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“What will I do while I’m lasting?”:  
Joy’s traumatic experience as daughter, mistress and lover in  
Janice Galloway’s *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*

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*“No matter how often I think I can’t stand it anymore, I always do. There is no alternative. I don’t fall, I don’t foam at the mouth, faint, collapse or die. It’s the same for all of us. You can’t get out of the inside of your own head. Something keeps you going. Something always does.”*  
(From Janice Galloway’s *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*)

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(From *A Selection of Poetry* by Jesus, Mary and Isabel. Visit their blog:  
<http://jesusmaryandisabel.blogspot.com.es>)

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ABSTRACT - Janice Galloway's *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* (1989) focuses on Joy Stone, a woman who bereaved after the accidental death of Michael, her married lover. Her status as his mistress deprives her of the possibility to express her mourning publicly, and this repression causes her to fall into a severe depression. The protagonist's trauma is reflected in her permanent melancholia, as she reacts to Michael's death in a pathological way, resorting to self-punishment and self-annihilation. Incomplete sentences, non-linear narrative and blank spaces embody the disassociation that her object-libido's loss has on her. However, she is not explicit when considering her dead lover as the main cause for her depression. Michael, who is rarely mentioned, is just defined as "the man Joy lived with", but one can read between the lines the extent to which she was emotionally dependent on their romantic relationship, since it is right after he dies that she breaks down. Thus, we read Galloway's novel as an illustration of extreme romantic love because we interpret that it is as a consequence of feeling so empty after Michael's loss that Joy deliberately empties herself by purging her body and starving. However, the protagonist suffers from a previous trauma as daughter that we should not overlook since it is as - or even more - relevant as her romantic companion's death.

### 1. Introduction: Object of study and objective:

The main aim of this paper is to provide contemporary readers with an alternative way of reading Galloway's *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*. According to literary research presented by Aliaga-Lavrijsen, Hock Soon Ng and McGlynn among others, Galloway's novel tends to be read as if the loss of romantic love conveys the loss of everything. In general, contemporary readers show an extreme obstinacy when it comes to attributing love to every single problem that an individual may have and this is why the objective of this paper is to demythologise the pivotal role that the great majority of readers from the 21<sup>st</sup> century think the romantic discourse actually plays. In order to prove that the romantic discourse takes a back seat concerning the actual cause of the protagonist's trauma, relevant quotations from the primary source will be analysed in-depth, due to the fact that the stream of consciousness narrative style is extremely revealing about Joy's psyche. Moreover, articles and books on depression, eating disorders and mental health by renowned researchers such as Freud,

Langford and Lazovitz will also be taken into consideration so as to consolidate the claims of this paper from a more accurate and documented point of view.

The thesis statement around which this paper turns is that, while it is evident that the protagonist's emotional dependency on her dead lover is the trigger for her nervous breakdown, its underlying inducement is not precisely the misfortune of losing Michael *per se*, but rather Joy's feeling of nothingness as well as her low self-esteem caused by her family trauma, which makes her feel unstable and incapable when it is time for her to face this catastrophe. This paper, which makes a diagnosis of the protagonist from a psychosomatic point of view instead of a sentimental one, is mainly addressed to those readers who do not usually see beyond the field of romantic love and who, consequently, tend to side-line other relevant factors apart from love which also make the existence of traumatized people really distressing.

These ideas will be structured in different sections. First of all, this paper presents Janice Galloway as a feminist post-modern writer and introduces the idea of the romantic discourse. Later on, it provides the reader with a diagnosis of Joy's condition concerning her determining traumatic childhood and solitary adulthood as well as her consequent and irremediable feeling of nothingness, which culminates in making her victim of an invigorating sexual abuse. Furthermore, this paper explores not only Joy's bulimia and anorexia as self-vanishing impulses but also the link between the aforementioned sexual abuse and eating disorders. On top of that, this paper studies the embodiment of Joy's chaotic psyche through both the narrative's formal techniques and the description of Joy's and Michael's house. To finish with, it deals with a conclusion that presents the protagonist's final resolution.

## 2. Janice Galloway as a feminist postmodern writer: the romantic discourse

Janice Galloway, born in Saltcoats in 1955, is a Scottish writer of great literary renown. Author of two collections of short stories and three award-winning novels, Galloway is remarkable for her interest in the “physicality, both of the human body and of the literary text.” (McGlynn 2001: 8). As she stated in an interview to Ruth Thomas, she is “interested in writing stories about problems which don't necessarily have answers” and this is why she generally takes a marginalised woman’s perspective as the basis of her writings. Among her great number of works focusing on hyper-sensitive women such as *Clara* (2002) or *This is Not About Me* (2008), the one that makes her stand out as a feminist postmodern writer is her acclaimed first novel, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (1989), “a novel that attempts to show what mental collapse is really like” (Saynor 1994: 11).

Galloway’s volume is ranked the 8th best Scottish novel of the last 50 years, out of a shortlist of 50 books compiled by the Scottish Book Trust (2013). The impact upon its publication was so considerable that it won a large number of awards<sup>1</sup> such as The Whitbread First Novel Award (1989), The Irish Times International Fiction Prize (1990), The Mind Book of the Year/Allen Lane Award (1990) and The Scottish Arts Council Book Award (1990), among others. However, the influence of her highly praised novel did not end on its publishing, since Michael Boyd, the director of Glasgow’s Tron Theatre, adapted it into a stage play in 1990 and, on top of that, the American rock band “Garbage”, led by the Glaswegian vocalist Shirley Manson, titled one of their songs “The Trick is to Keep Breathing”<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> For a summary of Galloway’s career see the entry at British Council Literature. <http://literature.britishcouncil.org/janice-galloway> (Accessed 1st March 2014)

<sup>2</sup> See the video on You Tube. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBz8iXdddqY> (Accessed 16<sup>th</sup> March 2014)

Janice Galloway's *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* is a novel mainly about a nervous breakdown. The first-person narrative gives the reader the opportunity to dive into Joy's depression and get to know first-hand the dramatic consequences that a trauma can have on an individual. Joy Stone is a 27-year-old drama teacher whose name -yet not her surname- conveys a dramatic level of irony. The feelings of bliss, exalted ecstasy and extreme happiness around which the word 'joy' turns are incompatible with the feelings of sorrow, grief and melancholia that actually rein within Joy. This is due to the fact that she has recently lost his married lover in an unfortunate accident while on holiday in Spain. What happened was that, while they were enjoying their stay in a camping resort, the protagonist witnessed how Michael drowned to death in a swimming pool, which caused Joy to suffer from a deep shock from that very moment on. However, Joy's surname 'Stone' is not ironic at all but accurately descriptive instead, since it metaphorically involves the melancholia that she feels after having lost Michael. In a sense, it feels as if Joy has to cope with her severe depression as if it were a heavy stone she will have to drag for life.

As contemporary readers from the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we automatically attribute the main character's severe depression to the accidental loss of her romantic partner, since nowadays the romantic discourse plays an essential role in everyone's life. According to Wendy Langford, in Western societies everything "begins when we fall in love, and everything, it seems, depends upon the quality and durability of the resulting emotional attachment. Therefore, if the relationship should end so, it can seem, does everything else." (1999: 2). However, one should bear in mind that there are plenty of other factors beyond the failure of romantic love that also contribute to our emotional stability. Thus, although Joy's exaggerated grief culminates in bulimia and anorexia right after Michael's death, we should not associate Joy's breakdown simply to her bereavement for the dead lover. Contrary to our

first impressions as 21<sup>st</sup> century readers, Michael's death is just the last straw that broke the camel's, or in this case Joy's, back.

This is why understanding Joy's exaggerated mourning requires an active reading of the main protagonist's background without ignoring the brief fragments in which she mentions her father being an alcoholic, her mother's attempt to commit suicide and her sister's abuse. Every mention of family life counts, and while it is true that Michael is the immediate trigger of Joy's depression, her extremely painful mourning cannot be explained purely in terms of the loss of her romantic partner. There is another wound inside her psyche crying out and waiting to be heard; or rather, waiting to be seen, as Joy vents her pain by injuring herself physically instead of by expressing herself orally. According to Sigmund Freud, "although mourning involves grave departures from the normal attitude to life, it never occurs to us to regard it as a pathological condition and refer to it medical treatment" (Freud 1914-1916: 245).

Nevertheless, Joy's mourning does result in a pathological illness since she suffers from an eating disorder. To make matters worse, she is given medical treatment, since she is hospitalised in a psychiatric hospital. Due to all these reasons, Joy's extremely exaggerated reaction to Michael's loss proves that our protagonist is not just suffering from bereavement. There is another trauma in her psyche that causes her to act this way. It is a silenced trauma which speaks without her noticing it, which needs to be externalised and which reappears at the same time of Joy's exteriorisation of the pain she feels after Michael's death. In fact, as it has previously been stated, it is precisely the aim of this paper to analyse this parallel trauma and provide evidence to prove that it traces back to Joy's childhood.



### 3. A diagnosis of Joy's condition

#### **3.1. A determining traumatic childhood:**

A wide range of studies and research claim that childhood is such a vulnerable period that traumatic events experienced during early infancy, including physical abuse and family instability, have serious consequences in adulthood. Taking the metaphor of 'the person as a pyramid' into account, childhood represents the basis upon which the pyramid is built. Therefore, if the basis of childhood is not well-established, the rest of the pyramid - and hence the rest of the individual's life - totters. As far as Joy's case is concerned, the following quotations evidence that she has suffered from both the aforementioned physical abuse and family instability.

To start with, her older sister beat her: "I've been afraid of Myra ever since I remember. She and my mother/her mother were pregnant at the same time. [...] Myra's baby died. I didn't. Maybe that was why she hit me so much" (59). On top of that, her alcoholic father abandoned them, which prompts her to say that "my father has been dead for twenty-two years" (177). To make matters worse, her mother committed suicide: "My mother walked into the sea. Not the first time she tried something like that but the most unusual one. It didn't kill her. [...] back home she [...] smashed her head when she fell on the fire surround" (199). However, the fact that the raw, first-person narrative mentions the previous events without going in depth through them does not mean that they are less important than Joy's loss of her lover. Therefore, when Joy confesses that "needing people yet being afraid of them is wearing me out" (84), her voice is as revealing about the protagonist's traumas as when she mentions Michael's accident. As active readers, then, we must not undermine these indirect but extremely explicit revelations.

### 3.2 A demoralising solitary adulthood:

In addition to that, throughout her whole ordeal, Joy is given little solace or support from her relatives and friends. To start with, she does not have any help from her parents or sister for the reasons that I have already mentioned. Moreover, no other existing relatives have been introduced to the reader, which means that Joy's only faith falls on her few acquaintances. However, she cannot really count on her best friend Marianna's support because she is away in the States, which makes her both emotionally and physically unreachable: "we stood on the platform watching as Marianne got smaller, waving. [...] I couldn't believe she was going far" (35). Ellen, Marianne's mother, is actually the only person who attempts to keep an eye on Joy, especially on her eating disorder: "She brings wedges of sticky lemon sponge with the coffee, several sticks of shortbread: I know they have been made for me. [...] Ellen makes things because it is how she cares. She clucks and tells me I'm getting thin" (33). Yet, despite being so caring, she fails to deal with Joy's bulimia and anorexia because Joy herself denies she has a problem. In fact, Joy "is trying so hard to keep on reality that it is impossible for her to consider her condition too closely or even to admit to herself how unwell she is." (Vatilo 2008: 16). Consequently, she refuses the one and only attempt to help her: "I told her nobody needed to worry about me. I said it was better she was going, sticking to her plans. Besides, staying wouldn't change anything. [...] You couldn't tell there was anything wrong with me at all." (35)

Joy is also side-lined by society in general since her status as a married man's mistress totally deprives her of the right to mourn in public. Thus, there is enough evidence to prove that it is not Michael's death per se what traumatises her. Actually, it is quite evident that the blow Joy suffers when he dies is of course the trigger to her depression but it is not what

traumatises her to the extent of self-denial. As Jessica Aliaga-Lavrijsen states, “her desire to be wiped out is in fact a re-enactment of a previous wiping out” (Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2013: 8). In fact, this first wiping out takes place during Michael’s funeral, where Reverend Dogsboddy suggests those present to “extend our sympathies, our hearts and our love, especially our love to his wife and family” (79). The fact that he does not extend his sympathies to Joy as he does to Michael’s actual wife, from whom he is separated anyway, is precisely what wipes Joy out of the ceremony and thus what makes her invisible and unable to mourn publicly. It is precisely as a consequence of this invisibility and effacement that Joy is led to her own invisibility and effacement as a person. Thus, this proves that the harshness with which society treats her despite her critical situation is also a major contributor to her breakdown.

### **3.3. An irremediable feeling of nothingness:**

Apart from Joy’s wiping out during the funeral, the protagonist does find herself in a society that, in general, is not structured to provide her with a place. She is nobody’s daughter, nobody’s mother, nobody’s wife and nobody’s widow. However, if she were not so dependent on the roles she is expected to play as a woman, she could perfectly fit into the current society despite being nobody’s someone. The problem is that, as McGlynn very well points out, “traditional family and heterosexual structures inevitably create damaging dynamics.” (2001: 23). This is why we try to attribute, mistakenly, the causes of Joy’s trauma to everyone surrounding her, when, in fact, the only cause of her trauma is Joy herself. Her mistake as a woman, and hence as a person, is to rely on everyone else except on herself to take the reins of her own life.

To start with, when she was a child, she relied on her parents to protect her, the same way the great majority of children tend to do. However, her first traumatic experience was to feel

how unprotected she was within a family made unstable by her father's alcoholism, her mother's abandonment through suicide, and her own victimisation due to her sister's physical abuse. Feeling vulnerable and unable to rely on her family, she put all her faith in her lovers, the most fulfilling but also dangerous emotional attachments that an individual can have. As a matter of fact, Joy never mentions this explicitly but her reaction to Michael's death makes the reader feel that, for Joy, "love appears to be a means of salvation" (Langford 1999: 28), and hence her lack of "existential security, personal identity, emotional satisfaction [...] and a life which has meaning beyond the round of everyday existence" (Langford 1999: 28) after the unexpected loss of her romantic partner.

Therefore, what causes the protagonist's breakdown is not Michael's death but the feeling of nothingness that she has after losing both her family and her lover, on whom she had put all her hopes as a child and later on as an adult. Thus, taking the metaphor of 'the person as a three-leg table', as readers we have the impression that one of these legs represents Joy's family, another one represents Joy's lovers and the last one represents herself, who cannot maintain the stability of the table, that is to say, hers, if the other two legs fail to be there. Furthermore, the protagonist's affairs with both her boss at her second job Tony and her ex-student David also support the claim that Michael's death is not what mainly causes Joy's depression. Although she is not given the opportunity to mourn in public, surely, if she really loved Michael, she would mourn in private regardless. However, she does not appear to feel such sorrow and grief over the loss of her romantic companion when, exactly "six days after Michael's funeral" (131), she starts dating Tony, and ends up in bed with him:

He invited himself into the living room, sat on the sheet-covered sofa flicking cigar ash into the neck of an empty bottle. I didn't say no. His mouth over mine was warm and made me lonely. [...] I would not sit on his knee but the kissing was taken for granted.

He had paid good money after all. A meal, dancing, flowers. It was Sunday morning.  
(174)

While it is true that love comes when you least expect it and thus nobody can be blamed for starting a new relationship just after a short period of mourning, this is not Joy's case as she is not actually in love with Tony. As readers, we know about Joy not being in love with her boss because she does not only go to bed with him but also with David in the same time period:

David reached over and kissed me. [...] Afterwards I cried till I screamed. I didn't know how much I needed to scream. This is the pattern of what I do every time I am with David. We get drunk and have sex and I scream a lot of the time. (133)

The fact that she has an affair with both Tony and David simultaneously proves that she does not give up the mourning phase because of new love feelings towards another man. It rather proves that her depression has nothing to do with Michael's death. It actually has to do with Joy herself and her low self-esteem: "I smile at the woman in the mirror. Her eyes are huge. But what looks back is never what I want. Someone melting. And too much like me" (48).

### **3.4. An invigorating sexual abuse:**

As Joy has been feeling rejected by her own family since she was a child, she has not properly developed the same sense of self that individuals whose parents believed in them during their growth stage might have. As a result of having become an adult without having been provided with the love and encouragement from her parents during childhood, Joy feels emotionally detached and lacks self-confidence, "My feet lift from the ground making no sound. I am unnoticeable. The poolside crowds with people who don't see me" (39). This lack of trust in her family and consequently in herself explains why Joy gives up the mourning phase to end up in bed with Tony and David right after Michael's death. She is

metaphorically looking for someone to replace the second leg of the table that is necessary to provide her with life balance, and besides, she constantly needs to feel that someone loves her as her family never did: “like everybody, I wanted to be loved” (82).

What is worse, she needs to feel that someone does notice her: “Depression isn’t sexy. But I wanted to be touched. I wanted very much to be touched” (132). Such is her emotional necessity to feel loved, noticed and cared for that she does not mind who does so: “Michael’s boots sit beneath my clothes on the rail in the corner of the room, David’s jeans over the chair” (133). Therefore, we can formulate a diagnosis for Joy: what causes emotional instability in the protagonist is the lack of love in general, that is to say, the lack of self-esteem, of family love and of romantic love, and not just the lack of her dead married lover, since “love represents a desire for transformation which arises upon the subject’s experience of existence as unsatisfactory” (Langford 1999: 142).

#### 4. Consequences of Joy’s condition

##### **4.1. Bulimia and anorexia as self-vanishing impulses:**

The aforementioned unsatisfactory existence makes Joy feel entirely unworthy as an individual. This self-conception inevitably contributes to Joy’s desire to be annihilated and this is why she tries to undo herself through bulimia, “There was only one thing to do. I swallowed my hand up to the wrist” (87), and anorexia “I stood here, bug-eyed at the sink, congealing soup up to my wrists. I didn’t need to eat. *I didn’t need to eat*” (38, original emphasis). These two self-destructive illnesses are primarily a psychosomatic condition since they reflect the suffering of Joy’s psyche upon her own body. On the one hand, through “binge eating coupled with compensatory behaviours” (Katzman and Golden 2008: 9), Joy’s psyche is “ejecting what it cannot hold in” (McGlynn 2010: 230), such as her unpalatable

childhood memories, her repressive status as a mistress, and her unfulfilling sexual encounters. On the other hand, through an obstinate refusal to eat and a “self-induced weight loss” (Katzman and Golden 2008: 1), Joy’s psyche is attempting to reduce her body to nothingness so as to make her own self vanish, due to the fact that she cannot cope with her silenced traumas and her invisible pain: “superficially, everything looks fine but underneath is another story” (92).

Accordingly, both bulimia and anorexia can be read as the embodiment of Joy’s distress and agony caused not only by Michael’s death - as readers with romantic preconceptions would claim - but also by her own desire to die, which is made evident through her various self-damaging impulses: “There are marks on the sheets too: trails from half-hearted cuts. I don’t menstruate but I bleed other ways” (92). Furthermore, not only does she react to daily problems through self-injury, binge-eating, stuffing, starving, or purging but also by having sudden bursts of other dissociative actions such as cutting her hair short, dying it with bright colours or having herself pierced so as to dissociate her personal image:

I soak up to my neck then scour the skin raw, rinse and wash my hair. Twice. With a pair of dressmaking scissors I face the mirror and cut my hair short. Spiky. I colour it purple with permanent dye I bought ages ago and never used. [...] Tomorrow I will have my ears pierced, twice on one side. (232).

The fact that Joy’s uncaring parents were not at the societally accepted standard of good parenting caused Joy to not believe in herself, and this resulted in her unconscious obstinacy to assert an identity on her own by self-destructing or changing her personal appearance drastically in order to escape other people’s expectations of how she should be. However, while it is true that her choice to assert her identity in society by means of bulimia and anorexia reveals her impulse of conformity with social expectations of feminine appearance, it also reinforces the dangerous alienation from her body, to the extent that she stops

menstruating: “No sign of bleeding yet? I shook my head” (145). Her preference to fit within a society that excludes her when she needs shelter, over her natural condition to menstruate “evades definition as mother and therefore as woman” (McGlynn 2001: 17): “I’m not a proper woman. I no longer menstruate” (105). In addition to that, the emotionally unhealthy relationship that Joy has with Tony makes her undervalue her womanhood even more since Tony forces her to have sexual relations with him:

I was too tight: muscles clenched with crying, difficult to penetrate. But he persisted. Three snubbed strokes before he reached for his spit and I was easy as a rocking horse. [...] He wiped himself down with his white handkerchief and told me it was alright now. Stop crying. He sighed. He was better off the way things were before. He wished I would stop crying. (176)

Tony’s sexual abuse contributes to her low self-esteem, objectifying her and making her disassociate with her femininity. If that were not enough, Joy ends up blaming herself for how badly she is treated by others, “It’s not Tony’s fault. It must be me” (176). As far as the protagonist’s self-blame is concerned, we can elucidate that it relates to her emotional dependency. That is to say, although Joy is aware that Tony is raping her, his sexual interest in her makes it clear to her that she exists in someone’s life, which makes her feel noticed and hence alive.

#### **4.2. The link between sexual abuse and eating disorders:**

However, although Joy’s behaviour reflects a clear passive acceptance of the rape, the sexual abuse from which she is suffering does not contribute to her well-being, since a reported history of sexual assault is implicated in a number of psychopathologies, including bulimic and anorexic attitudes (Schecter, Schwartz & Greenfield, 1987; Waller, 1991, Waller, Halek & Crisp, 1993), which means that Tony’s sexual abuse contributes directly



both to her bulimia and anorexia. The link between sexual abuse and eating disorders may be difficult to understand but Shands illustrates it quite well. According to him, “food is obsessively perceived as a threat of invasion, something that recalls some feminists’ views of rape.” (Shands 1999: 50). Consequently, the psychological link between sexual abuse and eating disorders depends on the victim’s reaction to the aforementioned abuse: in general terms, eating becomes an implicit acceptance of the rape and starvation a rejection of it. Taking into account that our protagonist suffers from both bulimia and anorexia, we could suggest that on the one hand, she accepts being raped in return for feeling herself desired by someone, but on the other hand, she rebels herself against the rape because it makes an attempt to isolate her from her womanhood.

## 5. The embodiment of Joy’s chaotic psyche

### **5.1. Formal techniques:**

Joy’s eating and mental disorders are “not only forcefully recounted, but also embodied by the narrative’s formal techniques.” (Hock Soon Ng 2012: 230). *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* illustrates the protagonist’s psychological and physical dissociation by means of bricolage style, since the inconsistent and variable form of the narrative style can be interpreted as a visual device to reflect Joy’s both unestablished identity and chaotic stream of consciousness. The narrative style includes a mixture of different kinds of texts ranging from magazine articles:

Jupiter in your sign makes you resilient, but even so, friends and companions can put a strain on personal charisma at this time. Watch out for new opportunities and chase any feeling of restriction – you’ll regret it later if you don’t. Just remember when the going gets tough, the tough get going! Big changes are on their way, if you are patient enough to let the develop.  
(26)

Signs:

13 13 (14)

Posters:



Lists:

I teach them:

1. Routine
2. When to keep their mouths shut
3. How to put up with boredom and unfairness
4. How to sublimate anger politely
5. Not to go into teaching (12)

Vignettes:



Diaries:

Thursday 9.05

The main door is cluttered with litter already and the sign is squint. (11)

Furthermore, Joy's fragmented identity is also reflected by the variable typescript, which changes to italics every time that a memory of her time with Michael comes to mind: "*warm fingers enclose one breast and a shallow wetness sucks the side of my neck. The smell of aftershave is overpowering as his weight levers closer*" (152, original emphasis). Moreover, the protagonist's sense of fragmentation is also made evident by those words written in the margins which are literally cut by the edge of the page:

**M6, beached whales in Alaska, earthquake in Chile. Screams and falling in the dark.**

**sometime**

**Blaze through work by all means but be circumspect. You'd**

(49)

Apart from reflecting Joy's splintered and unestablished identity, the fact that words are written on the margins of the pages also allows the reader to feel the protagonist's sense of disorientation since we feel obliged to choose between reading either the words written within the margins or the ones written outside. Consequently, a moment comes when we do not know where to look at and what to focus on, which makes us feel as disoriented as Joy. On top of that, Galloway's choice of a non-linear narrative appropriately makes Joy's trauma extremely apparent since it reflects Joy's constant and sudden flashbacks to Michael's death: "I walk past the church fast wondering what sort of people this is supposed to attract. I head straight for Marks and Spencer. The morning after Michael's first official night with me, we emptied out the carrier bags and knew we would need to shop" (153).

According to Judith Herman, "it is as if time stops at the moment of trauma" (Herman 1992, 37). Herman's conception of traumatic experiences justifies all the blank spaces found along the novel, which may represent Joy's gaps in memory after Michael's death: "*I can't remember the last week with any clarity. I want to be able to remember it because it was the last time anything was in any way unremarkable.*" (6, original emphasis). To make matters worse, the protagonist's conception of time is also distorted. This is why the great majority of scenes involving the day of Michael's accident are narrated by means of the present tense instead of the past tense: "a white truck skids too close to the side of the pool and a child starts howling. Women recede into the crowd, their faces yellow: canary pale under the leather tan." (69, original emphasis). The constant shift between the tenses proves the relevance of the role of Michael's death to the destruction of Joy's chaotic psyche.

## 5.2. Joy's and Michael's house:

If the narrative style is meant to embody Joy's psyche, her house does not fall short. "Galloway takes pains to delineate the ways that Joy's specific environment shapes her story, carefully implicating Joy's house" (McGlynn 2003: 82). According to the Swiss psychotherapist Carl Gustav Jung, the psyche and the domestic are closely related. What is more, in his partially autobiographical book entitled *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1962), Jung stated that "the house represented a kind of image of the psyche - that is to say, of my then state of consciousness, with hitherto unconscious additions." (Jung 1962: 180). Therefore, when Joy describes her house in a detailed way by saying that "After a month there were little shoots all along the hallway. Mould drew lines round the tops of walls and baby mushrooms appeared overnight. [...] The house was being eaten from the inside by this thing." (64, 65), she is in fact providing the reader with a subliminal description about the true state of her mind. The influence of the romantic discourse, though, makes the reader associate the un-homely and menacing conditions of Joy's house with her relationship with Michael. For instance, Aliaga-Lavrijsen claims that "in the past, with Michael, mushrooms threatened to destroy their love nest, as if reflecting the nature of their "unclean" or illegitimate relation" (2013: 8).

Nevertheless, since the aim of this paper is to prove the relevance of Joy's family trauma concerning her depression, the fact that the protagonist's house is being invaded by foreign entities can also be interpreted as her psyche being invaded by traumatic family memories, as McGlynn has previously suggested: "connecting the asexual spores to the parasitic family presence of Myra" (2011). On top of that, according to Homi Bhabha, "the unhomely [sic] moment relates to the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history" (Bhabha 1994: 11). These traumatic ambivalences do not have to do with Michael's death but with Joy's

family trauma, since the mushrooms invading their home are previous to Michael's accident. Further evidence proving that Joy's infected house represents the family trauma that cries inside her psyche is that Joy tells the reader about the deterioration of the house whilst Myra is in it. If Myra unintentionally revives Joy's traumas, it inevitably means that her sister, as well as everything related to her such as their parents, is the cause for them.

#### 6. Conclusion: Joy's final resolution

To sum up, all over the course of *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, Galloway invites us to spend most of our time as readers inside Joy's mind, which allows us to experience firsthand the shock of her ongoing grief and her inability to assert control over her life. As a matter of fact, this inability causes her to desperately look for different ways to either control her life or rather escape it. Unfortunately, Joy chooses to escape it by means of both bulimia and anorexia, two eating disorders which involve an extension of the suicidal impulse into time. This suicidal impulse that reins within the protagonist's chaotic psyche is made evident in scenes where, for instance, Joy is reflected in a mirror that "cuts off my head" (46), or what is worse, she appears in a photograph where "the camera bludgeons off half my face and the flash whites out the rest" (156). In other words, Joy's reactive depression to her silenced traumas reenacts her alienation from her body to the extent that she desires to "get out of my skin" (16). This is due to the fact that traumas distort the experience of painful past events without the possibility of simply leaving them behind. As far as Joy's traumas are concerned, Michael's unfortunate accident to death precipitated a breakdown in the protagonist that actually finds its roots not in his lover's death but in her family instability. Although Joy does not mention the causes of her nervous breakdown explicitly, symptoms such as low-self-esteem, emotional attachment, exaggerated mourning and self-punishing impulses can be

read as the unsaid or the unsayable, that is to say, those traumas that Joy suffers from despite the protagonist being unaware of them.

This is why when the novel is about to come to an end, Joy tries to find out the reason why she is so overwhelmed by everyday life while all people surrounding her are not. She figures out that “It has possibly something to do with families therefore possibly also my mother's fault. Maybe you could have hereditary minding” (198). In a sense, she blames her mother so much that she tries to begin a suicide attempt. Galloway depicts a young girl who, despite being the victim of a family instability is consumed with guilt because she cannot figure out why she was never loved by her relatives. However, despite the fact that Joy attempts to commit suicide, she also resolves to recover from her mother's suicide and from Michael's drowning accident by learning to swim. Apart from this, Joy's recovery period is also premised on her last words “I forgive you” (235), which can be addressed to herself and her self-blame, to her mother and her suicide, to Michael and his death, or to those social structures that have constantly wiped her out and deprived her of her moral rights as a lover. All in all, we can state that Joy feels responsible for not having done enough to prevent everyone else's tragedy, and it is precisely this feeling of self-blame which is gradually leading her to commit her own tragedy without her knowing it.

What is true is that her character's salvation, though, does not come from Michael's replacement by a new love affair, as contemporary romantic readers might expect, but rather, it begins when she directs more of her energy outwards in a positive way by both learning to swim and forgiving, instead of inwards in a negative way by submitting herself to undeserved self-punishing impulses. Thus, this paper can conclude by claiming that the author is particularly making a statement against romantic fiction in order to broaden those readers' minds who attribute love as the cause for everything, good or bad regardless. All in all, Joy's

condition makes it evident that, while a great number of health issues are unfortunately undermined, the romantic discourse is unnecessarily overrated.

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