurie's increasing shame seems to make her more and more class-conscious.

> She begins to wonder and cannot work out why she always feels so stupid when she was always the brightest in her class at school. *Then she realises that inside her head she is always carrying a hostile audience.* When she tries to translate herself into terms her tutor can accept she hears always the jeering laughter of the people from the street: `OO what a toff. Give us a taste of that plum you got in your gob´. When she tries to talk the old way, she sees always the resigned, dismissive faces of her tutors (110). [my emphasis]

Now the author uses the idea of "space" to create class divisions: The middle and upper classes (represented by the tutor), are positioned in the university, whereas the working classes are described as "people from the street". They are literally presented as the "down-and-out". Invisibility and marginality are directly connected here. In the course of the narrative, the stylistic devices symbolising class divisions, along with the working-class subject's feelings of non-recognition and invisibility, become more and more descriptive. Ranging from a fairly concealed "subject/object" metaphor to a clearer "above/below" topography; to images of "very small and very large" and finally differentiating between "in and out", these images appear increasingly graphic and impressive. The growing demonstrativeness of the figurative language symbolises the development of Laurie's class consciousness: her feeling of non-recognition, leading to class shame becomes more and more powerful and burdensome. The two "hostile audiences" in her head (110) can also be understood as a manifestation of her class consciousness, as the conflict between an identification with either the "old" class or the academic middle-class world symbolises the dynamic of shame and resistance. Thus, as mentioned in the preliminary notes, Laurie alternates between shame and resistance; she is "trapped in a transitional space between the world she cannot return to and the world she cannot enter" (Michael 109). Although it appears that the main character is torn between two worlds, going back and forth between them and being caught in an "interstage", the term "transitional" actually indicates a development. In fact, Laurie is undergoing a transformation – which creates narrative suspense: The outlook for change, for "moving upward" can be understood as rising action: will she feel recognised by university staff or "fall back" to her working-class world? The matter of "escape" is relevant here. Tension has reached its highest point when Laurie is due for the final exam. "In what ways do Dicken's narrative strategies undermine the

‘ideology of solitariness’ permeating his later novels”? is the test question, representing a purely language-based “trial” for Laurie to see if she can be a recognisable member of the academic word. As it turns out, Laurie passes the exam; her “transformation” to an academic person is complete. Nonetheless, she remains feeling inadequate, as her “prince-type” tutor does not recognise her romantic feelings for him. Instead, he “has an eye on” her fellow-student Fiona Smythe (112) who, reciprocating his glances at her, is “gazing levelly into his eyes” (112) .

> ‘What makes her so confident’, Laurie says. ‘Money’, says Shelagh. ‘She went to a better school than him. [...] Fiona went to the same school as Princess Ann. [...] It stinks, that’s what’, says Shelagh. ‘I told you it all boils down to sex.’ But Laurie thinks it has something to do with the kind of language you use. (112)

Here, it becomes clear that the cross-class romance between Laurie and her tutor will fail. The matter of language usage runs like a thread through Laurie’s story and it is always immediately linked to the concept of invisibility. Here, a different meaning is added to it: it is not Laurie’s academic work that stays unrecognised, it is her female body that becomes invisible – whereas “posh” Fiona is all-too visible to the tutor (see above). Shelagh, the main character’s counterpart, denies it is language usage that causes class-based discrimination; to her, it is the “classed body”[35] that causes it: “’it seems to me that the whole damn thing boils down to sex in the end” (112), comments Shelagh on recognition and non-recognition in the academic world. “’Power’, says Laurie” (112). She thinks:

> All her life she was brought up to worship power, that was what it was in the end with her tutor, power, not sex. “Power”, she whispers. “I told you it all came down to power in the end”. “Sex”, says Shelaghs voice. “Power”, Laurie says. (216)

Here, Laurie is only imagining the dialogue; Shelagh is another, resistant voice “inside her” that exposes and ridicules the dominant culture. The relationship

35“Class theorists of embodiment in Sociology point to and illuminate both an over- and an under-exposed body and experience that ultimately mark the bodies of the poor as ideologically, discursively and materially abject”, states Vivyen Adair in her essay on *The Classed Body in Sociological Imagination*, in which she refers to intellectuals such as Foucault and Bourdieu (Adair 3). “Class [...] is performed, marked, written on our minds and bodies” (quoted in: Ken Roberts 9), argues another sociologist. This point will be taken up again at a later point.

between Laurie, who "worships power" and Shelagh, who fulminates against oppressive mechanisms of the higher classes and the inferiority of working-class people, recalls the idea of shame and resistance. It could be argued that the character Shelgah, in fact, functions as a representative of Laurie's resistant class consciousness. Likewise, Shelagh symbolises gender awareness: Exposing Laurie's romanticising of the nameless staff as "crush-on-a-tutor-crap", the author challenges and deconstructs the power differences, based on class and gender, through this character (or rather the "personified class consciousness"). The fact that Laurie is disappointed in her desire for a love affair with the tutor is a significant narrative device. To put this into literary terms, the main character fails to be a romantic heroine (cf. chapter 2).

There is another aspect about the plot that requires final consideration: it is the question of Laurie's perceived invisibility, that is, whether non-recognition in the university context is a product of her consciousness only or is it due to actual discrimination? This conflict remains unresolved. On the one hand, Laurie understands that the "hostile audiences" are only in her head (cf. 110). On the other hand, Laurie and Shelagh come to believe that the adored tutor picks "posh Fiona" over her because of the former's upper-class background. At this point, the reader is made to wonder if class conflicts are apparent in "Laurie's university". When taking this thought a step further and translating it into non-literary, "real" social situations, it becomes clear that discrimination based on class requires social differences to be recognisable. And this evokes a debate: Elizabeth Fay and Michelle Tokarczyk argue that "class, because it is not readily visible as gender and race, can seem invisible. [...] Today, when jeans torn at both knees may denote a well-to-do student and not an impoverished one, it is nearly impossible to perform a cultural semiotics" (Fay & Tokarczyk 4). Contrary to this, Valerie Walkerdine claims that "class is not something that is simply produced economically. It is performed, marked, written on minds and bodies. We can 'spot it a mile off'" (quoted in: Ken Roberts 9). Interestingly, Livi Michael does not integrate the issue of appearance/dress into her class-conscious text – she focuses on language usage only: Laurie thinks that her class background is not necessarily seeable, but all the more hearable. Yet, the fact that she performs well in the "language trial" also makes her "inadequateness" in the academic world unheard of. The perceived invisibility/ non-recognition is an internal issue, however,

as Livi Michael shows, Laurie's shame and the reason "why she feels so stupid" (110) does not come from nowhere: it has a powerful historical background. As shown in the previous analysis, the power of class and gender constraints in terms of education and, specifically, language usage has silenced and interpellated many working-class women as illiterate subjects. Hence, Laurie's class shame seems to be a case of "history repeating itself" – which the author, by highlighting Laurie's misjudgments of her own intellectual capacity, tries to deconstruct.

Laurie as a Thief

> Laurie is a thief. For her it is a social occupation. She goes to one of the local supermarkets. [...] Then she picks out a shop assistant and strikes up a conversation. It's Laurie's theory that store detectives ignore people who are talking to shop assistants. (Michael 15)

The author plays with the concept of invisibility combined with language usage – and here it is used in the reverse sense: speech, not the lack of it, is represented as a tool to become invisible. Laurie's considerations if "her invisibility could ever be used as an advantage; if it could ever be anything other than a handicap" (166) become concrete. Yet, in this role, Laurie uses a different type of language: small talk, as opposed to middle-class academic language. The idea of class division is omitted in this context, as Laurie feels equal to her conversational partners and demonstrates her solidarity with the equally lower-class shop assistants. She wishes she could reveal to them: "I have been taking stuff from this store, the store that's been robbing you for years. Just think what would happen if we all did the same thing-a secret sisterhood of shop assistants and the unemployed, doing what has been done to us for years" (43). Laurie imagines being caught in the act so that she can proclaim her anti-capitalist motives:

> For when the *rich rob the poor*, she can hear herself saying, they call it free enterprise. Then with the police she will be self-possessed, explaining to them the logical inevitability of her actions and the theory behind them[...] After all, *she will say*, saving money on food allows her to spend more on gas and electric. And by removing the more exotic product from the shelves she is actually helping to create a demand. You could argue, in fact, t*hat people like Laurie give the system a boost* (43). [my emphasis]

“The rich rob the poor” is Laurie’s definition of capitalism and again, she creates a binary distinction of society: “rich and poor” corresponds to “them and us”. As opposed to her role as a university student, she appears to not be ashamed at all to make herself heard, instead, she desires to hold a speech. Her self-perception alters completely in this role. Moreover, Livi Michael puts a sarcastic tone into her character’s mouth: the statement about her reflating the market by stealing is a witty inversion of the capitalist strategy “the rich rob the poor”. Laurie appears eloquent and powerful and her poignant comments remind the reader of Shelagh, the symbol of her resistant class consciousness. In her role of a thief, Laurie seems to transform into Shelagh. Imagining herself speaking about her anti-capitalist actions, the main character not only wishes to be heard, but also presents herself as having an effect on the “system”. She symbolically steps out of her unimpressive, invisible body. Visibility, again, stands for power, agency, and ultimately for the centre.

The idea of invisibility is very complex in this “social occupation”: on the one hand, she wishes to bond with the shop assistants to manipulate “the system” and therefore desires to become noticeable as a thief, on the other, she needs to remain undiscovered to the shop staff in order to continue the theft. This conflict creates narrative suspense since the reader constantly follows her shoplifts, not knowing if she will be caught – or gets herself caught. This is intensified when the narrator comments on Laurie’s feelings as follows: “Sometimes she wishes she could confide in her shop assistant friends, offering something in exchange for their confidences, but she knows it’s impossible. The relationship is one way only. She is its eyes and ears” (Michael 102). The aspect of solidarity and sisterhood is emphasised, recalling the women’s class war that Laurie has declared in her mind earlier. The expression “eyes and ears” is striking, as the main character, feeling invisible and silenced in the university context, is now presented as an impressive and controlling instance of power in the “class war of the ruling and the working classes”.

Laurie feels highly visible in her role as a thief: whilst walking through the store and wondering which groceries she needs for dinner, she observes that “in the mirror her face is round and glowing in spite of the fluorescent light” (100). Not only she is described as a source of light, she also appears to recognise and acknowledge her reflection – again she symbolically leaves the invisible body and takes clear shape as soon as she enters the role of the thief “manipulating the system”. Again, it becomes

very clear that the concept of visibility stands for a person's agency, vice versa, invisibility symbolises powerlessness. Visibility stands for resistance. The main character remains powerful – until

> there is a hand on her arm. Laurie half-turns, smiling, her heart beating. Will you come with me, the man says. [...] The manager phones the police. [...] The police arrive. *They talk with the manager as if they are friends*, about the price of stock these days. They talk *as if Laurie is not there at al*l. She feels like a very small child. (Michael 200) [my emphasis]

Tension has reached its highest point: Laurie is caught in the act. The power of the bonding between police and store manager, presented as the "defenders of capitalism", makes the character transform back into an unimpressive body. The police empty her bags, take the stolen goods from her, register her as a "shoplifter" in their records and let her go. Strikingly, the store manager finds out about Laurie's thievery when she is physically ill and, not being able to afford medication, steals it. The pharmaceuticals are taken off her and, as the reader learns at a later point of this story, her illness remains uncured. Here it becomes clear that the products Laurie steals are more than just "objects". In her account on literary representations of theft, Lauvalerie King argues that products represent "not only external objects and people's relations to them, but also all of those rights, liberties, powers, and immunities that are important for well-being" (King 27). As Laurie is denied entities that represent her well-being, she remains – according to Honneth's moral understand of recognition – unrecognised and ignored in the capitalist system.

On her way home, Laurie comes across a well-to-do-area, a few miles away from her flat:

> She wonders if the people who live there have ever seen a council estate where she lives. It is close by, but they have probably never seen it. For a moment she remains at the gates, feeling her own invisibility, their presence. [...] She feels almost like she could slip through the gates unnoticed and invisibly enter their lives.[36] (Michael 216)

This passage can be described as falling action, as the main character now completely reverts to invisibility: her sense of power has vanished. At this point, the

36 This scene is reminiscent of a scene in the novel *Native Son* (1940) by Richard Wright.

two narrative strands, Laurie as a student and thief, are directly linked to each other. It describes the end of her "careers".

> She thinks again of Shelagh and the different paths they have taken. So much has happened, so many changes in both their lives, but in one way they are both alike. They have both broken away from their old lives. *Nothing of their former selves remains. They have both been erased.* As Laurie walks down the street she feels of well-being that is almost elation. *If she has been erased, she thinks, she is free to be anything at all*. (217) [my emphasis].

The term "erased" incorporates the peak level of invisibility. With the omission of her social occupations, she becomes a "classless" subject, interestingly; the protagonist perceives her classlessness as an "elation" – being rid of all oppressive, interpellating mechanisms that class divisions entail. By presenting a delighted "classless" subject, the author exposes capitalist systems as an overwhelming, destructive power structure. The idea of theft can be understood as resistance, as it stands for the refusal of dominant culture's values and rules. Theft is an example of resistant action.

Wanda

This character is introduced as a 16-year-old single mother who, after being thrown out of her parent's house when found pregnant, becomes homeless. Shortly after giving birth to her daughter Coral, she is accommodated in a hostel room until the social service organise a council flat for her. The young mother is unable to provide her newborn with food and clothing. On her way to the social welfare office, Wanda ponders about her position in society:

> There is no one to see her at all, but as she walks Wanda imagines she is being filmed, as part of a true-life documentary about the homeless. Down every alleyway invisible cameramen record her progress, sympathetically appreciating her plight. They cannot let her know they are there as it would spoil the realism of the documentary. Even so the thought of it makes Wanda walk with a certain consciousness, hunching her shoulders in an oppressed way. She imagines the narrator hurrying after her along the narrow streets, speaking into his microphone in hushed tones, but with a perfect accent....'In Britain today the number of the unemployed and homeless has increased yet again. Here you see one of the faceless million: a young girl, fresh from the maternity ward, onto the streets.' (Michael 10)

This passage is mainly characterised by the character's ideas and emotions in free flowing thought (cf. Morner & Rausch 212). Only once it is interrupted by a comment

of a narrator that appears to watch the scene from an elevated vantage point. Yet, for the most part, the stream-of-consciousness technique is applied: deictic expressions like “today”, “every alleyway”, “here”, “narrow streets” etc. and the hypotactic sentence structure particularly in the last two phrases indicate this narrative method (212). The beginning of Wanda’s story is also interfused with the invisibility-motif: she is described as a “faceless” homeless, unemployed teenage mother. The same principle as in Laurie’s university story is deployed: the main character wants to be recognised, however perceives herself as invisible. As opposed to Laurie, however, Wanda does not wish to hide her class-background, but wants the public to see her “plight”.[37] She appears class-conscious in a way that she, shame ridden, expects the public to “look down on her” – through a lens. Livi Michael plays with the visibility/invisibility concept and the metaphoric employed becomes highly complex in this scene: The “one in a million” unemployed woman, usually ignored and regarded inconsiderable, becomes very visible here. In this scene, her *visibility* stands for powerlessness. Imagining a camera team following her, Wanda is turned into a surveilled subject. Still, she has no agency and hence remains marginalised and invisible to the centre. The description of her movements makes her being watched closely. The technique Livi Michael employs here complies with what in post-colonial studies is called the concept of surveillance. As will be shown, the concept of the surveilled colonised subject and the imperialist’s gaze can be translated into the context of class. Bill Ashcroft explains:

> One of the most powerful strategies of imperial dominance is that of surveillance, or observation, because it implies a viewer with an elevated vantage point, it suggests the power to process and understand that which is seen, *and it objectifies and interpellates the colonized subject in a way that fixes its identity in relation to the surveyor.* The importance of the gaze has been emphasized by Lacan, since the gaze of the mother is the initial process by which identity is achieved. This gaze corresponds to the *grand-autre* within which identification, objectification and subjection of the subject are simultaneously enacted: the imperial gaze *defines the identity of the subject, objectified it within the identifying system of power relations and confirms its subalternity and powerlessness.* (Bill Ashcroft 226) [my emphasis]

In her imagination, Wanda is surveilled and interpellated as being a homeless unemployed by a reporter with “a perfect accent” – suggesting that he is well-

37 This term is used by Marx who frequently speaks of the “plight of the worker under capitalism” in his *Critique of Political Economy* (1859).

educated. Again, language usage works as a benchmark for class. The “higher-class” narrator functions as a representative of the dominant culture; he symbolises the “Other”[38] who objectifies the “classed body” as a figure representing the lower class. The fact that the reporter is male intensifies the polarisation between him, the educated, independent journalist and Wanda, the impoverished mother. Evidently, this scenario is presented as merely taking place in Wanda’s mind, yet it shows that the power of interpellation has also formed her bearings and movements; she begins to act accordingly: “the thought makes Wanda walk with a certain consciousness, hunching her shoulders in an oppressed way” (10). The character’s appearance is controlled by the dominant culture; she becomes a “classed body” and acts like a marionette that can only become visible in the form of an underclass subject. Wanda embodies class shame.

On the other hand, she is dominated by the feeling of being *invisible*: social services keep on ignoring her needs for hygienic and child-friendly accommodation and an independent life – instead she is forced to live in a rundown, dirty flat (11). The fight with officials and social workers becomes the central theme of Wanda’s story and it symbolises the class conflict: Wanda’s requirements remain unrecognised and her material needs are controlled by the ruling class. “It is a social occupation, spending money. Without it you do not belong in the world” (25) Wanda observes, and her statement reminds me of what has been said about consumerism (cf. preliminary notes). She desires to belong to the “centre” as she “looks at the big adverts on the side of Estelle’s and the bookie’s; women with exotic jewellery and shiny cars, men holding out flowers to them soothing oil into their suntanned skins” (52). Thus it is class and gender ideology that makes the impoverished single mother feel inadequate, unimpressive – invisible.

Yet, her feelings of invisibility differ greatly from the other character’s experiences in university: Laurie suffers from non-recognition in an intellectual sense, whereas Wanda’s is not being recognised in an existential sense. Furthermore, in Wanda’s story the invisibility-motif is presented in a more blunt and less metaphoric way: the very term “invisible” is directly mentioned repetitively (10, 11, 120, 120, 188). It could

38 The term “Other” – with a capital “O”- stands for the Grand Autre.

be argued that the straightforwardness of the motif in Wanda's story alludes to the severity and pressingness of her situation: she is ignored as a human being with basic needs, thus her invisibility is more threatening than Laurie's feelings of non-recognition. This becomes clear when the young mother takes on a job in a bar in order to become financially independent from social welfare. She leaves her baby with the neighbours during her shifts. As it turns out, her boss Jim not only wants her as a waitress, but also as his prostitute. He offers "two hundred pounds for half-an-hour's work" (159), which causes a severe conflict within her: "The next night *he is watching her* again. [...] She wouldn't want Jim if he was the last man on earth, but she is confused. She feels like she has some kind of power; *at the same time she feels like she is being moved more and more onto Jim's ground"* (156-157). [my emphasis] Again, it appears that Wanda only becomes visible in a certain "shape", here in the role of a sexual object. Repeatedly she is presented as a marionette, being moved through the invisible strings controlled by a gazing man. The invisibility here again stands for non-agency and marginalisation, in fact, rather severe oppression than marginalisation: Jim's attempt to prostitute Wanda points at the oppression based on class and gender. Aware of her poverty, he tries to make Wanda use her female body as a tool to survive. Furthermore, it symbolises a gendered class struggle between male employer and female employee. This scene creates narrative suspense, as the reader gains deep insight into Wanda's moral conflict, needing the money so desperately, and, on the other hand "she thinks of Jim and a kind of cold fear descends upon her" (159). The climax is reached when Wanda eventually prepares herself to have sex with Jim. Dressed up in a black gown, she takes him to her bedroom; her baby locked in the kitchen. Yet, when he begins to touch her, Wanda refuses. She imagines that

> someone is out there, on the balcony, filming everything for use as evidence against her. Her hands rub the material of her skirt up and down, then she drops on all fours. But it is no good. The cameras automatically adjust, focusing downwards. [...] No, she says. [...] Leave me alone. [...] No, she whimpers. Go away, go away, go away (194).

The description of cameras "focusing downwards" is a very illustrative device to show Wanda's self-perception. The downtrodden position, in which she becomes visible, alludes to the subjection in terms of both class and gender. The reader is witnessing her downfall in her class struggle against the male capitalist. Yet, shortly before it

comes to intercourse, Wanda pushes Jim away and throws him out of her flat (195). As a consequence, Jim sacks her from the bar job. The next scene takes place in her bathroom. Wanda lies down in her bathtub, grabs a knife – and slits her wrists. The reader gains insights into her final thoughts:

> The people with money and power need this to happen to you. They are the ones writing the script of the film going on all the time in Wanda's head, that kill her off in the end. They are with her now, recording the final act. (228)

Comparable to Laurie's symbolic "erasure" from the classed world, this female character also is wiped out – but, accordingly – in an existential sense and not on an intellectual level. Yet, the effect is the same: Livi Michael highlights the oppressive mechanisms of the dominant culture. As in Laurie's story, this narrative strand entails an anti-romantic element which, accordingly, is far more drastic than Laurie's unreturned "crush". The disrupted romance is directly linked to the concept of visibility/invisibility that clearly dominates both Wanda's and Laurie's story. The novel's title *Under a Thin Moon* alludes to the idea of invisibility: the moon is not a source of light in itself, it needs the sun, the "centre" to function. The adjective "thin" intensifies its unimpressiveness. Moreover, this expression may symbolise another aspect of life in British society. According Michael Ferber, the moon in literature stands for a symbol of time, a measure of time and phases (cf. Ferber 130). In that respect, the description "thin" may allude to a "meagre" and "barren" time for the British working classes: the Thatcher area – in which the novel is set.

The remaining characters, an alcoholic mother, a physically abused wife and her violent husband; and a young couple with severe financial problems only come to the fore very sporadically. They can be labelled as "static characters", as they do not change. They essentially symbolise class shame, however do not react to it.

Bethan Roberts: *The Good Plain Cook* (2008)

Bethan Roberts was born in Oxford in 1973 and brought up in a town nearby Abingdon. Unfortunately I have not been able to find out about her family background. She has appeared on the literary horizon so recently that there is hardly any information to be found about her yet. Roberts has earned MAs from Sussex and Chichester Universities and teaches creative writing at Goldsmith University of

London. She was awarded a Jerwood/Arvon Young Writers' Prize for The Pools. Robert now lives in Brighton. *The Good Plain Cook* is her second novel. It is set in 1936 in Sussex and it tells the story of the 19-year-old working-class girl called Kitty Allen, who works as a cook for a wealthy bohemian family: Ellen Steinberg – an American artist, who lives with her boyfriend George Crane, a communist poet, and Ellen's 10-year-old daughter Geenie. Geenie does not attend school but is taught drama and arts by her mother. None of the adults works in (what would be commonly considered) a regular job. The patchwork-family also has a gardener called Arthur. Kitty, who grew up in grinding poverty amongst traditional laborers, experiences a deep cultural shock caused by the unconventional lifestyle of her employers – especially when she hears them debate about literature and arts and sees them sun-bathe in the nude during work-days. Jenny Linford comments:

> The gap between Ellen Steinberg's expectations, as she casually orders "a quiche – like the French eat, you know the sort of thing", and the reality of Kitty's limited culinary ability offers a source for humour throughout the novel. At once funnier and sadder, however, is the tangled web of social misunderstandings and misplaced desires within the Steinberg household. Kitty has entered service in what is a self-consciously 'artistic' household.[...] It is symbolic of the revelations to come that Ellen has ordered the interior walls of the house she moves into to be knocked down. Love and lust are very much to the fore in this world that Kitty enters as an innocent. Ellen Steinberg prides herself on being open about her desires and wants, regardless of the effect this has on those about her. Selfish yet discontented, Ellen is the book's most vivid character, with the moment when she acknowledges to herself the part she played in her husband's death lingering on in one's mind. Her rampant sensuality, from nude sunbathing to her love affairs, is wittily depicted, with her encounter with a lustful hairdresser in the nearby town an enjoyably humorous episode. (Linford: "The Good Plain Cook")

It is not only Ellen's blatant openness about her lust that causes feelings of shame within Kitty who is forced to witness the rich woman's sexual activities. It also causes the housemaid to wonder if her inexperienced sex life (Kitty is a virgin) is "normal". As pointed out previously, "normality" as a construct of what is accepted and "right" in society plays a crucial role in the dynamics between centre and margin. In addition to this, Kitty feels shame due to Steinberg's expectations of her housemaid's culinary arts which she is, in fact, not endued with. Kitty's shame is, first of all, reflected in the way Kitty addresses and responds to her boss Ellen Steinberg during their first encounter: "'Yes, Madam. I mean, no, Madam' [...] No, Madam`", whereupon the other woman replies: "'Stop calling me that. It makes me sound like a brothel-keeper'" (11). The sharp contrast not only lies in the respective type of utterance–

response versus imperative – but mostly in its tone: Kitty appears distant, polite and obedient by calling her boss “madam”; whereas the comment that is put into Ellen Steinberg’s mouth bears a strongly colloquial and rude tone. This not only demonstrates the polarised power positions between employer and employee, but more significantly, it takes up the issue of class and language usage whilst exposing the middle-class women’s vulgar tone: the ‘intellectual’ Ellen does not avail herself of exalted speech, but appears rather rough when using the word ‘brothel’. Hence Roberts challenges stereotypes of classed language usage. She thus goes a step further than Livi Michael, as she not only exposes the relationship between language usage and class, but takes them to absurdity by confusing the roles: “working-class Kitty” is polite, “educated Ellen” is rude. Kitty keeps up her politeness/obedience, despite her bosses’ objection to it, and almost automatically, as it seems, replies to most of Ellen’s utterance saying “Thank you, Mrs Steinberg’ [...] ‘Thank you, Mrs. Steinberg’, she repeated” (13). In addition to this form of shame, expressed in speech, I detected another mode of presenting shame; namely in the protagonists bearings. When Ellen’s boyfriends welcomes Kitty to the house and her new job “she did a bob [...] her knees bent and she cast her eyes to the floor” (24). This is reminiscent to the concept of invisibility, as she makes herself smaller, almost appears to hide away, taking her eyes from her employer. In another scene, Kitty’s wish to become invisible, out of shame, becomes literal. Here, Ellen’s daughter Geenie expresses her dislike about the food that the housemaid is cooking; so “Kitty tried to make herself as invisible as possible by sliding past mother and daughter, sitting at the table and beginning to shell the peas” (156).

Later on in the text, Kitty is again described as making a bob before backing out of the room (208). In this respect, it is different from the perceived invisibility described in *Under a Thin Moon;* which seems more like a reaction to the “centre”. Kitty’s hiding, on the contrary, is an active expression of shame; it is quasi an embodiment of the margin. Here, invisibility, shame and margin are linked and put in equal terms again. As pointed out in the preliminary notes, the shame of the working classes is connected to the processes of commodification. Accordingly, Kitty is being referred to as a “thing” (206) (“’How’s the little thing coming on?’ asked Laura” about Kitty’s qualities as a cook). Interestingly, while Kitty becomes objectified and hence, “dehumanised”, another process takes place: kitchen utensils and food become

humanised. By anthropomorphising commodities on the one hand and dehumanising the worker on the other, Bethan Roberts creates a topsy-turvy world. The twisted imagery can be labelled a personification, although it is a very subtle form of this stylistic device (Cf. Morner& Rausch 165): the attributed characteristics are not blatantly obvious anthromorpophised (to exaggerate this point: the food neither has arms and legs nor can it speak), but the description of the cooking commodities definitely entails an allusion to human characteristics, as in: "In the larder, she was *greeted by bottles* and bottles of wine, stacked all around the walls" (25) [my emphasis]; and in "there was a *stubborn* mark just there; beneath the table" (120) [my emphasis]. Also, Kitty thinks of "her abandoned bucket" (127), and tries to arrange the Sunday's meal-mutton cutlets so that they are "bread-crumped, deep fried, and served *standing upright* around a mound of peas. Last night, every time she'd closed her eyes, Kitty had seen sheep wearing frilly white cuffs" (148). [my emphasis]. The humorous effect in the last phrase emphasises that Kitty is so absorbed in and overwhelmed by her work that her "world is turned upside down". This is what, in the quotation explaining commodification, has been called "phantom substantiality" (cf. Joseph Gabel 146).

"Phantom substantiality" also becomes evident here: "She began scrubbing again, concentrating on the sounds of the bristles on the flags. A ragged rasp, rasp, rasp. It reminded Kitty of her mother's breath when she's taken her to bed after Lou was married" (119). Thereupon, Kitty remembers her mother's death. This comparison of the kitchen tool's sounds with her mother's last breathing make them appear as if they are animated and bestowed with a mystical character. Thus, this working process indeed strikes Kitty like a "natural power would do" (cf. Gabel 146). Kitty is – literally – alienated (cf. *Theoretical Background).* Also, the personifications of lifeless objects, combined with the death of a human life, skillfully outline the process of commodification and the creation of a topsy-turvy world under the exploitive capitalist system. The personifications are an expression of shame; yet they cannot be clearly attached to either centre or margin. I would like to suggest that the personifications are an expression of the dynamics between the power of the centre and the reaction of the marginalised and oppressed working-class people to it.

As in Livi Micheal's text, resistance is also signified by the characters' actions and thoughts in this novel. Roberts also invents another character for this, namely the

gardener Arthur. Towards the novel's ending, resistance is also embodied by the "shameful" Kitty herself. Her expression of resistance against the oppressive dominant culture bears a strong physicality and is not as language-based as in Michael's novel. It is described that, after the scene in which Ellen Steinberg sharply criticises Kitty for her cooking and stultifies her in front of all her guest (210-211), Kitty –emotionally– breaks out of her obedience: "Anger made her body want to move, to lash out at something" (231). Interestingly, in this particular scene, the issue of classed language is taken up again, whereby the "cultivated" Ellen who is blaming Kitty for embarrassing the Steinberg-household with her cooking is exposed again: she calls the overdone food being served a "fucking incinerated fish" (211). Roberts leaves it to the reader to decide which of the two women is being embarrassing in front of the guests. Again, stereotypes are broken up, roles are confused and a topsy-turvy world is created in terms of language usage. The author creates multiple facets of upside-down moments; which seem to be her strategy to highlight and to question the positioning of centre and margin. To this upside-down imagery also belongs the slowly brewing love-affair between Kitty and Ellen's boyfriend George Crane, the communist poet. It is described how he praises her duties; expresses his admiration of her stitching work that she, so he says, should be very proud of (217-219). It is striking that George's gestures of affection and flirtation only happen in the context of Kitty's manual work. Hence the way he treats the object of his desire is in fact an objectification that is due to her class position: Crane appears to be projecting and hoping to be able to live up his political ideologies via a bond with Kitty, the representative of the working classes. George is characterised with a passionate solidarity with the working classes: "Crane always became so deadly serious whenever he started on about Marx and how the world's future lay in the hands of the workers" (140). He consistently talks about "the misery of the unemployed, the suppression of the working classes, how only revolution could bring true equality and an end to the class system that was tearing the country apart" (140). Crane is member of a socialist party. His political commitment in favour of the oppressed seems honorable to Kitty, yet it is questioned by another worker: Arthur, the gardener of the Steinberg household:

> 'I think it's good', said Kitty, keeping her fingers taut in his, the way Mr. Crane stands up for the working classes.' Arthur gave a loud laugh over her head. 'He's just playing at it.

> Underneath all that talk, the *Daily Worker* and all that claptrap, he's like the rest. He's one of them.' 'At least he cares.' [...] 'Crane doesn't know anything about the working classes, Kitty. Have you ever seen him do any actual *work?'*(235)

Like the character Shelagh in Michael's novel, whom I have referred to as the protagonist's "resistant part"; Arthur embodies resistance. He exposes and ridicules Crane's attitude as "claptrap" – that is idle talk – with no ambitions behind it. This is somewhat reminiscent of the idea of the reporter, who silences the working classes when trying to represent them (cf. *Theoretical Background).* The "representative" is even ridiculed by the gardener Arthur. His poignant comment (like Shelag's described above) signifies resistance again. It challenges the power positions between the dominant culture and the marginalised working-class. Just like Ellen Steinberg's "cultivated middle-classness" is unmasked by her rude talk, her politically committed partner is made look like a fool by the gardener Arthur. This not only downgrades the "intellectual" but simultaneously also upgrades the worker. Hereby, the power-positions are reorganized and the topsy-turvy world is counterbalanced. Strategies of resistance hence function to deconstruct the upside-down situation which dehumanises the workers.

The short-lived love-affair between Kitty and George Crane develops into a dramatic story: it lasts for one night, in which she loses her virginity to the "intellectual", and she is turned down by him the next day. Ironically, he leaves her as he has to set off to London to take part in a socialist conference. This conforms to the gardener Arthur's remark that Crane ultimately eschews work. "Real" work/labour is symbolised by Kitty's body which he ultimately rejects. Kitty is left devastated, having lost her innocence to a man who, after a "unification" of middle-class male and working-class female, lets her down. It is not directly indicated in the text, yet Crane's behaviour is somewhat reminiscent of the scenes in some novels in my anthology that describe the sexual exploitation, combined with the economic exploitation of the female body. As will be shown in the chapter *Rape, Battering, Trauma* (chapter 5) sexual exploitation and commodification are connected. Poignantly, the intercourse happens at a cemetery, in-between graves. Also in the chapter *Rape, Battering, Trauma* it becomes clear that sexual exploitation and notions of death are deeply intertwined, resulting in suicide attempts committed by the victims. In *The Good Plain Cook,* the matter of death remains subtle and is merely alluded to by setting the sex

scene next to a grave – which yet is effective and additionally leaves a grotesque and bitter tinge to the short-lived cross-class romance. Indeed, after Kitty feels George Crane distancing himself, leaving a feeling of exploitation within her, phantom substantiality – a manifestation of commodification – overcomes her again: "She rolled out the pastry and put it in the oven to bake *blind*" (297); [t]he damp grass *licked* her toes as she headed straight across the lawn towards the studio, her dress swishing behind her" (299). [my emphasis] She is wearing a dress that she sewed herself to impress him with it. In a next scene, Crane is visiting her in her chamber to talk to her about the ended love affair. Yet he pays her compliments on the dress. Kitty replies:" 'It's the first time I've worn it,' she said, wishing her voice didn't sound so *small"* (300). [my emphasis] This utterance signifies shame, however the woman – significantly– seems aware of it for the first time. This then causes a change in her class consciousness. When George Crane makes it clear again that their love-story is over, Kitty remarks – pointing to the bed sheets he has sat down on: "You should wash those', she said, staring at the blankets. 'They smell' (301). Here, Kitty performs a move of resistance: Kitty not only throws an insult on Crane – indicating that he stinks – which is sometimes stereotypically used to put down workers (cf. Madeleine Hurd 234). She also challenges the division of labour and turns the gendered and classed roles within the Steinberg household upside down: Kitty tells him to wash her bed sheets that he "stank out" by sitting on them. As soon as Kitty has entered the level of resistance, she carriers on bridling against the dominant culture. The following morning, Kitty refuses to get up and do her household duties and stays in bed instead. She thinks: "Let the woman [Ellen Steinberg] get on with it. She wouldn't know butter from margarine, or a skillet from a saucepan. Let her pull the kitchen apart, if that's what she wants. See how she fares" (307). Imputing Ellen Steinberg the incapability to manage, Kitty demonstrates resistance. Kitty's resistant moves are even intensified in this scene: when Geenie knocks on her door, the housemaid expects that the girl is about to ask her to prepare the meals, she explodes: "'Can't you get your own lunch, just for once?'" (307).

As it turns out, Geenie comes to invite Kitty to having lunch which Ellen has prepared. Kitty joins them to eat and she is being served scrambled egg. "Kitty could tell by the way the egg fell with a heavy splat that it would be rubbery. The toast in the rack looked limp and cold" (308). A twofold upside-down scenario is created here:

first, the “bohemian” slips into the role of the housemaid and second, the housemaid is presented as the expert and is cricitsing the “bohemian” for her work. This reverse imagery of the “conventional” power positions between middle- and working-class subject consequently is evened out; the two differently classed women can, then, meet “on eye level”: the novel ends on a scene in which Kitty, Ellen and Geenie eat together. This demonstrates the effect of Kitty’s resistant action. Second, it signifies Ellen Steinberg’s solidarity with the working-class woman. It is not directly indicated in the text, yet Mrs. Steinberg’s behaviour may lead the reader to assume that she knows what happened between Crane and Kitty; and feels equally betrayed by him. It appears that this is the basis for a bonding between the two formerly diametrically opposed women. On a symbolic level, this signifies resistance against patriarchal power. So it is not only the lower-class woman that needs to bridle against male power.

Andrea Levy: *Never far from Nowhere* (1996)

Andrea Levy is a London-based writer who, after years of being considered a marginal voice, received the *Art Council Writer’s Award* and the *Orange Prize for Fiction* in 2005. As mentioned in chapter 2, Levy was born in England to Jamaican parents who were part of the post-war "Windrush" generation. The Caribbean hybridity is manifested in the characters of *Never far from Nowhere:* the names of the family members Rose, Newton, Olive and Vivien Charles represent a mixture of English, French and American influences. Furthermore, the family members differ in view of skin tone: Rose has “a fair skin with strong African features” (Levy 2), whereas her eldest daughter Olive is “darker” (1) and Vivien, the younger one, has a “light skin colour” (1). Interestingly, the father’s skin colour is not mentioned. Levy clearly focuses on the experiences of black females in Britain and, as the story deals with two sisters who differ in skin colour and who perceive their cultural identity in a different way, the author points at two important considerations established by Black feminists and postcolonial feminists (cf. *Theoretical Background*). *Never far from Nowhere* begins with Vivien’s narration, who introduces herself via a comparison to her sister.

> We were sisters and we looked alike. We had the family resemblance passed down from our father's side. A large nose and correspondingly large ears, but somehow not out of place. Somehow looking right on our oval-shaped faces; Olive's more refined than mine, more symmetrical. *But* I had a light skin – a high colour. In a dim light I could be taken for Italian or Spanish. *Olive was darker. Black. The Caribbean legacy.* (Levy 1) [my emphasis]

The comparison between the characters is structured in a particular way. After enumerating many details that make the sisters look similar, Vivien "buts in" into her own description and moves on to their differences. It seems that Vivien's main point of comparison is their difference in skin colour. This effect is created by the sentence structure. Whereas the descriptions of the shape of their faces are presented in a hypotactic syntax that is extended by the use of adverbs and adjectives, the phrases describing Olive's skin tone are built up by a parataxis and a one-word sentence, followed by a two-word phrase. It appears that Vivien is dwelling on details before coming to the gist of the matter: Olive's black skin.

In order to elucidate the reason for her lighter skin, Vivien provides the reader with the family history, naming her fair-skinned ancestors (2) who caused her and her mother's lighter skin. By comparing herself to Olive, Vivien is othering her older sister; she draws a binary distinction between "light" and "dark" and identifies herself with the former – whereas Olive is attached to the opposite. Furthermore, Vivien's choice of words is striking: she uses the expression "high colour" in order to describe her skin tone. The adjective "high" is a synonym for "upper" and it functions as a relational term: by using this word, Vivien (symbolically) positions herself to an elevated vantage point and surveilles her darker skinned sister Olive. According to postcolonial theory, the process of othering is not a conscious process or "decision", but rather an unconscious mechanism activated by the psyche's urge to gain identity. Therefore, by picturing and comparing herself to Olive, Vivien is describing herself; she needs the other to present herself. The comparison works on the basis of a "cultural centre" – the White Britain – that defines and dictates how the skin colour is meant to look like. Vivien's complexion is closer to this "centre of colour" and hence her statement about being lighter-skinned, which appears to make her feel "better" (expressed in the term "higher"), hence signifies shame. Olive, on the contrary, makes a point by repetitively calling herself a black person: "I am black. [...] It's a political statement, not just a fact" (8). Translating this into the concept of invisibility, it can be said that Olive makes herself visible via this statement and hence signifies

resistance. I would like to suggest that the characters respectively stand, at large, for the concepts of shame and resistance. This hypothesis can be backed up by the fact that the narration is built up by altering viewpoints, each presented in a first-person narration. However, the elder sister sometimes demonstrates shame which yet fades away in the course of the story, particularly at the novel's beginning. For Vivien, on the other hand, I could only detect one move of resistant action. Her shame is intensified by another resistant contrast figure: her boyfriend Eddie that I will also come to describe in the following:

Vivien

After providing details about her ethnic background and the reason for her lighter skin (cf. page 3), Vivien moves on to a description of her parent's professions, explaining her father's occupation before mentioning her mother's:

> He worked for London Transport. He started when he first came to his country as a ticket collector on the buses. 'No standing on top, hold on tight and ticket please', being the only things my dad learned to say without a broad Jamaican accent. After a few years he got what he called a 'chance' and trained to be a mechanic. [...] *Without him 'them buses stop halfway up hill, 'em wheels spinning and not going nowhere, puffing black smoke.' Without him, the fleet of London buses would be in very poor condition. So he got up at four every morning and came home stinking of petrol with his navy overalls black with oil up to the chest.* (Levy 2) [my emphasis]

Vivien not only ridicules her father's work, but also the way he presents his career advancement and his efficiency within society. Her ironic tone is reinforced by the direct quotation of his grammatically incorrect utterances, which contrast with his statement about his professional achievement and thus makes him look like a fool. Just like Vivien upgrades herself due to her colour of skin compared to her sister, she reaches a level of superiority over her father by putting down his job. Her mother, she informs the reader, "had two jobs. She helped prepare and serve the meals at the local school. Then when school was over she went to hospital where she pushed a trolley round Out-patients and Antenatal, serving tea to anyone who wanted it" (3). Her parent's occupations are working-class jobs that also represent a traditional distribution of gender roles. The gendered division of labour is relevant here. Vivien, however, questions her father's "provider/protector masculinity" which he tries to

underline when referring to the significance of his job and his social mobility, having the chance to train as a mechanic (2). As it turns out, the reason for Vivien being so critical about her parent's occupations is that she is very much concerned about her own social mobility. Her issues to identify with her working-class parents are pronounced at High School, where she is mingling and competing with middle-class pupils and thus developing a feeling of being disadvantaged (cf. 33, 35-36, 99,100, 115-117). Hereby, Levy touches upon a significant issue in working-class reality: In her essay entitled *Working-Class Women's Identity and Schooling*, Wendy Luttrell argues that social class and access to education are very closely connected; in her opinion, "talking about school is a code for talking about class" (Luttrell 6). This is due to the fact that there exist prejudices about social class and education; which has been pointed out in the analysis of Livi Michael's text yet shall be stressed here again. Deb Busman argues:

> In the dominant ideology of a middle-class mythology that passes all too often as simply 'how it is', unmarked in its bias and masking of privilege, intelligence is often represented as somehow belonging to the 'educated' of the owning class. In the social body of capitalism, the 'head' is the intellect and reason of university-achieved privilege that rules 'the body' of the 'ignorant masses' - the workers. Encoded in that representation of 'mind over matter' is that the well-to-do are the smart ones. [...] Denying and undermining the intelligence of certain groups of people has been a long standing tradition [...], a personalised and institutionalised tactic of oppression used to deny the rights and humanity of women, people of colour, and the poor and the working class. (Deb Busman 75)

This is also emphasised in Levy's novel in the context of Olive's school career. She experiences even stronger discrimination due to her darker skin colour, as will be shown at a later point. Vivien and her "working-class friend Carol" (Levy 10) face some obstacles when trying to enter the sixth-form. During their counselling interviews with the headmistress, Vivien and Carol are advised to take a typing course rather than do their A-level in history. As it turns out, they are actually not registered for their preferred course and "put down for typing" (118). The school authority not only expels them from studying humanities, but also forces them to take up an activity which is often practised to prepare students for a job as a secretary or office clerk – a job that none of them intends to do. These jobs are often understood as "careers for women" and thus, the discriminatory mechanisms carried out by the school authority work on two levels: class and gender. The girls are marginalised.

Their acceptance of the allocation to the courses signifies shame. They merge into the "course for working-class pupils" and become invisible to the dominant culture.

Also in terms of ethnicity, that is Vivien's "original non-British" looks, she signifies shame: "My hair was a lie. It wasn't really straight. It shouldn't have hung down my face like it did. It should have been frizzing up around my chin. Olive and I straightened our hair. But I didn't like people to know" (43). Likewise, Olive embodies shame in this context.

Vivien enters the sixth-form, taking A-levels in English and Art and, amongst other subjects, doing the typing course she has been allocated to. However, being instilled with the idea about her restricted possibilities, she calls herself a "B-stream-girl" amongst "A-stream" girls.

> The sixth-form was full of A-stream girls. Posh girls from nice homes and who lived in houses like me and Olive grew up, only after they had been done up, *moved all the riffraff out. It was full of girls who spoke Latin.*[...] B-stream girls didn't usually do A-levels – they went straight into the commercial class. [...] I was in the B-stream. B-stream girls handed out the programme or did the cloakroom at the open-day concerts, where the A-stream girls played their string instruments. We weren't as bad as the C-stream girls, who had to perform gym and show what uses can be made of a Victoria sandwich. A-stream girls went to university and studied English or History. B-stream girls made good wives and C-stream girls...well, Olive was a C-stream girl. (100) [my emphasis]

Vivien uses the symbols of the English National Curriculum's marking scheme in order to illustrate the societal hierarchy amongst pupils. The presentation of the "A-stream" girls seems exaggerated, as neither pupils nor teachers actually speak Latin. Nonetheless, this statement symbolises her bitterness and her remoteness from privileged learners. Furthermore, she calls "people like herself" "riff-raff", which is an expression for disreputable and undesirable people (cf. Oxford Dictionary Online: "riff-raff), which clearly illustrates shame. Along the principle of internalised oppression (see further explanation below), she puts herself in a better position than her sister Olive in order to cope with the oppression carried out by the educational system. Struggling to understand the texts of Charles Dickens, she blames her uneducated relatives and the upbringing in a "near-illiterate" social environment for her problems to compete with her classmates: "I had no one to talk to about books. The last book I had read because I wanted to was the *The Runaway Echo* in primary school, and that was only ten pages long. My mum's idea of a good read was *Women's Realm* and Olive's was a shampoo bottle" (214). By using a cultural

“instrument” such as a literary canon to define her family’s state of education and their social position, Vivien shows a desperate striving for a fixed cultural identity, that is, for the dominant culture. Being torn between the contradictory contexts of her working-class home (margin) and the academic world (centre), she experiences the feeling of non-belonging in either dominant or mariginalised culture. I would like to quote Eileen Bresnahan who combines the concept of working-class schooling with the mechanism of internalised oppression based on her own experience:

> [w]hat being working class does, too often, is to isolate the sufferer. She is not one of the group, but neither is she a member of another group. She has to define herself against the rest, and so she does this even with those like herself. She cannot identify with them for the same reasons that she cannot be identified with: because they are shabby and slow and too serious and have little fun to offer. Were she to identify with them, she would have to admit she is one of the despised. So instead she despises the others, despises those like her – and despises herself. Internalised oppression. I’ve long since known it’s called. Frantz Fanon; blah, blah, blah. In high school it matters little, in high school you just want to fit in. (Eileen Bresnahan 93)

Yet, the separation from her social background is interrupted when Vivien begins to go out with Eddie, a working-class boy. Vivien spends the weekends with him, joining his family frequently at the working-men’s club for a Sunday’s drink (181). As opposed to Vivien, Eddie signifies resistance all along the line. He expresses his awareness about his working-class identity and does not try to hide it; but rather pronounces it mainly through language usage. For instance, he uses the expression “blimey”, which is an East-London cockney working-class slang word (Oxford Dictionary Online: ”blimey”). At the same time, he is, through his speech, presented as quick-witted and eloquent. It is mainly his speech, his word plays, that attract Vivien to him already during their first encounter. They meet in a music club just before Eddie is about to play guitar in a concert, when Vivien – significantly – tells him that she is originally from Mauritius; on which Eddie asks her where exactly Mauritius is situated. Vivien does not know what to say.

> I didn’t know. ‘Oh I’m not sure...somewhere...it’s been a long time, you know.’ ‘Well I wish I was from somewhere,’ he laughed. And I said ‘I was born in this country. ‘Oh well, you’re a Londoner then, like me.’ [...] ‘Can’t stay long –my public awaits.’ He put his pint of beer to his lips and seemed to drink half the content in one gulp. ‘Nectar’ he said, as he breathed out. ‘I usually have a bottle of whiskey as well so I can use the neck as a slide on my guitar. He mimed moving the bottle up and down, and shook his head to the imaginary music. [...] I smiled at him. (137)

The shame that is expressed by the lie about her country of origin works on the level of ethnicity and is similar to what we will see in the analysis of Yasmin Hai's novel. But this is also closely connected to "class shame". The resistant Eddie, on the contrary, breaks up class shame. Similar also to Shelagh in *Under A Thin Moon,* Eddie makes a humorous comment about his working-class heritage, stating that he wished he was from "somewhere". The fact that Vivien enters a relationship with "working-class Eddie" signifies resistance, for once. She symbolically reunites with her "original class". This is the only resistant move this character performs and it does not last for long.

The fact that Eddie has left school at the age of sixteen soon begins to present a problem to the extremely studious Vivien. This increases dramatically when she finishes her A-levels and begins to apply for university. When she visits her future Art College in Canterbury for a taster day with him, she feels ashamed when Eddie is trying to talk to the professors. Once she begins her studies at Canterbury Art College, she can feel the difference between herself and the middle-class fellow students. At first, Vivien narrates her experiences of culture clashes, for example the shopping-tour with "posh" Victoria, in a humorous way:

> I followed Victoria around. She picked up pots, turned them over and read the bottom. [...] 'Suzie Cooper for thirty pounds', she said. 'Mummy will go mad for it.' I understood. My mum would certainly go mad if I paid thirty pounds for an old teapot. (251)

Even though Vivien retreats to humour, she cannot overcome her class shame. Instead, her non-belonging and discomfort about her origin become more serious. She begins to tell lies about her family and is deeply ashamed when her boyfriend Eddie reveals the "truth" about her:

> 'Here, Vivien', Eddie said, 'your friends here don't know you're a cockney like me. They thought you was posh.' I laughed: What else could I do? I'd let people believe I was from Islington – one of the big houses near Gibson Square. My father was an engineer, I'd say, my mother's is in catering. I went to Grammar school. I let them make up the rest. 'No, she's a good old salt of the earth like me - council estate. She likes a knees up, don't you, Viv?' [...] There was silence. (265)

Shame and resistance are distributed and attached respectively to both characters; which recalls the idea of a division, of "schizophrenia". Hereby, Vivien and Eddie become polarised characters. Vivien's fabrications point at two important factors:

firstly, at the powerful hegemony of the ruling classes' value systems and secondly, at the constructiveness of identity. She lies in order to fit in, to be accepted and successful. After Eddie's comment, the young lovers end up having a fight that eventually precipitates the end of their relationship. It is somewhat tragic that Vivien cannot integrate Eddie into her "new" life, him who is the likeable and quick-witted "anti-hero" of the clichéd working-class world (meaning the cliché of the silenced, "illiterate" worker). Vice versa, it is striking that he cannot accept Vivien's success and her joy and fulfilment when studying arts – to him, it is nothing else than crossing classes and a denial of her working-class background. This is also a form of a failed cross-class romance between the upwardly mobile Vivien and the resistant Eddie, albeit not as pronounced as in Livi Michael's novel.
Furthermore, Vivien's adaption to the academic world provokes a fight with her "resistant" sister Olive, who calls her a "spoilt brat" (277). Vivien retorts:

> You act as if I was born in Buckingham Palace and you were born here. As if we grew up in different places. Didn't have the same mum and dad. Didn't go to the same bloody school. But we did. We had the same chances, we started from the same place. 'And'; I pointed in her face, 'and you chose to lead your life and I chose to lead mine.' (278)

This comment poses the question if Olive actually has the same choices or if she, due to skin-colour stratification, is too invisible to the dominant culture to succeed the academic world. Reviewing Olive's story, it becomes clear that she, as we will see, faces many obstacles which obscure her freedom to choose.

Olive

"'The black sheep of the family.' My mum said that once as a joke. 'Olive is the black sheep of the family.' [...] And the silly thing is, I smiled. Stupid, really" (6). Olive's mother Rose Charles alludes to her daughter's skin colour whilst referring to the negative connotation of the colour black in this expression, which stands for "failure", "uselessness", "being the odd one out". Olive is positioned to the lowest "rank" in the family hierarchy. The stigmatisation as the "good-for-nothing" instills feelings of shame within her (7). Yet Olive soon develops a strategy of resistance by stressing

and proclaiming her “blackness”: “I wanted to be black. Being black was nothing to be ashamed of, being Black was something to be proud of” (8).

It is not Olive, but her mother Rose Charles who creates much confusion about her daughter’s outer appearance. Whilst calling her a “black sheep” on the one hand, she denies her blackness on the other: “No, Olive, you’re not black, and that’s enough of this stupidness” (7) says her mother after Olive declares herself a Black person. Olive counters: “Well, I’m not white, I have to be something” (7). Interestingly, by presenting white and black skin colour as polar opposites, Olive denies the existence of people with a skin colour lighter than black, even though her sister Vivien and her mother are described as being fair-skinned Blacks. Whilst describing black and white skin as contrasts, the author reminds the reader of the fact that the concept of skin colour is based on a binary distinction and that the notion of black cannot exist without the notion of white. Thereby, Levy alludes to what Frantz Fanon points out in his famous work *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967). Fanon asserts that white civilisation and European culture have forced an “existential deviation” on Black people: “ What is called a black soul is a white man’s artefact” (16). Whilst analysing the psychological effect of colonisation, Fanon aims at a deconstruction of the dichotomy of inferior and superior (12-14).Being a Black girl in a predominately white school, Olive experiences skin colour stratification at school: even though she passes the “elevenplus”[39] test at high school, she is never encouraged to enter the sixth-form. This is presented to be due to racial discrimination (cf. Levy 25). As a reaction to this, Olive takes resistant measures: “I broke a stink bomb in assembly on my last day. The smell was disgusting. [...] The headmistress said she was glad to see the back of me” (26). Resistance is also established when Olive, like Vivien, falls in love with a working-class boy – whom she describes as a man who, according to her, is kind, mature, soft-natured and intelligent (38-39).

> He could talk, too. Not just about himself like most of them. He talked about worker’s rights, exploited labour and the right to strike. [...] And when he asked me, where I came from, I didn’t do what I usually did – stick my hands on my hips and shout London, England – I told him that my parents were from Jamaica. And he said he thought so. Then

39 This is an exam which is carried out in the last year of primary education in Great Britain.

> he talked about how black people were exploited and how we should get together with the workers to overthrow all oppression. (Levy 39)

Unlike her little sister, however, she does not leave her working-class boyfriend but instead gets married to “proletarian Peter” (cf. 40) and bears a child to him. Their wedding is presented as a fairly rushed business, as it is held on a Wednesday and the few guests that are present hurry back to work after the short ceremony. In this context, the reader gains insight into Olive’s thoughts about the ceremony not being a “proper wedding”: “The ceremony was at two-thirty and we got to the building at about quarter to two. It didn’t look like somewhere to get married in, it looked like a swimming-pool building. [...] but I was more concerned about Maggie, my witness, who was still wearing her Marks and Spencer’s overall. [...] And nobody had brought any confetti” (85). The character’s disappointment and concern are about not complying with a standard of what a wedding ceremony should be like. These are her impressions of “not being normal”, a principle that – as explained above – is connected to the dynamics of shame and resistance; as what is considered as “normal” is socially constructed by a dominant culture. This is one of the few (in fact, two) scenes in which Olive signifies shame which is skillfully expressed in this phrase, which I would like to declare metaphorical for Olive’s shame based on her skin colour: “There was a black fingerprint right in the middle of the white icing on the wedding cake” (85). The term “middle” is reminiscent of the concept of the cultural centre. The black spot at this “centre” is misplaced, unwanted and disruptive – just like Olive feels misplaced and unwanted in Britain’s “white centre”. After the wedding, the baby Amy is born. The reproduction of another working-class subject signifies resistance as well. In addition to this, Olive not only proclaims their workingclassness (39), but stresses their daughter’s “blackness”: “I tell Amy that she is black. But she has a very pale skin. Her dad was a white man. English, and she’s inherited his colouring. Lots of people don’t believe she belongs to me – but she does, every last little crack and hair of her”(8). This excerpt bears a form of resistance that is hidden in-between the lines. Making her character stress that the daughter Amy is hers, Levy alludes to an extremely powerful oppressive practice in Black women’s history: taking away the women’s children, who often were sired by the White masters. Margaret Hunter reminds us of the fact that

> One of the key phenomena to understanding skin colour stratification [...] is the history of sexual violence against African women by white men during slavery. The social order established by white men was founded on two inseparable ingredients: the dehumanisation of the African on the basis of rape, and the control of women's sexuality and reproduction. [...] This violent method of social control produced two important effects. The first and most obvious result was the creation of racially mixed children by white fathers and black mothers. The second long-term effect was the creation of a colour hierarchy through systematic privileging of light-skinned [people] over darker skinned [people]. (Hunter 17)

This is closely connected to the history of social class, since the brutal practice of rape and taking away the children bears strong capitalist interests: During slavery, rape was one of the most powerful white masculine mechanisms to oppress Black females and to control their reproduction in order to "produce more slaves", that is more "working tools" (cf. Hunter 17). It is indicated in the previous quotation – by the phrase "her dad was a white man" – that the family does not stay together. As it turns out, Peter leaves Olive for a white woman. This is somewhat reminiscent of the failing cross-class romance; only that it is not a class but a "cross-coloured" relationship that does not work out in the end. This comparison may seem hasty and oversimplified – after all, there are completely different dynamics involved in those two types of (failing) romances: the cross- class romance has, as we have seen, a long tradition in literary history. Also, it could be argued that a cross-class romance does not show a convincing resemblance with "cross-coloured" relationships, which sometimes bear strongly sexualised tendencies and rape – thus are frequently connotated with fear, shock and pain – rather than being about the female's upward-movement.[40] Yet the aspect of a failing relationship between two people who differ in their social identity is somehow reminiscent of the cross-class romance that also persistently fails in the texts under examination. The atmosphere between the newly-wed couple becomes especially strained and even aggressive after the baby Amy is being born. One night, "Peter just kicked [her] leg really hard and screamed 'shut the fucking baby up (98)!'" During a fight, he calls her a "stupid hysterical black cow"

40 For instance, in Toni Morrison's *Sula* (1973), the Black main character Sula leaves the town to study in a big city. There are rumors that she is sleeping with white men and therefore is, upon her return, despised by villagers. Also, in the previously mentioned *The Unbelonging,* Joan Riley's protagonist Hyacinth senses a strong threat of falling victim to rape when she befriends a white boy (cf. Riley 1985). Additionally, to come back to the influences of Black American Fiction, Richard Wright's main character Bigger accidently kills the white girl Mary whilst "silencing" her with a pillow in a situation that potentially looks like he is about to rape her .

(125). Peter, the “left-winger”, usually revolting against the oppression of Black people, now throws a racist insult at Olive. The latter reacts as follows:

> That’s when I went for him. I had had enough. I made a grab for his throat. It was like an instinct. He looked surprised. Then he pushed my hands off and I came back at him and started hitting him round the head. I just couldn’t stop myself. I wanted to hurt him. He held my hands up and I stopped struggling for a bit. We looked each other in the face, in the eyes. Then he said, ‘That’s done it’. He smiled, let go of my hands, walked out of the flat and slammed the door behind him. (125)

This is the first time Olive defends herself against a racist comment. Having bottled up all the previous attacks from her mother, her psychological pain now is transformed into aggression, leading to physical violence against the aggressor. The short, paratactic sentence structure tells the reader that Olive’s actions almost happen automatically, leaving her breathless.

Being called a black cow is the “last straw” in a row of insults. Olive begins to fight back and, in this scene, the reader is taken back to the discourse of resistance: now aggressive resistant action. Thereupon, Peter leaves for good. However, as will be shown in Yasmin Hai’s and Buchi Emecheta’s story, physical (counter-) violence cannot straightforwardly be labelled resistance. By hitting back, Olive creates a so-called “reverse discourse” (Francis Restuccia 106) which, “as Foucault describes it, does not simply produce a mirror reversal – a pure one-to-one inversion of the existing terms of the discourse it reverses. It is a discourse that takes us into a new direction” (quoted in: Restuccia 106). The physical violence carried out by Olive is an extended form of resistance, which will be discussed in detail in the chapter *Rape, Battering, Trauma.*

To come back to the insults enacted by Olive’s mother, it needs to be examined what function this mother-character has. At first sight, she seems to work as the bad character (the “baddie”) that automatically puts her daughters in a better light, underlining their strength and courage when struggling to overcome the discriminative mechanisms in Britain. Also, when comparing this to the novels described in the chapter *The Mother-Daughter Plot* it can be argued that she symbolises the colonising mother-country. She is teaching her children how to be in the world. She mimics the coloniser when violently imposing her cultural values – which are shaped by the brainwash through the colonisation – onto her daughters. In this novel, the mother’s particular history is outlined, and this is extremely relevant to

this story. The character Vivien points to the idea that her mother seems to be affected by a profound inferiority complex based on internalised oppression. When trying to find out about her psychological wounds, the reader can find information about her past at the very first page: “My mother [is] a country girl, brought up on a farm near Savannah-la-Mar in Westmoreland. [...] Her great-grandmother was a slave” (2). Rose has been brought up in an environment where the devastating aftermath of slavery was probably passed down to the next generations and who thus grew up with instilled inferiority, oppression and abuse. Rose’s self-esteem appears to be deeply marked by the consequences of an era of inhuman cruelty. The way she treats her daughters is possibly the way she has been raised herself. Thus, the story of Rose is an example of “history repeating itself”. Hereby, Levy points out how deeply historical modes of oppression based on gender, class and ethnicity that reach far into twentieth century Europe.

Towards the end of the novel, Olive falls victim to another form of strong skin colour stratification: institutional racism. Whilst driving at night in a borrowed car with faulty headlights, she is suddenly stopped by two police officers who require seeing the documents that prove her ownership of the car. Failing to do so, the white men force her to hand out her personal belongings for an “investigation”: “Get that fucking bag out here and empty it, and keep your dirty black mouth shut” (258). Olive follows the order and shortly after one of the policemen has frisked it, she is asked to open it again: “I forgot what was in there. Empty it again, you lippy nigger bitch” (258). There is now marijuana inside, which obviously has been planted by one of the authorities and there is nothing Olive can do against this dirty trick carried out by the policemen. She is accused of possessing cannabis and even her solicitor tells her to plead guilty in order to discontinue her suit. Here, the climax is reached: Olive has had enough of her life in Britain:

> I’ve decided – I’m going to live in Jamaica. Live in the sun and watch Amy playing on beaches. I’m going to live somewhere where being black doesn’t make you different. Where being black means where you belong. (273)

This cannot be entirely categorised as resistance; rather it has strong features of what I have labelled “return” (cf. *Theoretical Background).* Unlike her fair-skinned sister Vivien who embraces hybridity, Olive longs for identification with her “origin”. It becomes clear that “return” cannot be equated with resistance; since a return is

somehow imposed onto the marginalised person by the forces of the dominant culture and hence it "sabotages" the oppressed subject's resistance.
However, when it comes to class, Olive – as opposed to her sister – clearly does embody resistance again:

> Vivien thinks she's escaped, with all her exams and college and middle-class friends. She thinks she'll be accepted in this country now. One of them. She's pleased with herself – turned her back on everything she knows. My little sister thinks she's better than me. She looks down her nose at me and thinks I've wasted my life. But I know more about life than her. Real life. Nothing can shock me now. But Vivien, one day she'll realise that *in England, people like her are never far from nowhere.* Never. (273)

Olive's "return" is literally opposed to Vivien's "escape" in this scene. Olive thinks that Vivien, having completely adapted to the English culture, will never belong anywhere. Levy puts this thought into the expression *Never far from Nowhere,* the skilfully created title of her novel. The title *Never far from Nowhere* consists of a chiasm; the two adverbs of direction "far" and "from" stand next to each other, the first and the last word ("never" and "nowhere") are both absolute and negating terms. Therefore, this expression shows the metric structure "ABBA". The fact that the respective related terms are alliterated creates a certain effect: the title is melodic, catchy and promises a highly dynamic narrative – which it certainly is.

Yasmin Hai: *The Making of Mr. Hai's Daughter* (2008)

Yasmin Hai was born in 1971 in London to Pakistani parents. She works as a current affairs journalist for the BBC in London. Her father was a communist; he was prosecuted by the Pakistani government and forced to immigrate to England in 1964. His wife followed him a few years later. In her autobiography *The Making of Mr. Hai's Daughter,* Yasmin Hai tells her father's life story as an Asian exile in Britain and she reveals how his attitudes and lifestyle shaped her Asian-British identity in twentieth-century London. However, in the following analysis I will differentiate between Yasmin Hai, the author, and the narrator Yasmin (cf. comment on difference between narrator and author in chapter 4, *The Mother-Daughter Relationship).* In an interview, Hai summarises the first six chapters of her autobiography as follows:

> Our father instilled in us a very clear idea of what our identity in Britain should be. He strongly discouraged us from taking an interest in our Muslim past and urged us to adopt

> English people's ways – even when our white neighbours told us how we were a prime example of how the area was going down the drain. But, as far as my father was concerned, the quicker we became proficient in English ways, the more likely we would prosper here. [...] We were given crash courses in English table manners, regularly taken to see English plays and pantomimes, and my sister and I were even given short haircuts in the style of Milly-Molly-Mandy. Anything to prevent us from being mistaken for traditional Indian girls. He ordered to stop speaking Urdu, the only language my mother properly spoke. Instead, it was decided that we only speak to her in English. (Yasmin Hai: "First Person")

Mr. Hai has a strong desire to assimilate himself and his family to the dominant culture; and in this context, language usage also plays a vital part in the autobiography. It is not only a conflict between Urdu and English, but also between a middle-and working-class way of speaking, which the narrator also presents as a dichotomy of academic and non-academic language usage (cf. 131-135). Having grown up in "working-class Wembley" and having achieved a middle-class profession (see above), Hai states in another interview that "class is a major issue in shaping people's identities. [She adds:] 'I don't think it's just working or middle class.'" In her opinion,

> it's more the people who move from working to middle class who have opportunities and yet haven't reached an understanding of the nuances and subtleties of culture here and they don't feel like they can be part of the middle class of this country, but don't want to move back to the working class either. (Shariq, "An Interview With Yasmin Hai")

Interestingly, in this statement Hai moves from class differences to ethnicity – and combines these two factors. She describes the conflict between the subject's cultural heritage and the adaptation to the dominant culture. Dominic Head, who closely examines post-colonial literature in his account on *Modern British Fiction* explains that the concept of Britishness contributes to the schizophrenia of identity, "since by defining colonial places and people as "British" they were made to subordinate to England and to the English, whilst being held, simultaneously, as different" (Head 124). The idea of schizophrenia can, as it may cause feelings of non-belonging and "inappropriateness", be translated into Fox's analysis of shame and resistance/ centre and margin. The dichotomy "margin and centre" becomes particularly clear in a chapter in Hai's novel entitled *Operation Middle Class.* This title foreshadows a development; it alludes to the upward movement of the working-class Asian female – who will undergo an "operation" of cultural adaption based on class, gender and ethnicity. The gender aspect comes to the fore since the autobiographical character's

"becoming British middle-class" takes place in the "Camden School for Girls". Here, ideals of femininity are exemplified, cultivated and imposed onto the pupils. Yasmin (the autobiographical narrator) learns that her father chooses this school for her, as it is deemed to be a respectable British middle-class institution: "For my father the key to Camden's appeal was its middle classness. My father always nodded approvingly whenever the word [middle class] was mentioned. [...] All girls were very English. I would later discover that there was only one other Asian girl and three black girls in my year" (128). The fact that Mr. Hai admits his daughter to this school demonstrates his desire to be recognised as a member of the dominant culture and thus illustrates shame based on both class and ethnicity. During her first days at school, Yasmin experiences the differences between her and her class mates. Cultural indicators like food and dress cause the feelings of non-belonging and inappropriateness within her: "During the morning break, as my new middle-class friends munched on their apples while I worked my way through my jumbo packet of Bejam salt and vinegar crisps – I decided that, shabby clothes aside, I wanted to be like them" (131). Pamela Fox stresses the role of food and dress in her contemplations on class consciousness (cf. preliminary notes) and states that it may cause shame within the marginalised subject. Yasmin not only begins to stop eating cheap food[41], but also completely avoids bringing in any sort of Asian food into school. "Yasmin's quest for Britishness led to a fight with another Asian girl, who taunted her for being a 'curry lover'. Asian food becomes a source of shame, enjoyed only in secret", comments a critic in a book review on Hai's autobiography (Zenga Longmore, "Growing up in No Man's Land"). Dress, on the other hand, does not always work as a class code in twentieth century Britain – this is what Yasmin experiences in the girl's school:

> The middle-class girls, like Becky and Sophie, were called 'trendies'. They might wear ripped jeans or wear hand-me downs from Oxfam – but I learnt that was just an indirect way of saying: 'Hello, I am middle class'. [...] That's when I learned I wanted to move into Becky's world, it was an imperative that I also abandon the *infantile world of my past*. It is amazing what a projected voice, a ripped pair of 501 and eating wholemeal sandwiches can do for one's image. In a after of a few months, I was moved up to all top classes – and hung out with Becky and her posse of *mature* girls on the train. (132). [my emphasis]

41 The sociologist Jack Goody, for instance, outlines the relationship between food and social class in his book called *Cooking, Cuisine and Class* (1996).

This recalls the previously discussed debate that class can be invisible in terms of dress and style (cf. chapter “Laurie as a University Student”). Rather, it is the trend, however “poor or posh” it looks, which creates the centre for a teenage girl. The description of a “ripped pair of 501s” entails a certain poignancy: the label “501” refers to expensive “Levi’s jeans” which are purposely damaged. So, the supposedly scruffy/impoverished look still needs to be a costly one in order to look “trendy”. Trend and beauty are ideologies just like other cultural values that have the power to marginalise. Yasmin’s desire indicates class shame – and as she appears to have completely stripped off traditional Pakistani clothes either because of her father’s attitude or due to her own will, it entails sense of shame for her ethnic background as well. By “merging into” the mainstream-look, Yasmin becomes invisible. Invisibility is an expression of shame/marginalisation again. It is the white middle-class girls that now set the standard for the female look. Rather striking are the terms “infantile” and “mature” which describe Yasmin’s desire to literally grow into the dominant culture (see above quotation). The difference between Yasmin’s past and her desired state of maturity is based on ethnicity (Asian versus English), class (obviously working class versus middle class) and gender (“outdated” look versus new cultured codes of femininity in terms of style and fashion). Hereby, Yasmin Hai highlights the power of the dominant culture, imposing a complex range of values and ideologies onto the cultural other. The clothes aspect plays a vital part in Hai’s autobiography; the autobiographical character is literally wearing the dominant culture’s identity. To put it into Fanon’s terms, she is wearing a “white mask” (cf. Fanon 3). Translating Fanon into class and gender terminology, she wears a white “middle-class” mask to adapt to the dominant culture’s ideals of a Western feminine look. Yasmin narrates a significant experience concerning her wearing the “white middle-class mask”. She describes how an unknown white English girl physically attacks her on the street:

> The girl suddenly turned towards me. Something about my clothing, a trendy blue and white striped top over a tight black pencil skirt seemed to wind her up even more. Maybe I looked too stylish for my own good. ‘You wanna slap’? she spat out, when I refused to look away. ‘Why? Do you want one?’ I retorted, slightly taken aback by the confidence of my voice. [...] The girl marching towards me, her heels slapping the ground hard. I put my arms up to ward her off and somehow the abruptness of my movement ended up shoving her away. Much to my horror, the girl went flying back onto a middle-aged man passing by. [...] I gained the upper hand. I – Yasmin Hai, studious, gentle Yasmin Hai – had managed to unsettle the girl . (Hai 144)

This reaction, that is, a white girl becoming aggressive by the cultural other wearing "her" style, could be explained as a reaction to what in post-colonial studies is called mimicry. Bill Ashcroft states that the "coloniser" may perceive the "colonised subject's" copying of Western cultural norms as threatening, as the cultural other appears to "mimic" the white subject by creating a "blurred copy" of it (cf. Ashcroft 139). Evaluating Yasmin's self-defense, it is tempting to analyse it as a sign of resistance and to interpret it in terms of the shame/resistance dynamic. But that would be incorrect, as resistance in terms of "cultural consciousness"[42] means the refusal of completely adapting to the dominant culture and instead "hear one's own voice". It is a form of counter-violence that I have described above. Yasmin begins to "hear her own voice" after she leaves high school behind and – more importantly– after her father has died:

> These days, I wonder whether the price to belong can be too high. [...] But I think about what my father did in order to belong. Here, I suppose, I must be thankful to him. Yes, he put me on a path of assimilation, but he also gave me the tools to take control of my life. [...] My father hadn't brought me up to cower behind tradition or to look to others to speak on my behalf. Even though I am a girl, he had always encouraged me to speak up for myself. *Time to reclaim his legacy, find my true voice – which lives between various worlds* – and work out the making of Mr. Hai's daughter. (333)

Finding and "hearing" one's own voice is what I would like to label an essential phenomenon of resistance against the dominant culture. Furthermore, the binary opposition between "dominant" and "oppressed" culture is deconstructed here by the expression "various worlds". This points to the concept of hybridity, yet not only in terms of a "mixed" ethnicity, but in terms of a cultural consciousness: Yasmin appears aware of the influences of both cultures and attempts to negotiate her identity out of the "two", which are, in fact, heterogeneous in themselves: they both inhabit "various worlds". Yasmin thus moves her way out of class/ethnicity shame and positively presents multiculturalism "united" in one person: namely in herself. And here, she becomes visible as a multi-faceted, enriched, round character. One could argue that the autobiographical character has achieved a strong cultural consciousness indeed.

42 I use this term instead of class consciousness at this point. It shall demonstrate the interrelation of class consciousness with the aspects gender and ethnicity.

Summary

“I am an invisible man. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids – and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible; understand, simply because people refuse to see me” (Ralph Ellison 3). These are the words of one of the most significant invisible characters in literature: Ellison’s *Invisible Man.* Recalling this novel, I was wondering if the Black male character could be a “prototype” of the invisible characters in the novels analysed. And I concluded that, yes, there are many similarities between Ellison’s novel and the working-class texts. Michael’s character Laurie also suffers from non-recognition which, like in Ellison’s story, takes place in a university context. The more existential case of non-recognition, Wanda, also can be compared to the Black character, who experiences harsh discrimination exerted by capitalist institutions. So too does the character Kitty at her workplace in the bohemian household. The invisibility-motive in both novels shows that the character’s bodies and minds are shaped by the dominant culture. They only become visible to the White capitalist as objectified and downtrodden subjects: their cultural identities, let alone their individual “personalities”, are ignored; their voices remain unheard. Moreover, the comparison to Ellison’s novel underlines the fact that the concepts of class and ethnicity are closely related in terms of being sources of non-recognition and oppression. On the other hand, invisibility in Ellison’s novel essentially symbolises the “sightlessness of others” (Alice Bloch 268), the oppression based on skin colour stratification and “the darkness of reality that the invisible man tries to fill with light” (268). As discussed in the analysis of Laurie’s story, her feelings of inadequacy and non-recognition are not always a reaction to discrimination based on class. For the most part, they are internal issues and a sign of her class consciousness. This is also true for Vivien in *Never far from Nowhere* and Yasmin Hai’s autobiographical character. Levy’s Olive, on the contrary, is subject to “external” institutional discrimination.

Feelings of shame are, as in Ellison’s novel, historically determined. So too is the inferiority feeling based on gender, class and ethnicity. In terms of femininity, Ellison’s novel can obviously not be compared to the texts under discussion. It is true for all novels discussed in this chapter that invisibility stands for shame, powerless and marginalisation. This is often expressed in above/below, light/dark metaphors (the

latter attribute referring to the working-class subject) and the character's body disappearing and "merging with the margin". The commodification that is enforced by the "centre" is expressed through personifications. On the other hand, becoming visible is a sign of resistance that challenges the dominant cultural centre: Laurie becomes visible as a threat to the capitalist system, Shelagh and Arthur by exposing and questioning the language of the dominant culture; Olive becomes literally visible by underlining her blackness and Yasmin by underling her multiculturalism as a positive trait. The character's struggle for recognition constantly oscillates between shame and resistance.

4. The Mother-Daughter Relationship

teach me to survive my

momma

teach me how to hold a new life

momma

help me

turn the face of history

to your face

(June Jordan)[43]

Constantly moving between the lyrical subject's turning to and turning away from the "momma"-character, the poem evokes a profound ambivalence. These contradictory concepts incorporate dependence and independence, identity and difference, the wish of unity and traumatic loss, past and present at the same time. Whilst attempting to "turn" away, "survive" and "hold a new life", the speaker is still turning to and holding onto "momma", depending on her and asking insistently to "teach" her how to

43(quoted in: Valerie Kinloch and Margret Grebowicz 133). I am aware that the quotation of a poem creates an irregularity to this thesis, as this is the only lyrical text I include in my work. I decided to quote this poem, as it expresses what this chapter is about and thus is a very clear and vivid introduction to the mother-daughter relationship in working-class novels: the tone Jordan creates is strikingly similar to the daughter's voices in the novels under discussion. By unraveling the poem's ambivalence, I demonstrate how I will analyse the texts under discussion.

lead a life. Yet, there is change in the last three lines, which is introduced by the imperative “help me” instead of “teach me”. The choice of words indicates, although quite subtly, a growth in the speaker’s agency and her[44] independence from her mother. According to psychoanalysis, the separation of mother and daughter leads to a traumatic psychological experience of loss within the child; particularly when the father enters and “disrupts” the female bond (cf. Marianne Hirsch 4). As the daughter grows up, the intervening father-figure then becomes replaced by the male who courts the daughter. The separation takes place both physically (birth) and psychologically: according to Jacques Lacan, the acquisition of language is the consequence of the splitting of the subject when the union with the mother is ruptured and the child perceives itself as the other (cf. Adalgisa Giorgio 13). Literary representation of traumatic loss trace back to Greek mythology. The myth of Demeter and Persephone tells this story of loss: “The story of mother and daughter depends on Hades, the male figure whose intervention constitutes the disruption which prompts the narrative. [...] Loss is presented as inevitable” (Hirsch 5). Even though the father is not a central character in the novels under discussion, his mere presence, his masculinity and virility are presented as a disruption to the mother-daughter bond. This separation is also manifest in the poem quoted above. Its final line “help me turn the face of history to your face” not only indicates a separation, but also emphasises the daughter’s wish to distance herself from the mother’s past.

Strikingly, the phrase “help me turn the face of history to your face” mirrors exactly the voices in the novels under discussion. In Valerie Mason-John’s *The Banana Kid* (2008)[45] and Carolyn Steedman’s *Landscape for a Good Woman* (1986), as in Joyce Storey’s *The House in South Road* (2004), the protagonists are constantly struggling to free themselves from the aftermaths of their history mediated through their mothers. In all texts, the mother-character embodies the consequences of traumatic deeds against lower-class and non-white people such as slavery, colonialism and the

44 The expression “to hold a new life” presumably means “to give birth”. Therefore, I assume that the narrator speaks from the perspective of a female.

45 The novel was first published as *The Borrowed Body* in 2005 and renamed as *The Banana Kid* when re-published in a new edition by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF). The title is taken from a scene in the novel where the protagonist is called a “banana kid” in by her racist white classmates.

systematic exploitation of the working classes.[46] This is intensified by the fact that the mother-figure, by her gender, suffers a "double burden of oppression" in the history of imperialism (Steve Padley 175). Accordingly, the mother-characters in the texts under examination carry the traumas of the brutal exploitation of their ancestor's bodies. The "wounds of history" (quoted in: Victoria Burrows 8) seem to persist and to be passed on from generation to generation.

The following analyses will show that the aspect of social class, deeply embedded in all three novels under discussion, intensifies ambivalence: due to financial strains, the mother sometimes comes to consider her offspring as a burden. She begins to objectify them as "expensive items" (cf. Steedman 17, 39), who, at the same time, are wanted and cared for. This aspect of ambivalence will also be discussed. In her essay *Whiteness and Trauma,* Victoria Burrows theorises the representation of contradictory feelings in motherhood and mother-daughter relationships. She opens by asking the reader to

> imagine a densely threaded knot, one loosely entangled so that three-dimensional spaces are visible between the looped strands. This visual image has a double purpose. On the one hand, the knot suggests both the dense complexity and relational circuitry of the mother-daughter relationship which comprises separate subjectivities that are loosely tied together, bodily and psychically. These are interwoven with each other, joined but separate, the same and other, ambivalently fused by a sense of difference and commonality. [...] As knots can be untied and retied, they are not only processural and dynamic but their structuring is also relational and ambivalent. They can be knots of strength that hold things together, or snarls and obstructions that impede or hinder, or both at once. Knots bind one to one's own history – individual and collective – but the unraveling process provides a means of analyzing historical, socio-cultural genealogies that shape female subjectivity, a positionality always mediated through the axes of race and class as well as gender. (Burrows 1-2)

Burrow's description of the knot-metaphor clearly illustrates how the subjectivities of this relationship are "joined" and "the same" through the forces of history. It can be argued that the entanglement in mother-daughter relationships is stronger than in mother-son bonds, since mother and daughter are not only interloped in terms of class and ethnicity, but also by gender. Hence, the process of "turning away", of separating from the mother and the attempt to "turn the face of history to [her] face" is often hindered. Laurie Corbin reminds us that "women's need to separate themselves

46 cf. Ashcroft's explanation of the intersection of gender, class and ethnicity in chapter 1 (*Theoretical Background).*

from their primary caregiver is different from men's individuation. Men turn away from difference, women must turn away from the same" (Corbin 119).

I have briefly touched upon the different dimensions of ambivalence that are embedded in the mother-daughter bond along the lines of gender, class and ethnicity. For all novels being analysed, I will use the trope of ambivalence as a reading strategy and as an interpreting device. To analyse the "White British" novels, I will closely orient myself towards Burrow's knot-methaphor to analyse the texts. To analyse the postcolonial novel *The Banana Kid,* I will additionaly apply postcolonial theory that is concerned with ambivalence: Homi Bhaba's concept of mimicry, which he describes as follows:

> colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence, in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference [...] Mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is in itself a process of disavowal. (Bhabha 122-123)

As will be shown, the mother in *The Banana Kid* "mimics" the coloniser; she undergoes a "metamorphosis" from a black working-class woman into a white, male coloniser. In these moments of transformation, her daughter turns away from her; just like the daughters in the remaining two novels turn away from their mothers when they tend to act like powerful "males" towards their daughters and become the "same and other" to their children (cf. Burrows 1).

My aim is to unravel the narrative knot that ties the mother to the daughter-characters. I will attempt to tackle "untapped imaginative and theoretical spaces" that the knot-metaphor provides (cf. Victoria Burrows 1), whilst bearing in mind that "the mother-daughter knot, always entangled by its relationship to patriarchal oppression, racial and class domination and the exploitation inherent within white capitalist society, can never be separated from its own historicity" (Burrows 9).

Whilst analysing the texts, I will bear in mind aspects of the literary tradition of the mother-daughter plot. Whereas in Greek mythology a mother-daughter story emerged that is told from the perspective of the mother, who mourns the violent abduction of her beloved daughter by a man; the mother-daughter plot changed

dramatically across the centuries.[47] It was subject to a shift in perspective: according to Marianne Hirsch, it developed into a “heterosexual family romance”, dealing with male and female members of the nuclear family (Hirsch 9). She states that in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, this type of story structured the novels of male and female authors who wrote from the “perspective of patriarchy” (cf. 9-10). I have described the concept of the family romance in chapter 2. English novels that deal with adoption, orphanage and the concept of “noble” foster parents are, for instance, Henry Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews* (1742), and his *Tom Jones* (1949) and Jane Austen’s *The Watsons* (1803-1805). At the same time, a type of family romance emerged that transports a mysterious, “spooky” atmosphere: the Gothic Novel. Here, either the children or the adoptive parents or those who reveal themselves as the biological parents are dark and terrifying characters such as in Ann Redcliffe’s *The Italian* (1796) or, Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847). Margot Backhus argues that “the family romance has two faces: an idealised image that confers on parents the status and consequence of more highly ranked outsiders, and a converse demonic world” (Backhus 18).

Mainly the first type of family romance partly occurs in the novels under discussion. It will become clear that the three women writers Valerie Mason-John, Carolyn Steedman and Joyce Storey challenge and subvert the heterosexual family romance plot in order to underline their subjectivities as daughters and to question male dominance. This varies across the novels; Mason-John’s and Steedman’s texts demonstrate a clearly higher level of transgression from the traditional plot than *The House in South Road.* These differences will be discussed in the text analyses. The

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47 A description of the entire literary tradition would extend the scope of this thesis. However, I would like to add that according to Charlotte Daniels, this change is due to actual alterations in family life: “Throughout the seventeenth century and to a lesser extend into the eighteenth, the traditional family relied on strong ties with larger kinship and community groups for its support. Intrafamilial affection was not systematically part of such a structure. [...] Architectural records suggest that it was during the 18th century that families began to retreat from broader communities and kinship and to cloister themselves off in their houses. [...] Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* has suggested that changing marriage and family patterns were inextricable tied up with the concomitant emerge of the market economy and the novel. According to Habermas, an essential sense of self as a private entity came through the creation of the nuclear family. He argues that in the novel, that genre that emerged more or less in tandem with the market economy, that we find a concurring imagined space for this newly created formulated ‘je’.”(Daniels 23-26)

"imaginary interrogation of origin" is, however, a common principle in all texts under discussion and it works along the lines of gender, class and ethnicity. It leads to the "liberation of the female", which, according to Marianne Hirsch, is rooted in "the heroine's desire for singularity based on a disidentification from the fate of other women, especially mothers" (10). This, in turn, has caused another shift of narrative perspective in the twentieth century: Numerous mother-daughter stories are told through the eyes of the daughter-character only, as for instance Kate Atkinson's *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* (1995)*;* Maureen Duffy's *That's How It Was* (1960) and Jeannette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985). So too are the working-class novels under discussion, in which the father, as a character, clearly remains in the background. Male characters only become visible in the form of an unreachable masculine power that influence the mother-daughter relationship dramatically. They are, like in Greek mythology, disruptive entities, however their intrusive power is demonstrated via innovative narrative techniques.

Valerie Mason-John: *The Banana Kid* (2005)

Valerie Mason-John was born in 1962 in Cambridge. She is a Black playwright, author and performance poet. Mason-John uses the stage-name "Queenie". She wrote articles for various national publications, including *The Guardian*, *The Voice* and *The Pink Paper*. She is also a former editor of *Feminist Arts News*,directed *Pride Arts Festival* for four years, and the former artistic director of *London Mardi Gras* (Contemporary Writers, "Valerie Mason John"). Her debut novel *The Banana Kid* tells the story of Pauline, a Nigerian girl who is conceived through rape. Pauline's mother Wumni, who immigrates to England whilst pregnant, gives her away to white foster parents. The novel is told in a first-person-narration and is introduced with the I-as-a-narrator's siring:

> I could have been born and raised in Africa. [...] Instead I borrowed the body of a Nigerian woman who was trying to set sail to the land of Milk and Honey. [...] I jumped inside her body in the hopes that [...] I would be a love child. [...] It was not love, but hate which was bringing me into the world, she had been a victim of rape. (Mason-John 4)

Staying with her white foster family in Essex, Pauline grows up in middle-class surroundings. As her adoptive parents realise they are regarded “extraordinary” for having a black child, they decide to give her into care. Pauline then spends her childhood at “Dr. Bernando’s”, a British children’s home[48] – until her biological mother Wumni turns up. From this encounter onwards, Wumni appears and demands to see her daughter unannounced and sporadically; “she enters and exits her life often enough to cause major disruption”, argues a critic (Moira McPartlin, “The Borrowed Body by Valerie Mason-John”).

Pauline begins to dislike her biological mother and claims that Wumni cannot be her mother, since her “mother is dead” (Mason-John 6). This is reminiscent of the concept of the family romance. The character that Pauline chooses to be her more “noble” substitute mother will be introduced at a later point. Despite Pauline’s aversion towards her biological mother, it is decided that the girl is to live with Wumni for good. This means that she moves from white middle-class into black working-class surroundings. As it turns out, neither mother nor daughter can bond or identify with one another, as their relationship is affected by the dominant culture; and the tension between middle- and working-class lifestyles has created a deep gap between them. As will be shown, this is primarily illustrated via Pauline’s perception of Wumni’s housing conditions and her discomfort in the “improper interior fittings” (cf. Mason-John 123). Wumni works as a newspaper distributer, whereas both Pauline’s foster parents and her house parents at Dr. Bernado’s have middle-class jobs (cf. 16-40).

Furthermore, post-colonialism plays a central role in this mother-daughter relationship. In her essay *The Intricate Mother-Daughter Dyadic Relationship in Jamaica Kincaid’s Novels*, Simone Alexander examines literary mother-daughter bonds that are influenced by colonialism. Her analyses can partly be transferred to *Banana Kid,* as Pauline’s mother Wumni is presented as being “deeply affected by colonialism” (Alexander 46). The following text analysis will show that she appears to “copy” the coloniser’s power strategies to forcefully impose the dominant culture’s beliefs and values onto her daughter. The black working-class woman’s

48 “Dr. Barnado’s” is a children’s home in Britain.

"transformation" into a "white male coloniser" creates a profound ambivalence. The process of imitating the coloniser is what the post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha signifies as "mimicry". Bhabha also describes colonial mimicry as being close to the notion of "mockery": the colonised subject appears as a "disciplinary double" (123) to the colonial master – who may feel threatened by the "blurred copy" (Bill Ashrcoft 139) of himself. This creates ambivalence in terms of the power relationship between coloniser and colonised: the latter, by mimicking the cultural habits of the dominant culture, asserts power by disrupting the dichotomy coloniser/colonised; however is still "almost the same – but not quite" (Bhabha 123).

Simone Alexander argues that in post-colonial (African) mother-daughter texts, the relationship between coloniser and colonised is "marked by the tension between the mother's birthplace and the colonising territory (to which some of the main protagonists subsequently migrate)" (Alexander 16). Alexander terms this the difference between the "motherland" (Africa) and "the colonising mother country". The dominant culture is pictured as a "maternal power" (cf. 16). The colonised subject thus has "two mother-countries" that are in conflict with each other and that cause the subject's schizophrenia of identity.

Alexander points to the idea that the concepts of colonialism and motherhood bear certain similarities (cf.17-19). It may appear provoking and wrong to compare motherhood, often associated with care and love, to the violent and exploitive act of colonialism. However, on closer examination it becomes clear that these two aspects could bear a resemblance in terms of the imbalance of power between the mother/daughter and coloniser/colonised-relationship. Furthermore, similar power strategies can be deployed: Power can be asserted by "educating", surveilling and interpellating the "Other" – without physically violating the dominated subject.

Being dominated by the colonising mother country, the maternal character Wumni becomes a daughter herself – namely to the "white mother England" – and consequently "adapts to the habits, assumptions, institutions and values" (Ashcroft 139). Thus, she begins to mimic the male imperialist. Being raised by a black mother who acts like a colonial master, the daughter-character in *The Banana Kid,* Pauline, experiences a deep confusion. Having the same skin colour and gender as her mother, yet being surveilled, ordered about and abused by her – as the following examples will show – Pauline is confronted with the mother's schizophrenia of

identity. As Wumni undergoes a transformation, she “discards” and destroys the unifying and solidarity-creating identity of mother and daughter. The daughter’s confusion is intensified by the fact that the mother-character is acting all-powerful despite her powerlessness in economic terms. Pauline, having grown up in a middle-class family, is aware of her biological mother’s poverty. Her recurring comments on Wumni’s living conditions demonstrate her class consciousness and it becomes clear that she identifies her as a lower-class person: Wumni “does not even have a proper bathroom” (Mason-John123), she comments; and her room “is the size of a box” (121).

By acting like a colonial master, Wumni performs a transformation in terms of social class, which additionally brings out her schizophrenia of identity. The schizophrenia strikes Pauline as something “weird” and untrustworthy. Pauline is only used to power being performed by white, well-off people. Hence, she perceives Wumni’s behaviour as a deception. The girl feels betrayed and let down, that is abandoned, by her mother (cf. Mason-John 123-125). Abandonment of the daughter, based on the ambivalence incorporated by the mother-character, is the central element of this text. As mentioned in the preliminary notes, Simone Alexander uses the term “brainwashed” in her analysis to describe the adoption of “European standards” by an African woman (cf. 59): “Deeply affected by colonial teachings, the mother is unaware of the harm she is causing her daughter and their relationship, and in her effort to protect, she instead institutionalises her daughter”, describes Alexander the influence of colonialism (Simone Alexander 46). The aspect of unawareness is often involved within the concept of brainwashing. Accordingly, mother Wumni appears unaware of the fact that she has adopted the dominant culture, as she constantly claims to disapprove of the English (cf. Mason-John 122-141).

Although Wumni tries to “teach [Pauline] to be an obedient African child” (Mason-John 122), by announcing to break her “fancy English habits” (123) and to rid her of “that typical English smile” (141), Wumni appears rather “English” herself. This is what Pauline experiences during her first days in London with her mother: “We travel on the number 36 bus together. Wumni points out where the Queen lives, the Hilton Hotel and Speaker’s Corner” (124). Hence, it seems that the mother-character regards these “attractions” as significant indicators of British culture and by pointing them out to her daughter, she accepts and respects these status symbols.The

enumeration of these emblems bears a profound poignancy: firstly, the Queen obviously stands for Britain's political system, its history of imperialism and nationalism. By pointing out the Queen's regiment on their sight-seeing tour without making a comment about it, Wumni naturally presents the monarch as noteworthy and important – without questioning the cruel history hidden behind the notion of the British Empire that she herself has fallen victim to. Secondly, the Hilton Hotel that she refers to functions as a symbol of exceeding wealth. Again, no criticism is directed towards the Empire which gained its wealth by the brutal exploitation of their colonies. The Hilton Hotel presents a direct contrast to Wumnis living conditions. As previously mentioned, her accommodation is described as being extremely impoverished. Hence, an epitome of Western capitalism is contrasted to a lower-class symbol: Wumni's poorly equipped house. Thirdly, the mention of Speaker's Corner fits into the emblems of British institutional power: Although offering a space for "free public speaking", it is controlled and often censored by the British police (cf. Milly Jenkins: "It's Speaker's Corner, but Not As We Know it"). The tricolon of powerful institutions demonstrates the colonisation of Wumni.

The mother's internalisation of British values also becomes clear when she states she is "very proud" of Pauline when the girl successfully absolves the so-called 11+ Test (Mason-John 120).[49] This shows that Wumni not only was "brainwashed" into accepting the British political system, but also is conforming to its educational norms. Still, Wumni's attempts to "teach [her daughter] to be an *obedient* African child" (122) [my emphasis] and this is mirrored in the mother's language usage. Whilst going on a promenade with her daughter, the mother "orders"(108): "Just walk [...] Keep on walking [...] walk..[...]" (108). She communicates with Pauline via imperatives and "military" instructions. Furthermore, this quotation indicates that Pauline is being closely watched and surveilled. This – demonstrating Wumni's colonised mind – seems ironic as she also tells her daughter: "I don't want you playing with those English children, you've been brainwashed enough" (108). Simone Alexander states that:

49 This is an examination that pupils in Britain have to sit in their last year of primary education.

> Seemingly unable and unwilling to grant her daughter independence, the mother functions as a deterrent to the autonomy her daughter seeks. It is this unwillingness of the mother's part that Kincaid sees as a *projection of the colonizer's deeds:* The mother shows her daughter how to be in the world, but at the back of her mind, she thinks she never will get it. She's deeply skeptical that this child could ever grow to be a self-possessed woman, and, in the end, she reveals her skepticism; yet even within this skepticism are, of course, dismissal and scorn. So it's not unlike the relationship between the conqueror and the victim. (Alexander 46) [my emphasis]

Thus it could be argued that Wumni is projecting the coloniser's deeds onto her daughter. She not only institutionalises her daughter, but objectifies her. She threatens to "*post* [her] back to Africa" (Mason-John 106) [my emphasis]. As mentioned above, Pauline meets her mother several times before it is decided at Dr. Bernado's that she will move into her mother's house for good. The daughter-character is developing a strong aversion to Wumni, whose objectifying language victimises and hurts her (cf.106-107). Nonetheless, Pauline begins to internalise and "accept" the objectification conducted by her biological mother, as in this scene: "I am sent to bed and in the early hours of the morning she packs my plastic bag, travels with *me* on the train and *dumps me* at the village gates" (109). [my emphasis] The verb "to dump" bears multiple connotations. Its main usage is to describe the process of "disposing something unwanted", yet it is also sometimes used in the context of human relationships to colloquially describe abandonment (cf. "Oxford Dictionaries Online"). Abandonment is directly linked to the mother's interpellating power. Not only the semantics employed illustrate Pauline's objectification. This is also emphasised by the syntactical structure: the passive construction in the first clause, followed by a phrase constructed by a subject-object relation points to this: Pauline is continuously represented by the sentence's object.

Even though the girl expresses her growing hatred of Wumni towards her house parents at Dr. Bernado's, they stick to their decision of leaving the child with her biological mother: "They say it's better I stay in England than be sent home to Nigeria" (Mason-John 116). The reader gains insight into Pauline's thoughts during the train ride to her new home: "I know this is the end. [...] I hold on to my tears. When they are wrung dry, I have arrived at Wumni's flat" (121). Wumni's flat works as a metaphor for a trap; it alludes to a finish or an "ending" (121) of something in the protagonist's life. Firstly, this creates narrative suspense, as the reader is kept curious if and how the main character will manage to free herself from this "trap".

Secondly, endings also comply to the notion of abandonment. This, in turn, is intensified by the "trap metaphor": Pauline is, against her will, taken to an impoverished and deserted place.

This is a provoking image, as house/homes, and especially the parents' house, generally function as a literary motif associated with belonging and protection. The concept of protection works on two levels; it means shelter from climate as well as the protection/care/warmth created by family life in the house. Furthermore, houses are generally signs of stability. Friedrich argues that, "the image of the house is traditionally an image of stability. Houses protect us and express our true nature; as we build houses we create positive enclosure" (Reinhard Friedrich 65). The concept of stability stands in direct contrast to the "entrapment" in Wumni's flat and the instability of parenting/care in the protagonist's childhood. Altogether, the biological mother's flat is associated with exclusively negative characteristics. The integration of highly negative traits into a traditionally positive concept creates ambivalence about the house-motif. Furthermore, houses often stand for the concept of home in terms of "homeland/home country"; a notion of belonging in a wider sense. It could be argued that the negative connotation with "home" symbolises the idea of the colonising mother country. The "house-as-a-trap"-metaphor stands for Wumni's ambivalent relationship with England and her colonization. Hence, this metaphor also symbolises the abandonment of Pauline. Here it becomes clear that the ambivalence caused by "schizophrenia of identity" encroaches upon the character's daily lives. Ambivalence becomes an omnipotent threat, as it creates the feeling of non-belonging at various levels.

With Pauline's "relocation" to Wumni's flat another form of the girl's objectification/abandonment begins: her biological mother frequently hits her daughter with wooden sticks, kitchen utensils and belts (cf. 130, 134, 138, 141, 147, 155, 170). "Wumni tries to beat the English out of me every morning before I go to school", Pauline states (Mason-John 130). The physical abuse against the child can also be understood as being caused by Wumni's brainwash: violating her daughter to make an "obedient African child" out of her, to raise her child "her way", Wumni appears oblivious and uncritical of the fact her own culture has been violated in the same way. Instead of challenging history, she mimics the powerful, forceful coloniser's behaviour. Furthermore, the brutalisation of the black female body

conjures up notions of slavery and alludes to the history of violence against black women based on gender, class and ethnicity. At this point it becomes very clear how mothers can incorporate history and how they embody the principle of "history repeating itself": violent behaviour is being "taught" from generation to generation.

Images of slavery are also evoked when Pauline's half sister Shola arrives from Nigeria to visit with her mother in England for a while. Soon Wumni begins to violate her elder daughter too, as in this scene:

> Wumni is banging on the toilet door. 'It's been eight weeks and your period still hasn't arrived.' Shola doesn't reply. *'If you came to England pregnant you can get rid of the child now.'* 'I de see me period,' Shola yells. Shola flushes the toilet and when she comes out Wumni *grabs her by the throat and calls her a whore.* She rips all her clothes off and shouts: 'I'm not having a *prostitute* in my house.' '*I de lef before I go crase like you*'. Wumni punches her in the stomach. 'Shut your dirty mouth.'164) [my emphasis]

Simone Alexander emphasises the aspect of gender involved in a mother's violation of a daughter's body: "She no longer identifies through her sexuality or femaleness with her daughter; instead she appears to adopt a masculine, colonial rule, as she colonises her daughter's body" (Alexander 55). It is the colonisation of Shola's body, the controlling of her procreative functions, that conjure up notions of slavery. Particularly poignant are Wumni's accusations of her daughter being a "prostitute" and a "whore" (cf. Mason-John 164). As the reader learns at the very beginning of the novel, Wumni was raped and fell pregnant with Pauline as a result. Fearing her daughter is pregnant and accusing her of having prostituted herself, the mother denies that her daughter could also be a victim of rape. Wumni thus indirectly denies the cruelty that happened to her in the past and instead slips into the role of the white masculine "master". "During slavery, rape was one of the most powerful white masculine mechanisms to oppress black females. Sexual violence has been "used to regulate and contain the labour and dignity of black women", argues Margararet Hunter (Hunter 159). The black mother's transformation into an "enslaving", "male" aggressor clearly highlights her schizophrenia .This alienates her from her daughter Shola, who feels deceived and let down – thus abandoned – as a result (cf. 164- 165).

In the scene quoted above, I have not only emphasised the mother's speech and the description of her actions, but also the daughter's reaction "*I de lef before I go*

crase like you." The utterance can be labelled backtalk, as Shola redirects the verbal abuse towards her mother. The Black feminist bell hooks describes backtalk a source of empowerment (hooks 9). Talking back, argues hooks, "is a rite of initiation. It is that act of speech that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject – the liberated voice" (hooks 9). It could be argued that this is the daughter's attempt to turn away from her mother. Calling Wumni "crazy", Mason-John puts an allusion to the mother's brainwash into Shola's mouth. Unlike her mother, Shola, who has just arrived from Nigeria where she has spent her childhood and youth, seems aware of the colonisers' influence. Shola's awareness about the influence of the dominant culture is also mirrored in various comments she makes on the "Englishness" of her younger sister Pauline: "You no sabi talk pidgin English? [...] English people dem ridiculous. [...] Oh, God you're so Englisho" (Mason-John 160-161). Shola's comment is reminiscent of the principle of mockery (cf. quotation Bhabha). She also criticises the dominant culture, hence shows a tendency towards resistant speech. Resistance is linked to a turning away from the mother.

The fact that she speaks Pidgin English still demonstrates her colonisation however shows that she is more distanced from it than her sister Pauline – who speaks standard English. The tension between the identity and difference from the colonising mother-country is also mirrored by Pauline's European and Shola's African name. It is the latter's awareness of the coloniser's influence that stands in direct contrast to Wumni's brainwash and which signifies resistance. Also, by announcing a separation from her mother, the elder daughter is counteracting the abandonment caused by the mother. It can be argued that she attempts to "turn the face of history to her face".
Shola answers back several times, so that mother and daughter get into verbal fights – until Wumni loses control and attacks her with a carving knife. The daughter begins to throw objects at her mother (168).

> 'That's it', Wumni shouts. 'I am sending you back home.' Wumni gets on the phone and calls the police. Shola runs into the toilet and tries to barricade herself in. [...] I open the door and three policemen charge in. [...] Wumni screams at the police: 'Take her. She's an illegal immigrant. She's overstayed her visa'. [...] The police knock on the toilet door and ask if Shola will come with them to the police station. (169)

Extraditing her daughter to the police, calling her an “illegal immigrant”, Wumni’s transformation into the white coloniser has now reached its highest point. The identification with one another and the solidarity between them in terms of gender and ethnicity thereby is entirely eliminated. This scene, in which Shola is actually arrested by the police, signifies a symbolic death of the mother that corresponds to the notion of abandonment at its highest stage.

To resume the aspect of backtalk, the younger daughter Pauline, like Shola, begins to protest against her mother. Announcing that she wants to go back living with her house parents, that she is bored and unhappy at Wumni’s place (cf. Mason-John 109) and that she hates her mother’s impoverished living conditions (cf. 123), Pauline soon learns that she is always directly punished for backtalk:

> I bite my lip to try and stop myself from answering back. But it’s too late. [...] The wooden spoon snaps on my head. I get so used to the spoons snapping that I try to guess each Saturday how many Wumni will break on me that day. I can hardly feel them [...] But they do stop me from speaking my thoughts aloud. (134)

Pauline’s backtalk, her “movements from object to subject” (hooks 9) are only temporary, as Wumni’s punishments have the power to entirely silence the daughter. As in the violent scenes with Shola, the abuse against the child signifies abandonment; and again it is followed by a metaphorical death: Here, it is the daughter who gradually “dies”.

As a traumatic response to the beating, “her whole body goes numb” (Mason-John 145). The narrator describes the deadening of her senses as “I’m out of body floating above my head” (145).[50] Strikingly, the personal pronoun “my” is omitted when referring to her body – which underlines the aspect of dissociation. Dissociation is a reoccurring phenomenon in *The Banana Kid* (cf. 153, 158, 159, 165, 171, 176, 185). Entailing the notion of death, it is directly linked to abandonment. The aspect of division becomes manifest here.

Another form of “dying” takes place in Pauline’s imaginary world. More and more, she dreams of Annabel. Annabel is a childhood friend of hers whom she met at Dr.

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50 This phenomenon is called dissociation, as the abuse victim may feel that “body and mind” are separated from each other. Dissociation is the traumatic response to violation of one’s body (cf. Chapter 5, *Rape, Battering, Trauma*).

Bernado's and who died of a lung-disease (whilst they were friends). Pauline now thinks of her as an angel that functions as her guardian. The angel friend is an interesting literary device; Mason-John invents a fantasy figure that bears maternal characteristics: angels are associated with the "task" of protecting, caring for and guiding their helpless subjects. Therefore, it can be argued that the protagonist creates a substitute mother in her mind that fulfills the function her biological mother fails to do. The angel creates a contrast-character to Wumni. The fact that Annabel functions as a confidant is also mirrored in the way she "addresses" Pauline, who imagines the fantasy figure to always call her by her real name "Pauline". Hereby, she is again presented as the opposite to Wumni, who interpellates her daughter a "nasty English girl" (133) or "this child" (142). Angel Annabel's "goodness" is also expressed in her name: the alliteration, combined with an assonance ("e") makes her sound like an attractive, positive character. It can be argued that Annabel is the superior character that replaces Pauline's biological mother (cf. comment on "family romance").

In her thoughts, Pauline pleads with Annabel to take her "up to heaven" so that she can leave her violated body forever: "Annabel is holding my hand, she is pushing me towards my body but I refuse to enter it" (146). In another scene, the girl dreams that an unknown dead girl wants to slip into her body. But now, Pauline does not want to enter the "dead body":

> 'Give me your body', she [the "dead girl"] pleads with her bloody hands stretched out. 'No'. 'Please. I'll look after it.' 'No, I'm not ready to die.' 'Yes you are. I watch you every day asking God to take you away," and then she rushes towards my body. 'NO', I scream. And my body falls so fast, landing back on the bench, and I wake up to a cup of water thrown at my face. (153)

Pauline's ambivalent feelings towards death in her dreams also mirrors her relationship to her mother: on the one hand, her affinity to death symbolises the traumatic deadening of her senses caused by the violent abandonment by her mother; on the other, the narrator's refusal to "die" signifies her wish to bond and to belong. Susan Bainbrigge, like Simone Alexander, also argues that the concept of death involved in a mother-daughter plot clearly symbolises abandonment (cf. Alexander 49, Bainbrigge 216). Having said that, Pauline's "defense of death" can be understood as her urge to re-unite with her mother. Pauline's wish to belong creates

a conflict between her imaginary world and the reality in her mother's house. The concept of home is entangled in these opposite "places" again: as soon as the narrator escapes into her imaginary world, to "heaven" (where her angel friend becomes her "substitute mother"), she manages to blot out Wumni. Whenever she faces reality and attempts to both re-build a relationship with her mother and bond with her sister on "earth", her angel friend disappears: "Annabel's not been around lately because she is jealous of my sister and says the house has become too violent for Angels to stick around" (Mason-John 165). This remark shows that Pauline begins to feel betrayed even by her imaginative mother. Wumni's power to violently colonise her daughter's body and mind has caused her to feel entirely untrusting and let down: abandoned.

Consequently, Pauline separates from the imaginary Annabel, who becomes replaced by two destructive instances called "Sparky" and "Snake". They are noteworthy characters, as by inventing these fantasy figures, the author Mason-John continues a trend of both black and non-black British fiction in the nineteen-nineties (cf. chapter 2). The spirit "Snake" begins to dominate "Sparky". "Snake" is also the title of the final chapter. The chapter begins with Pauline's admittance to another children's home. She is taken away from her mother, as her PE teacher notices the marks and wounds on her body and reports this to the social services who eventually take action. Yet, the physical split does not mean that the daughter's psyche is freed from her mother:

> I feel as if Wumni is still controlling me, even though I don't have to see her anymore. [...] I have something constantly ringing in my head. It has such a shrill hiss that I call her Snake. Sometimes Snake travels through my body, knocking me off my feet. Other times Snake coiled herself around my body from head to toe. The buzzing in my body is like a force which pushes me in front of cars, makes me absent-minded and clumsy. I begin to crave for food, clothes, anything that will make the noise of Snake go away. When I feel *Snake inside me I sometimes think of being dead, but it's a different feeling from wanting to go and live in heaven with Annabel; it feels like I never want to move or breathe again.* (Mason-John 186). [my emphasis]

The term "controlling" points to the mother's colonialist power strategies and it indicates its effect on Pauline: it appears that Wumni's violations have caused deteriorating symptoms of trauma. Pauline describes these as the feeling of having an uproarious snake inside her body. A snake is a powerful symbol of death and it

signifies the end of the relationship between mother and daughter. This, again, represents abandonment at its peak.

In the chapter entitled “Snake”, Pauline is presented as a teenager. Abandoned and being “possessed” by “Snake”, she slips into a downward spiral of petty crime and drug-taking. This creates narrative suspense. The reader follows her on her shoplifting-tours and is engrossed by her fear of getting caught by the store-manager. The reader’s anticipations are met when the protagonist is eventually found out. As a consequence, Pauline is admitted to a young offender institution. Hereby, the idea of surveillance is taken up again, which recalls the mother’s objectifying gaze: the concept of surveillance, of powerful observance is often actuated in prisons.[51] The concepts of “prison” and “surveillance” are hence interconnected. Pauline is subject to a powerful gaze that fixes her identity as a “black criminal”.

Theft, as described in chapter 3 (*The Representation of Class Consciousness)*, is an active form of resistance against a capitalist police state. This does not mean that the author is trivialising thievery; the protagonist’s actions rather work on a symbolic level to signify resistance. In her account on literary representations of theft, Lauvalerie King argues that products represent “not only external objects and people’s relations to them, but also all of those rights, liberties, powers, and immunities that are important for well-being” (King 27).

Pauline’s thievery falls into the same category as the earlier mentioned backtalk against her mother: they are all forms of protest, a revolt against reality, and counteractions against the institutionalising and oppressive (m)Other. Ambivalence, created by her “schizophrenic” mother and by a culture that raises her like a white person but discriminates against her as a black girl (like her foster parents who gave her away), makes it difficult for the protagonist to confront these power structures. They are confusing, complex and entangled in terms of race, class and gender – like the knot I have described in the introductory notes. The psychological entrapment in this “knot” corresponds to her physical imprisonment in the young offender institution.

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51 In his essay *Discipline and Punish,* Foucault describes the power of the disciplinary gaze in prisons, particularly in the so-called “Panopticon”, a prison designed by Jeremy Bentham. It is a circular jail in which the individual cells can be surveilled from one elevated vantage point (cf. Bill Ashcroft 226; Michel Foucault 196f).

In her cell, at nighttime, Pauline is haunted by the image of “Snake”. She has a significant dream:

> Snake takes hold of my body again and throws me through the bed. I lose my breath. Paralysed by what I see by looking down on the river Oshun, my heart misses every drumbeat. I can see my Spirit being seduced again by the thought of being a love child. My heart begins to pound as I realise I chose my wife from a past life to be my mother and bring me back in the world. The voice in my head is Wumni. It’s my wife too. She never forgave me for selling our people, and the rape of all the village women. She poisoned me in my sleep. Since then I’ve been lingering for hundreds of years not healthy enough to reincarnate. And finally, almost seventeen years ago, I managed to be reborn. (Mason-John 241)

This scene plays with the reader’s imagination and understanding of the story. The narrative dream is a challenge to the reader; at first it is confusing, then it becomes surprising or may become shocking: Pauline imagines being a reincarnation of her mother’s violent husband; and supposedly of her own father – who raped Wumni. This is not expressed, however the reader knows that Wumni is a rape victim and the passage indicates that her husband did rape women in the village. It is stated that Pauline is not a “love child”. Her imagination of being the rapist, the violent creator of herself, evokes a literary horror-scenario: her existence is based on violence, hate, misogyny, pain, disgust and rejection which haunts her for the rest of her life – as it is she herself who caused it. The scene recalls the idea of the terrifying family romance in the gothic novel; intensified and provokingly highlighted by Pauline’s phantasm of being the reincarnation of “her own” rapist.

This illustrates strong feelings of guilt, which is a clear sign of trauma. Furthermore, Pauline’s guilt is reflected through the fact that she is often referring to herself as “I”, the subject/actor; rather than “me”, the object. This demonstrates the power of the historical crimes that are carried through the generations over and over again. For the first time, the mother appears in a different light. Mason-John creates a certain kind of sympathy for her who cannot forgive the rape. It can be argued that the protagonist, commiserating with her mother, now feels love for her. The fact that Pauline now feels remorse and pity for her mother points to an important aspect: Wumni, the violent mother, is victim and perpetrator at the same time. The ambivalence here illustrates schizophrenia in a very clear light, the aftermath of history. Suffering from the brutal exploitation of her body, and consequently projecting

it onto another black female shows, once again, the process of "history repeating itself" in its most poignant way.

Shortly after this scene, Pauline imagines this: "I am *face to face* with Snake. Besieged with remorse, I uncontrollably break down. 'I am sorry', I whisper to myself. Snake calms down in my body and I feel light, like a feather plucked from a bird" (243). [my emphasis]. Feeling sorry for the mother, the victim and, blaming the past perpetrators instead shows to be a painful, but liberating process. It makes her feel "like a feather plucked from a bird" (243).

It seems that the protagonist, in the last paragraph, begins to unravel the knot of her story, her relationship to her mother and her mother's schizophrenia of identity and thereby begins to understand why she was being abandoned by her mother. Unraveling the knot hints to Pauline's resistant thoughts against the dominant culture.

Carolyn Steedman: *Landscape for a Good Woman* (1986)

Carolyn Steedman was born in 1947 in South London. She studied History at the University of Sussex and Cambridge. In 1988, she won the Fawcett Book Award for her first book *The Tidy House*. Steedman has produced four novels and numerous non-fictional texts. She now teaches History at the University of Warwick. *Landscape for a Good Woman*n is labelled a hybrid text form, consisting of both Carolyn Steedman's memoirs and a biography of her mother's life (cf. Maroula Jannou 64, Sally Munt 27, Jeremy Popkin 253). Steedman limits the representations about her own life to a description of a few aspects about her childhood and adulthood, whereas the account on her mother's life entails representations of her infancy, adulthood, retirement and her death. In fact, *Landscape for a Good Woman* begins with the mother's death: "She flung up her arm over her head, pulled her knees up, looked out with an extraordinary surprise [...] and died" (2). This is what the narrator calls a "working-class death" (Steedman 2). It may appear strange and provoking to the reader to be confronted with death as a matter of class. Yet this has been the case in literary history before, as in Simone de Beauvoir's *A Very Easy Death* (1964), where she describes the "gentle" fading away of her upper-class mother. Steedman's mother-character, on the contrary, is in mortal agony. The description of her "working-class death" works as a symbol for

the persistency of the subject's social class and the "never-ending" struggle in life that working-class people, due to financial strains, are likely to face.

The mother's death is a significant narrative element and it mirrors a trend in women's literature that emerged during the 1980s: "Many narratives of the 1980s and 1990s take their cue from the mother's death and the acute awareness of a failed relationship. [...] The mother emerges with the desires, expectations, and frustrations typical of her time and her social situation" (Paola Splendore 190). Splendore declares *Landscape for a Good Woman* a working-class paradigm of this kind of mother-daughter text (cf. 190 f.). It can be understood as a "virtual dialogue with her dead mother in which the itineraries of two lives interweave" (Splendore 190). Furthermore, Jaques Derrida argues that accounts of the mother's dying is also a way of preserving her body within the body of the writing. It is also connected to the idea of unity and loss/ identity and difference: "The 'I' is founded on separation and the loss of the mother's body", argues Derrida (quoted in: Linda Anderson 113). The death also foreshadows the abandonment by the mother that Steedman is writing about.

To write about her mother's childhood in the 1920s, Steedman draws on historical accounts of the social conditions of the former's hometown Burnley (North England) during this era. Paola Splendore states that:

> Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman,* written in a hybrid form between essay and fiction, autobiography and social history, combines psychoanalytic insight and cultural analysis. The daughter's discourse is an attempt to retrieve the sense of the mother's marginal life and enter her perspective in order to reveal her dreams, her forbidden desires, and her frustrated ambitions. [...]She intends, on the one hand, to rescue her mother's life from the nothingness to which it is condemned by her marginalized condition and to show the singularity of her individual experience. On the other hand, she wishes to show how her mother's feelings conditioned her own self. (Splendore 190-191)

Likewise, Raymond Williams points out that Steedman attempts to hold together autobiographical and analytical perspectives on class (quoted in: Sally Munt 123). Despite this textual patchwork of (auto-)biography and social analysis, I will refer to the narrating/analysing instance as "the autobiographical narrator", "the narrator" or "the narrating daughter".[52] Intermingled with her memoirs are quotations of

52 I will differentiate between the author as an historian and the narrator, for "writing an autobiography is an act of personal narration that demands self-observation and the presentation of a 'self'. All

theoretical approaches to the role of the family and maternity within the British working classes; such as Hogart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) or Young and Willmott's *Family and Kinship in East London* (1954). The autobiographical narrator compares these essays to her mother's and her own life. Hereby, Steedman creates a formal ambivalence, making the narrator oscillate between representations of her personal story and scientific texts. The narrator finds that the essays fail to represent her personal family story.

> Her working-class parents, for instance, refuse to conform to the cosy stereotypes familiar from Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy*. Far from being a salt-of-the-earth domestic tyrant, her father was shifty and rarely there (half the week, as it turns out, he was living with another woman). Instead of being "our ma'am", the doughty lynchpin of the struggling household, Steedman's mother was [...] financially productive. (Kathryn Huges, "Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman*").

Throughout Steedman's text, the father remains in the background, the central parental figure clearly is the mother, who is the dominant, powerful character. She is powerful to her daughter; yet is powerless on another level – namely within a socio-economic context. She is earning very little at her manufacturing job and, throughout her lifetime, is lacking and longing for products and luxuries she cannot afford. The narrator states: "My mother's longing shaped my own childhood. From a Lancashire mill town and a working-class twenties childhood she came away wanting: fine clothes, glamour, money, to be what she wasn't" (Steedman 6). Splendore argues that, "at this point, the two stories overlap and the mother's youth merges into the author's childhood in an inextricable tangle of unhappiness, poverty and frustration" (Splendore 191).

I do not agree with this, as I cannot see signs of narrative "overlaps" in this excerpt, apart from the assertion that the narrator's life was shaped by the mother. But even here the narrator is "lifted" to a meta-level; the relationship is described from a distance, from an elevated vantage point and hence, it cannot be said that mother and daughter are merging. After all, the entire passage is held in a third-

questions of 'how am I doing' [and 'what did I experience?'] require the evaluation of an observer and narrator who are related, but not identical" (Sonja Apgar 50).

person mode of presentation. Rather, the narrator analyses the mother-character by drawing upon her historical, social and regional situation. She others her as a product of these circumstances and historicises her. Historicising, thus differentiating from her on the one hand and yet claiming identity with her (being "shaped by her") on the other, Steedman adds another ambivalent quality to the text. I would like to term this "ambivalence of identification". Jean Wyatt validates the assertion that the text entails hardly any representation of the autobiographical character Carolyn, but rather is focused on the mother's desires. Wyatt refers to the text as the "absence from auto in the autobiography" (Jean Wyatt 62), since "it is the mother's desire alone that fills the autobiography. [...] Over its length, *Landscape For a Good Woman* compiles a virtual inventory of the material objects denied the mother by an unjust class system" (51). Throughout *Landscape for a Good Woman,* the word "wanting" mostly refers to a material sense, as shown in the quotation above. The mother's desire for wanting "things" frequently occurs and manifests itself within the choice of words: various terms describing the quest for wealth/luxury and her painful experience of not having them, like "wanting" (6, 9, 22, 23, 109, 110); "longing" (6, 8, 16, 107); "envy" (7, 23, 111, 12, 123); "materialism/material" (10, 15, 36, 108, 111, 112) and "lack/lacking" (18, 36, 46, 122, 127) constitute the text.

In certain text passages, the narrator even speaks from the perspective of her mother and partly appears to "turn into" the mother, as for example in the following excerpt. The daughter recollects a situation shortly after her baby sister's birth, when a health visitor warns her mother that "this house isn't fit for a baby" (Steedman 2) – and comments on this as follows:

> And I? I will do everything and anything until the end of my days to stop anyone ever talking to me like that woman talked to my mother. It is in this place, this bare, curtainless bedroom that lies my secret and shameful defiance. I read a woman's book, meet a such woman at a party (a woman now, like me) and think deliberately as we talk: we are divided: a hundred years ago I'd have been cleaning your shoes. I know this and you don't. (2)

Jean Wyatt argues that

> the position of primal importance that Steedman gives this scene implies that Steedman's primary identification with her mother is based on class loyalty cemented by sharing her mother's hurt pride. She speaks as if it were she who had suffered. [...] Primary identification becomes a form of class solidarity. (52)

The narrator's speaking for the mother causes an "ambiguity of primary identification" (Wyatt 52). Particularly the expression "in this place lies [...] *my* secret and shameful defiance" [my emphasis] contributes to this confusion.

In fact, the entire passage quoted above is characterised by ambivalence. On the one hand, the narrator appears offended and hurt by a comment that actually is directed towards the mother and thus is identifying with the maternal character. On the other, she is clearly distancing herself from her mother in terms of social class: she claims to be like "such a woman", that is, the Other that has the power to dominate her mother, "now". This deictic expression indicates a change that has happened between daughterhood and womanhood after her mother's death. The change is class-based; it is the process of crossing classes that the narrator is illustrating and it is the internal conflict of what social class the working-class daughter, now working a middle-class job, belongs to.

Furthermore, the house-metaphor is also entangled in this conflict of belonging; the narrator "others" her mother and her impoverished house from the perspective of a middle-class professional, however feels solidarity with her at the same time. This, in turn, intensifies the ambivalence of identification. It can be argued that ambivalence of identification is a conflict of class identity. Essentially, this is very similar to the formal ambivalence I have described above: both textual ambivalences are based on a conflict of class identity (first: personal working-class story versus scientific social analysis from middle-class perspective; second: identification with working-class mother versus middle-class identity as adult) , and both are marked by a simultaneous turning to/turning away from the mother. So far, it can be argued that this conflict is expressed in both form and content.

In addition to these two types of representation, the conflict of class identity also takes place on a metaphoric level. Fairy tale images are deployed to describe the mother-daughter bond. Steedman uses fragments of Hans Christian Andersen's story *The Snow Queen* (1845) to describe an encounter between mother and daughter. A scene where mother and daughter meet after a long time after the latter has moved out of her parent's house is described as follows: "we were truly [...] without recognition: the mirror broken, a lump of ice for a heart" (Steedman 142).
Wyatt interprets the image of the broken mirror as "the mother's failure to mirror the daughter" (Wyatt 140). I would like to suggest that it stands for a disrupted

identification between mother and daughter, who, "now", have a different class identity. Whereas their past tied them together in terms of class, the mirror, the identity-building gaze of the "m-Other", is now broken. I agree with Wyatt that the expression "a lump of ice for a heart" simply stands for coldness, the absence of love in the mother-daughter relationship (Wyatt 140). However, it is not indicated which metaphor refers to whom – mother or daughter. Wyatt detects a strong ambivalence in this. She argues that "the refusal of grammatical attribution to one subject or the other maintains an ambiguity of primary identification, traits are unordered back and forth between the two in an infinite rebound" (Wyatt 64).

I have pointed out the three different modes of representing ambivalence of identification/the conflict of class identity (expressed in form, content, and stylistic devices). Now I would like to introduce another type of textual ambivalence. Although it is also rooted in the aspect of social class and the mother's "wanting", it is not about the narrator's conflict of class identity. Rather, it appears to be a different level of ambivalence which brings out the aspect of a failed relationship between mother and daughter. The narrator states: "My mother was a single parent for most of her adulthood, who had children, but also, in a quite peculiar way, didn't want them" (Steedman 6). As previously mentioned, the word "wanting" predominately refers to a material sense in *Landscape for a Good Woman.* The mother's desire for wanting "things" frequently is described in the text. The indications of materialistic wishes create a direct contrast to the narrator's statement about her mother *not wanting* (6) her and her sister.

Further on, the narrator shows that the mother's desires and her rejection of her children are, in fact, closely connected: the mother calls her children "burdens" (17), "expensive items" (17, 39) and "items of expenditure" (69, 90), who "ruin [her] life" (17, 85). On the other hand, it becomes clear that the reason why the mother does want her children is her wish to conform to the ideology of patriarchal culture; to fit into the gendered ideal of family life: it is stated that the mother wanted her children, who were illegitimate when born, to make their father marry her (cf. 71, 83). For the sake of conforming to male ideas about gender and the division of labour, the mother has children that she does not want. In this context, the father becomes a destructive element to the mother-daughter bond (cf. comment about unity and loss).

The narrator's unravelling of the ambivalence of being wanted/not being wanted may strike the reader as disillusionment. It is the only "type" of ambivalence that becomes resolved within the text – the conflict of class identity/ambivalence of identification remains unsolved (the formal ambivalence of (auto)biography and social history, for instance, is apparent for the entire novel). The process of resolving, clearing up and disillusion leads to a representation of melancholic thoughts:

> Excluded in this way, children do not develop self-love. [...] To know that, whilst one exists, one also need not have been, *that things might be better if one wasn't there at all*, presents all the ingredients of contradictions, the holding together of disparate information that sharpens the child's intelligence; *but the integration of the self and the mirrored self*, that provides the basis of sensuality, dies in the little girl. (Steedman 96) [my emphasis]

Although the passage is held in a third-person manner, which generally creates a distance to the things being said, the images of death/dying bring out the intensity of the storyteller's pain of not being wanted. The aspect of love/ the desperate longing for the mother's love is involved here. The notion of abandonment, described in the previous analysis, is also entangled in Steedman's text. The pain that she describes appears to be a consequence of feeling abandoned by the mother.

As previously mentioned, the ambivalence of wanting/not wanting is based on class, namely on the mother's material deprivation and her urge for "things", but it is not about the daughter-character's conflict of class identity. Rather it is about her emotional state, about being unloved and rejected.

Nonetheless, it appears to me that the two types of ambivalence are connected after all: it could be argued that the pain that is expressed about not being wanted make the autobiographical narrator turn away from her mother; and that class is a "tool" of differentiation. The daughter's "crossing classes" can be understood as a way to rid herself of the effects and aftermaths of history: the mother's material deprivation, her envy and the objectification of her daughters as "burdens" that run like a thread throughout the narrative. The daughter-character states that:

> As a working-class conservative from a traditional Labour background, she sharpened my childhood by the stories she carried *from her own, and from an earlier family history*. They were stories designed to show me the terrible unfairness of things, the *subterranean culture of longing for that which one can never have*. (11) [my emphasis]

With the term “subterranean culture”, a rather harsh “below-above” topography is employed to describe the situation of the working classes (for a detailed description of “below-above”/”upstairs-downstairs” imagery see chapter 2). Positioning her mother’s culture “underground”, hence “invisible” and insignificant, she clearly “others” her. Additionally, the literal downgrading of the mother bears a certain aggressiveness. It appears that at this point, traces of hatred come to the surface. It is a hatred towards the mother who teaches her daughter to be frustrated and envious; that the daughter now struggles to rid herself of/ to turn way from. Different to the Nigerian character Shola in *The Banana Kid,* Carolyn’s “turning away” from the mother does not signify resistance. The character’s attempt to “turn the face of history to her mother’s face” is not a move of resistance against the dominant culture. It expresses the daughter’s wish to belong to the dominant culture, the “centre” and to move away from the “margin”. This can be understood as an escape; which is also performed by Vivien, the upwardly mobile girl in *Never Far From Nowhere.*

Carolyn’s distance from the working classes seems to help her turn away from her mother, a “representative” of this social class, who has caused pain. The conflict of class identity, the constant oscillation between working-class past and middle-class present mirrors the conflict of the wish of unity and the traumatic loss and the process of sometimes turning to/ sometimes turning away from the mother.

Whether or not the daughter’s differentiation from her working-class mother and her constant affinity to the middle classes can be understood as an allusion to the concept of family romance is a delicate question. The narrator’s newly-adapted middle-class identity could work as a symbol for a turning to a “more noble” parental character. It may, however, seem too far-fetched to find elements of the family romance in Steedman’s hybrid text.

Joyce Storey: *The House in South Road* (2004)

Joyce Storey was born in Bristol in 1917. After leaving school at fourteen she worked in service before finding work in a corset factory. Storey gave birth to four children and died in 2001. She released three volumes of autobiography, *Our Joyce* (1991), *Joyce's War* (1992) and *Joyce's Dream* (1992). These stories are edited by Storey’s daughter Pat Thorne as *The House in South Road.* This autobiography is centred

around the narrator's relationship to her mother and it is similar to Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman* in many ways, particularly with regard to representations of an unwanted daughter: "My mother had carried me with bitterness and resentment. Just fifteen months earlier, she had given birth to my brother Dennis, and six months before that she had been marched up the aisle by a tight-lipped father determined to make an honest woman of her" (Joyce Storey 1). The mother-character, or rather, the mother's body seems controlled, guided and almost "navigated" by masculine power: The passive construction "had been marched up" presents her as a controllable entity[53], guided by a male that determines her future. This is followed by two pregnancies from her husband; a man that remains anonymous here: without his name being mentioned, he is presented as "just" another male character that controls and marks the mother's body. The repetition of temporal expressions make the marking of the female body appear timed, planned and systemised – for the sake of "systematically" maintaining a patriarchal ideology. Here, the father and the courting male become a disruption in female bonding (cf. comment on unity and traumatic loss in preliminary notes). Already the very first paragraph confronts the reader with societal constraints, based on gender, that are involved in the concept of maternity. The aspect of class is not indicated in this passage, yet is to follow soon – along with further representations of the unwanted pregnancy/the unwanted daughter:

> He [my father] hoped for reconciliation when a little girl was born. He loved my mother passionately, *but* he couldn't express what he felt; a lack of education damned him up, and he could find no expression in words. He would have done anything to please her, *but* she never forgave him for robbing her of her youth. In the years that followed, she played her part as wife and mother. She cooked, she bottled and she sewed. When money was scarce, she could produce a meal from a few scraps. She invented things from cardboard for us kids to play with and she could paint and make flowers and big fat Christmas crackers. *But* when she met my father's gaze, a hard look would come into those brown eyes of hers, as though the warmth was suddenly withdrawn, and my dad would bite his lip and walk away.(4) [my emphasis]

53 I am aware that "to march someone up the aisle/to walk someone home" are common expressions in the English language. Still, it entails the passiveness of the person that is "marched up the aisle" or "walked home".

The anonymous and almost demonised father in the narrative's beginning appears in a different light here. Although responsible for his wife's situation, he feels sorry for "robbing her youth". Being punished for it by withdrawal of affection, he is a "perpetrator" and victim of patriarchal ideology at the same time.[54] His inability to communicate this to his wife is, according to the narrator, class-based. In the chapter *The Representation of Class Consciousness* I have pointed out the interrelation between social class and language usage. Language usage, or rather, the lack thereof, is also interwoven in the context of the "unwanted working-class daughter". I will take up this aspect at a later point. To come back to the passage quoted above, the father-character's position entails an ambivalent quality. So too does the mother's, who does not want her children, however turns to and pleases them. I would like to term this "ambivalence towards societal expectations". Ambivalence is highlighted by both semantics and syntax: Contradictory expressions like "loving her passionately" and "walking away from her"/ "hard look in her eyes" and "her warmth" create a double meaning. This is intensified by the conjunction "but" in the three subordinate clauses that negate the meaning of the respective main clause. The autobiographical narrator unravels her mother's ambivalent behaviour by exposing her effort for the children as a fulfillment of an inescapable role that she "played" (4) but did not want. Thus, the "ambivalence towards societal expectations" is hereby resolved already. As a consequence, the narrating daughter-character senses rejection and, feeling her mother's turning away from her, "desperately want[s] to reach our for her love" (77). The daughter is positioned in a field of tension between her wish for unity and the experience of traumatic loss. Joyce Storey's autobiography could be understood as a literary continuation of the infant's separation from her mother. The physicality in this scenario is expressed by the choice of words: the idiomatic expression "reaching out for her love" illustrates the wish to physically bond, or even re-unite with the mother. The daughter remains disappointed in this. Trying to find reasons for the mother's growing distance from her, the narrator remembers a situation when she sees her mother again after having spent a long time away from

54 This is one of the few representations of the father-character that gradually fades in the course of the text. As mentioned in the preliminary notes, fathers in mother-daughter texts sometimes function as disruptions of female bonding and often do not have another purpose other than that.

home. As a young girl, she suffers from a lung disease and is admitted to a special clinic, called Painswick, far away from her parents' house. The narrator supposes that this physical split has contributed to the emotional distance between mother and daughter: "I often wanted to put my arms around her and be close to her, but ever since my return from Painswick I had never broken down the cold reserve that had grown between us" (98). Another significant scene concerning the daughter's return from Painswick is this:

> I waited for a grace to be said and my mother smirked when I asked if I should say it. 'You can forget that rubbish,' she said. 'You're home now.' 'Would you please pass the bread and butter?' I said politely. My mother laughed and said mockingly to my father, 'We have a proper bloody lady here.' [...] I felt desolation that was almost unbearable. [...] That night as I lay in that lonely back room, I looked out onto a bare blank wall and cried to go home. 'I want to go home,' I wept softly into the bedclothes so that they shouldn't hear me. 'I want to go home.' (27)

The excerpt implies that the daughter-character has learned and adapted to codes of behaviour and rites that differ from those at her parent's house: she has been introduced to new cultural habits. It would be inaccurate to state that these new rules of conduct are purely symbolising the middle classes and that, in turn, her parents demonstrate working-class behaviour/table manners. This would mean that Storey presents "politeness" as a sign of the middle classes only. However, I would like to suggest that the aspect of class is still involved in this scene. The dichotomy middle class/working class seems to be organised around the issue of language usage: away from home, the daughter has learned to perform table talk, that is, to use a certain discourse, to communicate. As the narrator states at an earlier point, the lack of verbal communication is a major issue in the relationship with the mother. The deficit of not being able to "find expression in words" is what the storyteller explains with a "lack of education" (4) which the working-classes in the interwar-period is said to have suffered from. Having her daughter speak eloquently and politely, ready to speak a grace, the working-class mother appears threatened by this. Hence, it is a power issue: in addition to her economic position, the mother-character seems powerless in terms of cultural capital (in Pierre Bordieu's sense). She perceives the well-spoken daughter as a menace to her (power-)position as a maternal character, the creator and guardian of her children. Her reaction is to put her daughter down, so that she can regain some kind of power.This creates a conflict of class identity within Joyce, which is expressed in her wish to go "home" (27), back to the clinic. Here,

ambivalence of identification is apparent (as in Steedman's text). This is the second type of ambivalence that, as in *Landscape for a Good Woman,* does not become unraveled. As will be shown at a later point, the concept of "home" is often used to outline class identity, particularly towards the narrative's ending. The concept of home is linked to the notion of communication/language usage: the clinic becomes Joyce's new "home", her "substitute" family. It could be argued that this recalls the concept of the family romance, which always involves a quest for different parents, more "noble" than the biological ones. "Nobleness" is expressed by language usage (cf. chapter 3, *The Representation of Class Consciousness*). Furthermore, the aspect of language recalls Jaque Lacan's idea that the acquisition of language is consequence of the splitting of the subject (cf. Adalgisa Giorgio 13). In a figurative sense, the daughter separates from the working-class mother via the acquisition of "middle-class language usage."

Lack of communication between them both becomes an issue, as they never express their feelings for each other in words; so that both fill this "verbal hole" with their own interpretations. Joyce remembers being criticised by her mother: "Don't talk about your brother and his feelings. You had *none* for me when you returned from Painswick" (Storey 83). [my emphasis] Likewise, the narrating daughter states: "Somehow I just knew that I would *never* get close to her, *not ever* (104); "the enmity between my mother and me would *always* be there" (206); "I *always* tried too hard to be close to her" (406) and, as stated above, "I often wanted to put my arms around her, but *ever since* the day of my return from Painswick I had *never* broken down the cold reserve that had grown up between us" (406). [my emphasis] The repetition of absolute terms underlines the storyteller's assertion that no mediation is possible, that their relationship has, already during her childhood, come to a deadlock.

Pronouncing their relationship "dead" since her return on the one hand and accusing the mother of withdrawal of affection on the other, the utterances quoted above bear an ambivalent quality as well. This is an ambivalence of feelings and could be described as the daughter's love-hate-relationship to her mother. It is identical to the mother's turning away/turning to the daughter. Furthermore, the idea of abandonment (cf. previous analyses) is involved in the daughter's growing hatred, as she feels let down by her mother. The cause for ambivalent feelings/behaviour is, according to the narrator, patriarchal ideology that forces the mother to "play a role"

(4). Thus, two types of textual ambivalences – ambivalence towards societal expectations plus ambivalence involved in love/hate relationship – are resolved once again. Combined with this powerful gender constraint is the issue of social class stratification that is understood as the reason for the mother's inability to communicate with her daughter.

In *The House in South Road,* gender and class are presented as factors that create a knot tied up by history. "If only it had occurred to me that there were choices. If only my parents had counselled me, or shown the alternatives" (143) comments the storyteller on her life as grown up. As it turns out, the adult Joyce is – like her mother – working a factory job ("I really had joined the ranks of the great working-class" (95), the narrator comments on this) until she is getting married to a man she does not love. She eventually gives birth to four children that she does not want. The representation of the protagonist's marriage and her pregnancies are almost identical to the descriptions of the scenes in the mother's life. The term "resentment" is used for both women's reaction to their pregnancies (1, 397). Particularly striking is the use of pejorative idioms to describe both women's pregnancies: whilst the mother-character resents to "have another mouth to feed" (51), Joyce speaks of "another bun in the oven" (238). The synecdoche and the downgrading profanity employed here illustrate the imbalance of power between mother and daughter and the downgrading of the latter. It recalls the family meal-scene where the mother puts down her daughter to regain some kind of power. It also foreshadows ambivalences that will be projected onto Joyce's children. Indeed, the reader learns that she also "plays her role" as a mother and housewife, although she does not want her children.

Despite turning away from each other, the mother's and daughter's stories become identical. This seems ambivalent; yet at the same time it shows the power of gender roles: the mother is forced to play a role, hence becomes a role model to her daughter. Storey deploys a narrative doubling to demonstrate the powerful maintenance of patriarchal ideologies. *The House in South Road* is – to use this expression for a last time – a story of "history repeating itself". Ambivalence of identification/the conflict of class identity is, at this point, resolved, as the daughter becomes identical with her mother: contradictions are turned into a doubling and the narrative field of tension seems to have disappeared.

Nonetheless, towards the story's ending the conflict of class identity/ambivalence of identification is taken up with the representation of the protagonist as a middle-aged women. The repeated attempt to "turn away" from the working classes, hence from her mother, works on two levels: firstly, it is expressed via the house/home metaphor that I have mentioned earlier. The concept of home, belonging, and class identity is expressed though the literary motif of a house. In her essay *The Parlour and the Suburb: Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity and Modernity,* Judy Giles analyses Storey's autobiography in terms of the protagonist's relationship to housing and property. Giles focuses on the scene where the protagonist, as a middle-aged woman, learns about a new government scheme which says that working-class people are offered the chance to buy a council house. Giles points out Joyce's "excitement" about this as an important narrative element: "To be allocated a house by the agencies of the state or offered a mortgage by the financiers of capitalism could be understood as a powerful statement of entry into full citizenship for women like Joyce" (Giles 50), she argues. "Never in my whole life I have lived in a house with a bathroom [...] I closed my eyes in sheer ecstasy. Just thinking about it brought a feeling of pride at the thought of owning a bathroom" (Storey 279-280), enthuses the protagonist.

Thus, the ownership of a house works as a symbol for crossing classes. Joyce recollects her mother's relationship to property: "'Don't get ideas above your station, my girl', when I told her I wanted red-velvet curtains and wall-to-wall carpeting when I got married" (363). This phrase, entailing a clear topography of "above" and "below": upper classes versus lower classes (cf. Chapter 2), is repeated in another context which, in turn, is connected to the house/home-motif:

> I bought my red curtains at long, long last. And I joined a writer's group. I realised at the first session that I had come home and all my searching was over. This, then, all along was all I ever wanted to do. [...] At school, an author was someone you looked up to in awe and wonder. It wasn't for the likes of me from the solid working class. 'Don't get ideas above your station,' my mother would have said. (429).

As in Steedman's text, the character's turning away from the mother does not signify resistance: she turns to the middle classes. Again, her attempts to "turn the face of history to her mother's face" is not a move of resistance against the dominant culture,

but rather an escape to leave the psychological pain of her working-class part behind. Pain is embodied by the mother, the representative of the class. Her newly-created authorship, that clearly recalls the concept of language usage, also symbolises her turning away from the mother/from the working classes.

It means, together with the ownership of a house, an upward movement to Joyce. After all, the novel's title clearly demonstrates the importance of the house. It can be argued, that "class" also works as a tool for differentiation from the mother, who caused abandonment, hence pain. However the mother – although dead –still seems to be on her mind and "in her way". Joyce is turning to and turning away from her mother at the same time; the ambivalence in identification is not completely unraveled, even when it is stated that:

> By the 1970s there was a massive swing of the pendulum, away from the repressive Victorian values of our youth and the dominant male role. It was not enough anymore for women to remain passive, to endure what has always been and think things could not be changed. Women were beginning to change things for themselves. A lack of warmth, a lack of communication, and a lack of generosity were all marks I stacked against John [her husband] [...] Perhaps my dream of equality for all women will become a reality now that the torch has truly been lit and there are so many working towards that end. That's all I ever wanted, all I ever fought for. The most important things in life are equality and freedom. (431)

With this statement, *The House in South Road* ends.

Summary

"The novel is, at once, the place where ideology is coiled and the place where it can be called into question" (quoted in: Marianne Hirsch 9). Hirsch uses ideology in the Althusserian 's sense "the system of representation by which we imagine the world as it is" (cf. 9). The novels analysed bear this ambivalence of ideology being described and deconstructed at the same time. Particularly *The House in South Road* works along the principle of "history repeating itself" in terms of social class and gender. This is created by a narrative doubling of the mother and daughter's story. *The Banana Kid* shows in a blatant way the entanglement with history along the lines of gender, class and ethnicity; which is also created by a narrative doubling of the coloniser and the mother-character, established by colonial mimicry. Not exactly a

doubling, but an ambivalence of identification offers Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman.* Identifying with their mothers, all daughter-characters are struggling to turn away from them. Whereas Storey mainly uses the realist mode to describe the separation from and the longing for her mother, Valerie Mason-John deploys innovative narrative devices such as magic realism and dream-elements in the text. So too does Steedman, who quotes fairy tales in her work. Furthermore, Steedman uses scientific texts to write the mother-daughter story and transgresses the narrative conventions of the novel. Storey only shows a tendency towards this in the final paragraph by quoting non-fictional ideas about feminism in the 1970s (cf. final paragraph of analysis). Hence, all authors quoted in this chapter use different narrative techniques or different combinations of styles to represent the mother-daughter story.

Elements of the family romance manifest themselves in *The Banana Kid* and much more subtly in *The House in South Road;* whereas in the case of Steedman's novel one can find "traces" of this plot device, but it may appear far-fetched to interpret this text with regard to the family romance. Therefore, Steedman's text entails a transgression not only in narrative technique but also in terms of plot. It demonstrates the issue of class and class identity in a more blatant and challenging way, underlining the difficulties of turning away from her mother she is identical with in terms of gender and class during her childhood. Valerie-Mason John, in turn, plays with the concept of family romance. She combines the two types of this story pattern, using them provokingly to challenge the reader and show her protagonist's entanglement and entrapment in her mother's story of oppression along the lines of gender, class and ethnicity. Simultaneously, the daughter-character's wish for a substitute mother illustrates her urge to rid herself of the aftermath of history. Likewise, Storey's text entails slight allusions to the family romance that underline the daughter's turning away in terms of class and gender; but in far more conventional narrative style.

The daughter-characters/narrators speak in a variety of voices. However a clear point of comparison is the aspect of ambivalence along the lines of a constant interplay of love/hatred, identity/difference, unity/loss, turning to/turning away; entangled with the conflict of class identity; which is illustrated by the use of the house/home metaphor – that, in turn, underlines ambivalence. The stories are all tied

up in narrative knots that only partly become unraveled. Representations of abandonment (directly linked to ambivalence) are apparent in all texts under discussion, but only in *The Banana Kid* it is a central topic. In the other two stories, the conflict of class identity is more pronounced. *Banana Kid* is the only narrative out of the three texts that shows a complex plot; including rising and falling action and involving a variety of motifs and figures; whereas the other two focus on the mother and the daughter-character "only".

5. Rape, Battering, Trauma

5.1 Rape and Trauma

> 'What does it matter who is speaking?' For literary critics confronting the entanglement with representation, Samuel Beckett's question, so central to debates about the status of the subject in Western (post)modernism, demands the answer: who is speaking may be all that matters. Whether in the courts or the media, in art or criticism, who gets to tell the story and whose story counts as "truth" determines the definition of what rape *is.* [...] The added recognition that the term *representation* cuts across boundaries of juridical, diplomatic, political and literary discourses sustains the assumption underlying this book: that the politics and aesthetics of rape are one. (Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver 1)

This is reminiscent of Spivak's and bell hook's thoughts on letting the sufferer speak. Most of the novels under discussion are rape narratives that are centred on a female victim. In Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* (1974) and Pat Barker's *Union Street* (1982), the sex crimes are presented through the eyes of a third-person narrator which frequently offers insight into the victim's inner life via interior monologues; whereas both Andrea Ashworth's *Once In a House On Fire* (1998) and Rachel Trezises's *In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl* (2000) are held in a first-person mode of presentation. Yet the reader may, at times, wonder "who or what speaks in the female character" (Higgins & Silver 3), as a "phallocentric perspective" on rape happens to be prevalent in some text passages (cf. 2). Especially when it comes to court scenes, the narratives sometimes appear to be framed by a viewpoint premised on men's fantasies about female sexuality (2). The "phallocentric perspective" often stands in direct contrast to the victim's silence. This adds a dramatic quality to the texts: the reader shares the knowledge that these characters are victims of abuse, yet witnesses their silence – or rather their silencing – in the court room. As it

becomes clear in the course of the stories, the female victims cannot disclose the sex crimes, since it is defined by the men, not the sufferers, what rape is.

This is said to be also true for the extra-literary world, in actual court rooms: particularly in the context of marital abuse, it is sometimes argued that “rape is a sex crime that is not a crime when it looks like sex” (Ellen Rooney 90). Due to this definition, the meaning of the act to the woman is ignored. The female body is defined as an object. This also constructs the female identity as inferior and controllable. Accordingly, the lawyers in two of the novels are presented through a phallocentric language and become alliances to the perpetrators. To put it in Michel Foucault’s terms, the “male figures have appropriated bodies and pleasures and deployed a sexuality that serves to control individuals” (quoted in: Silver 116). The male appropriation of the woman may induce the following mechanism:

> At issue are both the construction of the female subject and the effect of this construction on women’s experience of their own being: the ways in which women internalise a male image of their sexuality as their identity as women, making epistemology and ontology one. The process of being reduced to an object, moreover, constantly aware of being looked at, acted upon, can cause women [...] *to split themselves into two,* to watch themselves as women from the male perspective, affecting both their realisation and their presentation of self. Women, then [...] are both objects and separated from themselves as object. (118) [my emphasis]

This description is reminiscent of what in feminist theory has been termed “the male gaze” (cf. Chapter 1). Andreas Huyssen describes the concept of the male gaze in the realm of fiction as follows:

> Vision is identified as a male vision. [...] The male eye [...] constructs its female object and makes it come to life through multiple instances of male vision inscribed into the narrative. The gaze is an ambiguous mesh of desires: desire to control, desire to rape, and ultimately desire to kill. [...] Beyond that, it is the male vision which puts together and disassembles the woman’s body, thus denying the woman her identity and making her into an object of projection and manipulation. (Huyssen 75)

The idea of disassembling the female body is particularly interesting, as it – in turn – reminds of the “splitting apart” of the violated subject. Hence it can be argued again that the male gaze causes a division within the women into first, a male-dominated/possessed part and second, the “remains” of the female part. Ellen Rooney confirms that “gender is the principle of division” in the rape context (cf. Rooney 90). Also, it will be shown that “the desire to kill” is sometimes apparent within the representations of the literary rapists. The aspect of the “splitting apart” is the

most significant textual element apparent in the working-class rape narratives under examination, both in the representation of sexual abuse itself as in the metaphorical expression of its meaning to the victim. I have discussed the causes and effects of such divisions in the previous chapters – in both contexts: class identity and ethnicity. Yet, the statement concerning the splitting (quoted above) is exclusively concerned with gender; the consequences of sexual abuse seem to cut across classes and ethnicities. Rape is obviously neither a matter of class nor of ethnicity. There are no implicit links to the aggressor's economic status or cultural background: rapists come from all walks of life (Penny Parks 1).

However I would like to point out that both class and ethnicity bring a different dimension into rape. In these contexts, the matter of objectification/commodification becomes relevant: the language employed in the working-class stories of abuse frequently bear "synecdochal reductions" (cf. Brenda Silver 121). The features of these stylistic devices will be illustrated in the following. Synechdochal reductions establish a reduction of female characters to commodities. In the context of rape, the aspect of commodification gains a deeper meaning, as the notion of economic exploitation is combined with the sexual exploitation of the female body. For instance, a critic of Pat Barker's *Union Street,* a novel in which two female characters are subject to sexual abuse, states that "in the derelict society symbolised in *Union Street,* women are frequently reduced to commodities for use and exchange, their value determined in the impoverished system of social and cultural relationships and their ruined community" (John Brenningham 8).

I have also discussed the term commodification in the previous chapter (*The Representation of Class Consciousness*) and pointed out that it "conveys both the extinction of social relations and the objectification of the human under capital" (Bill Mullen 35). This mechanism becomes even more highlighted within rape narratives. In Barker's text, for instance, a character called Iris King undergoes this process that reduces her to a commodity of exchange: her drunk husband brings back home his pub-mates and incites them to have sex with his wife one after another. Commodification, expressed in synechdochal reductions, goes hand in hand with the pain that these violations cause. Representations of pain, both physical and psychological, are also central to these texts.

Since lower-class subjects tend to have a deeper experience of objectification than their higher-class counterparts due to the economic exploitation of the working classes, the aspect of commodification in sexual abuse also becomes more glaring in the context of working-class women: the capitalist practice of commodification is tied to a long history. In this way, class influences representation of rape. The picturing of commodification in working-class rape narratives, however, not only functions to illustrate the oppression of the women; but also to expose the prevalence of the phallocentric perspective on sex crimes. This is, again, very often demonstrated via synecdochal reductions of the violated subject, which blatantly show how the male gaze sexualises, controls and brutalises the female body. Exposing this, the authors use narrative strategies of resistance to rape.[55] I have used the term resistance in the previous chapter; and it has the same meaning here: it is the resistance, expressed on many different levels, to the domination of a more powerful subject or institution.

The phallocentric perspective and the victim's silence in front of the law within the texts under examination may strike the reader as the female character's passiveness; however the fact that the women writers make their female protagonists speak in the first-person narration incorporates a resistant quality already: they are presenting the incident from the victim's perspective in the form of interior monologues and thus sharing the "truth" with the readership. Hence, narrative perspective is one strategy of writing rape-resistance. Secondly, resistance can be created by what the characters do against the sexual assaults. Taking it to court is, for instance, such action. The earlier mentioned synecdochal reductions, another strategy of exposing and thus demonstrating resistance against male dominance, are a matter of figurative, resistant language in the texts. So, it can be summarised that rape-resistance takes place on the three levels: narrative perspective, action/plot devices and stylistic devices. Against this background, the assumption that "the politics and aesthetics are one" shall be reassessed and critically examined. What I have pointed out for the aspect of class in rape narratives can partly be referred to ethnicity as well; as it is also true that the sexual exploitation of particularly non-white

55 The idea that exposure means resistance has been described in the chapter 1 (*Theoretical Background)*.

women becomes more intricate against the background of imperialist exploitation. Very often, the notion of slavery is conjured up in this context: male dominance over the procreative function of the black woman's body is a common trope in rape narratives told from the perspective of black female characters.[56] This will be shown in the analysis of Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen.* The rape-resistance strategies employed in this text are similar, but not identical to the novels dealing with white working-class victims. It is important to stress that "rape narratives challenge not only sexual politics, but also ethnic and racial tensions" (Sorcha Gunne and Zoe Thompson 5); particularly in the context of slavery and colonialism. Indeed, sexual violence has been discussed by many leading post-colonial critics, for instance by Frantz Fanon (1967), Edward Said (1978), Gayatri Spivak (1988). It can be summarised that

> the force of global imperialism has left in its wake a hierarchical social order that is heavily encrypted with a binary model of male/female, superior/inferior, dominant/subordinate, for as Said incisively argues, 'imperialism after all is an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control'. [...] The female body is a site over which imperial power is enacted. [...] Controlling women's sexuality, exalting maternity and breeding a virile race of empire-builders were widely perceived as the paramount means for controlling the health and wealth of the male body imperial politic. (Gunne and Thompson 6)

In the following analyses, it will become clear that rape narratives often incorporate the issue of battering as well. These two phenomena are consistently textually interlinked, however their respective modes of presentation differ greatly. When writing about battering, the authors tend to describe the respective scene in a much more detailed way. More strikingly, the scenes of battering sometimes even provide an insight into the violator's motives, whereas the narrative perspective in rape scenes is almost exclusively limited to the victim's point of view. With the revelation of the perpetrator's inner life, as will be shown in Pat Barker's *Union Street,* a whole new dimension opens up to the literary critic. Therefore, I would like to analyse the

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56 cf. Valerie Mason-John's *The Banana Kid* .This is also true for many American novels like, for instance, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982)*,* Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and also novel *Push* (1996) by Sapphire (Romana Lofton) which was recently made into a movie called *Precious*. All texts deal with intra-family sexual violence.

two textual phenomena separately. I will divide the chapter into the analysis of the representations of "rape and trauma" and "battering and trauma"; however I will point out the overlaps between the two in the course of the examination. As the title suggests, I shall begin with the subject matter of rape; and move on to the consequent issue of writing trauma that belongs to the subject matter of both rape and battering as symptoms of their aftermaths.

The trauma theorist Cathy Caruth conforms to Jacques Lacan's findings when stating that "in its general definition, trauma is described as the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena" (quoted in Caruth 91). Examining these manifestations of trauma and applying a theoretical approach onto them proved to be a challenging task, as stories of the aftermaths of abuse are relatively new to the literary world. And so is trauma literature in general, that is, stories about accidents, war experience, deaths and other forms of violence are a fairly recent literary field. Following Laurie Vickroy's examinations on the history of this genre, "narratives about trauma flourished particularly in the 1980s and 1990s with increased public awareness of trauma and trauma theory" (Vickroy 2) .Vickroy retorts:

> However, the narrative approaches have varied in their depth and purposes. Although popular culture has at times offered some insight into the psychology of fear, it has more often exploited such anxieties with tales of terror, suspense, or prurience. Trauma narratives go beyond presenting trauma as a subject matter of character study. They internalise the rhythms, processes, and uncertainties of traumatic experience within their underlying sensibilities and structures. They reveal many obstacles to communicating such experience: *silence*, simultaneous knowledge and denial, *dissociation, resistance, and repression.*(3) [my emphasis]

Here, Vickroy names an important phenomenon that has been labelled a manifestation of trauma; namely the term dissociation, which stands for the full technical term "dissociative identity disorder" (Suzette Henke 122). This, according to Henke, is a common traumatic response. She describes it as a "condition in which the victim literally enacts the metaphorical figure of a shattered subject, psychologically fragmented and emotionally 'in pieces'" (122). The concept of splitting apart is apparent again. Suzette Henke names the two further manifestations of trauma: emotional anesthesia, often synonymously with "psychic numbing" and

meaning “any partial or complete loss of sensitivity” (Arthur S. Reber 35); and traumatic flashbacks “the spontaneous recurrence of experiences” (280). Laurie Vickroy confirms that these representations of after-effects occur in trauma fiction (Vickroy 5). She states:

> It is not uncommon for victims to separate or dissociate themselves from physical and emotional self-awareness to avoid pain; splitting off from one’s body or awareness can reduce the victim’s immediate sense of violation and help them to endure and survive the situation. (Vickroy 13)

With regard to flashbacks, it is said that trauma literature is deeply affected by this phenomenon, as

> these accounts retain intrusive literary conventions such as chronology, characterisation, dialogue, and a directive narrative voice. Survivor’s experience resists normal chronological narration or normal modes of artistic representation. For example, because they live in duration rather than chronological time, they continue to experience the horrors of the past through internal shifts back in time and space rather than experiencing the past as differentiated from the present. Moreover, witnesses do not feel the sense of agency characteristic of being in control of a narrative. (Laurie Vickroy 5)

The final statement would only hold true for autobiographies and even here, one cannot equate the victim and the narrator of trauma literature, given the difference and the tension between author and autobiographical narrator (cf. chapter 1). Apart from these difficulties of talking about writer and storyteller in the same vein even in autobiographies, the remark is interesting and I will bear it in mind whilst analysing the texts, since two out of the four narratives under discussion are autobiographies. Vickroy’s assertion that trauma fiction lacks dialogue applies to the majority of the texts being analysed. Additionally, Vickroy speaks of repression as a manifestation of trauma in the previous quotation. Now this is a very complicated issue indeed. It raises the question whether the traumatised subject in the text suppresses the abuse, combined with the fact that those narratives often lack dialogue, how is the reader meant to find about the experience which the author makes her heroine suppress? Representations of repression[57] hence only work via imagery of

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57 A significant example of an imagery of repression is a scene in Katherine Mansfield’s short story *The Garden Party,* which deals with the working-classes in a rather drastic way. Ariela Freedman observes: “We can read the trauma of the war into the story. To write about the tragic and accidental death of a young man in 1922, is to allude indirectly to a recent history of tragic deaths. The drama of the privileged family who hears of a death almost in their own backyards mimics the bizarre situation of wartime England, where the clattering report of machine guns could be heard from Kent. Laura’s

repression that hints to trauma in terms of metaphors expressing fear and pain, and also via the above described manifestations of the aftermath that indicate a preceding experience of abuse. Foremost, all texts under discussion will be analysed in terms of the three categories of trauma named. Often, two of the manifestation of trauma – dissociation and emotional anesthesia – are presented in metaphors. Genne and Thompson argue that such imagery stands for the liberation of the traumatised subject:

> To describe one's hurt in image is to project it into an object which, though at first conceived as moving toward the body, by its separability from the body becomes an image than can be lifted away, carrying some of the attributes of pain with it. (Genne and Thompson 16)

Metaphors of trauma tie in with synecdochal reductions; in fact they broaden them, as these metaphors not only unmask male dominance/the male gaze, but highlight its aftermaths. Presenting the trauma means exploring and exposing the consequence of abuse, thus it is an act of "writing against trauma" (Genne and Thompson 15). It falls into the category resistance in terms of stylistic devices (cf. previous comment). This third form of resistance mostly occurs in the context of the male gaze; which causes the "splitting apart" of the female subject. This is true for all rape narratives under discussion; which will be illustrated in the following. As mentioned earlier, trauma narratives do not have a long literary tradition. However, there is a famous example of writing trauma that shall briefly be explained here, as one cannot ignore Virginia Woolf in this context. Although her texts are rather upper-class, they probably served as an example to women writing rape across the classes. Woolf is consistently mentioned in the context of trauma-literature (cf. Suzette Henke 19-21) and her innovative techniques of representing childhood trauma are ground-

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mother claims about the slums, 'I can't understand how they keep alive in those poky little holes' and then we think of trenches; Laura speaks of the earth as 'blurred, unreal like a picture in the newspaper' (295) and we think of the reports returned from the front. This description more than anything else in the story moves the narrative from the personal to the historical plane. Indeed, I suggest that this story which is full of repressions, is not so much about the war as about the repression of the war. [...] A hat has the power to transform Laura and distract her from her conviction that they must respond to the death of the workman by cancelling the party. When Laura goes to her mother to insist the party must be stopped, her mother places the hat on her head" (quoted in: Freedman 89).

breaking. In her autobiography *A Sketch of the Past* (1939) Woolf develops a multilayered imagery of physical and psychological responses to the violations enacted by male family members. For instance she “realises that a great part of every day is not lived consciously” (quoted in: Louise de Salvo 103) and that she experiences life as a “film of semi-transparent yellow” (103) or as if she was living in a grape (ibid). This corresponds to emotional numbing that I have described above. De Salvo terms this a “suspended animation”, which essentially stands for the deadening of the senses so that pain and psychological wounds are being numbed. However, I would like to stick to the term “emotional anaesthesia”. Further on, de Salvo argues that Virginia Woolf’s autobiography is characterised by fragmentation, disconnection and detachment; experiences are often told in an isolate way. The earlier mentioned loss of time fits in this context: a chronology and a sequence of incidents are often disrupted in her life story. This belongs to the phenomenon of dissociation: the violated body splits off from painful experiences. Virginia Woolf surely is an influence to the authors whose texts will be discussed now.

Andrea Ashworth: *Once in a House on Fire* (1998)

Andrea Ashworth was born in 1969 in England, to a painter and a housewife. Her father died in a car accident when she was five years old and her mother re-married twice. At eighteen, she won a place to study at Oxford University, where she earned her B.A., M.A. and Dr. phil., and became a lecturer for English Literature. She has written several anthologised short stories, essays and introductions to Penguin Classics, and her work has been featured in *The Observer, The Telegraph, The Independent, The Guardian and The Times Literary Supplement*. Asworth was awarded the *Hodder Fellowship in Creative Writing at* Princeton University, USA. She works with several British charities concentrating on the protection of children and adults from violence and poverty.

Once in a House on Fire is the story of a young girl who is sexually abused by her stepfather. According to the author, it is the story of her own childhood. Writing about the abuse as an adult, Asworth looks back to her childhood and early teenage years when she was continuously violated by her stepfather. The life-story includes

representations about her childhood, moving on to her teenagehood and ending with her as a 19-year-old first-semester student at Oxford University. The narrative voice often shifts between a "child-like" diction and an "adult tone". The childlike diction is constituted by a strikingly paratactic syntax and a simplified word-choice. For instance, she describes her perceptions and movements in a linguistically reduced manner, as in: "I want to go to my mother" (49) "It felt frosty. I shivered" (15), "I shook my head" (49). In these contexts, the narrator refers to her stepfather as "Da-dee" (Asworth 5). The "child's" voice is then interrupted by angry comments and it appears that the adult woman rises to speak in order to release her anger about the abusive stepfather; as in "our lives were fluttering in the wind, for Christ's sake, while he lazed good-for-nothing on his bastard backside all fucking day"(49). This contrast between those two voices conjures up the idea of the splitting and indeed it can be argued that "child" stands for the male-dominated part (male-dominated by rape), whereas the adult appears to have split off from this experience and hence stands for resistance which is emphasised by the angry tone. I will resume and discuss the aspect of splitting apart also throughout this analysis.

The blending of voices from the abused child on the one hand and the adult on the other is also mirrored in the title: whereas the adverb "once" indicates the past tense, the expression "in a house on fire" has an alarming effect and is associated with an inescapable and immediate threat, panic and fear. As will be shown and discussed, the image of fire dominates the text.

As in Trezise's story (see following analysis), a court scene is integrated into the text. It is placed at the story's beginning and it only indirectly deals with the abuse. In fact the scene takes place at a family court, where the step-father-to be, Peter Hawkins, is interviewed in order to adopt Andrea and her sister Laurie. The girls are also interviewed, to make sure that "they are happy with [their] stepfather" (19). It is indicated that the interviewer is a woman. From here, the narrating voice shifts into an interior monologue:

> There had been a time...There had been a time during the night when my stepfather slid his fingers under my blankets and touched me between the legs. Keeping my eyes closed, pretending to be asleep, I had rolled away, close to the wall, to stop it. I looked at the official woman, who smelt of apples. Pearly buttons ran straight up her *shirt* into a dead white collar. Her *pen* was *poised* above her clipboard. [...] Yes, I said, we were happy with our stepfather. (19) [my emphasis]

The depiction of the "official women" could be said to be attributed with a phallus symbol- even though this may seem a little far-fetched. The "poised pen" strikes me as such; it is also emphasised by an alliteration. Furthermore, the interviewer is said to wear a "collared shirt", which pictures her as being dressed in a garment that is generally worn by men. This may all be over interpreted, yet this – albeit subtle – masculinisation provides a hint to understand the protagonist's action. Being dominated by an omnipresent threat of masculine power, seeing a man in the "official woman", Andrea feels too overpowered too acknowledge the rape against her as a reason to not accept the rapist as her legal step-father. Here also, the prevalence of the phallocentric perspective is exposed.

At this point, Ashworth's protagonist does not embody resistance in terms of plot devices. The resistance here remains restricted to the narrative point of view – of letting the victim share the "truth" with the readership. This then also disembogues into resistance expressed by figurative speech. As will be also be demonstrated at the next analysis, the principle of "writing against trauma" follows a similar pattern that is apparent in Trezises' *In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl*: Ashworth mainly employs metaphors for dissociation; hence makes her heroine split off from the "painful male part". Various synecdochal reductions are established in this context. This is the case in a scene that describes Andrea's migration to Canada. The family leaves England in order to find work abroad; and they stay in motels during the parents' search for a job and a place to live: "While we were waiting to find a house of our own, we kept *our lives squeezed up against the walls in plastic leather holdalls,* too crammed to risk opening properly", comments the autobiographical narrator (Ashworth 39). [my emphasis] Here, a *totum pro parte* is employed. Asworth uses the expression "our lives" for "the clothes needed for daily life". The girl's lives are thus described as "squeezable" entities; the abstract and highly meaningful term "life" is reduced and objectified to a manageable size that can be put into bags. Hence, it seems that their lives, that is, their bodies are taken off them and are being tucked away. This image complies with the notion of dissociation. Hereby, the storyteller expresses the perception of her existence as being controlled, acted upon, limited and downgraded through abuse.

A very similar example is the following passage I have quoted before: "Our lives were fluttering in the wind, for Christ's sake, while he lazed good-for-nothing on his

bastard backside all fucking day“ (49). The girls’ lives are, again, presented as being subject to a powerful male force. It appears that the adult rises to speak again, evaluating the situation from the retrospective and releasing her anger towards her stepfather by swearing. Simultaneously, male dominance is exposed and poignantly criticised. Intermingled with synecdochal reductions are representations of trauma. In addition to the objectification of “life”, another process takes place: objects are being animated, lifeless entities become alive. Hereby, the author creates a topsy-turvy world. The symbolic annihilation of the protagonist’s liveliness points to emotional anaesthesia/psychic numbing.

> At night, Laurie *and I became sausage rolls, baked* in musty sleeping bags on the bare floorboards [...]. Our stepfather slouched with his hands behind his head, waiting for us to be *swallowed into our sleeping* bags so he could have our mother all to himself. I crouched on the stairs, scribbling at top speed, *wondering when we would be bundled into the back of his van.* (152) [my emphasis]

The synecdochal reductions are obvious and at the same time, an object, the sleeping bag that “sucks in” the girls, becomes animated. In another scene, the narrator randomly describes a scene of afternoon tea at home, when “real milk crept into our tea” (196). The violated girl’s world is turned upside down: even in daily life things becomes anthropomorphised and simultaneously she is being objectified. The respective phrases describing either personifications or objectifications are each strongly alliterated, as in “*w*ondering *w*hen *w*e *w*ould *b*e *b*undled into the *b*ack of his van”152) [my emphasis]. This figure of speech makes the phrases appear powerful and overwhelming, like a “flood” (of words) that subdue the speaker. The overwhelming power is, essentially, the abusive stepfather who is a central instance in the passage quoted above. This becomes also clear in this example of personification: “He packed his shirts and the collection of leather belts that had been waiting, he was fond of warning, to teach us a thing or two. Coiled like snakes with sharp buckle tongues, he stuffed them into a black bin bag” (158). Even though this phrase should technically be labelled a simile (due to the word “like” that create an comparison of the belt with a snake), it definitely has personifying, or rather, “animalising” features. An intense threat emanates from this image which make the stepfather’s tools he uses to violate the girl additionally “turn into” a dangerous animal. Personifications, as pointed out the chapter *The Representation of Class Consciousness,* conjure up an imagery of working-class women’s commodification.

The snake, as described in chapter 4 (*The Mother-Daughter Relationship),* is a powerful symbol of death. Here it becomes clear that metaphors of trauma are often on the verge of death; and that this resistance is strongly “sabotaged” by notions of death. Hence, a narrative field of tension is created by the conflicting concepts of the resistance to rape on the one hand and death, meaning recapitulation, on the other. Terms belonging to the notion of death occur frequently: death/dead (88, 106, 59, 62,three times 78,80, 110, 138, 161, 203, 241, 295, 315). Further words that belong to this lexical field like “dying” (47, 126, 131, 132, 319);“kill(ed)/killing”(47, 113, 164, 184, 218, 284, 291, 294, 317, 320, 323); “buried” (55, 158 288, 292) “skull”(81, 128, 226, 298) “corpse” (140, 290) are apparent. Different to the death scenes in Trezise’s novel (cf. following analysis), there are no suicide attempts; the motif mostly functions on a symbolic level. A striking concomitant phenomenon of the death imagery is the concept of fire, which is even more so prepotent than the former. It stands for the long-term effect of sexual abuse: the imagination of a burning child evokes pictures of severe wounds. These injuries symbolise the psychological pain a violated person has to suffer (cf. preliminary notes). The term “fire” or related terms constantly reoccur in the text: “fire” (104, 150, 161, 164 twice, 218, 277 twice, 286, 289, 291); “flaming”: 25, 67, 75, 137,150 (twice)115, 116, 209, 229, 240, 290, 292); “burning” (106, 129, 137, 232, 299, 314;); “flames” (182, 185); “fume” (268, 278, 299, 325); “smoke” (45); “fiery (104) [....]. (104) [....]. Having a glance at the overlaps between words describing fire and death in terms of page numbers, it stands out that these terms often coincide. It can be said that they work together to sabotage the metaphors for resistance: as opposed to splitting off the pain, they stand for the deep, severe and painful wounds that they caused, overwhelming and destroying the violated subject. Like death, fire strongly works against metaphors of resistance. Fire, that is, the idea of burning presents a strong contrast to and sabotage the strategies of resistance.

The images of death and fire, conflicting with attempts of resistance, go hand in hand with the plot. In fact, *Once in a House on Fire* is constituted by a “see-saw plot”: it is focused on the stepfather who comes and goes, leaves the family in peace and turns up to violate them – until he is “replaced” by another step-father character called Terry. Terry is equally abusive and he comes and goes as well, as he is sent to prison for petty crime and turns up again when released.

In addition to the conflict of representations of pain and the resistance to it, another major plot element is connected with the representations of violence: it is, surprisingly enough, the protagonist's studiousness and her upward movement to a university student.

> 'Your daughter is university material', Andrea's form teacher tells her the girl's mother and father at the school's parents evening, 'It would be criminal to let her abilities go to waste.' 'Snooty bitch!' Dad ground the gear stick into reverse, screeching out of the school car park. 'What've you been telling her?' (250)

Not paying much attention to phallus imagery in this phrase and moving on to the subject matter of the heroine's education, it is blatantly obvious here that there is a clash between the educational world and the parents' house. "The books that really got my dad's goat were the red leather-bound ones: Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights" (230). Like the mother-figure in *The House in South Road* (cf. chapter 4)*,* the stepfather seems threatened by the daughter's cultural capital. The titles are carefully chosen by the author, as the former novel is a text which is approaching the issue of inter-family violence; and the latter is an outstanding feminist story. Both have the potential to educate and "change" her. To emphasise the contrast between Andrea's and her stepfather's education, it is noteworthy that he is depicted watching soap operas on the "telly" and reads tabloids like *The Sun* and *The Mirror.*

It can be said that Andrea's absorption in literature falls into the category of the resistant strategy of dissociation, as it is presented here:

> I had submitted fifty lines of verse to a literary society in London, at the suggestion of my English teacher; one morning a certificate for creative writing arrived through the post. *It made me feel invincible*, for a moment. [...] I could turn nasty things at home into stories. *I could cut myself off.* (313) [my emphasis]

The clash between an educationally deprived, violent and restless childhood and the victim's stoic ambitions to become an intellectual, unperturbed by the family situation, alludes to a dissociation. First of all, it appears that body and mind are separated: Andrea blots out the pain her body feels and it seems as if she is existing through/in her mind only – that is, her life becomes focussed on thoughts. On the one hand, Andrea experiences and relives the abuse and is caught up in pain, on the other she studies hard for her exams, concentrating strictly on her forthcoming career as a university student. It is partly the discrepancy between past, present and future; and

also actually a clash between educational deprivation and autodidact ambitions within one family life. This intensifies the aspect of the splitting. Simultaneously this recalls the conflict of class identity which I have described in chapter 4 (*The Mother-Daughter Plot*), particularly because the autobiographical narrator describes the conflict in terms of class: she fears that, despite her education, she can never be middle-class since her father has been to prison (221). Hence, it more and more looks like Andrea's studiousness is – although still seeming to be strategy to numb the pain/split off from the male, hurtful part – also more so a turning to the middle classes, and a turning away from the working class world. The turning away can be understood as an escape, as the aspect of escape is entailed in this excerpt:

> While I was writing, I would forget myself and everyone else; poetry made me feel part of something *noble and beautiful and bigger* than me. But my poems were all about drowning, worlds inside mirrors, flesh, bone and blood, the gloopiness of time-things that other people might not understand. (245) [my emphasis]

The term "noble" is frequently used to refer to the higher classes, as in the context of the family romance, where the child fantasises about having been born to high-class, or even royal parents. Both terms "noble" and "bigger" suggest that the I-as-a-narrator performs an upward movement on the "social ladder". The word beautiful seems to describe the language that she becomes absorbed in. Also language usage , as shown previously, is directly linked to social class. The protagonist appears to escape ("I would forget myself and everyone else") into this language, disband her lower-class identity and hence distance herself from her family members – especially her stepfather. The aspect of escapism is also pointed out in the phrase: "My favourite place is in my mind"; which is the title of her school essay she wins another price for. It is reminiscent of the principle of "turning away" from the working classes as a consequence of the turning away from the mother, the embodiment of class, who has caused pain (cf. chapter 5, *The Mother-Daughter Relationship)*. Since the idea of places is employed here, it can be said that, she is not safe in her parents' house, again a symbol of class identity (cf. Chapter 5), she escapes to a "safe space": (the language of) the middle classes.

Also, the category of "escape" is apparent here: "It was like looking at someone else's life" (326), comments the narrator when contemplating her past. Ashworth

raises the question of how the heroine brings up the strength to manage organise her university career at Oxford; leaving the life of extreme violence and mortal agony.

Rachel Trezise: *In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl* (2000)

Rachel Trezise was born in Rhondda Valley, South Wales in 1978. She was raised by her single mother who worked as a barmaid and cleaner when Rachel was a child. Her mother remarried when Rachel was six. At the age of fourteen Rachel ran away from home and lived on the streets until the police took her home. She began producing and editing a local music fanzine called *Smack Rapunzel*. Later, Trezise studied Journalism and English at Glamorgan University in Pontypridd; and later Geography and History at Mary Immaculate College in Limerick. Simultaneously, she wrote her first novel and worked in factories to finance her studies. She graduated in 2000 and her autobiographical novel *In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl* was published in the same year (cf. "Rachel Trezise Biography").The novel is set in Rhondda Valley, an impoverished place in South Wales, and it depicts a childhood and youth of poverty and abuse. From the age of eleven onwards the heroine Rebecca is repeatedly raped by her stepfather – until her mother divorces him. The author goes straight into the matter of abuse; although this does not happen in a too blatant way, for Trezise mainly operates with allusions to approach this theme. For instance, with the phrase "[m]y mother seemed to me like a bird with a broken wing" (Trezise 15), she creates the assumption that her mother must have been violated in some way. Later in the text it becomes clear that the mother has been abused, yet the representations of the mother's pain remain a marginal part of the novel. Instead, it is the daughter Rebecca who is consistently at the narrative's centre. The "brokenness" in the phrase quoted above is reminiscent of the concept of splitting apart that happens to violated subjects on multiple levels. A scene which confirms this assumption follows soon after: "I was woken one night by screaming. I went to investigate, and as though it was exactly what I expected, I saw my father beating my mother's head against the telephone stand" (34). In the next scene, mother and daughter are situated outside the house – inside the family car where they spend the

night to hide from the step-father. Almost in the same vein, it is revealed that the I-as-a narrator Rebecca is sexually abused by the very same man:

> He reached out his fat hand as I curled up senselessly, momentarily believing I could protect myself. He gripped my white cotton 'Tuesday' knickers and held my arm tightly, bruising them immediately as he did so. There was a lot of fumbling and dull pain, and five minutes into the skirmish the dull turned to the extreme. He *broke* my hymen and my senses alike (36). [my emphasis]

The narrative moves from a detailed description of what happens before the rape to a brief indication that a penetration is violently carried out on the girl's body. The sentence describing the incidents before the penetration is a hypotaxis, characterized by an enumeration of adjectives and adverbs. On a semantic level it is observable that the words employed here function to establish a rather graphic literary scenario of sexual violence. Violence is, in fact, at the centre of this vivid depiction; it is reflected through the words "gripped", "held tightly"; "bruising", and "dull pain". To describe the following sex act, it is merely stated that the "the dull turned into the extreme". Again, pain is at the centre of the utterance that Trezise puts into her heroine's mouth. This is the only rape incident that is presented in a scene. What follows is a short "summary" which informs the reader that the girl "felt the broomstick for a sixth time" (41) – depicting, again, an intense pain. The narrative style conforms to what Fiona McCann states about contemporary rape narratives by women writers:

> The representation of rape is particularly interesting in these novels as it oscillates between ellipses and excess of detail, between the said and the unsaid, between metaphor and realistic detail, always resisting sensationalism and constantly emphasising the multiple forms of resistance deployed by the female characters, who are the victims of this sexual violence. (McCann 86)

McCann takes up the aspect of resistance. In this context, it is directed at "sensationalism" in representations of rape. It can be said that the elimination of sensationalism works as a strategy to resist sexual fantasies entailed in rape (cf. preliminary notes). This then falls into the category of resistance in terms of narrative perspective, since it resists a "phallocentric perspective" about rape. Here the question of "who speaks" becomes overly relevant. The voice that Trezise creates appears to be struggling, yet strongly attempting to rid herself of the "phallocentric perspective" and to position herself against the perpetrator. This is also true for the

protagonist's actions, for Rebecca comes to officially accuse her step-father of raping her.

The action is set into operation after the victim's mother had found the girl's diary which reveals the abuse. Moreover, the entries indicate that Rebecca had, as a minor, slept with a young man called Griff. The mother, who is now divorced from the abusive stepfather, reports this to the local authorities. The following scene is set in a rural community centre, where Rebecca is interviewed by social workers about the matter. The narrator recollects:

> It began in a social centre on the outskirts of Pontypridd. [...] The upholstery was peach and pink with blue and purple stripes. The floor was carpeted with soft toys. The way my mother had made me dress could have made me look like I belonged there, but obviously I didn't feel it. *Beneath a cerise Adidas sweatshirt, empty nose and earholes and a plait,* I wondered what the hell difference would social workers asking me if I knew what 'consent' meant, make. What is oral sex, where exactly did he touch? Where exactly did the liquid go? Did he know about my not starting my period? [...] Then a doctor and a nurse laid me flat, naked on a board, holding my feet together but my knees apart. They prodded me with various metal instruments an*d talked about my body as though it had no mind attached*. (Trezise 57) [my emphasis]

In this interior monologue, the victim challenges the interviewer's inquiries. Connected with this are figures of speech, hence the third form of narrative resistance. I have emphasised expressions that can be labelled "synecdochal reduction" (cf. preliminary notes). The abused girl highlights the reduction of her body to an object, her "commodification", since she pictures her body and, accordingly, her self-perception as fragmented, detached and confined to few parts of the body. She names her ears – instead of her mouth – in a situation which should allow her to speak. This indicates that the victim is actually silenced in the interview about the sexual crimes against her; and, poignantly, her mouth is then mentioned in another context – namely in that of oral sex. Interestingly, the interviewers' gender is not indicated; which means that it must be assumed they are male; or they could be women dominated by "phallocentric perspective". This is what Rebecca is overwhelmed by, yet set against. It becomes clear that synecdochal reductions go hand in hand with the representation of rape from a masculine perspective. The synecdoches function to highlight and expose, and criticise the masculine perspective; hence they are a form of resistance. The question "where did he touch?" make the reader imaginatively follow the hands of the male offender. This is

intensified by the next question of where exactly the “liquid” went: the girl’s body is marked by the man’s semen and is exposed to the reader who is “forced” to imaginatively “watch” the naked body, “searching” for male traces on it. Hence the scene can be said to be framed by “male’s fantasies about female sexuality” (cf. Higgins and Silver 2). This is emphasised by the deictic expression that is put into the interviewer’s mouth, when Rebecca is being interrogated “*where* the liquid went.” [my emphasis] Hereon, the victim wonders “what difference it makes” to the testimony that she was being raped. She questions the importance of these details. Another synecdoche is employed in the final phrase “they prodded me with various metal instruments and talked about my body as though it had no mind attached” (57).

During a second questioning, that is now conducted by the stepfather’s defender, Rebecca is asked to provide further details about the rape:

> ’You say on your video, that the first time your step-father raped you he held you and took your clothes off, do you remember that?’ ‘Yes’. ‘Can you explain how he held you and took your clothes off?’ ‘He held me down and took my clothes off.’ ‘Yes, how did he do this?’ I struggled. And then, ‘It’s hard to explain how someone removes your clothes. He held me down and the next thing, my clothes were off.’ [...] I had been informed by the police that Brian William’s [the stepfather’s lawyer] would try to intimidate me. What it all came down to was the fact that any physical evidence my step-father had left inside me had been ruined by the physical evidence Griff had left inside me. All the prosecution could go on, was what I said during that day, or more to the point what the lawyers got me to say. The woman acting on my behalf worked only with a case file because I was not allowed to meet her; yet my stepfather was able to have many long discussions with his ginger man with black eyes. (59)

As in the previous scene, this narration conjures up images of the rapist’s actions; and, precisely because details are required by the lawyer, the reader is, again, “forced” to picture the violator’s hand movements, stripping the girl to rape her. This illustrates again the powerful dominance of the male perspective in a court situation. Rebecca states that, after this questioning surrounding the undressing by the stepfather, she is being silenced and said “what the lawyers got [her] to say” (see above quotation). The masculine influence on the definition of rape becomes transparent here. The fact that she is not allowed to speak with “the woman acting on [her] behalf”, but the offender is “able to have many long discussions with his ginger man with black eyes” (59) highlights this. The two males (the rapist and his lawyer) become allies here. The latter is depicted as one that cannot “see”, as in “see

the truth" – with his "black eyes". Here, the dominance of a "phallocentric perspective" is exposed again.

As it turns out, the stepfather is set free, since the traces of him in Rebecca's body are blurred by the intercourse she had with Griff. The mother's accusations against him are declared as an act of revenge against her ex-lover. Trezise's demonstration of phallocentric perspective is much more clear and effective than it is in the novels discussed later in this chapter.

After Rebecca's actions of resistance are overpowered by the law, the protagonist enters a stage of the splitting of her consciousness. She splits off from the painful experience, that is, dissociates from it. In this process, her body goes numb so that she can blot out the pain. These are two of the mechanisms of trauma I have previously described and which are labelled "dissociation and emotional anesthesia". The term dissociation recalls the idea of the splitting that is caused by male dominance over female's sexuality. Rebecca's consciousness separates from the – literally – male dominated, aching body; it separates from the so-to-say "masculine part" within her female body. As previously mentioned, representations of dissociation and emotional anaesthesia, particularly metaphors of such, are forms of rape-resistance.

Traumatic flashbacks, on the other hand, represent a contradiction to the process splitting off from the painful part. They interfere with the mechanisms of dissociation and emotional anaesthesia. In *In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl,* the categories dissociation, emotional anesthesia, depression and flashbacks are sometimes combined. Hereby, a narrative field of tension is created, as for example, in this scene:

> Somehow I ended up in a glass coffin. A dwelling where I could see and hear life going on around me, but where participating would not be possible. Speaking was not possible. I could relive the rape every night and console myself by hiding at the bottom of my bed, but to say a word as simple as "yes" became a hindering task which provoked tears and aroused suspicion. (Trezise 37)

The heroine's inability to participate can be understood as a sign of psychic numbing. The idea of a glass coffin is a powerful image; it depicts her as a person "buried alive" who is isolated from the outside world, who cannot interact or participate as physically cut off from anything around her. This describes the concept of emotional anesthesia or "psychic numbing". On the other hand, the expression "relive" indicates

that the protagonist suffers from traumatic flashbacks, the alliteration of “relive” and “rape” makes the sentence sound hauntingly impressive. Hence, Rebecca’s resistance is “sabotaged” by the flashback. In this text, trauma is not a stable, integrative phenomenon, but rather a factor that splits the subject further into competing “male” and “female” parts within one body.

Combined with the manifestation of trauma is, in turn, the concept of the male gaze – the root cause for the division of Rebecca’s consciousness. The picture of the girl in a glass coffin not only turns her into an entrapped, but also into a surveilled object, which is entirely exhibited to the outside sphere. This clearly recalls the idea of the male gaze that sexualises her body. The same image is repeated in a paragraph where Rebecca remarks: “I lived in a see-through box, the inside looking out. Nothing really mattered” (38).

Furthermore, the idea of space, or rather, the lack thereof is interwoven in the glass coffin/see-through box metaphor. The imprisonment in a box works as a metaphor for the different power positions of men and women/girls and thus between step-father and daughter: the female protagonist is tucked away, kept silent, suppressed and has no access to the male’s sphere. Thus, she cannot invade into the man’s “space”, whereas he has the power to violate her sphere. The notion of space/the lack thereof is also employed here: “I loved space. After years *c*luttered with *c*ollections of blue and white *c*hina, I wanted *room, room* to speak without kn*o*cking some*o*ne *o*ver” (56). [my emphasis]. The description of spatial narrowness in the last example is underlined by the linguistic density of the phrase that is created by the alliteration of the initial letter “c”, the repetition of the word “room”, assonances of the letter “o”, and the attribute clause. Linguistic density is also highlighted in this phrase: “Around and around the bedroom in circles, circles, circles, too scared to go out but too scared to stay in, and all hours of the day I heard smashing in the distance. Why wouldn’t someone shatter my glass?” (47). All examples create images of narrowness, limitation, claustrophobia and entrapment. These concepts are linked to traumatic flashbacks, which becomes particularly clear in this excerpt:

> Watching the closed door with anxiousness and watching through the window the sky turn red at night; and sleeping curled as a cat at the bottom of my bed in the early hours of the morning. Watching, and waiting for normality to come. Compelled to walk where I could find peace of mind, where I could be safe. (47)

Representations of open spaces always bear a certain danger; which stands for the victim's fear of being abused again. Whereas these spaces are "filled" with negative traits, the other category of space (named above) is described as hollow: "My inside was numb as well now. I hollowed out so that anyone or anything felt free to intrude"(42); "inside I'm dead" (97). The description of hollow bodily spaces is linked to the concept of emotional anesthesia, as being insubstantial means being lifeless, hence emotionless.

Out of the space-motif (both outside and inside spaces) develops another motif that becomes stronger and stronger in the course of the novel. In fact, it becomes the dominant narrative element; and the motif is turned into a significant part of the storyline: the notion of death. It functions both on a symbolic level as well as being part of the action. It is the most dramatic "sabotage" to the strategies of resistance, overwhelming the victim and introducing her "surrender". Rebecca recollects: "From a very early age I found avid interest in death" (24); "I found myself lured to burial places (25) [and] "when I was eleven years old I desperately wanted to die" (40), she states. Terms describing death are constantly reoccurring: "death" (24, 78); "die/dying" (44 (four times) , 48, 93, 116, 118, 119); dead (44, 50, 77, 89, 115, 118); "deadened" (112); coffin/funeral/buried (37, 44, 25, 77). The narrator's death wish is nearly realised when, after being "jealous of the dead and buried lizard [her boyfriend's pet reptile]" (77) she attempts suicide with a pill overdose (93). Her boyfriend Daf saves her by making her throw up the medicine. The suicide attempt signifies the category of "destruction" (cf. chapter 1, *Theoretical Background*).

Another suicide attempt takes places towards the narratives ending; which I will describe at a later point. Death is the story's leitmotif, and it can be argued that the earlier described scenes depicting narrow spaces/entrapment have the function to anticipate and "prepare" the reader for the notion of death. First, the idea of the glass coffin effectively combines the two concepts, second the "hollowness" inside her body serves as a strong allusion to death: "inside I'm dead" she states (97). Death thus is the last consequence of the splitting apart as it appears that the violated girl cannot rid herself of the painful male part of her to become "whole" again. As a consequence, the death wish becomes stronger and stronger in the course of the narrative. Death, in its various facets, overpowers the resistant strategies; and it is combined with traumatic flashbacks, that also sabotage resistance. Another scene

that I labelled a traumatic flashback is the following. It presents a childhood memory intruding into representations of Rebecca's teenage life:

> I remember lying in bed, shivering inside the shell of a pointless black *w*ar *w*reckage and *w*ondering *w*here my mother was. *W*ondering *w*hy she *w*asn't there to pick me out of this bloody, *w*et and painful battlefield I have for a child's bed; and I just guessed she was at Martin's. (88) [my emphasis]

The imagery is straightforward but effective: the "child's bed" is depicted as a war zone. The threat of pain and death is omnipotent, hiding is "pointless". Rebecca is at the violator's mercy and is captured in her bed, the "battlefield". Combining these contrary concepts –"bed and battlefield" also is a rather effective stylistic device. An alliteration of two terms that describe each other, yet the harsh opposites demonstrate that Rebecca's childhood is completely upside down: the child's bed, which is generally positively connotated with notions of safety, sweet dreams, rest and peace is turned into a death bed. Further alliterations are apparent in the scene quoted above. I have emphasised the initial sound "w" that occurs strikingly frequent. The linguistic density corresponds to the victim's confinement to her "battlefield bed". Trezise works the effect of sounds intensively here: the word choice is charcterised by a strong cacophony, which is particularly noticeable in the expression: "*b*loo*d*y, we*t* an*d* *p*ainful *b*a*tt*lefiel*d*" [my emphasis]. The harshness of the cacophonic consonants corresponds to the negative semantic quality of the quoted words.

Not all traumatic flashbacks are designed in the form of revivals of situations in the protagonists childhood. The following scene describes how Rebecca is frequently reminded of the rape, which – here – makes her think analytically about it rather than going through it emotionally:

> Not even when the court case was at hand, did I receive any medical for *rape*. For *rape*, *years and years of* them. [...] So I soldiered on, deadened everything, put the past to rest. Only it never rested, it showed itself in a dream or in a sick pub joke, or on particularly lonely nights, in a particularly lonely house. So I deadened myself with denial and drugs. (112) [my emphasis]

As the autobiographical narrator is contemplating about having flashbacks, I would like to term this a "meta-flashback". War-imagery is also evoked here, but in a reverse sense. Rebecca is no longer stuck in her battlefield bed, but "marches" on from there in order to survive. Yet, the flashbacks uncontrollably come back to her. Repetitions and parallelism (see emphasis) are employed to stylistically underline the

repetitiveness of the rape scenes in the victim's mind. Again, alliterations are apparent to bestow severity and "weight" to the things being said; as in "I deadened myself with denial and drugs". The next flashback I would also like to term a "meta-flashback":

> I saw many parallels between Coomsby [her boyfriend] and my step-father. Coomsby was raping me, emotionally, over and over and over. Stealing things which were rightly mine, and I never told anyone. Afraid like so many abused children, that deep down it was my own fault, that deep down I was a bad little girl who deserved it. And the hate I harboured secretly while he took, took, took, equalled the hate I felt for my step-father for so many years, while he took, took, took. (114)

The autobiographical narrator views her situation from a distance, from a meta-perspective. She draws a connection between past and present, and between two abuser's behaviour patterns and hence is analysing the violent incidents. It can be said that this is almost a shift in the narrative voice, which points to an alteration within the autobiographical narrator. These kind of flashbacks appear not be as random and powerful, but way more controlled by the victim. Hence these meta-flashbacks stand for an increasing agency and strength of the heroine.

Indeed, as it turns out, Rebecca gradually works her way out of the conflict of wanting to die (her surrender) and dissociation/anesthesia (her attempt to get rid of the painful part).

Interestingly, the aspect of class clearly comes to the fore here. It is introduced with a scene at her grandmother's house. This character suddenly appears in the story without having even been mentioned before. Rebecca finds "Gran", as she calls her, on her death bed; she is dying from cancer. On this, she reveals: "I was jealous of my Gran because she was dying and I wanted to" (117). This is repeating a phrase about the dying lizard Rebecca is jealous of earlier in the narrative. "I'm *half* dead anyway" (118) [my emphasis], she explains. Here, the splitting between a dead and resistant part is literal. Next, the girl hides in the bathroom and tries to kill herself (for a second time) with a pill overdose. But she does not die; she is rescued by her brother; and instead of her death, a surprising turning point is assembled to the story.

Having outrun death, Rebecca visits her grandmother the next day; and during a conversation with her about past times, the protagonist suddenly realises how much strength and courage the old woman conveys. Rebecca explains:

> My grandmother was a strong woman. She worked all her life. Born in Carmarthen, she left for London at fourteen to nanny. She worked through the war, driving buses, driving troops around Britain, and she was the only woman to do so. She moved to Rhondda when she met my Grandfather, and she cleaned every pub in Treorchy. Her children were the best fed and dressed. [...] She told me she had to wait until the following Tuesday to die, because the salvation army have a busy schedule on the weekend, and didn't want to be burying her as well. [...] My Gran died the following Tuesday as planned, yet she gave me more than a choice of clothes and a sewing machine, she gave me the person who is writing this sentence. (Trezise 177)

The concept of a strong woman seems to work as an inspiration for Rebecca to counteract the death wishes and to re-build resistance; finally regaining her "female identity" when following in the footsteps of her model woman. Jane Aaron confirms that it is the protagonist's grandmother who leads her to the decision to not only preserve her own life, but also preserve her experience in the form of an autobiography:

> It is through her relation to this woman, still undefeated in old age, that Rebecca gains sufficient sense of self-worth to want to live and to write her account of her struggle. Her grandmother 'gave me the person who is writing this sentence', she tells the reader: 'She gave me treasured stories and examples and standards to live by, reasons to fight my way to where I want to go. Reasons to get up in the morning and make the day a success. For all that, there seems little to hope or plan for in the 1990s Rhonddha Valley, in which 'more than half the population are living dead, walking wounded', yet 'the memory of my Grandmother pinches my arm and it's back to the fight'. (Jane Aaron 94)

This means that in the end, the narrative field of tension is removed; and Rebecca regains her female identity that the violations of rape had almost taken away from her and destroyed. She becomes "whole" again.

The grandmother character is, indeed, an extremely interesting device to bring the aspect of working-class life into the novel: her personal strength with the amount of work, type of work and working ethos. This strength is said to be an example for the abused girl to survive: to "soldier on" (Trezise 111), as the narrator puts it. Like her grandmother struggled through dangerous war work, her granddaughter uses this as a new guide and strategy to cope with the life-threatening aftermath of abuse. Hence, the hardship of work, an important aspect of working-class fiction, is presented here as a source of hope, magnitude and a reason to keep going. It portrays the old lower-class woman as a heroine, an icon of fortitude, who functions as an inspiration to her granddaughter and ultimately saves the girl's life. As previously mentioned, this is the most interesting device in working-class fiction I have come across so far: the working-class background is suddenly not presented as a detriment, stressor or

disadvantage to a person's success and well-being; but rather as a factor that teaches how to survive and strengthens the lower-class subject. *In And Out Of the Goldfish Bowl* is the only novel in my anthology that raises this point clearly and it is actually the only text that deals with an encouraging, "tough" grandmother-figure. Hence the creation of this character is an innovative device; therefore I consider Rachel Trezise's novel as a very significant piece of work within the realm of women's working-class fiction.

Pat Barker: *Union Street* (1982) (Kelly Brown)

Pat Barker was born in Thornaby-on-Tees, a working-class area in Yorkshire, the so-called "proletarian North" of England, in 1943. She grew up with her grandparents, as her mother had to give her away due to financial strains. Her grandfather ran a chip-shop, her grandmother worked as a cleaner. Barker qualified for the London School of Economics and in her early twenties taught History and Social Studies at a High School. She began to write in her mid-twenties. Her first novel *Union Street* was published in 1982 and was made into the film *Stanley and Iris*, directed by the American film maker Martin Ritt in 1990; "but with Jane Fonda and Robert de Niro taking the leads, it bears little resemblance to the source novel" (Sharon Monteith 19). Unlike the film, it is not a love story with a happy ending. The novel's title is rather significant, as it bears connotations that refer to images of working-class life. The term "union" entails a reference to working-class labour and also a history of strikes and struggles against exploitation by the ruling classes. The term street, although simple and straightforward, recalls the British working-class soap opera *Coronation Street,* which transports images of a close, familiar neighbourhood living in this street, all equal in term of their economic situation (another aspect that is also involved in the term "union"). Monteith argues that

> Union Street is a symbolic space that functions to delineate the imaginative contours of an urban, working-class landscape and social structure. In doing so, it connects with those earlier intrepid cartographers of working-class communities, with George Orwell, Hoggart, Raymond Williams and with the social realism in literature, drama, film and television of the late 1950s and 1960s. (3)

Monteith later retorts that this style of working-class writing is actually reorganised by Barker, who alters the construction of working-class women's identities and experiences. Indeed, the novel is not at all about "cosy" and close community life; which is made clear by its form. *Union Street* consists of seven different parts, each dedicated to a female living in Union Street. Even though they are sometimes interlinked, that means that the characters sporadically and briefly appear in each other's stories, the stories are largely isolated from each other. Familiarity is thereby negated already by the novel's form. Dominic Head argues that: "The title makes ironically reference to class solidarity and community spirit, for the action is largely a catalogue of narrow-mindness, poverty, and brutality, especially that stems from male oppression and violence" (Head 68). It is a novel about abuse presented in manifold facets.

The first section tells the story of Kelly Brown, a white twelve-year old girl who is raped by a character called "the man". As opposed to the previous texts, it is told by a semi-omniscient third-person narrator. Rape-resistance is not fully enacted by narrative perspective; however the reader still gains insight into the victim's inner life through the numerous interior monologues. The narrating instance fulfills a certain function: it speaks for the raped girl, whose story ends with her being twelve-year old and who thus cannot reflect the abuse from an adult retrospective. The narrator represents her – to use the term I have contemplated in the context of Spivak's essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (cf. chapter 1).

Kelly's story is organised in a narrative structure that follows principles of rising and falling action and a turning point. Kelly is introduced in a domestic scene, at breakfast with her sister Linda and her mother – and the latter's new lover. Instead of providing a description of this man called Arthur, he is characterised via his obvious sexual interest in the daughters:

> The door opened and Lisa came in. 'I can't find me jumper, she said. She was naked except for bra and pants. 'It will be where you took it off. Linda shrugged. She wasn't bothered. She turned her attention to *the man*. 'Hello!' ``'My eldest, Linda.' *Arthur, his eyes glued to Linda's nipples,* opened and shut his mouth twice. 'I think he is trying to say 'Hello", Kelly said. 'Thank you, Kelly. When we need an interpreter we'll let you know.' Mrs Brown was signaling to Linda to get dressed. (7-8) [my emphasis]

"The man's" attraction to Linda is illustrated via his gaze that sexualises her. Young Kelly appears aware of what is happening with the mother's new lover and she

responds mockingly to the situation. The protagonist's awareness leads her to feel his gaze on her as well, noticing that he was "glancing nervously" (11) at her after her mother has left the room. The omniscient narrator comments: "He was afraid of being alone with her. Kelly, looking at her reflection, thought, how sensible of him" (11). This comment indicates that Kelly is overly aware of the threat that emanates from this situation, and of Arthur's desire to become sexually involved with her; which he "sensibly" seems to fight against. Without the previous scene, Arthur's nervousness would not necessarily come across understood as sexual tension, it could be understood as his unease about being alone with the unfamiliar, much younger person by the reader. So, this scene works in the context of the male gaze and Barker's hints at the desire behind those looks.

The scene in the kitchen hence can be said to foreshadow the rape scene. It is enhanced by the fact that this unfamiliar gazing man in her house – thus intruding into her sphere (cf. previous analyses. Also, at one point, he is also called "the man" (like the rapist who will be referred to later) and he struggles to suppress his urge to touch her. Having a "guest" at the breakfast table causes the family additional trouble: Mrs Brown is desperately trying to hide from her lover that there is normally no food on the table in the morning; only a cup of tea for each of them, as her household money does not allow buying food for breakfast. The restrictions of working-class life come on the scene here. The concept of class is obviously neither linked to sexualisation of the girls, nor to the rape which is to happen to Kelly, but this aspect of poverty sets off the action: since Kelly's mother leaves the house to organise some food, all morning procedures are delayed and this causes Kelly to be late for school. Afraid of the consequences, she decides to skip school for the day and instead walks into a park. Here she spends the afternoon, playing and looking for conkers in the grass.

> She had heard nothing, and yet there in front of her were the feet, shoes black and highly polished, menacingly elegant against the shabbiness of leaves and grass. Slowly she looked up. He was tall and thin with a long head, so that she seemed from her present position to be looking up at a high tower. 'You found one then?` *She knew from the way he said it that he had been watching her a long time.* [...] His voice shook with excitement. [...] She would have liked to turn and walk away from him, just like that, without leave-taking. *He looked at her so intensely.* (13) [my emphasis]

Narrative suspense rises through the man's more and more demanding gaze. The protagonist senses threat and wants to walk away. This turns this scene into a field of tension. Again, Kelly is overly aware – in fact, alerted – by his gaze but does not walk away. "The man" persuades her to accompany him feeding the geese and takes her to an abandoned lake. Despite of feeling a sense of danger, "she is drawn to him, however, because he appears to fill a void in her identity" argues John Brannigham (7). It says in the text that "other people – her mother, Linda, the teachers at school – merely glanced at her and then with indifference or haste, passed on. But this man stared at her as if every pore in her skin mattered" (quoted in 7). The concept of the male gaze is highlighted again; in fact, Kelly's story is organised around this concept. John Brannigham observes that "his gaze creates her" (7), meaning that she is not only dominated by the masculine; but entirely defined it. This point will be proven after the description of the rape scene. "The man" holds her hand whilst feeding the birds; bodily contact is created between the two. But then, surprisingly, he lets her go home as soon as she wishes to do so: "he smiled at her and she smiled back. Now that she was going, now that he was not making an attempt to keep her there, she felt again that yes, it had been nice. *Yet, as she walked away, the sense of oppression grew "*(Barker 17). [my emphasis]

The same principle to keep the action/threat rising is applied again: this time he did not rape her, but will he next time? He will rape her; this is what the reader learns soon after the lake-scene. Hereby, Barker points out that rape is omnipresent; that women are always subject to the threat of it to happen. The same night, Kelly meets the same man again – by chance as it seems. This scene is set at a funfair, where the girl suddenly runs into "the man" after her friend has left the fair to go home. Darkness had come and the man offers Kelly to walk her home.

In the next scene outside of the funfair, the girl, again, senses the threat that emanates from his gazes. Kelly now tries to run away: "Climb the walls? To high. Get into a yard an dodge round him there? Yes. She darted forward, but already it was too late. He came round the corner and stopped for a moment, *watching her*" (28). [my emphasis] Here, suspence has reached a very high level. Kelly is trapped in this situation. And she falls victim to rape.

> At first he had just wanted her to touch him. 'Go on,' he whispered. A *single mucoid eye leered at her* from under the partially-retracted foreskin. 'Touch me', he said, more

> urgently. 'Go on'. But even when he had succeeded in forcing her hand to close around the smelly purple toadstool, it wasn't enough. He forced her down and spread himself over her, his breath smelling strongly of peppermint and decay. At first her tight skin had resisted him, and he swore at her until he found his way in. She stiffened against the pain, but even then did not cry out, but lay still while he heaved and sweated. Then, with a final agonized convulsion, it was all over and he *was looking at her* as if he hated her more than anything else on earth. [...] And he *was* tempted to kill her. [...] And now moisture of some kind was oozing out of his eyes, running into cracks that had not been there a minute before [...] he went on and on crying as if he had forgotten how to stop. (29-33) [my emphasis]

In the sentence that I emphasised first, the male gaze is stylistically equated with the phallus. Next, the sexual assault happens; and the scene is finalised with him looking at her. It is thus again embedded in the concept of the male gaze that is deeply connected to the threat and actuality of rape over and over and over again in the text. The desire to kill, that I have mentioned in the preliminary notes, is connected to the this concept. The gaze, which is said to cause the splitting of the woman's consciousness, is powerfully linked to the consequences of sexual abuse. The protagonist is not only partly dominated by a masculine power, but – after the assault – completely absorbed by it. Rape, comments the narrator on the victim's state: "is not like falling down, or getting run over by a car. She *was* what had just happened to her" (46). [author's emphasis] In accordance with this "ontological aspect" (cf. preliminary notes) occurs a metaphoric of trauma in the text: "Suddenly it was gone. She cut it off. You could tell she'd done it herself because it stood up all in jagged spikes and chunks" (46). The narrator is referring to the victim's long, wavy black hair that she detaches off her head. This is of traightforward symbolism; yet it can be argued that this works as a metaphor for resistance: the protagonist visibly discards her "feminine" traits that are gazed upon by a male – her long hair – which is sometimes regarded as a sign of a masculine-defined beauty ideal for women (cf. Victoria Sherrow 143). So, this is connected to the male gaze – and her action could be interpreted as a protection against the gaze to protect her from the rape to happen again. Also, the procedure of "cutting off" is reminiscent of the dissociation, the manifestation of trauma. As discussed in the previous analyses, metaphors of trauma are forms of rape-resistance. Hence, both forms of resistance take place: on the metaphoric level as well as in terms of action.

The subject matter of social class is highlighted in the context of her resistance. Although not directly indicated, the assumption is raised that the rapist has a higher-

class background. For one thing, the narrator comments that "he had sounded as if he might [live in one of those] posh houses" (51). Furthermore, although this may be an oversimplified interpretation, he appears upper class the way his outer appearance is described, as for example here: "In front of her were the feet, shoes black and highly polished, menacingly elegant against the shabbiness of leaves and grass" (13). His clothing, that is shoe wear, create a contrast to the world around him; to the social surroundings that Kelly lives in. This is intensified by the deixis involved in the expression "those houses", positioning him far away from Kelly's world. His supposed "upper-classness" becomes relevant when Kelly enters another level of resistance, that is no longer restricted to the character's inner life; but expands on the story's action: a few weeks after the incident, she develops a habit of breaking into private properties: houses, significantly houses of rich people; she does not steal anything but only peeps into their private sphere. Eventually she breaks into her school; precisely her head-master's office that she now ravages, for instance by writing the word "cunt" on the blackboard. On this, John Branningham comments:

> This is the language she has been taught in the derelict, crumbling community of her upbringing. This is the product of the social and economic deprivation of her street. She screeches in chalk the 'worst word she knew', the word that sums up her worth in a society in which she has only ever been valued by a man intending on raping her. This is Kelly's exasperated cry at the knowledge of what she will become. It is the fate of her mother, of Linda, and of the characters in the later stories, of Iris King, for example, whose husband invites his drunken friends to rape her. In the derelict society symbolised in Union Street, women are frequently reduced to commodities for use and exchange, their value determined in the impoverished system of social and cultural relationships and their ruined community. (8)

The aspect of the reduction to a commodity is apparent again. The scene that describes her first intrusion (I use the term purposely since she neither steals anything, nor does she intend to do so) is significant, as she comes to compare herself to "the Other" in terms of both class and gender when observing and sensing middle-class femininity in one of those posh houses: "She turned her attention to the bed, rubbing her hands across the flesh-coloured satin [and] the pink, flabby cushions, like the breast of the woman who slept in the bed. A man slept there too, but you could not image him. It was a woman's room, a temple of femininity" (53).

> This scene plays out a kind of rape on the protected feminity of this cozy middle-class world, figured in Kelly's easy penetration of its enclosed space. Kelly desecrates this temple of feminity because it appears invulnerable to rape, because it is imagined as the

> antithesis of her own world of violence, neglect, and poverty. She understands that she is excluded from this world, even if she does not understand the social structures that create and maintain such exclusions, and hence, in the girl's bedroom, she feels pity or hatred. There is no more stark comparison than this middle-class interior to her own, neglected home and childhood, no more salient reminder of the impermeability of the social and cultural barriers between class. In contrast, the interior of working-class culture, which Orwell celebrated as "a good place to be", is explored in Union Street as a postindustrial hell, an abyssal ghetto, from which there is neither respite nor escape. (Branningham 9)

Kelly's story ends with this scene in this house, from where she is returning to her working-class home. The final line of the story "she was going home" which seems to recover some sense of comfort in her home, suggests that Kelly finds in this vision some way of living with the confining conditions of her social situation. "Home is not the protective cocoon that it should be, but she resigns herself at least to what it does have to offer" (cf. Branningham 10). Like the characters Pauline in *The Banana Kid,* Carolyn in *Landscape for a Good Woman* and Joyce in *The House in South Road* (cf. chapter 4), Asworth's Andrea and Azzopardi's Dol (later) described in this chapter, Kelly does not feel protected and safe in her working-class home (mostly illustrated by the house-as-a-trap-motif). However, unlike all characters named above, Kelly returns home and it is not indicated that she ever leaves her parent's house longterm. There is hence no escape.

Also, the rape is never legally dealt with. Kelly reveals to her mother three weeks after the incident, which is leading to this conversation between mother and daughter: "'If you don't tell people earlier, what are we meant to do? [...] And there might have been some chance of catching the bugger then...' 'They won't catch him.' 'No, thanks to you, they won't. He could be anywhere. Mucking about with some other little lass'" (Barker 44). To sum it up, Kelly's story differs from the remaining rape narratives in terms of firstly what I have called "escape" from the working-class home and secondly, with regard to legal trials against the rapist. It resembles them, however, strongly in terms of the male gaze and also demonstrates the splitting of the female subject caused by the sexualisation and rape of her body.

As previously mentioned, Kelly is not the only character in this novel who falls victim to rape. In *Union Street,* her story is the one that is centred around sexual abuse; but there are short scenes of more incidents, for example that in which Iris King's husband brings back to their family house his mates so that they can rape his wife. Iris manages to fend off the drunken men; yet the attempted rape is never

legally dealt with either. It is stated that "she never *willingly* had sex with him [her husband] again" 194). [my emphasis] Iris King's daughter Lisa is said to be suffering from "schizophrenia [...] she is living in a different world, so they say" (178). Against the background of the former findings, this can potentially hint at the daughter's victimization as well. Lisa's sister, 15-year-old Brenda King, has fallen pregnant and tries to hide her circumstance from her family. At no point is it indicated that this girl is a rape victim. It is up to the reader to "fill in the blanks" and to bring this scene in context. As soon as Iris King does find out about Brenda's pregnancy, she suggests a backdoor abortion by the commonly known "Big Irene" who "helps girls out of the jam" (205). Next, a scene is established that is strikingly similar to a passage in Nell Dunn's *Up the Junction;* which I have described in chapter describing the development of working-class fiction written by women (chapter 1, *Theoretical Background*). A fetus is aborted by Irene and buried by Iris King; Brenda survives the illegal operation. It could be said that Irene stands for the active forms of resistance against rape and its physical consequences, since her "duty" means that she helps those rape victims who have fallen pregnant as a result. She removes the "embodiment" of the violent sex act. My previous hypothesis stating that more characters are affected by rape than it is actually described in *Union Street* is also reflected in the imagery employed across the entire novel: the idea of splitting, of brokenness occurs over and over again: the split shells of the conkers in Kelly Brown, and the galling example of a man's face cracking open like an egg after he had raped Kelly (33); the breaking waters of Lisa Goddards as she gives birth (127); smashed eggs and crushed chrysalis (138); the broken chimneys (234); the scattered ice (244). "Many more such imageries in the story suggest the fragility of protective shells such as body and home, and serve to identify the women symbolically with each other" argues Brannigham (10). He further states that:

> Barker is thoroughly feminist not just in pursuing these anguished cries of oppressed women, but also in showing such oppression as the product of a bankrupt social economy. In this context the rapist is not the victor, but is reduced before Kelly's eyes to a sniveling wreck. Everywhere, in fact, in Barker's landscape are the signs of a failed social system, from Kelly's act of outrage, to the absence of any guardians in her community, or the sickness paralyzing the few remaining men in the street [...] "Barker's main aim, Ian Haywood argues of Union Street, 'is to show that working-class femininity as constructed by those largely absent contexts of capitalist and patriarchal power, is a process of unremitted gloom and entrapment'. In this sense it more than superficially resembles the

> stories as trapped in a relentless cycle of poverty and debt, casual underage sex, backstreet abortions, abusive relationships, and early signs of illness. (8)

Conclusively, it can be said that the metaphoric splitting and brokenness probably not only function to stylistically underline representation of rape, but also might refer to the subject matter of battering. This is the theme my next analysis will be dealing with.

5.2 Battering and Trauma

As the grounds of physical violence become very relevant in the novel, I would like to provide a brief theoretical background also for this topic, which I will use to analyse the scenes that display wife-and child battering – mostly enacted by a male character. What has been said in the context of sexual offences that the politics and the aesthetics of rape are one – shall also be contemplated in the context of battering. Therefore I would like to remind of the statistic reality surrounding physical abuse. According to the British organisation *Women's Aid*, one in four women experience violence in their lifetime. It is stated that the police receive one call about violence every minute in the UK, which equates to an estimated 1,300 calls each day. Of these, 89% are calls by women being assaulted by men. Yet, it is also stated that only 31% of all assaults are reported (Women's Aid: "Statistics").

The upbringing in a patriarchal society is often understood as the cause of it. For instance, "there exist cultural norms approving of public displays of aggression by men and disapproving of those by women" (quoted in John Hamel 6). Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that there are also violent women and male victims, or female-on-female and men-on-men violence; also in homosexual relationships. Breines states that "invisibility and lack of information shrouds gay and lesbian battering" (28). It has been argued that the blatant majority of male batterers need to be critically examined. For instance, John Hamel states that "purported rates of 85% to 95% for male-perpetrated assaults have their basis in samples of battered women or in crime surveys that inhibits, particularly males, from disclosing their victimization" (Hamel 5). Hence, according to this hypothesis, there cannot be a clear picture of how many males that perpetrate violent acts were/are victims of abuse themselves. Also

according to Julia Babcock, patriarchy is the root of this complex issue: "Men have socialised to be strong, protective and self-sufficient, meaning that they have learnt to endure pain and not to seek help. This role is likely to lead the male, if victimised himself, covering up the abuse against him" (quoted in: David Fontes 306).

Neither of the novels to be examined deal with battering in homosexual relationships; they all represent male violence onto girls and women and only one of them (Pat Barker's *Union Street*) depicts a mother hitting her boy child. The gender factor is of primary importance in women writing domestic abuse; however the fact that Barker's readers are confronted with a "gender-reversed" scenario of abuse, shows that a revision of the positioning of men and women in the realm of violence is required. Patriarchal control, as it is true for the issue of rape, is the most relevant yet not an entirely sufficient explanation and "tool" to analyse the literary representations of battering.

As it has been shown by Albert Bandura already in the 1960s, the enactment of violence can partly be understood as learned behaviour, meaning that those who experienced violence are at risk to imitate it and to project it onto another victim. Bandura's studies were published under the title *Transmission of Aggressions through Imitation of Aggressive Models*. According to Bandura, imitational learning occurs as a function of observing, retaining and replicating behavior executed by others (cf. Bandura 575-577).

Having moved away from the false assumption that the use of violence is a symptom of mental illness (cf. The Advocates for Human Rights, "Theories of Violence"), psychologists widely acknowledged the idea of learning violent behaviour through observation and imitation. Additionally, Bandura's experiments showed that male test persons had a significantly stronger tendency towards physical aggression than their female counterparts. This, however, was not sufficiently explained at that time; an explanation was provided at a later point by radical feminist psychotherapists, who regarded the male propensity for violence and the female's relative "peacefulness" as characteristics of "socially constructed categories that function to maintain female-male dichotomies and male-dominated power structures" (quoted in Judith Worell and Pam Remer 9). Thus, it could be argued that "we socialise women for a culture of peace (to be caring, sharing, flexible and communicative) and men for a culture of violence and war (to be tough, over-

decisive, forceful and aggressive)" (Breines 34).Thus, once again, patriarchy is the most relevant, but not the only factor contributing to the undeniable majority of male perpetrators of violence; nor is Bandura's theory sufficient: not everyone who witnesses violence will use it and vice versa, violent people are not necessarily previous witnesses of physical abuse.Therefore, it has been suggested that there are certain "characteristics" that lead to this statistical reality. I will begin with those attributed to male batterers. Abusive men are said to have very specific characteristics:

> They are aggressive on the outside but dependent on the inside; require rules that are clear and unambiguous; have very rigid ideas about masculinity, femininity, and gender roles; are authoritarian and patriarchal; use primitive defense mechanisms such as denial and protection; and generally come from violent backgrounds. (Patricia Noller and Laurance Robillard 138)

Does this "characteristic-thesis" not blatantly entail the two factors named (patriarchy and Bandura's imitational use of violence)? It is hence not a convincing thesis in itself. But what is interesting in this statement is the contrasting of "aggressive", but "dependent". This makes it clear that the aspect of compensation is involved in the issue of violence. It is, generally speaking, the compensation for powerlessness in many facets that makes a subject use violence to regain some kind of power. Laura Toole, Jessica Schiffman and Margie Kiter Edwards speak of a "relative deprivation" that the male violator needs to "make up" for (77).

To finally approach the female's role in battering, it is important to note that the matter of those "characteristics" that lead to the enactment of physical abuse apply to women as well. In addition to dependency, jealousy is often named as one of those characteristics (Donald Dutton 42). Likewise, the respective women seek to compensate these characteristics by hence regaining control. Babcock states that "male and female survey respondents alike endorse control becoming violent retribution and a need to get the partner's affection" (quoted in: John Hamel 7). As shown at the example of characteristics of the male batterer, these also can be summarized and labelled with help of the term "compensation for relative deprivation". Also, Banduara's behaviour theory could partly work for the explanation of female violence. However, females batterers are a blatant minority; which shows that patriarchy must be the key issue after all: it forces men to compensate their

weaknesses more so than women and second, it hinders them to reveal physical abuse if they fell victim to it. Both factors constitute the gendered statistical reality; the former creates the numbers of male perpetrators, the latter the absence of male victims.

Now I would like to move on the aspect of class. Also here, the idea of compensating is applicable, namely the compensation for economic powerless. For instance, Babcock identifies the "stress of low income and unemployment" as "risk factors for female violence" (quoted in: John Hamel 7). In the context of unemployment, it can be argued that men, often pressured into the role as "breadwinners" are even more at risk to become violent if they feel the need to compensate. On the other hand, it is argued that the working world and even class divisions in itself sometimes bear the potential to promote violence: "Our daily life of industrial, class societies is one of violence. Violence poses as economic rationality as some of us are turned into extensions of machines" (Michael Kaufmann 36).The idea of compensating and "hiding" dependency and the need for protection with violent action tie in with the general assumption that violent abuse is rooted in the perpetrator's urge for control. Yet, relative deprivation, they argue, works across the different strata of society, and thus cannot only be understood as economic deprivation but also apply for "higher-class males":

> Despite their access to considerable economic and political resources, wealthy and high-class status men may also feel relative deprivation when gauging their physical competence or communicative abilities against the masculine ideal, resulting in the use of domestic violence to compensate for perceived deficiency in their relationships with women. [...] Measuring up to the ideal standard is difficult in a performance-oriented, market-driven, and highly stratified culture. (Toole, Schiffman and Edwards 78)

Class is thus not an explanatory factor in the context of abuse. Moving on to the female victims in the context of class, it is often stated that the working-class women's victimisation is also rooted in financial strains: as opposed to their middle-class counterparts, they simply cannot afford to leave their husbands. Secondly, Weis states that the historically determined idealisation of particularly the white nuclear family makes it even more difficult to break out of an abusive relationship:

> White working-class women's lives have been largely defined and contained by the family. The struggle for the white wage was a struggle that solidified men as breadwinners, as individuals that were responsible for the support of dependent women and children. (Weis 245)

This situation reaches far into the twentieth century. Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, for instance, explains that even though educational opportunities for women were increasing at the end of the twentieth century, “many of these reforms have made little difference to working-class women [...] who still spend their lives performing unpaid caring or domestic work” (Zweiniger-Bargielowska 13). Despite the relative poverty and the submission of the woman, this highly gendered family model is regarded as a “respectable” lifestyle (Weis 246). However, the romanticised image of the patriarchal family not only prevents the females from liberating themselves from violent domestic life, but also leads to a degradation of those who manage to escape.

> Working-class white women who rejected the ideology of domestic life and its attendant violence sacrificed their “respectable” place in the class fraction. They became seen as – that is, painted as “hard living women” who experienced within-class violence and an expulsion from the standard of gendered life. As a result, gender and class [...] ideology stays intact, as the dissenters exit – and are punished. (Weis 246)

It is argued that the ideology of domestic life works as a source of identity and that it leads to the discrimination of the “other”, which is not only represented by the women who left the violent home, but also by the cultural other. According to Weis, the concept of “respectable home life” is sometimes established by the comparison between white and black people.[58] Herewith, I have reached the aspect of ethnicity. As it is true for class, violent behaviour is not directly linked to the aggressor’s ethnicity. Like lower-class women, non-white women’s victimisation is sometimes aggravated by their economic situation. Moreover, the non-white battered immigrant woman – as represented by Emechta’s potagonist Adah, who moves to England with her husband Sylvester – often faces negative stereotyping by the white dominant culture:

> Immigrant women seeking to leave abusive relationships face additional hardships in a mainstream culture that is often hostile to both immigrants and their cultures. In this process they are often degraded, subservient, meekly accepting of male domination and

58 Weis’ use of the term “black” does not include other non-white ethnic groups, that means Asian people and those of a mixed heritage. I find it necessary to point this out, since “black” is sometimes used as a general term for all non-white people – even though postcolonial scholars stress the importance of considering the difference between these ethnic groups (cf. Steve Padley 175).

patriarchy; immigrant women are thus said to contribute to their own victimization. (Samita Das Dasgupta 56)

Let alone, adds Das Dasgupta, the pressure of victim's own culture she has to deal with when trying to leave the violent relationship. Stereotyping of battered black immigrant women also works along the mechanism of a patriarchal ideology-particularly in terms of concepts and idealisation of the white nuclear family:

It is argued that the ideology of domestic life works as a source of identity and that it leads to the discrimination of the "other", which is not only represented by the women who left the violent home, but also by the cultural other. Racial myths like the image of the "brutal black man" and his "rough wife" have lead to the wrong assumption that black people are "prone to violence" (Weis 246). At the same time, the glorification of white family life functions as a "cross-valorisation of the ideology of the family and the production/maintenance of whiteness as a racial identity marker" (246). Thus, by projecting the issue of violence onto the Black community, Whites may deny and hide the abuse that takes place in their own homes (cf. 247). This has a devastating effect: As the false image of tough and resilient black battered women deepens, the victims do not receive the same treatment as violated white women (cf. Sokoloff and Dupont 5). Kathleen Malley-Morrison validates this argument when quoting Tricia Bent-Goodley's experiences of Black women who are denied housing at shelters because of "worker's stereotypical assumption about Black women being strong and enduring hardship" (326). Finally, Dupont argues that, for example, black women who report the violence are less protected by the police than their white counterparts (5). This is also demonstrated in one of the novels under discussion.

Buchi Emecheta: *Second-Class Citizen* (1974)

As mentioned before, Buchi Emecheta was born in Lagos, Nigeria in 1944. At the age of 16, she married her Igbo husband Sylvester Onwordi who immigrated to London shortly after their marriage to study Law; and she followed him a year later. Emecheta experienced the harsh conditions black women were facing during the 1960s and 1970s in London, struggling to make a living in an often racist society. As

her student husband did not have an income, it was up to her to support him and their five children. Emecheta worked as a librarian at the British Museum, where she became inspired to read sociology and to write stories about the hardship of working-class life in Britain's capital. Her *Observations of the London Poor* were published in the *New Statesman Magazine* in 1971. The novels *In the Ditch* (1972) and *Second-Class Citizen* (1974) are based on this article and both texts were published as *Adah's Story* in 1983, which is described as an autobiographical text (cf. Contemporary Literary Critcism: "Emecheta, Buchi").

The novel is presented from the perspective of a third-person limited omniscient narrator that tells the story of the Nigerian female character Adah, who lives with her student husband and her children (in the course of the narrative, Adah gives birth to five children) in a one-bedroom flat in North London. Due to financial strains and the racist attitude of English landlords, Adah and her family are denied orderly accommodation and are forced to live in a run-down neighbourhood (Emecheta 37). She supports the family off her own back and begins a career as a writer during her job in a library. At the same time, Adah is severely abused by her husband Francis who constantly "brutalises, deliberately tries to inject a feeling of inferiority within her, and when all that fails, he tries to deprive her of what she values most – her children and her potential to become a writer" (Abioseh Michael Porter 273). The narrator comments on Francis' behaviour as follows:

> To him, a woman was a second-class human, to be slept with at any time, even during the day, and, if she refused, to have sense beaten into her until she gave in, to be ordered out of bed after he had done with her, to make sure she washed his clothes and got his meals ready at the right time. (Emecheta 175)

This description has an extremely powerful effect, which is created by both its content and form. According to the narrator, Francis commits a range of violent actions against his wife: he rapes, blackmails and inflicts bodily harm upon her. His deeds are presented in the form of an enumeration that draws the reader – bit by bit – into their brutal life behind the closed doors of their cramped flat. The hypotactic syntax reinforces the vehemence of the description: the uninterrupted listing of violent crimes "hits" the reader over and over again. Additionally, the lack of full stops creates the impression that Francis' brutality even leaves the narrator – who appears to be watching the scenes from an elevated vantage point – "breathless". Adah,

however, feels the need to support Francis and she does not think of leaving him (38-39) . Katherine Fishburn asserts that

> most Western readers are likely to long for the moment when she finally gets up the gumption to leave her worthless husband. But longing for this moment ignores what divorce would mean to a woman like Adah, who was raised with traditional Igbo values. For, as necessary as this divorce might seem to us in the West, the failure of her marriage signals a tragic rupture in the very community that should have nurtured her. (63)

Fishburn highlights the importance of considering the main character's cultural background before judging her for staying in the violent relationship. Still, Western readers may find it difficult to understand her instilled sense of responsibility in terms of supporting her husband; and might have forgotten about the novel's opening scenes where Adah, shortly after her father's death, is affiliated by Francis' parents – who pay a bride price for her.[59] Thus, their marriage also has a strong economic basis, it can be understood as a "contract", that additionally obliges husband and wife to stay together. Many Western readers are likely to know very little about the arranged marriage policy and other traditions in the Igbo culture, and thus probably struggle to empathise with Adah's situation and instead may evaluate her behaviour according to their understanding of marriage. In post-colonial theory, the process of judging the cultural other from a Western perspective is called universalism*.* Ashcroft explains that "universalism offers a hegemonic view of existence by which the experiences, values and expectations of a dominant culture are held true for all humanity" (235). According to Homi Bhabha,

> it is not that the [reading] subject cannot *see* historical conflict or colonial difference as mimetic structures or themes of the text. What it cannot conceive, is how it is itself structured ideologically and discursively in relation to the processes of signification which do not then allow for the possibility of whole or universal meanings. (Bhabha 104)

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59 "The bride price or bride wealth system constitutes an important role in the distribution of family property and the arrangement of exchanges and alliances among families in many societies. This institution specifies that a prospective husband, usually with the help of his relatives, must provide a substantial sum of money or highly valued goods to his future wife's family before a marriage can be contracted. [...] Among the Igbo, the bride price is more narrowly thought of as a payment to acquire rights in the children of the marriage and must be returned if a woman is barren or leaves the marriage before producing children" (Brian Schwimmer, "Bride Wealth").

The fact that Adah lives in working-class conditions may contribute to the reader's confusion about her being the "breadwinner", whilst Francis is the eternal student who keeps on failing his exams. Yet, Adah begins to reveal her discontent about the poor living conditions and thus indirectly announces her frustration and anger about his exploitive behaviour (Emecheta 36-37). When, eventually, Adah clearly criticises their housing situation, Francis' "temper snapped and he spat out in anger" that all black people in England are "second-class citizens" and tells her to accept this new "status"(37). Shortly after this scene, he forces her to have sex with him.

> The whole process was an attack, as savage as that of any animal. At the end of it, Francis gasped and said 'Tomorrow you are going to see a doctor. I want them to see this frigidity. I am not going to have it.'(38)

Here it becomes clear again that rape scenes are described less detailed than battering scenes. This I will attempt to explain in the summary of this chapter. According to Omar Sougou, the rape clearly is Francis' reaction to Adah's protest. Sougou remarks that "the narrative correlates with his financial impotence with the fear of losing his masculinity. Thus, he seems to use his phallus to repress the 'rebellious' woman" (44). This interpretation seems somewhat oversimplified and it is questionable whether Emecheta purposely draws a connection between financial strains and rape. It could be argued that, in fact, Francis suppresses any form of her protest by violence, no matter what his wife's attempted backtalk is about. After all, his assaults are essentially presented as a result of a deeply ingrained misogynist attitude rather than being attempts to compensate for his economic powerlessness (see following violent acts). His attacks are omnipresent and systematic and by no means "situational" or "occasional" incidents. Yet, Sougou's interpretation is accurate in terms of understanding sexual violence as a matter of gaining control. Furthermore, he is inferring that it is a powerful masculine mechanism to oppress women by controlling their reproductive function and containing their dignity (cf. Margaret Hunter 159). In how far Emecheta's representations of sexual violence point at the brutal exploitation of the female body during slavery will be explained at a later point in this analysis. The rape scene quoted above is followed by another attack. Here, Francis forces his heavily pregnant wife to have sex with him. Battering and rape are combined again. Adah struggles hard for defence.

> Francis was like an *enraged bull*. ‘You wicked witch! Is it too much for a man to want his wife?’, he thundered, shaking Adah brutally by the shoulders. She whimpered in pain, but she was not going to give in. (88) [my emphasis]

Resistance takes place in terms of both narrative action and figurative language. First, the heroine manages to repel intercourse. Second, as in Azzopardi’s text, an “animalisation” of the perpetrator takes place. From here, Adah’s liberation process – albeit slow and fraught with obstacles – begins. The text does not indicate a separation from Francis at this point; however Emecheta alludes to a change in outlook and foreshadows Adah’s emancipation when making her heroine tell Francis:

> My sons will learn to treat their wives as people, individuals, not as goats that have been taught to talk. My daughters...God help me, nobody is going to pay any bleeding price for them. (127)

At this point, the objectification and animalisation of the female body by the violent male is literal and clearly becomes exposed here. She tells Francis this shortly after the birth of her fourth child. After her verbal attack, Adah

> smiled at Francis, thanking God for giving her him *as a tool with which it was possible to have her children*. She would not harm him, because he was the father of her babies. But he was a dangerous man to live with. *Like all such men, he needed victims. Adah was not going to be a willing victim*. (127) [my emphasis]

The narrator, who appears to be able to read Adah’s mind, functions as a mouthpiece to express her reflections on her life with Francis. This creates the impression that not only the narrator, but also the victim is aware of the aggressor’s motives to violate her. Therefore, this text passage demonstrates Adah’s resistance: by considerately unmasking her husband’s systematic oppressive behaviour being a “pathetic” craving for power/compensation of relative deprivation, she raises herself to a level of superiority over him. On the other hand, the matter-of-fact tone and the absence of emotions in Adah’s contemplations on Francis describe the traumatic condition of emotional anaesthesia: being entirely pragmatic about her marriage with a violent man, Adah appears to have numbed the pain that the battering and rape had caused. It can be argued that the heroine is depicted as heavily traumatised. So, representations of trauma occur in this “pioneer” novel already.

Yet, despite the obvious aftermaths of the constant violations, the heroine emerges from victimhood when objectifying her husband as a “tool” (127) to sire

children. By reducing him to his procreative function, Adah creates an inversion of the traditional power relations: it is *her* who can utilise a man's body to have "her children" (127). The use of the word "tool" in the context of pregnancy and childbirth has a very poignant effect: it conjures up notions of slavery, as enslaved black women were raped to "produce" more slaves, that is "tools", for white men. Secondly, it alludes to the role of economic welfare in the brutal exploitation of the female body and thus, the concept of class is recalled at this point. By using the word "tool" in a reverse sense that is, portraying a black women who considers her husband a tool, Emecheta deconstructs the historically determined image of the bereaved black woman who, during slavery, was denied control over her body and who was not considered the legal owner of her children: Adah's claim to be fully in charge of her children thus functions as a powerful rejection and a determined turning away from the concept of male sexual power over black females that is based on gender, class and ethnicity. The objectification in a reverse sense, as in Azzopardi's text is employed. Also, a "reverse-commodification" through the reduction of Francis to a procreative tool is established. This is a form of resistance via stylistic devices.

Adah soon falls pregnant with a fifth child that she cannot afford to feed. Yet, as stated in the novel, given the socio-political circumstances in the 1960s, she has no choice other than carrying the child to term (cf. 157). Shortly after the birth of her baby boy, she consults a gynaecologist for contraception. When Francis later notices a diaphragm inside her during intercourse, he is outraged: to him, birth control is a sin and consequently, he beats his wife senseless:

> She was dizzy with pain and her head throbbed. Her mouth was bleeding. And once or twice she felt tempted to run and call the police. But she thought better of it. Where would she go after that? She had no friends and no relations in London. (Emecheta 154-155)

As opposed to all the other abused female characters described in this chapter, Adah does think of calling the police. However, she discards this thought since she does not expect much help from the authorities. Wondering where she could go after leaving Francis, Adah believes that neither the police nor any other official person would give her shelter. She appears to be aware that Black women face difficulties when calling for help, as skin colour stratification is apparent within many institutions.

This can also be transferred to the extra-literary world: according to Sharon Allard, negative stereotyping is a major obstacle to an appropriate treatment of physically abused black women. The way she describes these stereotypes in the statement below is striking and provocative, however she makes an interesting point when stating that:

> Race certainly plays a major role in the cultural distinction between the "good" and the "bad" woman. The passive, gentle White woman is automatically more like the "good" fairytale princess stereotype than a Black woman, who as the "other" may be seen as the "bad" witch. White women have the benefit of this dual stereotype of "good" and "bad", she can expect greater protection, while Black women are seen as "bad" and as deserving victims. (Allard 197)

Allard's argument about the stigmatised black woman receiving less support than her white counterpart is evident; however the description of the white woman as a "fairytale princess-figure" is somewhat disputable. Historically speaking, the label "witch" has certainly not been withheld from white women: "eccentric" looking white women were often deemed to be in touch with the devil and consequently were persecuted and burned at the stake.

Nonetheless, Allard's statement about the power and danger of stereotyping in itself is very plausible and it is approved by the sociologists Natalie Sokoloff and Christina Pratt:

> Some groups of battered women have been characterised demeaningly, as, for example, in racist, homophobic, xenophobic ways. Negative stereotypes of battered women can have serious consequences, which may prevent them from accessing legal and social services. For example, negative characterisations of black women as a whole – as overly aggressive, resilient, violent, and immune to the effects of violence – have prevented black battered women from receiving equal and sympathetic treatment in the criminal justice service, particularly by police officers, lawyers, judges, and other court personnel. Stereotypical notions of women of colour have also resulted in misdiagnosis of battered women by mental health practitioners.(Sokoloff and Pratt 5)

As Emecheta's character Adah does not call for help and instead stays with her husband, the violent scenes at home continue. He keeps on hitting her unconscious, so that eventually "even his beatings and slappings did not move her any more" (Emecheta 162). But then: "She did not know where she got the courage from, but she was beginning to hit him back, even biting him when it needed be" (162). As Francis' attacks are now life-threatening, Adah fights back to stop him from killing her; counter-violence is her last resort to survive the domestic battles. Yet, whilst leaving

the role as a victim, she remains strongly victimised by the ongoing threat of being beaten to death. Here, narrative suspense has reached a very high level: the main character is in constant mortal danger.

Adah's backlashes within the discourse of violence are significant narrative elements. These cannot simply be understood as resistance; rather they signify another narrative level: By hitting back, she creates a so-called "reverse discourse" which takes us into a new direction (cf. chapter 3). This does not mean that the "new direction", the image of a woman hitting back, is a solution for undermining the power of violent husbands, it only works on a symbolic level where it challenges and deconstructs the "positions of violence" (106) between the battering man and the helpless woman.

When, after the physical abuse, Adah resorts to her "verbal weapons", the climax is reached: "You remember the saying that the man who treated his mother like shit would treat his wife like shit? That should have warned me, but I was too blind to see then" (Emecheta 183). Instead of describing Francis' reaction, the narrator just remarks: "What followed is too horrible to print" (183). This is an effective narrative technique, which asks the reader to fill in the gaps and to picture the most violent scenes that are "beyond words".

Eventually, Adah decides to divorce Francis and the following scene takes place in a court room. As it turns out, Francis has burnt their marriage certificates and the children's birth certificates, which makes it impossible to conduct a legitimate divorce. The female's and children's identity have literally been wiped out; the male dominance is omnipotent and utterly overpowering – just as in the other law-scenes described in this chapter. Francis, who does not want to pay alimony, denies fatherhood of all his children. As the judge explains that Francis is legally obliged to contribute to their children's maintenance, Adah states that she will not take any money from him: "'Don't worry, Sir. The children are mine, and that is enough. I shall never let them down as long as I am alive.' She walked out of that court at Clerkenwell and wandered anywhere" (185). By rejecting his support, Emecheta makes her protagonist not only resist to financial dependency on her husband, which, in fact, is often understood as a common reason for working-class women to stay in a violent relationship. Also, on a symbolic level, the heroine bridles against the former practices of taking away the children from their mothers during slavery ("the children

are *mine")* [my emphasis]. Adah does not let financial hardship dictate her life; and the narrator reassures the reader that she will manage without her husband (186). The fact that Adah is not mentioning the rape of her body by her husband also points to the idea that especially in the context of marital abuse, it is defined by men what rape is (cf. preliminary notes).

However, some aspects of her novel are subject to feminist critique and *Second-Class Citizen* has actually been called a "somewhat flawed feminist novel" (quoted in Porter 268). Hereon, Tuzyline Jita Allan remarks that:

> Emecheta offers her own story of success in the face of insurmountable odds as a paradigm for female liberation. If Adah, embodying the ultimate sexual and racial Other, can claw her way out of the hardest racism of London society, her Nigerian husband's ingrained sexism, and grinding poverty, the self-willed woman can thus by inference defy and defeat the forces of her oppression. [...] Adah's second-class status of being African, female and poor is counter balanced by her "first-class" capacity for independence and creativity. Thus Emecheta sets up the indefatigable Adah as a paragon of female indomitability. *This strategy has serious backdraws, artistically and ideologically. First of all, the novel's underlying assumption that the strong-willed woman can achieve selfhood clashes violently with the unrelenting current of protest at a system that is determined to keep Adah "in the ditch" and "a second-class citizen*". (Allan, 98-99) [my emphasis]

Allan thus states that Adah's hard-fought "selfhood" and her ongoing position as a "second-class citizen" are contradictory concepts; meaning that Adah's emancipatory actions actually fail, since she stays, or rather, is kept in the position as a second-class citizen. I do not agree with Allan's statement, since what I have shown with Trezise's text, the harsh working-class background may work as a "breeding ground" for endurance and strength; and the heroine's success works along the principle of "striving under hardship". Only in this text this principle is not tied to a strong grand-mother character; and this device can surely not be simply transferred to Black women's writing, as the grandmother-generation's experience is certainly predominantly different from those of their white counterparts. It is accurate that her strength and success (Adah does become a writer) do create a sharp contrast to her working-class background and her history as a Black woman; yet this discrepancy outlines exactly what most texts are about: the splitting apart of the female subject.

Pat Barker: *Union Street* (1982) *(Lisa Goddard)*

Lisa's story is also told by a – sometimes intrusive – third person narrator; which also has a significant function: the storyteller's intrusiveness has a didactic function – as the adult heroine can neither speak nor act "for herself" (cf. also comments on Spivak's critique). This is, as will be shown, due to the socio-political circumstances at the time the novel is set in.

Lisa is introduced in a rather striking opening scene, which is set in a supermarket. She is doing the grocery shopping with her two children and, annoyed by her fidgeting son and her screaming baby boy, she eventually loses her temper and "hit [the eldest] child hard across the face. [...] He clung to the deep-freeze counter, and she hit him again and again, stinging, hard slaps, her face distorted by hatred as she looked at him" (Barker 100). This introductory text passage draws the reader straight into the violent discourse that plays a dominant role in Lisa's life. The reader is likely to be shocked by her behaviour; and the surprising effect of this scene is, although powerful, a very simple one: it is created by the fact the violent person is a woman. Lisa's behaviour might appear strange, as it challenges the dichotomy of "the purely passive women and the executive, violent man" (cf. Jennifer Grove and Stuart Watt 46-51). Moreover, as Barker's female character hits a boy, this concept is questioned further.

"All right, have your sweets. Have them! And I hope you choke" (Barker 101), the stressed mother goes on. "If you don't pull yourself together and start behaving yourself, I'll knock the living daylights out of you when I get back " (101). The mother Lisa Goddard threatens her child and thus deploys violent mechanisms in order to gain control over her children and, as soon as the next scene is introduced, it becomes clear that, in fact, she is seeking control over her own situation: "She could have sat down beside her son on the supermarket floor and cried as miserable as he was crying" (101). Having fallen pregnant with her third child, Lisa is desperate. The mechanism of compensation for relative deprivation comes on the scene here.

> She did not want this baby. They could not afford it: Brian had been out of work for the best part of the year. But even if there had been all the money in the world, she would not have wanted it. Brian was out drinking. As always. She did not want to have this child. (103-104)

Lisa's thoughts about not wanting her child due to financial strains are reoccurring: She did not want to have this child. The two she had already were as much as she could manage. More" (112); "she had not wanted this child" (136); and "when she first learned she was pregnant she had asked for an abortion. Darren had been six months old. Kevin, two. The doctor had told her there were no grounds" (132).
It is not indicated in the text, but it could be assumed by these mother-character's utterances of not wanting a child potentially allude to marital rape.

In a third scene, back at home, Lisa is having an argument with her husband about her unwanted pregnancy and the fact they cannot afford it due to his unemployment. Also, she accuses him of having stolen money from her; the coins that she saved in a piggy-bank to buy clothes for the newborn. Here, the financial strains of working-class life come – quite blatantly – on the scene: "So you're stealing money from your own child", she blames him. Thereupon,

> [h]e stood up and hit her, not very hard, on the side of the head. But the blow liberated something in him, an enormous anger that had been chained up waiting for this moment. He hit her again. And again. It was easier now. She was driven back against the wall. When it was over he stood and stared at what he had done. (117)

Lisa's husband is obviously compensating and releasing his anger; presumably his anger about being socially deprived – having to steal money out of a piggy-bank. After Lisa has given birth to the unwanted baby, it becomes clear that she disconnects, that is, she tries to disassociate from it both physically and psychically:

> There was nothing about this baby that she could recognise as hers. If she had been an animal she would have rejected it, would have sniffed at it and turned away, at once and finally [...]. It was simply she could not believe the child was hers. [...] How would she manage to care for this *baby for whom she felt nothing*? [...] She felt an *enormous distance* between them, and saw no way of crossing it. (133-136) [my emphasis]

This description recalls the phenomenon of dissociation and emotional anaesthesia ; Lisa is said to feel nothing for her child and, in a figurative sense, splits off from it. The baby can be understood as an embodiment of pain, a "product" of an encounter between the violator and the violated subject. The baby may stand for the personified pain that, as in Trezza Azzopardi's text, leaves the body and separates from it. Hence the childbirth-scenario can be labelled resistance in a figurative sense (in terms of

"writing against trauma"). This interpretation may seem far-fetched, yet it can be backed up by the following utterances which Pat Barker puts into Lisa's mouth:

> She looked down at the baby and remembered that she had planned to call it Katherine if it was a girl. Only somehow, she had never really believed it would be. She had not been ready for a girl. [...] Now she held her daughter in her arms. [...] *My daughter.* (137-139)

It is striking that in the previous excerpt is referred to as "it"; and here the child becomes a gendered being. Seemingly Lisa begins to view the detached object as being part of her after all. This part of her that the baby "grows on her" and gradually becomes "female". Embracing this female body, she then endeavours to become "whole again".

To come back to violence in terms of the plot, it needs to be pointed out that Lisa embodies a victim and a perpetrator of violence at the same time and, as previously mentioned, she transgresses the concept of the purely passive female. Rather, the way she treats her children shows that violence is a learned behaviour that may be imitated as a consequence of witnessing and experiencing violence. In that respect, the literary violent woman that Barker creates mirrors what has been discovered about the psychological grounds of aggression and violence around *Union Street's* date of origin: Bandura's behaviourist theory. I have stated earlier that from today's perspective, Bandura's theory seems insufficient. However, the learning theory has provided psychological research with an important thought: If the use of violence is learned, it can be unlearned. Lisa appears well aware that child beating is wrong, however she seems unable to change her behaviour by her own strength:

> *She had hit him too hard. And not for the first time.* [...] God forgive me, she thought. [...] It wasn't that she didn't love him. It was only that she got so desperate. [...] Why am I so bad-tempered with them? It isn't their fault. *She must try to do better.* (102) [my emphasis]

This text passage is characterised by a shift between short interior monologues and comments made by an intrusive narrator that appears to speak about the mother with a "wagging forefinger". Hereby, the storyteller shows that there is an urgent need and a possibility for her to overcome the compulsive violent actions. Interestingly, the narrator's didactic comment about "trying to do better" (Barker 102) in the text passage quoted above is only referring to Lisa and not to her violent husband. As

opposed to her husband, Lisa appears aware that her abusive behavior towards her children is a projection of her desperation onto them and hence seems to understand that she is trapped in a vicious circle. She wants to change, however does not seem to be able to change by her own strength – as long as she is with her violent husband. These thoughts seem to be linked to her not wanting another child, an embodiment of pain and trauma that will necessarily be subject to her compulsive child-battering: Lisa's story in *Union Street* is organised in a circular structure, indeed in the form of a vicious circle, to which financial strains seem to contribute hugely. Disagreements about money/income often lead to the following chain reactions in the text: Verbal fights – marital abuse – trauma – detachment from children[60] – child battering – fights about pregnancy – marital abuse etc.

The narrator's "wagging forefinger" about Lisa's child-battering also mirrors an atmosphere of rising political awareness about domestic violence in that era. Feminists pointed out that violence had to be tackled in a gender-specific way, women's refuges were built and a range of supporting measures were taken. Women-oriented counselling, however, was in a fledging stage in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as therapy first had to be freed from the male-oriented and the rather sexist Freudian influences. According to Remer and Worell, the first book on counselling women was published in 1970 (Remer and Worell 1). Russo and O'Connel state:

> As the feminist movement took form, so did a feminist psychology and psychotherapy and organised efforts to change the concepts and conduct of psychotherapeutic theory, research and practice [...]. Feminists challenged the psychoanalytic idea of male development as the norm and the goal of therapy as adjustments of marriage and motherhood. Biological determinism was rejected and the importance of going beyond intrapsychic approaches and examining effects of social context was emphasised. Problems that had been ignored and trivialised, including incest and violence against women, were named, and new approaches to them based on feminist analyses were developed. (Russo & O'Connel 514-515)

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60 The idea of a detachment from human beings is remniscient of "alienation", which is also caused by division/splitting apart.

Barker's Lisa, trapped in a psychological negative circle, embodies the need to make the "personal political". It is very clear here that the novel was produced in a different time and socio-political landscape than the following text.

Trezza Azzopardi: *The Hiding Place* (2000)

Trezza Azzopardi was born in Cardiff to a Maltese father and a Welsh mother. Her first novel *The Hiding Place* is centred around an impoverished Maltese-Welsh family that lives in the slums of Cardiff. It was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 2000. Richard Bradford notes that this novel, "as an exercise in unapologetic documentary realism, with notions of benevolent working-class solidarity ruthlessly overturned, is deserving of the praise it received" (Bradford 220).

The images of narrowness/entrapment described in the context of rape also work for the literary presentation of battering in the story; that is, the appropriative, invasive male gaze also functions to conjure up the threat of men-on-woman/girl physical abuse. Azzopardi's novel opens with a depiction of the entrapped girl Dol:

> I slept in the chest, when I was newborn. My mother told me how she wrapped me in a shawl at night and hid me from my father. He would have *smothered* you, she said without malice but with a strange sense of pride, as if I were a rescue kitten she had taken. (5) [my emphasis]

The verb "to smother" entails multiple denotations, meaning: suffocating a person by covering the nose and mouth; extinguishing a fire by covering it; causing a feeling of being trapped and oppressed, and to hide (cf. Oxford Dictionary Online: "smother"). As will be shown, all named semantic features refer, either in a literal or symbolic sense, to the incidents in Dol's childhood, who is stuck and hidden in a chest to be saved from violent and life-threatening assaults. Also here, her imprisonment in a little box works as a metaphor for the different power positions of men and women/girls and thus between father and daughter: Dol is stashed away, kept silent, suppressed and has no access to the male's sphere. Thus, she cannot invade into his "space", whereas he is constantly pestering and violating her. As shown previously, the idea of the male's sphere is deeply connected to the one which also

works in the context of literary battering: the powerful masculine character in the text is both appropriating the female body and her sphere by the sexualising, dominating glance. The idea of a lack of space as a symbol of powerlessness is also employed when Dol states that she shares her room with her five sisters and her mother, who are all equally victimised by her father, the "patriarch", who has a room to himself. Again, this is directly combined with the male gaze: Dol is hidden from her father's gaze; who else would otherwise have "smothered" her if he saw the baby Dol. The desire to kill, connected to the gaze, is apparent as well here.

The allusion to fire via the word "smother" points to the most significant narrative element in *The Hiding Place*: Dol's losing her hand to the fire as a baby. Thus, the idea of entrapment is linked to the motif fire in the opening scene: they both symbolise Dol's victimisation. According to Amanda Thursfield, "it is perhaps no coincidence that the name [Doloris] comes from the word meaning pain" (Contemporary Writers: "Trezza Azzopardi"). She being "tucked away" presents her as equally helpless as she is because of the loss of her left hand to the fire: it expresses, in a figurative sense, a massive detriment to her agency and power. Up to this point, resistance is only incorporated by the narrative perspective: the I-as-a narrator evidently goes straight into the matter of the abuse by the father-figure.

Resistance in terms of figurative language is, however, to follow soon: Dol remembers, for instance, her "father creeping into the bedroom like a pantomime giant"(Azzopardi 5). Interestingly, her choice of words does not picture him as a brute; but rather as a grotesque and spooky entity. Hereby, he appears dehumanised and reified. This recalls the previously described process of commodification of the characters that is established by personification and images of objectification. Strikingly, a "reverse" imagery is employed here: not the victim, but the perpetrator becomes dehumanised here. This is reminiscent of the "reverse-commodifiction" in Emecheta's text. Furthermore, the victim is dehumanising and also literally animalising the violent aggressor, as in:

> My father sits at the table with a claw of garlic in one fist, a rasher of raw bacon in the other. He eats like a dog, with his head down, quickly. He doesn't touch my mother's cooking; he'd rather scavenge. (129)

Azzopardi thus also creates a topsy-turvy world by objectifying the perpetrator and this animalisation works effectively to unmask the aggressor. Yet, it is mostly the second part of the novel that pictures the violator's deeds. This is where, as the narrator puts it, "things are being unearthed" (220, 277). Until then, the narrative works with allusion to the father's brutality and also images of repression. Those allusions are established by the repetitive mention of "clenched fist" (14, 67, 129, 146), which "knuckles are white with pressure" (146). Likewise, the reoccurring descriptions of him killing his daughter's rabbits agonisingly with a knife (17, 156, 181, 273 ,277) work as a sign of his roughness. On this, Amanda Thursfield comments in her review on *The Hiding Place*: "When we see what Frankie is capable of doing to a baby rabbit, we tremble to think of what further crimes of violence he might have been capable of inflicting on his family" (Contemporary Writers: "Trezza Azzopardi").

Images of repression are also apparent in the text. Like in the example of Katherine Mansfield's *The Garden Party,* which I drew upon earlier, symbols of things and bodies being covered up establish the notion of repression as follows: "her little gloved hands now under the belt of her raincoat" (Azzopardi 76); "a bluebottle flitting about under the glass" (83); "paper bags and odd clothes litter the floor. Fran can't quite see them, but she can feel the snagging and rustling around her feet" (102); "He [Joe, the mother's lover] puts his long hands over my mother's fists" (57). In the latter example, coverage is combined with the notion powerless: the women's gesture of aggressiveness, of agency is capped, recalling the idea of the textual sabotage to the victim's resistance. Sabotaging images are however, first and foremost (as in Asworth's text) the fire metaphors. The scene of "Dol's burning" – a flashback of complete powerlessness – reoccurs over and over again: "This is the day Iam burnt" (24); "my mother, on the wrong side of the wall, hears her baby burning on the inside" (31). "It's burning, burning, burning – and then Martineau lifts me with his great scored hands and hauls me out to daylight" (32); "I lost the fingers. At one months old, a baby's hand is the most perfect thing" (33); "It makes a fist, it spreads wide, and when it burns, that soft skin is petrol, those bones are tinder, so small, so easily eaten in a flame" (32); Mrs Jackson's [the neighbour] voice came out of nowhere: "Fire, Missus! Your house is one fire!" (220). These are merely the fragmented descriptions of the incident. The consequences of it are elaborated in other scenes, in which the narrator remembers the traumatic incidents: "If my mother hadn't left the house, I would not

have been burnt" (281); her recalling her mother shouting: "Look at Dolores, Fran. Look at Her! See? See what fire can do?" (96); her sister's antagonising her when "they begin to chant: Liar!Liar! Crip is on fire" (178). In addition to this, Trezza Azzopardi creates another plotline centred around "burning" when the protagonist's sister Fran sets the neighbouring corner shop on fire (cf. 102-104). I would like to label this resistance in terms of plot device as this can be understood as the victimized girl to "make herself seen/heard" of her situation – a cry for help which, eventually, is "smothered" again: as a consequence, Fran is admitted to a child centre where she, as indicated in the text (282), falls victim to physical abuse again.

Also, death is also an underlying theme. The mother attempts to kill herself in the novel's first part; and it remains unclear if her actual death in the novel's second part is the result of suicide or not. As in Trezise's text, there are clues that the mother has fallen victim to the man's violence as well. I have labelled death and the death-wish a manifestation of trauma, belonging to the category of flashbacks that sabotage resistance. Death works also on a narrative level describing animals (rabbits) being killed by the father (17, 156, 181, 273, 277) The words death/dead/die occur rather frequently (28, 32, 57, 92, 118, 120 132, 135, 142, 144, 157, 163, 184, 222, 227, 244, 245, 250, 252, 266, 277). They refer either to the mother's suicide attempts death, the animal-killing, or they are connected to Dol's burning, as in "She [the mother] thinks I am dead. When the ambulance man holds out his red blanket, she drops me into it like a swathe or kindling" (32); and "but I won't die: that's all that matters to her now" (57). The words "death" and "fire" coincide here: 28, 32, 142. Again, death and fire are combined to illustrate pain and to sabotage any healing-processes within Dol. This is partly validated by Robert Adams, who explains that

> the novel seems to be largely about the subjectivity of memory and the pain of an adult trying to lay to rest the ghosts of the past as she confronts all the memories she has constructed. Hers is a story that unfolds with almost unrelenting grimness, with all the calamities stemming from the flawed character of one man [her father]. (Adams 23)

The male is again presented as a disruptive, violent entity.

The second part begins with Dol's return to her home town. The sisters are now grown women and they gather for their mother's funeral. The narrator does not inform

the reader of what happens to any of the characters in-between the mother's disappearance and her funeral. During the sister's reunion, they begin to reveal their childhood experience. This is when "things are being unearthed" (277) .What follows is an enumeration of violent scenes carried out by their father: Dol recalls a situation when he "lifts her with one hand and throws her through the back door where she skids on her arm and face across the concrete floor" (219); Rose remembers him "shaking Fran like a rag-doll in his hands" (219) and Luca pictures a scene in which the father "has his back to Rose. His shirtsleeves are rolled up, the belt coiled around his fist [...] aiming at her head" (240). These are only a few examples. Interestingly, the violent scenes are never remembered and retold from the perspective of the victim herself, but by one of her sisters. There is hence a change in narrative perspective here. In a way, this signifies trauma, as it presents physical abuse as an experience that the characters repress from consciousness to "ease" the pain caused by the violations. In *The Hiding Place,* representations of trauma are, step by step, unfurled in their complexity. In addition to the descriptions of repression, images of psychic numbing are evoked. "Rose's leg has gone numb. She unfolds it from under her, tries to move, but *the pain of revival is too intense*. She waits for the pins and needles to pass" (241) [my emphasis]. Psychic numbing and reoccurring pain (flashbacks) are literally put in contrast to each other, which is created by the conjunction "but". The numbness of her legs describes a quite common physical reaction, however it also works as a metaphor for the deadening of her senses that she cannot "revive", as her body has experienced severe pain. It appears that the expression of trauma actually is the main storyline, that develops gradually towards some kind of catharsis: towards the end of the novel, Dol states: "Inside me, something claws to get out" (273). This "something" can be understood as the pain inside her, that the victim wants to rid herself of. Hence the pain is personified and animated here, moving to leave Dol's body. Having a second glance at this stylistic device, it stands out that the verb "to claw" clearly entails the notion of a hand. It can be interpreted that this stands for her hand she lost to the fire. It "claws to get out" to make her "whole" again.

Summary

Commodification is a key concept in this chapter, since violence and sexual exploitation are carried out on working-class women’s bodies. The female body is thus objectified. It works on all three levels: gender, class and ethnicity. The gender-aspect is obvious in this context; class is directly linked to a complex history of capitalist exploitation and it is combined with sexual exploitation; and so is ethnicity, particularly in the context of colonialism and slavery. Both rape and battering, as we have seen, cause the splitting apart of the female subject into a painful male-dominated and the “remaining” female part. This is the state of trauma, which is not always an integrative phenomenon, but consists of the conflicting elements of first, flashbacks, and second, emotional anaesthesia and dissociation. As shown, the former are represented via reoccurring violent scenes and are metaphorically expressed by fire and death, whereas the latter are represented by images of division: cutting off from painful parts which then become numb. Describing this numbness, the body’s resistance to the pain, is what I – by quoting Sorcha Gunne – have called “writing against trauma”.

Narrative resistance to rape works on the three levels narrative point of view, action, and stylistic devices. These types of resistance vary in degrees of their frequency and strength across the novels: Emecheta’s *Second-Class Citizen* and Barker’s *Union Street* are told in a third-person mode of presentation; and Trezza Azzopardi’s novel is constituted by partly altering perspectives. Yet, Emecheta’s novel enters a level of resistance that transcends the three forms of resistance: the heroine’s lifesaving counter-violence. Trezise’s protagonist is the only victim who gives testimony against the rapist. The fact that the stepfather-figure is cleared out of it validates the assumption that “the politics and aesthetics of rape are one” (Higgins and Silver 1). On the other hand, the strong forms of resistance in the novels confute this: the exposure of the phallocentric perspective and the graphicness of the imagery of commodification work against the pure victimisation of the working-class female. The intensity and impressiveness of this imagery is apparent in all novels; all of them hold a strong, resistant tone. In this respect, the politics and aesthetics of rape are not exactly identical. In fact, they diverge massively, since the aesthetics

resist representing rape from a male, phallocentric perspective. And so is battering represented from the perspective of the female victim.

The fact that the battering scenes are described in a more detailed way than the rape incidents probably – I can only draw a conclusion on the basis of my own analysis as I have not been able to find any essays dealing with the issue – can be traced back to the tabooing and relative newness of rape narratives. This is also mirrored in the development of women's working-class fiction: as shown in chapter 3, literary representation of battering already occur in 1946 in Margaret Penn's *Manchester Fourteen Miles,* whereas the first rape scene in this realm of fiction are to be observed in 1974, with Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen.*

Conclusion

To finally fix a typology, it can be stated that a contemporary working-class novel written by a woman author focuses predominantly on female characters. It entails a "perspective of poverty", which highlights the financial strains in these characters' living environments. Male characters either remain in the background or, on the contrary, are disruptive or even violent, destructive entities which cause women's oppression. There is no typical job being performed by the female characters. By trend, they are either depicted as housewives or as schoolgirls who strive to become writers and/or begin university careers. The novels often deal with the upward mobility of the female character. There is no typical narrative perspective; however there is a tendency towards the first-person narration in the later novels. As regards the setting, the narratives depict urban communities (cf. Gustav Klaus 9); often situated in London's North-East. Often, a cross-class romance between a working-class woman and a middle-class male is employed. This romance typically fails in the end. The characters frequently suffer from the imposition of the dominant culture's values and beliefs and hence become split subjects.

Reviewing the twelve novels being analysed, it becomes clear that the impact of the dominant culture onto the working-class female is the central underlying phenomenon of these literary texts. Political and cultural domination can be understood as a dividing force that leaves the working-class subject "schizophrenic".

As shown in the literary history of women writing about the working classes (chapter 2), the conflict between growing up female in impoverished rural labour communities and the women's entrance into the metropolitan male-dominated middle-class world runs like a thread through this body of writing. This is intensified when the matter skin colour is added to the cultural clash. This clash creates the narrative dynamics that consistently keep the stories going. As soon as the dominant culture affects the working-class female, the action is set off. The characters then enter a stage of schizophrenia. They are torn apart and struggle to become "whole again", that is, the characters endeavour to make sense of their identity and they strive to overcome trauma.

Their struggles to achieve an unbroken identity manifest themselves in four different ways which I have described as escape, return, resistance and destruction: the working-class characters either attempt to leave their working-class background and realign themselves to the middle classes or attempt to go back to their "cultural origins". The third category I labelled resistance is, as we have seen, realised when the oppressed subjects confront/act upon the "dividing force" of the dominant culture directly: here, the characters perform moves of resistance against the dominant culture via speech or/and action. Sometimes these categories result into each other. If all these three categories do not occur, that is, if the strategies of acting upon the dominant culture do not work, the characters enter a stage of what I have termed "destruction". This is the case when the "dividing forces" are too intense for the violated subject to "become whole again"; which is the case in the context of abuse.

The categories escape, return, resistance and destruction are spread over the novels as follows: "Carolyn" in *Landscape for a Good Woman* and "Joyce" in *The House in South Road* escape their working-class backgrounds and the gendered division of labour – they become writers/academics. So too does "Vivien" in *Never far from Nowhere,* who additionally escapes from her ethnicity when "merging" with her white middle class fellow students. "Andrea" in *Once in a House on Fire* falls into two categories: she both escapes from the working-class world via starting a university career and also resists to her trauma via speech (metaphors of resistance). Return is only enacted by "Olive" in *Never far from Nowhere.* Her wish to finally "go home" is preceded by various moves of resistance by both speech and action. Resistance via speech is also performed by "Shelagh" in *Under a Thin Moon,* by "Arthur" and "Kitty"

in *The Good Plain Cook,* by “Shola” in *The Banana Kid,* “Rebecca” in *In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl,* “Dol” in *The Hiding Place,* “Adah” in *Second-Class Citizen* and “Yasmin” in *The Making of Mr. Hai’s Daughter.* Resistance through action is also performed by “Adah” in *Second-Class Citizen* , by “Laurie” in *Under a Thin Moon* and “Kelly” in *Union Street.* In terms of this categorisation into escape, return, resistance and destruction, I do not raise claim for completeness. There may be another category I wasn’t able to detect. Yet this fourfold categorisation works well to provide an understanding of which plot devices are employed in women’s working-class writing; thence also serves to fix a typology.

Resistance, in its various manifestations, is the most frequent form of a reaction to domination and oppression. I would like to stress again that it is a strategy, rather than a mere consequence to the “dividing force” of the dominant culture. Ultimately, it is the most significant narrative strategy to achieve a level of subversion and change. Now subversion and change are big words and obviously narratives of resistance cannot change the world. But, they still have, as literary texts generally do, the potential to change the reader’s mind by challenging stereotypes and by making the oppressed speak. The idea of change requires the bridging between literary reception and the recognition of societal mischief in the extra literary world.

In order to achieve such recognition, George Lukács argued that authors should strive to organise their texts in a fashion which strikes the reader as a mirror of society (cf. Raman Selden 158). This takes us back to the “Brecht-Lukács debate” about the literary production of “realism”. Brecht and Lukács disagreed about the way in which art and literature should represent the world of late capitalism:

> Lukács reacted strongly against the formal devices exploited by modernist writers. Their abandonment of a unified perspective and their resort to techniques of disruption (montage, collage, multiple perspectives, reportage, episodic structure and so on) reflected, he believed, the alienation and fragmentation of human existence in a late capitalist society, threatened as it was by fascism and imperialism. Brecht’s attitude to the experiments of expressionists and surrealists was quite different, in his view socialist artists had to make use of every possible device which might assist the process of changing an unjust society. (Selden 159)

It is exactly that reflection of alienation that has a subversive quality. According to Brecht, this can be achieved by the implementation of literary devices that oppose the attempt of reproducing “reality”. Establishing a modified representation of late-capitalist society, the “socialist artist” (159) creates a critical distance to the

represented. In other words, confronting the audience[61]/readership with literally strange scenes, these artists show that society is estranged: alienated. This "alienation effect", which Brecht employed to establish a didactic effect in his political-aesthetic representations, also comes into operation in the texts under discussion. The portrayal of the character's schizophrenia/splitting apart may strike the reader as quite peculiar literary scenarios. For instance, the scenes in which "Laurie" in *Under a Thin Moon* turns from university student into a grocery thief in an instance, the way that "Andrea" in *Once in a House on Fire* completely escapes the working-class world and "lives" in her mind; the image of the child "Kelly" in *Union Street* who cuts off her long hair in a narrative time lapse and "Pauline's" conversations with Angel Annabel in *The Banana Kid* add a surprising, disconcerting effect to the reception of these texts which are often understood as "realistic" representation of society. The anthropomorphised kitchen utensils in *The Good Plain Cook* bring the alienation of the reader to a peak level. It follows the principle of Brechtian dramaturgical device of the "alienation-effect": exposing the societal state of alienation through this kind of imagery, he raised awareness about the state of affairs in a capitalist, patriarchal society. Brecht aimed at a transformation of the audience's political consciousness to see the "wrongs" of society. To put it in simple terms: Brecht alienated to show that we are alienated human beings. A dawning of consciousness is ultimately the way of creating an intellectual basis for political action – for change: "His approach to literary form was uncompromisingly political: his concern was with changing the world, and not merely with understanding it" (Selden 159).

I would like to point out that while the imagery of schizophrenia/division and the subsequent alienation are based on a political subtext, representations of violence feature an even more direct and pronounced way of promulgating change: they are organised around the principle of "the personal is political." The political aesthetics involved in women writing the working classes is yet not limited to the aspects of alienation and domestic violence. Throughout the development of this body of writing, the matter of "escape" is also consistently pivotal in this context. This is realised in the form of women's upward movement as well as the cross-class romance.

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61 Brecht's technique is, obviously, concerned with drama. I attempt to refer it to fictional texts here.

Here, escapism always fails for a political reason: its failing disillusions the reader in a ways which shows that there is no simple way out of poverty. To exaggerate this point, the novels exemplify that there is no “gentleman” or, to translate this into a fairytale and Hollywood-cliché ala *Cinderella*: there is no prince coming to rescue the poor woman. Also, the majority texts make it clear that this is not what the working-class women want. Their moves of crossing classes, of moving upward are realised in terms of their education and intellectual strivings. Many characters become university students: “Laurie” and “Shelagh” in *Under a Thin Moon,* “Vivien” in *Never far from Nowhere*, “Yasmin” in *The Making of Mr.Hai’s Daughter,* “Andrea” in *Once in a House on Fire, “*Adah” in *Second-Class Citizen*, Laurie being the expectation in her wish for a cross-class romance. “Carolyn” in *Landscape for a Good Woman* becomes a historian, “Rebecca” in *In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl* the writer of her life story.

Having detected “division” as the key phenomenon of this body of work and having verified that is it is linked to alienation, I was wondering whether my previous research on German working-class fiction by male authors has influenced my results presented in this thesis. In the framework of my thesis *The Representation of Alienation and Discrimination in Günter Wallraff’s “Industriereportagen”* (2006) I have, as the title suggests, focused on the mode of presenting alienation. In this examination I also traced for synecdochal reductions, personifications and further commodified language usage – hence my concerns about a prefabricated viewpoint on my “new object” of study. The increasing dominance of the matter of division may, at various points, seem single-sided or oversimplified. Notwithstanding the obvious tendency towards the division/alienation, it is that case that, when reading the novels for a first time, I found that they differ greatly from the texts written by their male pendants. The characters are housewives, university students, lecturers as opposed to factory workers. The setting is hence not a factory, but the texts depict various places and sceneries; the narrative technique spread throughout this body of work is multifaceted and innovative. The emphasis clearly is on women’s living environments and the matters of femininity. Thus the women’s writings build a sharp contrast to Wallraff’s literary figurations of the male worker’s world such as dockyards, steel mills and coal mines. So, the crucial difference between those two bodies of writings lies in the creation of fictional spaces and the type of work that is being performed. Owing to

these differences, I decided that the text corpus of women's writings needs to be examined from a theoretical point of view which transcends Marxist's concept of alienation. Having discussed feminists such as Spivak, hooks and further leading post-colonial critics, it is all the more fascinating that I have arrived at the same phenomenon via the discussion about division. As a result, I would like to suggest that the omnipotent matter of division/ schizophrenia in the texts can be understood as a continuation of the division of labour and that the alienating effect of divisions is – overall – rooted in capitalist/imperialist domination.

On the other hand, the manifestation of schizophrenia in the texts shows that working-class fiction is not a "deviation" from the literary mainstream, but part of it (cf. introduction). After all, the matter of a schizophrenic identity is a common phenomenon in both literature and the extra-literary world. Also, it is mirrored through every-day expressions like "two souls are dwelling in one body"; "janus-faced", being "torn" etc. A blatant example of narratives of schizophrenia would be Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hide* (1886). So, this aspect of division is certainly not only a specialty of working-class fiction, but rather an omnipotent psychological state due to the complex societal structures we are living in.

The most significant aspect, I find, is that this schizophrenia, mostly caused by domination, is constantly epitomised, discussed, exposed, criticised and condemned in the texts under discussion.

So, when finally stating what the quintessence of women's working-class fiction is, I would like to state that these writings are not about work, but about forms of resistance through language. Rachel Trezise's *In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl* is, to me, the most impressive piece of writing. This novel clearly presents a positive outlook to this kind of fiction. It will be interesting to observe if Trezise's approach of picturing poverty and manual labour as a source of psychological strength and creativity will be continued by future women working-class writers.

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Hannover, den 10.07.2011