

“A Natural Limit to Tears”

An Examination of Depression in Three Contemporary Scottish Novels

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1. Introduction

In recent times, Scottish society's awareness of mental illness has developed and deepened immeasurably. From advertisements on television to education in schools, attempts to further expand this increasing knowledge are ongoing. However, there appears to remain a number of people who perceive depression and other mental health issues to be trivial matters rather than serious health concerns,¹ or, at the other end of the scale, believe sufferers require patronising plaudits for their bravery.² Despite increase in education, these stigmas still continue to hinder the progress of those battling depression on a daily basis, preventing many sufferers from seeking help, or resulting in others feeling inadvertently patronised or misunderstood. Artistic output in its many forms is regularly hailed as forward thinking and progressive in all areas of society. Therefore, given depression is ‘currently the fourth most disabling medical condition in the world’³, it should not be unfair to expect those in the literary profession to make some level of contribution towards combatting the negative issues surrounding mental health problems. Consequently, it should be considered important to identify whether Scottish writers in recent times have aided this cause of awareness or have themselves fallen foul of employing their own mental health stigmatisation.

This dissertation will provide an examination of the mental health of three fictional characters in the work of some well-known contemporary Scottish writers – Irvine Welsh's psychotic Roy Strang who suffers from a bout of depression during the course of *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, successful yet suicidal rock star Dan Weir in *Espedair Street* by Iain Banks, and depressed and anorexic teacher Joy Stone in Janice Galloway's *The Trick Is To Keep Breathing*. This dissertation will explore the recognisable symptoms and potential causes of depression in relation to each of these characters and compare this analysis with expert medical information and opinion. This dissertation will also explore the way in which

society is portrayed in each novel, discussing how this impacts on the mental health of each character, and what such portrayals may tell us about the society in which we live.

In doing so, this dissertation will discuss the reaction to these portrayals of depression, emphasising how each depiction can be considered accurate and largely sympathetic. This dissertation will also consider the way in which the novelists use the relationship of each individual character with their surroundings to emphasise important issues in Scottish society and how these specifically relate to mental well-being. This will subsequently highlight how each writer uses the society of Scotland as a symbol of stagnation and depression, with travel and the emigration of Scots being seen as an escape not just geographically but also emotionally. Conclusively, this dissertation will show that, as well as portraying depression accurately, Welsh, Banks, and Galloway have contributed their small part to further understanding and awareness of depression and its stigmatisation, whilst drawing attention to unfavourable aspects of Scottish society which could be partly responsible for poor mental health.

2. Roy Strang in *Marabou Stork Nightmares*

2.1 Diagnosis

Before exploring Irvine Welsh's portrayal of depression through the mental health of Roy Strang and then discussing whether or not it can be considered accurate, it is first important to highlight how *Marabou Stork Nightmares* communicates Strang's depressive state to the reader. There is the possibility that Strang's mental health problems could have included depression from an earlier point in his life but it is not until he moves to Manchester following his rape trial that the reader is explicitly informed of his depressive struggle. When invited to an office party in particular, Roy admits that he attends the gathering only because he is 'so depressed [he does not] have the willpower to say no'⁴ and this is followed by a number of clear symptoms.

2.2 Symptoms

Roy's depression is hinted at from the beginning of chapter eighteen in which he explains 'just filling in an application form was a massive undertaking' (Welsh, p.215). This perception of a simple task as something strenuous could be a sign of the difficulty concentrating associated with forms of depression.⁵ Despite now living in the busy city of Manchester, Roy chooses to stay in the confines of his flat as frequently as possible (Welsh, p.234). In doing so, he essentially attempts to remove himself from society which shows an 'indifference to the outside world' (Wasserman, p.14), a typical symptom of major depression. On the occasion he does venture out to an office party he finds those around him are comfortable talking to him for a short period of time before moving on to perceived better company (Welsh, p.234). Although this is an example of a reaction to Roy rather than a specific symptom displayed by the character himself, it can be viewed as an indirect example of his

depression, with depressives said to 'elicit more negative responses from others around them'.⁶

The character's perception of himself can also be taken into consideration. Labelling himself a 'freak... thanks tae fuckin Winston Two' (Welsh, p.235), Roy refers to himself as an outcast rather than the victim of a vicious attack. This displays a sense of low self-esteem which can not only be a symptom of depression (Wasserman, p.14), but is often regarded as a contributory factor.⁷

Similarly, unwarranted guilt can also be identified (Wasserman, p.14). Given Strang's guilty conscience, or 'something close to it',⁸ appears to be the result of his participation in a gang rape, it seems natural to see this guilt as logical rather than unwarranted. However, given the psychopathic behaviour of Roy up to this point, such as stabbing Tam Matthews multiple times (Welsh, p.97) and using fireworks to kill his father's dog (Welsh, p.166), it could be argued that guilt for any wrongdoing is unwarranted for someone with his mentality. If a man is capable of such actions without remorse, it would suggest that any guilt felt for other unacceptable behaviour could be seen as unwarranted.

Despite these symptoms, Roy manages to overcome them in order to enjoy a busy social life and embarks on a relationship with Dorothy. However, this new lease of life comes as the result of his introduction to recreational ecstasy use. Recognised as a coping mechanism which can itself contribute to a spiral of depression,⁹ drug use becomes integral to Roy's life in England and, despite a successful beginning to his relationship with Dorothy, she leaves him following a return to his role as 'a depressed fuck-up who couldn't go out' (Welsh, p.242). A noticeable symptom of depression at this stage is Roy's desire to eat large quantities of food (Welsh, p.242), with both weight gain and loss now being understood as signs of a depressive state (Wasserman, p.79).

Following Roy's return to Edinburgh, his beloved Hibernian defeat Rangers in the League Cup to spark wild celebrations, during which Roy 'scarcely noticed' (Welsh, p.246). This apathetic response to a memorable moment in his football club's history suggests his depression is responsible for his 'losing interest in the things [he] used to enjoy'.¹⁰ His return to Edinburgh also coincides with an example of anxiety, itself a symptom of a wider depression (NHS: Clinical Depression -Symptoms). While in 'Rezurrection' with his brother Bernard, the sight of the 'Z' in the club's sign, which reminds him of the Zero Tolerance campaign, causes him to become 'hot, breathless and shaky' (Welsh, p.252), physical symptoms not uncommon with anxiety (Wasserman, p.62). It is while recovering from this reaction that Roy displays his most obvious symptom of depression, wishing to take his own life. Given 'suicidal wishes have historically been associated with a depressed state',¹¹ it is perhaps no surprise when Roy concludes 'death was the way forward' (Welsh, p.255).

2.3 Causes

Roy's depression being the result of deeply buried guilt over his gang rape involvement is a perception that seems to be favoured by critics.¹² This argument is strengthened by his negative reactions to reminders of the Zero Tolerance campaign. However, given Roy's life experiences up until this point, particularly throughout childhood, it would naïve to simply accept this without considering the possibility of other causes. In fact, it could be possible that he has been a depressive most of his life. This would then provide a possible explanation for Roy's 'recurring nightmare, worthy of Goya, of the Marabou stork devouring the head of a flamingo'¹³ mentioned throughout the novel, with 'disturbed dreams' being another symptom of depression (Wasserman, p.6).

It would seem unlikely Roy's most traumatic childhood experiences, particularly his role as a victim of child molestation in South Africa (Welsh, p.71) and his mauling by his

father's dog (Welsh, p.21), would not have played a part in shaping his poor mental health. With the likelihood of depression increased by traumatic life events (Gotlib & Hammen, p.141), it is possible that Roy developed depression at a young age but only became mentally vulnerable enough in Manchester to recognise it due to the use of ecstasy. If so, Strang's upbringing in the schemes of Edinburgh would not have helped to eradicate any developing depressive state. Feelings of hopelessness associated with depression can often be generated by 'living in conditions of social deprivation and poverty' (Wasserman, p.82), with Roy describing his home as an 'ugly rabbit hutch' (Welsh, p.19). The character's parents could also be considered as responsible for his depressive disorder. When the interactions between Roy and his parents are explored, it appears likely that he is the product of a negative parental relationship which can result in 'emotional deprivation' (Wasserman, p.82). Examples of this stressful parenting can be found in a number of instances, such as when he and Bernard are forced to box each other (Welsh, p.29) with Roy being 'bullied into pummelling his effeminate half-brother' (Morace, p.100). Furthermore, given depression can be a solely 'heritable genetic' condition (Friedman, p.8), it could also be suggested that the cause of Roy's illness is the result of his genetic make-up and it was, therefore, inevitable. This possibility is emphasised by the character's references to his family's poor genes on numerous occasions, particularly when he refers to his relations as 'not so much a family as a genetic disaster' (Welsh, p.19). Roy's condition being hereditary is also supported by the psychological states of both his parents, with his father referred to as an 'A1 basket case' (Welsh, p.21) and his mother having been committed to hospital following a mental breakdown (Welsh, p.20).

It is difficult to pinpoint the specific cause of Roy's depression. However, it appears unlikely that his condition is solely the result of guilt brought about by a newly found conscience. Given the medical understanding of the causes of depression, it appears likely

that his disorder was either the result of environmental factors such as traumatic life events or his upbringing, or was an inevitable result of genetics, and it would appear even more likely to be caused by a combination of these elements.

2.4 Society

The society in which Roy grows up is not portrayed positively by Welsh. His own scheme is a deprived area filled with 'sterile boredom' (Welsh, p.19) and the poverty stricken area seems largely typical of a Welsh novel.¹⁴ Furthermore, Welsh's use of Strang as an aggressive character is an exaggerated representation of a 'Scottish working-class 'hard man' masculinity'.¹⁵ By taking Roy's misogynistic behaviour to its extremes, Welsh provides a stinging commentary on a 'damaged and damaging'¹⁶ element of male society. Additionally, Roy's emotional awakening, in which he appears to shed this behaviour, suggests that such dominant masculinities are produced by 'social conditioning... rather than an immutable law of nature' (Kelly, p.126).

With this resultant vision of Scottish society purveying negativity, stagnation, and perhaps Roy's own instability, emigration becomes representative of an escape from these elements. Following his early years spent in Edinburgh, South Africa becomes a promised land for Roy's family, typified when John Strang tells Roy 'Sooth Efrikay, it'll aw be different there though, eh?' (Welsh, p.35). However, South Africa is not quite the utopia expected. On their arrival, Roy is quick to realise that Johannesburg is 'just another city... like a large Muirhouse-in-the-sun' (Welsh, p.61), highlighting the anti-climax of his new home. However, it does appear that Roy ends up enjoying his life there, declaring that he 'loved South Africa' (Welsh, p.72). Unfortunately, this happiness only lasts for a short period of time. The bleakness of Scottish society soon catches up on the Strangs as following a jail sentence handed down to Roy's father (Welsh, p.79), the family decide to return home.

Having spent another few years back in Edinburgh, Roy attempts to escape his problems for a second time by leaving for Manchester. Roy again overcomes a negative perception at first, soon enjoying an active social life, new friends, and a loving relationship, resulting in Roy's remark of 'Manchester was a brilliant place, it was the happiest time of my life' (Welsh, p241). However, it is a symbol of Scotland in the form of an advert for the Edinburgh-based Zero Tolerance campaign which shatters Roy's contentment and drags him home. It is then fitting that it is the discord of Scottish society which sets the scene for Roy's coma-inducing suicide attempt.

Having considered Welsh's depiction of Scotland, South Africa and Manchester parallel to the mental and emotional state of Roy Strang, two possible conclusions can be reached. Firstly, that Welsh uses the depiction of Roy's scheme as symbolic of wider Scottish society and its problems, both economically and psychologically. When explaining the deprivation of his scheme, Roy is quick to admit that he'd still rather be outside than dealing with the 'chaos' inside his house (Welsh, p. 19). If the rundown physicality of the neighbourhood is symbolic of a country in a similar state, the psychological turmoil inside his home may be representative of the discord in the psyche of Scottish society, which produces an 'enduring schism in the nation's self-understanding and image'¹⁷ epitomised by 'self-loathing and... a sense of inferiority and injustice'.¹⁸ In contrast, the glamorous locations outwith Scotland become symbolic of a better life and a healthier mental attitude.

It could alternatively be that it is the depiction of society which is symbolic of the struggle with mental health issues, suggesting that the problems cannot simply be cured by running away and that these escapes are only temporary respites from the inevitable, unless the issues themselves are confronted. Unfortunately for Roy, he fails to confront these issues, electing to attempt suicide instead.

2.5 Reaction

The most compelling aspect about Roy's battle with depression is that it is the only time the character is portrayed as a vulnerable, sensitive human being, capable not only of experiencing emotions such as love and understanding but possessing the ability to express these feelings. Although this is largely down to Roy's intake of ecstasy, it is his depression that reinforces his vulnerability and results in the only section of the novel where potential empathy between reader and character can exist.

His newly discovered emotions are first alluded to when Roy describes losing his ecstasy virginity as having 'put [him] in touch with an undiscovered part of [himself], one that [he] had always somehow suppressed' (Welsh, p.237). Despite this awakening having more to do with drugs than Roy's depression, it does stress a major emotional breakthrough for him. This even results in him discussing his fears, insecurities, and 'hang-ups' in a conversation he describes as 'supportive' (Welsh, p.239), something completely out of character for a man whose 'sense of masculinity [has become] intimately tied to notions of physical aggression'.¹⁹

The depressed Strang goes on to make progress as his life becomes more stable, soon becoming engaged to Dorothy (Welsh, p.241). The significance of this event in Roy's life cannot be understated. Falling in love is a profound display of human emotion, something perceived as impossible for Strang based on his behaviour prior to this point. Roy's sex-life with Dorothy is also used by Welsh to reinforce his newly exposed emotional state, as Roy admits he is 'trembling, scared of exposing [himself] without the chemicals' (Welsh, p.240) when sleeping with her for the first time without ecstasy. Furthermore, Roy describes this experience as being similar to 'a big psychic trip together' (Welsh, p.240), suggesting a spiritual experience between the lovers, the polar opposite of the violent gang rape earlier in the novel, serving as a clear example of how his emotional awakening has eradicated an

animalistic persona and left him as a vulnerable human being. Roy's sexual experiences are further used to highlight this after his break-up with Dorothy, when he sleeps around with a number of women. Although it is established that these relationships are nothing more than one night stands, Roy states 'there was massive respect' (Welsh, p.244), which again seems in stark contrast to the act of rape.

His behaviour following his Zero Tolerance-related breakdown is also important. The aggression that may have been used in response to such an experience earlier in the novel now makes way for a helpless reaction, as he 'embraced Dorie most of the evening and through the morning' (Welsh, p.241), like a frightened child might grip tightly to its mother. Although the trigger of this reaction reminds the reader of the heinous crime he carried out, the character no longer appears to exude the vile persona he once did, now appearing fragile and powerless.

It is not just through Roy's relationships with women that he appears to show glimmers of a human being hidden beneath his vicious exterior. Following his chance meeting with his homosexual brother back in Edinburgh, Roy's reaction is a far cry from the attitude of his earlier persona. In his depressive state, Roy and Bernard embrace a number of times and talk at length, with Roy apologising for his previous behaviour (Welsh, p.250).

As Roy reaches, what he perceives to be, the end of his struggle with depression and his own life, his final outpouring is worth considering:

'That was what I'd been doing all my fuckin life, running away from sensitivity, from feelings, from love. Running away because a fuckin schemie, a nobody, shouldnae have these feelings because there's fuckin naewhair for them tae go, naewhair for them tae be expressed and if you open up every cunt will tear you apart. So you shut them out; you build a shell, you hide, or you lash out at them and hurt them. You do this because you think if you're hurting them you can't be hurt. But it's bullshit, because you just hurt even mair until you learn to become an animal and if you can't fuckin well learn that properly you run.' (Welsh, pp.254-255).

Although it could be argued this apparent salvation is 'little more than a conscience-salving claim',²⁰ it is still a markedly different reaction to the one which would have been expected from his previous incarnation. Of course, the reader never forgets that he is still that same character, but what Roy conveys before his planned demise suggests an acceptance of his behaviour and his circumstance, if not a plea for forgiveness. Roy also subtly suggests the issue of mental health stigmas. His bemoaning that negative feelings cannot be shared with others because 'every cunt will tear you apart' (Welsh, p.254) is similar to the stigmatisation of depression as merely 'a sign of weakness' (Wolpert, p.221).

Overall, the horrific behaviour of Roy prior to his spell in Manchester makes him a character that the reader cannot sympathise with and his unreliable narration, exemplified by the discovery near the end of the novel that many of his accounts of events are incorrect (Welsh, p.264), subsequently casts doubt over Roy's entire narrative, including his battle with depression and how authentic it actually is (Kelly, p.25). Ironically, this very questioning of whether Roy's depression is legitimate is itself symbolic of the stigmatisation of mental health issues, with the common misconception that the condition is 'trivial and not a genuine health concern' (NHS: Clinical Depression -Overview). If, however, it is assumed that Roy's depression is genuine then it appears Welsh's portrayal of it, based on symptomatic behaviour and possible causes, is accurate. Furthermore, the emotional awakening Roy undergoes subsequently results in a depressed individual who finds himself suddenly engulfed in vulnerability and newly discovered human emotions. With this in mind, it would be difficult not to view Welsh's depiction of depression as a sympathetic one, presenting the illness as unforgiving with no attempt to stigmatise or parody the condition.

3. Dan Weir in *Espedair Street*

3.1 Diagnosis

The suggestion that Dan Weir is suffering from severe depression is made in the opening line of *Espedair Street*, 'two days ago I decided to kill myself'.²¹ Although no more is known of the character at this point, it is a logical assumption to make that someone suicidal is suffering from mental health issues. More light is then shed on the type of issues that Dan may be battling as he alludes to the memory of creating a cloud with his former lover which, although enjoyable at the time, would now 'doubtless depress' him (Banks, p.2). However, unlike *Marabou Stork Nightmares* where Strang's diagnosis seems to be made more obvious, Weir's struggle is never fully clarified as being specifically that of depression by Iain Banks and so it is largely left up to the reader to identify the mental health issues bubbling below the surface.

3.2 Symptoms

One of Dan's most noticeable personality traits is a lack of self-esteem. This can be identified from early in his life, such as when he first encounters Frozen Gold as a teenager, labelling himself as 'the tall, ugly, staring-eyed loony' (Banks, p.30) and 'the mutant of the household' (Banks, p.34). This self-deprecation is continuous as Dan refers to himself negatively on a number of occasions, including the 'six and a half foot semi-scrofulous mutant' (Banks, p.126). Even after becoming successful Dan's self-deprecation continues unabated. This is particularly evident when he considers his past relationships. With regards to his time spent with Inez, Dan finds himself unable to think of any reasons why she would have been interested in him romantically (Banks, p.148). Following his retirement, this attitude continues when he complains that he 'always assumed they were taking pity on [him], were merely satisfying their curiosity, or had made some uncharacteristic mistake in a moment of

weakness' (Banks p.206) in regards to all of his past relationships. It is widely accepted that depressives tend to have a negative perception of themselves, believing that they are 'useless, defective, and unattractive – and that such experiences will never change' (Gotlib & Hammen, p.3). Therefore, this constant thread of low confidence throughout Dan's life, remaining unaltered no matter how many positive experiences he enjoys, would suggest that it is a symptom of depression.

If there is one potential symptom that Weir noticeably shares with Strang it is that of guilt. However, whereas Roy's guilt relates to a heinous act, Dan's is simply an ingrained trait, producing a number of instances of the unwarranted remorse already established as symptomatic of depression. Dan's narration alerts the reader not only to the presence of this guilt but also its prominence in his life. When discussing childhood, Dan makes it clear that these feelings engulfed him to the extent they became 'the constant bass line to [his] life' (Banks, p.19). The triviality of this guilt is emphasised when he admits being overcome with remorse after such actions as missing church, leaving home, and masturbating (Banks, p.20). Later in the novel it becomes clear that these reactions also affect Dan in adulthood. For example, he cannot help but blame himself for the deaths of Davey and Christine despite his only involvement being the contribution of ideas regarding onstage visuals (Banks, p.303). Furthermore, Dan displays a sense of guilt simply for existing, becoming disgusted by his 'contaminating [of the world] with [his] presence', and suggesting that he must pay for doing so by sacrificing himself (Banks, p.310). This extreme depiction of unwarranted guilt appears to be both the conclusion of a life led feeling unnecessarily guilty and an identifiable symptom of the character's depressive state.

Dan's career as a musician also sees instances of 'anhedonia', a symptom of depression that involves 'reduced interest and pleasure in most activities' (Wasserman, p.12). For example, this behaviour occurs during the production of Weir's solo album. Despite this

being a project he had 'been all fired up and enthusiastic about' he finds himself suddenly questioning the point of the entire endeavour and, as a result, becomes disinterested in it (Banks, p.269).

Following his retirement, Dan's description of an 'Information Binge', during which he spends a week immersed in newspapers, radio shows, and TV broadcasts (Banks, p.59), suggests that for the rest of the time Dan's interest in the outside world is largely non-existent. Furthermore, at this stage in his life, disguised as James Hay (Banks, p.50), Dan only tends to interact with a few individuals, mainly McCann, Wee Tommy, and Blythswood Betty, the 'whore who visits [him] every couple of days' (Banks, p.49). This social seclusion is similar to that of Strang when he becomes a recluse. For Weir, this indifference reaches such a level that he feels as though an 'autopilot had taken over, as if temporary government was running things, some skeleton crew of the mind' (Banks, p.316).

A sense of hopelessness also appears to plague Dan's life. Referring to himself early on in the novel as 'just a hopeless case' (Banks, p.10), Weir proceeds to display behaviour associated with this attitude. When comparing himself to the academic aspirations of the Frozen Gold members, he cannot help but be overcome with feelings of inadequacy and hopelessness (Banks, p.75), and this outlook persists throughout the novel. Even after deciding against taking his own life, Dan continues to display this hopelessness by admitting that, rather than being positive or optimistic about the future, he is 'reluctantly resigned to [his] life' (Banks, p.320). This ongoing outlook is another recognisable symptom of depression displayed by the character.²² Also noticeable at times is the symptomatic 'inability to feel joy' (Wasserman, p.11). For example, despite being on the verge of realising his dream, Dan's reaction is one of negativity as he confesses he 'was so certain [they] were going to be incredibly famous and rich [he] got depressed about it' (Banks, p.129).

Symptoms of anxiety can also be found in the behaviour of Weir and, given 'many people with depression also have symptoms of anxiety' (NHS: Clinical Depression - Overview), it seems plausible to regard this as a sign of the character's depression. On two particular occasions, Dan seems to suffer from a possible anxiety disorder. The 'nervousness' that he experiences while visiting his mother's flat (Banks, p.22), despite there being no 'anticipated event or disaster',²³ could be identified as the 'sense of dread [or] feeling... on edge' associated with generalised anxiety disorder.²⁴ This can also be identified during his first practice session with Frozen Gold when Dan begins to believe he may have been invited as an act of humiliation. As a result, he experiences heat and itchiness on his face and forehead, a temperature-based reaction that could be due to anxiety (Rachman, p.98)

Dan also appears to exhibit an unhealthy relationship with alcohol, with his repetition of 'drink drink drink' highlighting this (Banks, p.15). This attitude sees Dan 'slowly drinking himself to death',²⁵ which could be identified as an example of 'male depression [being] masked by alcohol consumption' (Wasserman, p.36). Weir also presents a similar attitude to drug use, admitting that heroin is the only drug he has never tried (Banks, p.102). Although it could be argued that Dan's recreational drug use is simply an example of 'widespread substance abuse in the music industry',²⁶ Dan's use of narcotics has to be considered as a potential reaction to depression (Friedman, p.20).

Like Strang, Dan also displays the most severe symptom of depression, suicidal tendencies, revealing he 'just didn't want to live any more' (Banks, p.300). Although Weir does not ultimately act on this, his suicidal feelings must be regarded as symptomatic of depression, 'the single disease that is most strongly correlated with suicide' (Wasserman, p.138).

3.3 Causes

One of Dan's most prominent symptoms is that of unwarranted guilt. This could provide a link between Dan's depression and one possible cause when he states feeling guilty was 'one of the first things [he was] ever aware of... [and his] most formative experience' (Banks, p.19). This could suggest that both his guilt and depression were borne out of a strict upbringing. This is further emphasised when Dan explains how, as a child, he believed that he was a wrong-doer and 'was dirty and soiled and horrible' (Banks, p.20). This appears consistent with 'a state of so-called learned helplessness' (Wasserman, p.82), which can be caused by poor relationships with those around the child, such as family members and educators, and can lead to depression. The suggestion that Dan's upbringing could have played a part is further supported when Weir tells of 'a sad wee story' in which, during his fifth birthday party, his father returns home from the pub and viciously beats Dan's mother before striking any of the children in reach (Banks, p.158). Not only does this provide evidence of an abusive upbringing, itself a potential cause of depression (Wasserman, p.82), but the character's vivid recollection of this event suggests it has played a traumatic role in his life. If so, such an experience would be, like Strang's traumatic childhood experiences, enough to spark the mental health issues that would eventually lead to depression.

Adulthood also includes a number of significant events which could have aggravated his mental health. These include the discovery of his lover's infidelity with Davey Balfour (Banks, p.192), the accidental death onstage of Balfour (Banks, p.295), and the murder of Christine (Banks, p.275).

3.4 Society

Weir's childhood is spent in a rundown and particularly rough area of Scotland, Ferguslie Park. Described by the character as 'a wasteland of bad architecture and problem families'

(Banks, p.21), this depiction of society is similar to that in *Marabou Stork Nightmares*. This is emphasised by the 'streets covered in broken glass, boarded up windows, and walls adorned with spray paint' which surround the family home (Banks, p.21), and Dan's suggestion a documentary could be made of the area as representative of both urban deprivation and 'the ghettoisation of problem families' (Banks, p.23). Furthermore, a negative perception of his home both inside and out is recognisable, albeit subtly, with such observations as the flat being filled 'with gaudy junk' (Banks, p.145). Although not the 'chaos' of Strang's home (Welsh, p.19), the idea of Dan's mother hoarding items does suggest a similar sense of internal disorder. This portrayal of society not only serves as the motivation for Dan's escape through fame but it also represents the perception of a restrictive force holding back Dan from achieving something worthwhile. This is evident when Dan believes he is 'doomed to Paisley and grey walls and chip suppers' (Banks, p.35). For Weir, individuals who show promise or talent, such as Christine, are automatically categorised as 'very much not a product of Ferguslie Park itself' (Banks, p.41), maintaining this perception that such a society limits personal success. Banks's use of Scottish society to express negativity continues until Dan's decision to commit suicide. Despite narrating the novel almost entirely in English, Dan resorts to Scots when conceding his suicidal fate, stating 'ah, bugger it aw; Ah'm awa tae dae awa wi masel' (Banks, p.307). This use of the vernacular in the largely English narrative directly links his depression with his nationality and Scottish society as a whole, indicating that often 'the negative in the Scots mentality prevails' (Morrison).

In terms of travel, the contrast between Dan's life as a celebrity and his roots in Ferguslie Park is evident. The rough area of Paisley is replaced by major cities all over the world, with the band staying in hotels, apartments, and 'houses connected to recording studios in Paris or Florida or Jamaica' (Banks, p.179). This world of glamour is not only

different from the lives of those left behind in Scotland but it also follows a similar pattern to *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, with foreign lands symbolising an escape from a character's problems. However, it seems evident from Dan's narrative that even his life as a rich and successful musician comes with its own negatives. He may have achieved his childhood dreams but laments that he soon realised 'they were no longer dreams, just new ways of living, with their own problems and difficulties' (Banks, p.169). Similarly to Strang's experience, Dan's attempts to escape the society in which he grew up only reap temporary rewards before other issues arise.

When Banks's depictions of society and travel are thus considered, it becomes possible to draw similar conclusions to that of the portrayals in *Marabou Stork Nightmares*. There appears to be a similar focus on both the negative external and internal factors of the society Dan inhabits, representing both the social and economic problems of Scotland and the negative mental health of the nation, typified by a stereotypical Scottish self-loathing (Morrison). Like Welsh, it is Bank's depiction of a better life which seems to represent an escape from Scotland's problems. Additionally, if Ferguslie Park is symbolic of Dan's mental struggles and negative traits, like Muirhouse is of Roy's, then the life of the celebrity becomes his perceived emotional escape. But again, this is unsuccessful and it is only by returning home and making an active attempt to combat the negative aspects in his life that Dan is able to make progress towards happiness. Unlike Strang, Weir rejects suicide, instead choosing to surrender his wealth (Banks, p.342) before seeking out Jean Webb in Arisaig (Banks, p.354). Although Banks's novel does not state whether this happy ending is permanent, it does suggest a possibility of happiness for the character, something Roy was unable to attain due to his inability to confront his problems.

3.5 Reaction

The extent of the previously discussed symptomatic behaviour and possible causes would suggest that Bank's portrayal of depression is accurate. Furthermore, by creating a flawed and awkward but genuinely likeable character in Weir, Banks manages to generate affection for the sufferer, and Dan's symptoms of depression, in particular that of guilt and self-deprecation, are presented in a way that elicits sympathy from the reader. Despite being a self-proclaimed 'monster' (Banks, p.37), Dan is merely a clumsy and socially-awkward yet harmless individual who is not deserving of feelings of negativity. This is evident particularly in Dan's recollection of being rejected by Christine at a high school dance and subsequently wandering the streets in a cloud of shame and humiliation (Banks, p.41). Not only does this give Dan a vulnerability that can draw sympathy, this account of someone in their teenage years experiencing low self-esteem is universal enough to generate empathy on the part of most readers, given self-consciousness is a trait commonly found in teenagers.²⁷ The likeability of Weir is further enhanced by an almost comical depiction of his clumsiness, with his tripping up of Jean Webb and causing her minor injuries (Banks, p.62) akin to slapstick comedy. This in turn gives Weir's negative actions a humorous aspect. Perhaps the event used by Banks to garner most sympathy for Weir is the description of the aforementioned fifth birthday party. The contrast between the excitable group of young, innocent children wearing 'paper hats', with the brutal assault on Dan's mother by his father is powerful, as is the revelation that Dan 'never did get to blow out [his] candles' (Banks, p.158). Given Dan's young age during this harrowing experience, the reader is inclined to sympathise with the character.

Weir also displays behaviour that would result in him being considered an amiable individual by most. For example, he is a character that is both loyal to his friends, emphasised by his backing up of McCann during a fight with bouncers (Banks, p.214), and generous,

highlighted by the previously mentioned decision to give up his fortune to McCann. Even Dan himself cannot help but recognise he is, in his opinion, 'too nice' (Banks, p.307).

In terms of stigmatisation, there are no evident examples of stigmas associated with depression, either in terms of the reactions of any characters or the depiction of depression itself by Banks. However, the novel as a whole, which sees Weir's mental health issues persist no matter how much success he attains or how comfortable his life becomes, does effectively challenge the particular stigma that suggests, with regards to those with a materialistically comfortable life, it is 'incomprehensible that [they] should be depressed' (Wolpert, p.222). Instead, Banks's depiction of a successful individual makes Weir a fictional example of someone who 'overcame the life-altering effects of their mental illnesses (long enough) to make an indelible impression on society'²⁸, rather than a sufferer whose depression should have been magically cured by achievement. As a musician, Weir's condition is also an example of the view that particular psychiatric illnesses 'generally [tend] to be associated with the arts'.²⁹ However, unlike the other examples of stigmatisation mentioned in this dissertation there does appear to be some scientific evidence behind such a view.³⁰

As a whole, although he displays numerous negative personality traits, mainly self-deprecation and unwarranted guilt, Dan is largely harmless to everyone other than himself. As a result, unlike Strang whose acts in life make him a character difficult to empathise with, Weir appears to evoke genuine sympathy from the reader and is portrayed as a decent human being struggling with his own mental health. This in turn results in a portrayal of depression that is not only accurate, but also deserving of sympathy and understanding from the reader.

4. Joy Stone in *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*

4.1 Diagnosis

Unlike the previous novels discussed, where the depressive state of the protagonist is an additional factor to their lives, Joy Stone's battle with depression provides the main storyline for Janice Galloway's *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*. Although symptoms of her condition appear to be relatively clear from an early stage in the novel, it is perhaps her opinions on supermarkets that first clarify that her mental health is poor, describing both the anxiety and depression that can result from her being in such a place.³¹ However, it is when Joy mentions anti-depressants (Galloway, p.44) that the first suggestion is made of her having being formerly diagnosed with the illness, a suggestion that is strengthened by her regular visits to Dr Stead (Galloway, p.50). This formal diagnosis is confirmed when, in a letter to Marianne, Stone states uncertainty over whether her depression is 'chemical or reactive or both' but admits it has been ascertained that she is 'definitely depressed' (Galloway, p.155).

4.2 Symptoms

Like both Strang and Weir, guilt appears to play a big part in Joy's depression and this manifests itself on numerous occasions. For example, Joy's automatic response to problems is to blame herself for their existence, even describing herself generally as 'the problem' (Galloway, p.12). This is no more evident than when she gives in to Tony's sexual advances in a scene that could potentially be described as rape (Galloway, p.175). As this occurs in the narrative, Galloway's use of phrases bleeding into the margins, 'like a voice incapable of getting itself fully into the narrative',³² results in the statement 'often we ignore the warnings so when the worst happens we can only blame ourselves'³³ fragmented at the side of the narrative. This confirms Joy's tendency to blame herself for all negative aspects of her life. This symptom of unwarranted guilt is also found elsewhere in the novel. Whether it is caused

by her belief she is 'wasting [Dr Stead's] time' seeking medical help (Galloway, p.50), or simply by watching advertisements on television (Galloway, p.37), this inability to free herself from such a feeling is one of the prominent ongoing battles that Joy faces.

As well as guilt, a sense of hopelessness is also continuously presented by Joy, evident by the repeated question directed towards Marianne, 'what will I do while I'm lasting?' (Galloway, p.36). This terminology of 'lasting' suggests a hopeless outlook where life is not about fulfilment or enjoyment but simply about lasting the distance. This outlook also results in a belief 'This is the Way Things Are' (Galloway, p.96), a perception that she cannot combat, telling the hospital psychiatrist 'there's no fucking point' (Galloway, p.106). These examples among many others only serve to highlight the sheer lack of hope in the daily life of Galloway's character. Joy also displays despondency on a constant basis, something that is associated strongly with depression (Wasserman, p.12). In her psychiatric interview, for example, Joy acknowledges she is 'starting to hate things' (Galloway, p.105). This despondency also creeps into her ability to undertake simple tasks, something similarly identifiable in the behaviour of Strang and Weir. For the depressed Joy, even the simple task of walking is described as 'terrible' (Galloway, p.36) and getting out of bed seems impossible, feeling she is 'too heavy to move' (Galloway, p.81).

A lack of desire to interact with fellow human beings is also displayed by Joy. An example of this sees her deliberately dressed with 'scarf like a yashmak' in order to deter other people from talking to her (Galloway, p.94). This attempt to ensure social isolation is not only connected with depression, but also with suicidal tendencies,³⁴ and results in Stone displaying similar behaviour to the reclusiveness of the characters previously examined. Furthermore, although aggression is more often a symptom experienced by depressed men rather than women (Wasserman, p.35), isolated examples of aggressive behaviour by Joy can be pinpointed in the novel. This is evident in the revelation that she 'took a swing' at a

Spanish nurse (Galloway, p.95). Another noticeable symptom is the tendency for depression to result in absence from work. Given the condition is associated with 'excess absenteeism',³⁵ it is no surprise when Joy admits her work never ask for reasons behind her absences because 'they're used to it by now' (Galloway, p.17).

Whereas Strang and Weir appear to show symptoms of potential anxiety, Joy, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, seems to fully acknowledge this as another of her problems. This then becomes easier to identify in the narrative, in particular the feelings of nervousness while waiting (Galloway, p.11) and the anxious expectation that something disastrous will occur, resulting in her 'notion [that she has] to take the stairs in one or something terrible might happen' (Galloway, p.8).

As has been previously acknowledged, drink and drug use can often be symptomatic of a mental health issue, with 'alcoholism sometimes a manifestation of depression'.³⁶ Although Joy never seems to admit an alcohol addiction, the idea that alcoholism may be present underlies the narrative as a whole. This is highlighted when she admits 'most of [her] Saturday pay' from her part-time job is spent on a bottle of gin (Galloway, p.76), suggesting that her occupation in the bookmakers fulfils the main function of providing money for drink. The problematic nature of Joy's drinking is also hinted at when she admits 'if [she] gets drunk enough, [she] won't go to work' the following day (Galloway, p.87), tying into her depression-related absences. In terms of drugs, illegal use does not occur in the novel. However, it could be argued that Joy's intake of substances is just as, if not more, severe than that of Strang and Weir. Although this is the result of medical prescriptions, her intake at times appears to be excessive, described as 'red ones, yellow ones, green capsules, white tablets that break in half along a screw-top seam' (Galloway, p.95). Renton's assertion in *Trainspotting* that his mother is prescribed anti-depressants 'like jelly tots'³⁷ due to her gender seems like it could also apply to pill-popping Joy in *The Trick Is To Keep Breathing*.

As well as depression, Joy's eating disorder is another of her mental health issues. Throughout the novel she expresses her difficulty with food, highlighted when a 'Health Update: Ultimate Diet' article appears in the narrative stating 'not eating has become so rewarding you won't want to stop' and 'you know it'll all be worth it in the end' (Galloway, p.85). Joy's behaviour also emphasises this eating disorder, particularly when she drinks copious amounts in order to make the deliberate act of throwing up easier (Galloway, p.86). This behaviour, as well as causing physical reactions such as hair loss (Galloway, p.100), is symptomatic of anorexia nervosa.³⁸ This is of importance due to a recognised 'association between depressive symptoms and weight concerns'.³⁹

Like alcohol and drug abuse, self-harm is a coping mechanism often employed by those with mental health disorders.⁴⁰ Joy's self-harming takes various forms, from brushing her gums until they bleed (Galloway, p.59) to cutting her wrists and leaving traces of blood on her pillow (Galloway, p.92). With this tendency to hurt herself, it is no surprise that she, like Strang and Weir, also shows signs of suicidal tendencies. Her desire to die manifests itself in fantasy at times, such as when she visualises boulders crashing through her roof leaving her as 'mashed remains' (Galloway, p.84). However, these tendencies are not strictly the subject of fantasising. She references at least one suicide attempt following the death of her lover Michael (Galloway, p.116), and undertakes another attempt in the course of the narrative, mixing gin with tablets after writing 'thank you' on the floor (Galloway, p.201).

4.3 Causes

Throughout the novel, Galloway uses italics to distinguish Joy's flashbacks from the main narrative. During the first of these flashbacks, the character declares a yearning for the unremarkable perception of the previous week, during which she was 'eating and drinking routinely, sleeping when [she] wanted to' (Galloway, p.6). This is important in terms of a

possible cause of Joy's depression due to further flashbacks depicting the drowning of her married lover Michael, suggesting its role as a main trigger for Joy's depressive state. Furthermore, during the service held for Michael's work-colleagues Joy expresses a feeling of 'non-existence' (Galloway, p.79). This is symbolic of her inability to mourn for Michael and, as a result, 'causes Joy's grief – which receives no official acknowledgement, let alone sanction – to escalate into trauma',⁴¹ a development known as 'adjustment disorder' (Wasserman, p.6).

As plausible as it may seem that Michael's death is the trigger for Joy's depression, there are other potential causes. For example, as discussed in previous chapters, a traumatic childhood can lead to mental health issues and Joy reminisces about such instances during the novel, including sister Myra's violent behaviour to both her (Galloway, p.59) and their mother (Galloway, p.71). Much like with Strang, it could also be argued that biological reasons have resulted in Joy's depression. This is suggested by the character herself, referring to 'hereditary minding' (Galloway, p.198) due to the suicide attempts of various family members (Galloway, p.199).

4.4 Society

When comparing Galloway's portrayal of her character's surroundings with that of Welsh and Banks, Boot Hill may not seem as destitute as the depictions of Muirhouse and Ferguslie Park. However, it does seem to share similarities with both. For instance, Joy describes a rumour that the area was built for 'difficult tenants from other places' as 'partly true' (Galloway, p.13), further emphasised by her observation of 'all sorts of lunatics [hanging] around the estate' (Galloway, p.130). Her descriptions of the graffiti covered bus shelters (Galloway, p.13) and buildings with broken windows (Galloway, p.18) could also pass for the hometowns of Strang and Weir, with the increasing number of houses left empty due to

spiralling rents (Galloway, p.18) providing a suggestion of poverty. There also appears to be a lack of community spirit in Boot Hill with Joy explaining nobody in the town knows each other with all tenants keeping themselves to themselves (Galloway, p.26). These negative surroundings suggest, in a similar way to *Marabou Stork Nightmares* and *Espedair Street*, the compounding effect society has on mental well-being. Even the geographical location seems representative of Joy, with her social isolation symbolised by Boot Hill being 'an annexe of nowhere' (Galloway, p.37).

Joy's living conditions are also symbolic of her internal struggles as her house 'seems to be a menacing place' (Lavrijsen, p.92). This is emphasised by the shells 'of something dead' in her porch (Galloway, p.140), dry rot which results in the building 'being eaten from the inside' (Galloway, p.65), and shouting and screaming coming from neighbouring homes at night (Galloway, p.26). Furthermore, this symbolism is expressed by Galloway when Joy, having moved litter underneath a rug in order to hide it, proposes 'superficially everything looks fine but underneath is another story' (Galloway, p.92). This act and subsequent remark highlight her own attempts to appear to be coping even when she is not.

The isolated and graffiti-filled society of Boot Hill, and Joy's life within it, appears to be in stark contrast to the portrayal of emigration. This is communicated through the letters from Joy's friend who has moved to the United States prior to the narrative. We first see an example of Marianne's new existence when Joy receives a postcard which mentions camping and travelling to the Canadian border before stating the 'scenery [is] wonderful' (Galloway, p.15). Although this snapshot is not a vivid description of Marianne's life, it does suggest exhilaration and adventure compared to the despondency of Joy's daily struggle. This contrast is again made later in the novel. While Joy spends her time sedated in hospital, Marianne's letter tells of canoeing, museums, and mountains, with 'just the sound of the water and leaves' (Galloway, p.150). This contrasts Joy's situation with that of freedom and

peace. This ongoing correspondence prompts Joy to describe Marianne as 'sociable and outgoing' and '[inviting] confidence' (Galloway, p.197). This correlation between Marianne's pleasant personality traits with her positive surroundings reinforces the contrasting symbolic nature of Scottish society's relationship with Joy's negative traits and mental health issues. This in turn highlights Galloway's presentation of Scotland and poor mental health as connected, similar to the portrayals by Welsh and Banks, making the suggestion that 'national and individual traumas are intrinsically related' (Lavrijsen, p.93). However, if this correlation between surroundings and mental state is applied steadily throughout the novel, then Joy's plans to 'clean the worst of the visible damage, strip and wash the walls, open the doors to let winter air refresh' (Galloway, p.234) become symbolic of her beginning to work towards combatting her depression and gaining a sense of control.

The misogynistic element to Scottish society represented by Roy Strang also appears within Galloway's novel. This is first identifiable when Joy discusses her part-time job at the bookmakers, describing how she is 'only the girl at the till' (Galloway, p.31) and has her head patted by Tony while he calls her his pet (Galloway, p.32). Both these instances suggest a hierarchical structure in the workplace that is based both on occupation and gender. Her relationship with Tony further reinforces a sexist aspect to the novel, in particular his taking advantage of her (Galloway, p.175). The nature of this relationship is described when Joy is given the book *Courage and Bereavement* by Dr Two, discovering one of the chapters explains how 'some men prey on vulnerable women' (Galloway, p.171). This emphasises the misogynistic undertones of the novel while summarising Joy and Tony's relationship. Galloway also chooses to highlight this sexist side of society outwith the narrative, using a footnote to state how love or emotion produces embarrassment, unless it is the result of drunkenness or watching football, a loophole that 'men do rather better out of' (Galloway, p.82).

4.5 Reaction

With such an extensive array of recognised symptoms, other mental health conditions, and potential causes, it would be hard to argue that the portrayal of Joy Stone's depression is anything other than accurate. This undiluted account also allows the reader a far greater understanding of Joy's mental health struggles than perhaps that of Strang or Weir.

A natural response of sympathy from the reader can be expected due to the many tragic and negative events that befall Joy, resulting in a state of 'psychic homelessness' (Jones, p.212). There is also a level of sympathy garnered by her treatment at the hands of the medical professionals from whom she seeks help. This is identifiable when she discusses how her doctor had given her pills and then simply prescribed even more pills when the first batch did not work as intended (Galloway, p.83). This endless cycle of medication aids a sense of sympathy for a character desperately trying just to feel 'unremarkable' (Galloway, p.6) yet lacking the help or treatment required. This is only increased by the ever-growing levels of sedation employed within the hospital, emphasised by her description of being woken up simply 'to take sleeping pills/ anti-depressants/ tranquillisers/ suppressants' (Galloway, p.139). The exasperation felt by Joy in relation to her treatment is evident in her letter to Marianne in which she explains the variety of different medical opinions from the doctors who have seen her, none of whom are in agreement (Galloway, p.179). Although this is representative of the 'difficulties in making clinical decisions'⁴² that doctors face in regards to mental illness, it is still a soul destroying position for the character to find herself in. The mentions of electroconvulsive therapy in the hospital (Galloway, p.181) can also elicit a sense of sympathy. In a modern world where such treatment may be perceived as cruel or unnecessary despite still being in use today,⁴³ it would be unsurprising if a reader reacted negatively to the practice described by Joy. This reaction is perhaps caused by well-known

examples of its dramatisation in popular culture, such as in the case of Jack Nicholson's portrayal of McMurphy in the movie adaptation of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.⁴⁴

Despite these various avenues for a sympathetic response, Joy is certainly not a character without her flaws and some of her actions are questionable. In particular, her admission of an affair while in a relationship with Paul (Galloway, p.42) and her relationship with 17-year old David, a student at her school (Galloway, p.131), would not sit comfortably with most audiences. However, although these actions may be frowned upon they are not illegal, prompting Joy to declare 'I am not a bad woman... I have committed no act of malice' (Galloway, p.177). Yet, this claim is jeopardised later in the novel when Joy states 'maliciousness is unaccountable' (Galloway, p.195), suggesting that she does not connect such malicious acts with her own accountability. Essentially though, it is these negatives in Joy's character that establish her as merely a woman with flaws, just like any other human being. In this regard, she encapsulates the vulnerability of Roy Strang whilst displaying a number of human failings like Dan Weir.

In terms of the stigmas associated with depression, Joy's behaviour at times appears to be as a result of such. At numerous points in the novel she stresses her desire 'to look as if [she] can cope' (Galloway, p.84) suggesting that the alternative of opening up and expressing her emotions would be a far worse option, and this is emphasised by the 'Love/Emotion = embarrassment' footnote discussed previously (Galloway, p.82). Perhaps most poignant regarding this attitude is when Joy explains 'the trick is to keep breathing, make out its not unnatural at all' (Galloway, p.235), expressing her desire not to be seen as an outcast because of her illness. Additionally, the perception that mental health issues are not real illnesses due to a perceived lack of physical symptoms is suggested by Tony, when he admits to Joy he forgets to ask her how she is because she never looks ill to him (Galloway, p.99). Similarly to *Espedair Street*, the idea that successful figures cannot be depressed is also mentioned. While

looking through a magazine, Joy comes across an interview with two soap stars, in which one bemoans the fact that 'people just can't imagine the pressures and think it's all glamour' (Galloway, p.163), challenging the perception that fame and fortune somehow result in immunity from mental difficulties. Near the end of the novel Frank attempts to talk Joy into actively challenging the stigmas of depression, encouraging her to talk to those who believe she is 'cuckoo... [and] in a strait-jacket most of the time' (Galloway, p.225). However, even Frank seems to immediately slip into the territory of stigmatisation by remarking how he believed Joy 'had more fight' than to end up in hospital (Galloway, p.225). This is an example of a common perception that suffering from a mental health issue is 'a sign of weakness' (NHS: Clinical Depression -Overview), particularly if the sufferer is unable to cope with the condition without medical help.

Overall, Galloway's accurate depiction of a flawed individual's battle with depression deals with many stigmas associated with the condition and the sufferer's subsequent struggle to overcome these. This results in an extensive and informative examination of the illness which successfully elicits both sympathy and understanding from the reader, whilst steering clear of an exaggerated and self-pitying 'woe is me'⁴⁵ account.

5. Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation it is important to remember that, no matter how accurate or inaccurate each portrayal of depression is, these are depicted in novels of fiction and are not real-life case studies. Roy Strang, Dan Weir, and Joy Stone are three very different fictional characters, with three very different lives, presented in three very different novels. However, all three do share the mental health condition of depression and, as a result, all three share a number of similarities.

By exploring the extensive examples of symptoms in these novels, as well as analysing the potential causes for each character's condition, it is fair to say that Irvine Welsh, Iain Banks, and Janice Galloway have each produced accurate depictions of the depressive state. From the more obvious symptom of Joy Stone's self-harm, to the more subtle sign of Roy Strang's weight gain, it seems that it would be hard to argue that any of these portrayals were in some way inaccurate. Furthermore, the intimate and personal aspects to all three of these novels result in more detailed and in-depth accounts of the illness than perhaps many real-life case studies would provide. Subsequently, these novels should be considered as contributory to 'literature [stimulating] a re-thinking of clinical practice' (Calman, p.196). Also prominent is the way in which each portrayal relies on the character's human side. For Strang, his depressive state is perhaps the only point in the entire novel when the reader can feel any genuine empathy towards him. In Weir's case, he remains a socially awkward yet likeable character, even at the peak of his success. And for Joy Stone, her flaws ensure that she is not viewed as merely an innocent victim throughout her mental battles. This human aspect ensures that a level of sympathy is attributed to the characters, not because of their actions or their beliefs, but because of their ongoing fight with a hidden and debilitating illness.

In terms of stigmatisation, none of the novels in question appear to directly challenge the stigmas surrounding depression but their existence is alluded to on numerous occasions. Therefore, although *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, *Espedair Street*, and *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* do not appear designed to tackle specific stigmas directly, they do at times successfully highlight and criticise a number of misconceptions regarding the illness.

The portrayals of society are also paramount in all three novels, both on their own and with relation to poor mental health. Taken as examples of observational commentary on Scotland, each is highly critical, from the poverty and deprivation on the country's streets to the underlying 'liminal states of mind, such as schizophrenia, trauma and other altered psychological states' (Lavrijsen, p.86) that plague the nation's collective consciousness. With regards to mental illness, each writer insinuates that this society is, at least in part, responsible for the poor mental health experienced by its natives, something that sees the suicide rate among men in Scotland '73% higher than that of men in England and Wales' (Morrison).

Fundamentally, it is the identifiable combination of each depiction's accuracy with the vulnerability of the characters that aids awareness and understanding of depression as a disease, as it becomes clearer to the reader just how it can affect any human being in any walk of life and just how crippling those effects can be. With the additional attacks on Scotland by all three novelists, it becomes increasingly evident just how responsible Scottish society is for generating such mental health issues. As a result, perhaps only the most ignorant reader would fail to recognise the very real and very dangerous threat of mental illness, which has resulted in 'more human suffering... than from any other single disease affecting mankind',⁴⁶ and only the most passive reader would not wish to strive to better our society as a whole.

There may still be those who disregard the seriousness of depression, 'believing it to be largely under personal control' (Gotlib & Hammen, p.1). Yet, for the many sufferers

around the world, there remains no simple snapping out of it; no just being a bit stronger; no obvious road towards defeating the condition; and no 'natural limit to tears' (Galloway, p.165).

Word Count: 10,999

Notes

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