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'I Believe in Love': A. L. Kennedy and The Quest for Happy Ever

After

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on a close analysis of A. L. Kennedy's fictional work, both novels and short stories, examining the author's portrayals of love and placing them in a cultural and historical context. Kennedy's fiction invariably centres on the complex nature of human relationships, with protagonists frequently placed in an isolated situation (physically, mentally, or both) and yearning for some deep emotional connection, through love or sex, to form a link with the world which surrounds them. This thesis pays close attention to character and plot development, use of language and connections between Kennedy's texts, alongside a discussion of various sociological, philosophical or psychological works which tie Kennedy's fiction to both current and historical analyses of sexual behaviour, love and gender relationships. Different aspects of love and relationships are explored within each chapter, divided as follows:

Belonging, Identity, Place – examining how far and how useful it is to view Kennedy as a Scottish writer, going on to explore how notions of place and belonging affect her characters, beginning with the body-as-place and working outwards, through contrasting urban and rural locations to return to questions of nation, and how a sense of belonging can enhance the feeling of connectedness central to love.

Sex and Violence – analysing the relationship between sex and violence and questioning whether the two are opposing or may actually stem from the same desire to reconnect with the body and thus link the body more closely to the mind, whilst simultaneously connecting with others.

Unity and Isolation – more closely examining this powerful conflict within Kennedy's work; the fear of being alone and the opposing fear of losing one's individuality, one's self, through being open with and giving love to another, and exploring how such conflict may be resolved.

Desire and Addiction – exploring the relationship between desire and addiction and considering whether the terms can be interchangeable, and which of Kennedy's characters may be considered desiring or addicted. Ultimately this chapter argues that while desire and addiction may have similarities, desire itself is more desirable, because it relies upon some degree of connection not necessary within addiction.

Trauma, 'Madness' – examining the boundaries between trauma and the concept of 'madness', this chapter argues the possibility that many of Kennedy's characters could be seen as traumatised in one way or another, and looks at how this may affect their ability to love, and their attitudes towards it.

Romance – attempting to place a definition of romance within the context of British fiction, this chapter considers the development of the romantic narrative, including contemporary 'Chick-Lit', to argue that it is possible to view Kennedy herself as a romantic writer, given the questing nature of her fictions and the love towards which her characters ultimately strive.

Within Kennedy's writing there is a contradiction expressed in the portrayal of characters simultaneously desperate for love and fighting against the loss of their (often miserable) individuality. The purpose throughout these chapters is to emphasise the many elements which can constitute the notion of 'love', and the ways in which these can either threaten or enhance the development of a sense of self, through developing connection with another.

The aim of this research is to provide a new perspective on Kennedy's work, acknowledging the somewhat bleak nature of her writing but examining more specifically the romantic attitudes expressed within her fiction, the manner in which she explores the boundaries between realism and the concept of romance, and the question of whether she may be defined as a romantic writer, which will draw upon the history of romantic literary tropes and structures.

Declaration:

This is to certify that the work contained within has been composed by me and is entirely my own work. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed:

Frances Tomlin, June 2017

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Introduction

This thesis focuses on a close analysis of A. L. Kennedy's fiction, both novels and short stories, examining the author's portrayals of love and placing them in cultural and historical contexts. The aim of this research is to provide a new perspective on Kennedy's work; whilst her 'stubborn resistance to categorisation' (Mitchell 2008:ix) and a certain bleakness in her presentation of characters struggling 'simply to endure' (March 2002:138) are common topics for critics (Head 2002; Tew 2003; Gifford 1997a/b), the central importance of love throughout her work has been given less focus. Glenda Norquay has examined Kennedy's 'emotional intensity' (2005:146), and Sarah Dunnigan has made the crucial observation that the 'existential and philosophical darkness' in her work coexists with 'love's saving grace' (Dunnigan 2000:154), but the full labyrinthine complexity of Kennedy's presentation of love, and its vital role in not only enabling communication but also shaping and driving individual identity, is an area worthy of further exploration. The question of how far Kennedy may be considered a romantic writer, with each character striving (perhaps vainly) towards his or her own 'happy ever after', is an important one meriting consideration, and providing a fascinating angle from which to examine a challenging and complex writer.

Kennedy's Work: Overview and Critical Analysis

Kennedy's volume of work is now considerable, including journalism and opinion pieces alongside awkwardly genre-defying texts like *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1997) and *On Bullfighting* (1999), and the collection of essays *On Writing* (2013). Fascinating though these texts are, they do not form the focus of analysis within this thesis because, simply, they are *non-fiction* – the purpose of this thesis is to explore the way love and romance are incorporated into Kennedy's fictional world through her novels and short stories, and to place this in the wider context of British literary fiction. For the most part, Kennedy's fictional work has followed a pattern of alternating short story collections and novels, with non-fiction, journalism, and screenplays for both television and radio becoming more prolific as her career has advanced. The fictional texts on which this thesis is focused are *Night Geometry and the Garscadden Trains* (1990, short stories); *Looking for the Possible Dance* (1993, novel); *Now That You're Back* (1994, short stories); *So I am Glad* (1995, novel); *Original Bliss* (1997, short stories, including the novella 'Original Bliss' itself); *Everything You Need* (1999, novel); *Indelible Acts* (2002, short stories); *Paradise* (2004, novel); *Day* (2007, novel); *What Becomes* (2009, short stories); *The Blue Book* (2011, novel); *All The*

Rage (2014, short stories); and *Serious Sweet* (2016, novel). Some discussion of the BFI/Channel 4 film *Stella Does Tricks* (1998), for which A. L. Kennedy wrote the screenplay, will also be included as this appears to be a developed reworking of the story 'Friday Payday' from *Now That You're Back*, and provides an interesting comparison to the written text. *Serious Sweet* is not discussed in the main body of the thesis, as the publication of one coincided with the completion of the other. However, this novel is a very interesting addition to the oeuvre when considered in light of the thesis subjects, and as such a brief analysis is included in the Conclusion.

Almost all critical work on Kennedy has appeared in the form of essays within anthologies discussing either British or Scottish contemporary fiction, and sometimes more specifically women writers of contemporary fiction. Ian Bell's *Peripheral Visions: Images of Nationhood in Contemporary British Fiction*, published 1995, is one of the earliest of these and includes not only an essay by Dorothy McMillan discussing Kennedy's first novel but also a short piece by Kennedy herself. Unsurprisingly, the focus here is on Scottish identity and placing Kennedy's work within a Scottish canon. Other critics writing in the late 1990s/early 2000s also draw on Kennedy's nationality but emphasise the manner in which her writing resists categorisation in this regard (Gifford 1997; Head 2002; March 2002; Craig 2004). Bradbury (2001) and Tew (2003, 2004) are more keen to discuss Kennedy's place within postmodern British literature as a whole. The essays by Sarah Dunnigan (2000), Glenda Norquay (2005) and Helen Stoddart (2005) focus more upon the issues of self/other, pain, love and loss which are so central to Kennedy's writing, and which also form the body of this thesis. Kirsten Stirling (2008) and Carole Jones (2009) explore issues of gender and, once again, national identity, with Stirling noting Kennedy's progression from a clear Scottish location in her early work towards more non-specific notions of place in her later writing. Most recently, James Acheson's *The Contemporary British Novel since 2000* (2017) features an essay by Alison Lumsden which draws on Stirling's point, while also suggesting that Kennedy's focus is communication, and that the progression of her fiction is towards a less isolating and more communicative existence. Kaye Mitchell's *A. L. Kennedy*, published 2008, is the one critical text which focuses entirely upon this one writer. Designed as a student-friendly overview of Kennedy's work, Mitchell's book includes a timeline, biography, and interview with Kennedy herself, along with an analysis of her major works. This analysis groups Kennedy's fictions chronologically to focus on 'space, place and identity' in the early works (2008:43); the 'perverse romances' in *So I am Glad*, *Original Bliss*, and *Everything You Need* (2008:67); and 'communication' and miscommunication' in *Indelible Acts*, *Paradise*, and

Day (2008:94). This thesis will also explore these points as they are, undeniably, key issues within Kennedy's fiction. However, this thesis differs from Mitchell's analysis by making *love* the primary focus of study, so that all these other elements are considered in terms of what they suggest about love, and how they fit into a romantic context. It also largely resists chronological groupings, in order to demonstrate how key issues feature and contrast with each other throughout Kennedy's body of work, including the more recent texts, notably *The Blue Book* (2011) and *What Becomes* (2009).

A Note on 'Scottishness'

The issue of 'Scottishness' is one Kennedy has struggled to shake off. Her early fiction formed part of a surge of new literary voices coming out of Scotland in the 1990s, and as such it was this aspect which was often seized upon by critics, particularly while the work produced had more overtly Scottish settings (*Looking for the Possible Dance*, *Original Bliss*, *So I am Glad*). Before long, though, locations within Kennedy's fictions became more varied, unspecified or international, and Scottish elements less outspoken. In the mid-1990s, Kennedy herself viewed her nationality as merely one part of a much more important whole, expressing the hope that by sharing her 'intimate, individual humanity – Scottishness included', she might 'communicate a truth beyond poisonous nationalism or bigotry' (Kennedy in Bell 1995:102). By 2008, in an interview with Kaye Mitchell, Kennedy was addressing the question with a more weary forthrightness:

All this stuff is just labelling [...] I'm from somewhere; I'd have to be; it's a nice place; I take inspiration from it. If I was from anywhere else, I'd take inspiration from that. I tend to set my stuff in the real world and I set some of it in Scotland – it's close at hand and I get to look at it a lot. But it's not really what the thing's about.
(Kennedy in Mitchell 2008:128/134)

It is perhaps worth noting here that *Serious Sweet* (2016) – Kennedy's first novel since relocating to London – makes emphatic use of that city as a location, and may therefore lend support to the argument that Kennedy simply draws inspiration from wherever she happens to be. Whilst not openly refuting the role of nationality, Kennedy does refuse to grant central importance to it; a stance not unnoticed by critics – Dominic Head notes that 'humanity' is Kennedy's primary focus, with national identity being more fluid and evoked 'only tentatively' (Head 2002:153), while Kirsten Stirling asserts that Kennedy 'entirely rejects gendered and symbolic narratives of nation', ranking individual identity high above any 'all-incorporating national identity' (Stirling 2008:116-117). In spite of this, it is difficult to completely shake

off the common narratives surrounding nationality and the (sometimes gendered) nature of place, and they may, in fact, provide a useful starting point when scrutinising the author's exploration of love and relationships, centred as they are upon a sense of belonging and connectedness. This will be addressed and discussed in more detail in Chapter One, *Belonging, Identity, Place*. There are various points throughout the thesis where it is interesting to consider Kennedy's work as part of a Scottish literary tradition (the identity of the self, for example, explored in *Unity and Isolation*), but the key point of this discussion is to emphasise that questions of Scottishness or nationality form only part of a broader examination of Kennedy as a *romantic* writer which, unlike the debate surrounding national identity, has received little critical attention thus far.

To clarify, I am well aware that critics have devoted some considerable space to exploring the portrayal and nature of love in Kennedy's fiction (in particular Mitchell, 2008; also Dunnigan, 2000; Gifford, 1997). But the truly pivotal role that love plays, its paramount importance as a desired outcome, and the romance structures Kennedy employs as her characters strive towards it, have not been given the same degree of consideration. I wish to highlight that Kennedy does not only centre upon love as a driving force within her texts: her novels invariably employ the kind of quest structure typical of romance narratives, whilst throughout her fiction characters are seen to express a daring hope, a thirst for unity and a belief in the possibility of a happy ending which counteracts the bleakness, the darkness which is, undeniably, also present. With this in mind, the specific aim here is to allow for Kennedy's work to be considered as *romantic fiction*, taking into account the historical and literary perceptions and definitions of a romantic text.

Rationale

Kennedy's fiction invariably centres on the intricate nature of human relationships, with protagonists frequently placed in an isolated situation (physically, mentally, or both) and yearning for some deep emotional connection, through love or sex, to form a link with the world which surrounds them. The longer fictions in particular utilise the typical quest structures of romance to shape the narrative. The short stories do not have space for quests to develop in the same way, but often serve as snapshots of that same yearning which drives the novels forward. In exploring these fictional worlds, this thesis will pay close attention to character and plot development, use of language and connections between Kennedy's texts, alongside a discussion of various sociological, philosophical or psychological works which tie Kennedy's fiction to both current and historical analyses of sexual behaviour, love and gender

relationships.

The chapter structure within the thesis represents a breakdown of what I consider to be the key elements which make up *love* within Kennedy's fiction. This love relies on communication and connectedness, and as such is centred upon the various ways in which the individual interacts, or struggles to interact, with the world beyond him or herself. As the issue of 'Scottishness' is one that has rather stuck to Kennedy, particularly in her early work, the first chapter *Belonging, Identity, Place* will initially use critical discussions of the nature of Scottish literature, alongside the works of feminist geographers such as Doreen Massey, to examine how far and how useful it is to view Kennedy as a Scottish writer, and how much nation is intrinsic to a sense of identity. However, it will then go on to explore how broader notions of place and belonging affect Kennedy's characters, beginning with the body-as-place and working outwards, through contrasting urban and rural locations to return to questions of nation, and the manner in which a sense of belonging may enhance the feeling of connectedness central to love.

Sex & Violence analyses the relationship between these two powerful modes of physical expression, and their usefulness as methods of communication in Kennedy's fiction. Through reference to sociological studies on sadomasochism, pornography and the nature of pain, the chapter questions whether sex and violence must be viewed as oppositional, or may actually stem from the same underlying desire to reconnect with the body, thus linking the body more closely to the mind. Ultimately, it questions how successful violent physical expressions may be in enabling communication, or expressing love.

Unity & Isolation underlines the vital importance of this conflict within Kennedy's work; the fear of being alone and the opposing fear of losing one's individuality, one's self, through being open with or giving love to another. In exploring how the self is defined it references the work of R. D. Laing and John Macmurray, emphasising the manner in which the latter in particular may be seen to have great relevance to the conflict in Kennedy's fiction.

Desire & Addiction incorporates various studies of addiction, alongside examining Deleuzian and Lacanian concepts of desire, in considering how one separates the two terms, or whether in fact they may be interchangeable. It notes that, while many of Kennedy's characters appear fuelled by a central desire, questing and driven by *lack*, her fiction may still be seen to convey a belief in the transformative, positive possibilities of desire, as enabling connection where addiction ultimately permits only distancing and separation.

Trauma, 'Madness' references Freud and various psycho-analytical examinations of trauma, alongside critical studies of so-called 'Trauma Fiction', to highlight how many of

Kennedy's characters may be viewed as in some way traumatised. It considers how 'madness' may be considered as a part of the traumatic experience, affecting characters' ability to love, and how love, though sometimes labelled 'madness' in itself, may in fact offer a way out of trauma and towards healing, by restoring the connections trauma has severed.

Romance draws upon the previous chapters, along with the definitions and history explored in this Introduction, to form a more conclusive picture of Kennedy's apparent attitude towards love, and to question how far she may be considered to be a romantic writer. To achieve this it attempts to reach some workable definition of romance within literature, considering the mass-market publishing of popular romances and noting the elements of those texts which may also be seen to be employed in Kennedy's work. In particular, the significance of the *quest* is highlighted as evidence of the 'romance' of Kennedy's writing, with love almost invariably serving as the goal towards which her characters strive. The chapter, I feel, forms an appropriate conclusion, as all the aspects of love discussed in the previous chapters may ultimately be seen to form part of this greater, romantic, quest.

'Romance': A Definition, and Brief History

As this thesis focuses upon Kennedy's portrayal of love and, ultimately, how far she may be considered a romantic writer, it is perhaps useful to begin by developing a workable definition of 'romance', and placing it within a historical literary context. In the collection of essays *Romance Revisited*, Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey pinpoint the characteristics of a traditional romance narrative. The paragraph is worth quoting in full as it provides a detailed yet concise definition of the 'romance' which will be dealt with in this thesis:

Typically, the story offers the potential of a heterosexual love union whose fulfilment is threatened by a series of barriers or problems. At the most general level, then, romance might be described as a *quest* for love; a quest for another about whom the subject has very definite fantasies, investments and beliefs. This quest involves a staging of desire whose fulfilment may be realised with attainment or, just as likely, with its loss. To whichever closure the narrative tends, however, like all quests its structure requires the overcoming of obstacles: in the case of romance this means the conquest of barriers in the name of love, and perhaps, by extension, also in the name of truth, knowledge, justice or freedom. (Pearce & Stacey 1995:15-16)

This definition serves to emphasise how broad the scope of romance actually is, and how far its narratives are entrenched in our culture. With this in mind, it seems worthwhile to begin examining the impact of romance through the medium of the fairy tale, or folk tale, one of the earliest forms of story-telling within our society. These tales almost invariably centre on a

quest of some sort, most commonly in pursuit of a 'happy ever after', and since such stories have been around for centuries they are now so embedded in our sociocultural imagination that they continue, despite their fantastical content, to provide a framework for literature which reaches beyond fantasy and into more 'realistic', 'serious' fiction. As perhaps the most vociferous advocate of fairy tales in their capacity as tools for childhood development, Bruno Bettelheim asserts that 'more can be learned from them [fairy tales] about the inner problems of human beings, and of the right solutions to their predicaments in any society, than from any other type of story within a child's comprehension' (Bettelheim 1991:5). Bettelheim also takes care to emphasise that these tales carry huge importance for adults too; conveying 'at the same time overt and covert meanings' which 'speak simultaneously to all levels of the human personality', reaching the 'sophisticated adult' alongside the 'uneducated mind of the child' (1991:5-6).

In the fairy tale model the quest undertaken is a literal one; in which the youthful protagonist ventures out into the unknown, a forest or a faraway land, where he or she must endure trials and face down terrors to reach the final goal of love, marriage and perpetual happiness. From a psychological perspective these tales are often seen as a metaphorical illustration of the child's journey through the thorny confusion of adolescence towards the clarity and independence of adulthood. But they also serve as a blueprint for more 'adult' narratives where the subject, still lonely and lost, has reached maturity but not the completion implied in a romantic union and must therefore battle through his or her own trials to find love, a mate, and the all-important happy ending. Perhaps the main characteristic of the folk or fairy tale is its fluidity of form; these are tales springing from centuries of oral tradition, constantly altered and adapted to different audiences and consequently just as appropriate for adult entertainment as that of children. And yet, however widely varying the content of these stories might be they all seem to have been crafted with one central purpose – to provide the hearer with a temporary escape from reality, whilst simultaneously emphasising the real emotions and drives which motivate all of us.

Whilst fairy and folk tales may represent some of the earliest examples of romance narratives, it must be remembered that they come from an oral tradition, not a written one, and that therefore versions of most of these tales had been circulating for centuries before they were presented in written form – Angela Carter names Charles Perrault's *Histoires ou contes du temps passé* (published in Paris in 1697, translated into English in 1729) as the first 'self-conscious' collection of written fairy tales in Europe (Carter 1990:xi). The same development from oral tradition applies to tales of Greek mythology, without which,

according to Robert Graves, the 'official English literature of the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries cannot [...] be properly understood' (Graves 1960:11). Perhaps the best example of romance found in Greek myth is the tale of Eros and Psyche, the first written version of which appeared in Apuleius' *The Golden Ass* in the second century AD (although the myth has been recognised in Greek art as early as the fourth century BC). This myth forms a structural blueprint for what we might consider a 'typical' romance tale, as it begins with a meeting, a falling in love, then a dramatic separation and a series of trials to be undergone – the 'quest' stage – before the lovers are reunited at the conclusion. However, the Greek model differs from later romance narratives in one crucial way; which is that the quest section (the main body) of the narrative takes place in what Mikhail Bakhtin refers to as 'adventure time' – 'everyday time' is effectively suspended until the adventure is ended and the lovers are returned to one another. The practical result of this adventure structure is that, despite all the challenges which lie between the lovers' first meeting and final union, '*in essence* nothing need lie between them' – the love between the hero and heroine is never subject to doubt and remains '*absolutely unchanged* throughout the entire novel' (Bakhtin 1981:89). The heroes in Greek romance are not permitted to mature, to develop, nor is the strength of their passion allowed to fluctuate, rather they finish the tale as they began, purely and completely in love and totally unaffected by the dramas of 'adventure time' which have formed the centre of their narrative. As Bakhtin points out;

had [...] the initial instantaneous passion of the heroes grown stronger as a result of their adventures and ordeals; had that passion been tested in action, thereby acquiring new qualities of a stable and tried love [...] then we would have an example of a much later European novel-type, one that would not be an adventure novel at all, and certainly not a Greek romance. (1981:90)

In this sense, too, Greek romance also differs from the typical folk tale. In folk tales the passage of time may still be viewed as flexible, certainly to the extent that large chunks of time commonly flash by at speed for the sake of the narrative – a quest lasting a year and a day, for example, or a kingdom put to sleep for a hundred years – but this is usually accompanied by a suggestion of wisdom gained *through* the adventure experience. There is no indication here that the child who has learnt to be cunning and resourceful in order to outwit his or her enemies will carelessly cast these skills aside once the ultimate goal has been acquired. While it may still be firmly rooted in fantasy, the folk tale also provides tools to equip the listener (or reader, in latter days) for *real life* – thus putting the folk tale in closer

relation to later European romantic narratives, where the emphasis is on emotional development and experience, than to the pure escapism of Greek adventure romance.

Medieval or chivalric romances provide the next significant development in written romance, and this follows the folk tale formula a little more closely – here is the introduction of the fantasy setting while remaining in 'everyday time' and, frequently, the 'quest for a precious prize' of a more material nature; true love being so much more satisfying, naturally, when accompanied by a large pile of gold (McCracken 1998:77). Here again, romance is the 'popular' form and, importantly, the *feminine* one – David Salter observes the way that Chaucer, for one, 'presents the vernacular realm of romance as both literally and metaphorically an exclusively female domain' (Salter 2002:42). The chivalric form scorns real-life experience in favour of romantic excesses – in *Octavian*, for example; 'nothing about the narrative is reserved or half-hearted. It is set in a marvellous, miraculous world where the normal laws of probability and cause and effect are swept aside with a lofty disdain' (2002:48). It is also worth noting that, unlike some of the most well-known folk or fairy tales which frequently centre on a female protagonist, 'Middle English romance is a genre that deals almost exclusively with male concerns, and that puts male experience at the centre of its universe' (2002:43). This in turn implies that, if we consider romance as 'an exclusively female domain', Medieval chivalric romance presents us with the paradox of 'a feminine genre with virtually no female heroines' (2002:42). Here, a woman is defined 'exclusively in terms of her relationships with men [...] there is a lingering sense that she is never fully regarded as a person in her own right' (2002:49). *Octavian* presents us with two mother-figures, one good and one wicked, but both notable only as mothers, while Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* emphasises the torments of the hero, the lover, over the challenges faced by his beloved. The nature of Middle English romance is to idealise femininity of the 'undemanding, self-denying kind that presents absolutely no challenge to masculine authority' (2002:58), perhaps because here, as in the Greek romances, most of the texts we have available are of male authorship, where the author is named and known, and may therefore be written with a masculine bias.

This notion of idealised femininity is a trope that has continued to run through the romance genre even up to the present day, even with a vast number of female writers now dominating the genre. Contemporary romance almost invariably centres on a strong, independent female protagonist – a symptom, perhaps, of popular romance today being written almost exclusively *by* and *for* women – but the underlying message seems to remain essentially the same; that this woman can only go so far within the confines of her society, and that ultimately she needs a man to hold her and make her whole. Gender issues are

intrinsically bound up with the romance narrative throughout history because this is exactly what romance hinges on – the pursuit of (heterosexual) love and the relationship between men and women as they strive towards it. The fact that popular romance narratives in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries uphold traditional patriarchal values so overtly, and yet remain so successful among the contemporary female readership, is an issue of great interest to feminist critics, and this will be discussed in the *Romance* chapter.

After English translations of the works of Petrarch became available in the early sixteenth century the chivalric romances of the Middle Ages gave way to a vast proliferation of love poetry, in which subjects became less heroic and fantastical and focused more on intimate, personal experience. Works such as the Shakespearian sonnets and the poetry of John Donne demonstrate the poets' desire to echo the considered artistic perfection of Petrarch whilst simultaneously projecting a new, individual voice. Prose writing arguably took a back-seat at this point, with poetry and drama stepping to the fore, but the central theme of love and romance, and the quest for both, remained consistent. The development of the novel in the eighteenth century expanded upon the love-themes of the poets but also brought with it a shift towards more realistic writing. In *The Rise of the Novel* Ian Watt is careful to draw a distinction between 'novelists' and 'romantics'; the latter maintaining 'the emphasis on individualism and on originality' which features in early novels but expressing themselves with less 'formal realism', drawing more on the language of fantasy and dream and as such perhaps following the poetic mode more closely (Watt 1987:301), while the novelists' pursuit of realism lay in their attempt to 'portray all the varieties of human experience, and not merely those suited to one particular literary perspective' (1987:11). For Watt, it seems, any attempt to incorporate romantic tropes into a novel format immediately places that text in the less exalted ground of 'popular' novels, where the 'combination of romance and formal realism applied both to external actions and inward feelings [...] satisfies the romantic aspirations of its readers' by disguising 'an unreal flattery of the reader's dreams' as 'literal truth' (1987:205).

An excellent example of this popular style among early novels would be Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748), a huge and rambling novel presented entirely in the form of letters, whose exploration of the minutiae of its protagonists' existence lends it the shape of formal realism even as the plot moves through the simply romantic to the romantically ludicrous. In a narrative which echoes down the centuries to the Mills-and-Boon-type popular romance of today, Clarissa Harlowe is a beautiful young girl attracted to the handsome but wicked Robert Lovelace, and determined in her impeccable moral goodness to rescue him from his villainy. However, having set up this promising romantic scenario Richardson

guides it towards a disastrous rather than a happy conclusion as Clarissa is imprisoned, drugged, raped and finally taken to her bed to die quietly, though at length, of some non-specific ailment, after which the heartbroken villain is killed in a duel. While this is not exactly a 'happy ever after', the rigid moral backbone of the story, the emphasis on the purity of the pure and the just punishment of the irredeemably wicked ensures *Clarissa* remains more of a romance than a realist novel, with characters becoming symbols in a way not dissimilar to the earliest fantasies of fairy tale. In his introduction to the text Angus Ross notes how 'Richardson was stung by the wish expressed by many of his contemporaries for a 'happy ending' that would show Lovelace to have been good after all' (Ross in Richardson 1985:19), while Clarissa, once tainted, 'apparently accepts her own death as the only outcome of her rape' (1985:20). However attractive the character of Lovelace may appear he has to remain wicked; while Clarissa, a heroine of absolute goodness, becomes a martyr – and as such her death *becomes* her happy ending. There are numerous references in the text to Clarissa's joy as she approaches death; 'her happy exit' (Richardson 1985:1360) met with 'a sweet smile beaming over her countenance' (1985:1361).

This is perhaps one of the main differences between early romantic fiction and contemporary writing – so-called 'sentimental novels' often put an emphasis on the heroine maintaining purity and virginity at all costs, and once virginity is lost, death becomes a 'happy' alternative to the anticipated matrimonial finale. As Tania Modleski observes;

At the end of a majority of popular narratives the woman is disfigured, dead, or at the very least, domesticated. And *her* downfall is seen as anything *but* tragic. (Modleski 1982:12)

Death, by this reckoning, can be more glorious than domestication through marriage because in dying the heroine compromises nothing – she can remain perfect and untouched forever. In dying, she 'does not have to depart from the passive feminine role, but only logically extend it' (1982:18). For most readers, however, domestication seems preferable to death, as the 'happy ending' through heterosexual union with another carries greater fantasy appeal, unsurprisingly, than dying alone in virginal glory. It could be argued that the increasing secularisation of contemporary society, along with its isolating nature, have led simultaneously to greater fear of death and greater longing for unity and companionship while living, but it should also be remembered that, in novels which attempt to blend romantic notions with realistic structures, marriage *is the more realistic outcome of the two*. It takes a greater suspension of disbelief to imagine a character dying of a broken heart, or a broken hymen, than it does to accept that

two characters, after journeying through various trials, should choose to spend the rest of their lives together. It is easy to argue, for example, that Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) is a more realistic novel than Richardson's *Clarissa* because, though Austen maintains many similar romantic formulae, she ensures Marianne does not die after having her heart broken by Willoughby but instead recovers and goes on to marry Colonel Brandon, who is less exciting, perhaps, but much more sympathetic and dependable. Marianne, as most readers surely would in her position, chooses marriage over martyrdom, and domestication over death.

Ian Watt's definition of the popular romantic novel as one which disguises 'an unreal flattery of the reader's dreams' as 'literal truth' (Watt 1987:205) renders such a novel a beguiling yet dangerous beast, one which 'confuses the differences between reality and dream more insidiously than any previous fiction' (ibid), and which therefore inevitably leads to disappointment. And if all romance must be defined as 'popular', because of the expectations arising from it, one could extrapolate that a romance cannot be a true novel, and a true novel, attempting an honest and realistic portrayal of its protagonist's inner and outer experience, cannot be romantic. While this may be in some degree accurate in regard to the early novel-forms Watt is analysing, such an absolutist definition fails to take into account the myriad ways in which romantic elements can be incorporated subtly into a novel-text and, more importantly, the increasing self-reflexivity of the novel in its later development, where the romantic, 'happy ever after' dream of the reader may be reflected back through the identical desire within the protagonist. A novel does not have to be a 'popular romance' to address the reality of love, gender relations, or the desire for unity. Rather, one could say that an acknowledgement of the prevalence of heterosexual romance fantasies within our society can add to the complexity of realism portrayed in the text; as the protagonists struggle to reconcile this fantastical expectation, carried within themselves and their readers, with the reality which presses in around them. I would argue that any contemporary text which goes beyond the simplistic structures of the most basic fantasy or 'Chick-Lit' and yet also incorporates this struggle, this questing and romantic yearning, may be considered a romantic text, and that Kennedy's fiction falls within this category.

The Romance of Kennedy

Within Kennedy's writing there is a contradiction expressed in the portrayal of characters simultaneously desperate for love and fighting against the loss of their (often miserable) individuality. The purpose throughout these chapters is to emphasise the many elements

which can constitute the notion of 'love', and the ways in which these can either threaten or enhance the development of a sense of self, through developing connection with another. Overall, the thesis attempts to highlight Kennedy's relevance in a contemporary Western society in which issues such as secularisation and the growth of urban living have contributed to a sense of loss, individual isolation and a search for meaning. In so doing it attempts to highlight love as a driving force, and the continuing power of the romantic quest, by exploring Kennedy's work through a context of attitudes and emotions, rather than one solely defined by specific issues of gender or nationality. Many of the themes and issues explored here have been touched upon, to a greater or lesser extent, in Kaye Mitchell's *A. L. Kennedy* (2008), which provides a wide-ranging and very useful introduction to the complexities of this particular writer. However, this thesis differs, I feel, in attempting to explore these themes across the whole of Kennedy's fiction, with less focus upon chronological order and more upon the similarities these works exhibit. Also, and more importantly, Mitchell argues that the 'undertone of violence and perversity' within Kennedy's writing 'undercuts' any reading of her work as 'romantic' (Mitchell 2008:67). I wish to counter this by suggesting that violence and perversity may in fact form part of a greater romantic framework. Love may be seen as the central drive which *incorporates* issues such as family, nation, trauma and violence, rather than simply being one of them. I would argue that evidence of darkness and brutality serves to painfully highlight the fragility of that 'happy ever after' for which Kennedy's characters continue to yearn, which in turn emphasises the complexity of romantic desire as cultivated by a paradoxically isolating, and even cruel, society. In exploring all facets of love within Kennedy's fiction, I wish to show that romance not only remains powerful, but also goes beyond simple categorisation.

1. Belonging, Identity, Place

To remake existing cultural perceptions is no easy business: you may not like the existing construction; you may wish to replace it with something else; but to negate it, to deny it, to refuse to be associated with it denies the very past which represents, at least in part, the commonality of which you are an inheritor, linking you to the rest of your community, and justifying the need for a cultural identity at all.
(Craig 1996:112)

It could be argued that one cannot thoroughly examine the works of any author without taking into account the identity of that author him- or herself. While it may be overly simplistic to claim that an author's origins, culture or gender will always be evident in his or her writing, it would also be naïve to assert that the background of the writer does not influence the writing to some extent. A. L. Kennedy addressed this issue directly in her 1995 essay 'Not Changing the World'; stating 'I am a woman, I am heterosexual, I am more Scottish than anything else and I write. But I don't know how these things interrelate' (Kennedy in Bell 1995:100). The essay reads as a plea from Kennedy not to be defined simply by gender or nationality, but rather viewed as 'a full human being with a dignity and identity drawn from many sources, both empirical and theoretical' (1995:102).

In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson perceives nationalism as growing out of the 'dusk of religious modes of thought' in the eighteenth century, where the '[d]isintegration of paradise' required 'a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning' (Anderson 2006:11). From here, the 'idea of nation' becomes embroiled in notions of destiny, catching the individual within the flowing story of the nation; 'an historical tradition of serial continuity' (2006:195). Kennedy is clear in her refusal to adhere to this model of nationalism as somehow predestined, providing crucial meaning in an otherwise empty existence. Rather, she is at pains to point out that the place of one's birth is purely circumstantial, and should neither define individuals nor fill them with a weighty sense of historical expectation. Accepting that Scottishness forms only a part of the background to Kennedy's work, it nonetheless remains interesting to examine the notion of a Scottish identity, specifically a Scottish identity within fiction, and the ways in which this may impact upon one's interpretation of the writing. An examination of gender may similarly add greater depth to the explorations, as gender and nationality together, whilst not forming an identity in and of themselves, do play a role in shaping our sense of who we are. A sense of *place*, of *belonging*, can be crucial in developing a sense of self and affecting how one relates to both one's location (in space/time) and the others one encounters within it. Many of Kennedy's characters appear to be questing, rootless and lost;

and thus the need for belonging becomes intertwined with the need for love, where both are necessary in developing a clearer sense of self. And this ideal self appears to be modelled on that which John Macmurray describes as an 'Agent'; existing 'only in dynamic relation with the Other', rather than the isolated Subject Self 'conceived as 'spectator of all time and all existence'' (Macmurray 1961:17). The Self-as-Agent model not only allows for more meaningful interactions with others, in which love may become a powerful and dynamic force of connection between two active Agents, but also allows for the formation of a clearer personal identity, through asserting one's connection with the community and environment in which one lives – viewing oneself as always 'in relation' ensures that one is always *connected*, however tenuously.

In Search of a Scottish Identity

Both within literature and out of it, attempting to define what it means to be Scottish is problematic. Cairns Craig highlights the paradox central to any quest for national identity; that 'the desire to maintain simultaneous narratives and therefore the value of differences' clashes with 'the desire to abolish difference by linking everyone within a particular space into a single trajectory of narrative and a single totality' (Craig 1996:223). Disputing Anderson's view of nationalism as both homogenous and genealogical in its quest for continuity, Craig argues that nationality is best perceived as a 'cultural space' wherein an 'acceptance of simultaneity' permits 'the intersection of many narratives'. In so doing he appears to define Nation in terms of a pluralistic and dynamic present rather than as the continuation of a singular, weighty past. If one chose to apply to Kennedy's fiction a definition of nation as cultural space, then Craig's argument can certainly be more readily applied to her writing; the short stories in particular present 'the value of differences' through 'simultaneous narratives' and a plurality of voices, but it must be remembered that this is in the very nature of the short story as a genre, and the mere presence of diverse narratives running alongside each other is not sufficient to proclaim Kennedy a nationalist by Craig's model. It is notable, too, that Kennedy does not write solely about Scottish characters, or invariably Scottish locations. The broad reach of Craig's definition permits the labelling of almost any writer as nationalist, but this does not seem entirely fair with a writer such as Kennedy, whose nationalist feeling is notable mainly by its absence. However, the idea that Nation may yet operate as a space which shapes identity and individual narrative – not deliberately perhaps but through accident of birth and personal familiarity – seems more valid, and is worth considering. As an intrinsic part of the author, it seems reasonable to claim that nationality could function in the same way as gender or social background in subtly colouring the texts produced, regardless of whether

the author chooses to acknowledge it or not. Thus a writer who identifies as Scottish will find their personal experience of Scottishness affecting their writing, though quite possibly in a slight or unobtrusive way.

Having said that, Scotland does appear to be a country where the weight of history and genealogical nationhood may be difficult to shake off. As one of the smaller countries forming the United Kingdom, Scotland is frequently portrayed negatively. Caught in the shadow of a more domineering, more densely-populated England, Scotland may seem inferior and parochial in comparison, and the history of the two countries does little to shake this view. The narrative of their relationship is, predominantly, a tale of oppression. Tom Nairn describes Scotland as being part of 'backward, would-be nationalist Europe' (Nairn 1981:106); an 'unclassifiable marginal aberration' struggling to create its own sense of nationhood. For Nairn, Scotland falls back on negative preconceptions because these do at least provide *an* identity, albeit a broken one:

Cramped, stagnant, backward-looking, parochial – all these and others are the epithets traditionally and rightly ascribed to modern Scottishness. But deformed as they are, these constitute none the less a strong, institutionally guaranteed identity.
(1981:103-131)

In Craig's analysis, the result of Scots accepting themselves as parochial has been a double-edged sword of self-hatred and sentimentality which can only be broken by reshaping the national narrative in ways that 'do not make of it simply a botched version of English culture' (Craig 1996:30). The problem with Nairn's interpretation, according to Craig, is that slaughtering 'the great tartan monster' (Nairn 1981:116), representative of all the myths and mock-culture acquired by Scotland over generations, leaves only 'the Nothing which had supposedly produced the myths in the first place'; an 'emptiness, a void, a vacuum' (Craig 1996:107). This in turn permits the rather extreme conclusion that Scottish identity *does not exist* except in relation to a more dominant (oppressive) English one. Scottishness would therefore become centred on lack; defined by what it does not have in the manner of all oppressed minorities – races, faiths, genders – throughout history. Whilst claiming the total non-existence of Scottish identity would be a rather extreme final analysis, it is not unreasonable to suggest that this uncertainty surrounding Scottish identity might impact upon Scottish writers. Other contemporary writers like Iain Banks and Alan Warner stand alongside A. L. Kennedy as creators of narratives that frequently centre on characters who are questing, restless; searching simultaneously for freedom and a sense of belonging, acceptance.

Often physical geography comes into play too, as writers utilise the dramatic contrasts of the Scottish landscape as a backdrop for the journeys of their characters. However, for Kennedy in particular, nation and nationality form a backdrop, not a centrepiece. Eleanor Bell notes a 'shift' from the Scottish literature of the 1980s, which often appeared to be 'concerned *with* Scotland', to the writing from the 1990s and beyond, which 'seems to be more interested in writing *from* it' (Bell 2004:41). She argues that 'parochial visions of nationhood are no longer believable', and in fact only become 'increasingly ironic' in the 'age of globalisation'. For Bell, the postmodern, contemporary Scottish writer has the potential to 'look beyond the often overly fixed boundaries of 'home'', to attempt to 'escape or simply avoid this apparent 'need' for obsessive depictions of Scotland and Scottishness:

From a post-modern position it is no longer easy to place trust in stereotypes when concepts of the nation and Scotland itself have changed so much. Where in the past some critics have claimed, for example, that Calvinism is a dominant trait of the Scottish 'psyche', these notions of a collective 'psyche' are themselves archaic... (2004:43)

If one accepts this view of Scotland as a place of positive progression, it is easy to perceive Nairn's views as 'backward' in themselves; compounding notions of Scotland's 'introversion' with 'static metaphors' of illness and castration (Bell 2004:61), whilst at the same time treating Scotland as a kind of singular, 'primordial given' (Anderson 2006:89). Craig's argument is more progressive, but also more complex and somewhat contradictory, as he appears to argue for the acceptance and preservation of myth, implying acknowledgement of a singular, flowing historical narrative, whilst simultaneously emphasising the heterogeneous, plural nature of nation, and its need for a multiplicity of narratives. In so far as it carries any pretensions of 'Scottish' identity, Kennedy's writing adheres more closely to Craig's model, as she acknowledges certain cultural myths and stereotypes whilst maintaining the individuality of her characters, but it must be emphasised that there appears no deliberate attempt to write Scottishness within Kennedy's fiction. Supposed 'Scottish' elements are presented as secondary, circumstantial. In this regard Kennedy is an excellent example of the contemporary Scottish writer's urge, in Eleanor Bell's words, to 'get *beyond* the reductive' (Bell 2004:122).

Similarly, it is important to note that, while certain narrative tropes may recur in much contemporary Scottish fiction, they should not therefore be seized upon as being *uniquely* Scottish, but rather as a Scottish interpretation of a broader state of being. As mentioned above, uncertain identities and the quest for belonging are themes which run throughout

Kennedy's work, and that of some of her contemporaries, but while they may be enhanced by various, supposed aspects of Scottishness, they are by no means exclusive to it. The sense of being adrift or disconnected may be found in any culture and much more powerfully in some. For example, in her exploration of black identity in the United States, bell hooks observes:

Again and again as I travel around I am stunned by how many citizens in our nation feel lost, feel bereft of a sense of direction, feel as though they cannot see where our journeys lead, that they cannot know where they are going. Many folks feel no sense of place. What they know, what they have is a sense of crisis, of impending doom. (hooks 2009:1)

Some tentative similarities may be drawn between the Black American experience and the Scottish experience in terms of the oppression of one people by another; a history of violence; and the difficulty of establishing a separate identity which is not defined in the terms of the oppressor. In reference to this Cairns Craig argues that the Scottish problem is not one of race so much as language; noting that '[i]t is not by our colour, of course, that we have stood to be recognised as incomplete within the British context, it is by the colour of our vowels' (Craig 1996:12). Nevertheless, the cultural difference thus highlighted could also, arguably, serve to add to a sense of lack or non-being; in turn feeding a sense of rootlessness and loss akin to that which hooks describes. And if, as Benedict Anderson states, the concept of strong national identity was forged out of the ashes of religion, to render life and death more meaningful in an increasingly secular world, then this lack, this rootlessness would certainly carry within it a despairing meaninglessness – the sense of 'impending doom' would become less surprising. In this situation, the desire to either take from or cling to the dominant culture may seem appealing, even as it further erodes any individuality. Craig notes that those who 'live within the vowel system of the oppressed' may 'borrow the eyes of the dominant culture', through which they 'are allowed to see 'the world"; while hooks observes that 'speaking to those who dominate' may change 'the nature and direction' of words, ensuring that '[l]anguage is also a place of struggle' (hooks 1990:146). Despite their considerable differences, both analyses speak of the need to find an independent voice, to create a separate identity with which to fill the emptiness; 'that space where our words would be if we were speaking, if there were silence, if we were there' (hooks 1990:151).

The extent to which this struggle for a voice is evident within contemporary Scottish writing may be debatable, but it does suggest that authors who identify as Scottish are working against a background of uncertain identity which is simply not present within the

dominant (English) culture. Then again, there is a difference here between *identifying* as Scottish and simply *being* Scottish, since *identifying* signifies a conscious, personal choice while *being* is, essentially, a pure accident of birth. To consciously identify as Scottish involves taking on preconceptions of nationality, even if it is only to refute or challenge them, whereas if one just 'happens to be' Scottish, and chooses to attach no importance to it, engaging with such preconceptions is rendered inessential. This is the stance Kennedy takes in her later fictions, although there is evidence of greater engagement with questions of nationality in her early work, as Stirling notes:

She is aware of the problematic and politicised status of the Scottish writer, and this may account for the marked difference between her earlier work, which is at times overtly concerned with Scottish identity, and her later work, which appears to separate politics and place and elides any overt discussion of the subject of Scottish national identity. (Stirling 2008:117)

The Question of Gender

Alongside nationality gender is, of course, another battlefield on which the language of domination may be played out. In his introduction to *Gendering the Nation*, Christopher Whyte notes that 'national identity can never be taken as given' in 'small, minority, emergent cultures' such as Scotland, and that it is precisely because of this that 'these are privileged sites for the study of gender and its interaction with other factors in the formation of identity' (Whyte 1995:xvi). If England, as the dominating culture, assumes an active, conquering role which can too readily be labelled as masculine, then that would make Scotland passive, conquered, feminine, assuming one adheres to negative feminine gender associations. These may carry connotations of weakness, of inferiority; but the feminine label brings with it also nostalgia, comfort, and reassurance. In the gendering of geography, the feminine is associated with the site of the mother, the domestic, the first place we recognise as *home*:

The construction of 'home' as a woman's place has, moreover, carried through into those views of place itself as a source of stability, reliability and authenticity. Such views of place, which reverberate with nostalgia for something lost, are coded female. (Massey 1994:180)

The notion of the feminised place as being filled with nostalgia speaks to the idea of a nationhood tied up in its own myths. This in itself may be viewed negatively, as in Tom Nairn's assertion that 'mythical resuscitation of the past' is only a tool 'to serve present and future ends' (Nairn 1981:115); or, as Tamar Mayer would have it, positively 'essential to the

life of the nation' - the embracing of myths serving to 'perpetuate not only national myths but also the nation itself' (Mayer 2000:3). Nairn's view of a Scottish identity centred upon a craving for some romanticised past focuses this craving upon a falsehood, as the lost past so desperately yearned for does not actually exist. One cannot go back, and to stay in one place – the feminised home, the site of yearning – ensures that identity cannot be fully developed. This would indicate the more negative associations of a feminised nation; one that is not only inferior but non-progressive, static. Pamela Shurmer-Smith and Kevin Hannam note 'an identification in feminist geography between women and place [...], an assumption that women operate in the realm of the particular and the local and have difficulty extending their view of the world' (Shurmer-Smith & Hannam 1994:108). This is echoed in Cairns Craig's statement that Scottish culture 'has cowered in the consciousness of its own inadequacy' such that, should you succeed, you 'are no longer Scottish...be Scottish and your achievement is necessarily local' (Craig 1996:11). To move forward in a feminised culture becomes more difficult as it is centred upon a localised, stationary location. And yet it is arguably only by and through movement that a full and whole identity can be created; defining the self not just through connection to place and culture, but also connection with others. Identity is not formed by anchoring the self in one specific place, but by forming relationships within a culture; and the culture in which one finds oneself must be 'a place of dialogue, between self and other, between inner and outer, between pasts and present, between invented pasts and discovered pasts' (Craig 1996:117). This echoes Mayer's more positive claims about the value of myth and memory; that the past can be used to shape and drive the present, which in turn connects to more dynamic feminist perceptions of nation as a place of both resistance and growth; where the past 'can serve as a foundation for us to revision and renew our commitment to the present, to making a world where all people can live fully and well, where everyone can belong' (hooks 2009:5). This drive towards equality of belonging is evident in Kennedy's work, and while she may never use 'nationality and gender as metaphors for each other', or express overtly feminist sentiment, she is nonetheless 'concerned with the role of women in society' (Stirling 2008:117); shying away from the 'traditional representation of the nation in female form' to 'put Scottish women at the centre of their own narratives' (2008:14).

Bodies in Space

The physical body is arguably where both gendering and personal identity start, being the first 'place' which we recognise as our own, and yet from the beginning it occupies 'an ambiguous position', as Macmurray describes; a thing which 'is me or part of me' whilst simultaneously

being 'an object which I 'have' or 'own' or 'possess' (Macmurray 1961:81). Macmurray argues against the dualism of viewing the Self as 'an immortal soul in a mortal body'; stating instead that '[a]ction is the integration of knowledge and movement' (1961:213) – action renders the Self embodied, and identity can only be fully realised through this active connection of mind and body, and of body with the world beyond. However, the body is also the site of the closest, most intimate experiences; where sight is displaced by touch:

Seeing has the effect of putting a distance between self and object. What we see is always “out there”. Things too close to us can be handled, smelled, and tasted, but they cannot be seen – at least not clearly. In intimate moments people shade their eyes. Thinking creates distance. (Tuan 1977:146)

There is no clear reason why other bodily senses besides sight should not *also* be associated with the mind, unless one accepts the dualism of mind and body as separate, with the mind inexplicably located at a distance from the immediate and bodily. Tuan seems to lean towards this dualistic view, and this connection of the *bodily only* with the intimate, with an experience somehow too close for thinking or reason, is one of the ways in which feminist geographers argue that the body is gendered female. Gillian Rose points out that, traditionally, the knowledge of men 'depended only on the abstract thought of the mind', whilst women were perceived as being 'ruled by the passions of their bodies' (Rose 1993:9). Thus '[k]nowledge, the social, the theoretical' are associated with the masculine, along with 'the cultural and the scientific, the work of Man'; meaning the feminine is left with '[t]he bodily, the specific, the private, the relational'; more 'natural' traits where to be 'natural' is to be non-progressive, separate from productive, masculine development (Rose 1993:74). Writing in 1977, Yi-Fu Tuan may praise intimate experience but he also seems to clearly place the intimate within the realm of the static feminine; describing intimate occasions as those 'on which we become passive', whilst intimate places are 'places of nurture where our fundamental needs are heeded and cared for without fuss' (Tuan 1977:137). Place itself is defined as 'a pause in movement' (1977:138). Tuan does argue for acknowledgement of the 'fleeting intimacies of direct experience' (1977:146), but he also appears to view place as not only stationary but also limiting. Intimate places create contentment, he points out, which may be 'a warm positive feeling' but is also 'most easily described as incuriosity toward the outside world and as absence of desire for a change of scene' (1977:159). Intimacy is ultimately incuriosity, comforting but marked by the absence of the mind, or desire for development and progression. Thus *place* appears in direct opposition to *time*, or movement.

This is the kind of argument Doreen Massey is writing against when she claims that both *space* and *place* are traditionally gendered feminine, while *time* is masculine. Referencing Laclau's notion of a space-time dichotomy, to which writers such as Tuan seemingly adhere, Massey notes that such perceptions ensure that 'time is defined by such things as change, movement, history, dynamism; while space, rather lamely by comparison, is simply the absence of these things' (Massey 1994:256-7). In such a dichotomy, space becomes 'defined by absence, by lack', just as 'woman too is defined in terms of lack':

With time are aligned History, Progress, Civilization, Science, Politics and Reason, portentous things with gravitas and capital letters. With space on the other hand are aligned the other poles of these concepts: stasis, ('simple') reproduction, nostalgia, emotion, aesthetics, the body. (Massey 1994:257)

Genevieve Lloyd views this dichotomy as a battle between immanence and transcendence, where transcendence is a shifting away from the bodily to the realm of pure reason, a 'transcendence of the feminine' (Lloyd 1984:101). By this analysis, bodies are feminine regardless of personal gender, and the immediate and intimate experiences of the (feminine) body in (feminine) space are somehow deficient unless they can acquire some (masculine) reason, or show evidence of progressing through (masculine) time – only this will lend value to such experiences. However, if one refutes this dualism and chooses to acknowledge that 'space and time are inextricably interwoven' (Massey 1994:261), it is also possible to view the body as a site not determinedly feminine but rather consisting of intermingling, inseparable feminine and masculine elements, where neither is assigned specific positive or negative associations. Lloyd points out that 'human bodies are lived as male or female in different ways under different historical conditions', and that if one is to view the mind as connected, not something separate and sexless, its affiliation to the sex of the body it inhabits must be acknowledged (Lloyd 1984:xii). However, whilst one's actual, physical gender has a part to play in the construction of personal identity, to perceive the relationship to one's body as a jumble of negative (coded feminine) and positive (coded masculine) gendered elements is to foster conflict within the very place where our identity is first created. Such confusion may further heighten a sense of lack or loss but also isolation; denying us the most basic and yet powerful tools with which to reach out and form relationships with others – our bodies and how we use them.

'Buffeting and Bruising': bodies in Kennedy

Gillian Rose refers to women's experience as being full of 'buffeting and bruising', of 'confinement and stumbling' triggered by self-consciousness in being 'watched and judged' (Rose 1993:145). This suggests that the outside gaze is not only masculine and judgemental but somehow dominating; rendering the physicality of the feminine clumsy, even shambolic, when placed in the spotlight of its superior presence. Distance brings perspective and therefore reason and the formulation of thought, and so sight is designated masculine. Should one accept this division of the senses, viewing sight, thought and reason as masculine traits, whilst more intimate bodily experience, sensation and touch is feminine, and should one then view masculine and feminine as being in conflict with each other, this creates the distinct danger of viewing oneself as a masculine mind trapped within a feminine body; dissociating one's identity from the body in which it resides. If our bodies are simply 'an object to us', we run the risk of seeing ourselves as 'positioned in a space not our own', which can then 'feel like an alien territory' (Rose 1993:146). And yet it is only through the reconciliation of mind to body, and the assimilation of the two, that a *whole* personal identity can be created. Within A. L. Kennedy's fiction there are many examples of characters who embrace the 'buffeting and bruising' of physical experience. Some use pain as a way of reconnecting the mind to the body: Nathan in *Everything You Need* uses his violent, self-inflicted near-death experiences as a 'physical exaltation' (Kennedy 1999:26), while Helen in 'Original Bliss' regains a sense of self and personal worth only after the brutal assault by her husband. In spite of the damage it causes her body, Hannah in *Paradise* uses her drinking as a way of maintaining her identity, and revels in the 'mellow and buzz' of it, making her 'fixed and certain'; 'balanced in [her] skin' (Kennedy 2004:18). Other characters use sex in a similar manner, to break down the boundaries not just between the mind and body but between the self and the other, the lover and the beloved; 'healed together, flesh to flesh, in one hot graft from their ankles to their scalps' (Kennedy 1999:54). There is a sense here of pushing the self to extremes, be they emotional or physical, in an effort to shake dualisms, blur boundaries and to further understanding of both personal identity and relationships. While many of Kennedy's characters may not resort to such measures, almost all of her protagonists crave *touch*, physical sensation which often replaces speech, creating a space which is not passive but dynamic, allowing a flow of connections which bring healing and love but also, through them, development and progression. In the story 'Touch Positive' in *Indelible Acts*, feeling lost after being thrown out by his girlfriend, Tom also uses alcohol to reconnect to his body, making him feel 'softly calmer', allowing him to 'inhale and exhale like a human being' (Kennedy

2002:105). He recalls working in a stables as a teenager and the owner drunkenly telling him;

'You know us? People like us? We're like the horses. Yes, we are. We're touch positive. You press against us, even hit us, and we lean in to feel more. We like touching. We're not ourselves without it.' (2002:104)

If touch cannot be obtained in the ideal manner, through the loving contact of another person, an alternative must be found in order to function, to be 'ourselves'. For Tom, the alternative may be gin or whisky, a 'lovable, gentle thing' (2002:101), but this still remains only a temporary solution, paving the way for a fantasy reconciliation where 'he'd tell her that he was sorry and that they would be OK and she would believe him' (2002:106). This craving for touch, for love, is echoed by the protagonist of 'The Cupid Stunt' in *Original Bliss*, who uses the term 'hi-hat' to describe the experience of sharing a connection with another person:

When the comic hits the punch line, when the tune beats to a stop, when you touch the touch that's a good touch, the one that licks the brink – that's all the same thing, that's the hi-hat. *Pt-tssch*. [...] The hi-hat makes you want to reach for something, for someone, and then hold on. Because of it, your skin develops a hard, instinctive thirst. (1997:144)

This character even goes so far as to use her collection of X-rays as a seduction technique, utilising the way such images bring bodies into focus, because no one can 'imagine physicality for long without a hint of sex'. If the signs are 'favourable', she makes sure to finish with 'her favourite, the pelvic plate; its sacrum and lower vertebrae afloat with teasing curves' (1997:145). For this woman all aspects of physicality are linked to the sensual, even bones, as 'an interior skeleton' is after all something two people will always have in common (ibid). Left without a relationship, craving 'to touch and to be a touch' (1997:147), the physical longing becomes so intense that she wishes to somehow separate from her 'too demanding' body, to 'walk out' and 'leave it staring from a jammed revolving door' while she slips away (1997:148). Faced with this impossibility of this, she finds a temporary solution in visiting a masseur, whose regular, constant contact with her body serves as her 'rehearsal' (1997:150). Massage becomes a way of keeping 'in touch'.

In both stories the implication is not only that touch is vital in connecting with others, and forming relationships, but also that it is a crucial part of the formulation of one's own identity – physical sensation reinforces the connection to one's own body, without which one cannot be truly whole. In *Looking for the Possible Dance*, Margaret recalls a clear moment of

connection between soul and body when she was taught how to breathe fire:

It was good. At first she closed her eyes, but the fourth time, she just watched what her breath could produce. It was like her soul coming out. She'd always known her soul would be that colour. (1993:95)

On another occasion, cut off from Colin, Margaret uses smoking as a way of connecting, once again watching what her breath produces, letting 'the smoke rise, herself sink' (1993:99). She is also craving touch and attempting to find a substitute, and the drug provides her with 'the echo of power'; a sense that 'if she touched herself now, Colin would feel it', that if she 'let her wanting become a sweat, a movement, he would know' (1993:99-100). Through touching herself, connecting with her body, Margaret feels she may also be able to reach out and touch Colin, again emphasising how touch forms an integral part of love in Kennedy's work. When a character is pleading for the love and acceptance of another, it is frequently described in sensual, physical terms, for example when Nathan tells Mary 'I'm in your hands completely' (Kennedy 1999:567); or Beth repeatedly tells Arthur 'I would touch you' (Kennedy 2011:373). It is worth noting that in both these novels, *Everything You Need* and *The Blue Book*, it is also *writing* that is used as the principal form of communication, echoing Kennedy's own assertion that writing is 'a complex sensual and spiritual experience of enormous power' (Kennedy in Bell 1995:102). The physical act of writing becomes the first step towards a more complete physical connection, and when that connection is achieved, it is often described in terms of perfection and completeness – when Alfred sleeps with Joyce in *Day* it makes him '[m]y best me' (Kennedy 2007:213); while Jennifer and Savinien together become 'altogether enough' in *So I am Glad* (1995:250); and Edward and Helen in 'Original Bliss' finally 'have exactly what they want' (1997:308) and become 'one completed motion' (1997:311). All of these relationships are developed with some written communication, letters, postcards, a book, and culminate in physical contact. Intimacy is not just a way for characters to demonstrate their love for each other, it can symbolise the highest achievement of human relationships, the connection of individual mind and body simultaneously connecting with the mind and body of another. The sense of the self being *in place* in one's own body may be heightened if one feels an equal sense of belonging to the other at the same time. While he may not view the idea of a human person being a 'place' or 'home' as 'immediately acceptable', Yi-Fu Tuan observes that we nonetheless 'speak of *resting* in another's strength and *dwelling* in another's love' (Tuan 1977:139). Kennedy's fiction may be viewed, in part, as an argument for the power of touch and physical connection in providing this place of belonging, the primary and

most intimate home for those who feel isolated or lost.

The Meaning of Home

Beyond the bounds of the body, the location and definition of 'home' is quite complex. Initially, one may think of the family home, the actual physical location in which one grew up, but for such a place to be labelled 'home' it must be more than a simple geographical locus; it must carry emotional associations and connections to other people. The very word 'home' has connotations of comfort, reassurance, and quite possibly nostalgia. For feminist geographers home, like the body, will always be gendered female whilst it carries these associations. Gillian Rose notes how, in the nineteenth century, women were believed to be 'dominated by their reproductive system' and thus 'compelled to remain in the private domestic sphere by their natural maternal instinct' (Rose 1993:32). Nominally, the home was woman's proper place, and she had no place in the world outside of it. Seen from the dominant male perspective, the male able to move freely and dynamically beyond the home, the female domestic sphere could acquire the status of a natural idyll, isolated from the ruthless progress of the world, a still centre from which the intrepid male could venture forth and to which he could then return to be refreshed, nurtured, cared for. Evidence of this can be observed even in twentieth century writers such as Yi-Fu Tuan who, whilst not directly disparaging the home-place, does refer to the 'vigorous adult' experiencing 'fleeting moments of longing for the kind of coziness he knew in childhood'; and to the home being perceived as a place 'where the sick and injured can recover under solicitous care' (Tuan 1977:137). This is home observed by said 'vigorous' male, outside looking in; who 'can find security and nourishment in objects, localities, and even in the pursuit of ideas' but for whom home will always be there as 'a pause in movement' (1977:138). Such an insidiously patronising perspective, ingrained in our society even now, is the kind that Doreen Massey speaks out against, insisting that we question 'whose identity we are referring to when we talk of a place called home and of the supports it may provide of stability, oneness and security' (Massey 1994:167). Through the eyes of masculinist geographers, she argues, *home* becomes the epitome of *place*, where place is associated with 'stasis and nostalgia, and with an enclosed security' (1994:167). Such readings require places 'to be enclosures, to have boundaries', and to establish their identity only 'through negative counterposition with the Other beyond the boundaries'. For Massey, this view is untenable – home should instead be regarded as more fluid; an open space 'constructed out of movement, communication, social relations which always stretched beyond it' (1994:171). Gillian Rose agrees that geographers have tended 'not to see the home

as a social location' (Rose 1993:121), and adds that it is the role of feminist geographers to challenge this view and 'reveal the connections between the supposedly 'separate' spheres of private domesticity and public labour' (1993:120). Thus, the home may continue to be gendered female, but not as an isolated and isolating place. Instead, it becomes a social space, flowing with interaction and, importantly, giving us our first childhood experiences of love and relationships, influencing the shaping of our own identities. bell hooks notes the emotional power of the home-place for children, as a feminised but vitally important space:

In our young minds houses belonged to women, were their special domain, not as property, but as places where all that truly mattered in life took place – the warmth and comfort of shelter, the feeding of our bodies, the nurturing of our souls.
(hooks 1990:41)

The difference between this and Yi-Fu Tuan's analysis is that hooks perceives home as a site not just of power but also of resistance. The childhood image of a specific home-place, safe and nurturing, shifts when confronted with the realities and challenges of adulthood, at which point we may have to dynamically shape a new home for ourselves, creating that space 'where we return for renewal and self-recovery, where we can heal our wounds and become whole' (1990:49).

Home, then, may be both the place which helps form our young identity and also the place we create as adults as a space of safety – arguably the term may be applied to any location where we feel a sense of belonging, of being nurtured, and of being truly and wholly ourselves. This definition also indicates the manner in which home may be perceived as being another person, or indeed any thing to which we return when we need to feel comfort. Within Kennedy's writing, both Tom in 'Touch Positive' and Hannah in *Paradise* view alcohol as a kind of home. Sitting in his car drinking gin, Tom feels 'at home – his genuine home, if not fully arrived, then on the way' (Kennedy 2002:105). Hannah describes a dream sequence wherein a mouthful of 'perfect alcohol' provides 'the warmth of my own true home and a welcome indoors' (2004:187). But for most of Kennedy's characters home is more specifically, and traditionally, a place – both a childhood location to be looked back on, and an adult ideal to be pursued.

Safe or Stifling: the childhood home

The childhood home is presented in Kennedy's fiction in a number of different ways. For some characters, the place of their upbringing appears hugely influential as the first place they

felt safe, knew love, and started to develop as individuals. In *Everything You Need* Mary believes she has experienced 'the best sort of family' (Kennedy 1999:207) with Bryn and Morgan which makes leaving painfully difficult; 'I do want to come down by here every morning and eat breakfast the way you cook it and be with my Uncles, all comfortable' (1999:37). Margaret in *Looking for the Possible Dance* remembers her father's heartbeat; his 'atmosphere of Lifebuoy soap, of pruned leaves and of varnish' (Kennedy 1993:5) and his night-time pacing which she carries with her, 'the hush of slipper footsteps, still walking through her mind' (1993:20). In *Paradise*, Hannah recalls a loving upbringing, perhaps the most traditional of the three, centring on a mother, father and brother, though she does observe that 'I was brought up well, but the details of that don't always show' (2004:29). This 'bringing up well' is representative of home in its most traditional sense – a specific building containing nurturing family members, which does appear to conform to the notion of home as a pause in movement, rather than a dynamic space. These homes exude a calm, comfortable and peaceful familiarity, defined by the people within them, their daily routines, their appearance, their scent. But it is worth noting that of these three examples only Hannah's childhood home has an actual, female mother figure at the centre of it. Margaret's home is focused entirely on her father, while Mary is cared for and loved by her two Uncles, who arguably present the most tender and near-perfect domestic arrangement in the whole of Kennedy's work. The idyllic home one can imagine to be necessary to being 'brought up well' must have love at its centre, but that love does not require a female figurehead. bell hooks describes a 'true home' as a place 'where there is constancy', but also 'where growth is nurtured' (hooks 2009:203). The love a true home can offer should provide stability alongside the possibility of freedom; supporting the individual identity while allowing it to develop, as Bryn tells Mary '[y]ou can do anything you want to. You're our Mary and we brought you up to be that way' (Kennedy 1999:310). These two aspects must work in harmony, and the Uncles in *Everything You Need* succeed in comforting Mary with their care and routines but also giving her space to mature. When they bring tea and cake into the bedroom after Mary's first sexual encounter, Mary finds herself "more comforted than irate" (1999:34). And yet this idyllic home still remains a place from which to move away, as if growth can only be fully achieved by leaving, even temporarily. The Uncles accept Mary's assertion that 'if I could learn what they're going to teach me and stay here, I wouldn't ever go away', but also acknowledge the necessity of her leaving with a gentle 'we're sure you have to go' (1999:37-38).

In contrast, Margaret's daddy in *Looking for the Possible Dance* provides considerable

constancy but struggles more with nurturing growth, not wanting his little girl to grow up and move away, pleading with her 'don't go. Just don't leave me. Please. Please. Margaret, please' (Kennedy 1993:66). The intensity of their relationship, with just the two of them living together, appears to leave Margaret feeling stifled, limited, under-developed in her personal identity, her character seeming to 'shrink' until she has 'almost forgotten what she was like' (1993:85). Despite a larger family group, Hannah in *Paradise* also finds elements of home life stifling, though this is not immediately apparent. She views her childhood home as a place of loving constancy, creating her initial sense of self, observing that living in the same house up to the age of seventeen provided 'the sort of stability you can't buy', building 'reinforcement into your whole identity' (2004:19). She recalls family outings, picnics; 'the signs of parental care' (2004:270); and when she imagines her parents she sees them engaged in gentle, quiet pursuits like gardening:

She has her perennials, her bedding plants and shrubs and he breeds up his succulents, cacti, bromeliads, listens to Radio Four and sits inside his little glass walls, smoking at his house leeks and staring. (2004:21)

Like Mary with her Uncles, though, Hannah is also very aware of the love between her parents, a 'tenderness' and the suggestion that they 'have been together for so long they have run out of words for each other, or have found something else they can use between themselves that I can't hear' (2004:22). However, unlike Mary, Hannah does not find this evident tenderness comforting but rather intimidating, further evidence of an ideal she herself can never achieve, like her mother's 'grace', an attribute she can never obtain – 'I won't be a woman the way that my mother is, I'll never do it right' (2004:21). The stifling, here, comes from Hannah's belief that her own identity and being is somehow crushed, rendered meaningless when set against the supposed perfection of her parents. Hannah is perhaps the one Kennedy character who most acutely sees herself as a 'bad' child, deficient, hurting her parents through her continued existence as a broken, damaged human being:

...it took many more years before I could abandon my domestic family and start looking for the freak show where I'd be a better fit. It was a gradual process. For instance, I don't know when I stopped wanting to think of my parents – that is, when they became too much to bear. By the time I was nineteen or twenty, they were already difficult – changed from the human beings I've known longest to proofs of discomforts and injuries I've inflicted and the predictable lack of mercy I have taught. (2004:216)

For Hannah, her parents and childhood home symbolise everything she is not and cannot be, a brutal reminder of her own failure and her power to cause pain. Her brother's house has a similar effect; demonstrating '[p]reparation and attention to detail [...] what you need to break a house into a home', another example of what Hannah feels herself to be incapable of achieving (2004:146). Thus she creates a new, different kind of home for herself through drinking, which provides comfort but also an escape. That domestic idyll represented by her parents is something which she can neither reclaim nor create anew in the manner of her brother, and so when she is finally forced to return temporarily to the family home through illness and hospitalisation she can only see herself as separate from her parents, an outsider, there only to 'do them harm' (2004:271).

Both Alfred in *Day* and the child in 'A Bad Son' (*Indelible Acts*, 2002) are also in the position of feeling they have somehow failed to live up to the domestic idyll of home, but the difference here is that the idyll is already a fantasy that has been shattered by violence. In these cases Kennedy often portrays characters as yearning for a serene and safe home environment whilst simultaneously feeling guilty and somehow responsible for the violence which disrupts it. Alfred in particular does seem to apply a gendered nostalgia to the home-place as explained by Massey; being not only 'where the heart is' but 'where the woman (mother, lover-to-whom-you-will-one-day-return) is also' (Massey 1994:180). Massey describes a particularly male characterisation of 'Mum', 'not as herself a living person engaged in the toils and troubles and pleasures of life, not actively engaged in her own and other's history, but a stable symbolic centre – functioning as an anchor for others' (ibid). Alfred's perception of his mother involves viewing himself as protector of her quiet domestic world against the violent encroachment of a brash, drunken father; he holds her and rocks her 'to make her safe, to be her safety' whilst praying 'to be a strong, strong man' (2007:47). Similarly, the boy in 'A Bad Son' yearns for the day when he will be 'older and stronger'; able to 'turn into somebody new, somebody [his] father won't expect' (2002:87), to fight and rescue his mother. In both instances the idyllic aspect of the home is seen as being the realm of the mother, with the father rendered a monstrous invader, violently destroying the peaceful, nurturing female space. And yet there is a simultaneous assumption that to take on the protective role by turning *against* the father is not 'right', either – one becomes the 'bad son'; 'made inside [...] to be wrong' (2007:254). The implication is that the violent actions of the father may oppose the domestic passivity of the mother, but the repression of them remains an inescapable part of what is defined as home. This is the way it has always been, and to wish to change that is to somehow deny the validity of one's upbringing. Home should be

somewhere calm and safe, not necessarily insular but enclosing, protective. When that safety is shattered by violence or abuse, the often secretive nature of that violence ensures its location remains a private space, but a space that has ceased to be home, and may only continue to be viewed as such if the violence within it is repressed. Rather than being a place of comfort, this home becomes a place of fear – *unheimlich*, in the language of Freud; 'that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar' (Freud 1955:220). Freud himself notes that *heimlich* is itself somewhat ambiguous, on the one hand meaning 'what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight' (1955:224-5). By this analysis, the home is not only a place of comfort but also a place of secrets; of the familiar which has become frightening through repression. Shurmer-Smith and Hannam observe that while it is perfectly acceptable to despair over the 'inadequate nature' of other people's backgrounds, it is seen as 'terrible disloyalty' to complain about one's own - 'home should be sacred, and when it is not, then one should remain silent on the subject' (Shurmer-Smith & Hannam 1994:30). Made to witness her parents' sex acts from an early age, Jennifer in *So I am Glad* finds her home has become a place where 'no one should get in and see us, find us out'; where her parents' 'inquisitive eyes' are 'in ambush', making the house 'unsafe' (Kennedy 1995:70-71). Here almost all comfort has been removed and the home becomes solely a place of secrets, a dark antithesis to the tender and nurturing childhood homes evident in *Paradise* or *Everything You Need*. This is home as site of trauma and repression, a home from which to escape, and yet Jennifer is still careful to dismiss its impact or lasting importance, claiming that it is 'just some of the stuff that families do – certainly not the worst I've heard about' (1995:72).

Other homes, less traumatic but nonetheless unsatisfactory, often appear in Kennedy's writing through the attempted creation of domestic order in the face of emotional chaos, an attempt not solely restricted to female characters. Nathan takes satisfaction in his 'slightly obsessive domestic diligence', laying out blankets and hot tea to soothe him after his not-quite-suicide attempt (Kennedy 1999:26); Helen Brindle seeks refuge from the violence of her husband in domestic tasks, putting effort into cooking and cleaning to encourage 'faultlessly polite and inoffensive' habits in the 'absence of her interest and will' (Kennedy 1997:163). In *The Blue Book*, Arthur painstakingly describes for Beth the remote home he has created for himself, 'a kind place', ordered, calm and beautiful and yet somehow incomplete without Beth's presence, but 'prepared' for her (Kennedy 2011:91). To say that Arthur's home requires a woman's presence to make it whole would be reaching once again for simplistic gender stereotyping; the central need here is, simply, for love, for another person to share the space.

The overriding sense in Kennedy's fiction is that home, a true home, must be created and sustained through love. Gender is of secondary consideration to the importance of having another person within the home-place, if that person is equal, loved, and valued. In the absence of such a person, home may be created alone, but it will always be somewhat inferior, lacking that second presence to make it complete. In their different ways both Nathan and Helen use routines to create a superficial 'home' and combat their isolation, in contrast to which Arthur's retreat is embellished with hope and the possibility of the presence of another. But the homes which are most beautiful in Kennedy's fiction, presented as most desirous and enviable, are those which are shared and shaped with love – the homes of Hannah Luckraft's parents, and Mary Lamb's Uncles; the type of home Jennifer in *So I am Glad* has been denied and finds, instead, in Savinien:

...someone who needs no acceptance, because they are already home. They are not a change, but an expansion, like the flavour of a kiss, where one mouth finds another and presses into somewhere not new but warm and familiar and much more than before. (Kennedy 1995:108-109)

Rural versus Urban

In his 1973 text *The Country and The City*, Raymond Williams provides a clear analysis of the stereotypes attributed to both rural and urban landscapes:

On the country has gathered the idea of a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue. On the city has gathered the idea of an achieved centre: of learning, communication, light. Powerful hostile associations have also developed: on the city as a place of noise, worldliness and ambition; on the country as a place of backwardness, ignorance, limitation. (Williams 1973:1)

To some extent these stereotypes are still in evidence in contemporary writing, to be either sustained or refuted. Within Scottish fiction, many contemporary writers appear to be challenging such preconceptions. Whilst the city may be represented with a dark, industrial, dirty bleakness in Alasdair Gray's *Lanark*, or the writings of Kelman and Welsh, writers such as Banks and Rankin, Galloway, and Kennedy herself, permit the city more complexity, a blending of dark and light. Similarly (in defiance, perhaps, of the Scottish kailyard tradition and the romantic landscapes set in place by Burns and Scott), in books like *Morvern Callar* Alan Warner tears up notions of rural Scotland – beautiful it may be, but the limitations it has are not bound by ignorance, and innocent it most certainly is not. The idea of the country and

the city as representing opposites, though, is more entrenched, and still makes an appearance in these texts. For Kennedy's characters, the belief in this difference is often evidenced through an act of escaping. From a life that is going wrong, from a past in some way abusive or oppressive, from themselves, or a combination of all three. The degree to which they succeed seems marked by how much their attempted escape brings them closer to the discovery of their true selves – running away in order to understand oneself more clearly, like Margaret in *Looking for the Possible Dance* or Mary in *Everything You Need*, is usually blessed with some degree of success. If, rather, it involves hiding or concealment, as it does for Nathan (also *Everything You Need*) or Beth in *The Blue Book*, the outcome is less sure. Characters are encouraged to confront themselves honestly because this, it is implied, is inevitable; those who shy away from that confrontation will only have to deal with it later in any case. The nature of the setting in Kennedy's writing frequently reflects the nature of the story itself, and the struggles each protagonist experiences. Many of Kennedy's characters are urban or city-dwellers, for whom the city is at once impersonal and seething with life, an environment where one may choose not to be seen; to be lost in the crowd, or alternatively where it is all too simple to assume a mask, a different persona, to act a version of oneself to ensure one fits in. In contrast, wilder, more rural or remote landscapes provide fewer ways in which to dissemble; a smaller community may appear more caring but also more interfering, less respectful of one's privacy. A rural landscape devoid of people, in turn, may be liberating, isolating, terrifying or just plain dull, and this very much seems to depend on the nature of the individual who finds him or herself within it. In any case, as one examines Kennedy's fiction it becomes apparent that the rural and the urban landscape may both serve a similar purpose – either one may be used as a supposed escape from the other, but each may also lead one to feel trapped. The relative power of this feeling of imprisonment, and its opposite feeling of liberation, appears to be governed by how much the specific environment reflects the true identity of the character at the centre of it.

Escape to the City

Quite a number of Kennedy's characters begin their stories already centred in the city. For those who run towards the city, however, the attraction seems to be in the city's anonymity. The rural landscape may be viewed as more *natural*, a place where the body (one's primary natural home) may stand in harmony with nature; but it may also be the place where the body stands exposed, vulnerable, and alone. The city, in contrast, allows the body to become part of a greater mechanism; one small cog in a vast machine:

...the city is, of course, also the site for the body's cultural saturation, its takeover and transformation by images, representational systems, the mass media, and the arts – the place where the body is representationally reexplored, transformed, contested, reinscribed. (Grosz 1998:47)

If one follows the traditional methods of gendering spaces (as evidenced in masculinist geography), the dynamic nature of the city renders it masculine, while the countryside is feminine. The city, after all, is the site where the history of progress and civilisation is most in evidence, and Time and History are seen as belonging to the male, as Doreen Massey points out. The city may be seen as 'the most immediately concrete locus for the production and circulation of power' (Grosz 1998:49), and throughout the history of Western civilisation power has been in the hands of the male. Rural spaces, on the other hand, are notable for precisely that expanse of *space*, with much less evidence of human progression, and may all too easily be defined by lack in the same way as the female – the not-city allied with the not-male. Rural spaces may also be viewed as having an unchanging quality; a passivity in contrast to the active bustle of the city, besides being more natural or organic, and all these are attributes which are traditionally assigned to the female.

However, such labels are too simplistic; the city in particular is a complex space and branding it purely as the 'masculine realm' of the male takes away from that complexity. Even if one allies gender stereotypes to the definition the city may be seen to carry the feminine alongside the masculine; it is 'masculine' in its triumphal scale, its towers and vistas and arid industrial regions; it is 'feminine' in its enclosing embrace, in its indeterminacy and labyrinthine uncentredness' (Wilson 1991:7). More than this, Elizabeth Wilson sees the city as being 'disquieting' in its 'continual flux and change'; which renders it 'dreamlike and magical, yet also terrifying in the way a dream can be' (1991:3). Fantastical and dreamlike elements may be considered more 'feminine', and yet it is only through the 'masculine' mechanical aspects of the city, the growth, the building and restructuring, that this dreamlike quality may be achieved. This complex interdependence demonstrates once again that to insist upon gendering a space detracts from the many facets of that space's construction, and its impact on those who dwell within or pass through it. For the woman in the city (and many of Kennedy's women are city-dwellers), the freedom-through-anonymity on offer may in fact make the urban location more desirable; a 'place of liberation' which 'normalises the carnivalesque aspects of life' (1991:7). Within a densely populated urban environment the sheer variety of humanity existing in close proximity, the whirl of social events and chance

encounters juxtaposed with an emphasis on individual living may make it 'more possible for a woman to lead an existence predicated upon her own desires and will than it is elsewhere' (Shurmer-Smith & Hannam 1994:123). And yet with greater freedom comes greater danger. The same critics who speak out for women's freedom in the city will also emphasise the hazards involved, and often note that, in cities as they are now, the 'individual' woman risks being branded a 'public woman' or 'prostitute' (Wilson 1991:8). bell hooks observes that, in order to avoid such categorisation and be safe, women 'cannot loiter or linger' in the city as they have 'no outdoor territory'; they must be 'endlessly moving or enclosed' (hooks 2009:143). However, such a hypothesis implies that the supposed freedom the city can offer to women is in fact an illusion. The urban woman can either stay enclosed at home, as invisible as possible, in the 'private' domestic sphere that is traditionally hers, or she can venture out, become more public and risk being branded a prostitute, 'asking for' any sexual or violent encounters with the men in whose proper territory she is trespassing. Not forgetting, of course, that even if she remains indoors and carves out a private life for herself, a woman living alone may often be 'represented as defective' (Shurmer-Smith & Hannam 1994:112). Ultimately, location barely seems to matter, the overriding implication is that women just cannot win. A woman may be just as trapped in the city as she would be elsewhere – possibly more so, if this bleak analysis of contemporary cities as 'the worst of all worlds' is to be believed; places of 'danger without pleasure, safety without stimulation, consumerism without choice, monumentality without diversity' (Wilson 1991:9).

Within Kennedy's writing, however, the city is not represented so grimly. The women here find positive experiences in the urban environment alongside the negatives; even finding a kind of comfort in it. In *Looking for the Possible Dance* Margaret does appear to feel isolated, alone when she is in the city without Colin, possibly even defective; 'surrounded by a movement she could not take part in' through being single:

She was a single woman when a woman should never be single, but looking for a man, or for the right man, or marrying a man, or living with a man, or thinking about living with or marrying a man, or leading several men a merry dance, or seducing a man, or deserting a man, or trying to understand, reform, divorce, encourage, murder, castrate or like a man. Margaret was single. (Kennedy 1993:53-54)

For Margaret the city landscape, with its enforced physical proximity to others, only serves to heighten the perceived societal expectation that a woman should not be without a man to give her definition and purpose. Her move away from her rural upbringing demonstrates her

desire to move beyond her relationship with her father to find her own individuality, and yet in the city she feels a great pressure to be in a romantic relationship, to once again be defined only through her connection to a male counterpart. The city appears to offer more freedom but in actuality seems to offer only a different kind of expectation. However, the movement and flow Margaret perceives in the city is not wholly associated with being coupled to someone else, arguably it is more a general sense of belonging which Margaret lacks, a sense obtained perhaps only *through* greater understanding of one's individual identity. When she is apart from Colin and feeling lost she is 'slipping through' the general movement (1993:53); when she boards her train at the beginning of the novel she is apart from the crowd which seems 'very much at peace, very focused, just a little unnerving' (1993:10); and yet by the end of the novel her personal movements merge with those around her, 'becoming first a moving shadow, then a curve, a dancing line' (1993:250). The train may be seen to serve as a metaphor for Margaret's developing understanding and acceptance of herself; a journey allowing space for reflection so that, upon arrival at the station, Margaret appears to sense a personal connection simultaneous to the train's termination; her track 'beginning to bind itself under others' as she feels 'things around her mooring, rippling up to the platform's head and then growing still' (1993:249).

There is no single way in which Kennedy's female characters react to and interact with the city; their responses are different just as each character is different, reiterating that there is no straightforward gender stereotyping in Kennedy's work. In contrast to Margaret, the protagonist of the story 'Cap O'Rushes' (*Night Geometry*) appears to find within the city that 'place of liberation' Elizabeth Wilson mentions. Leaving a role as wife and mother, the nameless heroine here does not feel isolated in the same manner as Margaret; she feels 'no need to lean on an absent boyfriend, or a husband', and doesn't care if people think she is 'gay, or frigid, or mad', because she is secure in her own identity, having 'stretched and grown into work and business, happiness and her own home' (Kennedy 1990:121). The young girl in 'Friday Payday' (*Now That You're Back*), who *is* a prostitute, the city's traditional 'public' woman, sees the city's blending of public and private as 'very ideal for her lifestyle'; 'bright, but very strange where the lights were and very black over everything else', with '[t]he black to hide and the bright to show' (1994:129-130). In *Paradise*, Hannah also sees the city as a public place; 'the greasy, grey-faced hole where no one can ever be truly unobserved' (2004:84). For her, the city is there to be simultaneously lost in and hidden from, as alcoholism, unlike prostitution, must remain wholly in the realm of the private; the 'peering' city sees too much, so one should stay inside (2004:259). In *So I am Glad*, Jennifer's

experience of the city is shaped by its being the backdrop to her relationship with Savinien – in this case the anonymity offered by the city becomes overwhelming, even frightening, when Savinien walks out and is swallowed by the urban expanse, replete with so many people that finding one man becomes impossible. Here, the city causes both frustration and desperation through its ability to hide two people from each other:

First, he told me where he'd been which made me sad because for all those lost weeks, he'd stayed ridiculously close. For some reason, the idea of such a tiny, but total, separation suddenly set me feeling how stupidly alone we both had been.
(1995:175)

This anonymity does carry with it, perhaps, an element of threat. But wherever the city appears in Kennedy it is more complex than being simply either threatening or liberating, and it should be stressed that these experiences of the city are by no means confined solely to female characters. All these characters, to some extent, appear to experience the city in the dialectical style of Walter Benjamin's *flâneur*; a man 'viewed by all and sundry as a true suspect' whilst simultaneously being 'utterly undiscoverable, the hidden man' (Benjamin 1999:420). The *flâneur* can draw energy from the crowd; observe and make connections, and in this manner see beyond the streets being full of 'empty interactions of soulless individuals' (Frisby 2001:258) to give the crowd meaning. However, the character of the *flâneur* does carry pretensions of superiority, as one who 'derives pleasure from his location within the crowd, but simultaneously regards the crowd with contempt, as nothing other than a brutal, ignoble mass' (Gilloch 1996:153). Kennedy's characters, meanwhile, find themselves separate from the crowd whilst struggling to find meaning in themselves, to find their own position within an urban context the modernity of which is characterised by fragmentation; 'a loss of experience and a phantasmagoria of commodities' (Buci-Glucksmann 1994:110). They are apart from the crowd but *want* to be connected to it, to belong.

Crucially, the public and populated nature of the urban landscape is not what makes it threatening in Kennedy's work. For the female characters in particular, danger and violence are more likely to occur within the private sphere, behind closed doors. The protagonist of 'Friday Payday' is unique among Kennedy's characters in being a female for whom the city itself poses a definite threat, and that only by the nature of her profession. At most, the city is guilty only through its passivity; its ability to simultaneously observe and also turn a blind eye to the myriad private events taking place within it. Interestingly, the two notable instances of public, city-based violence in Kennedy are inflicted upon male characters and are extreme,

unnatural, almost fantastical. Savinien spends time living rough and is called upon by the 'men from the waste ground' to take up his sword one night and fight a dog, in a nightmarish sequence:

'I promised them I would kill the dog and eat it. I would roast in on the fire and throw them its skin [...] The dog's flesh ... the warmth ... blood, it made me sick. The sound of it crying when I slashed its belly took away my appetite [...] The men applauded me and I watched the firelight catching all about me in the blood.'
(Kennedy 1995:180)

In *Looking for the Possible Dance*, while the city provides a space for Margaret to find a sense of personal identity, it also allows Colin to stumble into the operations of a crime syndicate which results in his being crucified, nailed to the floor of a warehouse by Mr Webster, who informs him:

'You are an example, Colin. People will hear about you and will not admire what you did. They will not wish to repeat it. This is our own small Terror, Colin. You can gather it every day from everywhere; post offices and court rooms, your evening paper, your evening streets. We just make our own use of it.' (1993:230)

In both situations there is a sense of the men moving somehow beyond their designated space and into the darker side of the city's existence, which then punishes them. This suggests that the threat of the city lies in its unpredictability; the implication that to live in it is to tread a fine line between safety and danger; its disinterestedness able to flare into incredible and public violence should one stray from the path. And yet, in contrast, private violence is perhaps more threatening and more insidious because it already falls within the range of individual experience. There are many examples of women suffering domestic violence in Kennedy's works, and the one 'public' woman, the heroine of 'Friday Payday', is gang-raped when she attempts to claim more independence (1994:141). Gillian Rose references Gill Valentine's observation that, if women 'are seen as properly belonging to the domestic sphere' this makes them very vulnerable to male violence both inside and outside the home – inside, it is 'no-one else's concern'; outside, she deserves it (Rose 1993:35). The city may offer the opportunity to escape from or change one's private experience, but it also cannot be trusted. Freedom and threat stand side by side.

Escape to the Country

The critic Philip Tew appears to view Kennedy's strength as lying in her focus on ordinary

individuals experiencing 'bafflement and incomprehension' within the 'void' of urban living (Tew 2003:127), and when she moves away from this, as in the predominantly rural *Everything You Need*, he claims she has 'lost her way' (2003:136). To me, this seems to rather miss the point that Kennedy is constantly working to highlight the *extraordinary* within the ordinary, alongside the individual's thirst to belong, and a rural, even slightly fantastical setting like Foal Island can serve to illustrate the questing of her characters just as the city can. The urban backdrop is certainly more usual in Kennedy's fiction, but in certain cases the rural landscape provides the escape, particularly when characters find themselves overwhelmed by the crowded and impersonal nature of the city. These characters often seem to find something rejuvenating in their escape from the urban, and a quietness within which they appear to gain a greater understanding of self and personal identity. This ability to aid self-knowledge seems directly correlated to the remoteness of the location – small towns are not quite sufficient; the community (if any) must be tiny, the setting wild and isolated. Foal Island in *Everything You Need* is the most obvious example of this; the 'religious retreat and writer's colony' off the 'rain-asphyxiated' Welsh coast (Kennedy 1999:43). Nathan notes how everyone on the island wants '*a cure for something: loneliness, emptiness, bitterness, illness – any ness you care to name*' (ibid). The unique addition in this case is that inhabitants of the island are supposed to aid their personal revelations by accumulating near-death experiences, but the remote location forms an important part of this. Even the cynical Nathan finds himself 'beginning to love it – being with the sea'; the water like a 'patient partner' calming him with its breathing (1999:62). It is the place he chooses to bring Mary, to attempt their reconciliation, and by the end of the novel the island does seem to unite them in their isolation; as they stand together 'facing the black of the sea, the beat of its lights, the island like a great ship beneath them, drifting them safe away from shore' (1999:559). The simplicity of island life is contrasted sharply with London's 'roads and pavements locked into one damp, elbowing, ill-tempered crawl' (1999:365) and the 'broiling', oppressive insincerity of literary parties (1999:367). But whilst the island represents a definite escape from the relentless pretence and enforced sociability of the city, it is not portrayed as a wholly calm, rustic alternative. The island has its dangers too – not only for the writers attempting brushes with their own mortality but for their innocent dependants. Both Nathan's dog and Joe Christopher's daughter nearly die through the actions or negligence of those who love them. The island, in fact, appears to take the notion of escape to extremes by placing all those upon it within easier reach of death. There is an implication that being simultaneously closer to nature *and* closer to death allows for greater clarity, self-awareness, and freedom; Joe's self-

styled 'island cure' (1999:43). An echo of this idea features in the story 'Spared' in *Indelible Acts*, where Greg suspects that the end of the world may be imminent and therefore decides to leave the city and drive North:

The thing about this is, I can't be sure I'm right. In fact, I can be almost certain that I'm not.

*But if I **am** right.*

If I am right, I should be like this when it happens – with myself alone, contented. As close to contented as I get. (2002:17)

Like Nathan, Greg feels himself being 'calmed' by the natural landscape; in this case the 'flat of the glen floor' and the 'slow spin of mountains' (2002:21). In tentative anticipation of the apocalypse he lies down in the grass and sets himself aside from 'the misery' of his affairs to find 'a great peace' which in turn precedes 'an utterly painless sleep' (2002:22). However, as the end of days fails to materialise Greg does of course wake up cold, damp and 'immediately terrified by the total dark' (ibid), before stumbling back to his car and returning to the city.

This concept of the rural landscape providing only a temporary escape is quite common in Kennedy's work – the city, for the most part, is where reality is, and must be faced. The main reason for this seems to be that the remote and isolating aspects of the countryside naturally limit possible interactions and developing relationships, and the driving force for Kennedy's characters is almost invariably the need to reach out to others, to love and be loved. The city may itself be isolating, but at the very least population density allows for a greater possibility of touch, of person-to-person contact – in the wilderness, one is alone. Solitude may enhance one's sense of identity up to a point, but Kennedy continually returns to the idea that to know oneself and be truly whole requires a relationship with others, or specifically one other. Rural landscapes are frequently juxtaposed with their urban counterparts in a manner which lends them a fantastical, dreamlike quality. For all its savagery, Foal Island in *Everything You Need* has a mythical quality, named for the legend of a Tudor lord who filled the island with horses and then killed them all, and this is more marked when set against the bustle of literary London. Meanwhile Arthur's house in *The Blue Book*, also on an island, is there to provide him with an escape from his own city-based deceptions and is described as supremely idyllic, peaceful and comforting; a place for him to forget 'who I am and what I do' and revel in the 'flowers', the 'thick stars' and 'the scent of the island – like a big dog – a big, warm animal – woody and clever and dusty and living and salt' (2011:88-91). Arthur describes his home on the island as being incomplete, as if waiting for

Beth to join him there, but elsewhere in Kennedy's fiction, in those instances where couples *do* escape to the wilderness together, it is again presented as a kind of dream, a temporary escape. Margaret and Colin go away together in *Looking for the Possible Dance* and they feel as if they have 'stumbled up to the heart of the world', prompting Margaret's romantic outburst of 'I do love you. Colin, you're beautiful. You are beautiful' (1993:210-211). However, within the space of a page the romance falls apart somewhat and Margaret is clarifying; 'I've been on holiday, Colin [...] It has nothing to do with real life' (1993:212). Similarly, the protagonist of 'The High Walk' (*Night Geometry*) invites an ex-lover on a walking holiday which initially seems full of sensual possibility: the 'shapes of other mountains, intimate, like knees and forearms and bellies under a brown, stained coverlet' creating 'the feeling that something might happen', like a 'careless movement underneath the sheets' (1990:79). By the close of the story though, it is apparent that nothing romantic will happen and the wild environment becomes oppressive, the sky 'too blue to look at', the heather stalks 'weathered to the paleness of bones' – in the end nothing has been resolved, 'nothing found' (1990:81).

Raymond Williams notes how the technical and ever-changing aspect of the city can lead us to 'feel either numbed or divided'; in which state of mind 'the most abstract and illusory ideas of a natural rural way of life tempt or at least charm us' (Williams 1973:293). But just like the city, the country offers no solutions in and of itself. To see it as an escape, a more natural, beautiful remedy to the buffetings of city life, is once again to seek solace in dualisms, where the city is defined by 'a necessary materialism' and the country by 'a necessary humanity' (ibid); the city the seat of the rational, the country the realm of the emotional. Such a view is unsustainable in that it does nothing to address the crucial issue of belonging which, certainly in Kennedy's writing, must begin with establishing connections with other *people*, to see oneself *in relation*. Aspects of location may help or hinder this, but are ultimately of lesser importance. The quest from rural to urban and back again is most important in what it represents, that search for connection, for love, which may appear as nostalgia but really speaks of something more fundamental:

It is not so much the old village or the old back-street that is significant. It is the perception and affirmation of a world in which one is not necessarily a stranger and an agent, but can be a member, a discoverer, in a shared source of life.
(Williams 1973:298)

Conclusion: Country and Nation

As a woman I have a country [...] I need to understand how a place on the map is also a place in history within which as a woman, a Jew, a lesbian, a feminist, I am created and trying to create. (Rich 1987:212)

Arguably, national identity may form an important part of one's sense of belonging, but this requires not only attempting to understand one's country, but also one's personal place within it, as Adrienne Rich observes above. This relationship may be affected by gender (and sexuality, or religion); country and nation may be gendered just as the body, the home, the city are. *Nation* carries masculine connotations of development, production, pride of place among other nations, and may be seen to refer to the people within a country, while *country* is perhaps the more feminised term, softer, suggesting the landscape in which the *nation* live, and often a romanticised rural landscape at that. *Nation* is active, *country* is passive. Nira Yuval-Davis notes that women are 'often required to carry' a country's 'burden of representation' as they are 'constructed as the symbolic bearers of the collectivity's identity and honour, both personally and collectively' (Yuval-Davis 1997:45). The country may become the Motherland, to be defended and nurtured. Some of Kennedy's earlier works 'deal quite explicitly with issues of national identity' (Stirling 2008:117). Scotland has all too frequently been viewed as the weak, feminised subsidiary of the more powerful, dominant English culture, 'often historically depicted as female' (Bell 2004:61); and though Stirling notes that Kennedy evades and refuses 'the symbolic use of the female body' (Stirling 2008:14), she does seem to adopt, in these earlier works, the concept of Scotland as a 'parochial' state 'whose existence has no significance in the eyes of the world' (Craig 1996:12). Tom Nairn's influential 'Scotch Myths' analysis marks Scotland as having 'no culture', only 'a mockery, a travesty of a culture' (Craig 1996:105). Then again, remove the myths and what is left is a Nothing, a 'vacuum' (1996:107). This sense of being part of a Nothing nation is summarised by 'The Scottish Method (for the perfection of children)' which appears in *Looking For the Possible Dance*, which claims that the 'history, language and culture of Scotland do not exist', and that Scots are 'only defined by what we are not'; '[n]othing in a country which is nothing' (Kennedy 1993:15-16). Alongside this, the story 'The Role of Notable Silences in Scottish History' (*Night Geometry*) notes 'there's no point in being Scottish if you can't make up your past as you go along' (1990:64). These are direct instances of the apparent nothingness of Scotland being emphasised, though such overt engagement with questions of national identity quickly dies away in Kennedy's later works, a

shift perhaps indicating an early attempt to fit into an established 'Scottish Literature' model before this is overtaken by a focus on the quest of the individual and the thirsting to belong. The fear of being nothing remains, but not necessarily tied to any specifically Scottish sense of inadequacy.

Kennedy's characters are adrift, wandering and restless; their journeys presented as a crucial factor in both discovering and developing their personal identities, which in turn allows for the possibility of the love they desperately need. Some characters flee the countryside for the city, or vice versa, but in other cases this is not enough and a move to an entirely different country is required in order to generate some kind of personal development. Here, the sense of *home* (where one comes from) as being stifling or inhibiting, something to escape from, is heightened – home represents a previous incomplete, often damaged sense of self, and one can only change and heal by getting as far away from it as possible, at least temporarily. In *Paradise* Hannah is sent from Scotland to Canada to 'cure' her alcoholism; Alfred in *Day* can only begin to deal with the traumatic aftermath of war by leaving home and returning to Europe; *The Blue Book* finds Arthur and Beth having to meet on a cruise ship crossing the Atlantic in order to address their relationship. The most extreme example among the novels must be *So I am Glad*, for whose protagonists love and healing apparently involves not just a geographical leap but also one across time and history; from Paris to Glasgow and from the seventeenth to the twentieth century. Many short story protagonists are also portrayed journeying, questing, escaping. The protagonist of 'Armageddon Blue' (*Now That You're Back*) takes a cruise to escape the reality of a failed relationship; 'Awaiting an Adverse Reaction' (*Indelible Acts*) describes preparations to travel and escape a failed marriage; 'Made Over, Made Out' (*Original Bliss*) takes one giant leap further and features an astronaut who has, physically at least, gone away entirely; 'left the Earth behind him' (1997:66). Again, there are two different kinds of journeying here – travelling to a new country may signify a need to find oneself, to reclaim something apparently lost, or it may represent a desire to run away from oneself, and the hope of finding something entirely new. It is possible to see in Kennedy's writing an echo of the *Bildungsroman*, which 'charts the journey away from home to seek one's true identity in experience'; the 'story of the journey from youth to maturity depicted as a quest' (Shurmer-Smith & Hannam 1994:39). Whilst this genre traditionally centres upon a boy leaving home in order to become a man, it is possible to see both male and female protagonists in Kennedy as having similar motivations; the drive to get entirely away from the home-place in order to grow, to find that 'true identity'. Crucially, though, while various short stories conclude with their characters remaining far away and somehow lost, the

greater space given to characters in the novels almost invariably leaves them turning once again towards home. The implication is that to truly find oneself one must not only go away *but also* come back. Whilst questing may present opportunities for personal development, home represents the starting point for our identities, and the possibility of the comfort of *belonging*:

...for many of us returning to our native place does bring an end to isolation. We are connected. And those connections both past and present solace, keep us excited by mystery, bring us joy. (hooks 2009:214)

In Kennedy's novels, the journey appears necessary to instigate change, the home-coming necessary in order to crystallise it. In *Day* Alfred, who once again suspected that he might die abroad and hasn't 'expected to to going home' for a second time (Kennedy 2007:270), has a moment upon returning where the sense of carrying 'the smell of somewhere else' makes him feel 'younger and excitable', until he recognises that he cannot simply 'stay like this' because he 'do[es] not quite fit any more' (2007:272-273). Alfred can only attain his sense of belonging by making 'a change' and returning to Joyce, the love which provides his most important connection; 'the most wonderful thing' (2007:277). *The Blue Book* finishes with Arthur finding in a foreign city the possibility of going home:

And when the man comes to land, walks on solid ground, the ocean will stay with him, will rock with him, and when he stands the world will roll, will dance, be an amazement. And this will make him feel that it isn't impossible, that it isn't completely impossible that he could be happy, that he could *come home and live*. (Kennedy 2011:372-373, emphasis added)

Again, there is the implication that to be home and be happy and complete, to truly be oneself and live, is only possible with the closest, loving connection with another person. Hannah in *Paradise* believes that she cannot 'get well' in the clinic if she is separated from Robert: '*He went there without me and then I did the same and it didn't work. We didn't get better. We have to both be there, together – that's what we need to make us well*' (2004:321). For Hannah, the home to be returned to is a place where she can be with both Robert and alcohol – these are the two things she loves, and the 'cure' from her experience lies in the realisation that she is nothing without these things. Robert and drinking, and drinking with Robert, let her know who she truly is. In *So I am Glad*, Savinien's journey has to end with him returning to death, and the place of his death, and giving himself up to nothingness once again, and this

is somewhere Jennifer cannot follow him, because she cannot make herself 'wish to die with him, to go with him' (1995:276). The laws of time and space cannot be permanently cheated in this fashion and yet the love between Jennifer and Savinien remains to give a sense of belonging, of true being – Savinien assures Jennifer that 'even if I am gone and you cannot see me [...] I will keep you with me'; while she in turn is left with the memory 'of one man's voice, not a part of it fades' (1995:280).

Throughout Kennedy's fiction, the notion that love is only possible through knowing one's own identity, and seeing oneself in relation to others, is reiterated again and again. The knowledge of identity itself can be developed through the attainment of a sense of belonging, and this in turn can come about through acknowledgement of history and location – placing oneself in both space and time. The past does not have to be the site of nostalgia, but nor is it irrelevant – like Walter Benjamin's *flâneur*, we may seek 'to trace the archaic and most ancient in the heart of the ultimate site of modernity' (Gilloch 1996:104); claiming not one 'internally produced, essential past' but one which rather connects to the present through the flow of the space in which one is located, where the 'identity of place' is 'always and continuously being produced' (Massey 1994:171). Embracing, or at the very least acknowledging, the myths of the past can help in creating a sense of cultural identity, as culture 'takes place' and every place 'has histories and archaeologies which are inscribed on it' (Craig 1996:117). In a country as redolent with myths as Scotland, their recognition does not have to be nostalgic, restrictive, or inhibiting, rather it may allow for greater freedom, a sense of progression and moving forward which is nonetheless grounded in a common place, a common past. In relating the myth of Foal Island in *Everything You Need*, Louis tells Mary that the truth behind the legend 'doesn't matter':

What matters is that this is how people remember what is important, this is where they are themselves, where they keep what has been stolen, where their words are their own. We always have the stories we make of ourselves, of our topography, our music. That kind of voice, the true kind, will never die entirely, even if it's turned to stone. (Kennedy 1999:126)

Acknowledgement of the past is about establishing connections which assist in comprehending the present, and one's place within it. And such acknowledgement does not have to be defined in terms of nationality, or gender. I would argue that within Kennedy's writing the sense of belonging is not gendered, but addresses instead a more wide-reaching humanity, a need for love and connection in which gender is not of primary importance.

Gender plays a part in the shape of her fiction, just as Scottishness does, but neither is of core significance. Rather, they are almost accidental elements within core narratives of persons trying to find meaning, love and connection with others, and through that a greater understanding of themselves.

2. Sex and Violence

There appears to be a cruelty, a rage, a latent frenzy in humanity which is not explicable in terms of basic strivings for survival...It is an attack on vulnerability, whether perceived in the self or in the other, which drives human beings to defile one another. And if vulnerability can be forced into the other and attacked there, then we can momentarily be relieved of experiencing it ourselves. (Mollon 2000:68)

Just as one's identity and connection to others may be influenced by a sense of belonging *in place*, belonging *in body* can carry the same power. Actions serve to emphasise one's physicality, connecting the mind to the body, and in turn allowing the body to interact and connect with others. Sex and violence, imposed upon the body, may represent the most dramatic ways in which this connection comes about. It may be, as suggested by Phil Mollon above, that a dormant violent capacity is an integral part of human nature, triggered by an intense fear of vulnerability. If one then views sex as predominantly the physical expression of love, this immediately places it in conflict with such violence, as love relies upon a degree of vulnerability – the giving of affection to another requires an exposure of the self, however small; laying one's emotions open to the whim of the beloved, acknowledging their power to bring joy or pain. Thus the vulnerability inherent in loving is persistently at odds with that 'latent frenzy' lurking within humanity, which yearns to strike out against such perceived weakness. In other words, love exists under permanent threat of attack, and since sex may move beyond the pleasurable expression of love and become imbued with violence itself, the attack may come from both sides.

The physical, the connection with the body, is a vital element in A. L. Kennedy's character development. Both the sexual and the violent act serve as physical expressions of emotion, and as such may become blurred – Sarah Dunnigan notes how Kennedy 'frequently invests sexual desire with violence' (Dunnigan 2000:151). This chapter will explore the interplay between sex and violence in Kennedy's writing; whether the two are presented as opposing and yet complementary forces, pleasure principle versus death instinct; or whether in fact both are powered by the same driving force – that which draws us to assert ourselves as physical beings, the deep-seated desire to prove our own existence.

The Emotional: Detachment and Destruction

Kennedy takes the intimate connection of sex and violence to darkly comic extremes in the story 'Mixing with the folks back home' (*Now That You're Back*). Here, the character Irma

Jean amiably relates how she and her serial killer lover buried her husband alive in the backyard. Her husband Taylor was, she says, 'allergic' to her skin, which meant that 'intimate relations' had to be assisted by uncomfortably hot, 'flannel all-over bodysuits' (Kennedy 1994:202). Literally stifled, Irma Jean is rescued by Bob Coons, local handyman and serial killer. Irma manages to persuade Bob not to bury her alongside her husband and moves smoothly from one man to the other, reflecting that it is 'appropriate' for Taylor 'to die kind of short of breath on a hot morning in his sleeper suit'; and rejoicing in the feeling of Bob's skin against hers (1994:217-218). Though she does not approve of Bob's serial killing, she finds herself 'more forthright' after stomping down the earth on top of Taylor, realising that 'you can do that to a husband, or anybody else, any time you like' (1994:221). It is this newly forthright nature which saves Irma and Bob's relationship, as she forces him to look into new ways of satisfying his lust 'to hear those noises they make' (1994:220); buying a tape recorder and mixing deck so that he can create as many variations on screams and moans and pleading as he likes. With this, the two of them can be 'happy again' (1994:223).

Interestingly, despite a 'macabre' and 'dysfunctional' family life (Mitchell 2008:65), Irma Jean seems wholly satisfied with her relationship – she has a man she loves, a daughter she adores and a nice family home. Such hearty satisfaction is something of a rarity among those Kennedy characters exposed to violence, but then so is Irma's portrayal as a straightforward woman not given to introspection. Her story focuses firmly on the physical, and the shift from her life with the 'allergic' Taylor in a house 'dry and tight as an old skin' (1994:200), to the 'mighty fine' feeling of Bob Coons' skin against hers (1994:218), symbolises Irma's liberation in the same way as the burial of her first husband does – whether stomping the earth on the grave or holding her lover skin-on-skin, she is freed by embracing the sensual, her own physicality. Crucially, the burying of Taylor Whitman is also a violent act the two lovers commit *together*, rather than being inflicted upon one by the other, and so it binds them together in the same way as a shared sexual act. Also, apart from this one incident, the acts Bob commits never threaten Irma herself or those close to her because *that* would be appalling; 'that would be just like murder, wouldn't it?' (1994:219). Having assisted in one murder herself Irma is now strong and secure in her position, happy to permit Bob's hobby, perfectly content as long as his sharp objects and recording equipment are kept in the woodshed away from his wife and child. It is through finding the balance between love and violence in her life that Irma achieves that happiness at which so many of Kennedy's characters fail, though admittedly in rather extreme fashion. When violence threatens Irma's personal safety, she rises up and joins in, shaking off her own vulnerability, saving herself by

claiming some of the power invested in the violent act as her own.

In contrast to Irma's cheerful physicality is the emotional intensity evident in the story 'Sympathy' (*What Becomes*, 2009). This story relates the sexual encounter between two strangers in a hotel room solely through dialogue, lending it a stark immediacy. Being presented only with what the characters themselves reveal, the reader is forced to piece the story together from potentially misleading or even false statements. While no physical violence actually takes place, the use of aggressive language makes the sex seem violent, highlighting the power play and shifting vulnerability between the characters. Initially the woman appears to be in control, observing that her male partner is 'nervous' and stating 'you look like I'm going to fuck you' (2009:154); being the first to introduce the word 'fuck' and placing herself firmly in the active role. The deliberately light, humorous and rambling tone of the early conversation, however, seems to emphasise an unease and nervousness in both parties. But again this shifts when the woman implies that the man is 'just saying' he will 'fuck' her instead of actually doing it (2009:159) and he, 'annoyed', responds by switching sharply to a demanding, imperative tone:

Take off your knickers [...] This is when you get what you want. Okay? You get exactly what you're asking for. So now shut up and show me your tits. Really. I mean it. I'm very serious. (2009:159)

The man exploits the woman's vulnerability in harsh, threatening and controlling language, constantly reiterating that this is what the woman wants, *telling* her 'you're not shy, you want this' and demanding '[I]ike it' (ibid). The pornographic tone of this male monologue not only lends a certain brutality to proceedings but also adds an air of unreality or performance, the male mind shifting what is before him into the realm of filmed pornography. At points he switches to third-person narration, announcing 'down she goes' and 'ladies and gentlemen – she gets romantic' (2009:162-163), as if performing in front of an audience, rendering the scenario yet more impersonal.

Where Irma Jean needs physical intimacy to initiate a deeper connection between herself and her lover, the physical intimacy in 'Sympathy' seems to drive the lovers further apart, when after a brief exchange of personal histories the woman becomes more emotional and the man less so, taking refuge in patronising platitudes such as 'smile, love. It might never happen' (2009:175). Unlike Irma Jean, this woman has exposed her vulnerability in her attempt to achieve intimacy, stating that she has 'no one' (2009:165); even expressing a desire to erase herself through the sex act, instructing her lover to 'take everything' (2009:163). In

this vulnerable role of victim, it appears she becomes even more desirable, her lover keen to 'fuck' her again while she is 'soft' and 'opened up'; overriding her 'I can't' with 'yes, you can' (2009:170-171). Part of the great sense of unease generated by this story lies in Kennedy's refusal to provide a definitive narrative voice. The reader is not permitted any clarification of the characters' thoughts, only their words, which seem stark and disconnected. The constant stream of dialogue during a sexual encounter should imply an engagement in intimate physical and vocal communication simultaneously, and yet there is no positive resolution. Speech alone is not enough because it does not reveal everything, and physical communication in the sex act itself seems lacking because of the very situation in which it has come about.

Interestingly, 'Sympathy' not only carries a more strident moral message than is usual for Kennedy (the fairly uncontentious notion that random sex with a stranger is unlikely to be followed by a meaningful physical or emotional connection), but also places its characters quite categorically within traditional gender stereotypes. It could be argued that this is employed as a device with which to demonstrate a more resolutely feminist standpoint than is perhaps in evidence elsewhere in Kennedy's fiction. Although Glenda Norquay observes that Kennedy frequently and 'clearly' writes in a context informed by feminism – with 'recognition of the social constructions of femininity which have held women in particular roles and positions of powerlessness' (Norquay 2005:144) – most of Kennedy's fictions seem to me to be explorations of both men and women as *people*; and are feminist primarily through the author's determination to portray both sexes as equal without emphasising the female experience, or belittling the male. The 'recognition of the social constructions of femininity', though, is very much in evidence in 'Sympathy', where the story begins with the female character appearing strong and in control, before it is the man who takes over, not only dominating and objectifying her sexually but also narrating her past, altering her behaviour up to that point to tie in with this sexualised, objectified image:

...minutes ago you were in the bar downstairs and by yourself and ready to pick up anyone, anyone at all, ready to fuck anyone, because that's what you like [...] You'd have done that in the bar, wouldn't you? Wouldn't you? You'd have sat on a table and lifted your skirt and fingered yourself so anyone could see you, any stranger, and that's why you're doing it for me. (Kennedy 2009:159-160)

Later we discover that the starting point for each character is very different, the woman having come from her mother's cremation, the man from a very successful job interview, so

the woman actually enters the hotel room in a state of intense bereavement, while the man is flushed with the promise of career success. Even the title 'Sympathy', which could indicate an affinity of feeling, takes on a much more unequal meaning as the story progresses, implying pity for another whose sorrow one is spared from experiencing. In the end the female is left naked on the bed while the male rushes to get back to work, and though she tries to reach him emotionally, telling him she is 'scared' of returning to her mother's house, he still insists upon objectifying her, responding with: 'you worry too much, I've said. Throw back the covers for me, love. Don't you want to give me a good send-off?' (2009:173).

This male refusal to interact emotionally with a clearly distressed woman confirms the feminist notion that men are insensitive to women's needs when it comes to sex, preferring the whole situation to play out like a pornographic fantasy, in which comforting a lonely and bereaved woman does not feature. In contrast, the woman's desire appears to focus on sex leading to further acquaintance, and consequently further intimacy of a social rather than sexual nature, asking if her lover would have breakfast with her; suggesting that he might want to know her name (2009:172). Sexual stereotypes are used here to emphasise both the vulnerability inherent in exposing the self, and the way people can turn to sex in an effort to define their selfhood and connection with others, which is a recurring subject in Kennedy's work. The fact that this story stands out by being so bleakly emphatic in laying down sexual stereotypes is perhaps indicative of Kennedy's belief that sex or speech alone is not enough – two people must also have a conscious, emotional connection to lend meaning to their physical interaction, as emotional detachment effectively destroys the possibility of love.

The Physical: Blood and Bodies

Harvey and Gow suggest that it is easy to closely link sex and violence because both are seen as transgressive in Anglo-American culture; representing 'that aspect of self that emerges through lack of control, that exists and finds expression against reason' (Harvey & Gow 1994:2). Like an act of violence, a sexual act has the potential to be purely centred on the physical; a mechanical encounter between two bodies where great mental or emotional participation is not necessary. In a society built upon a Judaeo-Christian heritage and the concept of a pure soul residing within the corporeal form, acts of sex or violence may therefore threaten not only our 'sense of bodily integrity' but also the 'spirit enclosed therein', thus enabling 'the notion of violation to apply to more than physical hurt' (ibid). When we engage in an act of sex or violence we are not only exposing and endangering our bodies but our whole being, moving beyond the boundaries of acceptable, reasonable behaviour.

However, this view as it stands is too simplistic. It is hard to imagine many sexual or violent acts occurring with *no* emotional involvement. Even the most horrific acts of violence will usually be driven by a motivation in the mind of the perpetrator, be it punishment, revenge, or self-defence, while, at its most basic, sexual motivation is almost invariably founded in a physical attraction between persons. Many would perhaps wish that sex be totally liberated from the bonds of transgression, to be viewed not as a violation but simply as a celebration of love and pleasure which should not be hidden shamefully away. Violence cannot be defended in this manner because it represents the lashing out of one individual to another; a tearing apart rather than a bringing together, powered by negative rather than positive emotion. And yet everyone may have the capability for violence dormant within them, just as they have the capability for sex. In his book on serial killings Mark Seltzer points out that, if we accept violence as an inherent latent impulse, we must conclude that the only difference between 'the psychic killer' and 'the psycho killer' is that the latter 'is one who *does* what others merely *think*, collapsing the distance between representations and things, private desires and public acts' (Seltzer 1998:143, emphasis added). This collapsing of distances, this outburst of suppressed impulses, may also result in the line between sexual and violent acts becoming blurred. Sexual intercourse itself, of course, may be viewed as 'inherently violent, involving penetration and the transgression of bodily boundaries'; while torture, though indisputably violent, is 'shown again and again to be a highly sexualised activity' which attempts to 'rupture the boundaries of the self' (Harvey & Gow 1994:13).

There are many examples within A. L. Kennedy's fiction of the sexual and the violent merging, be it through sadomasochism, domestic violence or other sexual abuse. In *So I Am Glad*, Jennifer tells of a childhood where she was forced into the position of voyeur for her parents' sexual encounters, which 'frightened' her, the noises her mother made sounding like she was 'hurting' (Kennedy 1995:71). Over time this fear is pushed down inside and replaced by a conscious emotional detachment. Jennifer recalls one incident in the car where her father began fondling her mother, who was driving, causing the vehicle to swerve and slip. Their daughter remembers comforting herself with the thought: 'if I was going to die, they were, too. They were older, they would go first. I looked forward to that.' (1995:105). So sex for Jennifer has from an early age been interwoven with the idea of pain, a violent hatred, even a wish for death, but simultaneously an emotional detachment developed in order to cope with her parents' behaviour. She begins the novel by stating that sex 'makes no sense' to her, an act in which she becomes 'one half of a larger, insane thing that flails and twists and flops itself together in ways far too ridiculous for daylight' (1995:1-2). When she meets the masochistic

Steven their sexual relationship builds around a scenario where Jennifer is 'The Captain' and Steven the lowly deck-hand, tied or cuffed face down and beaten with a leather belt. As a character scarred by her parents' openly displayed sexual 'love' for each other, physical restraints possess a deeper symbolism for Jennifer; her personal definition of love is bound up in the 'indelible cliché' of handcuffs. Cuffs are 'not gentle things', 'tight' and 'painful', and yet to her they mean 'only love' (1995:90), suggesting that love itself is a cold, enclosing thing, carrying only negative associations. The fact that she sees love and sex in this way means that the 'games' Jennifer and Steven play shift from being an enjoyable consensual sex act to something much darker, because the dominant partner finds her enjoyment primarily in the inflicting of pain, and whether her submissive partner enjoys it or not becomes irrelevant. He may enjoy himself but Jennifer is 'happy anyway', Steven having let her discover this new, darker place. 'I could never have done on my own what I did with him', she observes, 'only politicians are able to sit by themselves and still make other people hurt' (1995:64).

Jennifer's new-found 'relish' in these moments when 'The Captain' takes over and relieves her of responsibility (1995:93) permits her to distance herself even further from her actions, as the 'theatrical' elements of 'SM' play (Thompson 1994:118) overtake the reality. By the time of her final encounter with Steven, Jennifer's alter ego has become quite a solid creation, possessed of a 'wicked, old seafaring voice' and 'a tang of sulphur, beneath the salt' (Kennedy 1995:124). 'He' is referred to as an external presence, a somewhat sinister guest:

When I stopped being with Steven, Bligh stopped being with me. I hadn't for a moment imagined he might pay us a visit that night. I was sure we both remembered that in his later incarnations he had played more than a touch rough, but there Steven was, hailing him to come aboard for all he was worth. (1995:123)

Viewing Bligh as a separate entity enables Jennifer to blame 'him' for her violent tendencies. For example, at the prospect of one last night with Steven it is the Captain who is 'extraordinarily keen', Jennifer does not attribute the emotion to herself (ibid). However, Steven persistently refers to Jennifer as 'Ma'am' throughout their games; acknowledging her role as the Captain but denying her the distance supplied by a male alter ego, constantly reminding her of her own, female, presence. Perhaps this is one of the reasons Jennifer in this instance goes 'too far', gagging Steven and then beating him until he bleeds (1995:127). This is not genuine 'SM' role-play, in which 'sadists' must develop an extraordinary level of perceptiveness to know when to continue and when to stop' (Thompson 1994:118); this is violence for its own sake, torture, even. Jennifer cannot get any pleasure or sense of release

from sex, and the role of the Captain, instead of aiding her enjoyment and participation, now only serves to push her further away from a consensual 'SM' experience, which 'depends directly on the communication between the partners' if it is to work (Beckmann 2009:88-89). For Jennifer, permitting this violent transgression to burst forth seems the only remaining way to feel anything, and this feeling lingers, leaving her with the sensation that she 'never did actually stop':

...I uncover that feeling under my heart and along my spine of finding an edge and stepping beyond it and finding an edge and stepping beyond it and gripping that edge and throwing it away. But then I caught myself. (Kennedy 1995:127)

The fact that she has 'caught' herself is of little comfort when she is left nauseated by her actions, and yet there is an exhilaration evident here too, a fierce thrill in letting go. For Jennifer at this point in the narrative violence is infinitely more powerful than sex, allowing her (albeit briefly) to experience intense emotions hitherto lacking in her life, though she struggles to admit this to herself. She states an intention to take 'full responsibility', but goes on to describe how both she and Steven 'behaved as if some crazed stranger had broken in to do this while we were engaged elsewhere' (1995:128). The need to cling to the character of the Captain as the evil-doer, demonstrates that neither party at this stage is prepared to accept that their own actions and desires led to this explosion of violence. The potential for violence lurking within Jennifer is too unnerving, too tied up in sexual desires and actions to be comfortably dealt with head-on. But this does nothing to alter the fact that, after a childhood where sex was used as a kind of torture, Jennifer has finally risen to the position of torturer herself. It doesn't matter that she *does* eventually catch herself, feel disgusted and try to help the whimpering Steven with tea, paracetamol and many apologies – for one brief period she has become the torturer with absolute power, abusing her position just as her parents abused theirs, maybe even stepping beyond the edge her parents reached, because she inflicts brutal physical damage as well as mental.

This mingling of sexual and violent action, and the need for transferring vulnerability onto the other rather than the self, is a frequent feature of Kennedy's short stories, where it often takes the form of references to domestic violence, whether past or present, in the lives of the protagonists. Characters recall fathers beating and abusing mothers in 'Sweet Memory Will Die', 'The High Walk' (both *Night Geometry*) 'A Bad Son' (*Indelible Acts*) and 'Saturday Teatime' (*What Becomes*), to name a few. Helen in 'Original Bliss' is the victim of a violent husband, the protagonist in 'Marriage' (*What Becomes*) is himself a violent husband.

Alongside these stories are those involving sexual abuse, including 'Translations', 'The Moving House' (both *Night Geometry*) and 'Friday Payday' (*Now That You're Back*). Of these, however, 'Marriage' and 'The Moving House' stand out as being the only two stories where violence and sexual abuse form the main focus of the plot. For the rest, such incidents appear as merely a small part of the character's overall experience, one with a far-reaching impact but which also carries a cold, depressing mundanity, highlighted through the simple, sparse nature of the writing. The protagonist of 'Sweet Memory Will Die' describes how 'when the hitting came again' after the first outbreak of violence, it was 'different' and 'cold' (1990:59); the hitting in 'A Bad Son' is simply referred to as 'that other noise' (2002:84); while in 'Saturday Teatime' the narrator describes the noises coming from her parents' bedroom as 'not completely familiar' but understandable (2009:67). One could argue that Kennedy uses these multiple references simply to reflect the prolific nature of domestic abuse in our society – a contemporary Scottish Crime Survey, for example, states that 26,000 incidents of domestic violence were reported to police between April and December 1999 (Macpherson 2002:5), alongside clearly noting that this is probably an underestimation of 'the full extent of domestic violence occurring in Scotland' (2002:2). So many have experienced and do experience such things on a daily basis that it may become a twisted kind of rite of passage. I would argue that Kennedy's recurrent references emphasise the commonplace nature of such violence, however transgressive we may perceive it to be, but also highlight the manner in which domestic abuse brings sex and violence very close together. In the short story 'Marriage', the domestic violence issue is not only given centre stage but related from the perspective of the abuser, whose motivations are presented as being nowhere near as complex as Jennifer's in *So I am Glad*. Here, the male protagonist appears to see a level of mutual understanding in the violence he inflicts; noting how his wife 'doesn't see it coming' or sometimes 'ducks the wrong way' (2009:133), implying that his wife should somehow expect to be hit and so the issue is her getting out of the way, not his initial assault. He views her as an inadequate sexual partner, too, an 'endlessly cold, stupid bitch', not participating but 'lying like meat' which he is '*allowed*' to touch (ibid). Infuriated by this lack of happy compliance the man punches her in the face, the 'fantastic' noise of which arouses him so much that he climaxes immediately (2009:134). Holding her in the street the next day, he imagines the pair of them being 'admired' as a fine example of what marriage looks like, with 'the shape of his coat [...] bringing more than a dash of romance to the scene' (2009:135). The casual nature of the narration and the level of self-delusion present in this character cannot but trigger a disgusted response but, like the man in 'Sympathy' starring in his own imaginary porn film,

the creation of this elegant concluding image in the husband's mind serves to powerfully illustrate the gulf between private and public acts, a violent truth concealed within a romantic fiction –the woman's face may be bruised but if he holds her close no outsider can see it; seeing instead only the illusion of love and tenderness implicit in the embrace.

It is often the case in Kennedy's fiction that sexual situations lead to violence, as if acknowledgement of the lesser transgression leads to the greater. Kaye Mitchell describes how 'physical contact is a primary form of intimacy in her stories, but as such it is extremely fraught, with such intimacy always threatening to shade into its opposite, isolation, or into violence' (Mitchell 2008:140). Many of Kennedy's characters seem to turn towards violence as another way of connecting with others and fending off a sense of isolation, but in a much more negative manner, forcing vulnerability into the other rather than accepting it within themselves. The protagonist of 'Night Geometry and the Garscadden Trains', finding her husband in bed with another woman, immediately heads for the kitchen and pulls a knife from the drawer:

I was going to run back to the bedroom and do what you would do with a carving knife, maybe to one of them, maybe to both, or perhaps just cut off his prick. That thought occurred. (Kennedy 1990:33)

However, the very fact of the thought occurring prevents the action following on, causing her to observe that one 'shouldn't pause for thought on these occasions' (ibid). In the end she tries to stab the knife into the worktop instead but it slips and cuts her hand, thus the thought of hurting her husband converts, albeit accidentally, to the physical action of hurting herself. But it should be noted that here the instant response to sexual betrayal is to seize a weapon, even if it is not actually used to attack or threaten – in the moment, aggressive physical action seems more logical than speech, as the protagonist notes: 'I don't believe I said a single word. There wasn't a word I could say' (ibid). And where the woman in this story sees the appearance of the knife as marking, appropriately enough, the severing of her relationship; the husband in 'Marriage' views his punch as reinforcing his relationship, putting him back in a satisfying position of control. Though one outcome is much more positive than the other, for both it is the act of violence, not the sex, which drives their lives forward. It is, perhaps, a bleak comment on the power of violence that the male protagonist seems to regain control through his action, ending on his freeze-frame 'romantic' moment, while the female loses hers by accepting instead a slide into isolation, acknowledging her 'small' life, craving the impossibility of 'some proof, while I'm here, that I exist' (1990:34).

A Few Thoughts on Blood

I believe it is worth taking a moment here to consider the volume of imagery in Kennedy's writing relating to blood and the shedding of blood. Blood has a complex symbolism – Foucault notes how, in times past, blood 'constituted one of the fundamental values' in a society where 'famine, epidemics and violence made death imminent' (Foucault 1990:147). In times when power was gained and maintained through conquering and usurpation, violence was the means to power and blood the symbol of it. Power 'spoke through blood'; whether it be a king leading his troops to battle, a lord executing his enemies, the glory of war, the 'triumph of death', everywhere blood 'was a reality with a symbolic function' (ibid). While many countries within the developing world may still remain societies of blood, in contemporary western society there has been a definite shift and we are now, according to Foucault, a society of 'sex':

...the mechanisms of power are addressed to the body, to life, to what causes it to proliferate, to what reinforces the species, its stamina, its ability to dominate, or its capacity for being used. (ibid)

This certainly corresponds to the much more materialistic lifestyle the West has carved out for itself. In a place where money, not violence, is considered the answer to all problems, where anything can be bought or sold and everything is a commodity, why not view the body itself as such, and allow the use or abuse of it to symbolise one's power? The main problem with this is that the body becomes an image, to be cleansed, honed and dressed in reflection of one's status; constantly tweaked in pursuit of the beautiful, sanitised perfection our celebrity-fuelled society craves, and in this manner the reality of the body, its true function, is lost. We view with distaste its fluctuations and excretions; we are continuously dreaming up new ways to clean and tidy it so that we can defy its sweaty, hairy potential. Being confronted with the reality of our bodies makes us uncomfortable, and as bloodshed is one of the less natural, quotidian secretions, it is also faced with a degree of fear. A vital, life-supporting fluid within the body, out of it blood serves only as an unpleasant reminder of human physical frailty, a conspicuous indicator of violence being wrought upon the body, linking us to a more visceral, primal part of ourselves. Kennedy plays with these complexities, embracing rather than denying the inherently bloody nature of human beings. She portrays blood itself as beautiful, regardless of circumstance: in 'Tea and Biscuits', the first story in her first collection *Night Geometry and the Garscadden Trains*, blood is a warm and precious thing, and while donating blood the protagonist rests the slowly filling bag on her stomach, feeling 'the weight

in it growing and the strange warmth'; appreciating the 'lovely', rich red colour (Kennedy 1990:7). The imagery invites parallels with a pregnant woman feeling her belly; an indefinable sense of comfort and pride in this thing created within herself. However, in this case the significance of the blood changes when the protagonist discovers she has contracted a disease from her older lover, transforming her blood from a positive, life-giving substance to a sinister, life-threatening thing, an alteration which she struggles to comprehend:

I am full of blood. My heart is there for moving blood. The pink under my fingernails is blood. I can't take it away. And now I am not what I thought I was. I am waiting to happen. (1990:8)

Even for this woman, who accepted and enjoyed her ability to give blood from the beginning, there is cruelty in the realisation that ultimately things may happen to her body which are beyond her control.

There are several references to the importance of blood in the collection *What Becomes*. The title story deals with a bereaved man who at one point cuts his thumb and becomes hypnotised by the way the blood flows, the shapes it makes. In language both scientific and poetic he refers to the 'large, symmetrically rounded drops indicative of low velocity and a perpendicular descent', while 'haloing every drop' is 'a tiny flare of threads, of starring' (2009:7). This man gets so involved in sprinkling 'his own trail' across the kitchen that he fails to comprehend his wife's astonished 'what the fuck are you doing?' and simply responds with a smile, his bloodshed having become a deeply personal thing completely separate from his relationship with his wife (2009:8). For the woman in 'Story of my Life' blood is also wonderful and personal – she is all too aware of the quantity she is losing through repeated and complicated dentistry and hates to see it leave:

The surprise of my own blood, that's true – thick and live and oddly tasty – I never did get used to that, my inside being outside – on my face, my hands [...] my blood can halt and then amaze me. It's almost hypnotic – seeing myself run. (2009:141)

The protagonist in 'Edinburgh', meanwhile, directly connects his blood to his relationship, cutting himself while chopping swedes, daydreaming about a woman whom he has already described as 'thinning' his blood (2009:43). In all these cases there is an implication that the appearance and shedding of blood, whilst being disturbing, is also strangely wonderful, a 'hypnotic' process which permits these people to connect themselves and their emotions with their physicality, a physicality not properly acknowledged by the society that surrounds them.

If my blood is 'my inside', even 'myself', then its appearance 'outside' represents an exposure of the self, a sharing of my inside with the world around me, which may enhance vulnerability but also suggests an increased level of intimacy precisely *through* such vulnerability, and in this manner bloodshed may be linked to the experience of love.

Blood can also be used as representative of the most extreme forms of human violence. In the novel *Day*, Alfred finds himself immersed in the new society of blood which the Second World War creates. When his comrade Pluckrose dies, Alfred can relate very few details apart from implying the sheer amount of blood involved; the 'red mess' which is all that remains of his friend, everything 'messed with blood' and the remaining crew 'kneeling in the blood and doing nothing' until 'Pluckrose is on them' so they are thoroughly 'messed' as well (2007:159-160). The man has been reduced to nothing but his insides, and while this is horrifying it is also portrayed as a kind of baptism, a final opportunity for the men to bond with their dead comrade through an extreme, visceral intimacy so that even this becomes a bloody celebration of love; the living men 'grinning and holding each other, grabbing at cloth, and covered in him and singing and singing' (2007:160).

For Kennedy, then, bloodshed seems to hold an inherent contradiction. Whilst it is unquestionably a violation of the body, in some cases there can be relief in the transference from inside to outside, enabling characters to recognise their physicality and thus connect with the world around them. In this respect the supposed violence of bloodshed may be as effective as the connection or union implied through sexual acts, perhaps even more so, because bleeding unavoidably involves part of the inside self, a part vital for continued existence, becoming outside and vulnerable. However, whilst sex may not *have* to involve such personal exposure Kennedy does make clear that the best kind of sex, sex as an expression of love and personal connection, must carry the same risk of exposure and vulnerability, though it may be of an emotional rather than a physical nature. Simultaneously tender and brutal, bloodshed may serve as the form of transgression which stands between sex and violence, and can incorporate both.

Object-Women: Prostitution and Pornography

When I'm here, I'm me. But when I'm out there, I'm not there. I'm something else.
I'm just a prostitute – I'm something I can sell.
(Linda' quoted in Phoenix 2003:232)

Whilst I would argue there is much truth in Cristie March's statement that A. L. Kennedy

prefers to focus on 'interpersonal connections rather than gendered issues' (March 2002:134); Glenda Norquay's assertion that Kennedy is 'clearly writing in a context that is informed by feminism' (2005:144) has equal validity, especially when considering those texts which not only deal with violence against women but also place women in the position of objects. The commodification of the body is perhaps nowhere clearer than in the role of the prostitute, and this is dealt with directly in the story 'Friday Payday' (*Now That You're Back*). This is the only one of Kennedy's fictions featuring a protagonist who is also a prostitute; one whose romantic plans for the future have been crushed by the reality of working and trying to support her heroin-addict boyfriend Danny:

He'd made love to her before – not the other stuff – and he'd been different and really lovely. He'd used to hold her and kiss and say the nice places in Scotland where they'd live when everything was fixed. Ha ha. (Kennedy 1994:136)

The romance having died, she would much rather Danny was 'somewhere else', even though this would make her 'lonely' (1994:142). Living in London, she is homesick for Scotland but feels the capital is the only place she can work at this one job she knows, being too young and under-qualified for anything else. There is a stark logic in her attitude towards her profession, as she knows her only alternative would be a 'dirty job' in a café, where she would 'work all week to earn what she could in a day, just now':

And all these folk that wanted her to change and to take her away from it – they talked about qualifications and training and then they just stopped. They couldn't make sense of it either. They asked you what you wanted to do and then stopped – just lies or nothing – because nothing they could give you would be better than what you'd got. (1994:137)

This echoes the comments collected by Sophie Day in her work with prostitutes in London, where many describe the 'irksome work routines and poor pay' in the 'straight' world as a motivation for staying in sex work (Day 2007:79). It is interesting that in Kennedy's story the word 'dirty' is used to describe waiting tables, with the implication that prostitution is somehow a cleaner way to earn a living. Similarly, at the start of the story, old chewing-gum stuck to a brick wall is described as 'disgusting', the protagonist observing that she likes to 'keep clean' (Kennedy 1994:127). Of course, if one is selling the body as a commodity, it has to be as clean and attractive a prospect as possible if it is to be successful.

Sophie Day observes the powerful distinction between 'public' and 'private' parts

within sex work, in that 'what was sold was divested of any nurturing qualities', thus ensuring 'penetration at work was distinguished from sexual intimacy in other relationships'. Similarly, 'an exterior working body was separated from an inner person' (Day 2007:36). This discrimination is also evident in Kennedy's protagonist; the contrast between 'making love' with Danny and her more mechanical, emotionally detached 'tricks', centring on performance, lying that she is 'scared' if that is what the men need to hear (Kennedy 1994:130). When the 'Hotel Man' believes he has made her cry she is angry because 'he could never do that, wouldn't know where to begin' (1994:132). However, when she attempts to leave the control of the 'Hotel Man' and is gang-raped as punishment she is left feeling 'dirty into her bones, stiff with it' (1994:141). Here even the slightest pretence of control has been removed, and with no opportunity to keep herself 'clean', alongside the fact that her body has been used without her consent, she struggles to keep her private and public parts separate – memories of the rape ensure that she doesn't feel 'right', instead feeling 'a bit sick' (1994:138). However, what makes her saddest is that the 'dirty', violent nature of the rape emphasises how she will 'never be as good as her mother', how 'her skin would never be as nice, or her fingers' (1994:131-132). Her last dream, it seems, was that one day she might escape her life and try to live up to the paragon of clean, 'straight' female existence which her mother appears to represent, and now she cannot. Kennedy's frequent presentation of mothers as almost mythological creatures, idolised yet absent, achieves added poignancy in this story through directly drawing upon the misogynist dualism of women being either mothers or whores. The empathetic development of the central character does not alter the fact that she herself seems to accept this concept, yearning to be good like her mother, and knowing that what she does, and what has been done to her, makes that impossible.

The 1996 television drama *Stella Does Tricks* features a screenplay written by A. L. Kennedy and is interesting in the way it develops, or contrasts with, some of the concepts explored in 'Friday Payday'. Again, the protagonist is a young prostitute who has run away to London from Glasgow, but here she has a name, Stella, and less of a solitary existence as she is part of a group of girls kept by the pimp Mr Peters. Both protagonists have previously been sexually abused by their fathers, something by no means unusual in the cases of real-life sex workers – Susan Brownmiller notes that 'psychiatric case studies of prostitutes unearth accounts of childhood rape or molestation by relatives with stunning regularity' (Brownmiller 1975:279n); almost thirty years later Joanna Phoenix observes that 'the women of this study had early family lives marked by abuse, neglect, running away' (Phoenix 2003:226). Phoenix also emphasises the importance of independence for the women of her study, who frequently

'constituted the dependency they experienced in their childhood pasts as *the cause* of violent abuse, sexual abuse, neglect and/or restrictions that were unduly harsh' (2003:228). As a result, economic and social independence became 'the means by which they could avoid any future abuse'. The problem presented in both 'Friday Payday' and *Stella Does Tricks*, though, is that such complete independence in prostitution is difficult to achieve. Both protagonists fall into the 'trap' which the women in Phoenix's study are so desperate to avoid – being taken on by the 'Hotel Man' and Mr Peters respectively, they immediately become dependent on another older male figure. These men, in turn, are then able to inflict hideous abuse when the women try to leave and reclaim some independence.

In *Stella Does Tricks*, the lines between abuse and love, or 'work' and love, are explored more closely than in 'Friday Payday'. With one seemingly shy man, Donald, Stella enters a fantasy scene where she imagines introducing him (still shy in his socks and underpants) to her father and aunt as a 'nice man' she has met. The idea of his 'niceness' seems confirmed when Donald tells her what a 'beautiful girl' she is, but is shattered when he follows by calling her 'a really grand little fuck' (1996). Stella's relationship with Peters is more confused – when he accuses Stella of wanting to leave him and demands 'why do you stay?', she hesitates before responding 'because I love you', to which Peters, smugly satisfied, replies 'that's right, you do' (1996). Shortly afterwards Stella shows the other girls Peters' cigarette burns on her arm, stating 'you only hurt the ones you love'. Stella seems desperate to believe in some deeper feeling, but from the outset Peters is represented as just another twisted father figure. In the opening scenes, in a park filled with the sounds of children we see an infantilised Stella, dressed in long socks and a mini-skirt with her hair in bunches, sitting with Peters, an older man dressed in a suit. She is masturbating him under a newspaper while he holds her ice cream. Later, as he gets more frustrated with 'Stella's flights of fancy' Peters becomes more callous, demanding 'you think I should marry you? Adopt you? Be sensible, Stella'. Finally, when Stella insists on leaving, Peters appears saddened but still stays in the room as she is gang-raped, letting his hand slip from her grasp and parting with the words 'you have three hours to leave or they'll be back – I'll send them' (1996).

The contrast between the 'private' and 'public' parts of the prostitute's existence is also emphasised in the television drama. Stella never quite manages to separate the two. She is shown to take pleasure in innocent, simple things, such as playing with the children outside a block of flats or quietly swimming one length of a swimming pool underwater. She finds a new job working on a flower stall, surrounded by the traditionally feminine, floral images of purity and beauty. She consistently tries to make her life better, cleaner, but this in itself

demonstrates that she does in fact view her prostitution as dirty, that she cannot distance herself from it enough to feel completely detached. However, this overlap of private and public seems to give Stella a dynamism which the protagonist of 'Friday Payday' lacks – because she fully and consciously acknowledges what it is that she does, she is in a position to change it. Often, she chooses to purge her life through fire. We see her blowing up the car of a man who horribly assaulted one of her friends. We are presented with a flashback to her as a child burning down the pigeon loft where her father abused her, then witness her returning to Glasgow as an adult to set her father's genitals alight. In the end, though, she remains trapped by a level of dependence upon Eddie (the re-named heroin-addict boyfriend) and seems unable to break away, once again failing in a bid for true independence. In Stella's case, it seems that her blurring of the 'private' and the 'public' has made her too involved, mentally and emotionally, in her past to ever truly leave it behind her. In the final few scenes she assures Eddie that she loves him before considering overdosing on pills, at which point her father and aunt appear before her in a dream-like sequence in order to encourage her. For Stella love and abuse, or love and violence, have become inseparable, and the only independent option she has left is to place herself beyond the reach of both.

Like prostitution, pornography (that is, mainstream heterosexual pornography) is one of those areas where women are not only objectified but where violence and sex can so easily intermingle through such objectification, as individuals are robbed of their humanity. Diana Russell defines pornography as 'material that combines sex and/or the exposure of genitals with abuse or degradation in a manner that appears to endorse, condone, or encourage such behavior [sic]' (Russell 1998:3). Andrea Dworkin expresses a similar view in blunter terms – 'violence is sex. Pain is pleasure for the woman. The pornographic conceit is that the normal female demands the force, the violence, the pain' (Dworkin 1981:165). Where pornography is mentioned in Kennedy's work it seems to conform to this view. It may be that 'pornographic fantasy has no straightforward connection with what would be presumed to be its 'real-life' enactment' (Segal 1992:71), but this does not stop the male protagonist of 'Sympathy', as previously mentioned, attempting to live out his personal porn fantasy through insisting to his female partner 'you want this' (Kennedy 2009:159); commanding her to 'roll over, all fours. Like a bitch' (2009:160); and attempting to initiate anal sex which he has only watched 'in porn films before' (2009:174). In order to feel in control of the situation the man attempts to degrade his sexual partner as he has witnessed in pornography, implying similarities with Robert Jensen's 'pornography as a mirror' theory, which shows 'the ways in which many men who accept the conventional conception of masculinity see women' (Jensen 2007:14).

The feeling of awkwardness created throughout 'Sympathy' lies perhaps in Kennedy's juxtaposition of the pornographic with the mundane, stressing that the pornographic 'fantasy' is *not real* and cannot be dealt with as such outside of a 'scenario' framework – even in a hotel room with a stranger, normal human behaviour must kick in. The constant use of dialogue throughout also implies an unease with the enactment of such scenarios – the stream of 'dirty talk' during sex, following the somewhat predictable lines of 'I'm a bad bitch' (Kennedy 2009:163); 'I fucking like fucking your fucking mouth' (2009:162) and so on, becomes ridiculous when contrasted with the attempts at civilised conversation which fall in-between, talking about a job interview and a funeral (2009:166/170). However much these characters wish to lose themselves in the porn fantasy, Kennedy shows them to be *people*, as opposed to the tireless, sexual machines portrayed in pornography, and so reality must break in. Physically and emotionally these characters are too human for pornography but not quite compassionate enough for love, and so the relationship breaks down. They put their faith in pornography, and it fails them.

The troubled relationship between pornography and love is explored in greater depth in Kennedy's novella 'Original Bliss'. Here, Edward Gluck finds mingled disgust and pleasure in his addiction to pornography, needing more and more extreme material to achieve satisfaction, carrying an echo of *So I Am Glad* and the steadily increasing violence in the 'SM' play between Jennifer and Steven. For the majority of 'Original Bliss', while Helen Brindle feels she has lost her God, any hint of sexual pleasure for her is mingled with disgust too. As her attraction to Edward grows, the voice in her dream warns her against lustful feelings:

Don't think you want to blaze right over him like sin. [...] Do not think about fucking him. Think of your intentions and he will see, because they will leak out in the colour of your eyes and what do you think will happen then? (Kennedy 1997:200)

Once she has fled her brutal husband to the refuge of Edward's flat in London, she acknowledges the 'murmur of sin' he produces within her (1997:274), but at the same time her response is 'contradictory' (Mitchell 2008:85). When she strips so that Edward can see her naked, it is described as 'what she wanted, or at least what they'd agreed'; and while she does feel physical arousal, as soon as Edward leaves the room she feels 'foolish, even slightly angry, but mainly alone' (Kennedy 1997:276). Perhaps more overwhelmingly than in 'Sympathy', Kennedy portrays a sort of pornographic invasion in 'Original Bliss', tormenting her characters. Explicit material has become such an integral part of Edward's life that, however much he may claim otherwise, he cannot resist making Helen a part of it, trimming

her pubic hair to make her look 'like one of the women in his films' (1997:280). To see her naked is not enough, he has to see her naked and trimmed down to emphasise her nakedness; the vulnerable parts of herself. He makes up a bed for her in the same room in which all his pornography is stored, ostensibly to remove his own temptation, to make him feel 'safe' (1997:263), but at the same time such action means Helen herself is exposed, unsafe, surrounded by explicit and violent material so that she becomes a part of it, another desired object in a room full of forbidden, desired objects. This again displays a shifting, a deliberate transference of vulnerability onto the other. Helen is literally and figuratively filling a gap in Edward's pornography-ridden life and finds herself threatened by the possibility of the pornographic:

No matter what he asked, she would allow and the thought of that covered her with a dull, sweet fear. [...] She would become the kind of woman who would want him to do everything they could think of and who would love it. (1997:278-279)

This 'dirt of her thinking'; the idea that she *is* 'like the women in his films' and is being steadily 'emptied of all but the terrible things' she wants to do (1997:280-282) is what drives Helen to return to Glasgow and confront her husband. She buys into Dworkin's 'pornographic conceit' that the women enjoy what is being inflicted upon them, and believes she has to try to rediscover God to prove that she doesn't have to be that 'kind of woman'.

Once again the reality of Kennedy's all-too-human characters falls short of pornographic fantasy, but then again Kennedy never suggests that pornography (or behaviour mimicking pornography) is some kind of sexual ideal. Rather, the implication in 'Original Bliss' is that *love* should be the ultimate goal and that love and porn cannot co-exist. Kennedy in fact takes a clear feminist stance here in equating pornography with violence; the brutal physicality emphasised through Edward's grotesque descriptions of women masturbating males as if 'gutting fish' (1997:279) and a woman being penetrated by two men at once, whose 'penises make one, fat kind of rope that greases and sews right through her' (1997:218). As Gluck describes the more and more extreme and violent material he has to use to obtain orgasm it is Helen who draws the stark comparison between this and the violent and sexual abuse she has suffered at the hands of her husband – 'you'd have watched it, wouldn't you? If I'd been a video, you'd have watched' (1997:266). Gluck uses the rather feeble excuse that pornography is 'not real' (1997:266), but he has already acknowledged his own awareness that the woman in the photograph/film is no more than an object, 'just there to get it where it's put'; to be 'used and humiliated by seven men while her mouth has the wrong emotions and her

eyes shut down' (1997:219). This directly engages with the feminist pornography debate; the argument that 'pornographic fantasy has no straightforward connection with what would be presumed to be its 'real-life' enactment' (Segal 1992:71) set against the contention that pornography merely enables men to be more 'convinced and sincere in their perception of adult women as objects' (Dworkin 1981:49). However, in the case of Kennedy's characters the way to escape pornography's stranglehold is gloriously simple – fall in love, and porn loses its power. In love with Helen, Edward states:

I can't do what I used to any more – the films, the magazines – and I'm telling you, I gave up fighting and tried and it didn't even matter, because I couldn't do it, couldn't even begin. I just missed you. There's nothing I can do about missing you. I haven't got anything when you're not there and I don't know what to do with me on my own, with myself. (Kennedy 1997:302)

However, if 'the crux of the problem' within the feminist pornography debate is the question '*is it, or is it not, possible for women to conceive of, and enjoy, an active pleasurable engagement in sex with men?*' (Segal 1992:79), Kennedy's answer appears to be a resounding 'yes', although only if the question is actually removed from the pornographic arena. When Helen and Edward finally have sex, which is initiated by Helen's statement 'that's what I want' (Kennedy 1997:307), the language becomes much more gentle and tender, as they 'cover each other up, carefully and entirely', and begin 'to cling and be still and kiss and move and touch every place' (1997:308). With the immediate threat of pornography and violence removed, Helen can take enjoyment in Edward, the 'lovely man' (ibid). Kennedy seems to imply that a woman can indeed take whole-hearted enjoyment in sex with a man if it is sex as an act of love first and foremost, removed from violence or vague societal suggestions of what sex *should* be. In this she moves away from the extremes of feminism and into the domain of romanticism, albeit a romanticism powered by gender equality rather than any, perhaps more traditional, patriarchal ideals.

The Language of Pain: Child Abuse, Adult Suffering

In her book *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, Elaine Scarry observes that the 'achievement' of physical pain lies in its 'unsharability' and its 'resistance to language' (Scarry 1985:4). The person in pain struggles to communicate the experience to another who is without pain – for the former, the pain may be all-encompassing, while the latter is dependent on words alone to describe a sensation they themselves are not

experiencing, and thus can never fully comprehend the pain's significance for the sufferer. In this manner, Scarry states, 'to have great pain is to have certainty; to hear that another person has pain is to have doubt' (1985:7). This implies a great difficulty in communicating physical pain through the medium of language, and within literature. Scarry comments on a 'near-absence' of 'literary representations of pain'; noting that 'even the artist – whose lifework and everyday habit are to refine and extend the reflexes of speech – ordinarily falls silent before pain' (1985:10). However, it is worth noting that in recent years the language of pain has emerged into a genre all its own, due largely to the surge of public interest in 'survival writing'; tales frequently autobiographical or based upon actual happenings, where the protagonist suffers intense pain and hardship. And yet it is the 'survival' element of these texts which makes them so perennially popular; the protagonist passing *through* intense pain and suffering to emerge scarred but, ultimately, safe. Readers can engage in the fear and hurt of the writer at one remove, secure in the knowledge that said writer's survival is the crucial point.

In fiction, though, survival is never guaranteed. Any number of cruel and sadistic characters may prevail, and authors may draw upon public unease to flesh out their unpleasant creations, as explored by Marina Warner in her book *No Go the Bogeyman: Scaring, Lulling and Making Mock*, which examines the history and increasingly prolific nature of cultural figures of terror. Warner's conclusion finds that, in contemporary society, the issue of child abuse stands alone as the most powerful trigger of fear, more so than rape or even murder – it is 'the new coinage of psychological death' (Warner 1998:384):

Fears tell us what we value as well as what we dread to lose: the bogeys of today – child-snatchers, child-killers, sexual violators of the young – horrify us at some deeper, personal level than even the atrocities of recent civil war. (1998:385)

Our society worships children as the epitome of all things innocent. They are symbols of purity and goodness in a corrupt world, the hope of the new generation, and the impulse to love and protect them is overwhelming within our collective subconscious. And always in the background is the shadow of the paedophile, who loves children 'in some ghastly masquerade of the way so much of the rest of society also 'loves children'', and throws into relief 'the deepest anxiety of our time: the way we have reified children as objects of desire across the whole spectrum of material culture' (1998:386). A. L. Kennedy uses this dread of the potential harm that could come to a child in the story 'A Perfect Possession' (*Now That You're Back*). Here the nameless protagonist laments the difficulties of bringing up a child in the

modern world, full of 'tabloid sewage and the cheap and foreign pollution most people seem content to have wash around them all day' (Kennedy 1994:6). To fight the corrupt nature of contemporary society these conscientious parents keep their small son indoors, in a bedroom with a locked door and a barred window, screwed shut 'to put our minds at rest' (1994:4). Being God-fearing people who believe 'children come from sin'; their son of course has 'sin in him' which they fight through frequent examinations for 'signs of filthiness', refusing to let him cuddle a pillow at night because that is 'dirty' (1994:7-8). Worrying about their son's 'extreme delicacy' (ibid) and 'the silly shaking in his hands' (1994:5), they nonetheless rejoice that he has become 'much quieter' and that it won't be long before he is 'a good boy entirely' (1994:7-9). Interestingly, the sex of the narrator in this story is never revealed, and though both parents are clearly collusive in the abuse of their child, arguably a greater sense of unease is created through this uncertainty, left open for the reader's interpretation. Brian Corby observes that, while father-figures are most frequently associated with violent or sexual abuse, 'it is generally thought that mothers are mainly responsible for mistreating children in cases of neglect' (Corby 1993:65). However, he is also careful to point out that 'women might well be over-represented in the abuser category because of beliefs about their roles, responsibilities and natures' (ibid). In a society where the greater burden of expectation still rests on women in regards to tender, nurturing 'instinct', for a woman to break that mother-child bond is somehow more horrifying and disturbing. In this story, of course, whether a father or a mother is narrating both are still subjecting their child to abuse dressed up as love, despite being determinedly non-sexual. Kennedy draws upon the parental paradigm of protection and nurturing rather than that of affection and physical attachment, but demonstrates how these ideals may be warped in an equally destructive way.

In contrast, the abuse in the story 'The Moving House' (*Night Geometry*) is starkly sexual. Here, the girl Grace takes pleasure in simple, beautiful things, remembering the sun shining through a glass vase, or a rainbow in a summer storm, in an attempt to block out her rape by her mother's partner. The impact of this story, as in 'A Perfect Possession', lies in what Kennedy does not say – the abuse itself is 'circled around', not 'directly described' (Mitchell 2008:52). We are presented instead with the language of abuse through the monologue of the abuser, swerving from pleading to violent to placatory:

Please, Grace, don't. You're a good girl. Don't tell her. [...] Stupid cunt. Nobody's gonny believe you. Who are you? You're fuckun nothun. [...] It's something you do with a friend, Grace [...] I'll be good to you. Don't worry, honey, the next time, it won't hurt. (Kennedy 1990:40-41)

Alongside this there are hints of Grace's physical pain; when she 'sees the blood, is sick, cold after' (1990:38-39), and also her mental anguish that something vital has been stolen from her, observing that her school uniform 'has stayed the same, a children's thing' when it should no longer fit (ibid). When her abuser cries after his first assault, it only increases Grace's sense of violation that he has now 'taken everything', even 'the sounds she would make' (1990:40-41).

In both of these stories what is taken from the children is not just innocence or the right to a childhood but also language, the ability to communicate. Kennedy often dwells upon the quality and effects of the love her characters encounter, drawing us into their philosophising, their attempts to express their experiences of love through language – the ability to express it, perhaps, making it real. But the travesties of love which these children experience push them beyond this point of constant vocalisation into a place of pain. However, Grace in 'The Moving House' manages to regain some of her voice through the narration itself, which switches between third and second person to tell the story in 'a decidedly fragmentary narrative' which 'mimics the workings of a traumatised consciousness, where the memories are initially repressed [...] and the individual remembers in stages' (Mitchell 2008:52). Kaye Mitchell observes that through this technique Kennedy allows Grace to gradually gain power 'by putting herself in the subject position and by bringing her story to the surface' (ibid). Then again, this power still remains limited. The fact that the story ends with the voice of the abuser saying 'next time, it won't hurt' not only denies Grace the final word but also implies the abuse continuing beyond the text, and while Mitchell points out that we don't learn 'how long the abuse continued or when or how Grace ultimately escaped the brutal Charlie' (ibid), I would argue that there is no evidence in the text to suggest that she *does* escape, or that the present her story starts with is in any way a better place than the past described. As readers we are left with no promise of a positive outcome, only the sinister words of the abuser staring off the page. In the end, like the boy with no voice in 'A Perfect Possession' Grace's voice too is stilled, both characters, to use Elaine Scarry's phrase, 'falling silent' before pain.

A. L. Kennedy deals more frequently with psychological pain than physical. In this she is not alone. Unlike the physical, psychological suffering '*does* have referential content, *is* susceptible to verbal objectification, and is [...] habitually depicted in art' (Scarry 1985:11). But this does not mean that Kennedy shies away from the physical altogether. Rather, she deals in 'sudden gestures of violence' (Bradbury 2001:552); with a subtlety of touch and lack of graphic description frequently surrounding instances of physical pain, which are perhaps

all the more effective for leaving many elements to the imagination of the reader. The crucifixion of Colin in *Looking for the Possible Dance*, one of the most horrific acts of violence in any of Kennedy's works, is simply described from Colin's perspective; with his arms and legs stretching 'endlessly away in the most curious pain':

Quite quickly, he discovered the pain was in his hands and then his feet. Enormous. They must be cutting off his hands and feet. How could they do that? He would die. (Kennedy 1993:230-31)

There is an innocence here; a man reduced to a state of childlike confusion by the colossal, incomprehensible pain he is experiencing, intensified as words become disjointed across the page:

stig

YOU'LL HAVE

STIG

concentrate don't go away from us
STIGMATA

JUST LIKE BABY JESUS (1993:231)

The pain overwhelms everything else to become Colin's primary focus. When he wakes after an uneasy sleep to find 'the man who was called Mr Webster' kneeling on his arms, this is rendered 'a charitable, almost loving act' precisely because it prevents Colin from 'moving and pulling at the nails' fixed through his hands and feet (1993:232). Here, once again, violence and love collide as the man responsible for inflicting such hideous pain shows a tender, 'loving' consideration in temporarily removing it. Pain's 'resistance to language' may make it impossible to describe in any explicit fashion the sensation of being nailed to the floor, but Kennedy demonstrates that such explicit description is unnecessary. Subtle statements, coupled with momentary shouts across the page, allow the imaginative space for each reader's horror, wonder and personal recollections of physical pain, thus making the narrative far more powerful and poignant for each individual.

In direct contrast to this, however, is the character of Nathan in *Everything You Need*. Here, Kennedy exploits the power of violence through using graphic descriptions of physical

pain to emphasise Nathan's tumultuous psychological state. As he lies awake trying not to think of his ex-wife Maura, Nathan likens his heartache to the most ridiculous, yet horrific, physical tortures in an effort to console himself that things 'could be worse':

*Rubbing an open wound with living wasps. My wound. My wasps. Worse.
Or stapling my scrotum to the flesh of my inner thighs and then performing Scottish
country dances until I feel my socks congeal.
I think that would be worse. (1999:4)*

The bizarre nature of these examples serves to not only demonstrate the bitter, black humour so often instilled in Kennedy's characters, but also highlight the melodramatic nature of Nathan's situation. It is revealing that the only way he can express the depth of misery he feels is by placing it firmly among examples of hideous *physical* pain. An old photo of Maura triggers a switch to violent sexual imagery; Nathan's imagination described as 'performing a type of well-informed rape: penetrating him painstakingly with a ghost, with a time past restoring, an unreachable skin'. Nathan himself likens the experience to the idea of the 'head fuck', observing bitterly to himself that '*your head is your only private part that still has any chance of **getting** fucked*' (1999:5). Whatever the reader takes from this idea of Nathan's mental 'rape', the language used does demonstrate how intensely Nathan feels his mental anguish – for him it is a pure violation, which relates back to Harvey and Gow's premise that the notion of violation can 'apply to more than physical hurt' (Harvey & Gow 1994:2). In this instance though, Nathan has brought the violation upon himself. He is both torturer and tortured, and therefore the pain and the perverse pleasure in inflicting the pain are almost inseparable. He cannot resist looking at his wife's photograph. He attempts suicide several times but cannot go through with it. He seems to crave what Elaine Scarry describes as the 'grotesque overload' of pain, rather than the complete 'cessation of sentience' which comes with death (Scarry 1985:31). In Freudian terms Nathan appears to be driven by the 'primary impulse' of masochism within the death-drive principle, but only so far as the point of death, never beyond it (Boothby 1991:5). He has to be fully sentient to experience the pain and thus derive what pleasure he can from it, causing an argument within himself:

*You've got a nerve complaining. You love it.
It's all I've got.
But you don't have to love it.
But I do. That's what makes it worse. (Kennedy 1999:5)*

When the text takes the reader inside Nathan's head it often switches between first and second person narrative; he can be 'I' or 'you' or even at times 'we', which hints at his mental confusion. Perhaps there is an implication that it is easier to inflict pain upon oneself if the mind is split in two. Importantly, though, through all the psychological and physical assaults to which Nathan subjects himself it is *love* that he is ultimately seeking, for which he desperately reaches out. He is a man who needs love in his life, and since the pain of a lost love is all he is left with, the pain and the love become synonymous.

Surrender and Transcendence

...death itself [...] must be stared straight in the face. [...] Death remains the standard whereby the authenticity and depth of all activities may be judged. (Vale & Juno in Beckmann 2009:187)

Symbolically, physical pain may be used as a substitute for death, an action which can be attributed to 'an intuitive human recognition that pain is the equivalent in felt-experience of what is unfeeling in death' (Scarry 1985:31). Death is the one experience one can *never* fully experience; an annihilation of the self for which the closest imitation may be the dark, insular world of extreme pain. For Elaine Scarry, the infliction of physical pain is 'always a mock execution'; and though death occurs 'in the cessation of sentience' whilst pain is expressed through 'grotesque overload', together the two represent 'the most intense forms of negation, the purest experiences of the anti-human' (ibid). In the fictional world of A. L. Kennedy, however, the significance of pain is turned on its head. Whilst bringing the sufferer closer to death than ever before, extreme pain is also represented as crucially different in being something one can *come back from*. These characters may stare death straight in the face but then they are pulled away from it, the intensity of their pain underlining their ability to feel it, proving through sensation that they are, undoubtedly, still alive. From being an 'intense form of negation' the pain experienced is transformed instead into a triumphant affirmation of existence.

There is frequently a suggestion in Kennedy's work that such intense experiences are necessary to induce a kind of epiphany, to pass beyond the mundanity of everyday life to a greater level of understanding. These experiences invariably focus on violence and pain, whether it be sexual violence, as in 'Original Bliss' when Helen's husband beats her for running away to another man, or just plain brutality, as in Colin's crucifixion in *Looking for the Possible Dance*. As part of her research into the 'Sadomasochism' scene, Andrea

Beckmann notes that for many participants 'the pain involved becomes a nearly therapeutic tool' (Beckmann 2009:62). Similarly, in his studies on self-mutilation Armando Favazza observes that certain 'body practices' can provide 'temporary relief from a host of painful symptoms such as anxiety, depersonalization, and desperation', as well as touching upon 'the very profound human experiences of salvation, healing, and orderliness' (Favazza 1996:xix). It seems many of Kennedy's characters have similar experiences; embracing pain, even to the edge of death, as a final, undeniable proof of their existence – a suffering necessary to make them well and whole. In *Looking for the Possible Dance*, Webster uses Colin's crucifixion as a lesson in *carpe diem*:

...we will all die. [...] You mustn't forget. Not ever forget. You have to burn your light through, Colin, drink it all down, have it all inside you. Do every tiny thing you want to do. (Kennedy 1993:131)

Should Colin fail to fully appreciate the experience of being alive after the horrific pain he has endured then, Webster argues, his suffering has had no point, no significance. Webster's almost fatherly tone as he kneels on Colin's arms echoes the statement of Margaret's 'daddy' from the beginning of the book, that 'being alive is important. Everything *else* is a waste of time' (1993:5). During Colin's recuperation Margaret notices a difference the pain has effected in him, that a piece has been 'added or removed' beneath 'the paleness and the scars', making him seem 'somehow much closer to her than he had been', as if the pain has made him more real (1993:242). His renewed need to seize everything and hold it close prompts Colin's urging that Margaret go to London, and this in turn enables her realisation that she wants to go back, to be with him. The pain Colin goes through may therefore be seen as partly responsible for triggering the resolution of their relationship.

In 'Original Bliss', Helen returns to her violent husband in order to 'sort things out' (1997:300); offering to sacrifice herself for a God who is 'tender like a furnace' and will enable her to 'go through fear into somewhere else entirely' (1997:291). After being badly beaten by her husband and crushed by a wardrobe, Helen can barely comprehend that she is awake and alive, these being 'two such remarkable things' (1997:298), but gradually she comes to see herself as whole and new, and the discovery is joyful:

I got through. I was taken through. I mean, I'm *alive*, Edward. I believe in Something – or Something believes in me. And I believe in me and I can do any and every living thing a living person does. I am alive. (1997:301)

The pain Helen permits her husband to inflict upon her ultimately carries a 'therapeutic' quality in triggering her sense of salvation. At the conclusion of the story she lies peacefully with Edward under 'God the Patient, Jealous Lover' and, comfortable in the knowledge of her place in the world, Helen finally 'lets herself be' (1997:311).

Everything You Need carries a more direct focus on the notion of transcendence through pain. The writers on Foal Island, overseen by Joe Christopher, are encouraged to put themselves 'in the way of dying at any time':

Their aim should not be suicidal, but should make genuine efforts towards exposure to absolute risk. Joe was always keen that people should try their best. And, having survived, he was also keen that people tell him all about it. (1999:42)

Joe holds firmly to the belief that anyone with emptiness in their lives, anyone 'after a cure for anything' can find their physical and mental state 'altered by extreme experience' (1999:43). Protagonist Nathan does not believe this, maintaining that he is actually desperate to die, only lacking 'the necessary courage' to see the act through (ibid). However, Kennedy implies that Nathan in fact craves the 'temporary relief' described by Favazza, seeking affirmation through pain rather than the numb finality of death. Early in the book he attempts to hang himself, but only after laying out painkillers, a blanket, and a flask of herbal tea against his possible survival, suggesting that Nathan is a man used to failure. The hanging itself seems to serve primarily to remind Nathan how much he loves life, which is after all the goal Joe Christopher wishes all his writers to achieve. It is described as being like a rebirth; Nathan is 'washed', reality 'licks him whole, salting something dark and raw, in close beneath his skin' (1999:24). Clinging onto the rope at the last second and 'eye to eye with nothing', he finds himself 'dumbfounded by all that he is', with a 'hunger for more of himself, for more of everything' (ibid). Nathan appears to revel in the pain he experiences because it is the strongest indicator of his continued existence: '*Christ, it hurts. I am able to hurt. Jesus Christ, I fucking hurt. That's fucking lovely. Yes*' (1999:25). Left red-eyed, vomiting and shivering on the floor, he is nonetheless touched by the 'profound human experiences of salvation, healing and orderliness' which Favazza describes. The tragedy for Nathan is that this experience is unsustainable; the 'physical exaltation' fading and becoming 'unremarkable' to him, merely 'something else to disappoint' (1999:26). And yet whilst the transcendence, the depth of emotion encountered through risk and pain is not a long-term solution, it does provide a respite from the numbing depression of day-to-day existence – deprived of love itself, the looming proximity of death is the only thing capable of making Nathan love life, and love

himself, however briefly.

Through these incidents Kennedy seems to nod towards Sigmund Freud's work on the notion of a 'death instinct' within the human psyche. This drive towards destruction, principally of the self but capable also of being turned outward and inflicted upon others, only makes sense to Freud when placed alongside a counterbalancing pleasure principle:

Only by the concurrent or mutually opposing action of the two primal instincts – Eros and the death instinct – never by one or the other alone, can we explain the rich multiplicity of the phenomena of life. (Freud in Boothby 1991:4)

One could argue that the pain, violence and empty sexual encounters Kennedy's characters experience is representative of their struggle to balance these two opposing principles of pleasure and destruction. But perhaps a more appropriate philosophical comparison is to be found in the words of Georges Bataille who claimed that, rather than struggling within the psyche as opposing forces, the pleasurable and destructive drives actually work towards the same end:

The luxury of death is regarded by us in the same way as that of sexuality, first as a negation of ourselves, then – in a sudden reversal – as the profound truth of that movement of which life is the manifestation. (Bataille in Tew 2003:122)

From this standpoint, it is the same impulse that drives us towards sex and death – a desire to surrender the self completely in the hope of the sudden revelation of proof of life. However, while in sexual terms such revelation could be achieved through the powerful release of orgasm, the concept of proof of life *in death* only works if death itself does not occur. What Robin Morgan describes as the 'ultimate orgasm of violent death' (Morgan 1989:175) cannot be achieved if the death in question is one's own, for then only the complete negation of self is obtained. To reach the 'profound truth' which follows one has to pull back from the brink, attempting to experience everything right up to that final instant when life is extinguished, and then retreating. Cairns Craig notes that amongst Kennedy's characters 'those who achieve fearlessness do so only by journeying into the ultimate fears: there is no other way through' (Craig 1999:46). The problem with this is that, being repeatedly cheated of the final release of death, the feeling of fearlessness or 'profound truth' cannot last, as is illustrated by Nathan's perpetual frustration in *Everything You Need*.

Lacan interprets the death instinct as a more complex interweaving of 'simultaneously non-being and insisting to be' (Lacan in Boothby 1991:13) from which existence 'takes on all

the meaning it has'; a 'desire for death' being the manner in which the subject 'affirms himself for others' (Lacan 1977a:105). And it is this notion of total surrender of the self, combined intoxicatingly with a powerful confirmation of existence, to which some of Kennedy's characters appear irresistibly drawn. In 'Original Bliss' Helen gives herself over completely to the possibility of death and the result for her is a glorious affirmation, having been 'taken through' (Kennedy 1997:301). Though unasked for and unanticipated, Colin's crucifixion in *Looking for the Possible Dance* is also a kind of resurrection, leaving him 'much closer' to Margaret (1993:242). Even the depressive, self-obsessed Nathan, after his final near-death experience, seems tormented by Lacan's paradox:

...he wanted to be able to love those he loved and able to hate them, too. And he wanted to rest at ease in his skin and in his time and place, while he wished to abandon them completely and be gone. And he wanted to die of wanting and he wanted to be properly alive. (1999:537)

This harks back to the claim of the protagonist in 'Night Geometry and the Garscadden Trains' that 'there is only one thing I want more than proof that I existed and that's some proof, while I'm here, that I exist' (1990:34). The affirmation of existence in Kennedy is frequently centred upon the physical, affirming the connection with the body in what Helen Stoddart describes as a 'grappling between abstraction and substance' where 'doubt, disappearance and abstraction' collide with 'pain, spectacle and physical presence' (Stoddart 2005:136). Sex or death may each provide a way for Kennedy's characters to prove their 'substance', but as death is so final, with proof lying in total negation, violence and pain are used instead as substitutes which reach towards death, without actually touching it. Thus Jennifer in *So I am Glad* resorts to more and more sadistic sex in order to feel; whilst Nathan repeatedly assaults himself physically in *Everything You Need*; and 'Original Bliss' sees Helen martyring herself to her husband's brutality while Edward attempts to quell his desire for violent pornography with electric shocks and emetic drugs. In each case the need for violence speaks to and provides an intense proof of existence, even though the proof thus obtained may only be temporary.

However, where violence and the looming presence of death are ultimately shown to be inadequate for characters seeking affirmation, the more powerful, far-reaching alternative, returned to again and again, is love. Most often, this is highlighted once characters have explored the limitations of violence – Helen survives her beating and is allowed to finally be with Edward; Jennifer moves on from her sadistic sex with Steven to discover a meaningful relationship with Savinien; Nathan is not permitted to die but is instead given the space to

reach out to his daughter and even to develop a closer relationship with his dog, who is not permitted to die either. Consistently, Kennedy chooses to keep pulling her characters back from the edge, to give their failing, struggling humanity a chance for redemption. And it is through love, she implies, that such redemption is possible. The violence and pain must be transcended, and when one has passed through them, there is love on the other side. In her book *Disappearing Men* Carole Jones observes that transcendence, whether 'spiritual or secular', is 'always frustrated in Kennedy's fiction' (Jones 2009:124), but then Jones chooses to define transcendence as an 'escape' from the 'material bodily realm', whereas I would suggest that, within Kennedy's work, it is portrayed as only being achievable through acknowledgement of one's physicality. Escaping from the bodily realm seems more likely to result in death, the ultimate negation of self, than in the affirmation of existence so crucial in Kennedy's writing – transcendence *here* works at creating a unity between body and mind rather than a separation. Kennedy implies that one must expose one's vulnerability in order to transcend it, and that moving through such exposure only makes one stronger. Violence and pain, and to a lesser extent mechanical sexual activity, represent a short-term solution to emotional numbness which enables her characters to feel, but the ultimate goal is love, which is trickier to achieve and requires faith in others if it is to succeed – throwing off notions of the self as something solitary or isolated, embracing one's vulnerability, and considering the possibility of unity.

3. Unity and Isolation

Cairns Craig has described A. L. Kennedy as being engaged in 'uncovering the 'You and I' in the isolated individual of modernity' (Craig 2004:273). The seeming polarity of unity and isolation represents arguably the most powerful central conflict within her work, a struggle for compromise between the fear of being alone and the fear of losing one's sense of individual identity through close connection with others. The need for proof of existence, coupled with the need to give that existence meaning, may cause her characters to reach out but this is also an act of vulnerability, an exposure of the self. The quest for unity brings risk, but the alternative is perpetual isolation, and Kennedy continually returns to the premise that reaching out is preferable to remaining alone.

The 'isolated individual of modernity' has been a feature of British literature since the middle of the twentieth century, where a degree of 'existential futility' has meant that there 'are no more heroes', replaced instead by 'the individual; solitary, responsible for his or her own destiny, yet powerless when set against the ineluctable forces of the universe' (Carter & McRae 1997:449-450). This struggle of the individual against the universe, the Everyman in constant conflict with his or her own powerlessness and sense of futility, triggered initially by the fragmentation and disillusionment following the Second World War, has continued to preoccupy British writers through the end of the twentieth century and on into the twenty-first, A. L. Kennedy among them. The existential theories from which this exploration of futility is drawn can be traced back to Heidegger, and more recently Jean-Luc Nancy, particularly in the light of their work on Being. Jean Wahl states that for Heidegger 'to exist' is 'to be outside oneself, to be in the world' (Wahl 1969:48). Wahl goes on:

It is only when we are dead that our life becomes a veritable whole according to Heidegger. Thus the idea of boundless freedom ends in failure. (1969:64)

For Heidegger, then, trying to reconcile ourselves to our 'being in the world' is vital not only to lend understanding to our existence but to *prove we exist in the first place*. However, if our life only attains complete meaning once we are dead, then the entirety of our lived existence becomes one of dissatisfaction and the dread which is, Heidegger claims, our 'fundamental feeling'; a dread which we experience 'not in connection with any particular thing, but in connection with the world as a whole' (Wahl 1969:68). This fundamental dread can be directly related to the 'existential futility' described above. Jean-Luc Nancy's development of

this view centres on not simply *being in the world* but *being with others* – for Nancy, 'existence is *with*: otherwise nothing exists' (Nancy 2000:4). Thus our existence 'can only be grasped in the paradoxical simultaneity of togetherness (anonymous, confused, and indeed massive) and disseminated singularity (these or those “people(s)”, or “a guy”, “a girl”, “a kid”)' (2000:7). This aspect of Nancy's philosophy also correlates with that of John Macmurray, who argues that we can only define ourselves *in relation* to others (Macmurray 1933:137). Each of us may consider ourselves to be alone in a crowd but we must simultaneously acknowledge that we form a part of that crowd in order to grasp the sense of our 'being in the world' or 'being with'; which is itself, according to this particular philosophy, only the more precise definition of 'being' – 'being with', in fact, signifies the true nature of our existence. For Nancy, the sense of futility or dread fostered within an isolated existence can stem only from a desperate desire for individuality, which causes us to continually attempt (and fail) to separate our 'being' from our 'being with':

...not being able to say “we” is what plunges every “I”, whether individual or collective, into the insanity where he cannot say “I” either. To want to say “we” is not at all sentimental, not at all familial or “communitarian”. It is existence reclaiming its due or its condition: coexistence. (Nancy 2000:42)

It is this particular existential dilemma – the struggle for personal identity and 'being a self' set against a craving for acceptance and happy coexistence, for 'being with' – which forms a central part of A. L. Kennedy's fiction. When Kennedy began writing in the 1990s, it was as one voice in 'an age of recession and preoccupation' (Carter & McRae 1997:449) where new authors such as Iain Sinclair, Will Self and Jonathan Coe were frequently drawn to 'very specifically interrogate the crises of identity of their own class' (Tew 2004:86); exploring that particular brand of existential futility which comes from dwelling in a middle-class, urban-centred, consumer-driven world, a world, as Philip Tew puts it, which is 'suffused with banality' (ibid). The struggle of each of these individual characters may once again be summarised by the desire expressed in 'Night Geometry and the Garscadden Trains':

There is only one thing I want more than proof that I existed and that's some proof, while I'm here, that I exist. Not being an Olympic Skier, or a chat show host, I won't get my wish. There are too many people alive today for us to notice every single one. (Kennedy 1990:34)

This passage demonstrates a direct opposition to the existential theories expressed by

Heidegger and Nancy – the protagonist here believes that it is only through acknowledgement of her unique qualities, her individuality, that her existence can be proven. Accepting that she is not solely an individual but also, crucially, part of the 'many people' she mentions would provide existential certainty, but at the cost of the view of herself as an individual self or isolated agent. This desperate craving for recognition set against the fear of anonymity, of losing one's self in a crowd, is particularly prevalent in the works of contemporary Scottish writers – Kennedy sits alongside a host of novelists each exploring these issues in his or her own way. James Kelman and Irvine Welsh deal with the place of the individual within the lower levels of Scottish society; Iain Banks with the one lost in the miasma of history and industrialization; and Janice Galloway with the woman crying out to be heard over the shouts of the men. All of these are writers dealing in the experience of 'anonymity and despair' (Tew 2004:111) through attempting to capture 'the nuances of a range of urban voices demanding attention' (2004:163).

The main conflict experienced by these characters, then, is the struggle to reconcile the notion of the self (that is, individual identity) with the apparent indifference of the society within which that self has to exist. The ultimate aim must be to achieve a union whereby the self feels connected to the society surrounding it while still maintaining a sense of individual identity, but such balance may be difficult to achieve, even impossible. Arguably one always has to connect with society, even if only in a crude physical sense, through every-day activity such as work or travel, but it is only through establishing greater personal connection that an individual may, perhaps, be at risk of losing identity. Conversely, though, the strengthening of such a connection may also be crucial for the individual, if his or her individuality is only recognisable *in relation to* the society surrounding it. In this case an attempt to isolate oneself from the outside world merely encourages anonymity. Thus this conflict between isolation and unity, and the place of individual identity in each, is a cause of very real *fear* for these characters, though in many cases the source of the fear goes unrecognised and it is simply felt as a general sense of unease.

Being an 'embodied self' in a society where violence and disease come ever closer to the individual through encroaching on previously 'safe' spaces such as schools, hospitals and homes, it is all too easy for the boundaries of internal and external threat (that is, the threat to the self as opposed to the threat to the body housing it) to become blurred so that the individual falls into a state of 'embodied paranoia' – 'not knowing what to fear most, and then feeling guilty about this very uncertainty' (Frank 2005:217). With postmodern times placing the embodied self in 'a *perpetual* condition of multiply threatened intactness'; the individual is

faced with a terrifying existence where 'everything has potential to threaten' (2005:218). The death of the self, marked by the loss of individual identity, therefore becomes inextricably linked to the death of the body, and one becomes trapped within Lacan's 'symbolic order' of 'simultaneously non-being and insisting to be' (Boothby 1991:13), fighting isolation and anonymity in order to *be* in the fullest sense of the word, and to keep both body and self alive and whole.

R. D. Laing and The Divided Self

Cairns Craig asserts that 'from the very inauguration of the modern, Scottish thought was searching for an alternative to that 'purely individual self' based on the independent, rational consciousness' (Craig 2004:280). He references Hume's observation that we have 'no choice left but betwixt a false reason and none at all'; and observes that Scotland has developed 'a literature that is committed to going beyond reason in order to escape from the madness to which the isolated rational consciousness [...] inevitably leads' (2004:280). Such forays 'beyond reason', initiated by texts such as Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) or Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) could easily, in contemporary terms, encompass the industrial nightmare of Alasdair Gray's *Lanark* (1981); Iain Banks' portrayal of casual murder and animal cruelty in *The Wasp Factory* (1984); or Alice Thompson's exploration of desire and sexual sadism in *Justine* (1996). More recently, James Robertson's widely successful *The Testament of Gideon Mack* (2006) provides an echo of Hogg in its examination of a priest who makes a pact with the Devil; whilst Irvine Welsh's *Skagboys* (2012) once again explores the darker recesses of Scottish drug culture. Though A. L. Kennedy may not wish her writing to be simply labelled as part of a Scottish tradition, there is some evidence of this trait, this reaching 'beyond reason', in her own work. Douglas Gifford argues that *So I Am Glad* 'deliberately echoes older Scottish fiction of the supernatural with its doppelgangers and dualisms' (Gifford 1997b:620), while *Paradise* deals with the uncertain, liminal existence of the alcoholic and *The Blue Book* delves into the world of a professional psychic. Going 'beyond reason' by exploring the darker side of humanity or dabbling in the supernatural may not be the exclusive remit of Scottish authors but it does appear to hold a certain fascination, perhaps because identifying as Scottish involves the acceptance of a history banished to the peripheries of mainstream, 'British' culture (see 'Belonging, Identity, Place', above). But what all these writers have in common, aside from their nationality, is an apparent drive to examine the 'isolated rational consciousness' as a thing *in division* – the self fighting against the self. Again and again characters within these texts are split in two; whether by addiction or

sexuality or simply the naggings of conscience, and frequently tread a fine line between 'escaping' madness and plunging headlong into it.

This existential tightrope and the struggles of the self against division and towards definition are issues intimately explored in the work of Scottish psychologist R. D. Laing, who prefaces his 1965 text *The Divided Self* with the reassuring statement:

In the context of our present pervasive madness that we call normality, sanity, freedom, all our frames of reference are ambiguous and equivocal. (Laing 1965:11)

In his 2005 study of Laing and his work, Gavin Miller observes how the man 'moved from the forefront of humane, and humanist, psychiatry to a position of notoriety', going on to note that Laing in his later years was 'alcoholic, professionally unlicensed, and as disturbed, at times, as anyone he had ever treated' (Miller 2005:1). However, while he may remain a controversial figure in the field, marked by the 'stigma of irrationality which is frequently attached to anyone who seems to criticise the authority of psychiatric science' (ibid), Laing's work examining issues pertaining to the self and individual identity does provide a fascinating perspective through which to study Kennedy's fiction. In particular, his development of the concept of 'ontological insecurity'; defined as 'the experience of threatened existence' (Miller 2005:45), as well as his work on the embodied and unembodied self, resonate with Kennedy's examination of 'the contradictions of a modern world obsessed with selfhood and yet where lives seem increasingly decentred' (Tew 2003:133). The struggle for the self to achieve an individual identity within a 'decentred' lifestyle can lead to a sense of the self being under threat from anything and everything outside of it (as in Frank's theory of 'embodied paranoia', above). Laing and Esterson's work on *Sanity, Madness and the Family* highlights how other people in particular, carrying other identities, become 'menacing' and are 'not to be trusted' (Laing & Esterson 1970:98). The psychologists' study of families seemingly lacking in any 'genuine affection' observed how such insecurity came to 'preclude the possibility of any spontaneous, unguarded, trusting expression of self with others, without contracting rights or obligations' (ibid). The exposure of oneself to others is, clearly, a risky business. Another individual may enrich ones life experience or, conversely, may be responsible 'by a glance, a gesture, or a remark' for 'shrivelling up the reality in which one is lodged' (Goffman in Laing & Esterson 1970:97). The threat of a shrivelling personal reality is sufficient for some people to avoid any genuine interaction with others – the anticipated damage to the self outweighs the possibility of a positive outcome. Thus, in order to function in day-to-day activities, the

self divides – what the individual perceives as his or her own, 'true' self is hidden behind the mask of a created, 'false' self, to ease unavoidable social interaction, and Laing emphasises that this divided self is not an experience restricted to the traditional 'schizoid' personality on the periphery of 'normal' society but is, in fact, incredibly commonplace:

'A man without a mask' is indeed very rare. One even doubts the possibility of such a man. Everyone in some measure wears a mask, and there are many things we do not put ourselves into fully. In 'ordinary' life it seems hardly possible for it to be otherwise. (Laing 1965:95)

For Laing, the persistently encroaching nature of the 'other' is regularly countered with the creation of a false self, as a kind of protection. In Kennedy's work this 'masking' may be seen in *So I Am Glad* when Jennifer assumes the role of The Captain for her sadistic sexual encounters with Steven, thus protecting her self from intimacy and exposure. To achieve a similar goal Nathan in *Everything You Need* hides his complete and true identity by presenting himself to his daughter only as Nathan the writer, not Nathan the father. However, the danger of applying this mask too readily, Laing observes, is that it can cause alienation from the body; the 'true' personality is seen as a 'hyper-conscious', unembodied self detached from the functional, yet 'false', bodily self (Laing 1965:69). In this circumstance the actions of the body can become like the actions of a machine, meaningless repetitions which the 'mental self' observes dispassionately from a distance. Again, Jennifer stands out as a Kennedy protagonist who experiences this kind of distancing; describing her sexual exploits as if they were happening to someone else, unable to connect emotionally with the physicality of sex. She states 'I discover I am having sex again' as if the action is beyond her control, almost accidental, and she finds herself 'not surprised, just disappointed' at this turn of events (Kennedy 1995:1). The false self may also be employed as a buffer against the outside world – Laing and Esterson coined the term '*affective impoverishment*' to describe a patient who, wearied by the 'superficial chatter of others', employed 'a false self to maintain an empty collusion' (Laing & Esterson 1970:67). This type of situation is one in which Kennedy frequently places her protagonists; 'colluding' with the expectations of the world outside themselves in order to appear 'normal', while on the inside they feel anything but. Sometimes the outside world itself becomes a fantasy creation or stage upon which the characters act out their 'false' selves – the wife-beating husband in 'Marriage' (*What Becomes*) imagines the romantic image of himself and his wife as being 'admired, a little focus of attention for the street' (Kennedy 2009:135); while the wife in 'Cap O' Rushes' (*Night Geometry*) thoroughly

embraces the fantastical by imagining her husband as a Goblin King, father to two 'little changelings' – a belief which, in her mind, needs little justification beyond 'Colin was a goblin because it was obvious he was a goblin and once you knew he was a goblin, you couldn't think otherwise' (1990:110-111). In both these cases it is the outside world, the concept of 'normality', which has become skewed and falsified in the protagonist's mind, and the inner self, where the truth resides, is kept hidden.

'I' Versus 'You': Cooper and Macmurray

Through his notion of the divided self, Laing presents us with the problem of how exactly we go about reconciling our hidden, 'true' self with the world around us, especially when we view that world as hostile and threatening to our integrity. David Cooper, psychologist and associate of R. D. Laing argues that, in a world where interaction with others is unavoidable, maintaining the self intact is impossible. Since 'I' only recognise my existence as a separate entity through interaction with 'you' - the recognition of which Cooper terms the 'existential birth' (Cooper 1970:36) – any assertion of my self requires, through such interaction, the giving of a part of my self to you. In fact Cooper takes this further and claims that such giving actually involves a 'partial death' – in order to acknowledge the existence of 'you' (and by extension 'me', as something separate from 'you'), 'I' have to kill a part of my self. He states that:

We all repeatedly die partial deaths in order that the others, for whom we are the sacrificial offerings, may live. The archetypal Christ, in so far as he has any reality at all, is in each of us. (1970:40)

When considering Kennedy's fiction this notion could easily invite connection with *Looking for the Possible Dance*, where Colin becomes a graphically 'archetypal Christ' – his brutal crucifixion asserts the existence of the men who crucify him, and thus he stands as a warning to others but, by surviving the experience, his 'partial death' serves as proof of his own existence at the same time. However, aside from this rather literal application Cooper's dramatic statement is a little too extreme to sit comfortably within Kennedy's fiction. By Cooper's analysis, we must be prepared to sacrifice a part of ourselves in order to 'be' with others, unless we can find a way to 'leave each other alone' (Cooper 1970:88). Until such time as we can co-exist side by side without the partial death of our selves we live in a world of what Sartre termed 'existential haemorrhage', where my inner self 'bleeds' from me under the gaze of another, 'you', so that 'I' become 'an object in the world' – 'your' look 'penetrates

the space of my subjectivity' (Cooper 1970:53).

I would argue that the conflict of unity and isolation in Kennedy's fiction owes more to Scottish philosopher John Macmurray, for whom there is no such thing as the isolated self in the first place:

The idea of an isolated agent is self-contradictory. Any agent is necessarily in relation to the Other. Apart from this essential relation he does not exist.
(Macmurray 1961:24)

As social beings our selves, our individualities, can *only* be defined through interaction with others. Macmurray 'insists' that we are 'dependent [...] not only on the whole network of society but on the existence of others', through whom each of us 'achieves and maintains the significance of being a person' (Craig 2004:79). Without the presence of 'you' to define me, 'I' do not exist. It is this aspect of Macmurray's philosophy which Nancy appears to incorporate into his theory of 'being with', above. In Macmurray's model it is in fact *essential* that you penetrate 'the space of my subjectivity', and I yours, as it is only through such a shared sense of subjectivity that either of us can be defined as human beings. Unless we enter into a reciprocal opening up of the self we run the risk of becoming an object, rather than a subject, in the eyes of others, and the danger there is that 'the object is always recognized as in some sense purely for our use or for our enjoyment' (Macmurray 1933:126). If we start to view a person as an object we are 'making a personal relationship with them impossible, because it involves treating them, at least for the time being, as less than persons' (ibid). It is only through 'the communion of selves' (1933:137); through seeking to know and understand 'you', that my self, my 'me', is brought into existence. Macmurray is careful to emphasise that the case is not 'I am because you are', but that 'I am I because I know you, and that you are you because you know me' (ibid). Thus, in Macmurray's philosophy, the solitary individual of contemporary fiction yearns for meaningful interaction with others not only to rid him of his isolation but also, more fundamentally, to prove his own existence. Some of the ways in which Kennedy's characters resort to sex and violence in their quest for such proof have already been noted (see 'Sex and Violence', above), but many of these methods involve a kind of objectification of the other; a *true* personal relationship, one through which individual identity may be clarified, may still remain out of reach.

Interestingly, Macmurray is one of the few thinkers whose 'ideas resonate with those of Laing both as an influence, and as a parallel, philosophical theory' (Miller 2005:5). The problem for many characters within A. L. Kennedy's work is that they appear to carry Laing's

theories alongside Macmurray's – craving the contact of others in order to define themselves but simultaneously dreading such exposure, for if in the end the other denies them, they cease to exist. If this situation is tackled by use of a 'false self' this only serves to create further problems. On the one hand, the recognition of the false self by the other ensures the acknowledgement of one's existence while keeping the true self safely tucked away; however, if the 'false' self is that which the world knows and recognises as 'you', *that* self could arguably be said to represent who you truly are, while the other you keep hidden away is in fact the illusion.

Isolation in Kennedy

For Cairns Craig, John Macmurray's philosophy is in direct opposition to the traditional definition of postmodernism which, he argues, remains 'deeply rooted' in the crises of the 'modern' and is in fact 'modernism caught in a repetitive loop' in which our connection with the real is 'continually undermined' (Craig 2004:270). This repetitive modernism does not consider the Self as an agent interacting with the real world around it but rather focuses on an 'isolated knower, who is the abstraction of an independent and isolated witness to the world rather than a participant in it' (2004:269). Macmurray represents *true* postmodern thinking for Craig because:

...[he] starts from the entirely different basis that the Self is first an agent rather than a thinker, and that this agent inhabits a social world of persons rather than a mechanical world of objects or a dynamic world of organisms. (2004:272)

Craig argues that those Scottish writers who may genuinely be branded postmodernists (in which group he places A. L. Kennedy) succeed in breaking out of this modernist loop to adopt a viewpoint based on Macmurray's, where the Self becomes an agent, an 'I', which interacts with the society of people around it, the 'You'; rather than remaining the 'modern' Self or 'isolated knower', refusing the role of Walter Benjamin's *flâneur*, observing the crowd but remaining steadfastly separate from it (Benjamin 1999:420). What must be emphasised here, though, is that these supposedly postmodern Scottish authors do not present characters as simple agents with no thoughts or knowledge; rather they deal in protagonists who are in *a state of constant conflict* between *being* an isolated intelligence and *interacting* with the world around them.

A. L. Kennedy's writing perfectly and repeatedly explores and expresses this conflict. She continually presents us with characters who crave unity while at the same time fearing the

cost of breaking out of necessarily self-involved isolation. And these characters are not the heroes of traditional fiction; rather their ordinariness is emphasised – the woman next door, the man you pass in the street. But this goes deeper than Kennedy merely expressing 'empathy for modern losers' (Gifford 1997b:616). The unremarkable appearance of her characters seems crucial to her narrative, making the intense inner existence of each one even more remarkable in comparison and yet conversely assisting in making each character more likeable and recognisable to the reader. Carole Jones notes that Kennedy 'disarms the unbearable melodrama and hysteria of her characters' personal existential crises with the mundanity of their ordinary, everyday lives' (Jones 2009:131). Habitually placing her protagonists in a contemporary, urban setting, Kennedy gives voice to one individual in a massive, heaving crowd, one continually fighting against the assault of the humdrum, struggling to reconcile his or her perceived selfhood to a world populated by an ever-increasing, seething mass of humanity. This is expressed most clearly in the final paragraphs of 'Night Geometry and the Garscadden Trains':

I learned that half of some things is less than nothing at all and that, contrary to popular belief, people, many people, almost all the people, live their lives in the best way they can with generally good intentions and still leave absolutely nothing behind. [...] But the silent majority and I do have one memorial, at least. The Disaster. We have small lives, easily lost in foreign droughts, or famines; the occasional incendiary incident, or a wall of pale faces, crushed against grillwork, one Saturday afternoon in Spring. This is not enough. (Kennedy 1990:34)

Though this is perhaps the one place where Kennedy lays out clearly the struggle her characters face, and very early in her published career, the fight against anonymity and the terror of isolation is a thread which runs through all her work and continues to be refined and shaped in more subtle ways. Glenda Norquay observes that Kennedy 'consistently engages' with the problem of 'becoming 'one hundred per cent' a self within the complicated dynamics of subjectivity' (Norquay 2005:143-144). Norquay in fact highlights Freudian and Lacanian elements in Kennedy's exploration of the psyche, based upon the understanding that 'from the moment of birth our sense of self is predicated upon lack, by the child's separation from the mother'; so that 'driven by loss and isolation we are always searching for the (illusory) possibility of wholeness' (2005:145). Lacan's theories of human desire being fuelled by lack seem to me very pertinent to Kennedy's fiction and will be explored in more detail below (see 'Desire and Addiction'). Evidently, though, if the possibility of wholeness is an illusion or if, in fact, the wholeness we seek can only be provided by union with another person, then the

individual will always be doomed to failure in this particular quest.

Kennedy's characters are portrayed as continually struggling to connect with others whilst seemingly desperate for recognition of their individual existence. Cristie March notes that frequently, as discussed in the previous chapter, 'sex and sexuality begin as central to the ways in which characters attempt to relate' (March 2002:139). When Mary is first trying to relate to Nathan in *Everything You Need*, not knowing that he is her father, her thoughts shape this relationship, this 'need in her for *something*', as a sexual attraction:

His giving against her, a kind of admission in the pressure of his arms, a change: the mildly peach-skin nap of the skin between his eyebrows when she kissed him: unlikely things to think of and to find so good. (Kennedy 1999:327)

In contrast, Hannah Luckcraft in *Paradise* satisfies the 'need in her for *something*' with alcohol, and shapes her self-definition around alcohol and this need for it:

Being me is a job – is labour so time-consuming and expensive that I have to have a second job just to support it. So that I can drink, I have to *get* drink and that isn't something people give away... (2004:84)

However, Hannah's relationship with fellow alcoholic Robert puts this need for alcohol in conflict with the need for sex; something which 'we will do next, must do next'. For Hannah, sex with Robert makes everything, even herself, 'simplified and clear' (2004:78), but the alcohol, a necessary part of herself, means that she cannot remember the sexual encounter afterwards and all she has is the 'weight of forgetfulness, of losing us' (2004:83) – here sex seems the clearest way to create a unity, an 'us', but in order to connect to that and 'remember more' Hannah would have to sacrifice the alcohol which forms an integral part of her 'being me'; her self in isolation.

March's further observation that sex becomes 'almost inconsequential when characters do or do not manage to connect' (March 2002:139) seems erroneous, however. Though many of Kennedy's characters do in fact 'remain isolated' (*ibid*), with their thirst for wholeness unsatisfied, for those who achieve a close personal connection the sexual component of that relationship continues to have importance. Edward and Helen in 'Original Bliss', Jennifer and Savinien in *So I Am Glad* and Arthur and Beth in *The Blue Book* all develop and persist in using the physical connection of sex as a tender yet powerful means of communication. However, it is also important to recognise that, when the attempt at connection through sexual means breaks down, language and crucially *writing* is the thing to which Kennedy's characters

consistently turn. Writing becomes the simplest, the purest means through which these individuals can communicate, or attempt to do so; perhaps even more than sex writing is a reaching out from the self to the other, and a true expression of love.

'The Act and Art of Love'

If one self is struggling to connect to another in Kennedy's work, writing can form an integral part of such communication. Trapped in a loveless and abusive marriage, Helen in 'Original Bliss' has 'never been able to write' the word *love*; 'a small word like a scalpel or a pocket knife' (Kennedy 1997:252) because it seems so far removed from her personal experience. In contrast to this, Savinien in *So I Am Glad* writes to Jennifer about how much he loves her, because it is 'more difficult to speak than to write' (1995:235), and she in turn feels happy that he has chosen to write about her because this involves her in the writing process, giving her 'no cause to feel lonely when he drew back into his words because I would be there, too' (1995:234). Once Savinien has gone, it is Jennifer who then writes the tale of their encounter as her own letter to a departed love; 'now there's no one here but me and you and this' (1995:280), desiring nothing more than to 'put this down right' (1995:272). Nathan in *Everything You Need*, perhaps Kennedy's most extensive exploration of the relationship between writing and love, is also desperate to 'put this down right' because, estranged from his wife and terrified to tell his daughter his true identity, writing seems the only means of communication available to him. In the absence of anything else, his need for it is vicious:

If this is all you fucking have, if this is all you'll ever be allowed to have, if this is all you will fucking allow yourself, then this is what you fucking do, you cunt, this is what you fucking do until it's done. This is what you are for. This is all that you were ever fucking for, so write. (1999:494)

Over time Nathan's writing becomes not just about his daughter but *for* his daughter, telling her about her childhood and the way his relationship with her mother broke down, in the hope that Mary, as a writer herself, will understand him; telling himself that 'in the end she'll read me and she'll know what I mean, because we're like each other. She'll take in what I give her and she'll add herself and we will fit' (1999:221). And, in the end, having provided Mary with his Rules of Writing, he concludes:

Here's one last Rule for you: Rule Seven. I think that I have tried to follow it and not done well, but I do still believe this to be the most useful and beautiful Rule of all, the one that is most true: *do it for love. (1999:567)*

Kennedy herself describes the writing process as a 'sensual' one, where the aim is simply 'to communicate, person to person' (Kennedy in Bell 1995:100); through a medium which 'can give me a sense of power within my own identity, a permission to be myself and a message from the world beyond me that there are other people who feel the way I do' (1995:102). Within Kennedy's fiction, then, writing becomes 'the act and art of love', causing reading to become 'a reciprocation of that love, an absolution' (Dunnigan 2000:150). But once again there is the conflict between unity and isolation here. Writing may give me 'permission to be myself', but then by sharing that writing with another, who reads it, there is always the risk that my writing, and by implication the self which I have laid out in the words, may be rejected. And then my attempt at unity has failed, and my self is not only isolated as it was before but isolated and exposed, which is worse. Thus for Kennedy's characters writing may also take on an 'emotionally sacrificial nature' as an 'attempt to find presence, to restore an absence or [...] an emptiness' (2000:148-149). Writing may involve an exposure of the self and a vulnerability far greater than that laid out through sex, and as such the attempt to 'find presence' remains one filled with risk.

The Blue Book

In *The Blue Book*, published 2011, the idea of writing as an attempt to connect with the other is a crucial plot point, as in *Everything You Need*, with the protagonist once again reaching out to a loved one through the written word. Again, too, the risk involved in such exposure of the self is emphasised by Kennedy's refusal to conclude the exchange. Where in *Everything You Need* the reader is left with Nathan's pleading final words, 'please, my darling, have need of me' (1999:567); in *The Blue Book* it is protagonist Elizabeth's plea we are left with - 'I'd give you my hand if you wanted. I'd give you everything' (2011:373). In both cases the narrative ends before the exchange is complete, before the other has received what has been given by the 'I' in each case. The reader is left with the possibility of acceptance and unity, but an equal possibility that these tender selves, laid bare through the writing process, may be rejected. No happy conclusion is reached, no union achieved within the space of the narrative. The fact that Kennedy refuses to complete this crucial exchange between lover and loved, writer and reader, serves to demonstrate just how important she considers such exchanges to be, while also putting herself at risk alongside her protagonists, as she admitted to Kaye Mitchell in a 2008 interview – 'I have no idea what people's reactions will be. It's not my job to second guess the reader. I have to do the best I can and hope it will be okay for someone' (Kennedy in Mitchell 2008:131). By ending her texts on a note of yearning, Kennedy appears to accept

the risk that she may leave her readers unsatisfied alongside her characters; wanting more which she will not, or cannot, give.

As with Kennedy's other novels, *The Blue Book* presents an intricate and detailed exploration of the relationship between self and other, the definition of individual identity, and the quest for unity and for love. The plot centres on Elizabeth Barber's reunion with her old lover, Arthur Lockwood. The couple shared a passionate relationship but also worked together as 'fake mediums', perfecting the art of cheating the credulous, until Elizabeth could no longer accept the inherent falsity of the profession and left Arthur to pursue it alone, attempting to find 'the right ways to do wrong' (Kennedy 2011:30). Making one of her principal characters a 'fake medium' gives Kennedy an interesting angle from which to investigate what is meant by the 'self' – as a man constantly channelling other personalities and identities, Arthur is forced to consistently employ 'false selves', similar to those described by R. D. Laing, among which his true self hides; he is the perfect example of a 'man with a mask' because his day-to-day existence, his employment, requires him to be so. Like an actor, Arthur cannot allow his true self to become visible, not only because of the risk of exposure but also because his very ability to do his work depends on his true self remaining hidden. To be successful in his work, however, he must make his clients believe in him, and so he has to establish a thoroughly trustworthy and sympathetic character – he is constantly attempting to create an intense connection, but one based entirely upon falsehood; his job simply 'to be the perfect liar, because that's what his audience needs' (2011:27). After working with a woman who was raped and mutilated by the murderers of her husband, giving her 'everything' she needs by allowing her to visualise her husband and her son just for a moment, Arthur is left feeling hollow:

The man will stand and hide himself from the end of his work, another job done, and he will watch another stranger walk away and he will wonder how he came to be here. He will wonder how he came to be so far from love. (2011:119)

Love is about putting the self at risk, exposing the self to another and finding unity through such interaction and, Kennedy implies, Arthur can never come close to achieving that while he continues in a profession founded upon so much fraud. Within these sections which focus on Arthur's work there is a juxtaposition between frequent references to him as 'the man', a cold and impersonal third-person label automatically distancing Arthur from his own identity, and lengthy italicised passages which reveal his innermost thoughts, emphasising the division within him, demonstrating how much his hidden, inner self is struggling with love and loss:

*I shouldn't be alone.
I shouldn't be without her.
That ought not to happen.
Except it will.
No words to stop it.
And I'll lie on the bed and be alone and be alive, but not exactly. (2011:181)*

Once again, words are important here. Arthur tries to write a letter to Elizabeth, even though he knows there are 'no words to stop' his isolation, but insists '*I'll write to her anyway – an angry, inadequate, pleading thing – and I will wish for magic, that she will touch where I touch the paper, I will tell her my wish, my little wish that I know will fail and not bring an answer*' (2011:182). The 'magic' here lies in the writing being read and accepted. But even in full awareness that such a thing is impossible, the implication is that the act of writing is enough, because taking the time to sit and write words of love is the very thing which proves Arthur's humanity and his ability to love in the first place. One could even speculate that the act of writing is in fact essential; based on Kennedy's own description of writing as a 'sensual and spiritual experience of enormous power' (Kennedy in Bell 1995:102) – for the man or woman in love, writing is perhaps first and foremost a reflex action, not an intellectual or even especially logical one; an uncontrollable impulse which forms a crucial part of being in love. By the end of *The Blue Book*, though, it is Elizabeth who actually writes; using the model of the traditional 'blue book' in which mediums keep the details of their clients, she presents Arthur with one of his own:

'It's your book, Art. That's what it is – it's your book. Because I know you and I learned you and it's your story. It's the story that I wrote for you and it's your story and all the parts of it that matter, they're all true.' (2011:359)

There are things which Elizabeth cannot bear to speak aloud, and so the story of how Arthur had a son, who died before his father even knew he existed, is presented through Arthur's blue book, because Arthur has to know the truth if his relationship with Elizabeth is to work, because otherwise '*we would be broken and pretending and a lie and I can't give him another lie – not my love*' (2011:356). This writing out of painful truths echoes that of Nathan in *Everything You Need*, who tells Mary in writing that she is his daughter and that he loves her, a truth which must be told but is too difficult to speak aloud. Kennedy continues to return to the point that love cannot be founded on a lie, or an unspoken truth, and when speech is not enough (or, conversely, overwhelmingly too much), writing provides the alternative – it

becomes an act of love, and a step towards unity.

Like *Everything You Need*, *The Blue Book* is filled with the desperate desire to communicate, struggling against the fear of the consequences of doing so truthfully. To add an extra dimension to the inherent tricks and quirks of Arthur's profession, Kennedy reveals the numbers used as code between Arthur and Elizabeth in their work together:

5 – Help

6 – Betrayal

7 – Love

8 – Accident

The useful words, they had to be numbered to let us work them as we'd wish [...] A word could repeat and repeat and repeat and give you loss underneath its own meaning, a stranger's little gift. Whatever we said, thought, did, the numbers ran through it, illuminated, were additionally generous, complicated. (2011:214)

Having provided the reader with this information, in places throughout the text Kennedy then uses this code herself in the numbers at the top of each page, giving an 'additionally generous' and 'complicated' experience to the reader, too, who must then flick back and forth attempting to decipher the author's clues. For example, when one finds the number 934 at the top of page 156, a page discussing mothers and children, and then learns that, according to Beth and Arthur's code, 9-3-4 stands for PAIN-LOSS-CHILD, one begins to get a hint of where the narrative is going, although the tragic death of Beth and Arthur's child is not actually revealed in the text until page 366. This layering of the narrative with the reader's own individual experience is not only a very clever device for drawing the reader further into the plot (worked alongside frequent use of the second-person-singular 'you'), but also serves to highlight just how important communication is as a theme throughout the text. The secret Beth yearns but fears to tell Arthur, it is implied, is a secret the author yearns to tell the reader, too, and yet because it is a secret centred on something so tragic, the needless death of a child, the very revealing of it is frightening. Such a revelation may be a step towards the truthful communication essential for bringing the 'I' and the 'you' closer together, but the nature of the revelation is also sufficient to drive them apart. Because in acknowledging the death of her child Elizabeth must acknowledge that love, by itself, is not enough. That her child grew surrounded by 'the people who love him' (2011:364) and still drowned. Love was not enough to keep her with Arthur in his dishonest profession, and when Arthur later considers leaving that profession for love of her, she must reveal a truth to him which demonstrates, so clearly and tragically, just how badly love can fail. This is a dreadful risk for Elizabeth, but in order

to avoid that place where she and Arthur '*would be broken and pretending and a lie*' (2011:356); the risk must be taken and the truth must be told. It is only through the emergence of the truth that any genuine unity, any reconciliation, is achievable, and in this way the death of the boy, though terrible, provides a new beginning and the possibility of a kind of transcendence, a moving beyond the sadness of death. Where Arthur's profession involves lying about the dead to provide false comfort and healing, Elizabeth's truthful acknowledgement of the death of her son creates a space in which genuine healing and comfort may be found, in the love she and Arthur have for each other.

Family Ties

Kaye Mitchell observes that, in Kennedy's work, families play 'a crucial role in the construction of the individual's identity', whilst also functioning as 'microcosmic reflections of the world at large' (Mitchell 2008:64). As with the individuals she creates, none of the families presented by Kennedy are perfect; in fact many are downright dysfunctional, but the way each family shapes the persons within it is undeniable. For example, when Jennifer in *So I Am Glad* states 'I will tell you soon about my parents and the original ways they could have, but when I do, you'll already know they played no part in making me how I am' (Kennedy 1995:6), the reader may well be incredulous. It seems highly improbable that, in a woman who was forced to watch her parents' sexual encounters as a child and then as an adult finds her own sexual encounters 'ridiculous' and 'insane', becoming more of an observer than a participant, the former genuinely has no impact upon the latter.

The viewing of family relations, particularly during the formative years of childhood, as a vital part of the shaping of individual identity is well-established within our society. In *Persons In Relation*, John Macmurray points out that 'the most obvious fact about the human infant is his total helplessness', and that 'the baby differs from the young of all animals' not only through this initial helplessness but also through 'the prolonged period of time which must elapse before he can fend for himself at all' (Macmurray 1961:47). Given this state of affairs, Macmurray concludes that the human infant is 'made to be cared for':

He is born into a love-relationship which is inherently personal. Not merely his personal development, but his very survival depends upon the maintaining of this relation [...] [h]e cannot do himself what is necessary to his own survival and development. It must be done by another who can, or he will die. (1961:48)

Humans can only learn self-reliance through beginning from a position of total reliance on the

other. Each of us is born into an immediate union with our mother or the one who cares for us – the isolated infant does not exist, or rather, the isolated infant will die. It is only as we grow and develop that we are able to break away from this initial unity, and the isolation of the self is therefore inextricably linked with the development of independence, of self-reliance. If the parent betrays his or her position through refusing to care for the child, through violence, abuse or simple abandonment, the child may well seek refuge in an isolated state – if the primary union with the other ends in betrayal then perhaps the other (in whatever form) cannot be trusted, and reliance upon the self alone is safer. In *So I Am Glad* Jennifer would like to believe that her childhood has had no impact upon her adult behaviour, but in fact such a denial only serves to highlight the impact this initial betrayal has had upon her, to the extent that the reader is unsurprised when she finishes the book with the observation that 'sometimes the best beginning is a lie' (Kennedy 1995:280).

Kaye Mitchell's description of the family in Kennedy's work providing 'microcosmic reflections of the world at large' (Mitchell 2008:64) is similar to certain definitions found in psychiatry. David Cooper, for example, observes how family is the first 'box' we are placed into on emerging from the womb, before progressing to the box of school, after which 'we have become so conditioned to being in a box that from then on we erect our own box, prison, bin around us – until, finally with relief, we are put into the coffin or the oven' (Cooper 1970:32). In this model it is arguable that the family 'box', being the first one we are exposed to in our formative years, may well provide the shape for the boxes we create for ourselves thereafter. Alongside this, the family we grow up in gives us our first opportunity to identify the 'other' as apart from the 'self', and so it is possible that permanent impressions of the relations between the two and the definitions of each may be taken from this stage. In their book *Sanity, Madness and the Family* R. D. Laing and A. Esterson claim their focus to be upon 'persons, the relations between persons, and the characteristics of the family as a system composed of a multiplicity of persons' (Laing & Esterson 1970:19). For Laing and Esterson each person within the family *nexus* is not of interest only as an individual but as an individual *in relation* to those around them; the crucial point here being that 'people have identities' but may also 'change quite remarkably as they become different others-to-others' (1970:20). This is an excellent example of Laing's 'false self' system (Laing 1965:95) at work within the primary social group each of us is involved in, that of the family. We may present one 'mask' to our father, a different 'mask' to a brother or sister and a different one again to the family when gathered together as a whole, and still none of these may feel like the 'true' self each of us feels we can be when in isolation, alone. Within Kennedy's work, families can be

hugely influential in their effect upon the protagonist, his or her ability to love, and the fear or longing to achieve a state of unity.

Fathers and Daughters

When discussing *Looking for the Possible Dance*, Douglas Gifford refers to Kennedy's 'identification of the terrible sadness underlying love, particularly in the case of parental love' (Gifford 1997b:619). If one examines Kennedy's fiction as a whole, the parent-child relationship is given almost as much space as the relationship between lovers and, where the parent-child relationship is explored in any depth, it is almost invariably the father-daughter bond which is under scrutiny. Sarah Dunnigan states that 'no other contemporary Scottish woman writer explores the complexity of father-daughter devotion' and observes that Kennedy's 'most tender fictions' are about 'lovers, and daughters and fathers' (Dunnigan 2000:150-154). Dorothy McMillan goes further; praising Kennedy's 'immense contribution to the idea of the family' in *Looking for the Possible Dance* through presenting a love which is 'enabling, not crippling'; with the 'proper physicality' of the father-daughter bond conveyed 'without embarrassment or excess' (McMillan 1995:96). Though I would argue that Margaret's relationship with her father is not entirely devoid of its 'crippling' elements, notably his desperate reluctance to let her leave home and her sense that her identity is being gradually stifled (Kennedy 1993:65), it is undeniable that Kennedy writes the father-daughter relationship with a kind of fierce tenderness seldom encountered elsewhere; emphasising how much this relationship can affect one's sense of identity and notion of love; while also using it as a supreme example of 'the tension between dependence and independence in relationships, our desire for closeness and the accompanying fear of a loss of self that comes with the most intense relationships' (Mitchell 2008:61).

Kennedy's first novel focuses on Margaret's growing up and away from her father, and moving into a mature adult relationship with Colin. Early on in the text Margaret notes how 'her father and her pleasure have always been close' (Kennedy 1993:6), her mother having left when Margaret was young, but the 'terrible sadness' to which Gifford refers forms an integral part of the characters' mutual closeness, both through her father's realisation that, when Margaret leaves, he will have nothing left, and also through Margaret's own acknowledgement that when her father dies, she will be left behind. Towards the end of the book she has a dream where her dead father speaks to her of their identities being somehow merged:

You and me, we're the same thing. We're family. We're more than family, we're the same. Two parts of one thing, do you see? And I...I love you. [...]
We're the same thing. When I saw you born, living, I knew. We were the same thing. You made a door in me and you got inside but now I'm empty there. (1993:154)

While love described in this way could be interpreted as invasive or suffocating, an example of the loss of self through intensity which Mitchell describes, when Margaret wakes from this dream it is to the memory of 'the feel of his skin on her neck, his voice in her mind, the softness of his kiss', and a feeling 'under the sadness' of 'a flicker of peace' – having the intensity of her father's love reiterated for her leaves Margaret peaceful and tender, because it proves to her that she will 'always be family now' (1993:154-155). Even while she enjoys her freedom and independence it is the recognition that she is part of something else, a family, a relationship, which makes her feel properly whole.

All these themes are expanded within *Everything You Need*. Once again we are witness to a fiercely loving and protective father having to stand by and watch as his daughter grows away from him, although in this case the emotions are complicated by Mary not knowing that Nathan is her father in the first place. The reader is exposed to Nathan's adoration of his daughter in all its ferocity; there being nothing about her he wouldn't '*bleed for and die for and look after until [he] went stone mad with the effort of it all*' (Kennedy 1999:131), and also its tenderness; the touch of her hair and the smell of her skin rendering 'the whole progress and defence of Enlightenment' quite 'superfluous' (1999:145). Alongside this, the reader is also witness to the growing and shaping of Mary's feelings, which are grounded in confusion. When she believes her relationship with Jonathan to be breaking down, Mary's need for '*something*' to fill the 'sudden, sucking depths' (1999:327) inside her briefly leads her to sexual thoughts of Nathan, but when this dissipates what is left is a closeness she cannot quite put a name to, and one which is simultaneously awkward; leaving her unsure if she and Nathan 'should hug now, or keep standing', with no 'obvious option available' (1999:548). Meanwhile, to contrast with this uneasy not-quite-relationship, the relationship between Joe Christopher and his young daughter Sophie runs in parallel throughout the book, and this is a father-daughter bond carried out in complete openness; based upon a 'mutual appreciation' where father and daughter can come together and be 'completely busy, completely closed inside all the patterns of noise and touch that let them know each other, claim each other' (1999:155). Besides this, there is the relationship Mary has developed growing up with her adoptive fathers, 'the Uncles' Bryn and Morgan, another relationship full of embraces, kisses, openness and ease, developed since Mary was a young

child to form an unshakeable bond in which Mary 'might go away' but will never 'fail to love them and let them know' (1999:32). And yet it is perhaps worth noting that Bryn and Morgan never totally occupy a father-space, however close and affectionate their relationship with Mary; she may describe them to Nathan as 'my parents' (1999:91) but they remain 'the Uncles' throughout the book. Nathan, of course, does not occupy true father-space either, through his refusal to acknowledge his paternity, and so Mary is surrounded by three almost-fathers in the place of the true, recognised one. Her adopting of Nathan as a father-figure is demonstrated not only through the gradually increasing physicality of her relationship with him, but also in the way she compares him to Bryn after Morgan's funeral, noting how Bryn and Nathan have 'the same feel' when she hugs them (1999:309). And by the end of the book the peace and ease Mary finds with Bryn; 'their sides pressing together and easing back, a soft, soothing motion' (ibid), seems to have also developed between her and Nathan, to a point where the two of them can just be together, quietly, with 'the island like a great ship beneath them'. However, as Mary still doesn't know the truth about her father, their voyage together is not completed but continuing, 'drifting them safe away from the shore' (1999:559).

Less detailed, but nonetheless powerful, examples of father-daughter relationships repeatedly appear throughout Kennedy's work. There is the father in 'The Snowbird' (*Original Bliss*), terrified about the way his broken marriage might affect his two 'lovely girls', wishing that parents could somehow 'suspend what they do while their children grow past them and get safe away' (1997:100-101). There is the shattered father-daughter relationship in *Paradise*, where Hannah Luckcraft's father struggles to relate to his alcoholic daughter, offering to make tea '[a]s if his doing something shipshape and domestic will change us to straightforward people with a firm relationship', but still unable to hide that she hurts him, wringing his hands and crying (2004:95-96). More tragic still is the grieving father in 'What Becomes', who cannot communicate with his wife after their daughter dies; who so cruelly experiences the 'terrible sadness' of parental love ending in loss:

*Our world is thick with it, clotted in patterns and patterns of grief. And, beyond this, I know you're sad. I know your days are bleeding too. [...]
And I miss her like you do.
The no one who comes home with you holding your hand.
The girl who isn't there... (2009:17-18)*

Absent Mothers

Predominantly two types of mother appear in Kennedy's fiction: the one noticeable by her

absence; either dead or otherwise departed, and the other the domestic angel, revered and even feared by the child who consistently worries that he or she will never be good enough in comparison. In both cases what is immediately obvious is the *inhumanity* of these figures, either through their lack of natural, loving maternal behaviour or their portrayal as almost mythological, super-human characters. In the former category are the mothers of *Looking for the Possible Dance* and *Everything You Need*, both of whom walk out on their young daughters, leaving them to be raised solely by men, who exhibit the caring and affectionate natures the women apparently lack. In each case this early desertion leaves the daughter to face the fear that she too may grow up to be unloving and detached. Margaret's father states angrily that her mother 'might as well have died' when she left him with the baby; lashing out at Margaret by telling her '[y]ou're like her, you know that, you always were like her' (1993:66). Mary, meanwhile, notes the way in which Bryn sometimes makes her feel 'as if leaving was in her genes, as if that much of her mother was in her nature' (1999:32), so that when she finally goes to visit her mother after years of separation this is what sits at the forefront of her mind – '*I only want her to tell me that I won't be the way she was. I want to know that I can marry, can be normal, can have children that I'll like*' (1999:332).

For the children of the domestic and angelic mothers this fear is reversed, and becomes a worry that they will never grow to be like their parent, never be good enough. Hannah in *Paradise* is a particularly poignant example of this, notable also in being the primary *female* protagonist amongst the men who seems in awe of her mother, a woman who can 'perform any task without apparent effort, or disorder, everything executed with this – well, the only word is *grace*' (2004:20-21). Hannah's own existence and identity as a woman are thrown off balance by the perfection she perceives in her mother, and she concludes: 'I am a woman and not unwomanly, I suppose; but I realised years ago, before I was seven, that I won't be a woman the way my mother is, I'll never do it right' (ibid). This may be seen as a development of the sentiment Kennedy has touched on earlier through the young girl in 'Friday Payday' (*Now That You're Back*), who also feels that she will 'never be as good as her mother was' (1994:131).

The male protagonists, meanwhile, tend to experience angelic mothers who are victims of domestic violence, which their sons are desperate to stop (see also 'Belonging, Identity, Place', above) – Ronnie in 'A Bad Son' (*Indelible Acts*) worships his mother and feels colossal guilt in spending one night away from her:

His mother's eyes – blue like his eyes, unless she was crying – and her smell, her

warm, home smell – and the way she was the only one who called him Ronald so that was his name, his real name [...] and he'd left her alone. She was there with his father and no one to help and you couldn't trust him. (2002:81)

As a child Ronnie is unable to protect his mother, and so his only consolation is that, once he gets 'older and stronger', he may be able to do so through becoming 'somebody new', somebody his father 'won't expect' (2002:87). This sentiment – the implicit, unfulfilled desire to save the mother by killing the father – is another developed by Kennedy in a later novel. Alfred, the protagonist of *Day*, is convinced that his father killed his mother after years of systematic abuse and so, after some time in the army, causes his father to drown in the river, providing some kind of justice and resolution:

I fixed him, though. I bloody fixed him. Showed him what I've learned – that fuckers like him can only be stopped by force. (2007:113)

After years of struggling with his inability to act; years where he 'closed his eyes and prayed again to be a strong, strong man' (2007:47), Alfred turns passivity into a weapon of vengeance, standing by while his father flounders in the water and doing nothing, only enjoying the fact that it takes 'a while' for his father to finally succumb (2007:197). Where the angelic nature of Hannah's mother is defined through her loving relationship with her husband; 'my mother's eyes soft as she looked [...] to his mouth, *his* eyes'; their daughter sure that 'they are much the same now, but without us to watch them and stunt their tenderness' (2004:34), Alfred and Ronnie have mothers whose goodness is shaped around their passive response to male violence. The purity brought about through love is to be desperately craved and possibly never obtained; the purity damaged by violence must in turn be avenged by violence – either way, the angelic mother becomes a symbol, an unattainable ideal.

Unity and Communication

David Cooper refers to the 'box' of the family as being like a trap; discussing the 'obsessive, imprisoning' nature of family love and how damaging this can be for the child involved (Cooper 1970:44). But the majority of Kennedy's fictions demonstrate the way in which recognition of the family connection actually enables independence and liberty, rather than denying it. When Margaret dreams of her father after his death, and wakes crying, she does not tell Colin why, because it is 'something private', but her 'flicker of peace' comes from knowing that she will 'always be family now'; private or not, her connection with her father

remains (Kennedy 1993:155). Acknowledging that her love for her father will never change allows Margaret to move forward in her life while simultaneously carrying that love quietly inside her, warming and comforting, 'like the small heat of her father's smile' (1993:198).

In the conclusion of *The Blue Book*, the book itself is described as being 'scared and in your hands and incomplete unless you're with it and can see', yearning 'to be able to live and see you back' (2011:360). The idea of the self as a being isolated and unfinished, until interaction with another gives it purpose, returns again and again in Kennedy's fiction. Individuals, tired of being lost and uncertain within their own identity, surrender themselves to the other in search of definition, recognition and, crucially, love, because it is impossible to fully comprehend the constitution of the self, it seems, unless one has some other to compare it to. Characters in the Laingian mould, who have carefully constructed false selves to deal with the menacing nature of the world around them, suddenly find that this existence, centred on the divided self, threatens not only their concept of their own identity but also their notion of reality as a whole. In desperation, and driven in the main by a powerful hope, they risk exposing their true selves to the other before them; preparing to sacrifice their isolated (but protected) selves for the greater goal of true unity with, and recognition from, that other. Thus Kennedy's characters may be seen to shift from the philosophy of Laing to that of Macmurray, leaving the divided self behind and moving into a space where unity and knowledge between persons helps also to cement individual identity; a space where 'I am I because I know you' and 'you are you because you know me' (Macmurray 1933:137). What Kennedy's characters repeatedly cry out for is a state of honest communication, at the centre of which is the need for love – Elizabeth cannot allow herself to be with Arthur, cannot let him love her until he knows the whole truth; in the same way that Nathan cannot permit a full and loving relationship with his daughter until he has told her everything. Such honesty forms a vital part of unity, and a vital part of love, which in itself gives the individual back his or her own, separate identity. This adheres closely to Nancy's belief that 'it is through affectionate and passionate relations with the other – through *plurality* – that *singularity* is constituted' (Secomb 2007:142, emphasis added). Perhaps a shattering of the self is unavoidable in the acceptance of love and unity, but perhaps it is only through this shattering that we come to a greater understanding of the self; an understanding forever incomplete while we stand apart in isolation. And perhaps, Kennedy suggests, it is this offering, this exposing of the self to the other through love, which then enables us to put ourselves back together and to form, in the end, a more coherent whole.

4. Desire and Addiction

If one was to apply the label of 'addict' to any characters in A. L. Kennedy's writing, the principal choices would in all likelihood be alcoholic Hannah in *Paradise*, or pornography addict Edward in *Original Bliss*. One could also add the secondary character of Stella's drug-dependent boyfriend Eddie from the 1996 film *Stella Does Tricks*, to which Kennedy wrote the screenplay. But while these three characters display addictive behaviour in its most clinical sense, if one examines Kennedy's fiction more broadly it is possible to discover traces of addiction within the specific obsessions of other characters. For example, there is an argument to be made for Nathan's addiction to ex-wife Maura, or rather to the *memory* of Maura, in *Everything You Need*; or Arthur's addiction to his psychic lifestyle in *The Blue Book*, not just for the money it provides but the comfort it gives his clients, however transitory. In these cases the addiction is not focused upon some solid object or substance (alcohol, drugs, pornography) – although the money Arthur receives for his psychic readings is a contributing factor – but rather on something more intangible and amorphous, a feeling created purely through the mental processes of the character himself, in engaging memory or producing a psychic 'reading', almost as if these characters have sidestepped the need for the substance entirely and tapped straight into the emotional response such addiction produces. With such a direct connection to the emotional outcome these addictions move one step closer to love; that craving for an 'other' of some kind to banish feelings of isolation, as described in the previous chapter. The connection between love, desire and addiction within Kennedy's work is one full of complexity – there are various characters who might be said to have an addiction to another person, for example, which may cause one to query whether an addiction must be fixed upon an object or applied to the desire for another human being. Conversely, Hannah in *Paradise* is a notable case of a character who experiences addiction as a kind of love, with all the intensity and tenderness that implies. Through examining the Deleuzian definition of desire, the nature of addiction, and the conflict between the 'real' and the 'unreal' in contemporary culture, this chapter will explore the ways Kennedy may be seen to combine all these elements to further her characters' quests for connectedness.

Defining Addiction

In the first instance, a dictionary definition may be useful here. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines addiction as:

The state of being addicted *to* a habit or pursuit; *esp.* the state of dependence on a drug to the extent that it cannot be withdrawn without adverse effects.
(Trumble & Stevenson 2002:25)

While the words 'habit' and 'pursuit' have a certain breadth here, the word 'drug' seems more specific and appears to be used in its strictest sense; the dictionary definition being '[a]ny substance that affects the physical or mental functioning of a living organism' (2002:764). With such definitions firmly in hand, one can confidently label a heroin addiction, or an alcohol addiction. The 'habit' of achieving arousal through sexually explicit material may also be easily labelled as a pornography addiction. At this point, though, it is important to note the intrinsic negative associations present not just in the substances named but the label of 'addiction' itself. Maryon McDonald observes that 'the imputed 'addictiveness' of a substance holds a persuasive congruence with the degree of religious and political fear of it, and the capacity for evil attributed to it' (McDonald 1994:2-3). Thus to label something as addictive is to make it instantly dangerous. Whilst both 'addiction' and 'desire' are (arguably) characterised by a central craving, the former differs from the latter by carrying solely negative associations. No one speaks of a 'good' addiction. Addiction is desire taken to extremes; warped, pathological; an unhealthy state to be deplored, pitied, fought and, if possible, conquered. In contrast, desire itself may carry many positive associations, dependent on how one chooses to interpret it. In the comprehensive exploration of desire that is *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari present a compelling argument for viewing desire as 'productive', in opposition to the more Lacanian definition of desire as 'an idealistic (dialectical, nihilistic) conception' centred upon lack; specifically 'a lack of an object' (Deleuze & Guattari 1983:25-26). This in turn permits Claire Colebrook's interpretation that 'desire does not begin from lack – desiring what we do not have. Desire begins from connection; life strives to preserve and enhance itself and does so by connecting with other desires' (Colebrook 2002:91). In her examination of Deleuze, Colebrook even goes so far as to state that 'life is desire, and desire is the expansion of life through creation and transformation' (2002:135). Such a resoundingly affirmative definition is impressive not only in its positivity but also its scope – if life *is* desire, it follows that desire is at the very centre of our existence, shaping who we are as individuals and human beings: without it, we cease to be. We are no longer alive. For Deleuze and Colebrook, desire is our essence.

It is difficult to imagine anyone arguing so persuasively and passionately for the vital necessity of addiction. Addiction is destructive, never productive. It is not formed from the desire at the core of being; rather it usurps such innate desires with a craving for an external

object or substance, at the expense of the self. From this conclusion one could posit, as Stacey Margolis does, that:

...the problem with the addict is not that he desires too much or too freely, but that he stops desiring altogether. Since the user is actually replaced by the drug, addiction here is constituted not by the self that wants the drug, but by the drug that wants itself. (Margolis 2002:22)

If, therefore, one views addiction as a situation whereby the self and the body are taken over by a substance hungry for nothing more than an excess of itself, one could broaden the definition to include the wanting of a person, or a memory. Certainly, A. L. Kennedy presents Nathan in *Everything You Need* as being so consumed by the memory of Maura that one could label him an addict, with the memory inside him craving its own return to reality. With the persistent absence of Maura, though, Nathan (or, perhaps, the memory that drives him) must seek refuge in less satisfactory substitutes, much as an addict craving a specific drug may grasp at others to ease the pain of withdrawal. Nathan's attempt to satisfy his particular fix takes the form of writing the story of Maura, connecting with Mary (who, as Maura's daughter, carries a strong biological link, if nothing else) and, when all else fails, lending physicality to extremes of mental anguish through self-harm and suicide attempts. In each case, the substitute serves to replace the seemingly impossible ultimate goal – the reclaiming of Maura – with the possible, the achievable, the definite. And yet, in the same way that Hannah in *Paradise* finds it almost impossible to replace the allure of alcohol with a sober love for another person, Nathan battles to focus on the reality around him, to finally rid himself of the ghost of Maura. Substitutes and alternatives are insufficient and reality, paradoxically, is not 'the real thing'.

Desire in Context

Critics have made desire the constitutive feature of modern subjectivity. It is not surprising then that the addict, who is defined by his endless and exaggerated desires, has become emblematic not only of the consumer but of the modern subject in general. (Margolis 2002:23)

As described above, addiction may be seen as the twisted extremity of desire, perhaps even driving it to the point where the desire destroys itself and only the object remains. But the manner in which this desire (and the object of it) is constituted, and then how exactly it can be

placed in the context of contemporary fiction, requires further examination. In its most fundamental form, desire may drive the individual towards both people and things; subjects and objects, but the desiring alone need not render these two indistinguishable. That which is desired need not always be marked as an object in the eye of the desirer.

Established philosophy may be of some use when exploring the concept of reality itself: that is, how we as individuals perceive reality, and position our desires within it. As has been mentioned above, Deleuze views desire not as a lack; an 'actual' subject or being yearning for a 'virtual' object or possibility, but rather as a positive and transformative force in a world of virtualities. Claire Colebrook notes the way in which postmodern culture has been labelled 'a society of 'simulacra'', described through 'a distinction between the actual and the virtual: there was once a time when we were close to reality (which is actual) and now all we have are images (the virtual)' (Colebrook 2002:97). However, for Deleuze 'the real is always actual-virtual', as *all* things 'emerge from processes of copying, doubling, imaging and simulation' (2002:98). Thus there is no 'original life that is then varied or copied in different versions; each event of life is already other than itself, not original, a simulation' (2002:99). To some extent this narrows the distance between the one who desires and the object of that desire, as both exist within the realm of actual-virtual rather than being separated by the bounds of actuality; Deleuze in fact seems to be in direct opposition to Lacan here, for whom the real is 'always felt as an absence, gap or tear in the symbolic order' (Colebrook 1997:177) which we as desiring subjects struggle to access – for Lacan, the very nature of desire is to be 'unknown', and it is only 'in this point of lack' that 'the desire of the subject is constituted' (Lacan 1977b:218-219). Three main philosophies emerge here: first, there is a scenario where the desiring self represents reality or 'original life' with the desired object being beyond its scope or, at most (after Kant), existing in 'an unreal, hallucinatory, or delirious form' created through the desire itself (Deleuze & Guattari 1983:25). Second, there is the Lacanian concept in which the self exists within a rigidly structured system with the desired object once again on the outside, in a purer reality beyond such systems and from which we are permanently distanced. In each of these philosophies the desirer is placed firmly within reality, driven through a sense of lack towards a desired object we can never reach, precisely because the desire and lack *define* that object – if attained and brought into our reality, it ceases to be lacking and therefore simultaneously ceases to be desired. Elizabeth Grosz notes Lacan's similarity to Hegel in a conception of desire as 'a fundamental lack, a hole in being that can be satisfied only by one 'thing' – another ('s) desire' (Grosz 1990:64). Lacanian desire is always reaching beyond reality to future possibilities; caught 'in the margin in which demand

becomes separated from need' (Lacan 1977a:311), ever-hungry, never satisfied:

Where need aims at an object which satisfied it, demand appeals to an other in such a way that even if the demanded object is given, there can be no satisfaction. This is because the demand is really for something else, for the next thing the other can give, for the thing that will 'prove' the other's love. (1990:61)

This conception of desire as a continuous craving, a persistent reaching for the next thing, and the next, fits very neatly with standard perceptions of addiction as an extreme and negative form of desire, since both are built around a central lack. Though desire in this case is always for love, or greater proof of love, while addiction typically craves alternative substances, both are trapped in a downward spiral of decreasing satisfaction; a 'chain of substitution whereby the first (lost) object of desire generates a potentially infinite chain of (only partially satisfactory) substitutes' (1990:100). The crudest examples of this could be the abandoned lover seeking solace in a string of one-night stands; or the alcoholic unable to obtain spirits resorting to cheap cider or cough syrup, like Hannah in *Paradise*. Whatever the circumstance, Lacan's implication that we are doomed to a perpetual cycle of desire and diminishing satisfaction, with our desires always reaching for the next thing beyond our immediate reality, is a rather depressing one. Meanwhile, the notion of a desire centred on *lack* is recognisable in many of Kennedy's fictions, and may be the reason various critics perceive a certain bleakness in her writing; a 'Nietzschean mode of negativity' (Tew 2004:86) highlighting 'the terrible sadness underlying love' (Gifford 1997b:619).

The third philosophy, in sharp contrast to the first two, is the Deleuzian theory in which both the desiring subject and the object of desire exist in the same actual-virtual reality, where desire is a productive force, and as such 'can be productive only in the real world and can produce only reality' (Deleuze & Guattari 1983:26). This seems much more optimistic: if we desire things which already exist within our reality, they are by definition attainable, and the concept that the very act of desiring can *produce* the desired object is undeniably empowering when set against the constantly craving Lacan. For Deleuze and Guattari this Lacanian, perhaps more immediately familiar, concept of desire as a thing centring upon lack – 'I want what I do not have' – is an intrinsic part of the social and capitalist systems in which we are all captive, and it is precisely because of this that such a concept is so recognisable – the capitalist system has *made* it so in order to keep us captive:

The deliberate creation of lack as a function of market economy is the art of a

dominant class. This involves deliberately organizing wants and needs (*manque*) amid an abundance of production; making all of desire teeter and fall victim to the great fear of not having one's needs satisfied; and making the object dependent upon a real production that is supposedly exterior to desire (the demands of rationality), while at the same time the production of desire is categorized as fantasy and nothing but fantasy. (1983:28)

Here, true desire involves breaking away from the capitalist model and recognising that desire is not only real and productive but also undemanding; it 'clasps life in its powerfully productive embrace, and reproduces it in a way that is all the more intense because it has few needs' (1983:27). If one extrapolates from this attractive idea; that desire is a powerful drive that actually needs very little to sustain it, addiction can be viewed in one of two ways: firstly, as a thing not connected to *true* desire at all, but rather a sickness brought about by the capitalist system, the 'creation of lack as a function of market economy' described above; or secondly as the powerful productive force once again taken to extremes – like desire itself, addiction can be transformative, altering the mind and body through substances. Whatever the ultimate outcome, it is undeniably productive, producing difference, reshaping the individual into something new. This substantially more positive interpretation of addiction as productive rather than destructive may seem fanciful, and certainly the first alternative of addiction as capitalist sickness appears more logical, but at least Deleuze's conception gives one the *option* of viewing addiction as positive and transformative, an analysis very rarely encountered elsewhere but of particular interest when looking at A. L. Kennedy's *Paradise* (see below).

Interestingly, despite their seemingly vehement opposition in thought, the one point at which Deleuze and Lacan cross is on the notion of desire as an energy, with a power not confined to the strictures of societal norms. In his introduction to *Anti-Oedipus*, Mark Seem notes how the authors attempt to 'discover the “deterritorialized” flows of desire, the flows that have not been reduced to the Oedipal codes and the neuroticized territorialities' (Seem in Deleuze & Guattari 1983:xvii); whilst Ian Buchanan states that '[t]he bottom line in all Deleuze and Guattari's thinking is the axiom that desire in its raw state is inimical to civil society' (Buchanan 2000:161). In her work on Jacques Lacan, meanwhile, Elizabeth Grosz describes desire as 'a movement, an energy that is always transpersonal, directed to others', and also acknowledges its subversive power:

Desire threatens to subvert the unity and certainty of conscious demand. As unconscious, desire cares little for social approval or the rewards and punishments

consciousness offers to demand. Desire is concerned only with its own processes, pleasures, and internal logic. [...] While such a logic can support social laws and values, it is also able to subvert or betray them... (Grosz 1990:65)

Unlike Deleuze and Guattari, Lacan views desire as integral to the self/other relation; a force between individuals. However, by this analysis it is possible to find a point of similarity in the two philosophies – Lacan also identifies desire as a flow moving between persons, a power in its own right and one concerned only with itself; as capable of opposing and betraying the social order (what Deleuze and Guattari would view as the capitalist, Oedipal framework) as it is of obeying it. Despite this, though, the intrinsic difference of Lacan's concept is undeniable. Desire within this definition carries a strong sense of futility, where the subject 'demands a wholeness, unity, and completion which it imagines the other can bestow upon it', in the process aspiring to 'a union or unity that is strictly impossible' (Grosz 1990:137). Besides which, the focus of Lacanian thought rests upon individuality: here, desire 'always refers to a triangle – the subject, the other and the Other. The other is the object through whom desire is returned to the subject; the Other is the locus of signification which regulates the movement by which this return is made possible' (1990:80). Deleuze and Guattari, on the other hand, view desire as much more inclusive and collective, not centring on one other but reaching out, dizzyingly, to *the whole of reality*; a 'sublime vision of collective existence' whereby 'we make ourselves free, where free means living in harmonious relations with others' (Buchanan 2000:6). This desire does not yearn for the impossible, rather it makes *everything* possible. It is not just positive and productive, it is revolutionary.

Deleuze's theory is certainly appealing in its definition of desire as a positive productive force, but the notion that 'each event of life is already other than itself, not original, a simulation' (Colebrook 2002:99) is potentially more problematic. If life is shaped solely by simulations and repetitions, then everything is real, and nothing is. Also, if every desired object/outcome is merely a repetition of what has gone before, one struggles to argue for specificity in analysis of the *impact* of that desire – the way in which *each* desire affects *each* individual who experiences it. This implies that Deleuze denies the struggle between Self and Other which remains so apparently crucial in examining the literature of the individual. In fact, this denial is crucial to Deleuze's argument – Mark Seem points out that *Anti-Oedipus* is all about ego-loss; a radical platform from which Deleuze and Guattari 'urge mankind to strip itself of all anthropomorphic and anthropological armouring, all myth and tragedy, and all existentialism, in order to perceive what is non-human in man, his will and his forces, his transformations and mutations' (1983:xx). This seems an almost impossible task for

contemporary writing such as Kennedy's, which focuses so much upon the struggles of the individual, redolent with the 'myth and tragedy' of what A. S. Byatt calls 'a history constructed by beliefs which have lost their power' (Byatt in Carter & McRae 1997:449). Any literature of experience must surely carry this weight of simulation, echoing what has gone before, and yet for Deleuze it is precisely the denial of such simulations which defines *true* literature; literature not engaged in 'the repetition of already formed generalities' but beginning 'from diverse affects or experiences' and tracing 'their organisation into characters or persons' (Colebrook 2002:84). In this model, 'art works become singular not by *being* in the world but by transforming it through images that are at once actual and virtual' (2002:99). So true literature, like desire itself, must acknowledge its existence in a world of images and imitations, but then reshape virtual possibilities to make something new. Viewed in this way, Deleuze's definition becomes slightly more workable, if one considers postmodern literature to be founded upon the acceptance that there is nothing new, and that the 'trick' lies in expressing the old and the familiar in new and unfamiliar ways. However, one cannot comfortably place literature such as Kennedy's squarely within a Deleuzian framework because the ideal notion of total ego-loss is an insurmountable problem. Each protagonist is undeniably an individual, whose desires are inseparable from his or her Self, and in whom the desiring drive appears to be powered not by a thirst for growth and the new but rather by an intense awareness of loss, and of being alone. Mark Seem observes that a Deleuzian 'politics of desire would see loneliness and depression as the first things to go' (Seem in Deleuze & Guattari 1983:xxiii). Both are a long way from being defeated in Kennedy's fiction, and yet it is worth noting that the *hope* in the transformative power of desire is ever-present. Therefore one could say that, while Kennedy's characters appear trapped in a Lacanian universe, they are striving for a Deleuzian one.

Craving in a Consumer Culture

Aside from the radical call for total ego-loss presented in *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze does not dismiss the self merely as an unnecessary product of the capitalist system. Rather, if one can only break away from societally imposed strictures, he argues for a new freedom, beyond 'the closed image of the self that we take ourselves to be' (Colebrook 2002:142). As a desiring-machine, the self is not condemned to obliteration but rather urged to work in harmony with the other desires surrounding it; refusing to repress 'the excess, violence and disruption of life – the creative force that transgresses the boundaries of persons or intentions' (ibid). However, breaking out of this closed, repressive system is not easy: indeed, the potential for losing the

self within the image-filled actual-virtual world described by Deleuze is considerable, and seems particularly relevant to our twenty-first century society. In a world where we are at risk of becoming mere products of consumer-driven capitalism, where we are in fact more objects than subjects ourselves, it is perhaps easier for our desires to reach towards other objects instead of fighting for our own subjectivity; shutting the self down rather than expanding it. Rosi Braidotti argues that:

'our bodies, ourselves' are abstract technological constructs fully immersed in advanced psycho-pharmalogical industry, bio-science and the new media. This does not make them any less embodied, or less ourselves, it just complicates considerably the task of representing to ourselves the experience of inhabiting them.
(Braidotti 2000:160-161)

Braidotti also comments on Deleuze's aversion to 'the liberal bourgeois definition of the self and the necessity instead 'to think the deep, dense materiality of bodies-in-time' (2000:161).

In applying such concepts to contemporary literature, Patricia Waugh observes that the contemporary novel does have 'a continuing preoccupation with what it feels like to live in a biomedicalized, neo-corporate, late capitalist, post-postmodern culture' (Waugh 2013:20). Alongside this, however, she also claims that it will primarily be a novel 'about loss, inadequacy, and weariness in which the dominant mood is depressive (though sometimes comic-depressive) rather than apocalyptic, manic or addictive' (2013:21). Loss, inadequacy and weariness may be instantly recognisable as themes within A. L. Kennedy's fictions and yet, in the novels especially, there are elements which seem rather to adhere to the Deleuzian model as described by Braidotti – there is weariness, yes, but these characters (specifically Nathan, Hannah, Edward and to some extent Arthur) are also acutely aware of the bodies they inhabit, of their materiality. They are capable of breaking through the depressive barrier in pursuit of transformation, and in so doing demonstrate manic, addictive, and in Nathan's case even violently self-destructive behaviours. In these novels the self is not dead, but it *is* struggling, seeking a new way of engaging with the world which surrounds it. This is the challenge as described by Fredric Jameson in *Signatures of the Visible*; to 'reawaken, in the midst of a privatized and psychologizing society, obsessed with commodities and bombarded by the ideological slogans of big business, some sense of the ineradicable drive towards collectivity' (Jameson 1990:34). The problem here is that the potent desire to connect the self to its surroundings can result in the self closing down to such an extent that it becomes just another object in a world of objects, objects which are, after all, safer and simpler to connect

with than *subjects*; other individuals who 'can see what is hidden, can reach, conceivably even violate, the "core" of the self' (Benjamin 1995:149). To be known or recognised in this manner is 'immediately to experience the other's power' (ibid), and in this manner the self becomes simultaneously not only subjective, but under threat, as explored in the previous chapter.

Arguably it is the recurrent fear of sharing and possibly losing the self which drives these characters to focus their desires on inanimate items like alcohol or drugs, or unreal ones like pornography. In fact, one could apply Jean Baudrillard's notion of the 'hyperreal' to pornography and similar addictions; where a 'normative position of realistic perspective' is lost, and one is left with 'total involvement or immersion combined with alienating detachment' (Lane 2000:98). The self is protected because it is not involved, the addiction is simultaneously all-consuming and impersonal, 'like the extreme close-up and an extreme long-distance photograph at the same time' (ibid). It is interesting also to view this idea in the light of Lyotard's concept of the inhuman: like Gilles Deleuze, Jean-François Lyotard explores the dangers and difficulties of being human within a capitalist system, but for Lyotard the human is not a desiring-machine but rather a site of conflict for two, opposing 'inhumans' (Malpas 2003:91). Capitalism, according to Lyotard, has turned the human into a 'technical product', transforming it into a mechanical *inhuman*, the 'cog in the machine of capitalism' (2003:90). And yet within this inhuman lies another one, shaped by art; giving one the potential for 'surprising and uncanny transformative possibilities that cannot be predicted, explained or mastered by technologically-based systems of reason' (2003:91). This second inhuman shares many qualities with Deleuze's powerfully productive desire; a force which is 'at once disturbing and potentially liberating' and a site of resistance against the technological, capitalist machine (ibid). Arguably, those who find themselves desiring and addicted to substances or objects provided by the system in which they are placed (rather than, say, desiring connections with other humans or the potentialities situated outside the system) are feeding their mechanical inhuman at the cost of the alternative, emotionally driven inhuman lodged within the psyche. By Lyotard's analysis, ignoring the 'uncanny strangeness' of this internal inhuman renders the human unable to 'resist the other form of the inhuman, that of the developmental system' (2003:92). Thus the human rejects its own subjectivity and gives itself over to the world of objects, a world where 'all of us reach for the phantom 'object' – material or social – to explain our sicknesses of soul'; where 'I' become 'simply a body extended into a nervous system that helps me survive through the illusion of a self; I am, in effect, wired up like a computer, and when I go wrong it is for mechanical reasons, just as a computer goes

wrong' (Waugh 2013:18-19). The tragedy here lies in the fact that 'I' may still desire another human, but if the internal inhuman has been dismissed and I am simply a 'cog', the desired other must be a mere 'cog' too. In other words, if the self is viewed as just another object wired up to the technological machine, any desire for another person can be seen as taking 'the other as fantasy object, not as an equivalent center [sic] of being' (Benjamin 1995:8). Thus, as *I* lose my subjectivity, so do *you*.

This analysis clears a path by which desire for the other (human) can be labelled addiction. If one wishes to define an individual's desire for the other this way, it is more straightforward if the other is not a separate subject but a 'fantasy object' - if the other is a fantasy created by the self it can never be truly separate; rather this fantasy of the other can be nurtured, subsumed into the self like a drug, forming an addiction which, as Margolis states (above), feeds upon itself. It is only by 'destroying the other, not literally but in fantasy', acknowledging their absolutely separate nature and recognising that they are totally 'outside our mental powers' (Benjamin 1995:90) that we can love them as *subjects*, present and yet permanently apart from ourselves. And presence is crucial. A love-subject existing only in the past cannot *be* a subject because all that remains of them in the present is within the mind of the self. They are not only fantastical, but by belonging in the past they are also complete, whole, safe. Whether one regards memories like the French philosopher Bergson as things which are 'inactive, virtual' and fundamentally different from the experience of present perception (Grosz 2000: 218); or in the more fluid definition of Deleuze, as things requiring 'empathy and cohesion between the constitutive elements', yearning for a moment of 'sustainable balance or expression, before they dissolve again and move on' (Braidotti 2000:162), in either case they exist only in, and are therefore solely controlled by, the individual mind. The memory of a loved one, for example, can be objectified and moulded into whatever shape is most required by the self at any one time, and can be revisited again and again, whenever a 'fix' is desired, with no reference to (or necessity for) any other who may be currently existing outside the self. Whilst engaging with the memory of a loved one may demand an empathetic mind, doing so at the expense of actual physical interaction distances the self from the body, and places it more in the virtual world than the actual.

Arguably this is an addiction which, like alcoholism, carries dangerous potentialities, but where alcoholism involves the mind-in-body, a chemical craving which may begin in the brain but cannot avoid incorporating the whole physicality of the self, damaging the body as it damages the mind, addiction to a memory is dangerous precisely because it distances the mind from its physicality. The self here is at risk of forgetting its embodied nature, its

physical connection to the actuality which surrounds it, and may never move forward, never (in Deleuzian terms) 'become', and achieve transformation, because if it does not recognise its relation to (and dependence on) its own body it cannot use that body to connect with the surrounding world. Nathan in *Everything You Need*, the memory-addict, is trapped in a cycle of desire and fulfilment just as Hannah, the alcoholic in *Paradise*, is, and though one loses the body through the cravings of the mind while the other loses the mind in the cravings of the body, for both the addiction to the object inhibits the possibility of engaging with an other, a subject – in other words, the possibility of love.

Defining Love

To define love as a relationship between individual subjects – in other words, an emotion or state of being only existing between living, breathing persons – is hardly controversial, and is indeed the default starting point for many philosophers and critical thinkers when love comes under discussion, from Plato's description of love as 'mediation and becoming' (Secomb 2007:12) to Nancy's assertion that love 'is an opening of the subject to the other so that the subject is from that moment [...] shattered' (2007:145). For Gilles Deleuze, love 'is the encounter with another person that opens us up to a possible world' (Colebrook 2002:17), and it is this element of possibility which is key. For the emotion I experience to be defined as 'love', it must carry the possibility of *response* from the loved one. The form that response takes, be it reciprocity or rejection, is not the issue – it is my loving which creates the possibility of response and so defines my own state of being. In a society where the overwhelming presence of technology and ever-increasing virtual worlds threaten to overtake actual person-to-person communication, pessimism has 'established a strong hold on the postmodern mind', ensuring that 'human limitations are more readily acknowledged than in the recent cultural past' and '[r]eason alone is no longer seen to be our eternal saviour' (Sim 2003:13). Within such a society it is easy perhaps to view love as a pure thing; the most basic and paradoxically the most complex connection which can be forged between persons and, through the undeniable fascination it has held in the human mind throughout history, a strong link to the past in a society which seems to be forever driving forward. In opposition to this, though, there is Barthes' assertion that, rather than loving the beloved, the lover 'is in love with love': 'it is love the subject loves, not the object' (Barthes in Secomb 2007:122). In such a case the element of possibility is removed – no response is required from the object of love, the very act of loving is its own end. Whilst this theory still requires an other, a loved object to provide a focus for the emotion, the irrelevance of any elicited response alters the

parameters of the definition, and robs the beloved of his or her subjectivity. Following Barthes, the beloved is rendered an *object*, and need not even be another person with actual bodily presence – if the act of love is the very thing which enables us to label it 'love', one could love the memory of a person, a fantasy other, even an inanimate object, as long as the emotion experienced by the lover was heartfelt enough to be called 'love'. However, as society in general continues to perceive love as existing solely between persons, supposed 'love' for a memory, a fantasy, or an object is more likely to be categorised, by others at least, as obsession, addiction, or even illness.

If one assumes that love exists only between persons, then communication between individuals provides a crucial element if the love is to receive a response of any kind. Whilst physical expression can form a considerable part of this, verbal communication, through speech and the written word, permits greater breadth of expression through the rich and varied nature of language. But this in itself presents a problem, as love has been spoken of and written about so exhaustively throughout history that it is a struggle to write or say anything new, anything truly individual, anything which defines a personal rather than a collective reality. Within A. L. Kennedy's work characters are consistently grappling with this problem; struggling to express their love powerfully enough, personally enough, or at all. In her book *Philosophy and Love* Linnell Secomb examines various philosophical and critical approaches to this issue; from Umberto Eco's belief that 'each expression of love is already a self-conscious quotation of earlier romances' (Secomb 2007:2); to Julia Kristeva's assertion that 'the experience of love is allusive, defying direct description and relying on metaphorical allusions' (2007:3). Secomb also draws attention to Luce Irigaray's analysis; that conventional modes of the expression of love are not only problematic but also potentially damaging, where 'the declaration 'I love you' demands not only a reciprocal affection but also imposes an obligation, a debt, or a duty on the beloved' (2007:8). So once again, love proves itself paradoxical and complex – a pure and personal emotional experience which can only express itself in cliché and metaphor; a sentiment which cannot be truly fulfilling or transformative until it is expressed but one which, the instant it is uttered, cheapens itself (according to Irigaray) by laying demands upon the beloved. One may work around this problem in a number of ways. For Eco, the postmodern lover's solution is a self-aware acknowledgement that he or she is expressing nothing new, where both lover and beloved 'accept the challenge of the past, of the already said, which cannot be eliminated' and begin to 'consciously and with pleasure play the game of irony' (Eco in Secomb 2007:3). Irigaray suggests a new and indirect mode of expression, 'I love to you', to avoid the reduction of love

to 'an exchange relation' (Secomb 2007:8).

There may be some middle ground, too; a way in which love can be communicated without resorting to irony or indirect expression. One could follow Habermas' theory that it is the communication itself which is key, rather than the method or the outcome:

For Habermas, you communicate not in order to satisfy your desire, but crucially in order to '*make known a desire or intention*'. You don't aim to satisfy the want by talking, you aim to disclose it. Then others can respond – that is the suggestion. (Myerson 2003:155)

By this analysis, while we may frequently use words purely 'to satisfy a want', 'true communication' only occurs when we 'are primarily concerned with making ourselves understood' (ibid). Thus true love, or rather true communication of love, places no demand on the beloved beyond their ability to hear our communication, however we choose to express it. However, whilst it is reassuring to think that one can communicate love in this unselfish manner, it is somewhat difficult to imagine a situation where the lover can express the violent and extraordinary passions they are experiencing without some yearning for response, for reciprocation, from the beloved. However impossible the situation may seem, such a lover must cling to even the smallest hope that their beloved feels the same way. Perhaps the purest love requires no response, but the majority of lovers do. Their love *needs*, it *desires*, and in so doing it becomes another type of addiction, craving satisfaction.

A. L. Kennedy frequently draws upon this tortuous conflict of communicating love. Characters are driven by the imperative to express their love; with the implication that love unexpressed is not only damaging but also unbearable for the lover, but the expression of love becomes an admission of need, a pleading for reciprocation which renders the lover vulnerable, open to rejection, besides placing demand upon the beloved. Often, as described in previous chapters, characters resort to expressing love through physicality, through touch and sex, and when that is no longer sufficient, through the written word – three of the novels feature protagonists who turn to prose or letter writing to communicate the depth of their feeling, and to shape that final plea for a return, that confession of need. In *So I am Glad* the reader is not only presented with Jennifer's writing out of her relationship with Savinien, but also extracts from Savinien's own writing about his need of her; his assertion that '*[n]o torment will harm me, no demon will come near because I will have the extent of Hell's eternity to need you with all the force of my soul*' (Kennedy 1995:280). In *Everything You Need*, where desire is so openly evident even in the title, Nathan finishes his novel, his

extended love-note to Maura and then to Mary with the words: '[p]lease, my darling, have need of me' (1999:567); while Elizabeth concludes *The Blue Book* with a similar plea for reciprocity from Arthur: 'I'd give you my hand if you wanted. I'd give you everything' (2011:373). Desire throughout the novels is built up to such a level of intensity that it seems almost impossible to express in an immediate fashion, face to face, and so characters are left to cry out through their writing.

In contrast, many of Kennedy's short stories present a snapshot of characters who seem so trapped in the fear of exposure that they prefer not to communicate at all, attempting to distance themselves from any reminder of physicality – no talking, no touching. Within the collection *What Becomes* the protagonist of 'Whole Family with Young Children Devastated' is told by her lover 'I miss you' and responds immediately with 'could you not say that' (2009:107); while the wife in 'Confectioner's Gold' reflects that maybe 'the secret way to keep each other' in marriage is to 'never look and never touch. Never meet' (2009:89). For others, verbal communication is abandoned in favour of the purely physical, communicating through the body in a way which is not only less effective but also (frequently) physically damaging, so the stories unfold and conclude in a quiet agony of things left unsaid. 'Not Anything to do with Love' (*Indelible Acts*) features a woman who cannot say anything to her former lover 'because I won't speak to him, because he won't speak to me and vice versa', and finds herself instead getting 'angry' headaches:

He's my sole trigger for the migraines, I never used to have them before. The stomach cramps, the dreams, the shortened attention span: in a purely pathological way, he's much more a part of me these days than he ever was. (2002:61)

'This Man', the final story in the collection *All The Rage*, also features a couple who have not been speaking, at least in any meaningful sense, caught in a pattern of silences where '[h]e didn't, of course, ask' and '[y]ou didn't, of course, tell him' (2014:201), but they seek to solve their inarticulacy with a kiss, which carries infinitely more profundity:

He kisses with a pressure which is nearly an absence and therefore aches.
You kiss him back.
You do not kiss as if you are friends.
You do not kiss as if you are acquaintances.
You kiss, both of you, back and soft and back and soft and back.
You kiss each other back. (2014:211)

Often the physical expression of need within these stories is sexual, sometimes violent. In 'A

Wrong Thing' (*Indelible Acts*) a marital affair permits a kind of communication simultaneous to a distancing, where the wife, smelling another woman on her husband, observes how 'he noticed when I flinched, and took care to kiss me again, as if he wanted me to be quite sure that he'd done a wrong thing'. Rather than driving the two of them apart, however, this knowledge seems to tie them hopelessly together: 'Now that we're strangers, we need each other's company. This won't change' (2002:167). The husband in 'Marriage' (*What Becomes*), unable to gather any sign of approval from his wife, resorts instead to hitting her during intercourse, as previously mentioned (see 'Sex and Violence', above), the noise of which is so 'fantastic' that he climaxes 'like a shot'; the sound of violence replacing that of speech (2009:134). The wife in the story 'What Becomes' itself cannot bear her husband talking about their daughter and also turns to violence; '[h]is sentence interrupted when she hit him, punched out at his chest and then a blow against his eye' (2009:20), which in turn is replaced by the sound of them both weeping 'too loudly, too deeply, the din of it ripping something in his head' (2009:20-21).

In the novels, when need becomes centred in physicality, it may be taken to even greater extremes. In her essay of 2005 Helen Stoddart analyses the 'problems of articulation' in Kennedy's work, and notes 'the very common circumstance in her writing wherein a character finds themselves frustrated in speech but then in some way physically emblazoned, often very painfully' (Stoddart 2005:137): Colin's crucifixion in *Looking for the Possible Dance* and the near-death experiences of Helen and Nathan in 'Original Bliss' and *Everything You Need* are obvious examples of this. The infliction of physical pain as a somewhat drastic substitute for vocal communication may in itself be interpreted as a kind of addiction – particularly in the case of Nathan, who inflicts the most severe and constant harm upon himself. In his psychiatric study *Bodies Under Siege*, Armando Favazza notes the way in which a group of neurotransmitters called enkephalins may contribute to acts of harm and self-mutilation; referring to the theory that 'since enkephalins have a generally pleasurable effect (similar to what is experienced by taking opium or heroin), self-mutilators harm themselves to induce their production'. Thus 'the pain associated with self-mutilation results in the release of pain-reducing and pleasurable enkephalins' (Favazza 1996:262). For Nathan, the infliction of physical pain leaves him feeling 'incandescent with life', if only for a fleeting moment:

Yes.

The best of all possible highs, the fix of fixes, joy at the cellular level and then up.

Yes. (Kennedy 1999:25)

Helen in 'Original Bliss' relives her own near-death experience as a multi-sensory drama; 'a sort of dance where Mr Brindle twirled her body so that it banged and cracked and splashes of light appeared with colours in time to his beat' (1997:296), but also ultimately finds herself filled with the joy of life, a wonder at the 'remarkable' fact that she is both awake and alive (1997:298). Even after the horror of his crucifixion, Colin appears to carry with him Webster's order to '[b]e alive, Colin, don't forget' (1993:233) and is also transformed, with 'something about him', making him 'somehow much closer' to Margaret than he has previously been (1993:242). In each case extreme physical violence acts like a drug, providing a temporary sense of joy and clarity, but goes further by then laying the way open for verbal communication that perhaps wasn't possible before.

It is fair to say, then, that even where violence is used as an extreme physical version of communication, as a substitute 'drug', Kennedy's characters cannot help but yearn for true contact –written or spoken – with the other, the one they love. Stoddart emphasises the huge importance both verbal and written communication carry in Kennedy's work:

Language, and more particularly the act of writing, in the beauty and force of the sounds, textures and different forms and intimacies it continually makes available, is both its own consolation and also the means through which its inadequacies, losses and absences are traced – though not always spelled out – through characters whose bodies bear the punishing marks of powerful feeling that blisters on the surface of the body. (Stoddart 2005:147)

So Jennifer, Savinien, Nathan and Elizabeth all turn to writing to counteract the punishing effect that love can have upon the body, and to achieve, through language, greater depth of expression, and reach out to their loved ones. However, for some characters the desired object is not another person but quite literally an object, which cannot respond to any expression of feeling. This does not prevent these characters from using the same language of need, of love, in reference to their desire, but it does mean that reciprocation in kind is impossible, and the hope of meeting a responsive need in the other is doomed to failure. The object only demands more of itself, in a continuous spiral of need, and in so doing may also threaten any opportunities for the character to actually connect with another human being.

In most cases, this love for an object is recognised as something to be fought and defeated. Edward in 'Original Bliss' views his addiction to pornography as just that, noting the insatiable power of it: 'there isn't any end to what I want [...] I'll never get out of this'

(Kennedy 1997:220). His first solution for 'reconditioning' in a way that satisfies his 'self-disgust' is to use drugs as a deterrent:

I look at my pictures having injected myself subcutaneously with 6mg of Apomorphine. The injection causes nausea unrelieved by vomiting, at least in theory. This means I should associate my sexual obsession with nausea, rather than orgasm. No carrot, all stick. (1997:230)

Once again, a character is shown to be blurring the lines between pleasure and pain in a desperate response to what he perceives as a shameful, all-consuming need. This is also the path chosen by Arthur in *The Blue Book* – his addiction is less clear-cut than that of Edward but may still be viewed as such, if one considers the manipulation of strangers through clever deception as another 'unreal' substitute for actual human contact. Arthur gains a kind of transitory happiness through providing superficial satisfaction for his clients, and at the same time grows more reliant on the financial benefits of such a career. He is conflicted; having 'believed in' his work as a psychic but also believing that it is 'a terrible thing'; a shameful way of earning such large sums of money that he can live 'incredibly well, unnecessarily well', supporting a lifestyle he knows he 'wouldn't want to lose' (2011:326). Like Edward, Arthur cannot shake off his particular need, but simultaneously believes that he 'should have' punishment for it and so he chews on poisonous berries which 'burn'; his logic being 'I say bad things, so I punish my mouth' (2011:328). For both Edward and Arthur, though, there is a recognition of the impossibility of sustaining their particular addictions if they wish to develop an actual relationship with the women they love – each sees the conquering of his addiction and the re-focusing of his desire upon the other (subject) as the correct, perhaps the only way forward. Edward appears to succeed in this eventually, after Helen's love and fullness of character are opened up to him he finds pornography has lost its attraction; even when he 'gave up fighting it and tried' he 'couldn't do it', because of the realisation that without Helen he hasn't 'got anything' (1997:302). The desire for Helen is so strong and so real that it overcomes the desire for the unreal, 'fantasy' pornography. Helen becomes the new focus for Edward's love, his need – arguably, *she* is his new addiction. For Arthur the way is more complex, perhaps because he cannot view his desire for his particular work, his 'fix', as a wholly bad thing. He acknowledges that 'I can't do it again. If you don't want me to, I can't, Beth' (2011:328) but also that there would be 'maintenance' involved in closing down, combined with the risk of hurting others in a sudden, more direct fashion: '[c]losing it down would take so long...Christ, Beth. I don't want to harm them' (2011:330). Both Arthur and

Elizabeth seem to recognise that the two desires cannot function side by side, that that would be unsustainable, and so there is a yearning for things to be 'uncomplicated', for them both to be 'happy and allowed it' (2011:329). They remain desperately reaching for the sharing of desire that Edward and Helen finally manage to obtain; that apparent craving of all of Kennedy's protagonists, the replacing of addiction or 'unreal' desires with the 'real', the love of another. And yet it is interesting that Kennedy's most in-depth study of addiction – recognisable, clearly defined addiction – presents a character seemingly unconvinced by the notion that these two desires must be incompatible.

The Loved Object: Hannah in *Paradise*

The character of Hannah in *Paradise* provides a multi-faceted insight into a woman whose addiction to alcohol runs alongside her love for another human being. A novel featuring an alcoholic female protagonist is quite unusual in itself in a culture where it can still be claimed that 'societal views of alcohol serve to reinforce existing power imbalances between the sexes' (Waterson 2000:13), and where 'women with drink problems are often seen as inherently more depraved than men with similar problems' by actively 'betraying and debasing the fundamental nature of their feminine identity, whereas male alcoholics are frequently endowed with semi-heroic qualities as they battle with their dependency' (2000:60). While a male alcoholic may be defined solely in terms of his addiction in women, it seems, alcohol addiction must be linked to sexuality, the one implying a rampant appetite for the other. A man's alcoholism may highlight his stereotypically 'masculine' qualities, possibly associated with a tendency towards violence but nonetheless entwined with the notion that excessive or heavy drinking signifies a 'real' man, in touch with his physicality and strength. Women, on the other hand, face the paradox of being branded overly sexual 'social misfits' whose drinking is 'often interpreted as a lack of self-control and self-respect and even regarded as dangerous, an indication of uncontrolled sexuality' (Gefou-Madianou 1992:16), whilst simultaneously being 'unwomanly' by shedding their 'responsibility for propriety', their 'established roles of carer and moral judge', and so proving that they 'are not proper women, are not nice women' (McDonald 1994:22). Such analysis creates a depressing picture of the female alcoholic as an isolated, drunken sexual object, barely a person in her own right, as her dependency robs her of those qualities by which society would define her.

The character of Hannah refuses to conform to these stereotypes. Once again, Kennedy plays with our expectations as readers by focusing on Hannah's humanity – she may not be 'typically' feminine, but then femininity is not evident as an important factor in *any* of

Kennedy's female characters. Hannah is not portrayed as rampantly sexual but neither is she particularly reserved; she is first and foremost a person, and a person who experiences the full range of human emotions. The way in which Hannah relates to both her addiction and the world around her is communicated through a continuous first-person narrative, previously employed by Kennedy in *So I Am Glad*, and here again bringing the reader unavoidably closer to a complex female protagonist who exists somewhat outside societal norms. Hannah is well aware of the cultural and gender stereotypes attached to alcoholism and rationally, logically sets out her reasons for shirking them, for being 'inappropriate' by drinking 'how a man drinks':

I should have been at home behind my curtains with the methylated gin, the Tia Maria and Blue Nun. I should have been an early-morning shame at the off-licence: make-up uneven, hands trembling into my bag for the greasy purse and then flitting over the counter to snatch up a genteel quarter-bottle [...] sneak it down mixed with my tea [...] nobody there to see me, but female drinking is a sin and should be made invisible. (Kennedy 2004:184)

This rather grim image of the female drinker echoes Sharon Macdonald's observation, when exploring alcoholism in Scotland, that a woman's serious drinking habits becoming 'public' is regarded as 'particularly shameful', and that 'female heavy drinkers or alcoholics often make rather desperate attempts to hide and conceal their drinking' (Macdonald 1994:132). The logic behind Hannah's desire to avoid this stereotype is simple: 'I stay with the men, because then I'm not alone and because they do their best to be happy [...] *I've got to be with the boys. How else would I meet anyone?*' (Kennedy 2004:184). For Hannah the need for alcohol can operate alongside the need for human interaction, human contact, but more importantly the alcohol is the thing which *brings about* human contact, rendering it necessary not only in its own right but also in its vital role of facilitating communication. Hannah is fully aware of this when she first meets Robert, observing:

...if I really do want to fuck him, and I really do, then I really do have to be more liquid than I am. In preparation for real physical contact, I have to be freed and insulated and warm and fortified and these qualities only come to me, or indeed anyone else, when they've had a drink. (2004:51)

The repetition of the word 'real' here seems to demonstrate the way in which Hannah views her own experience – the desire for the 'real' contact which comes through sex is practically inseparable from the imperative, 'real' need for drink, the one cannot happen without the other.

Hannah's ability to communicate, or touch, or interact with another person at all, can only be viewed in relation to her drinking because she views the drinking as an integral part of her being, her own reality. She notes that 'we are all mostly liquids' anyway (2004:28); and from the very first page she is using the language of need, of desire, to describe her addiction, as she addresses us, the readers, directly and casually:

I'll tell you what I do like, though: what I adore – I'm looking right at it, right now and it is gorgeous, quite the prettiest thing I've seen since 8.41. It concerns my other hand – the one that is leaf-free.

It is a liquid.

I do love liquids. (2004:3)

It doesn't matter that the liquid in this particular case turns out to be apple juice – the very mention of it here, right at the start, signifies how important any liquids are in Hannah's view; 'gorgeous' things to 'love' and 'adore'. This paves the way for her first proper drink in the novel, fourteen pages later, half a bottle of Bushmills which is regarded almost like a lover; 'delicate' and 'special', smelling 'clever and hot and masculine' and seeming to provide the highly desirable combination of comfort, contentment and courage that could, perhaps, be found in the beloved: 'I need no more, or less, than this, I am balanced in my skin and whatever has gone before is unimportant and whatever has yet to come will make me smile' (2004:17-18).

The consistent comfort and contentment that alcohol provides is in stark contrast to the doubt and uncertainty Hannah experiences in her relationship with Robert. Their first sexual encounter leads her to a moment of thinking 'I want to stop this', and to conclude 'I'm at fault and he is, too – he didn't drink and so I didn't drink enough, didn't dose things appropriately, and so none of this has happened as it should' (2004:58-59). After this, every meeting that follows demonstrates Hannah's indecisiveness, both wanting Robert and not wanting him - 'I am glad that we are together these days, together often, but there are times when he's here too much' (2004:74); and occasionally she finds him manipulative, 'working at me, leaning against my arm, making sure I meet at least one solid, lock-picking look, the kind that lets him nudge into my mind and change it' (2004:75). There is an element of panic, even terror, in the description of their first almost-sober encounter, captured by a flurry of words and broken sentences:

We are both very near to sober – he may even be completely sober. And being without clothes is one thing – is a fine thing – but being without clothes and without drinking

and about to do what we have to be about to do – that's completely another thing and one that we've never attempted. Like this, I don't know if I can stand how beautiful he is – the rush of that and need and hormones and nothing to smooth it out, nothing to keep me held so I can focus. (2004:114)

It is this exposure of the self, the abandonment of control implied by sober sex and by fully sharing oneself intimately with another, which scares Hannah, as it does almost all of Kennedy's protagonists. For Hannah, the alcohol is protection against this. Throughout the novel there is a conflict between the two kinds of love, for a person and for a drink, and both for Hannah possess a visceral quality, a powerful link to her physicality. Human love is the more painful as it draws out the heart 'like a thorn' (2004:115) and 'calls you in your bones' (2004:156). Alcoholic love, meanwhile, is simple, glorious, and fluid in every sense: 'your limbs hollowed out with rushing and your heart thinned to pure motion, a soft knot of blood that evaporates, burns into joy' (2004:164). The negative aspects of drinking are described only in terms of social and practical difficulties, the 'constant work' of buying drink and storing drink and having the right amount of drink. Hannah cannot love Robert separately from the alcohol, cannot love him wholly, for the simple reason that the alcohol came first, and provides her with a 'full-time occupation': 'Robert said he'd be the cross that I would bear, because he didn't understand my situation and couldn't know that was a lie. I already have my cross: we've been getting acquainted for years' (2004:84). Even at the very end of the book, when Hannah is happily imagining Robert coming to her, being with her, alcohol still forms a central part of the picture:

I reach into the holdall and find the full bottle of Bushmill's undisturbed: that marvellous label: the long, slim door that leads to somewhere else. When Robert has finished, when he steps through, pink with scrubbing, wrapped snug in a towel, then we'll lie on the bed together and we'll talk, we'll tell each other everything. I'll ask him to bring through the glasses and then we'll begin. (2004:344)

'Reality – there's nothing but horror in that'

In *Paradise*, addiction forms a central part of Hannah's existence. The reason she gives for the development of the addiction, however, is a necessity to escape from the reality which surrounds her – an acute awareness of the harsh nature of life, the struggles inherent in 'being in the world', 'all the obvious misery of everything', leads her to cultivate her own, more personal reality:

I am delicate and the world is impossibly wrong, is unthinkable and I am not

forewarned, forearmed, equipped. I cannot manage. If there was something useful I could do, I would – but there isn't. So I drink. (2004:240)

Robin Morgan describes excessive alcohol consumption as providing a 'disintegration of the self' (Morgan 1989:122); and this seems to be Hannah's intention, particularly when she yearns for the condition she labels 'blessed drunk', which 'burns you up completely and grants you the grace of a temporary death while it curls up and rejoices in your soul' (Kennedy 2004:247). In contrast, love for another person only permits escape from the self when the self is viewed in isolation, and this escape from isolation is inevitably linked with an exposure, a merging or sharing of the self with the other, so that in loving another the boundaries of the self may be altered, but total obliteration cannot be achieved. Hannah may use loving language to describe her relationship with alcohol but she is also able to separate it from human love in this fashion – love between persons demands presence and consciousness, while addiction allows absence and forgetting. Crucially, too, while addiction centres on action – the need for obtaining and drinking alcohol, for example – love requires communication; the need for another must be expressed if the love is to develop. Love relies on language; language which 'allows humans to create their own world and identity' and become 'self-transcending' (Colebrook 2004:14). Addiction, in contrast, *replaces* language, still permitting the creation of an individual world and identity but with the end-point of self-obliteration rather than self-transcendence, destroying rather than creating. Self-transcendence is not destructive if the move it permits is one from the self-in-isolation to the self-in-relation – the creation of a new self and identity; exposed but also empowered by its relationship with other selves.

Both love and addiction have the power to reshape reality, but only addiction can guarantee an escape from the surrounding reality, as it relies on no relationship other than that between addict and substance. Going back to Baudrillard's notion of the hyperreal, what addiction may offer is not an inferior simulation of reality, but a third way of experiencing that is 'a world without a real origin' (Lane 2000:86); a 'decentred structure' within which it is 'impossible to locate the traditional nodes of power and subjection' (2000:98). Baudrillard emphasises that in hyperreality 'the subject is not actually "alienated" or "repressed" in the Marxist sense [...] it isn't a "fake" existence in the sense of the representation blurring with the real – it is another type of "reality", and that is how the subject experiences it' (2000:100). Baudrillard seems here to be echoing Deleuze's notion of a powerfully-producing universe. However, even Hannah in *Paradise* struggles to be satisfied with addiction alone and must

reach out for love with another human being as well. Kennedy's characters, it seems, cannot surrender themselves to the hyperreal, the third way of addiction – they must have reference to a human, subjective reality. And yet the declaration of love, or need, for another opens up a whole new, unknown reality, of which the characters are almost uniformly afraid. There are many examples in Kennedy's fiction of love going unspoken, and the damage which can be caused by this reluctance to communicate (as outlined above by Stoddart), and it is this kind of love, fearful of the altered reality which might be brought about by its expression, which is almost in itself a kind of addiction – a destructive force which prefers to silently feed on itself than confront the reality surrounding it. The suffering, self-pitying and masochistic Nathan in *Everything You Need* is perhaps Kennedy's finest example of this; a master of self-inflicted mental and physical tortures, distracting and shielding him from genuine expression.

If one grants love the power to alter reality through language, though, one then has to consider the various levels on which this applies to a fictional text. By its very definition fiction is *written unreality*, thus all love (and addiction) within it is virtual, and yet the very fact that it is written creates a reality for it; nor does its fictional nature exclude all possibility of realistic representations within it. Alison Lee observes that 'as soon as there exists a frame for reality, anything that is within that frame ceases to be "reality" and becomes artifact' (Lee 1990:5), and also that 'there is no single, direct correspondence between the written word and "reality". Language creates "reality", and language is inescapably plural' (1990:39). The inherent contradiction of reality in art, such as fiction, is also explored by Fredric Jameson, who argues that if realism is defined as 'a correct or true representation of the world', it cannot be 'an *aesthetic* mode of representation' and thus 'falls out of art altogether':

If, on the other hand, the artistic devices [...] whereby it captures that truth of the world are explored and stressed and foregrounded, "realism" will stand unmasked as a mere reality [...] *effect*, the reality it purported to deconceal falling at once into the sheerest representation and illusion. (Jameson 1990:158)

For Jameson, these contradictory elements of reality-within-art must always operate in tandem, because the tension this creates is intrinsic to the whole process. So we can, for example, recognise the truths inherent in a fictional account of love while simultaneously acknowledging the fictional context in which it is presented. And yet, if the transformative power of love lies in its ability to be communicated from person to person, surely it is also possible for us as readers to take the place of the beloved, by reading the love that is written and thus bringing it into our own reality. If writing is a 'sensual' process in which 'to communicate, person to person'

(Kennedy in Bell 1995:100), then perhaps this is the ultimate power of the love story, to find its completion in being read, whether or not the characters within the story find love with each other. Then again, if the reader becomes intrinsically involved in this 'sensual' process of communication, then surely the reader's own need and desire must form a connection with the text, and the text itself has the capability to become the loved object. Arguably, in some cases this can lead to another kind of addiction – the craving for another love story, another satisfactory conclusion as seen, perhaps, in obsessive readers of mass-produced Romance fiction (see 'Romance'). The simple act of reading about love can be addictive in itself, a need focused on an object, on words, but not speech. The fact that reading centres on non-verbal communication may mean that it forms a very intimate and personal part of our individual reality, but the simultaneous presence of the book before us also anchors it in the reality outside our selves. Through exploring addiction and the nature of desire in her fictions, Kennedy is challenging our notions of the 'real' and 'unreal' on two levels, both within the text and outside it; and the possibility of pulling away from the constantly lacking Lacanian universe, shifting towards a more Deleuzian, productive and healing love which has the strength to override addiction and communicates 'person to person', may draw upon the hopes and fears of her readers as much as her characters.

5. Trauma, 'Madness'

The notion of love as a kind of madness, a departure from reason, is not new, and many of the characters in Kennedy's fictions could be said to demonstrate this departure within the experience of loving. Madness, however, is a very general and disputed term, with many negative associations. The term *trauma*, by comparison, carries a certain scientific and medical weight, tracing an individual's mental turmoil back to specific, significant events. This chapter will suggest that Kennedy's works may be read as trauma narratives, where traumatised characters reach out for love, or where love itself becomes the traumatic experience. The two terms trauma and madness both suggest a powerful and fundamental blow to the personality, and while either may be employed to indicate a warping of the subject's reality, risking the loss of a sense of self, 'madness' is more vague and defamatory. Arguably, it implies a greater level of personal responsibility for the resulting 'abnormal' state of mind, or at least a refusal to acknowledge any readily identifiable source for such abnormality. For the purposes of this chapter, 'madness' may most helpfully be viewed as a generic label for the various coping mechanisms and behaviours which form *as a result of trauma* – madness *follows* the traumatic event; it is simultaneously a more emotive and a more lazy way of describing the post-traumatic state. Definitions of madness will therefore be discussed here in order to highlight the damaging manner in which post-trauma behaviours may be labelled, not just by society but by trauma survivors themselves, as 'abnormal'. While 'madness' may be considered a term 'at once stigmatizing and offensive' (Scull 2015:11), it nonetheless incorporates 'some of the most profound forms of human suffering – sadness, isolation, alienation, misery and the death of reason and of consciousness' (ibid). This suffering is experienced by many of Kennedy's characters, who describe themselves as broken, damaged, or simply 'wrong', as their thoughts or actions carry them beyond the 'reasonable'. Following an examination of trauma, this chapter will address the issue of 'madness' in Kennedy's work in an attempt to show that it may in fact be interpreted as a recognisable and important part of trauma recovery, with love and communication guiding the individual towards healing, even where love itself has formed part of the traumatic experience.

Trauma frequently causes, and may even be caused by, a breakdown in communication which not only throws the self into crisis but impacts upon the individual's ability to form relationships, and it is this aspect which is most pertinent to an exploration of A. L. Kennedy's work. Like violence and addiction, trauma may present significant obstacles

to the quest for love; once again blurring the boundary between the 'real' and the 'unreal', and sharpening the conflict between the need for unity and the apparent safety of isolation. Examining the history of perceptions of both trauma and madness highlights common elements within the two definitions but also points the way towards understanding 'madness' as a part of trauma, and thus towards healing and possible resolution. The connection of trauma to madness could be said to have begun with Freud's work on hysteria in the late nineteenth century, when many women suffering from the 'female malady' of hysteria were discovered to have traumatic events in their past from which the origin of their symptoms could be traced. By the mid 1890s investigators such as Freud, Breuer and Janet 'had also discovered that hysterical symptoms could be alleviated when the traumatic memories, as well as the intense feelings that accompanied them, were recovered and put into words' (Herman 2001:12). Besides heralding the birth of 'talking therapies', this discovery marks a distinct link between trauma and madness, in that the seemingly illogical symptoms of madness were frequently demonstrated to be the result of some form of previously unarticulated trauma.

Trauma

With the recognition and naming of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among veterans of the Vietnam war in the 1980s, the nature of trauma itself came under scrutiny. Since that time, writers such as Cathy Caruth and Judith Lewis Herman have begun examining psychoanalytical aspects of traumatic experience, whilst others like Anne Whitehead and Laurie Vickroy have looked to so-called 'trauma fiction' to explore literary perspectives on the ways in which trauma can be defined, expressed, and possibly healed. In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Cathy Caruth provides a succinct definition of trauma as describing

an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena. (Caruth 1996:11)

Caruth also points out that while the original Greek *trauma*, or 'wound', referred to 'an injury inflicted on a body', in later medical and psychiatric usage, such as the writings of Freud, the term *trauma* 'is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind' (1996:4). Trauma refers to the long-term mental and emotional response to an event, but the original event which brought it about is often centred upon physical violence, whether it be

experienced by many, as in war, natural disasters, train crashes and so on; or focused on the individual, as in domestic abuse or rape. For the sufferer, however, the form and nature of the traumatic event may be seen as secondary – more than any physical 'wound' inflicted it is the emotional memory, the terror experienced, which takes over and continues to affect life after the event. Judith Lewis Herman's *Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* draws parallels between the post-war trauma experienced by soldiers and the trauma of victims of sexual abuse. In both cases the survivor may 'relive the event as though it were continually recurring in the present' (Herman 2001:37); a reliving which carries 'all the emotional intensity of the original event', with the result that the survivor 'is continually buffeted by terror and rage' (2001:42). Herman's powerful and impassioned plea for empathetic understanding emphasises the difficulty survivors face in re-integrating into society, a difficulty inextricably linked to an overwhelming sense of isolation:

Wounded soldiers and raped women cry for their mothers, or for God. When this cry is not answered, the sense of basic trust is shattered. Traumatized [sic] people feel utterly abandoned, utterly alone, cast out of the human and divine systems of care and protection that sustain life. Thereafter, a sense of alienation, of disconnection, pervades every relationship... (2001:52)

Whilst focusing mainly on war veterans and rape survivors, Herman concludes her book with the suggestion that the impact of trauma and elements of traumatic experience are in no way limited to these two groups. Rather, she implies, the definition of trauma is forced to become more fluid, and the effects more widespread, by the increasingly violent nature of contemporary society, where 'even in peacetime, exposure to violence is more commonplace and more damaging than anyone would like to believe', and the 'enduring consequences of our endemic social violence have only begun to be appreciated' (2001:238). As more survivors come forward, *listening* is of pivotal importance; 'bearing witness' becomes 'an act of solidarity' (2001:247). For Herman, 'creating a protected space where survivors can speak their truth is an act of liberation' (ibid). Perhaps the growing interest in trauma fiction is born of the same instinct – to create a space, within and through the narrative, where the traumatised can speak, be heard, and attempt to break free.

The necessity of speaking the unspeakable, vocalising the traumatic event and more crucially *bearing witness* certainly appears central to the examinations of many critics dealing with trauma fiction. The traumatic event itself may perhaps prove so horrific it defies understanding, but it is through listening (and, by extension, reading or writing) that a

connection, an 'act of solidarity', can be generated. Shoshana Felman's *Literature & Psychoanalysis* (1982) may be viewed as a seminal study which heralded the merging of literary and psychoanalytical examinations of fictional texts. Within it, Felman and others seek to place literature and psychoanalysis alongside one another as equals; placing value on psychoanalysis as a tool with which to understand and explore literature whilst simultaneously acknowledging the nature of literature itself, and avoiding a psychoanalytical reading which '*mis-recognizes* (overlooks, leaves out)' the literary specificity of these texts (Felman 1982:6). In her introduction Felman lays out very clearly her vision of the possibilities inherent in the merging of the two mediums:

...the interpreter's role would here be, not to *apply* to the text an acquired science, a preconceived knowledge, but to act as a go-between, to *generate implications* between literature and psychoanalysis – to explore, bring to light and articulate the various (indirect) ways in which the two domains do indeed *implicate each other*, each one finding itself enlightened, informed, but also affected, displaced, by the other. (Felman 1982:9)

Applied to the study of fiction, this ideal gives the critic space to explore psychoanalytical interpretations of a text at will, provided that the nature of the text itself – as literature, as a work of fiction – is also taken into consideration and given equal weight in the shaping of any conclusions.

The delicate application of psychoanalysis to literature offers an extra, potentially fascinating dimension to textual examination, and fiction which centres on trauma, especially large-scale, historical trauma, lends itself particularly well to this type of analysis. Texts such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) or Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy (1991-5) use the powerful and intensively traumatic backdrops of American slavery and the First World War respectively to underpin the more personal traumas of individual characters, and highlight their trouble in finding a voice. This type of text, sculpted around an undeniable factual trauma, is the kind most often treated to analysis in such books as Deborah M. Horvitz's *Literary Trauma* (2000); Laurie Vickroy's *Trauma & Survival in Contemporary Fiction* (2002); and Anne Whitehead's *Trauma Fiction* (2004). Despite often dealing with fiction written at least a decade earlier, all these texts appeared after the turn of the millennium, when an increased interest in trauma fiction, especially war fiction, could perhaps be attributed to various factors such as the much-publicised arguments surrounding treatment of 'Gulf War Syndrome' among veterans in the nineties, the horror surrounding the 9/11 attacks in 2001, and the start of the second Iraq War in 2003, all of which placed widespread trauma, and its

psychoanalytical treatment, squarely in the public domain. Following Felman's plea for a balanced relationship of the two disciplines, these critics do attempt to '*generate implications*' (Felman 1982:9) between trauma fiction and the psychoanalysis of trauma theory; to analyse the ways in which such narratives 'go beyond presenting trauma as subject matter or character study' to 'internalize the rhythms, processes, and uncertainties of traumatic experience within their underlying sensibilities and structures' (Vickroy 2002:3). Running through these critical examinations is the argument that trauma fiction, whilst powerful in and of itself, may also be considered a useful tool for understanding trauma outside the fictional realm, providing narratives which may *give back*, by giving voice, to psychoanalysis. In attempting to speak the unspeakable, in exploring the nature of traumatic experience through both characters and narrative structures, these fictional texts may reveal 'the relation of the cultural to the psychological, the formation or disintegration of subjectivity, the nature of boundaries and excess, as well as making us face the unthinkable that happens in our midst' (Vickroy 2002:221). Anne Whitehead implies that the most effective trauma fiction will emphasise the importance of 'working through' whilst remaining 'attentive to the resistance and shock of trauma' (Whitehead 2004:88), echoing the values of clinical counselling and talking therapy. Deborah M. Horvitz also highlights the healing power of expression and narrative, boldly stating that 'when the stories of the past are consciously recognized, the cycle of violence can end, because the narratives, not the sadomasochism or the trauma, are repeated and passed on' (Horvitz 2000:134). Cathy Caruth observes that 'literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing' (Caruth 1996:3), and whilst expressing the unexpressed is arguably of importance across the range of literary fictions, within trauma fiction it develops a particular resonance. Expression here may point the way towards understanding but also healing, as described by Horvitz above, and this perhaps gives trauma fiction a closer bond with psychoanalysis, as 'it is at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet' (Caruth 1996:3). The argument these critics put forward seems to be that exploring the connections between literary and psychoanalytical theory, through the medium of trauma, can enrich the study of both. The fiction writer, at one remove from the traumatised individual, is thus perhaps permitted a greater freedom of expression in exploring the impact of trauma, giving voice whilst at the same time bearing witness. As Shoshana Felman observes, literature 'is the language which psychoanalysis uses in order to *speak of itself*, in order to *name itself*' (Felman 1982:9), and this is perhaps most evident within trauma fiction, linking psychoanalysis to the power of narrative.

The definitions of trauma theory provide an interesting medium through which to examine A. L. Kennedy's fiction. Certainly the results of trauma as highlighted in previous critical analysis – a loss of connection with others coupled with a yearning to connect; an overwhelming sense of isolation; recurring and intense personal pain, combined with the sense of the narrative providing a kind of 'working through', permitting expression and understanding after the event, are all readily identifiable features of Kennedy's writing. The question of how far Kennedy's characters could be considered to be traumatised is more debatable, but surely Alfred in *Day*, as a war veteran returning to civilian life, and Beth in *The Blue Book*, attempting to come to terms with her bereavement, may both be examined in this light as undeniable survivors of traumatic events, alongside Colin in *Looking for the Possible Dance*; a secondary character but also a survivor of horrific torture. If one then includes the other kind of trauma, stemming not from one single event but from recurrent incidents, evidence of this may be seen in the many characters in Kennedy's short stories who have been exposed to domestic violence or sexual abuse. This chapter will begin by examining the characters of Alfred and Beth in more detail, before going on to look at other possible examples of trauma in Kennedy's work, how this relates to the notion of madness, and the ways in which this affects each character's interaction with others and their quest for connection, or love.

After the War: Alfred in *Day*

When placed alongside Judith Lewis Herman's *Trauma and Recovery*, one can find a good deal of evidence in *Day* to suggest that Alfred suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder. Herman observes that because 'reliving a traumatic experience provokes such intense emotional distress, traumatized [sic] people go to great lengths to avoid it'. However, this effort at self-protection only serves to further aggravate the PTSD; 'for the attempt to avoid reliving the trauma too often results in a narrowing of consciousness, a withdrawal of engagement with others, and an impoverished life' (Herman 2001:42). Within the first few pages of *Day* Alfred is battling with his thoughts:

If you couldn't keep control and stay wary, you might think anything, which was exactly the one freedom you'd avoid. You could dodge certain thoughts, corkscrew off and get yourself out of their way, but they'd still hunt you.
You have to watch. (Kennedy 2007:2)

There is a definite fear attached to the process of remembering; Alfred must keep 'in charge'

of his thinking in order that 'things stay friendly and polite' (2007:16). His initial 'withdrawal of engagement' seems to develop as a coping mechanism within the prisoner of war camp, during which Alfred becomes 'light and distant, as if his release had already come and unlocked somewhere underneath his skull, parted him from his dirt, his flesh' (2007:58). Upon his actual release, however, he experiences a terrifying resurgence of feeling:

One afternoon, there'd been this rushing inside his arms and his heart doubling, racketing about – there was no way to misunderstand the terrible life that roared back in. He'd been caught again and no escaping. It all would come for him and hurt him and he wouldn't die, he would only want to and not get his way. He would have to be there, be Alfie Day and feel. (2007:62)

This appears to be a clear kind of 'intense emotional distress' which Alfred subsequently does 'go to great lengths' to avoid (Herman 2001:42); telling himself to '*chop it*' (Kennedy 2007:3) and '*defend*' himself against the things he '*should never remember*' (2007:23). Alfred does seem to recognise that this refusal to remember, to feel, results in withdrawal and 'an impoverished life' (Herman 2001:42), but also appears resigned to the fact, even enjoying 'the well-trained, emptied murmur that mildly ran his brain inside his skull' (Kennedy 2007:4). He appreciates his isolation, cutting himself off from others because people are 'unpredictable', providing 'nothing on which to rely' because they can at any moment 'splinter in your face' (2007:7).

As the only member of his crew to have escaped death, Alfred appears to suffer the guilt of the survivor. Examiners of trauma in war veterans emphasise the incredibly strong bonds developed between the fighters – Herman references W. H. R. Rivers, whose psychoanalytical studies of soldiers in the First World War repeatedly highlighted the fact that the most powerful motivation for overcoming the fear of battle was not 'patriotism, abstract principles, or hatred of the enemy', but rather 'the love of the soldiers for one another' (Herman 2001:22). Herman argues that this bond remains the overriding force which holds men, and women, together in times of war:

Clinging together under prolonged conditions of danger, the combat group develops a shared fantasy that their mutual loyalty and devotion can protect them from harm. They come to fear separation from one another more than they fear death. (2001:62)

Kennedy's description of Alfred's bond with his crew closely echoes this. There are rituals they develop; playing a few bars of 'I'll See You In My Dreams' before each op, or playing

catch at night; 'because if they kept on doing impossible things – even something as small as catching and throwing a cricket ball in the dark – then maybe they would last out', and 'because the more they were together, the more they would feel together and work and think and act together' (Kennedy 2007:108). The fear of death, the recognition that one night the crew 'will most probably get the chop' is dulled by this intense camaraderie:

...the mercy is that when they go you'll be there with them: dying too. You'll be together. Or, even better, the chances are that you'll go first. So it's OK, you can be fond of them, or have any other feelings you decide. (2007:39)

The one thing this bond does not allow, however, is the possibility of coming out of the combat situation as the sole survivor. When he lets his guard down, when he sleeps, Alfred is haunted by his dead crew, 'the thought of the boys [...] with him again, the whole pack of them, staring into his head' (2007:21). In her examination of trauma narratives, Cathy Caruth argues that the fact of survival, and the guilt, rage or fury attached to it, is an integral part of the traumatic experience – trauma does not reside solely in 'the encounter with death', but in 'the ongoing experience of having survived it'. For Caruth, trauma narratives centre on 'a kind of double telling, the oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival' (Caruth 1996:7). This unbearable nature, the fearsome possibility of life, is first expressed in the book through the attitudes of Alfred and his crew, as they near the end of their thirty missions:

...this should not be mentioned: the terrible idea that sometimes mouths inside your head
I might live.
And the way it drives along your muscles [...] the way it makes you feel afraid.
I really could live.
The way it always feels like it's a joke at your expense. (Kennedy 2007:234)

As the only survivor after the plane goes down, Alfred initially feels that it's his 'business to live' and that the memory and love of Joyce gives him something to be alive for, 'maybe nothing else, but she is enough' (2007:250-251). However, once he is in the camp and receives the letter in which Joyce rejects him, this motivation and sole explanation for his continued existence is taken away. It is described as if his life literally stops at this point:

February '44. That's how far I made it, until February '44. In the bag nearly six

*months and that was it.
When you say go, I go.
But I was already gone. (2007:267)*

In this way, for Alfred Joyce, and the memory of Joyce, becomes an inextricable part of his trauma. The emotional trauma of rejected love is put alongside darker memories, such as his crew dying around him and the horrified recollection of bombing Hamburg, and like them is shut away in an effort at self-protection, becoming one more thing against which to 'defend' himself. After the one terrifying moment where he realises that he will 'have to be there, be Alfie Day and feel' (2007:62), Alfred attempts to avoid doing just that, shutting himself down to all emotions, avoiding anger 'because that could lead to weakness and other sorts of grief' (2007:18); acknowledging a 'pressure' in the neck which is 'as close as [he] should get to being sad' (2007:33). He cannot escape emotion entirely, however, because he cannot block out the pain and the way it manifests itself as a physical presence:

Your broken heart, it's still not right. You don't forget, because of the day when you turn too quickly, or you roll over in your bed and the pieces of heart are jolted in together, still sharp. Makes you cough. (2007:34)

Besides this, anger in particular proves a difficult emotion to conquer. Judith Lewis Herman notes how, in war veterans, there is a 'difficulty in modulating intense anger' which may cause survivors to 'oscillate between uncontrolled expressions of rage and intolerance of aggression in any form' (Herman 2001:56). At points the proximity of Alfred's rage can be interpreted through a sudden recourse to more vicious language – 'you were fucked off with yourself and fucked off with them and fucked off with the thing and its taste and its fear and its living in you' (Kennedy 2007:19) – but the complex relationship with anger is perhaps best demonstrated through Alfred's interaction with Vasyl, the Ukrainian he encounters at the film camp after the war. When Vasyl uses his Luger to threaten a German mother and child Alfred moves quickly from the vocal 'you fucking bastard. What the fuck are you doing?' to a more incoherent physical violence:

*you are extremely, extremely – you are upset until you find that you are on the grass and cannot quite breathe and you have stopped him. [...] your arms operate without you, very smooth and calm [...] You decide not to mind how many times you slap him. Don't hit him, slap him, let him feel small.
This makes you smile. (2007:28-29)*

Later, when Vasyl recounts his history of torture and murder, Alfred's reaction becomes more violent, more furious:

The bloodsmell everywhere, the old slither and clog in your breathing, over your tongue. 'You cunt.' Holding Vasyl's one arm bent behind his back. 'Cunt.' Your other hand keeping the grip under Vasyl's chin, ready to twist, break the neck, very ready. (2007:228)

However, even at this point there is part of Alfred holding back, the 'ghost of blood' inside his hands, 'slippy', making him 'doubt them' (ibid). The repeated use of Vasyl's name here could also indicate a refusal to dehumanise; Alfred remaining fully aware that this is a *person* he is trying so desperately to hurt. Later still, when a group of other men from the camp offer to 'see to' Vasyl as 'a favour' to Alfred, his response is one of alarm, shouting 'No. The war's over. I don't want that' (2007:264). To further complicate matters there is an unpleasant suggestion of similarity between the two men, a comparison Vasyl draws when he tells Alfred 'we don't die. People like you and me, Alfred. It's the other ones that die. We kill them' (2007:229). This creates a sense of unease for the reader as by this point we know that Alfred *is* a killer outside of his action in the war – murdering his father, or at least enabling his father's death, as vengeance for the death of his mother. Alfred's 'intolerance of aggression' (Herman 2001:56), after years of witnessing his father abusing his mother, leads him to seize the opportunity when on leave to throw bricks at his drunken father and then stand quietly by, listening to him drown. The difference, perhaps, is that while Alfred knows himself to be a killer, his killing is more justifiable because he kills a guilty man, a brutal man. His 'expressions of rage' (Herman 2001:56) upon encountering Vasyl could then be interpreted as being provoked by the same impulse; using violence to punish the man who enjoys using violence, protecting the innocent by hurting the man who would hurt them.

For Alfred, too, the return of rage is valuable as it permits him to feel, which in turn helps him rediscover his desire to live. The motivation behind his decision to participate in the film camp is presented as somewhat confused, but centred on the possibility of finding something lost, something to fill 'the dark, the numb gap' which is 'asleep inside him'; the thought that he might 'work out what was missing, maybe even put it back' (Kennedy 2007:35-36). Again, this draws comparison with Herman's observation that commonly 'traumatized [sic] people find themselves re-enacting some aspect of the trauma'; a drive towards 'the repetitive reliving of the traumatic experience' which many theorists speculate 'must represent a spontaneous, unsuccessful attempt at healing' (Herman 2001:40-41).

However, the attempt is not guaranteed to be unsuccessful – Herman acknowledges that some re-enactments are 'adaptive', if survivors can 'find a way to integrate reliving experiences into their lives' (2001:40). She also notes that, during the Second World War, the treatment for 'combat neurosis' was built around 'the recovery and cathartic reliving of traumatic memories, with all their attendant emotions of terror, rage, and grief' (2001:25). This implies that, despite their potentially harmful nature, re-enactments may also carry the possibility of healing. This is the gift Kennedy grants Alfred in *Day*, a reconnecting with personal emotion. As he wrestles Vasyl to the ground, Alfred experiences 'a kind of private uproar' because 'it's back: whatever it is that stops you dying has come back' (Kennedy 2007:29). His feeling of not wanting to be killed is surprising because he never expected to 'feel that way again' (ibid). Through Alfred, Kennedy's description of the immediate experience of trauma highlights its numbing and unfathomable nature, placing one in a position where '*[y]ou see too much and have no words for what you see and see and see until it doesn't reach, is nonsense, there without you*' (2007:48). This mirrors Cathy Caruth's observation that, at the moment they occur, traumatic events are 'experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known', and are 'not available to consciousness' until they emerge later in the form of nightmares or repetitive actions (Caruth 1996:4).

Through his participation in the film camp – his own particular re-enactment – and once the fight with Vasyl uncovers within him the desire to live, Alfred is able to access and face his traumatic memories, which are gradually shared with the reader, building up through the book to peak at the two most intense moments, his plane being shot down and his rejection by Joyce. Laurie Vickroy notes that a fundamental part of traumatic experience is 'that the past lingers unresolved, not remembered in a conventional sense' (Vickroy 2002:12), and this is reflected in Kennedy's narrative style, as Alfred's memory comes through in non-chronological pieces which the reader has to fit together. The memory of his last moments in the plane, Alfred's most traumatic recollection, is formed of one long stream-of-consciousness, almost incoherent in places, slipping further into dialect as it progresses, and with no punctuation:

...pummellin wind about yo and ash and Window magic Window flying all about and the flak's stopped which is good and why yo'm alive and there's no people yo cor find any people and yo go forward and there's no one yo'm alone legs rattlin under yo everything rattlin apart... (Kennedy 2007:247)

The immediacy of Kennedy's writing here, along with her persistent use of the second person,

places the reader in the crucial position of a listener bearing witness to Alfred's trauma. This witnessed uncovering allows for the possibility of healing, and the easing of the guilt with which Alfred struggles; a common emotion for survivors who need to 'regain some sense of power and control', as to 'imagine that one could have done better may be more tolerable than to face the reality of utter helplessness' (Herman 2001:54). For Alfred, the possibility of redemption, forgiveness, and the release of this guilt, comes on the final night of the film camp when he sings 'Jerusalem' for the crowd:

...he can believe that if he opens up his eyes the benches will be full of all the boys lost to the sky and his friends the closest, his crew the closest, so near that he can take their hands and know they are well and never were harmed and never were frightened, never lost.

And he can believe that he is forgiven.

He can believe so much, the truth of it makes him weep. (Kennedy 2007:268)

Throughout *Day*, Alfred actually says very little – the insights readers are given into his personality come mainly through our access to his thoughts, as with many of Kennedy's protagonists. It is interesting to note that the moment of healing, of possible forgiveness, comes here with an actual physical vocalisation, a communication between Alfred and those around him, men who join in with his singing as if to demonstrate that he is not alone, and that he can still connect with others, even if only through the medium of song. Certainly this one moment of communication seems to precipitate another, when Alfred returns to London and goes in search of Joyce, to face his remaining 'unfinished business' (2007:275), the one part of his past which still 'lingers unresolved' (Vickroy 2002:12). The implication is that, through acknowledging his trauma, Alfred is not only accepting the possibility of forgiving himself, but forgiving others, forgiving Joyce, and in so doing allowing himself once again to be open, and to love.

losschildbetrayal: Beth in *The Blue Book*

The case for viewing Beth as a trauma survivor is perhaps a little less clear than that of Alfred in *Day*, but bereavement, specifically the death of a child, is an undeniably traumatic event and there are many aspects of Beth's behaviour within *The Blue Book* which echo both Alfred's experience and the recognised traits of traumatised individuals as discussed by Herman, Vickroy, and Caruth. As with Alfred, Kennedy gives Beth surprisingly little dialogue considering the length of the novel, preferring once again to allow readers direct access to the character's consciousness, with the result that we know what she is concealing

from others, but not what she is concealing from herself. In a similar manner to the exploration of Alfred's trauma, the manner in which Beth's loss is repeatedly glimpsed and hidden before finally being fully revealed means that 'the reader is guided through the narrative via the disorientations and conflicts of traumatic memory' (Vickroy 2002:3). If trauma 'is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available' (Caruth 1996:4), the story of Beth's loss falls squarely within the realm of the traumatic, crying out for acknowledgement whilst being simultaneously shrouded in silence, repression, and guilt.

In defining trauma narratives, Laurie Vickroy notes the way in which they 'reveal many obstacles' to communicating traumatic experience, such as 'silence, simultaneous knowledge and denial, dissociation, resistance, and repression' (Vickroy 2002:3). All of these obstacles can be found in *The Blue Book*, to a greater or lesser extent, as Beth struggles with her bereavement. Silence and repression form a central part of Beth's narrative, ostensibly to protect Arthur from the awful truth – that he had a son and that that son is now dead – but also to protect herself. During a long love scene towards the end of the book the reader is presented with the sharp contrast between Arthur, who says a great deal and seems determined that both of them 'aren't going to hide any more' (Kennedy 2011:325), and Beth's determination to remain guarded, 'keeping herself a secret from herself so that she can manage, be as she must' (2011:315). As the scene is viewed from Beth's perspective, the dialogue is broken up throughout by her thoughts and there are regular intermissions of a line of text which contains only a 'Sssshhh', implying points where she is hiding the truth not only from Arthur but also from the reader, and from herself. While Beth does acknowledge that Arthur '*ought to have all of the true*' (2011:321) she also seizes upon the suggestion to only reveal what is necessary:

One thing at a time and about what we need it to be about.

Not everything.

Everything would be too much.

Which suggests to her that she's being distracted by how she shouldn't be distracted
[...]

But there are worse things.

Sssshhh. (2011:324)

Despite the very different circumstances of each character, there is another similarity here between Beth and Alfred in *Day*. Both these traumatic experiences focus on the death of others, and in both cases there is an emphasis on how the whole truth of the traumatic

memory is just 'too much'. The overwhelming nature of the trauma in each case is therefore partly due to the terrifying acceptance of loss that must come with acknowledgement and healing, as the 'absence of the dead remains inviolable and forms the central silence around which the narratives circle but which they cannot finally redeem' (Whitehead 2004:88). Part of Beth's argument in not revealing her trauma to Arthur is the recognition of how much this irredeemable loss can hurt, even though she 'is certain that he should have and see and know everything – all that's left'; she 'can't do that' because it would be 'like hitting him, like making him bleed' (Kennedy 2011:334). Beth experiences the guilt of the survivor just as Alfred does, blaming herself for the 'unforgivable' and 'impossible' (2011:368) death of her young son, stating 'I lost him because I was stupid' (2011:371). This 'stupidity' also provides an excuse for her silence, the repression of truth permitted by the act being out of character, a fragile justification which first appears quite early in the book:

...if, for example, you did in actuality do some unfortunate thing and it was completely unlike you [...] if it was so far from who you are that describing it, admitting it, would be misleading – then a deception might be called for, a silence might be justified. (2011:62)

Once again, the use of the second person here creates a sense of immediacy and asks an empathetic response from the reader. And Kennedy does present a compelling argument; that human beings 'are not intended to be comprehensive in their expression of themselves' because then they would be 'terrifying', always meaning 'too much' (2011:63). The reiteration of 'too much' serves to highlight the overwhelming nature of personal emotion when faced with the impact of trauma, and this is revisited at the end of the book through Beth's explanation that the whole thing 'killed my father, left my mother without both of them and how would I tell you this and not hurt you, too' (2011:371). This self-justification implies a need to apply logic to the desired repressing of the memory of trauma; in an attempt to avoid the 'intense emotional distress' of reliving the traumatic experience (Herman 2001:42). The supposed need to protect Arthur, juxtaposed with the 'certain' knowledge that he should be told everything, also demonstrates one of the key ways in which trauma can affect personal interactions, impelling people 'both to withdraw from close relationships and to seek them desperately' (2001:56). The 'need to avoid reminders of the trauma' may be seen in Beth's distancing herself from Arthur after their son's death, but the simultaneous 'need for protective attachments' caused by 'the terror of the traumatic event' itself (ibid) appears, firstly, in Beth's attempt to begin a new relationship with Derek, who is 'a reliable man' (Kennedy 2011:87);

and is arguably also evident in the intensity of her craving to be physically close to Arthur on the boat; 'to be nearer than she is to him, to be fastened – arms straining with being so very hard fastened – and round his breathing' (2011:323).

As in *Day*, the narrative in *The Blue Book* is shaped around a trauma which is suggested but continues concealed, unknown and unspoken, until the protagonist reveals it in a climactic episode towards the end of the book. Both Alfred and Beth demonstrate a somewhat fragmented, broken state of self, and alongside this each novel again implies that *communication*, the admission of the trauma not just to the self but to others, is the crucial first step in the process of healing and acceptance. The manner in which the two protagonists move both towards and away from such communication, fearing and craving it in equal measure, may be seen as further evidence of their traumatised natures. Alfred signs up to the film camp in the hope of reclaiming something 'lost' during the war, but will also 'chop' and shut down any traumatic memories when they threaten to surface. The cruise offers Beth the possibility of seeing Arthur, after which she cannot resist becoming physically close, but she also cannot bear the intrusion of traumatic memories and shies away from them with a 'ssssshhh'. While Alfred's final release appears to come through song, weeping as he sings 'Jerusalem', Beth's is centred on the written word, a book she gives Arthur containing the truths her traumatised mind still cannot speak; his very own 'blue book' which 'wants to feel like touching and like trust' and 'wants to tell [...] everything, but it's scared' (Kennedy 2011:360). Beth cannot express her trauma out loud, but giving the book to Arthur represents a moment of vulnerability and reaching out, just as Alfred's song does. Besides this, in order that we as readers understand the nature of the trauma suffered by her protagonists, Kennedy must reveal it to us in the text, presented as an immersion in that character's thoughts – a character does not need to physically vocalise such thoughts for readers to access them, but the very fact of their presence in the text of each novel marks an opening of communication, a sharing of experience between character and reader, 'incomplete unless you're with it and can see' (Kennedy 2011:360). In this manner the narrative itself, which by its very nature must engage in 'compelling victim-survivors to remember and to repeat stories suffused with terror, panic, and pain', may be able to 'serve a palliative role in the healing process' (Horvitz 2000:6).

Pushing the boundaries of trauma

It may be stretching the evidence to claim that *all* of Kennedy's protagonists demonstrate signs of trauma, but it is indisputable that her fiction focuses on those who are damaged and

frequently appear in some way lost, incomplete. Laurie Vickroy observes that some trauma theorists 'have insisted that we extend the boundaries of how we view traumatic experience', because PTSD may actually be 'a widespread cultural phenomena', even if we choose to ignore it (Vickroy 2002:13). Beyond easily recognised traumatic events such as war, rape, or bereavement, are myriad others which carry a potential traumatic impact – anything, in fact, which could be labelled 'sudden or catastrophic' (Caruth 1996:11). Response to traumatic events is also highly subjective; a single incident may leave one individual mildly troubled whilst causing much more intense trauma in another. This is the key point, that the definition of trauma lies not in the event itself but in the individual's response to it, and in this manner trauma theory may actually be applied to the vast majority of Kennedy's characters.

In some cases there is a single, 'catastrophic' event, the traumatic consequences of which are unquestionable, and Alfred's war trauma is the prime example, being the central focus of *Day*. Alongside this, though, one could place Colin's horrific crucifixion in *Looking for the Possible Dance*; an event which temporarily leaves him nothing more than a 'creature, a wounded something' (Kennedy 1993:235); terrified to fall asleep because that is when the music comes back, the Mozart Clarinet Concerto played during his ordeal which continues to plague him with the seemingly endless repetition of the truly traumatic (1993:247). Bereavement may be seen as a more commonplace event, with its own separate forms of processing and healing, but surely one can make an argument for grief being a type of trauma, especially if the death in question was sudden, violent or considered preventable by the grieving party, as is the case for Beth in *The Blue Book*. A death that is tied up with personal feelings of guilt is likely to trigger agonised re-enactments and the kind of mental haunting recognised in sufferers of trauma. This scenario is also hinted at in the short story 'What Becomes', focusing on a man whose wife blames him 'for one terrible thing which had been an accident, an oversight, a carelessness that lasted the space of a breath and meant he lost as much as her, just precisely as much' (Kennedy 2009:17). Like Beth, this man struggles to cope with the overwhelming nature of grief and is simultaneously attracted and repelled by any reminder of it, in this case leaving his wife, and sitting in a cinema to watch a man and his daughter on screen over and over again (2009:21).

In the many short stories which do not feature one 'catastrophic' event, Kennedy frequently still presents the reader with characters who have been victims of more repetitive, stealthy, 'lower-level' trauma in the shape of some form of domestic abuse, either against themselves, as adults or children, or witnessed between their parents. Judith Lewis Herman notes the way in which such 'prolonged, repeated trauma' may be not only as harmful as a

single, acute event but possibly more so; developing 'an insidious, progressive form of post-traumatic stress disorder that invades and erodes the personality' (Herman 2001:86).

Subjected to repeated beatings from her husband in 'Original Bliss', Helen finds herself aching with the effort of 'holding on, with clinging as hard as she could from the inside, so nothing of her personality could fall out of place' (Kennedy 1997:259). Grace in 'The Moving House' (*Night Geometry*) also feels herself being eroded by the sexual abuse she suffers from her mother's lover as, caught between being 'out on the street, or stuck here for life', she reflects that either way she'll 'be nothing', she 'won't be anything' (1990:38). Meanwhile Ronald in 'A Bad Son' (*Indelible Acts*) is witness to his father's abuse of his mother and yearns for a complete shutting down of emotion, praying '*please make me not feel a thing*' (2002:84), but also recognising the numbing and hardening impact of sustained fear, which always changes 'to something different' if you can just 'wait' (2002:87). Repeated trauma in childhood 'forms and deforms the personality' (Herman 2001:96) and this can be seen in both Grace's loss of self-identity and Ronald's desire to become nothing more than an instrument of revenge against his father. One could argue that in Ronald's case there is that impulsion to 're-create the moment of terror' often encountered in trauma survivors (Herman 2001:39), to respond to the violence which has left him feeling helpless by creating more violence of his own, and it is this dramatic situation which appears again, in more detail, within Alfred's experience in *Day*; waiting until he is older and stronger before going back and killing his father.

The case of Nathan in *Everything You Need* is slightly different. As a husband whose wife has chosen to leave him, taking their child, Nathan's sadness is understandable but in his mind this departure stands out as a catastrophic and deeply traumatic event, which subjects him to the same guilt and agonised re-enactments that other protagonists experience in dealing with memories of war or abuse. Nathan's response to his situation is notable for its somewhat paradoxical nature – he is incredibly self-destructive, attempting suicide and damaging himself physically on numerous occasions, but he also pours a substantial amount of energy into writing his story, thus encouraging the kind of healing brought about by sharing with others, and inviting his daughter to read and bear witness, as Beth invites Arthur in *The Blue Book*. Nathan's powerful feelings of guilt, his lack of self-worth and belief and his agonising struggle to let go of the memories which torment him are all suggestive of a man suffering the after-effects of trauma. Even if the 'traumatic' event itself is not one we might readily label as such, Nathan's sense of abandonment and misery is undeniable:

I don't want to be this way. Dear God, don't let me have to keep on being this way.

Please. I'll do anything. If you'll only tell me what.

There came, as he'd expected, no particular revelation. (Kennedy 1999:120)

Through the intensity of his grief and suffering, Nathan is an excellent example within Kennedy's writing of the far-reaching and complex nature of trauma, beyond the catastrophic event:

Trauma also has meaning in that it is indicative of basic life issues such as the relation between life and death; the meaning and quality of existence; physical and psychological survival; how people understand and cope with loss and self-diminishment; and the nature of bonds and disconnections among people. Because all these issues have bearing when we consider traumatic responses, it becomes a phenomenon that touches many more people than the most severely traumatized [sic]. (Vickroy 2002:221)

'Madness'

Trauma, then, may be characterised by the inability to connect; a disassociation from one's surroundings which is, however, frequently coupled with a desperate desire to reach out, heal and somehow *re-connect*. 'Madness', in its definition as seemingly irrational behaviour, may form a part of this. Returning to Freud for a moment, the early work on hysteria seems to indicate that, all too often, an individual who is hysterical ('mad') at the present moment will frequently be found to have been the victim of trauma in the past. Thus, every encounter between doctor and patient takes on 'the quality of a quest', with 'the solution to the mystery of hysteria' being found through a 'painstaking reconstruction of the patient's past' (Herman 2001:12). In this manner the principle of the 'talking cure' works backwards – beginning from the current, seemingly irrational madness and tracing it back to a previous trauma, to which the 'irrational' response appears more justified and understandable. The ability to blame extreme or abnormal behaviour on a specific traumatic event may serve to make such behaviour more scientifically acceptable, as the non-specific madness then becomes merely a reaction to an unspoken past experience; a reaction which may then be eased by speaking out and giving voice to that experience. On an emotional level, this connection of madness to trauma may create greater empathy for the subject but also, crucially, it rationalises the irrational – once the traumatic 'solution to the mystery' of madness has been uncovered, the subject may be in the paradoxical position of continuing 'mad' behaviour whilst no longer being 'mad', if one considers madness to be behaviour with no reason behind it. This lends weight to the argument that madness is simply a label applied all too readily to unfamiliar behaviours.

This highlights one of the main differences between the two terms – arguably, while *trauma* may be defined at least up to a point in clinical, medical terms, *madness*, though it may carry some of the same characteristics, is a more general term that 'actively defies' formal diagnostic classification (Baker et al 2010:3). As such, madness is open to a much wider variety of interpretations than trauma can be. For example, without knowledge of a preceding traumatic event madness may be seen to reflect negatively on the sufferer, as weak-willed perhaps, or hysterical. Conversely, though, through its inherent suggestion of subversion and the shattering of normality, that thing labelled 'madness' may be viewed as possessing positive, even transformative characteristics, which one would struggle to attach to 'trauma'. The broader scope offered by the term also ensures much more contention among critics as they search for a definition. For example, Baker postulates that naming specific mental illnesses causes a 'narrowing' of focus to one 'mediated through a medical viewpoint'; whilst the word 'madness' is more universal, signifying 'a number of different meanings for different people' (ibid). He goes on to suggest that madness 'might confer creative advantages and insights rather than being associated exclusively with distress and disability' (2010:4). In this Baker appears to follow Foucault's implication in *Madness and Civilization* that madness permits a certain kind of liberation, 'escaping truth and its constraints' (Foucault 1989:93) to move 'beyond imagination' and yet be 'profoundly rooted in it' (1989:94); to be a paradoxical 'nothing' that can nonetheless 'manifest itself', exploding 'in signs, in words, in gestures' (1989:107). Lillian Feder, however, accuses Foucault of romanticising madness; employing a 'vaguely mystical' tone to present it as 'essential freedom constrained', and in so doing representing an 'all too fashionable' approach centred upon 'an idealization [sic] of madness that actually confuses compulsion with freedom, anarchy with truth, suffering with ecstasy' (Feder 1980:33). One can imagine Feder would be equally disparaging of Baker's earnest assertion that even the most damaging schizophrenia may have 'some positive and life-enhancing aspects' (Baker et al 2010:4).

Despite this, the 'madness' which may be experienced by the trauma survivor, centred upon a refusal to adhere to social codes and constraints, can perhaps offer some respite from a world which has ceased to make sense anyway, given the power of traumatic events to 'undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience', violating the victim's 'faith in a natural or divine order' and casting them 'into a state of existential crisis' (Herman 2001:51). The post-traumatic need for self-protection, the victim's drive to 'separate or dissociate themselves from physical and emotional self-awareness to avoid pain' (Vickroy 2002:13), and the determined distancing from reality this entails, may all be seen as signs of

'madness', but this is madness employed as a coping strategy – an 'irrational' response triggered by the vast irrationality of the traumatic event.

Within literature, this concept allows authors to bear witness to a character struggling 'against the defences they have created to protect themselves from their trauma and the desire to heal through speaking about it' (Anderson 2012:3). Representations of post-traumatic madness permit an exploration of individual existence within a 'chaotic, confusing, unknowable, unmappable, un-understandable world', whilst also providing an opportunity to 'depathologise and demythologise' madness itself, not just as an 'individual phenomenon' but as a 'cultural condition' (Baker et al 2010:183). This aspect of Baker's viewpoint, at least, is shared by Feder, who concedes that 'patterns of communication' do emerge in literary as in actual madness, as the individual's withdrawal from the world opens up an opportunity for understanding it: the distancing of the self provides an alternative perspective, although Feder does stress that such patterns offer 'revelations of suffering more often than of achievements of freedom or glory' (Feder 1980:34). Feder appears keen to highlight the more tragic aspects of madness, wherein any attempt at escapism is doomed to failure, as there are numerous 'intricate ways in which the mad incorporate the very conflict and suffering of the world from which they have withdrawn' (ibid). In other words, the fantasy world created may offer no more security than the real world outside of it, and in fact may do more damage as it encourages individuals to further dissociate themselves from the reality and the society which surround them. The trauma victim, survivor of an event which 'call[s] into question basic human relationships', shattering 'the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others' (Herman 2001:51), may feel their loss of identity as a kind of madness, as they are cut adrift from the sense of self and the physical and emotional ties linking them to the outside world. At the same time, the post-traumatic madness itself may manifest as perpetual re-living of the traumatic event, so that victims compound their isolation with a failure to escape the one thing they wish to forget.

Within fiction, the depiction of this post-traumatic madness is often presented not just through the behaviour of the characters who are suffering but through the structure of the text itself. Anne Whitehead asserts that the term *trauma fiction* in itself presents a paradox, because 'if trauma comprises an event or experience which overwhelms the individual and resists language or representation, how then can it be narrativised in fiction?' (Whitehead 2004:3). She goes on to note the way in which writers of such texts frequently choose to represent the 'impact of trauma' by 'mimicking its forms and symptoms', so that 'temporality and chronology collapse' while narratives may be 'characterised by repetition and indirection'

(ibid). In this manner trauma fiction may 'foreground the nature and limitations of narrative' to convey 'the damaging and distorting impact of the traumatic event' (2004:82). Madness, as a more generic, catch-all term, is more analogous with fiction from the outset, as both demonstrate a break from 'reality':

...literature has much in common with those forms of insanity that desire to negate the real. Madness and literature spring from the same imaginative capacity to entertain present worlds that do not (really) exist. (Thiher 2002:162)

The manner in which such madness is represented within a text, however, takes a form identical to that chosen to represent trauma, once again highlighting the connection between the two. Uncertain time-frames, warped realities, confused or rambling internal monologues presented in a stream-of-consciousness style, even the shaping of the words on the page, may all be used to disrupt a conventional, linear narrative and thus 'signal to the reader that there has been a rupture of the symbolic order' (Herman 2001:84). In Kennedy's novels, these devices are frequently employed to indicate of the inner turmoil of her characters. Linear narratives are abandoned in favour of jumps back and forth from the past to the present, allowing the history and memory of each character to be revealed slowly and teasingly. This in itself is arguably a *more* realistic style; mirroring as it does the manner in which one becomes acquainted with another person in reality, but also the way in which traumatic memories are uncovered, and the fact that the most traumatic events are revealed last (as in *Day* and *The Blue Book*) may serve as an accurate depiction of the nature of trauma discussion. In *Paradise*, however, the narrative jumps are more confusing, the narrative itself less clear, and this serves to highlight the nature of Hannah's alcoholism – her own madness; her personal escape from reality. It is life itself, the simple struggle of existing, which has become traumatic to Hannah; drinking is a way of imposing order but also disassociating herself from the trauma and pain of the world. Her 'madness' is a response to the 'mad' world around her, a simple attempt at survival. Seen through Hannah's eyes, existence carries a certain dream-like quality anyway, so that we cannot be sure, within the world of the novel, what is 'real' and what is not. This sense of warped reality, of escaping the ugly and traumatic elements of human existence, is taken further in *So I Am Glad*, where the apparently fantastical presence of Savinien suggests a similar dissociative 'madness' in Jennifer. Both these women are seeking respite from what has become, for them, a traumatic reality – they require an alternative place of safety.

This need to disconnect from reality may also create a space for characters to question

their own sanity. The lengthy, italicised monologues so central to *Day*, *The Blue Book* and *Everything You Need* powerfully underline the vast gulf that can exist between thought and speech, and also the way that the mind can break down in times of stress, whether it be Alfred's disjointed account of his plane going down, Beth's resorting to psychic number codes to relate the loss of her child, or Nathan's furious ranting at himself and his own failure to commit suicide:

What did I find. What did I bring back to tell you? Nothing. Fuck all. Because I do this for me and only me, because who the fuck else is there? And every time I get the same message [...] when you're steamed right back to your bone, when there's fuck all else for you to find, then a big, fucking, comfy, intrusive narrative voice will say: LOVE, NATHAN – THAT'S THE IMPORTANT THING. (Kennedy 1999:44-45)

Nathan has been traumatised by love, a love he feels to be crucial and yet forever beyond his reach, and this torment is at the heart of his 'madness'. It is important to note that Nathan, like Alfred, views *himself* as being both mad and broken – '*we're all fucking cracked. I know that I'm cracked*' (1999:42). Both these men are in love, have had love denied them and consider, to a greater or lesser extent, that life holds nothing for them and they would be better off dead. To Alfred, it seems 'very light, to imagine leaving, not having to carry on' (2007:35), while Nathan just wants 'to be a corpse' (1999:43) – Judith Lewis Herman notes that traumatised people, once they have lost trust and faith in the world, often 'feel that they belong more to the dead than to the living' (Herman 2001:52). Whilst the intensity of Alfred's traumatic reaction is perhaps more understandable, centring as it does on the horrors of war (to which disappointed love is merely the grim escort), Nathan is nonetheless ultimately in the same position, struggling to continue living in a world to which he feels he no longer belongs. For both characters, the very fact of their existence appears mad, so their behaviour and actions must therefore take the form of madness. In this they are joined by Hannah, who assures us quite early on in *Paradise* that she was born 'with death firmly in mind'; the 'absolute certainty' that she would die 'before leaving thirty', after which her continued survival has enabled her to 'excel in improvisation' (Kennedy 2004:63). Hannah's claim to have been spared 'much useless introspection and unease' by her certainty of an early death does not, however, carry much weight when placed alongside her assertion that drink is what keeps her 'free' by removing her from the horrific mundanity of existence, wherein any person 'truly pausing to examine the miserable details of their life would at once choose a merciful dash to the nearest unattended well' (2004:19). With drink removed, Hannah is in the same position

as the other protagonists robbed of love; she becomes 'no one' (2004:339). Her alcoholism, her personal escape from what is, to her, a traumatic reality, has also become her self. Like Nathan and Alfred asserting that they are 'cracked' or 'not entirely sane', Hannah's drinking forms an integral part of her personal identity – without their personal, irrational behaviours, their individual 'madness', these characters have, and are, nothing.

Those protagonists who have experienced the severest trauma frequently view themselves as a kind of nothing – lost, broken and with no real identity. Beth in *The Blue Book* describes herself as a 'non-working human being' (Kennedy 2011:371), a 'wrong person' (2011:372); struggling to define herself and the way she relates to those around her:

I no longer know what I am: but if I owned something this broken, I'd throw it away. I should be thrown away. (2011:278)

In *Day* Alfred also views himself as broken, driven mad by the prison camp which leaves him feeling unreal, 'fictional' (2007:42); like Beth, convinced that he will 'always be wrong' (2007:43). He presents it as a statement of fact, describing himself as 'round the bend' (2007:34), seeing it as so much a part of who he is that even at the end of the novel he feels the need to tell Joyce 'I'm not entirely sane any more' (2007:278). Yet if one views this wrongness, this 'madness' (as Alfred sees it) as forming *part* of the traumatic response, it becomes simply one element in the process of healing, and thus healing can come *through* the madness, if only some reconnection, some communication can be established. One could argue that the fact that each protagonist recognises these 'mad' qualities within themselves is the first step towards healing; opening up communication with an admission of abnormality, they may then begin the Freudian 'quest' backwards to acknowledgement of the original trauma. Both characters also appear aware of how interaction with others, crucially others who love and care for them, can help pull them towards healing and normality. In her final plea to Arthur, Beth admits 'there is nothing I can help or solve [...] but if it would please you I can give you this which is my voice to be with you' (2011:372); while Alfred notes:

The idea there was somebody beyond you imagining, picturing, guessing – it could make you seem more solid, more likely to survive, and worrying – you were ashamed of this – but if they might worry about you, that could wish you almost human again. (2007:42)

Both of these novels therefore carry the implication that love, the most desirable connection with another, may show the way back from trauma, the way out of the perceived

madness. In *So I Am Glad*, love is used slightly differently – the central love story is itself fantastical and forms the heart of Jennifer's trauma response, the manifestation of her own disconnection. The entirety of her relationship with Savinien, and indeed the existence of Savinien himself, has the quality of a dream, from the moment he falls into the spare room to the moment he falls through a brick wall and vanishes. The ugliness of reality appears to have traumatised Jennifer, as it does Hannah in *Paradise*, but where Hannah turns to alcohol, Jennifer's escape centres upon the creation of an alternative existence wherein she can be loved and valued, and not just by any man but by a great, romantic historical figure. One could speculate that Jennifer's previous experience of relationships, where her 'emotional deficiencies' (Kennedy 1995:93) cause an impatience with romantic attitudes and a disinterest in sex unless it involves the inflicting of pain, lead her to this specifically loving 'madness', a fantasy in which she creates Savinien to prove that she can love tenderly, properly, and experience an intimate connection with another person. As in *Paradise*, reality becomes blurred, and the novel remains ambiguous as to whether Savinien exists outside of Jennifer's mind or not. There may be evidence of Savinien's interaction with other characters, but the reader is also made repeatedly aware that Jennifer is the one narrating; and while she assures us that she is 'honest' or at least 'set out to be' (1995:129), she also tells us at the end of the book that sometimes 'the best beginning is a lie' (1995:280). That part of the narrative which emphasises the similarities between herself and Savinien certainly implies closeness and connection, but is also open to the interpretation that the two may in fact be part of each other:

Of course, nothing tangible happened between Savinien and myself. What could happen between the professionally calm and the long-term dead? But I knew I moved my hands the way that he did and I knew he had one of my laughs and I knew I didn't care. There was nothing to stop us being together so we didn't stop. (1995:100)

Arguably, the existence of Savinien as a separate character is somewhat irrelevant, as it is the way the relationship changes and shapes Jennifer's character that is important. It is notable that while this love may manifest as a fantastical part of the trauma-response, it *simultaneously* marks the beginning of the healing process, not only encouraging Jennifer to communicate but demonstrating that love may be a force for good rather than being meaningless, ugly, or damaging. Such positive effects may outweigh the issue of whether Jennifer's love is 'real' or not. Certainly if one subscribes to the belief voiced by Julia Kristeva that *all* love is a kind of 'accepted madness' – the 'allowed expression' of 'the uncontrollable force of the unconscious' (Kristeva 1987:168-169) – then there is no reason

that an imagined love should be less valuable or credible, particularly if the result is similarly positive. Kristeva describes love as a kind of *desirable madness*; a gloriously exciting emotional roller-coaster 'shifting from the abject to the sublime, savoring [sic] the gamut of sufferings and delights, supreme guarantee against boredom' (Kristeva 1987:82). Within Kennedy's fiction love is both desired and feared, and it is closely connected with trauma – its 'madness' lies in its paradoxical ability to both traumatise and point the way out of trauma, to move 'broken' characters towards a connection with the world by which they feel abandoned, even as it highlights just how alone they seem to be.

In examining the relationship between madness and literature, critics have highlighted the notion of madness as escapism but also as a reaction to a world which is not, after all, totally sane. Allen Thiher observes that literature 'vindicates its own knowledge of madness in order to show that insanity is a societal problem that may destroy us, or even at times to show that our models for understanding madness are somewhat mad in themselves' (Thiher 2002:165). Charley Baker notes that, in dealing with madness, texts have the opportunity to 'actively engage' with 'troubling questions about the rather fluid boundaries between madness and sanity' (Baker et al 2010:5); in which he again echoes Foucault's claim that madness 'provokes a breach without reconciliation where the world is forced to question itself' (Foucault 1989:288). Again, this would seem to connect madness to the traumatic experience – what is described as 'madness' here may be viewed rather as an understandable, possibly even necessary, response to a violent and disinterested outside world; the reaction of the traumatised individual against the vast and unfeeling universe in which he finds himself. The writer's role then becomes empathetic, revealing 'his own deep knowledge of psychic pain and terror' in solidarity with 'individuals struggling to communicate such experience' (Feder 1980:28). The frequency with which writers tend to focus this exploration of madness upon the experience of *love* is not, perhaps, surprising, as love may be considered not just the most societally 'accepted madness' (Kristeva 1987:169) but also the most desirable of 'possible response[s] to the human existential condition of contingency and self-consciousness':

...human beings search for ways to escape the burden of loneliness while avoiding confrontation with a cold and indifferent cosmos. One of the ways this escape can be attained is in the experience of falling in love. (Lindholm 1995:67)

This argument focuses on the apparent universality of love, driven by 'the widespread cross-cultural fear of rejection and loss' (Jankowiak 1995:5). From the perspective of the traumatised individual, this illustrates an alternative manner in which love may be seized

upon – not as an attempt to re-connect with the world which has cast them out, but rather as a further way of protecting themselves against that world, by creating a more fantastical romantic experience. And this fantastical quality in turn lends itself to the label of 'madness'. The escape from reality such romantic love offers requires 'an act of imagination' in investing the loved one with 'absolute value', and thus *must* be placed beyond reason:

to love “for a reason” is not to love at all. We love because we love, and not because of any advantage that the beloved other has to offer us. (Lindholm 1995:66)

This notion also links back to Foucault in his assertion that madness may be 'beyond imagination' but is still 'profoundly rooted' in it, as it allows the image 'spontaneous value, total and absolute truth' (Foucault 1989:94). Within this particular type of romantic love, the image of the beloved as 'fountainhead of all that is beautiful, good, and desirable' (Lindholm 1995:66) becomes absolute truth for the lover; who moves beyond reality to a pure and idealised form of love which may be conceptualised as a 'quest for transcendence' (1995:68). For Anthony Giddens, this is the point which separates romantic love from a more biological, 'earthy sexuality'; presuming as it does a 'psychic communication, a meeting of souls which is reparative in character' (Giddens 1992:45). Within Kennedy's writing, however, this 'mad' love, taking place outside reality, can only ever be temporary – sooner or later, as in *So I Am Glad*, reality must come crashing back in. Escapism may assist in the healing of trauma but, to continue onward, the sufferer must ultimately re-establish her connection with the world. Love as 'madness', far removed from reason, is only part of the overall process of recovery.

Giddens' discussion of this fantastical love draws once again upon Lacanian notions of desire and *lack*, wherein the beloved 'answers a lack' in the lover which 'is directly to do with self-identity'; thus allowing the 'flawed individual' to be 'made whole'. Noting how moral judgements and emotional sentiments have come to be regarded as 'antithetical' (1992:200), Giddens acknowledges that such passionate escapism still 'carries an echo of the transcendent', but stresses that this may actually be more damaging than desirable, as sexuality becomes 'surrounded with an aura of nostalgia and disillusion' (1992:203); reduced to little more than 'frustrated love, doomed endlessly to seek out difference' (1992:197). This may be seen as another example of the difference between a healing love, based in reality and focused on re-connecting with the world, and the post-traumatic love which only offers a temporary solution – another kind of escape. By Giddens' analysis, any attempt to escape or transcend reality with an idealised love is bound to fail, because it relies upon the loved one

filling a space the lover feels lacking in themselves. The 'madness' of fantastical, post-traumatic love is therefore two-fold – the madness of *being in love* itself, centred on the adoration of the other, is coupled with the madness of *believing* acceptance by that other is the only thing necessary to heal the doubts and fears centred in the self. And because it can only ever be a temporary part of the recovery process, this two-fold madness carries immense power to hurt and even become traumatic in itself; through relying so heavily upon the response of the (idealised) other, the possibility of rejection, the potentially brutal disillusionment as the individual is dragged back to reality, is rendered deeply damaging.

It could be argued that it is an awareness of the risk inherent in this return to reality which explains the desperate note of pleading particularly evident in *Everything You Need* and *The Blue Book*. At the end of each novel the protagonists are taking their first steps in true communication, actually reaching out to the world which traumatised them through the ones they love. Here, fear of rejection and yearning for reciprocation is at its most poignant, coupled with a reluctance to relinquish the fantastical escapism which would ensure everything turns out well. Nathan's final piece of writing which finishes 'have need of me' still implies a personal shaping of reality with its title 'Thinking the World' (Kennedy 1999:567), while Beth goes further, recognising that her ideal outcome may be somewhat fantastical but also clinging to the belief that 'it isn't completely impossible':

If this is a spell and there is magic and everything that matters can be true, then you can be happy and be loved.
And if I was on solid ground and with you I would give you my hand if you wanted.
[...]
I'd give you everything. (2011:373)

Even Hannah, towards the end of *Paradise*, finds her yearning for human contact, the desire for connection with the world beyond herself and her addiction, temporarily overcomes the desire for alcohol. Briefly, she visualises a different reality, in which love provides both a salvation and a sense of identity:

...Robert should have been here and I should have been able to find him and tonight we should be together and alive. And we should be each other's mercy, each other's gift, each other's love. And I should be Hannah Luckraft and that should be a joy.
(2004:339)

Here, the desperate repetition of 'should' implies a recognition of the great healing power of love, even as it places such healing beyond Hannah's immediate experience. The possibility

is out there, but she cannot reach it – the return to reality is too traumatic for her to seriously contemplate.

For these characters, suffering the 'intrusions and literal aches of unfulfilled desire' (Tennov 1998:80), love appears simultaneously wonderful and tormenting. And yet this is preferable to the possibility of rejection, of having no love at all, because the loved one provides not just a comfort, as a companion with whom one can face the grim nature of reality reinforced, but also an affirmation of self, a heightened sense of identity brought about by the self being placed in relation to another. When seen in this light one can surely make a case for love, or rather the loss or absence of love, as being a traumatic experience, if one concedes that trauma disrupts 'one's perception of the world as meaningful and orderly' and may lead to a 'diminished, even shattered sense of self' (Vickroy 2002:23). Certainly the torments Nathan experiences in *Everything You Need* imply a man so deeply affected by the loss of love that the term traumatised does not seem wholly inappropriate – he is, after all, haunted by a memory, a mental and emotional 'wound', and certainly seems to feel that he belongs 'more to the dead than to the living' (Herman 2001:52). The plea for reciprocation at the end of these novels then represents not just a need for love but also the crying out of the wounded, the need for hurt to be recognised, for both the loved one and the reader to bear witness to 'this plea by an other who is asking to be seen and heard, this call by which the other commands us to awaken' (Caruth 1996:9).

Arguments that describe love as 'madness' tend to imply that romantic love serves as a kind of defensive reaction, against a world which the individual finds mundane and frightening in equal measure. Such a love may also be the result of traumatic experience, offering an ideal, fantasy alternative to a love based within that world, which relies on communication with another and thus carries the possibility of rejection, misunderstanding, and pain. However, if one separates these two kinds of love, an argument may be made for the latter, love in reality, as offering a way out of trauma. If the most harmful outcome of trauma is that it leaves one feeling abandoned, alone, and distrustful of a world which in itself no longer appears to make sense, then surely a love which is centred on emotional understanding with another may reach through the 'madness' and isolation of post-traumatic behaviours, and allow healing. The power of love here lies in its ability to re-establish a sense of personal identity, to give value back to the self by demonstrating how that self is valued by another, and through this tentative re-connection with one individual to initiate a further connection with the greater reality beyond. This is not love as 'madness', this is love at its most sane: if it can help the individual to function, to *be* and survive in the world from which

he or she previously felt so detached, then surely it may be considered desirable, pulling the individual away from unhelpful or even self-destructive post-traumatic behaviours.

However, while it may serve as a healing force, such love can never be entirely benevolent, simply because it *is* based in reality. The 'heights of the emotional union' of love also have their costs, namely 'separation, rejection, and grief' (Jankowiak 1995:5). There is a delicate balance to be found here – even the greatest moments of emotional turmoil require the subject to *feel*, thus asserting their existence, so by its very nature love causes the lover to feel alive, but if these feelings grow too intense or the disappointments too severe, love itself may become traumatic and bring about a feeling of numbness, or emotional death. This element of risk may illustrate why Kennedy's protagonists seem to fear love as much as they crave it. Genuine love relies upon communication to be successful, whereas a 'madness' perceived as a 'break in circuitry' (Thiher 2002:165) reflects a 'distortion in communication' (2002:283), much more consistent with the isolating impact of trauma. Love develops *through* intimacy and connection, growing only 'to the degree to which each partner is prepared to reveal concerns and needs to the other and to be vulnerable to that other' (Giddens 1992:62). This 'imperative of free and open communication' is, according to Giddens, 'the *sine qua non* of the pure relationship' (1992:194), and distances love from any kind of 'madness' centred upon the abandoned, traumatised individual. Love's greatest power to torment resides in its being *unexpressed*; held back and turned inward to torture the lover who is, for whatever reason, unable to communicate it to the beloved. This is the kind of love most frequently encountered in Kennedy's novels, the kind to which protagonists struggle to give voice, simultaneously fearful of rejection and yet desperately craving that 'pure relationship' of which Giddens speaks. And it is the vocalisation of this love which ultimately points the way out of traumatic isolation and towards healing; the way to reconnect with the 'human community', as we must if we are not 'to wander alone, like Homer's Bellerophon, on the fields of melancholia' (Thiher 2002:161). Language may be a little too ready to label dissociative or abnormal behaviours as 'madness' but it is also our weapon *against* that madness, providing 'access to the community that allows that fullness of being we call, hopefully, sanity' (ibid). This movement towards wholeness and sanity allows both the possibility of love and the healing of trauma through the power of language – speaking, listening and bearing witness. Narratives such as Kennedy's may mimic the patterns of trauma through exploration of alternate realities, uncertain structures or the revelation of the traumatic event, but they also serve as a powerful communicative tool. Through entering into a dialogue in which 'madness' may be seen as simply one name for the behaviour of the

traumatised individual, struggling for reconciliation with the world, the reader may also bear witness to the possibility that love has the power to bring about communication, healing, and recovery.

6. Romance

The previous chapters have attempted to highlight the powerful nature of love within A. L. Kennedy's fictions. Trauma and madness, addiction, violence and the fear of isolation may all be seen as elements which obstruct and obscure each character's quest for love, whilst the complexities of desire, sexual relationships and the craving for unity may add confusion but also motivate and drive characters forward. This discussion has included an exploration of that 'undertone of violence and perversity' which, Kaye Mitchell argues, 'undercuts' a romantic reading of Kennedy's work (Mitchell 2008:67). In order to make a case for Kennedy as a romantic writer, then, this chapter will go further in attempting to clarify what defines romantic writing in a contemporary context, before demonstrating how this may be applied to Kennedy's fiction, and how such sinister undertones may in fact be seen to form part of a complex, romantic whole.

Brian McHale has observed that 'romanticism' is a 'discursive' rather than a 'real-world' construct, which 'does not exist' in any tangible sense and therefore may be constructed 'in a variety of ways' (McHale 2004:4). Whilst what is under discussion here is not 'romanticism', as defined by the eighteenth century movement of the same name, but rather the notion of 'romance' itself, the crux of McHale's observation still applies – 'romance' in all its forms, including the literary one, 'does not exist' as a thing in and of itself. It is a social, ideological construct and therefore open to myriad interpretations. Within literature, the primary battleground for romance seems to be located in the conflict between 'serious' and 'popular', with romance too often dismissed as simple fantasy or escapism. This may, in part, be due to romantic literature having its root in folk or fairy tales, as mentioned in the Introduction, but this in itself does not necessarily render them wholly fantastical. Angela Carter observes that, whilst appearing in a fantastical context, fairy tales nonetheless demonstrate 'the extraordinary richness and diversity of responses to the same common predicament – being alive' (1990:xii). The romantic element forms a crucial part of these tales for adults at least as much as children; Carter points out that 'the common, unspoken goal is fertility and continuance', but the nature of reality is such that the inevitable marriage and 'happy ever after' is, for adults at least, rendered not a conservative ending but 'a form of heroic optimism – as if to say, one day, we might be happy, even if it won't last' (1990:xviii). In this respect, it is all too easy to draw parallels between traditional fairy tales and the mass-market popular romance or 'Chick-Lit' so prevalent in contemporary culture. When Carter describes folk tales as 'creations of fantasy and wish-fulfilment [...] not formal inventions but informal dreams dreamed in public' (1990:xx), and especially when one considers the preponderance of female

protagonists, the foreign or exotic settings, the trials to be undergone and the triumph of love at the tale's conclusion, it seems reasonable to postulate that the one gave birth to the other; that today's popular romances are the trendy grand-daughters of Mother Goose – that they have become, in fact, our modern fairy tales. And yet, to denigrate romance because of its popularity in this classic form, to banish it entirely to the realm of the popular, is to ignore the many, sometimes subtle, ways it may be incorporated into more 'serious' literature, and to deny the incredible power that romantic tropes and expectations still carry in contemporary society. This chapter will therefore examine the definitions of, and conflict between, serious and popular literature, in an attempt to demonstrate that romance and romantic elements may be employed in a wide variety of fictions, and to show that in fact romance, in the hands of a writer like A. L. Kennedy, may remain a thing of enormous power.

'Serious' versus 'popular' – the development of romance

In looking back at the development of romance literature it must not be forgotten that many individual texts which have now been raised to the ranks of 'serious' literature were, at the time of publication, regarded as popular, 'common', or even downright trashy. In the early to mid-eighteenth century, prose writing, specifically that which would come to be defined as 'realist' writing, was regarded as having one principal purpose – to instruct and guide its readers on the path of morality. Samuel Johnson, writing in *The Rambler* in 1750, pontificates on this subject at some length, taking pains at first to differentiate between the fiction of his own time and 'the romances formerly written' which were, he claims, more fantastical tales, where 'every transaction and sentiment was so remote from all that passes among men, that the reader was in very little danger of making any applications to himself' (Johnson in Leitch et al, 2010:368-369). Amongst eighteenth century novelists, however, Johnson sees a greater desire to employ a realistic tone. He observes that it may be 'justly considered as the greatest excellency of art, to imitate nature', but that it is also 'necessary to distinguish those parts of nature, which are most proper for imitation' (2010:369). Writers of fictional narratives carry great responsibility, he warns, and must be discerning in the subjects they choose to present:

In narratives, where historical veracity has no place, I cannot discover why there should not be exhibited the most perfect idea of virtue [...] the highest and purest that humanity can reach [...] Vice, for vice is necessary to be shewn [sic], should always disgust; nor should the graces of gaiety, or the dignity of courage, be so united with it, as to reconcile it to the mind. (2010:370)

Bearing these sentiments in mind it is not difficult to understand why novels such as *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), demonstrating the resilience of the human (Christian) spirit, or *Clarissa* (1748), extolling the virtues of (female) chastity, were so popular among Johnson and his contemporaries. In contrast, it is possible that Johnson's lament against 'thousands of the readers of romances willing to be thought wicked, if they may be allowed to be wits' (2010:371) was in some way precipitated by the publication of the infinitely more frivolous and morally ambiguous romp *Tom Jones* (1749), where Tom's virtues and vices are not only intimately bound together but also rather endearingly represented by the author, and which caused Johnson to state that he 'scarcely knew a more corrupt work' (quoted in Watt 1987:280).

By the early nineteenth century, the publishing of critical opinion in regular journals and Reviews had become more commonplace, but, as Annika Bautz observes, 'the status of the novel was low – despite its general popularity critics and Review editors 'regarded the genre with some disdain' (Bautz 2007:9). As in the previous century, moral instruction remained 'the main criterion a novel had to fulfil' (2007:13), but now this was due to the genre having developed a 'perceived femininity' (ibid) which shaped the reviews of the time. As Bautz puts it, 'the – predominantly male – reviewers saw themselves as protecting a female readership by selecting suitable novels for them' (2007:10). Analysing a review from *The British Critic* in April 1815, Bautz highlights common assumptions regarding the novels of the time – that readers will be 'young women available to condescension due to their weak intellectual faculties'; that they will lack 'the necessary patience and intellectual stamina to read anything of a higher literary value', and thus concluding that novels 'are trifles that are not to be taken seriously' (2007:11). The works of Jane Austen were a popular topic for contemporary reviewers, as they were seen to possess a strong moral core and present a fine example for young ladies, but the realistic nature of her work was at the time regarded as something of a deficiency. In March 1818 the *British Critic* reviewer observed:

in imagination, of all kinds, she appears to have been extremely deficient; not only her stories are utterly and entirely devoid of invention, but her characters, her incidents, her sentiments, are obviously all drawn exclusively from experience.
(Quoted in Bautz 2007:21)

To her contemporaries, then – or the male ones at least – it seems Austen was just *too* realistic, when it is precisely this realism which has come to be praised by more recent generations as demonstration of the author's subtle sophistication. Virginia Woolf, for one,

praised Austen for her wit and 'the perfection of her taste' (Woolf 1968:177); whilst also noting that she 'knew exactly what her powers were' and possessed the intelligence not to pursue impressions or emotions which lay beyond the bounds of her personal knowledge, employing, for example, 'all sorts of devices for evading scenes of passion' (1968:179). Thus Woolf seems to concur with the contemporary analysis of Austen's 'deficient' imagination – including the slightly wistful observation that Austen 'describes a beautiful night without once mentioning the moon' (ibid) – and yet in this instance such a focus on realism is viewed as a positive demonstration of the novelist's success. If Austen had attempted more creative and exciting narratives, she would have failed. As it stands, for Woolf at least, her novels are perfect, neatly framed by the boundaries of their author's experience. It is interesting that for a modern readership the realism of Austen's writing is tied up with the perceived 'romantic' nature of the text – she does, after all, invariably lead her heroines towards a nuptial finale; a restrained, Regency 'happy ever after' following a narrative centred on romantic pursuit – so that the realism of her writing is tempered not only by the passage of time, with the clear historical context providing a degree of distance, but also the fact that, for many twenty-first century readers for whom marriage is neither necessity nor obligation, the tidy conclusion which centres on a traditional heterosexual marriage union becomes tinged with fantasy and escapism – romantic, but not realistic, insofar as it relates to modern everyday experience. Therefore, if one defines 'popular' literature as being built around escapist fantasy, while 'serious' literature confronts the issues of actual, lived existence, a novelist like Austen, though highly praised and subject to exhaustive critical analysis, may yet be said to straddle the boundaries between the two – too realistic to be popular, too romantic to be serious.

Within that category of fiction we may label *romantic*, then, it becomes even harder to differentiate between the serious and the popular; as the very nature of the romantic narrative seems to place it firmly in the 'popular' literature category, where gritty realism is discarded in favour of fantasy and escapism. However, all too often one finds romantic elements and themes running through literature otherwise defined as 'serious', buried deep within even the bleakest and most harshly realistic of texts. The romantic aspects of A. L. Kennedy's writing underpin the unity/isolation conflict her characters experience (see Chapter Three, *Unity and Isolation*), and this combination of drives and turmoil is in no way unusual within contemporary fiction, particularly that which may be considered trauma fiction. Ganteau and Omega have observed the connection between trauma and romance in contemporary fiction as being defined by excess – romance, 'a form whose favourite themes are love, war, the past and its mysteries', privileges 'excess, unbalance, and the spectacular' in its formal construction,

and while some authors may 'obviously work within the tradition of romance' others may simply import elements into a framework 'not especially or explicitly defined as that of romance', such as trauma narratives (Ganteau & Onega 2013:5-7). Kennedy may be seen to employ both romance themes and trauma frameworks, with characters desperately reaching for 'the emphatic happy ending that helps formulate the possibility of a resolution of trauma' (ibid:9). In this manner 'serious' literature such as Kennedy's can display many of the tropes employed by popular romance fiction, though perhaps in more subtle ways. The many guises of the romance formula only serve to highlight its continued allure for writers and readers alike, and amidst the traumatic narratives of twenty-first century society the optimism of romance perhaps becomes even more important – we may not *believe* in the 'happy ever after', but that doesn't stop us from craving it.

Romance in contemporary culture

As mentioned above, all too often 'romance' can be, and has been, viewed as a derogatory term when applied to a text – Scott McCracken marks it out as 'the genre which has been taken least seriously in literary studies' (1998:75); while Northrop Frye observes:

Any serious discussion of romance has to take into account its curiously proletarian status as a form generally disapproved of, in most ages, by the guardians of taste and learning, except when they use it for their own purposes. (Frye 1976:23)

To label a text as a 'romance' appears to brand it instantly as a lower form of literature, one which in contemporary terms is indelibly associated with the 'mass-market formula publishing' of the likes of Mills and Boon (McCracken 1998:75); a morass of badly written sentimental fantasy designed more for cheap titillation than intellectual stimulation. However, the unrelenting popularity of these texts implies that they cater for a need which cannot be satisfied elsewhere, and it is important to try to understand the appeal of this basic romance formula before one can consider the ways in which it may be applied to other, more 'literary' texts.

If, as far back as Chaucer, romance was considered to be 'an exclusively female domain' (Salter 2002:42), the twentieth century has seen it develop into an area of literature not just associated with female sensibility, but dominated by female writers and targeted exclusively at a female readership and their 'supposed concerns' of 'love, desire, fantasy and imagination' (McCracken 1998:75). The standard formula of the popular romance still follows the path of the fairy tale, on a basic level, where the heroine falls in love and must

overcome various physical or emotional trials before she can be united with her lover at the conclusion, and they can have their 'happy ever after'. Within popular romance the relationship will always be a heterosexual one, and the union will usually be marked through the official medium of marriage. Herein lies the comforting familiarity of romance novels – rather than exploring new characters and different scenarios they all '*retell* a single tale whose final outcome their readers always already know', thus serving as 'the ritualistic repetition of a single, immutable cultural myth' (Radway 1984:198). The enduring appeal of popular romance, then, lies in its ability to present us with a predictable structure which is absent from our lived experience. As discussed in previous chapters, the isolating nature and fast pace of contemporary western society can leave the individual struggling to define his or her own identity, and popular fiction, as Scott McCracken observes, 'has the capacity to provide us with a workable, if temporary, sense of self'; whilst giving our lives 'the plots and heroes they lack' (McCracken 1998:2). Here, the entire objective is a drive towards the satisfaction of a happy ending. But the ephemeral nature of this satisfaction, which vanishes once the book is concluded, is the very thing which ensures such novels maintain popularity and a high level of readership. From a feminist perspective, Janice Radway blames contemporary culture for creating 'needs in women that it cannot fulfil'; needs which may then be provided for by popular romance and its 'short-lived therapeutic value' (Radway 1984:85). McCracken emphasises the point that once the happy ending is reached there is nowhere for the plot to go, and no further escapism is available to the reader other than to repeat the process with another text. For him, romances should not be viewed individually but 'as one long saga, where the happy ending is constantly rejected for a new, unhappy beginning' (McCracken 1998:98). The implication here is that the happy ending, once achieved, provides no real satisfaction, especially when the text is concluded and the reader is hurtled back to reality, and it is, in fact, the imperfect nature of reality which drives women to 'seek out ideal novels' again and again, reading 'not out of contentment but out of dissatisfaction, longing, and protest' (Radway 1984:215).

A feminist perspective

Given the almost exclusively female readership of popular romances, alongside the adherence of the plot to the 'immutable cultural myth' (Radway 1984:198) of a glorious finale centred on heterosexual union, it is unsurprising that feminist critics are drawn to analysis of these texts. According to Scott McCracken, such critical feminist accounts frequently 'see popular romance as complicit with the social norms of women's subordination to men', where the

heroine is represented as 'no more than a longing', with her identity 'moulded through her relationship to her male lover' (McCracken 1998:80-81). Two of the most influential feminist critics of popular romance in recent years, Janice Radway and Tania Modleski, seem to agree on this point, with Radway noting the way in which these texts 'continue to prescribe patriarchal marriage as the ultimate route to the realization of a mature female subjectivity' (Radway 1984:16); while Modleski observes that 'the heroine of the novels can achieve happiness only by undergoing a complex process of self-subversion' (Modleski 1982:37). The ideal heroine, who must be beautiful and sensual but also innocent, 'unusually compassionate, kind, and understanding' (Radway 1984:127), usually takes it upon herself to 'tame' a previously promiscuous hero through her goodness and fidelity, the implication being that the novel's 'happy' outcome rests entirely upon her ability to 'read male behaviour successfully' (1984:149). In light of this it is worth noting that while many of these texts centre the male as representative of ideal union in a patriarchal society, they also give him very little to do – it is the woman who must work towards him, and mould herself around him; he is vital as a figurehead but not always so well-structured as a character. Because the romance heroine must have *some* structure and personality within her; to label her as 'no more than a longing' (McCracken 1998:80-81) is to dismiss the vital importance of her ability to arouse sympathy and recognition within a broad female readership.

In her close analysis of an American women's reading group, Radway observed that what was demanded of these romance novels was an 'emotional identification with the central character' juxtaposed with a 'lack of similarity between events in the fantasy realm and those in the real world', so that the reading experience could be simultaneously 'escapist' and identifiable (Radway 1984:98); this last harking back to Frye's statement that 'the message of all romance is *de te fabula*: the story is about you' (Frye 1976:186). The (female) reader of the popular romance must identify with the (female) protagonist if she is to become sufficiently emotionally involved for the 'therapeutic value' of the fantasy to take effect, however 'short-lived' such value may be. Radway's study seems to indicate that women crave the fantasy of the happy ending *precisely because* this is what is missing from their own lives – as one of the reading group states, 'why should we read depressing stuff when we have so much responsibility?' (Radway 1984:98). This need to counter the mundane, the unsatisfactory and the unpredictable aspects of real life with the world of romance; a world related through 'a verbal structure that can be 'decoded' easily and quickly on the basis of previously mastered cultural codes and conventions' (1984:197), is seized upon by both Radway and Modleski as evidence of women's continued subjugation in contemporary

society. Radway claims that consumers of popular romance are reading 'not out of contentment but out of dissatisfaction, longing, and protest' (1984:215), while Modleski drily observes the connection between the heroine striving for her happy heterosexual union and the feminist activist in these terms: 'if the popular-culture heroine and the feminist choose utterly different ways of overcoming their dissatisfaction, they at least have in common the dissatisfaction' (Modleski 1982:26).

Contemporary 'Literary' romance

It is difficult to know exactly where to draw the boundaries between what is 'literary' and what is 'popular', especially if one is attempting to work within the hazy parameters of 'romance', which itself carries a whole weight of disapproval and negative connotations within literature. Deborah Philips observes that many 'novelists who are acclaimed as literary and feminist writers have themselves frequently made use of popular generic forms' (Philips 2006:10), and there can be many structural aspects within literary texts which we can identify as stemming from a popular, romantic tradition. Arguably the main point differentiating 'literary' romance from popular romance, aside from the probability of a more complex style, syntax and subject matter, is the assumption that the 'literary' will make more concessions towards realism than the 'popular', even if 'the novel's realism does not reside in the kind of life it presents, but in the way it presents it' (Watt 1987:11). If romance is about 'the unending, irrational, absurd persistence of the human impulse to struggle, survive, and where possible escape' (Frye 1976:136), the literary romance adds to this a self-awareness and, frequently, a wry cynicism against the possibility of a 'happy ending':

The mood [is one] of disillusioned romanticism, an over-intensified, over-determined desire for an ideal life as opposed to the real one, a desperate recognition of the fact that this desire is doomed to remain unsatisfied, a utopia based from the start on an uneasy conscience and the certainty of defeat. (Lukács 1971:116-117)

If one sees realistic literary fiction as 'essentially parody-romance', whose characters are 'confused by romantic assumptions about reality' (Frye 1976:39), the boundaries perhaps become a little clearer. The heroine/hero of popular romance is rendered a more one-dimensional character; industriously working and maybe struggling towards her/his 'happy ever after' but never doubting that such a conclusion will be reached or, perhaps more importantly, never allowing *the reader* to doubt this as the inevitable outcome. In literary romance the realism lies in the absence of any such guarantee – protagonists become more

fallible, more unremarkable, mere individuals as opposed to heroines or heroes, and while the continued presence of the 'immutable cultural myth' (Radway 1984:198) keeps them (and by extension us, as readers) craving their very own fairy-tale ending, they remain constantly aware of the extreme unlikelihood of such conclusive neatness within a realistic context. Literary romance, then, takes the expectations and promises of popular romance and wraps them up in the form of 'the novel of disillusionment' (Lukács 1971:151). By this definition, and with such notes of caution in place, I believe it is possible to describe A. L. Kennedy as a writer of romantic literature.

Besides this, and without wishing to place too much emphasis on nationality, if one acknowledges Kennedy as a *Scottish* writer it is then interesting to note the particular manner in which Scottish literature and romance may be seen to collide. Working within the definition of literary romance above one could also, for example, comfortably place Ali Smith and Iain Banks alongside Kennedy in the romantic Scottish fiction category, particularly in works such as Smith's *Girl Meets Boy* (2007) and *Free Love & other stories* (1995), and Banks' *The Crow Road* (1992) and *The Bridge* (1986). However, whilst there is plenty of evidence as to the romantic nature of these works they are also, perhaps, working against greater strictures and prejudices by the fact of their nationality. Cairns Craig, one of the central critical voices in the study of Scottish literature, perceives the romance/realism conflict as being more evident in Scottish writing than other English language works. The argument is two-fold: firstly, that contemporary Scottish writers may be anxious to distance themselves from the concept of a kind of national romance as appears in the works of Walter Scott; a man who 'carries the burden of having invented a Scotland which displaced the real Scotland in favour of his romantic illusions' (Craig 1999:117). Secondly, Craig sees a greater conflict stemming from the oppressive weight of Scotland's Calvinist history:

Far from being God's representative on earth, as the Romantics optimistically prophesied, the artist, in this iconoclastic tradition, is the diabolic antagonist of the Truth [...] Novelists must therefore write in the consciousness of their own evil, must doubt the very products of the imagination by which they create and must turn back from within the novel to gesture to its own essential falsehood. (1999:201)

In this severe national context where all fiction is not only false but a wicked blasphemy against the Truth, any novel combining romantic ideals with a realistic framework would surely be the most blasphemous; presenting a world purporting to be our own and yet hinting at romantic possibilities and day-dreams beyond the quotidian. Of course, this argument does

nothing to deny the existence of romance within realist Scottish fiction, but if one accepts Craig's analysis then it does lend a more rebellious and daring air to the works of writers such as Smith and Banks, and Kennedy herself, who permit their realistically fallible and human characters to quest for love unashamedly. Kennedy is arguably the most consistently romantic, though, as all her protagonists, in the novels at least, are driven towards achieving a greater understanding of love: as Sarah Dunnigan observes, 'the typologies of longing so embedded in all of Kennedy's longer fiction give them the structure of a quest' (Dunnigan 2000:154).

The Quest in Kennedy

As set out briefly in the Introduction, the typical romantic quest, from early folk tales onwards, follows a distinct path in the order of having love – losing love – travelling through trials – reclaiming love. Although she refuses to provide any definitively happy endings, this formula is instantly recognisable in Kennedy's longer fictions, as Sarah Dunnigan notes; with characters struggling to 'discover the means of (re) enchantment' (2000:154). Alfred in *Day*, Beth in *The Blue Book*, Hannah in *Paradise* – all these characters embark upon actual physical journeys, as well as emotional ones, to bring them back to their love with deeper understanding and the possibility of greater connection. The pattern is one that seems to have developed from Kennedy's first novel, *Looking for the Possible Dance*, which unfolds between the narrative book-ends of Margaret taking an actual journey, from Glasgow to London, this in itself being a test of love which Colin begs from her:

'You have to go away to London and if you're ever going to leave me, you have to do it then. Just stay away. If you come back, it has to be forever. Please. Promise.'
(Kennedy 1993:247)

It is only through going away, through parting and distance, that Margaret's love can become clearer to her so that she and Colin can finally be closer together. Similarly, Mary's journey to the island in *Everything You Need* enables her relationship with Jonathan to develop from youthful passion to something deeper and more lasting; while her presence simultaneously permits Nathan to move on from the all-devouring nature of his love for Maura towards a more promising and fulfilling love, the love of his daughter. The quest of Nathan himself is an intensely painful one which takes him to the edge of death and back and this, as mentioned in previous chapters, links his experience to that of Colin's crucifixion in *Looking for the Possible Dance*, and Helen's final brutal beating at the hands of her husband in 'Original

Bliss'. In each case an initial, damaging love is replaced by stronger, mutual love through not just an emotional journey but also an intense physical trauma; 'the punishing marks of powerful feeling that blisters on the surface of the body' (Stoddart 2005:147), followed by an emotional clarity and healing, which accompanies the physical recuperation.

This particular version of the romantic formula, the quest which carries the protagonist to the very brink of death en route to his or her final reconciliation, is another for which many examples can be found throughout history; from the fantastical tales of Ancient Greek heroes descending to the Underworld, or the 'Beheading Game' in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, to those where romance is blended with realism by, for example, the introduction of a dangerous illness – once again Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* provides a classic example of this type. In the case of A. L. Kennedy, the introduction of the possibility of death is usually accompanied by certain fantastical or bizarre elements in an otherwise realistic narrative, which serve to emphasise not only the ultimate mystery of death itself but also to bind her writing more closely to the fairy tale tradition. Paradoxically, though, the incorporation of fantastical elements could also be said to tie Kennedy more securely to a postmodernist format in which 'the fantastic flattens out into that tone of unfantastic banality' where 'the characters' failure to be amazed by paranormal happenings serves to heighten *our* amazement' (McHale 2004:75-6). Certainly the remarkable nature of the near-death experiences Kennedy's characters undergo is seldom the focus of the characters themselves – to them, it seems, the *fact* of narrowly escaping death is crucial, but the bizarre *manner* in which this escape comes about is almost circumstantial, though it may impact heavily upon the reader. For causing minor disruption to the work of the local crime syndicate, Colin is not only kidnapped and badly beaten but crucified on a warehouse floor to the accompaniment of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto, a punishment not only brutal but extreme and somewhat extravagant in the details. After several failed suicide attempts (forming a regular part of the 'steps' writers undertake on Foal Island), Nathan's final brush with death comes through the elaborate man-traps he has built for himself in the trees behind his cottage, which he drunkenly runs into; the final attempt to take his own life carefully built and prepared for and yet, again, quite brutal and medieval in its execution. Helen permits her final beating in 'Original Bliss' only after she has prayed so comprehensively that she feels she has reached a state of utter forgiveness, a literal bliss, a kind of religious ecstasy which allows her to incite her husband to extremes of brutality while remaining completely calm, full of 'lightness'; 'cleaned and uncovered' (Kennedy 1997:291-292). In each case the physical pain and endangerment carries with it an element of ritual, even magic, which in turn precipitates the

development of the love which is to follow it, and yet this primal or ritualistic element appears so integral to the process that, from the character's perspective, it is unremarkable – a vital necessity, not an extravagance. Even Colin, traumatised by the violence he neither expected nor deserved, does not appear to question the manner of its execution. In *So I am Glad* the magical element is taken one step further as the central passion of the story transcends death – the man Jennifer falls in love with is already dead, and once he has taught her how to truly love, how to feel, he returns to death and nothingness. This is the only example in Kennedy's fiction of a pure and tender love which requires death as the necessary and only outcome, to make it complete. Variations of *this* particular quest, where a character returns from the grave to fulfil a 'lesson' in love and acceptance for the protagonist before vanishing again, have proved very popular in contemporary culture, particularly film culture, the 1990 film *Ghost* probably being the most well-known example, though Kennedy adds a complexity to the romantic narrative framework by making her 'ghost' a seventeenth century nobleman, not an ex-lover, whilst at the same time refusing to romanticise or glorify his final departure; focusing only upon the raw pain of the separation and Savinien's sinking into death with a 'pale and emptying' face, 'over-sweet' breath and 'cold, hard lips' (Kennedy 1995:277).

The Language of Love

Despite the ways in which Kennedy could be said to be presenting a version of traditional romantic narratives, it is important to note the multiple ways in which she also subverts or manipulates romantic expectations. Though there may be similarities in the use of romantic tropes, the purpose here is not to claim that Kennedy can fit comfortably within the bounds of popular romance fiction. On the contrary, there are many aspects to her writing which set her works firmly apart from those of the romance writers. One of the most obvious differences is to be found in the style of writing; where popular romance can be said to favour 'simple syntax, elementary realism, repetitive vocabulary, and authorial interpretation' which creates a verbal structure able to be 'decoded' quickly and easily by the reader (Radway 1984:197), Kennedy's fiction is 'narratologically complex', with the use of 'free indirect speech and thought' allowing 'access to characters' interiority' (Dunnigan 2000:145). This 'access' in itself creates complications though, as it exposes the reader to the full turmoil of the characters' mind so that we become embroiled in their personal confusions, self-deceptions, desires and concealments, and have to work through this intimate intensity to grasp the focus of the narrative, as in this extract from *The Blue Book*:

And if he can be precise, brave, and they are alike and with each other and together and they have love and are in love, are inside love, then it ought to be possible for her to tell him everything. Her everything.

Sssshhh.

But he prevents her confession with his own and she lets him.

Because I am a coward.

True. (Kennedy 2011:326)

The long opening sentence with its stream-of-consciousness style and the repetition of 'love' emphasises Beth's sense of urgency and longing, which is suddenly curtailed by the '*Sssshhh*'. The shift into italics highlights the separation between the third-person narrative and the thoughts inside Beth's head, and yet the narrative is also occurring from Beth's perspective, so the boundaries between narrator and character become blurred. The fact that '*Sssshhh*' and '*Because I am a coward*' are also placed alone on separate lines creates a definite sense of fear and suggests that Beth's secret, which has not yet been revealed to the reader, must be a powerful one. Thus the reader is placed between the two lovers at this point – unlike Arthur, we are given enough insight into Beth's mind to be aware that she has a confession she is not yet ready to make, but we also do not know what it is, and in this respect we are being kept in the dark just as Arthur is. As readers we are made fully aware of the *pain* inherent in the lover's desire to share everything; because sharing everything involves the bad as well as the good:

Put it in his wonderful head – give him what's ugly, what's me, like hitting him, like making him bleed.

Sssshhh.

My darling.

I can't.

I can't do that. (2011:334)

Once again, though Kennedy's style places the reader squarely in the complex emotional interiority of her characters, she continuously highlights the intensely physical sensations of love. Besides the truth being something that could make the lover 'bleed', Beth also describes the phrase 'I love you' as a kind of physical assault, which '*burns in the mouth, burns like fuck. Never said it so much and it burns me*' (2011:335). In *So I am Glad* Jennifer describes the way in which the awareness of a lover, 'the whole sense of him – the touch, the scent, the taste – will slice in sharper than fire' (1995:263), and when Helen first discovers her love for Edward in 'Original Bliss' it is described as a 'shiver in the blood' which leaves her feeling 'impossibly naked' (1997:175). For Nathan, the '*emotional fucking haemophiliac*' of

Everything You Need (1999:474) love is, of course, unrelentingly visceral; a violence which

fixes you by the bone, lays you bare and makes you want it, makes you need her to *see* you, really see you – muscle parted, veins unzipped, right into the sad, little shiver of your cells where, Jesus God, she already is, she already is, she already is. (1999:512)

The emotional and the physical are thus made inseparable in Kennedy's writing. There is nothing dreamy or detached about the emotions her characters experience – more often than not, love is linked to actual physical pain, and this emphasis on the continual presence of the body firmly roots such emotions in an identifiable, and at times uncomfortable, realism. And yet tenderness within this physicality is also possible, frequently expressing itself through the sexual union of the protagonists but also, at times, moving beyond sexual passion to find delight in the mundane. When Helen and Edward finally make love at the end of *Original Bliss*, for example, the sexual need is very evident and yet almost reverently expressed:

She walks him to the bed and they cover each other up, carefully and entirely, and begin the gentle, strenuous fight to cling and be still and kiss and move and touch every place when there are acres of places, all moving and turning and wanting to be touched. Edward's skin, she could never have fully imagined how completely satisfactory Edward's skin would be. (1997:308)

However, while the tenderness within the sex act itself is apparent here, Helen also finds pleasure in the simple physicality of her lover, taking time to note the way in which a man swallowing, 'nothing but that', can be 'incredible' (1997:309); ending with this exchange as the lovers drift off to sleep:

'You have really large feet.'

'Feet?'

'Mm.'

'Now she tells me.'

'You do.'

'I'm very tall.' Bright at her ear, breath and sound and Edward being pleased to sound mildly offended. 'Didn't have big feet – I'd fall over. We wouldn't want that.'

'No, we wouldn't want that.' (1997:311)

Arguably, it is this continued blending of the passionate with the painful and the beautiful with the mundane which sets Kennedy's writing apart from straightforward escapist romance fiction, making her work simultaneously more complex and more powerful. This is literature about love which fights to show love as it really is – not just euphoric or gentle but frequently

messy, painful and complicated.

Romance versus Realism

In an essay in *Romance Revisited* Rosalynn Voaden quotes romantic novelist Irene Roberts:

It is not, and never has been, the function of a romantic novelist to continue further than the first dawning and final declaration of true love [...] It would take the gilt off the gingerbread to follow the romantic dream with realism.
(Roberts, quoted by Voaden 1995:81)

By this reasoning Kennedy would *not* be a romantic novelist, as she is preoccupied not just with the initial euphoria of falling in love but with exploring what happens afterwards – the ways love can grow and change, or turn sour, the impact of affairs, violence, bereavement or simply the keeping of secrets. In fact the first flush of romantic attachment is granted very little space; it is fair to assume that Kennedy's major interest lies in portraying the 'realism' of what comes next. In *Paradise* the blending of romance and realism is used to devastating effect by running protagonist Hannah's love for Robert alongside her love for alcohol – both, it is implied, are needed to make her happy and whole, while careful use of the same romantic language renders the two inseparable. Hannah places 'the depth of adult and liquid relationships' side by side (Kennedy 2004:163); describes how alcohol can 'dissolve your bleak points and blur your edges' so that they don't 'hurt' (2004:19); later noting how she and Robert 'blur into each other' (2004:76). In places her craving, her physical need for both Robert and alcohol becomes unified, so the one cannot be experienced without the other:

'What are you drinking?'
'Mother's ruin. If you were here it could ruin you, too...'
The growl sinking to a purr.
'I'd like that.' The oily, cheap-perfume sting of his gin is almost with me, I can smell it in the meat of my mind, hot.
'I'd like that a lot.' And gin would be the way his mouth tastes, the memory of juniper under his tongue and the spirit's brightness, its good hurt. (2004:151)

Paradise concludes with Hannah's joyful anticipation of having both Robert and whiskey returned to her; he will 'bring through the glasses' and then they can 'begin' (2004:344). The fact that Kennedy goes to such lengths to emphasise the almost identical nature of Hannah's two loves, right to the end of the text, subverts romantic expectations to allow passionate joy into the existence of the alcoholic, while simultaneously highlighting the darker, addictive

aspect of the love felt for another human being.

There are other notable ways in which Kennedy shakes romantic stereotypes. Firstly, as has been noted previously, there is very little gender bias within her texts. A typical contemporary romance text will centre upon a female protagonist, who may be 'spirited' and independent but is often also 'unusually compassionate, kind, and understanding' (Radway 1984:127), and will follow her quest to find true love with 'a hero who is always depicted as magnetic, powerful, and physically pleasing' (1984:105). Once the hero is successfully obtained the text must rapidly draw to its conclusion to avoid, as Roberts put it, taking 'the gilt off the gingerbread'. In contrast, Kennedy's protagonists can be either male or female, and are frequently introduced after the first flush of love has passed. Their quests lie more broadly in a need for unity, the thirst for another in order to define the self, or the recognition, through past mistakes, that real love can only flourish in a state of thorough openness and honesty. Many of her characters are caught revisiting lost loves, whether momentarily in the short stories or extensively in the novels (*Everything You Need, Day, The Blue Book*). Frequently the short stories describe relationships or marriages falling apart while lonely protagonists try to pinpoint what went wrong. Sometimes the central character achieves everything he or she wants, only to have it snatched away by death, or the memory of death, as in *So I am Glad* and *The Blue Book*. But in each case the gender of the protagonist is secondary to the emotions he or she experiences. Elizabeth's yearning for Arthur in *The Blue Book* is matched by Nathan's desperate craving for Maura in *Everything You Need*. Helen's tender regard for Edward in 'Original Bliss' finds echoes in Alfred's quiet, intense love for Joyce in *Day*. Kennedy makes the point that both men and women can love with equal intensity, both can pursue the loved one with equal fervour and, crucially, both can fail – man or woman, each is an example of a different kind of flawed humanity, and nobody is perfect.

External details carry much less weight for Kennedy, too, in comparison with the way they are used to drive romance fiction texts. One could tenuously place most of Kennedy's protagonists in a middle-class bracket, and in urban surroundings, but she does not waste time on the lavish descriptions of careers, locations, possessions and dress which preoccupy contemporary romance novels. Such descriptions may form an essential component of romance fiction as a genre, where a fictional setting which can be easily 'decoded' (Radway 1984:197) has to be quickly created within a frame of straightforward syntax, but Kennedy is writing in a context more centred upon challenging the reader and examining the emotional landscape in which characters operate, rather than the physical one which surrounds them. Similarly, physical descriptions of the characters themselves are rarely provided, because

when the focus is predominantly on the internal experiences of love rather than the external expressions of characters as they search for it, outward appearance carries much less importance. This kind of physical descriptive detail only tends to surface in Kennedy when a character is being viewed by a lover, and this in turn means that the focus is upon very specific, intimate details – the curve of a hip bone, the shape of a mouth – rather than overall impressions of appearance. In bed with Jonathan, Mary notes 'the shape of his weight a completely familiar pattern [...] the smooth small of his back, the angle above his hip' (Kennedy 1999:486), whilst Alfred's final encounter with Joyce seems to render him almost unable to describe her at all, noting only that 'she's lost a little weight and shorter hair, slightly shorter, and her hands are beautiful' (2007:277).

This intimacy of examination allows Kennedy to thoroughly explore the motivations of her characters in a way which frequently highlights the bleaker, more dangerous side of the human psyche – Hannah's alcohol addiction in *Paradise*; Jennifer's sadistic tendencies in *So I am Glad*; or Nathan's masochistic ones in *Everything You Need*. The persistence with which the shadow of domestic violence looms in the background of Kennedy's work also serves as an uneasy reminder of the ways in which the concept of love can be twisted; a demonstration of how rapidly romance can turn sour. Like their fairy-tale predecessors, Kennedy's protagonists must travel through a darkly sinister emotional underworld on their quest towards love, but unlike those fantastical adventures, here the dark can remain unconquered. These characters may yearn for love, as the heroines of romance fiction do, believing it to be a thing necessary to render them happy and whole, but here they uncover the cruel reality of a love which involves effort and commitment, is intimately connected with pain and can at any moment be snatched away or soiled to leave them, once again, afraid and alone. The short stories provide snapshots into uneasy relationships or marriages where love or the promise of love has brought pain or disappointment, while Kennedy's longer fiction ends all too often with a character teetering on the brink of a revelation which, if it were only uttered, could perhaps bring them to some sense of a happy conclusion. But this rarely happens within the text. *Original Bliss* stands out as a collection where several of the stories conclude with the happy union of two people. Both 'Groucho's Moustache' and 'The Administration of Justice' end with the lover (female in the first case, probably male in the second) contemplating the beloved and reflecting on the power which love holds over them:

When I held my breath to watch his face, I knew I loved him: I could hear it – like the pause before sunrise, or the small drumming of clean rain. (1997:49)

For all I have left of my life she has made me unfinished when I was so sure I was done. There is no adequate repayment I can offer her for this. (1997:80)

Yet even here there is recognition of the transitory nature of such happiness – the protagonist of 'Groucho's Moustache' rejoices that 'for one complete moment, 'I want' was the absolute truth', but also cannot help acknowledging her lover's observation that 'we're nice and fit and healthy now, pretty young and pretty pretty, but it'll go – I've seen it gone' (1997:48-49). In 'The Administration of Justice' the concern is that the love expressed will just never be enough, or will come out wrong – 'I want to love her enough for me to feel it and believe in it and still be nothing but gentle and I never do know the right way' (1997:79). Such acknowledgements, so closely intertwined with passionate loving emotions, ensure that the long sought-after joy of unity is, at the last, tempered by a wistful sadness. 'Original Bliss' itself, of course, also concludes with the two lovers finally coming together; as Helen finally reconciles her faith and her love and simply 'lets herself be' (1997:311). I would argue that this is the one example of 'happy ever after' romantic fiction that Kennedy has yet produced (until *Serious Sweet*, which is discussed in the Conclusion); a text in which her protagonists overcome all the barriers thrown in their path in order that they can finally come together and be at peace. The barriers in question may have been particularly huge, cruel and violent – Edward's addiction to hardcore pornography, Helen's abusive husband and her brush with death at his hands – but arguably the sheer brutality of these obstacles only serves to highlight the ways in which they contrast with the tenderness and passion blossoming between the two protagonists, which in turn gives them the strength to confront and conquer the horrors before them. Even here the 'ever after' is a stretch, as the all-too-human fallibility of the characters ensures readers are aware of how fragile such happiness may be. However, by the time the novella reaches its conclusion, there is no sinister foreboding of future problems or dark prescience of mortality, but simply Helen and Edward in the moment of their unity, in each others' arms, in love, and happy.

In this joyful conclusion, though, 'Original Bliss' stands very much alone. More often than not what Kennedy leaves us with is a sense of the *possibility* of happiness, but not the realisation. This is particularly evident in the longer fiction, where there is space to fully explore the motivations and insecurities of each protagonist, thus demonstrating the ways in which each can jeopardise, complicate or confuse a happiness always tantalisingly within their grasp. Jennifer in *So I am Glad* is operating under slightly different circumstances,

perhaps, since her lover appears to be a dead man who must therefore be reclaimed by the grave and placed beyond her control, but there is an implication that Savinien only appears in the first place because Jennifer needs to be taught the true value of love, so it could be said that everything occurring within the text stems from her own actions. Either way, as with Kennedy's other texts the result is loss rather than completion. There may be a hinted possibility of reconciliation, but it is one which must take place in the fantastical space beyond the final page. So Jennifer grieves, Margaret and Beth (*Looking for the Possible Dance; The Blue Book*) both walk away, Nathan (*Everything You Need*) says nothing, Hannah (*Paradise*) reaches for the bottle yet again. The romantic satisfaction of a happy ending is denied to both character and reader, because that is not the reality of love, and it seems realism, here, is more important than romance.

Conclusion: Happy Ever After?

I would argue that the crucial factor in defining the romantic nature of Kennedy's novels lies less in our definition of Kennedy as a writer and more within the way we define romance itself, in the context of written contemporary fiction. If romance *must* follow the formula of popular romance novels, as described by Janice Radway, then a 'happy ever after' ending is essential. Within the popular genre, an unhappy ending 'excludes a novel that is otherwise a romantic love story from the romance category' (Radway 1984:99), making for a dissatisfied readership and thus rendering such a text unsuitable for the mass-market nature of popular romance publishing. Historically, such a definition has also helped to draw a clear boundary between the *romance*, which must carry the fantasy of a happy ending, and the *novel*, which must be grounded in realism. Ian Watt is another critic keen to emphasise this separation; noting that 'the novel's access to the inner life gives it a more pervasive and enduring sway than the romance', the latter being 'fundamentally an unreal flattery of the reader's dreams' (Watt 1987:205). The formulaic nature of popular romance also lends itself to much picking apart by feminist critics – the plucky heroine who again and again overcomes various obstacles to gain, as she must, the man of her dreams, provides a convenient platform from which to examine societal gender inequalities. Radway seems to argue that romances provide a necessary escape for women caught in the drudgery of a patriarchal society, while Modleski implies that the texts' persistent reassertion of said patriarchal society makes them a more troubling barrier to female liberation. Both, however, equate the incredible popularity of these texts among women readers with an inherent female 'dissatisfaction' with the status quo (Radway 1984:215; Modleski 1982:26).

In contrast, Kennedy's fiction defies such straightforward categorisation and analysis. Her texts, as has been mentioned elsewhere, can centre upon a protagonist of either sex. Her writing style and plot development are narratologically complex in a way which instantly sets her apart from writers of mass-produced popular fiction, and she seldom, if ever, permits her characters a happy ending; in itself enough to banish her from the realms of romance writing as defined by Radway. And yet the romantic elements within Kennedy's writing cannot be ignored. If one looks back at Pearce and Stacey's definition, quoted in full in the Introduction, it is stated that romance 'might be described as a *quest* for love'; a quest which 'involves a staging of desire whose fulfilment may be realised with attainment or, *just as likely, with its loss*' (Pearce & Stacey 1995:15-16, emphasis added). By this more generous definition, any text which features a quest for love at its centre could be comfortably labelled 'romance' – here it is the need for love, and the searching for it, which makes the text romantic, along with 'the conquest of barriers in the name of love, and perhaps, by extension, also in the name of truth, knowledge, justice or freedom' (ibid). The journey each protagonist undertakes in order to arrive at the conclusion is therefore the most important aspect of the text, and so the degree of 'happiness' offered by this conclusion becomes substantially less relevant. In other words, the text may finish with a loss, and yet still be romantic. This shift away from reliance upon a happy ending permits the entry of romance into the more realistic narratives of writers like Kennedy; who can also use their awareness of the 'immutable cultural myth' (Radway 1984:198) of the fairy-tale 'happy ever after' as a tool with which to dig apart the emotional insecurities of their characters. In Kennedy's work these take the shape of 'typologies of longing', to use Sarah Dunnigan's phrase, where the protagonists' thirst for love, unity, and completion drives them towards the possibility of a happy ending even as their doubts, fears and insecurities threaten to snatch it from them. Dunnigan states directly that 'the underlying structure of Kennedy's novels is loss and their 'quest' a restoration, whether moral, sexual or spiritual', as her characters search for the 'means of (re) enchantment' (Dunnigan 2000:154), and examining Kennedy's fiction as a whole it is impossible not to see this thread, this burning desire running through her work. To claim, as Kaye Mitchell does, that Kennedy's 'undertone of violence and perversity' undercuts any labelling of her work as 'romantic' (Mitchell 2008:67) is to ignore the origins of romance in the dark, violent realm of the fairy tale, whilst simultaneously dismissing the 'romantic' as something wholly frivolous, unreal, fantastical. In contrast, if one accepts or even embraces the romance within Kennedy's fiction, it can be seen to add depth and poignancy to the violence and bleakness her characters encounter – far from over-simplifying, it adds further conflict, contributes to narrative

complexity, and finds a place for Kennedy in the tradition of a literature of *hope*. Writing in 2017, Alison Lumsden describes *Day* in particular as 'suggesting that in spite of the individual and collective traumas of the twentieth century, establishing authentic relationships may yet be possible' (Lumsden in Acheson 2017:82). I would argue that this belief in possibility may be seen to run throughout Kennedy's work, driving the quests of her characters and linking her writing to both the 'heroic optimism' of fairy tale (Carter 1990:xviii) and the romantic yearning for a happy ever after. Hope, possibility and romance do not detract from Kennedy's 'serious' fiction – they add to its power.

Conclusion

I have attempted, in the previous chapters, not only to explore the many ways in which A. L. Kennedy uses love in her fiction but also to emphasise the vital, crucial role that love plays, both within each narrative and as a strong thread linking the many narratives together. In its overwhelming power, love is simultaneously the most beautiful and the most terrible thing, which her characters yearn for and fear in equal measure. In light of this, I have tried to argue for Kennedy as a romantic writer. As previously mentioned, many critics have touched upon the representation of love in Kennedy's work (Dunnigan 2000; Norquay 2005; Mitchell 2008), but through this thesis I wished to go further in examining the depth and complexity of Kennedy's relationship to love in all its forms. Beyond which I hope to show that the trials, the separations, the torments undergone by her characters are all aimed towards an ultimate coming together, in a structure which echoes the questing found in both fairy tales and more typical romance narratives. Again, Sarah Dunnigan has already noted the 'structure of a quest' within Kennedy's longer fictions, but emphasising *loss* as the central component, with the quest being one of 'restoration' (2000:154). While loss is of undeniable structural importance, the fact that this is almost invariably a loss of *love*, and the quest a search for *love's* restoration, is the key point I wish to address. Such a quest is not possible without hope, without some faith in the joyous possibilities of a loving unity, and it is this optimistic journeying towards unity which I feel marks Kennedy as a romantic writer, not simply one who writes about love.

The romance of Kennedy's fiction lies not only in the quests her characters undertake in the name of love but also in the way she returns them, again and again, to a belief in its redemptive power. Even the most uncertain of her conclusions seems to imply that finding happiness in love *should be possible*, if only the lovers could communicate fully and honestly with each other: on the final page of *The Blue Book*, Beth assures Arthur that '[i]f this is a spell and there is magic and everything that matters can be true, then you can be happy and be loved' (Kennedy 2011:373). This suggests a seemingly unshakeable belief in the good that love can do, in spite of all the pain, turmoil and darkness which reality can inevitably inflict. Combined with this, perhaps, is the acknowledgement that people will never stop searching for a happiness to call their own. I would argue that Kennedy's fiction is in fact an excellent example of what Robert Louis Stevenson, himself a passionate creator of Scottish romantic fiction, termed 'true romantic art'; which 'makes a romance of all things'; reaching 'into the highest abstraction of the ideal' whilst simultaneously not refusing 'the most pedestrian

realism' (Stevenson 1999:60). For Stevenson romance and realism need not be mutually exclusive but can complement each other, enriching the reading experience with texts in which 'situation is animated with passion, passion clothed upon with situation' and 'neither exists for itself, but each inheres indissolubly with the other' (1999:58). In light of this appealing definition, one can view Kennedy not only as a romantic writer, but also a highly relevant and important one – for demonstrating how deeply-held cultural romantic beliefs not only clash against, but may also be incorporated into, a contemporary realist context. The fantasy 'happy ever after' may not be in evidence in Kennedy's writing, but the 'heroic optimism' (Carter 1990:xviii) of the fairy-tale tradition most definitely is – to 'believe in love' (Kennedy in Mitchell 2008:123); to continue the quest and have faith in the healing nature of love, and the power and possibility of hope – this may be the best that romance can achieve within a turbulent and isolating world, and may be, in fact, 'altogether enough' (Kennedy 1995:250).

'Here it is'

I would like to conclude with a brief comment on Kennedy's latest novel, *Serious Sweet* (2016). Published as this thesis was nearing completion, *Serious Sweet* incorporates many of the elements discussed here: a man and a woman, Jon and Meg, both of whom consider themselves to be 'wrong' in some way or other, begin communication in the form of letters and spend most of the novel attempting to come together for a proper meeting. The narrative takes place over twenty-four hours and is filled with the frustrations, obstacles and personal anxieties which typify Kennedy's novels, and yet what is notable here is a particularly powerful sense of redemption, a hope which cries out from the page more emphatically than in any of her previous fictions. Even the title implies a juxtaposition of the real and the romantic, the brutal and the tender. The novel is set in London, and the central action is interspersed with descriptions of unremarkable people doing remarkable things; Londoners caught in moments of kindness, compassion, or simple happiness. We discover towards the end of the book that these are people Meg 'collects': '[e]very time the city gives me something sweet, I remember and I write it down' (2016:490). Meg herself is perhaps one of the strongest characters Kennedy has created, unusually sure in her sense of self. A recovered alcoholic, she may be seen as representing a possible future for Hannah from *Paradise*, and yet Meg is very much her own character, coming through not just alcoholism but sexual assault and determined to look for goodness and hope. Despite being a senior civil servant, Jon is definitely the more insecure of the two – agonisingly unsure, somewhat self-loathing,

so worn down he seems convinced happiness is beyond him. And yet, almost miraculously, the two do meet, and the happiness of simply being there, 'unsteady and together and unsteady and together' (515), knowing that they 'would rather be here and die of it than have to be anywhere else' (519), causes the book to end with a triumphant proclamation:

Here it is.

Love.

Here it is. (515)

Looking back over Kennedy's previous work, the only couple who have approached a similarly happy ending would be Helen and Edward, united at the end of *Original Bliss*. And there, notably, they are still only complete 'under God'; the 'Jealous, Patient Love' (1997:311) of Helen's faith remains a central part of her joy. In contrast, Kennedy allows Meg and Jon in *Serious Sweet* to 'believe they are saving each other' (2016:515), to grant them a moment in which absolutely no one and nothing else matters. Optimistically, this may be read as the culmination of all the hope, the possibility, and the yearning through which Kennedy's characters have travelled over the years. The happiness here may be brief, may still be a long way from 'ever after', but it has undoubtedly been found. The quest, for this moment at least, appears to be over.

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