Dissecting the feminine

Volume Two

Representations of female consciousness in Marie Darrieussecq’s *A brief stay with the living* and Jacinta Halloran’s *Dissection*: An analysis of narrative voice

An exegesis submitted in (partial) fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (Creative Writing)

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# Dissecting the feminine

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INTRODUCTION

The barrier between mind and matter is only apparent and arises as a result of language.
(V S Ramachandran, neuroscientist)

I want to know what anguish is, what happiness is, the sea, a baby, the interior of things, as if it were the first time that I tested these waters. I want to say to the reader: ‘See, smell, listen: this is a wave, this is a woman who is losing herself, this is a brain that is thinking.’ [. . .] I want to open eyes under the eyes of readers, ears under their ears, a new skin under their skin. [. . .] For this work, one needs new sentences, new forms, new attitudes towards writing.
(Marie Darrieussecq, novelist)

Introduction to Marie Darrieussecq

Marie Darrieussecq has been hailed as one of the new generation of pre-eminent French novelists, alongside Michel Houellebecq and Virginie Despentes. Her first novel Truismes, an allegorical tale of a woman who slowly transforms into a sow, was published to great acclaim in 1996. Truismes was widely critiqued as a feminist work, in that it was seen to be a comment on the persistent objectification of women in post-feminist 1990s France. Darrieussecq’s subsequent novels, while less absurdist than Truismes, have

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3 The English translation was entitled Pig Tales and was published by Faber and Faber, London in 2003.
remained stylistically and thematically inventive. Both her 1999 novel, *Le Mal de mer*, and *Bref séjour chez les vivants* (2001, POL, Paris; translated into English in 2003 and published as *A Brief stay with the living*) have drawn critical comparisons with the writing of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce.

Darrieussecq has said of her own writing, ‘I am looking to invent new forms, to write new sentences, because it is the only way to realize the modern world.’ She is an ‘experimental’ writer: plot and character development are backgrounded in her work, while stylistic inventiveness, poetic language and ideas—often couched in scientific terms and conveyed through the consciousness of her characters—take precedence.

Although a self-described feminist whose novels centre around female subjectivity and identity, Darrieussecq has been reluctant to discuss her writing in gendered terms, instead urging critics to ‘focus on formal and structural issues, on the creative process, on her exacting relationship with language, and on her determined and invigorating effort to shunt the novel into new spaces.’

Having completed a doctoral thesis in French literature at the prestigious École

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5Hereafter referred to as *Breathing Underwater* in the UK and *Undercurrents* in the USA.
6Hereafter referred to as *Brief stay*. All further references will be to the English translation, published by Faber and Faber, London, in 2004.
9Ibid.
10Jordan (2005), p 52.
Normale Supérieure and having lectured on Stendahl and Proust, Darrieussecq has strong academic credentials that have no doubt influenced her approach to writing. What then can be said of her approach to the ‘formal and structural issues’ of writing, and to language itself? Does her use of structure and language accord in any way with the consistent content of her novels—that is, female subjectivity and identity?

While it is tempting to examine Darrieussecq’s use of language and its relationship to female subjectivity, I will refrain from doing so, for three reasons. First, as I am working from the English translation of Brief stay, it is somewhat tenuous to make claims for syntax, word-plays, metonymy and rhythm—in short, to perform a semiotic analysis of the prose—when using a translation that, no matter how sensitively it has been undertaken, is likely to have lost some of the nuances of the original French and gained new nuances in English. Second, a semiotic approach to Darrieussecq’s novel with respect to female subjectivity will inevitably steer me into the realm of semanalysis, (Julia Kristeva’s term), and the écriture feminine of French feminist literary theorists, notably Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray. Such an inquiry would be at risk of becoming more political than practical and, tied closely as

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[12] Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous have, to varying degrees, studied, argued for and participated in the development of a ‘feminine’ writing practice. According to Rita Felski, such a writing practice encourages ‘textual practices which seek to subvert the coherence of language as a signifying system’ and aligns those practices with ‘a notion of the feminine as subversion, a transgressive force linked with the realm of the mother’s body that continually threatens to disrupt the single fixed meanings of an authoritarian and repressive phallocentric discourse.’ (Felski R, 1989, Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change, Harvard UP, Cambridge, p 23.) ‘Writing the feminine’ thus becomes synonymous with linguistic play and experimentation, and textual practices become more important than practical expressions of feminist politics in the text.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
semanalysis and *écriture féminine* are to 1970s French feminism, would no doubt be viewed as outdated. In addition, the concept of a feminine writing practice is not necessarily associated with female writers or fictional female characters, at least according to Kristeva.\(^\text{13}\) As this exegesis is concerned with the portrayal of *consciousness* of female characters in the contemporary novel, reference to Kristeva’s theory of the feminine in language will therefore confuse rather than clarify my argument.\(^\text{14}\) (I will, however, make reference to Kristeva’s 1979 essay, ‘Women’s Time’, in my discussion of autonomous monologue in *Brief stay* in Chapter One.) From now on I will use the term ‘consciousness’ instead of ‘subjectivity,’ as the former is more relevant in the context of a study of writing praxis.\(^\text{15}\) My use of the term ‘consciousness’ corresponds to the *Collins English Dictionary* definition: ‘A part of the human mind that is aware of a person’s self, environment and mental activity and that to a certain extent determines his choices of actions.’\(^\text{16}\)

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13 Kristeva does not at all confine her theory of semanalysis to women’s writing: in fact her oeuvre only occasionally refers to women writers, Virginia Woolf being one of these. (Minow-Pinkney M, 1987, *Virginia Woolf and the problem of the subject*, Harvester Press, Brighton, p 23.) For Kristeva ‘femininity is a psychical position, not a [biological] essence, an archaic phase of experience that remains available as a possibility rather than a substantive entity specific to women.’ (Minow-Pinkney, p 21.) This stance has placed her at odds with other French literary theorists of her day, notably Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray. The literary critic, Rachel Blau Du Plessis, has this to say of Kristeva’s stance on women writers: ‘It is a peculiarity of Kristeva’s analysis that she is so ungenerous, so unsuggestive on the subject of women writers. For if all who write are filial, they are for her, more specifically, the sons. In *Desire in Language* all examples of poetic stances and poetic careers engage only with male writers, even though a most profound, elegant and boldest woman is herself writing.’ Du Plessis R, 1990, *The Pink Guitar: writing as feminist practice*, Routledge, New York, p 87.

14 At this point it is necessary to defend my choice of project title, *Dissecting the feminine*. While *Dissecting the female* would have been more accurate, it sounded far too gynaecological for my taste.


My third reason for avoiding a semiotic analysis of *Brief stay* is that such an analysis would not serve to answer the question in which I am most interested; namely, what are some of the techniques available to novelists that can enhance the representation of consciousness in fiction? Or more specifically—as this exegesis is concerned with the representation of female characters, both in *Brief stay* and in my novel, *Dissection*—are there techniques that can enhance the representation of the consciousness of female characters in particular?

**Introduction to Dissection**

My novel, *Dissection*, is, in essence, a portrayal of the inner world of Anna McBride, a female GP who has been sued for medical negligence. The novel spans the three-month period prior to Anna’s mediation meeting with the young male patient, now the plaintiff, and his mother. In the writing of *Dissection* I have attempted to render the consciousness of a woman who, in the wake of what she perceives to be a grave error of judgement, unflinchingly questions her worth and her relationships with others. The Australian novelist and essayist, Amanda Lohrey, has written the following about *Dissection*:

> In a famously disdainful piece on the limitations of historical novels, the critic James Wood argued that the role of the novel is to map changes in consciousness, in who we are and how we think. This is an injunction of great moral seriousness, and Jacinta Halloran is up to the task [. . .] *Dissection* is a gripping
Rationale and scope

My chosen term, ‘female consciousness,’ begs explanation and definition: a difficult and somewhat circular task. While my focus in this exegesis is the representation of consciousness of (biologically) female characters, I am not in any way attempting to suggest that ‘women think differently from men’: such an argument is well outside the scope of an exegesis that takes creative writing praxis as its focus. As a novelist, rather than a literary or cultural theorist, or, for that matter, a neuroscientist or psychologist, I use the term ‘female consciousness’ to describe the narrative construction of women’s inner experience. Rather than attempting any examination of ‘how women think’ in the world outside the novel, this exegesis is primarily concerned with some of the literary techniques used in the narrative representation of the internal worlds of fictional female characters.

I have chosen the term ‘female’ over the term ‘feminine,’ although I acknowledge that both terms engender complexities. Rather than valorising the term ‘female’, it is perhaps more appropriate to defend my decision to avoid the term ‘feminine.’ ‘Feminine’ is a descriptor of gender rather than sex; thus, in the context of this exegesis, the term ‘feminine consciousness’ might have applied to the inner experiences of male as well as female characters. As Judith Butler writes:

When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one.\(^\text{18}\)

So the term ‘feminine consciousness’ is unhelpful, in that it cannot be used with any specificity to discuss that in which my interest lies; that is, the narrative representation of women’s experience, be it socially constructed or biologically determined.

Given that the terms ‘female’ and ‘feminine’ are both problematic, can I justify the use of either? Should I have defaulted to the general term of ‘consciousness’? Does an acknowledgement of the difficulties inherent in the words ‘female’ and ‘feminine’ (and, for that matter, ‘woman’) necessitate an avoidance of these terms? This question echoes one of the major concerns of feminist literary scholarship of the past forty years; that is, the formation of the female subject through language. In the wake of Lacan’s infamous aphorism, ‘la femme n’existe pas’ [woman does not exist], feminist literary theorists have both examined the effects of a patriarchal language system on female identity and argued to varying degrees for a writing practice that better fits with women’s identity and experiences. While there is no circumscribed set of practices that can be said to constitute ‘women’s writing,’ the issues surrounding identity and autonomy—both for women writers and the female characters who inhabit their narratives—help to shape this discussion. One aspect of such a discussion, and the

focus of this exegesis, is the use of narrative strategies in the representation of
female characters. By using the term ‘female’, I acknowledge all the difficulties
inherent in its use. Still, I make a claim for it on the grounds that to avoid it (and
thereby to avoid the focus of this study) is to say that the subject does not warrant
exploration. As a female novelist who wants to write about women, I do not
agree.

The British critic, Shirley Jordan, has examined Darrieussecq’s
portrayal of female characters in the context of Darrieussecq’s position as a
contemporary French female writer.\(^{19}\) Jordan has also examined some of the
technical and thematic aspects of the portrayal of consciousness in Brief stay.\(^{20}\)
But Jordan has not tied these two areas of interest together: that is, she has not
examined the literary techniques that might be relevant to the portrayal of
consciousness in Darrieussecq’s many specifically female characters. My
intention is that this study will address this particular knowledge gap.

There is also an historical perspective on the representation of
consciousness in fiction that has some relevance to this exegetical topic: that is,
the connection between a growing artistic interest in the concept of
consciousness and the Freudian ‘unconscious’ during the early twentieth
century, and the development of Modernism as a literary form. This topic is
briefly discussed in Appendix I.

It is now important to define what literary technique/s I will be
examining in relation to the portrayal of female consciousness in my two

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\(^{20}\) See Jordan (2005).
chosen novels. In the interest of creative writing praxis I do not intend to examine the thematic or story content of these two works. Instead I want to focus on the writing technique of ‘narrative voice’.

**Narrative voice and female consciousness: an overview of theory**

The literary technique I intend to examine with respect to female consciousness is that of ‘narrative voice’. In Appendix II my use of the term ‘narrative voice’ is explained and justified in the context of the work of narratologist, Susan Sniader Lanser. I argue that this term allows a broader, more inclusive approach to narrative technique than either ‘point of view’ or Gérard Genette’s term, ‘focalisation’.

In Chapter One I examine the effect of the narrative voice used in *Brief stay* on the portrayal of consciousness of its four female protagonists. I will examine Darrieussecq’s use of multiple narrative voices in the context of Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of the dialogic novel and Lanser’s concept of communal narrative, and I will argue that a multiplicity of narrative voices enhances the portrayal of female consciousness.

With reference to the work of narratologist, Dorrit Cohn, I will also examine the use of ‘autonomous monologue’\(^{21}\) in *Brief stay*. With reference to Kristeva’s concept of ‘Women’s Time’, I will argue that Darrieussecq’s use of autonomous monologue in the final pages of *Brief stay* serves to enhance the portrayal of female consciousness through its generation of a psychic space and manipulation of linear time.

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\(^{21}\) This term will be explained in Chapter One.
In Chapter Two I will discuss the narrative voice I have used in *Dissection* and its effect on the representation of my female protagonist. Again, with reference to Cohn’s work, I will argue that my use of what Cohn terms ‘narrated monologue’\(^\text{22}\) enhances the representation of my protagonist’s state of mind. I will also argue that narrated monologue is a technique that is especially ‘double-voiced’ according to Bakhtin’s theory of novelistic discourse, and that this double-voicedness is particularly useful in *Dissection*.

**Relationship between novel and exegesis**

The novel has been written with the aim of capturing the consciousness of a woman in crisis. Rather than focusing on plot development, mimetic dialogue and character description—the hallmarks of realist fiction—I have instead chosen to explore my protagonist’s inner world. To this end I have employed a somewhat fragmentary and associative narrative that focuses on and delves into particular moments in the protagonist’s life. Her thoughts are explored in detail; a moment of reflection will take up several pages; dialogue and plot are intentionally sparse. Through themes such as the rearing of children and the concept of motherhood; the demands of being a doctor; the marital relationship and the ageing body, I have tried to articulate the central concern of my protagonist: that is, self-identity as a woman in the face of crisis, and the ramifications of guilt. I have found Darrieussecq’s novels, in particular *Brief stay*, to effect an immensely skilful portrayal of such a female subjectivity.

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\(^{22}\) This term will be explained in Chapter One.
While acknowledging the obvious differences in narrative voice and style between the two works, I believe that both novels have been written with a similar aim: that is, to grant the reader privileged access to the consciousness of the protagonist/s as they negotiate identity on a daily basis. It is Darrieussecq’s intense and particular focus on the portrayal of female consciousness that makes Brief stay a valuable work for comparative study alongside Dissection.

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23 Dissection has fixed internal focalization, a third-person figural narrator and narrated monologue throughout, while Brief stay uses alternating narrated monologue and autonomous monologue and variable internal focalisation. This will be discussed further in Chapters One and Two. The prose style of Brief stay is also more experimental than that of Dissection.
What effect does the narrative voice used in *Brief stay* have on the representation of consciousness of its female characters? At first glance it is tempting to say that the answer to this question is surely self-evident. If, in literature, a female character ‘speaks’ (through a representation of her speech) or ‘thinks’ (through a representation of her thoughts) then this speaking or thinking is representative of her consciousness. But already the qualifications begin. A character’s speech may not accurately represent her consciousness, especially if she is attempting to obfuscate or to not disclose (in speech) what she knows to be true. Her narrated thoughts will accurately represent her consciousness if it is she who narrates them, but what of a third-person narrator with access to her consciousness? Does such a narrator have a lesser or greater authority when it comes to a female character’s consciousness?

Such questions and qualifications touch on the points of conflict between feminist literary theories of ‘narrative voice’ and structuralist theories of ‘narrative.’ In order to elaborate these conflicts and their relation to the literary portrayal of female consciousness, it is first necessary to define the terms ‘narrative voice’, ‘point of view’ and ‘focalization’, and defend my choice of the term, ‘narrative voice’. I have done this in Appendix II. A synopsis of *Brief stay* is given in Appendix III.

I now intend to examine the effects of the narrative voice/s of
Darrieussecq’s *Brief stay* on the representation of female consciousness.

**Narrative voice in *Brief stay*: An overview**

Conveyed in the present tense through the consciousness of a mother and her three daughters, the narrative of *Brief stay* is internally focalized through each of these four female characters in turn: this is the technique of *variable internal focalization*, according to Genette.\(^\text{24}\) None of these four characters alone is invested with the power to see the whole ‘story’. Instead, it is through their communal vision that the narrative is fully related. The post-structural narratologist, Susan Sniader Lanser, calls this technique ‘communal narration’, and this will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Much of the narrating in *Brief stay* is in the first person, as the characters think, dream and recount through the technique of what Dorrit Cohn terms ‘autonomous monologue’\(^\text{25}\). The following passage, focalised through the mother character, demonstrates this technique:

> And sometimes when I dance it’s miraculous too, when we dance, sometimes, the steps arrive without me and with me, the clearness of this body, this rhythm, on the open floor, the ease of the walk . . . Like those distant days when I forgot Momo’s face, when I no longer saw it, the missing half of his face was

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\(^{25}\) Jordan (2005) uses the terms ‘interior monologue’ and ‘stream of consciousness’ in her description of first-person narration in *Brief stay*. The narratologist, Dorrit Cohn, argues that the term interior monologue does not distinguish between first and third-person narration of a character’s thoughts, hence Cohn’s distinction between autonomous and narrated monologue. Autonomous monologue is consciousness reported in the first-person with no orthographic cues. For a more detailed explanation see Cohn D, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978), p 15.
no longer there . . . Ten to eight, I must concentrate, it’s crazy, the lesson’s almost over . . . (BS, p 120, author’s ellipses)

The novel also contains many sections of narrated monologue\(^{26}\) which, by Cohn’s definition, demonstrates the presence of a third-person narrator while staying true to the character’s speech idiom. The following passage, focalised through the character of the youngest daughter, Nore, highlights this technique well:

She looks at him. They can’t hear each other. How annoying. They didn’t come here to listen to music, that guy on stage chucking his voice at them as though he’s about to collapse at the end of each song, as though only his ribcage was keeping him upright. It’s tedious, and everyone’s smoking, she needs some air, she’s probably gone red – she puts down her glass, puts on her jacket with grandiose gestures, and leaves – he catches up with her. The air is mild. The moon’s red through the cat’s hat, he kisses her, made it, she closes her eyes . . . (BS, p164)

In *Brief stay* Darrieussecq uses narrated and autonomous monologue alternately throughout the novel, shifting seamlessly between each mode.\(^{27}\) Such a narrative style highlights the difficulties inherent in the concept of ‘point of

\(^{26}\) Narrated monologue is Cohn’s term for what is also known as ‘free indirect discourse’ or ‘free indirect style’. It is a mode of third-person narration which, according to Cohn, ‘maintains the third-person reference and the tense of narration, but like the quoted monologue it reproduces verbatim the character’s own mental language.’ (Cohn, p 14).

\(^{27}\) One of the striking aspects of *Brief stay* is the almost exclusive use of either narrated or autonomous monologue. Apart from the very occasional passage of more objective third-person narration, the novel is written in monologue.
view’. Is such a narrative written in first or third-person point of view? The style of *Brief stay* also highlights the nuances involved when responding to Genette’s questions about focalization and narration: the questions, *Who sees?* and *Who speaks?* Sometimes the characters both see and speak, while at other times the third-person narrator speaks while the characters see.

*Brief stay’s* rapidly shifting narrative voice again recalls Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway*, of which Minow-Pinkney observes:

> The narrative voice is fractured, wavering, multiple [. . .] What Woolf’s writing effects is a denial of the unified subject which supports all discourse and is necessarily “masculine” [. . .] The narrative consciousness in her writing, if indeed there is one, has stopped judging, interpreting, explaining; it has no single identity or position.\(^{28}\)

While this shifting narrative voice has, of itself, feminist implications,\(^ {29}\) I do not intend to discuss it further. Rather I intend to now focus on the effect of two aspects of the narrative voice of *Brief stay*: namely, autonomous monologue, and what Lanser terms ‘communal narration’. What implications do these two narrative techniques have for the portrayal of the consciousness of the female characters of *Brief stay*? To answer this, I will now examine the use of each of these narrative techniques in turn.

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\(^{28}\) Minow-Pinkney M. pp 57-58.

The autonomous monologue and its relationship to consciousness

In her 2005 critique of Brief stay, Jordan writes of Darrieussecq’s ‘stream of consciousness’ techniques. At this point it is important to note that I regard ‘stream of consciousness’ as more of a historical literary term than a description of any particular narrative technique for presenting consciousness: Cohn does not use the term at all.\(^\text{30}\)

Jordan (2005) writes of Brief stay:

Snatches of memories, fantasies, and half-formulated thoughts cut more rapidly across each other in a chaotic bursting forth of mental activity which challenges concepts of control and volition and which is by turns exhilarating, mysterious, and exhausting.\(^\text{31}\)

In its incorporation of horoscopes, fragments of different languages, snatches of song, rhymes and advertising slogans, Jordan describes the text of the novel as ‘governed by an aesthetic of disruption which is redolent of Joyce.’\(^\text{32}\)

As previously indicated, Cohn’s term, ‘autonomous monologue’,

\(^{30}\) Originally used by William James in his 1890 book, The Principles of Psychology, the term ‘stream of consciousness’ was first used in a literary sense by May Sinclair in her 1918 review of the first three book-chapters of Dorothy Richardson’s novel, Pilgrimage. Sinclair wrote: ‘In identifying herself with this life, which is Miriam’s [the main character’s] stream of consciousness, Miss Richardson produces her effect of being the first, of getting closer to reality than any of our novelists who are trying so desperately to get close.’ Sinclair, M, 1918, ‘The novels of Dorothy Richardson’, in Kime Scott, B (ed), 1990, The Gender of Modernism: a critical anthology, Indiana UP, Bloomington, pp 442-48. While Richardson did not use the term ‘stream of consciousness’ herself, she wrote in the 1938 preface to the collected Pilgrimage that she had wanted to ‘produce a feminine equivalent of the current masculine realism’, a narrative mode that would more accurately represent female consciousness and female experience in a male-dominated society. In the same preface Richardson also noted that her ‘lonely track’ had, since 1918, become a ‘populous highway’, pointing to the styles of Joyce and Woolf. Most so-called ‘stream of consciousness’ novels employ a variety of narrative modes for presenting consciousness: ‘autonomous monologue’, ‘narrated monologue’ and ‘consonant self-narration’ are a few of the terms Cohn uses. ‘Stream of consciousness’ is a term most often associated with literary modernism.

\(^{31}\) Jordan (2005), p 57.

\(^{32}\) Jordan (2005), p 58.
denotes an ‘apparently self-generated’ first-person form of representing a fictional consciousness, and best regarded ‘as a variant—or better a limit case—of first person narration.’

The narratologist, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, sees autonomous monologue as the most mimetic narrative technique with respect to speech representation. While narrated monologue and narrated speech (with orthographic cues) are diegetic to varying degrees, autonomous monologue appears to flow, unmediated by a narratorial presence, from the consciousness of the character direct to that of the reader. It would appear, then, that autonomous monologue is a very effective technique for portraying a character’s consciousness. But what, particularly, of a female character? One might argue that any attempt to portray a character’s consciousness—that is, to portray a flow of thoughts and impressions that does not adhere to the syntactical and grammatical rules of language, that is pre-linguistic—is, in itself, an attempt to produce the ‘thetic rupture’ of Kristeva’s semanalysis.

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33 Cohn, p 15.
34 Rimmon-Kenan names this technique ‘free direct discourse,’ not autonomous monologue. Free direct discourse, according to Rimmon-Kenan, is ‘direct discourse shorn of its conventional orthographic cues. This is the typical form of first-person interior monologue.’ Rimmon-Kenan S, 2002, Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics, Routledge, London, p 211.
35 The terms mimesis and diegesis can be traced back to the poetics of classical Greece. Originally described by Plato, mimesis means ‘the imitated speech of a character’ while diegesis means ‘authorial discourse.’ Henry James and his followers transposed these terms into ‘showing’ (through characters’ actions and dialogue) versus ‘telling’ (through narrative discourse) and many critics of the early 20th century novel privileged mimesis (showing) over diegesis (telling). However Genette points out that the ‘very idea of showing . . . is completely illusory: in contrast to dramatic representation, no narrative can “show” or “imitate” the story it tells. All it can do is tell it in a manner which is detailed, precise, “alive,” and in that way give more or less the illusion of mimesis, for this single and sufficient reason: That narration, oral or written, is a fact of language, and language signifies without imitating.’ Genette, pp 163-164.
36 Rimmon-Kenan, p111. Cohn also makes mention of ‘the paradox that narrative fiction attains its greatest “air of reality” in the representation of a lone figure thinking thoughts she will never communicate to anyone.’ Cohn, p 7.
However, as previously stated, I do not intend to further explore Kristeva’s theory of semanalysis, as it is not the possibility of the feminine in language in which my interest lies. Instead I now want to dissect the consciousness of two biologically female characters—Jeanne from Brief stay and her famous forebear, Molly Bloom—through closer examination of the technique of autonomous monologue.

The autonomous monologue of Molly Bloom: a structuralist approach

With respect to the autonomous monologue, Cohn believes the ‘Penelope’ section of Joyce’s Ulysses to be ‘the most famous and the most perfectly executed specimen of its species.’\(^{38}\) While I do not intend to analyse ‘Penelope’ in great detail, I wish to highlight and comment upon some aspects of Cohn’s analysis, as I believe they have application to the portrayal of consciousness in Brief stay.

Cohn describes the Penelope section as a ‘self-generated, self-supported and self-enclosed fictional text . . . the only moment of the novel where a figural voice totally obliterates the authorial narrative voice throughout an entire chapter.’\(^{39}\) Cohn notes Joyce’s own comments on his work: ‘“Penelope” has no beginning, middle or end’ and ‘It begins and ends with the female Yes. It turns like the huge earthball slowly surely and evenly round and round spinning.’\(^{40}\) Cohn states that while Joyce marked all the other sections of Ulysses with numbered hours of the clock, the original time for Penelope was

\[38\] Cohn, p 216.
\[39\] Ibid, p 218.
\[40\] Cohn, p 218.
marked as infinity in one schema and ‘Hour none’ in the other.\textsuperscript{41}

This concept of the self-contained, cyclical and timeless nature of ‘Penelope’ has implications for the portrayal of a female consciousness. In her 1979 essay, ‘Women’s Time’,\textsuperscript{42} Julia Kristeva contends that while linear time—the time of history—is that of the symbolic patriarchal order, women are more associated with the concept of ‘the space generating and forming the human species.’\textsuperscript{43} Kristeva also links female subjectivity—at least from the perspective of reproduction and motherhood—with cyclical time (repetition) and monumental time (eternity). Kristeva sees monumental time as more of an imaginary space:

> A monumental temporality, without cleavage or escape, which has so little to do with linear time (which passes) that the very word “temporality” hardly fits: all encompassing and infinite like imaginary space . . . \textsuperscript{44}

While ‘Women’s Time’ is a more of a sociopolitical than a linguistic essay, the concepts of women’s time that Kristeva postulates—both cyclical and monumental—can be applied to ‘Penelope,’ and, as I will later demonstrate, to Jeanne’s autonomous monologue at the conclusion of \textit{Brief stay}.

Cohn claims that ‘one of the most striking structural peculiarities’ of an autonomous monologue ‘is the stricture it imposes on the manipulation of the

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{42} First published in 1979 as ‘Le temps des femmes’ and published in English in 1981.
\textsuperscript{43} Kristeva J, ‘Women’s Time’, 1981, in Moi, p 190.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid, p 191.
While most narration can be speeded up by summary, slowed down by digression or reversed by retrospection, ‘A continuous interior monologue is based on an absolute correspondence between time and text, narrated time and time of narration.’ Does such a time frame, unusual in literary terms, have any bearing on the portrayal of consciousness? Because the autonomous monologue is, by definition, ‘a discourse addressed to no-one, a gratuitous verbal agitation without communicative aim’, it lacks the sequential narrative imperatives of other discourses. I would argue that, freed from the requirements of narrative, the autonomous monologue can be seen to represent a psychic space, that of the monologist. Thus the time of the autonomous monologue is more akin to Kristeva’s concept of space than of a linear, sequential time.

While Cohn argues that ‘Penelope’ has a linear narrative sequence imposed by the inception of Molly’s menses, thus dividing the monologue into a ‘before’ and an ‘after’ menstruation begins, she also acknowledges the mythological and eternal overtones of this event, as well as other critics’ reading of the ‘eternal return’ of ‘Penelope’. Cohn also notes that the inception of her menses ties Molly to biological time, ‘the time of a biological organism on its way from birth to death.’ I would argue that rather than complying with linear time, Molly’s consciousness of her menses and its

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45 Cohn, p 218.
46 Cohn notes that such a time frame coincides with what Genette terms récit isochrone, a type of narrative he believes to be purely hypothetical. (Cohn, p 219.)
47 Cohn, p 225.
48 Ibid, p 218.
implications fits entirely with Kristeva’s concept of cyclical women’s time; the time of repetition and reproduction. Joyce’s image of ‘Penelope’ as the earth slowly spinning suggests that he saw ‘Penelope’ as governed by monumental time; an eternal time/space encircled by, as Joyce puts it, ‘the female Yes.’ Linear time, according to Kristeva, is also borne out in language: a sequence of words. While a complete abandonment of linear sequence and syntax would render a text unintelligible in a communicative sense, the absence of punctuation that marks the ‘Penelope’ section serves to disrupt linearity to a great extent, and bestows a rhythm and poetry that hints at the feminine semiotic.

Cohn asserts that Molly’s monologue is ‘language-for-oneself . . . the form of language in which speaker and listener coincide.’ She points to three aspects of the language of ‘Penelope’ that make it so: 1) the predominance of exclamatory syntax; 2) the avoidance of narrative and reportive tenses; and 3) the non-referential implicitness of the pronoun system. I will now examine each of these in turn.

Cohn states that the many exclamatory and interrogatory remarks found in ‘Penelope’ ‘stamp Molly’s discourse with subjectivity.’ She explains: ‘As the form of discourse that requires no reply, to which there is no reply, exclamation is the self-sufficient, self-involved language gesture par

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50 On discovering her menstrual blood, Molly thinks: ‘anyhow he didn’t make me pregnant as big as he is’ (James Joyce, 1961, Ulysses, Random House, New York) in Cohn, p 223.
51 In Finnegans Wake, Joyce comes closer than any other novelist to rendering meaning (in the patriarchal sense) fluid. (Lechte J, 1994, Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers, Routledge, London, p 215; Lodge D, p 63.)
52 Cohn, p 226.
53 Ibid.
While interrogation is usually considered dialogic, Molly’s questions are ‘essentially exclamatory’ and ‘voiced’ without expectation of an answer. While Cohn does not comment on whether this subjectivity is particularly female, the subject matter about which Molly ‘exclaims’ and ‘questions’ includes her menses, her body and her sexual experiences with men: subjects that stamp her subjectivity as gendered female.

Cohn observes that Molly Bloom’s activity, which basically consists of her excursion to the ‘chamber’, is never reported by Molly: that is, there is not one instance of a first-person pronoun coupled with an action verb in present-tense. Rather, her physical activity is implicitly reflected in her thoughts. The first-person, present-tense combination in Molly’s monologue occurs exclusively with verbs of internal rather than external activity such as supposing, wishing, hoping and remembering. This absence of narratorial language anchors all activity within her consciousness.

The final aspect of language in ‘Penelope’ to which Cohn refers is the non-referential use of pronouns. ‘He’ is used to refer to each of Molly’s lovers: sometimes it is not clear as to which ‘he’ she refers. ‘We’ is used to refer to women in general. Molly is herself, of course, clear about which ‘he’ she is thinking of at any given time and, given the non-communicative nature of her monologue, this is all that matters. The non-referential use of ‘he’ can therefore be seen to strengthen the self-enclosed quality of ‘Penelope.’

In summary then, in Cohn’s analysis of ‘Penelope’ as the paradigm of

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54 Cohn, p 225.
55 Ibid.
an autonomous monologue, we see how Joyce uses time, syntax and grammar to enhance the portrayal of female consciousness.

**The autonomous monologue of *Brief stay*: A comparative exercise**

The closing eight pages of *Brief stay*, in which Jeanne drowns in the Tigre River, are described by Jordan (2005) as ‘the novel’s concluding tour-de-force and perhaps a modest tribute to Joyce’s Molly Bloom.’ Like ‘Penelope’, Jeanne’s death scene is also written as an autonomous monologue. As her Volvo sinks slowly into the silt of the Tigre, Jeanne’s thoughts range from the banal: ‘Did you know that 37 per cent of women are dissatisfied by their weight?’ (BS, p 182) to the exigencies of her situation: ‘Try the passenger door—the boot, of course, the boot will be open...’ (p 183) and occasionally to the philosophical: ‘Does your life pass in front of your eyes?’ (p 184-5).

More heavily punctuated than ‘Penelope’, Jeanne’s monologue is scattered with ellipses, commas, dashes, italics, capitals and foreign languages: punctuation marks and stylistic choices that serve to fragment and dialogise the text, as the following passage illustrates:

> Breakfast like a king, lunch like a prince and dine like a pauper, drink a litre and a half of water a day and eat lightly in the evening because it’s then that the body makes its reserves, thank God I’m not digesting – and the four hours a week in the gym, the swimming pool, colonic irrigation, and the best years of my life thrown away with all those sodding blacks, TO END UP

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57 Jordan (2005), p 61.
LIKE THIS – stop, calm down – someone’s holding the windows shut – don’t think about it – and the hell I went through to give up smoking . . .

(BS, p 184, author’s italics and capitals)

This passage demonstrates the fluidity of Jeanne’s thoughts as they move rapidly between past and present. The words in italics point to the ‘rules’ of daily living; rules that now seem inconsequential in the face of impending death. The use of capitals underlines the emotional content of the monologue: calm, alternating with fleeting moments of panic and anger, until the hallucinatory, poetic final paragraphs.

Jordan (2005) comments, ‘In this last section of her novel Darrieussecq seizes with authority an imaginary space which every reader has at one time or another inhabited by considering the question, “What will it feel like to die?”’

Like ‘Penelope’, Jeanne’s monologue can be seen as occupying psychic space—the space of what it feels like to die—rather than a narrative of dying, narrated in linear time. Darrieussecq touches on this idea within the monologue, as Jeanne asks, ‘How long does it take to die? Two minutes, ten minutes? When we used to play at sticking our heads under water . . . how long is it now?’ (BS, p 184) Although curious about time, Jeanne discovers she has no concept of how long she has been in the water. She notices the digital clock—a marker of linear time—on the dashboard ‘flashing away sarcastically’ (BS, p 185) and observes, ‘time has lost its rhythm’ (BS, p 185). Eventually, however, perhaps symbolizing the futility of recording time when dying, the

58 Jordan (2005), p 60, my italics.
clock fails as the water rises. Trapped in her car and facing death, Jeanne loses all sense of chronology: in her final moments past intermingles with present as, in her dwindling consciousness, she ‘sees’ her dead brother and the rest of her family come to meet her. Is the vision of her dead brother simply the effect of lack of oxygen to Jeanne’s brain, or is Darrieussecq hinting at some sort of after-death experience? Time in Jeanne’s monologue—time as psychic space, chronological disruption and perhaps even as eternity—seems to closely match Kristeva’s concept of monumental time.

Like that of Molly Bloom, Jeanne’s monologue contains a fleeting allusion to pregnancy: ‘. . . and what if I’m pregnant—Princess Diana was, lady dies in her limousine in the Alma tunnel . . .’ (BS, p 184). The possibility of pregnancy has been preoccupying Jeanne as, previously in the novel, she wonders several times if she has recently conceived with her husband, Diego. Her thoughts of pregnancy during drowning recall Kristeva’s cyclical time: indeed, Jeanne’s desire to conceive, as yet unattained, and her recurrent thoughts of pregnancy reinforce Kristeva’s temporal concept throughout the novel.

Again, like Molly Bloom, contained in her bedroom, Jeanne’s entire monologue takes place in her sinking car. Cohn notes that:

Joyce not only places the monologizing mind in a body at rest; he also places that body in calm surroundings. The sensations that impinge on Molly’s consciousness are few and far between

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59 ‘Thirty-three and still childless.’ BS, p 61; ‘This time, maybe she’s pregnant.’ p 97; ‘She’ll buy a test tomorrow, no you have to wait till you’re late.’ p 142
. . . only minimally deflected by perceptions of the external world, her monologue is ‘interior’ not only in the technical sense of remaining unvoiced, but also in the more literal sense: it is directed to and by the world within.\(^6^0\)

Jeanne, too, is stationary and—apart from the cold rising water, the sky, and the flies that swarm on the river—cocooned from external stimuli. While the confines of a sinking car might not necessarily be described as akin to Molly’s ‘calm surroundings’, Jeanne does find herself, for the most part, surprisingly calm.\(^6^1\) She notices the sky, turned green because of the tinted glass of the car windows: her reverie is quietly poetic:

> Where the trees merge, the sky’s a clear green, the Tigre is shaded, its arms quietly hold you, hug you, last tango in Paris, last trip to *don’t cry for me, Argentina* . . .

(BS, p 185, author’s italics)

Jeanne’s silently sinking prison becomes the confines of her world: introspection is enhanced in such a place, at such a time. Self-centred and self-generative, Jeanne’s consciousness can, in this setting, be captured in its most mimetic form.

In accordance with Cohn’s analysis of ‘Penelope’, I will now examine the language of Jeanne’s monologue with respect to exclamatory syntax; narrative and reportive tenses; and use of pronouns.

\(^{60}\) Cohn, p 222.

\(^{61}\) ‘. . . how calm I am, if anyone told me I’d be this calm . . .’ BS, p 182.
Jeanne’s monologue is replete with exclamations about her predicament: ‘How silly . . .’ (BS, p 182), ‘I can’t believe this, what a stupid way to die. . .’ (p 183), ‘I really don’t want to . . .’ (p 183), ‘. . . don’t say such things . . .’ (p 184), ‘How quiet and green it all is. . .’ (p 186), ‘It just isn’t possible . . .’ (p 187) are some examples of her mental state as she fluctuates between disbelief, panic and calm. The depiction of such rapid transitions of emotion accentuate the mimetic effect Jeanne’s autonomous monologue, as it seems highly improbable that in such a desperate situation someone—that is, a person with ‘normal’ psychology—would not be in a state of emotional flux.

While Jeanne asks herself many questions, they are generally rhetorical. Her questions relate to her subjective experience: for example, ‘Why can’t I concentrate, why do I suddenly lose touch with what I’m doing?’ (p 182), ‘How could I have missed the bend?’ (p 182), ‘Who would have thought that the Tigre was so cold?’ (p187); or to more existential concerns: ‘How stupid we are, needing air, why should we?’ (p 188), ‘How long does it take to die?’ (p 184), ‘How long does the brain survive?’ (p 188). Rather than being questions asked of another—dialogic questions that serve to propel the narrative forward—the questions themselves, devoid of answers, function as part of Jeanne’s subjective experience of death.

Darrieussecq, like Joyce, has, throughout Jeanne’s monologue, avoided the use of first-person pronoun combined with present-tense verb of action. Jeanne’s physical activities—unbuckling her seat belt, trying to break a window, moving around the car interior to escape the rising water—are made
apparent without direct reporting of such activities: nowhere does Darrieussecq write, ‘I unbuckle my seat belt’ or ‘I bang against the window’, for to do so would introduce a jarring note of reportage into the monologue\(^{62}\) and break the illusion of consciousness. Instead Jeanne’s actions are conveyed in the imperative: ‘First, undo your belt, that’s mechanical at least . . .’ (p 183), ‘. . . Try the passenger door’ (p 183); or the subjunctive: ‘If I break the windscreen and water only comes up to the wipers . . .’ (p 183). This imperative and hypothetical language is exactly what we use when we ‘talk’ to ourselves in a ‘pull yourself together’ or ‘what if?’ fashion. It is easy to imagine using such mental language in a perilous situation, as one urges oneself to stay calm and think of possible solutions to the predicament.

Finally, Darrieussecq’s use of non-referential pronouns differs from Joyce’s. While Molly thinks of all her lovers using the non-referential ‘he,’ Jeanne’s monologue is much more specific: her husband, Diego, her psychiatrist, Dr Welldon, her father, John, and her dead brother, Pierre, are all named, as are the women of whom she thinks. Cohn suggests that Joyce might be intentionally creating ‘the contingency of the [Molly’s] erotic partner’ with his non-referential use of ‘he’ in ‘Penelope’.\(^{63}\) There is no such contingency in Jeanne’s life: Diego is her only partner. Nevertheless, does the use of names in Jeanne’s monologue diminish the portrayal of her consciousness? Despite Cohn’s assertions that a monologist knows of whom she thinks so does not need to name him or her, it seems to me entirely plausible Jeanne thinks of

\(^{62}\) According to Cohn, this is the problem with less well-executed autonomous monologues, such as Dujardin’s *Les Lauriers sont coupés*. Cohn, p 227.

\(^{63}\) Ibid, p 230.
Diego and her family members by name rather than simply ‘he’ or ‘she’.

Furthermore, while Joyce might have been creating contingency by use of the non-referential ‘he’ with respect to Molly’s partners, he does not abandon names entirely: there are many other instances in ‘Penelope’ when Molly thinks of people by name.64

Interestingly, the only time in Jeanne’s monologue where the non-referential ‘he’ is used is in the following passage:

You know he’s waiting for you at the bottom, you know he’s expecting you, laughing, covered with silt, it’s been written since time immemorial, you knew that it had to happen, so stupid, at the bottom of the Tigre, sitting merrily playing with his toes in his little red trunks, a little blond Buddha, je t’attends je t’attends depuis longtemps . . .

(BS, pp 185-186)

The ‘he’ of this poignant passage is Jeanne’s dead brother, Pierre, who Jeanne was charged with minding when he drowned. This isolated use of the non-referential ‘he’ comes just before Jeanne’s acceptance of her fate and marks a turning point in the portrayal of Jeanne’s consciousness. Immediately following the above passage Jeanne thinks, ‘Stop banging on the windows, it’s pointless . . .’ (p 186) and then, two paragraphs later, ‘let go, and relax, a green, calming relaxation . . .’ (p 186). No longer preoccupied with means of escape, she instead thinks of how her family will react to news of her death. Her acceptance

of her situation, coming as it does after the above passage, seems to have been triggered by the ‘knowledge’ that Pierre is waiting for her. This knowledge, perhaps previously repressed, has been ‘written since time immemorial’: such imagery again has links to Kristeva’s monumental time; the time of eternity. The use of the non-referential ‘he’ and Jeanne’s subsequent acceptance of her fate, while expressed though her consciousness, hints darkly at deeper things: that is, Jeanne’s subconscious conviction she is responsible for her brother’s death. The only possibility of atonement is through death: ‘You knew that it had to happen,’ Jeanne thinks. Only at the point of death can the awful unmentionable ‘truth’ be understood and expressed in thought.

The mimetic nature of autonomous monologue is, of course, not sufficient reason to claim it as a technique best suited to the representation of female consciousness. But when Kristeva’s theory of women’s time as psychic space and cyclical repetition is applied to this narrative technique, and when the subject matter is particularly female (that is, related to the female body), it can be seen that autonomous monologue has the potential to encapsulate a female consciousness most effectively.

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65 Elsewhere in the novel, Jeanne remembers her brother’s drowning and thinks about herself, ‘Seven years old, old enough to look after him . . .’ BS, p 102. While there is other evidence of her feelings of guilt (nightmares, psychotherapy, leaving her family and moving to Argentina) up until this moment she does not consciously express her belief she must die to atone for Pierre’s death.
Multiple voices in *Brief stay*: Heteroglossia and communal narration

Does Darrieussecq’s use of multiple narrative voices enhance the portrayal of female consciousness? Given that the novel is predominantly located in the individual consciousness of four women, this question seems at first glance to be redundant. But what of the multiplicity of voices? Can multiplicity itself enhance such a portrayal?

The effect of multiple narrative voices can be initially explored through Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of the novel as a dialogic discourse. Unlike the epic or poetry, which must abide by rules of composition and are ‘hierarchal, ahistorical and canonical’, according to Bakhtin the novel resists such hierarchies and authority: in fact, the novel laughs at authority. As a historical and changing entity, the novel is dialogic or ‘double-voiced’: it participates in the interaction of different languages, voices and ideologies. Herndl states:

> The novel, because it records ordinary speech [. . .] also participates in the interaction of voices [. . .] As long as there is conflict in the novel between character’s voices or between the narrator’s voice and the characters’, there will be ‘heteroglossia,’ multiple voices expressing multiple ideologies

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66 With the exception of four sequential pages located in the consciousness of John Johnson, the father. BS, pp 156-159.


68 According to Bakhtin, the novel is part of the ‘carnival’ of laughter. Carnival laughter is opposed to the official, as Bakhtin explains in his essay, ‘Rabelais and His World’. Carnival laughter is both festive and mocking. The novel, for Bakhtin, is the carnival of modern times. Ibid.

69 Heteroglossia is Bakhtin’s term. In his essay, ‘Discourse in The Novel’, Bakhtin states: ‘. . . at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom; it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present . . . [A]ll languages of heteroglossia . . . are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words . . . As such they all may be juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated.
from different strata of language in use.\textsuperscript{70}

Although Bakhtin himself writes very little about the work of female novelists, his theory of dialogic discourse has been embraced by feminist literary theorists of the past twenty years who argue that women’s writing is dialogic or ‘polyphonic’ in a way that writing by men is not.\textsuperscript{71} If language is, by its very nature, patriarchal and phallogocentric, then women must speak (and write) in a foreign language. Using Bakhtin’s definition of dialogism—‘another’s speech in another’s language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way’\textsuperscript{72}—it could be argued (and, indeed, Herndl attempts such an argument) that women’s language is essentially dialogic and the language of the novel is essentially feminine.\textsuperscript{73} But Herndl eventually retracts from this position:

The woman is likely to be at a loss to know whether she’s using her own language or the language \textit{ascribed} to her by culture. The feminine writer must confront the question of whether speaking the language of the other is really her \textit{own} language or if it is merely assuming her place in the phallogocentric paradigm.\textsuperscript{74}

Susan Sniader Lanser takes issue with Bakhtin’s idea that all novelistic
\textsuperscript{70} Herndl, p 9.
\textsuperscript{71} See Bauer and McKinstry.
\textsuperscript{72} Bakhtin, p 324.
\textsuperscript{73} Herndl, pp 7-23.
\textsuperscript{74} Herndl, p16.
discourse is dialogic, instead arguing that dialogism pertains more to the discourse of ‘disauthorised’ writers than to writers in general. Lanser states, ‘I believe that disavowed writers of both sexes have engaged in various strategies of adaptation and critique that make their work “dialogical” in ways that Bakhtin’s formulation, which posits heteroglossia as a general modern condition, may obscure.’

While much feminist literary criticism of the 1970s and 1980s demonstrates the historically disadvantaged position of women writers, can it be said that present-day female writers remain disauthorised? And, if disauthorisation of female writers persists, how does this affect both their writing and its critical reception? While such questions are beyond the scope of this study, it can be said that Darrieussecq actively participates in such a discussion through both her public comments and her oeuvre. Speaking about women in the arts, Darrieussecq has said:

That men and women produce different works seems to me a rich and interesting idea—more so than the supposed ‘neutral’ that is often used to denote ‘male’. Yet as if by chance, this difference is generally used to belittle works by women.

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75 Lanser uses this term to describe writers who are seen by the hegemony (usually white males) to write without ‘authority’. According to Lanser, this includes women and writers from (other) marginalised communities. Lanser S, 1992, *Fictions of Authority: Women writers and narrative voice*, Cornell University Press, p 21.
76 Ibid, p 8.
Jordan (2004) notes that the critical reception to Le Bébé, Darrieussecq’s hybrid diary-novel about her own baby, was:

... complex and suggested in particular a high level of intolerance for writer-mother blurring ... a broadly hostile literary community pilloried the book for its lack of literary merit and its aberrant status.\(^{79}\)

I contextualize Darrieussecq’s writing in this way, not to answer the broader questions about the current status of women writers but to demonstrate how Darrieussecq’s own position as a female writer might dialogise her work. Jordan (2005) comments that Darrieussecq’s use of multiple voices in Brief stay is, in part, ‘to interrogate a structure “en desordre,”’ that of the contemporary family.\(^{80}\) The intense focus of each female character on family history and identity provides the reader with both internal and external viewpoints on female protagonists. Part of the consciousness and identity of each woman is inextricably linked to how each of them sees herself within the family. The three sisters also communicate in telepathic ways, echoing each other’s thoughts and dreams, and all reading the same horoscope in the newspaper.\(^{81}\) At the moment of Jeanne’s death, on the other side of the world, Anne wakes, screaming in terror.\(^{82}\) This textual communication between the

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\(^{79}\) Jordan S (2004), p 43.

\(^{80}\) It is interesting to note how, within the family of Brief stay, the father character is marginalised, both as a voice in his own right and in the collective family history.

\(^{81}\) The sisters are all born under the sign of Capricorn.

\(^{82}\) Anne who suffers psychotic delusions about being recruited by aliens, believes she can ‘get directly into Jeanne’s mind’ (BS, p 82), a belief that seems somewhat validated at the time of Jeanne’s death.
female characters of *Brief stay* —their thoughts about and between each other—is one of the ways in which the novel is unusually dialogic.

*Brief stay* is also dialogic in a more traditional Bakhtinian sense. Heteroglossia is a prominent feature and operates in two ways: firstly, in an obvious sense, through smatterings of French and Spanish, and secondly within the main (English) language of the text. Jeanne, a French teacher, is living in Buenos Aires and married to an Argentinian. Her trilingualism—French, Spanish and English—causes her to reflect on the nature of self: ‘Diego asking me if I’m the same in other tongues. I don’t even know if I’m the same from one sentence to the next.’ (BS, p 57) and, ‘Say it in the past, the present, the future. Are we the same in different tenses?’ (p 57) Jeanne’s questioning of the stability of the subject as constructed by language echoes Lacan’s theories of the formation of the subject through language. Jeanne’s and all the other characters’ use of language—they are all at least bilingual—also illustrates the provisionality of meaning in language. Why think in one language instead of another? Does one language at any given time articulate better than another one’s pre-linguistic consciousness, or is it that no language can fully articulate this?

Heteroglossia abounds within the English text of *Brief stay*. As Jordan (2005) notes, the text ‘incorporates, line drawings, opticians’ charts, horoscopes . . . snippets of popular songs, and advertising slogans – all the unrelated flotsam and jetsam that incessantly snatch at our attention and litter

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83 I am restricting my comments on heteroglossia and dialogism to the English translation only.
84 See Lechte, 1994.
our heads.

Scientific language and the jargon of psychoanalysis are also prominent. Anne, doing a doctoral thesis, muses constantly on brain function: the neuroanatomy of memory (pp 85, 86, 112) is a common preoccupation. Jeanne uses her therapist’s language to interpret her dreams and actions. Darrieussecq’s eclectic approach to language serves both to illustrate the ‘littered’ hold-all nature of quotidian consciousness and to highlight Bakhtin’s idea of novelistic discourse as ‘entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents.’

Through frequent use of scientific ideas interspersed with nursery rhymes and references to Shakespeare and Tolstoy, Darrieussecq contextualizes and dialogises her protagonists’ consciousness within their external world.

Polyphony also operates at the narrative level in Brief stay, through the voices of the four female protagonists. Does this narrative mode—what Genette would call variable internal focalization with intradiegetic and metadiegetic narrative levels—have any relationship to feminine consciousness?

Lanser examines the textual strategies historically used by Western women novelists to achieve discursive authority. She analyses the two most recognized narrative modes—the authorial and the personal—and goes on to describe a third lesser-known and lesser-used mode, which she calls communal narration. Lanser describes this mode as: ‘a multiplicity of individual female

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85 Jordan (2005), p 57.
86 Holquist, p 276.
87 Intradiegetic narrative refers to events within the first level of narrative and metadiegetic narrative is Genette’s second narrative level: that is metadiegetic narrative is a narrative within a narrative. (Genette, p 228)
88 The authorial mode largely corresponds to that of the third-person, omniscient narrator: Lanser uses George Eliot as an example. The personal mode is the first-person autobiographical form of narration, such as Charlotte Bronte’s Jane Eyre.
voices that echo one another through experiences and perceptions that are also distinct. These voices are not competing for authentic versions of a narrative or offering multiple perspectives on a single story, but offering multiple stories, each one contributing to a fuller portrait of a specific community.' In communal narration, ‘narrative authority is invested in a definable community and textually inscribed, whether through multiple, mutually authorising voices or through the voice of a single individual who is manifestly authorised by a community.’ Lanser sees communal narration as a technique on the margins, unused by ‘white, ruling-class men perhaps because such an “I” is already in some sense speaking with the authority of a hegemonic “we.”’ Lanser defines three types of communal narration: singular, simultaneous and sequential. She describes sequential narration as ‘giving voice to a diversity of women of some shared identity without making any single experience or consciousness normative.’

Does *Brief stay* fit with such a narrative mode? As previously stated, *Brief stay* contains multiple female voices that echo each other’s thoughts and experiences, while each maintaining a distinct subjectivity. But are the protagonists ‘offering multiple stories’ as Lanser puts it, or ‘multiple perspectives on a single story,’ the latter of which, according to Lanser, would not qualify as communal narration. Lanser’s definition begs the question: What

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89 Lanser, p 262.
91 Lanser, p 21.
92 Lanser defines three types of communal narration: the *singular* form, in which one authorized narrator speaks for a collective; *simultaneous* form, in which a plural ‘we’ narrates; and *sequential* form, in which individual members of a group narrate in turn. Ibid.
93 Ibid, p 263.
is a story? Does it necessitate the recounting of objective events, or can a story be a largely subjective experience? If the central ‘story’ of Brief stay is Pierre’s death, it might be said that the female protagonists offer multiple perspectives on this single event. But if, instead, the central story of Brief stay is the effect of the death of a child on individual remaining family members, then Brief stay can be seen as a communal narrative of the sequential type.

Pierre’s death as an event is never fully articulated by any character. Jordan (2005) sees the nature of this event as the reason why the narrative is structured as it is:

An exploration of consciousness and memory is the only way of getting anywhere near it [Pierre’s death], given that it is generally hidden from the subject’s own conscious mind, and given the family’s tacit pact not to articulate their grief and guilt and to protect Nore from the past.\(^\text{94}\)

The fact that Nore does not ‘know’ about Pierre’s existence or death (although, given her strange fear of water and the apparition of Pierre’s ghost, she ‘knows’ at a deeper level) yet has a ‘textually authorized’ narrative voice\(^\text{95}\) implies that her state of ignorance is as important to the narrative as the state of those who try to keep her ignorant. Pierre’s death, therefore, is not the ‘single story’ of Brief stay. Instead, in this portrayal of the consciousness of individual female family members, fractured and traumatized by tragedy, multiple subjective stories of loss, anxiety and grief ‘contribute to a fuller portrait of a specific community’: that of a family in crisis.

\(^{94}\text{Jordan (2005), p 61.}\)

\(^{95}\text{Each section of narrative is headed with the name of the character who is ‘speaking.’}\)
Lancer’s assertion that communal narrative is a mode adopted by ‘marginal or suppressed communities’\textsuperscript{96} raises an interesting aside about \textit{Brief stay}. Given that the novel deals with repressed trauma and that, in general, death is a taboo subject, at least in Western societies, can it be said that the Johnson family constitute a suppressed or marginalised community, in that their story is one that is often disallowed? So difficult/disauthorised is Pierre’s death to articulate, it is only through the contributory consciousness of each family member, as they obliquely touch on then skirt around death, that the narrative achieves a cohesion of sorts. The idea of bereavement as marginalization thus strengthens the case for \textit{Brief stay} to be viewed as a communal narrative, according to Lancer’s definition.

The feminist critic, Rachel DuPlessis, sees communal narrative—or the ‘communal protagonist’, as she defines it—as a means of structuring the work so that neither the development of an individual (as in the \textit{Bildungsroman}) nor the formation of a heterosexual couple is central to the novel. In this way the use of the communal protagonist ‘can suggest the structures of social change in the structures of narrative.’\textsuperscript{97} DuPlessis sees the communal protagonist operating as a critique both of ‘the hierarchies and authoritarian practice of gender and of the narrative practice that selects and honours only major figures.’\textsuperscript{98} Thus communal narration, while largely a narrative practice of disauthorised (female) communities, can also be seen to be subversive in its

\textsuperscript{96} Lancer, p 21.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
rejection of the individual (and male-encoded) narrative. As such it seems a fitting mode for the representation of the inner worlds of female characters, especially, like those of *Brief stay*, whose story concerns a shared trauma that, for many reasons, is difficult to articulate.
CHAPTER TWO

NARRATIVE VOICE IN DISSECTION

Introduction

My novel, Dissection, is written in the third person. This in itself is an inadequate description of the narrative mode of Dissection, for, as I will discuss further in this chapter, third-person voice can take a variety of forms. In my novel, the thoughts, words and actions of the protagonist, Dr Anna McBride, are narrated by an unidentified narrator who is external to and absent from the narrative. Lanser calls this mode the third-person figural voice, while, according to Genette, the narrator of Dissection is extradiegetic and heterodiegetic. The use of such a narrative technique is not unusual in the history of the novel: in fact, Homer’s Iliad is written in this style.

In this chapter I will examine the third-person narrative of Dissection in relation to the portrayal of the consciousness of its protagonist, Anna McBride. How does the use of this third-person figural voice effect the portrayal of consciousness in Dissection, and what are some of the specific narrative techniques that contribute to this effect?

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99 Lanser uses Franz Stanzel’s definition of ‘authorial’ versus ‘figural’ third-person narration. The authorial mode permits narrative self-reference; that is ‘extrarepresentational’ acts: reflections, judgements, and generalisations about the world beyond the fiction. In the figural mode, all narration is focalised through the perspectives of characters, and thus no reference to the narrator or the narrative situation is feasible. Lanser, p 16.

100 Genette, p 248.

101 Ibid.
Before I deal with third-person voice *per se*, I want to touch on another related narrative technique of relevance to *Dissection*, that of focalisation.

**Fixed internal focalisation and the representation of consciousness: intensity and narrative momentum**

In his discussion of narrative mood, Genette eschews the term ‘point-of-view’, preferring the term *focalisation*. Genette uses this term as a means of differentiating between ‘the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective’ and the narrator; or, put more simply, ‘who sees’ in the narrative versus ‘who speaks’. According to Genette’s classification, *Dissection* employs a *fixed internal focalisation*, by which it is meant that every narrative event is seen through the eyes and filtered through the consciousness of Anna McBride. Genette nominates Henry James’ *What Maisie Knew* as a good example of fixed internal focalisation and notes that Maisie’s “‘restriction of field’ is particularly dramatic in this story of adults, a story whose significance escapes her.”

In Genette’s opinion, then, the use of this particular type of focalisation has enhanced, or at least lent drama to, the James’ novel as a whole. Likewise, the use of fixed internal focalisation in *Dissection* lends a certain dramatic quality to the portrayal of Anna.

102 Genette argues persuasively that the term ‘point-of-view’ is a blunt instrument. See Genette, pp 185-189.
103 Ibid, p 186.
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid, p 189.
106 Genette holds that internal focalisation can occur in both first-person and third-person narratives, except in the case of a first-person present tense interior monologue, when narrating and focalising cannot be separated. Ibid, p 194.
107 Ibid, p 189.
Anna McBride is a woman in crisis. The impending mediation meeting (at which she must meet face to face with the young man she has harmed), her strained marriage and her overwhelming sense of guilt have caused her to become withdrawn and defensive. Her world-view is now restricted to a negative appraisal of her work, her marriage, her physical appearance and her ability to mother her two sons. Events external to her immediate quotidian life do not enter her consciousness and she rarely has pleasant, mood-elevating thoughts. My intention was to portray Anna McBride in exactly this way. As a perfectionistic doctor in the midst of the most stressful period of her life, the character of Anna had to be portrayed as withdrawn, depressed and relentlessly self-critical. To portray Anna’s consciousness I wanted to use a narrative mode in keeping with her state of mind. Fixed internal focalisation (in the third rather than the first person)\textsuperscript{108} seemed to me to be the best fit. Because Anna is trapped within her negative thought patterns and unable to cease thinking about her predicament, I chose to focalise the narrative completely through her consciousness. Variable internal focalisation, while providing the reader with some relief from Anna’s dark thoughts, would also have had the effect of diluting Anna’s intensity and providing some sort of ‘objective’ balance to the narrative. Focalising through the character of Anna’s husband, Paul, for example, might have given the reader access to his thoughts about his wife and the state of their marriage. Focalising through Ben, the young man who lost his leg, would have afforded a view of the negligence suit from the other side; that

\textsuperscript{108} My choice of third person narration is discussed later in this chapter.
of the plaintiff. But it was exactly this relentless intensity and unbalanced perspective that I was trying to achieve, both in the portrayal of Anna and in the mood of the novel in general. In order for readers to best experience Anna’s state of mind, it was important that I did not opt for relief or balance. I did not want to make the reader’s work easy: instead I wanted the reader to experience as fully as possible the relentlessness of Anna’s punishing and guilt-ridden thoughts.

Such an authorial decision carries a fair degree of risk. By forcing the reader to remain in Anna’s obsessively dark and claustrophobic consciousness, I risked alienating him/her from the protagonist. Indeed one critic has already commented on this. Yet the narrative momentum of *Dissection* largely relies on the reader’s ready access to Anna’s increasingly disturbed state of mind. While the date set for mediation acts as a temporal compass for the novel, it is Anna’s increasing psychological disturbance that propels the narrative forward to that date. To take the reader out of Anna’s head, and into either the external world or the minds of others, would have been to slow or detour this narrative momentum. Some critics and readers have commented on the ‘unputdownable’ and compelling nature of *Dissection*. Such an effect would

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107 Genette’s term for this is *external focalisation*, ‘in which the hero performs in front of us without our ever being allowed to know his thoughts and feelings.’ Genette, p 190.

have been difficult to achieve, I believe, had I not employed the technique of
fixed internal focalisation.

It should be said at this point that while fixed internal focalisation is a
very useful technique for representing consciousness in the novel, I make no
particular claim for it in relation to female consciousness. Because fixed
internal focalisation can encompass first and third person narrative as well as a
variety of narrative modes for representing consciousness, for the purposes of
this exegesis it is too general a technique to have specific application to the
representation of female consciousness.

**Narrative authority in Dissection**

As mentioned previously, a narrative that is internally focalised can, according
to Genette, be narrated in either the first or third person. Thus, with the
intention of situating the narrative within the consciousness and from the
necessarily restricted perspective of Anna McBride, Genette’s work suggests I
could have equally chosen to write *Dissection* in the first person, thus
‘authorising’ Anna to tell her own story. Apart from the obvious necessary
grammatical changes this would entail, what difference, if any, would a move
to first-person narration have made to my novel? While Genette would have us
believe there would be no difference,\(^{112}\) Lanser takes a different view. Lanser’s
narratological standpoint, unlike Genette’s, is heavily influenced by her
interpretation of the social and political context in which female authors have

\(^{112}\) Genette, p 193.
written (and continue to write) novels. This context, Lanser believes, has shaped female narrative voice and narrative authority in varied, complex and innovative ways, as women writers negotiate their way, some more successfully than others, around the hegemonic male voice.

Lanser, drawing on Genette, defines the ‘personal voice’ as belonging to those first-person narrators ‘who are self-consciously telling their own histories’ and who are the protagonists of the stories they narrate. Both Joanne Frye and, to a lesser extent, Lanser, valorise this personal voice as a narrative mode that authorises both female writers and their female fictional characters. Frye views the narrating ‘I’ of women narrators as subversive, in that it ‘threatens the very assumptions of male-dominant thought’ and disrupts ‘the culture text of femininity which has made her, as a woman, into an “object.”’

Lanser notes that while the personal voice ‘remains a structurally “superior” voice mediating the voices of the other characters, it does not carry the superhuman privileges attached to “authorial voice”,’ and its status is dependent on a reader's response, not only to the narrator's acts but to the

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113 Lanser, pp 18-19.
114 Frye J, 1986, *Living Stories, Telling lives: Women and the Novel in Contemporary Experience*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, p 50. Lacanian theorists would disagree with Frye, as Elizabeth Grosz observes: 'In one sense, in so far as she speaks and says 'I', she too must take up a place as a subject of the symbolic; yet, in another, in so far as she is positioned as castrated, passive, an object of desire for men rather than a subject who desires, her position within the symbolic must be marginal or tenuous: when she speaks as an 'I' it is never clear that she speaks (of or as) herself.' Grosz E, 1990, *Jacques Lacan: a feminist introduction*, Routledge, New York, pp 71-72.
115 Lanser uses the term ‘authorial voice’ to identify narrative situations that are heterodiegetic, public, and potentially self-referential. Since authorial narrators exist outside narrative time (and indeed, 'outside' fiction) and are not 'humanized' by events, they conventionally carry an authority superior to that conferred on characters, even on those who are also narrators. See Lanser, pp 16-17.
character's actions.' In addition, personal voice may compromise the authority of a female narrator's claims 'if the act of telling, the story she tells, or the self she constructs through telling it transgresses the limits of the acceptably feminine'. One of the risks inherent in the first-person voice is that it might simply be dismissed if it does not conform to existing cultural constructs about femininity. Thus the 'authority of personal voice is contingent in ways that the authority of authorial voice is not.'

Macris states that 'first-person narration has the advantage of quickly establishing an immediate, intimate link between narrator and reader.' But, as Lanser suggests, this 'advantage' is contingent upon the acceptability of the story being told. In the case of Dissection, a first-person narration, through its establishment of intimacy, might have endeared Anna more to the reader. But if the reader felt that Anna, through her medical error and her ambivalence concerning marriage and motherhood, had 'transgressed the limits of the acceptably feminine', she or he might just as easily have dismissed Anna’s first person narration as self-justification in the face of wrongdoing.

Anna McBride’s inability and/or refusal to tell her side of the story ‘in her own words’ is a recurring motif throughout the story of Dissection. She is given many opportunities to speak but she refuses them all. Why, then,

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116 Lanser, p 19.
117 Ibid.
118 Ibid.
119 Ibid, p 69 (my italics).
120 The following excerpts from Dissection demonstrate this refusal: ‘She should have said sorry then, said the word a thousand times over, but she had been too afraid to speak.’ (p 23); ‘But she bites her tongue.’ (p 29); ‘Talking about it doesn’t make things harder, but neither does it help.” (p 47); ‘She does not say she has miscarried, too.’ (p 81); ‘But she does not ask it. What would the poor woman think?’ (p 134); ‘[ . . .] she cannot talk about it, she does not have the right [ . . .]’ (p 151); ‘Please, let’s not discuss it.” (p 204);
would she tell her story to the reader? What would be her motivation? While she might yearn for understanding or forgiveness, she feels she does not deserve such things and therefore will not ask for them. Instead, alone, ‘she takes up her cross and carries it.’\textsuperscript{121} It has been noted that Anna McBride is not an entirely likeable character.\textsuperscript{122} What is the basis for this element of dislike she engenders? I believe that, in part, it is to do with her situation as a woman who has made a mistake in her professional life, and in doing so has transgressed the social code. As a woman, schooled in the patriarchal world of medicine, and to a lesser extent that of the Roman Catholic Church, and now immersed in the patriarchal world of the law, Anna has brought shame upon herself by breaking the rules of these hegemonies. While, through her legal defence, the mediation process and the offer of psychological counselling, Anna is authorised to speak—that is, to ‘give her side of the story’—this authorisation comes via the patriarchies whose rules she resists.\textsuperscript{123} Such authorisation is conditional upon her ‘following the rules’ of due legal process, but she refuses it, choosing instead to answer to herself and to the mother of the young man she has harmed, albeit unintentionally. Anna has also suffered a miscarriage, a distressing experience that, in contemporary Western society,

\textsuperscript{121} Garner H, 2008.
\textsuperscript{123} Anna’s resistance to the law is evident in her attitude to John, her defence lawyer: ‘Is she behaving badly? Is she being uncooperative?[. . .]How has she been labelled? “Difficult – a difficult woman”’? (p 21.) Her resistance to counselling is conveyed thus: ‘Should she seek counselling? How she hates that word[. . .]But a psychiatrist! \textit{Spare me your transference and your counter-transference, your wooden defensive silence. This is an affair of the heart. Do not pretend that Freud and Lacan can help. They would tear her story from her and give her nothing to replace it.}’ (p 161.) She has also rejected the edicts of the Catholic Church and so cannot repent in a religious sense. See p 207. Anna has also resisted the patriarchy of medicine by developing her own style of ‘intuitive’, female practice. See p 187.
still carries with it the taint of shame and secrecy. Because Anna’s story—that of the stresses imposed by a medical negligence suit and the grief of a miscarriage—disauthorises her voice, I felt it important that this disauthorisation be in some way reflected in the novel’s narrative discourse. To this end I have employed a figural narrator who does not engage in Lanser’s ‘extra-representational’ acts, instead presenting both Anna’s internal and external world to the reader without judgement or comment. The narrator in Dissection provides the window into Anna’s consciousness, thereby ‘making known’ to the reader that which Anna, given her situation, is not authorised to ‘tell’. I use the words ‘making known’ and ‘tell’ purposefully. Though there are narrated elements in Dissection that relate to external events and reported dialogue, the narrator does not ‘tell’ Anna’s internal narrative on her behalf. Rather it is through the closely-knit techniques of figural narration and ‘narrated monologue’ that my narrator permits Anna’s consciousness to be revealed, if not in her own (spoken) words then in her own most intimate thoughts.

Narrated monologue and figural narration: a ‘very special’ relationship

As has already been mentioned in Chapter One, narrated monologue is a mode of third-person narration that renders a character’s thought in her own idiom while maintaining the third-person reference and the basic tense of narration. (Narrated monologue corresponds to both of the terms, free indirect style and

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124 This is my personal observation after twenty-five years in medical practice.
125 Cohn, p 100.
free indirect discourse. However, as I have used Cohn’s terminology in Chapter One, I will now continue to do so.) Before I go on to discuss the use of narrated monologue in Dissection, I want to comment briefly on the relationship between figural narration and narrated monologue. Cohn sees this relationship as ‘very special’, a relationship of ‘mutual affinity and enhancement.’ Cohn praises the technique thus:

The narrated monologue is at once a more complex and a more flexible technique for rendering consciousness than the rival techniques [of quoted monologue and psycho-narration]. Both its dubious attributions of language to the figural mind and its fusion of narratorial and figural language charge it with ambiguity, give it a quality of now-you-see-it, now-you-don’t that exerts a special fascination. . . the device is irresistible precisely because it is apprehended almost unconsciously.

I share Cohn’s enthusiasm for this narrative mode, having stumbled across it almost by accident. I began writing Dissection with an omniscient though non-intrusive narrator and with the intention of writing from the ‘point-of-view’ of both Anna and her husband, Paul, but I soon became dissatisfied with this approach. Somehow I couldn’t reconcile the requirements of such a narrative set-up with my recurrent desire to explore Anna’s deepest thoughts, memories and anxieties. One day, in frustration, I dispensed with ideas of ‘how to write a novel’ and wrote a page exactly how I wanted. That page, written in a new,

126 Cohn, p 111.
interior language—some of it narrated monologue—became the beginning of the final version of *Dissection*.

The following passage from *Dissection* illustrates my use of narrated monologue:

A minute later she is in the street again, clutching her little blue-and-white carry bag of purchases for which she has just paid the ridiculous sum of one hundred and fifty dollars. Why did she do it? She could have declined the young woman’s lukewarm offer of a twenty-dollar discount on all three items and left the salon with her wallet still intact, if not her pride. Instead she signed the credit slip with an extra flourish and let the door slam on her way out. She shoves the purchases into her bag and zips it closed: *she does not want* Margaret to see her parading through the waiting room with a bag of expensive cosmetics. *Is it too late to return them? A moment’s embarrassment: that is all it would cost her. She need never visit that salon again.*

(*Dissection*, p 67, my italics: see second paragraph below.)

Cohn asserts that a simple transposition of grammatical person (that is, ‘she’ to ‘I’ in the above passage) and tense will translate a narrated into an autonomous monologue. Such a transposition can be used as a litmus test to distinguish between the narrative sentence of a character and that of a narrator.128 This test can be successfully applied here. Narrated monologue also ‘teems with

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128 Cohn, pp 100-101.
questions, exclamations, repetitions, overstatements and colloquialisms,¹²⁹ as does the above passage.

The use of the pronoun ‘she’

Throughout Dissection I have chosen to refer to Anna McBride by the pronoun ‘she’, rather than by her given name. While she is named in the opening sentence of the novel—‘Doctor Anna McBride has begun to think of herself first’—Anna is not referred to by her given name again (except in quoted dialogue when another person addresses her). Frye sees the repeated use of the third-person ‘she’ as part of the male-encoded ‘femininity text’ that constrains women within cultural expectations of femininity,¹³⁰ but I would argue that the use of ‘she’ in Dissection is justified on technical grounds: the repeated use of ‘she’ is part of a narrative technique that ultimately enhances the portrayal of female consciousness. While replacing every ‘she’ in this passage with ‘Anna’ would be heavy-handed, I could legitimately have used ‘Anna’ in the first sentence (‘A minute later Anna is in the street again’) and again in the sentence that begins, ‘She shoves the purchases. . .’ But such a use of the given name implies, at least to me, some necessity for the act of specific naming. It implies that Anna needs to be named so the reader will know of whom the narrator ‘speaks’. However as it is always Anna through whom the novel is focalised, always her consciousness at work, the name ‘Anna’ becomes somewhat redundant. The use of ‘she’ also creates a seamlessness between reported

¹²⁹ Cohn, p 102.
¹³⁰ Frye, p 65.
actions that can be attributed to the narrator (shown in roman type in the above passage) and narrated monologue (in italics). And, of course, the use of ‘Anna’ in passages of narrated monologue would be counter-productive. Replacing ‘she’ with ‘Anna’ in the italicized sentences above (for example, ‘Why did Anna do it?’ or ‘Anna does not want Margaret to see her parading...’) has the effect of privileging the narrator’s voice over that of Anna, and rendering narrated monologue as something akin to the omniscient narrative voice.

There is also another reason why I want to briefly take issue with Frye’s criticism of the use of ‘she’. Contrary to Frye’s assertion that the repeated use of ‘she’ defines femininity by male standards, I would argue that the frequent use of ‘she’ draws constant attention to the protagonist as female. What’s more, the repetition of ‘she’ is inclusive in a way that the narrating ‘I’ is not. While the narrating ‘I’ is agent and owner of her story, the use of ‘she’ suggests the story can be shared by other women.  

**Narrated monologue and Bakhtin’s dialogic**

Since the late eighteenth century, narrated monologue has been widely used by novelists in the representation of consciousness. Modernist writers such as Proust, Joyce and Woolf, concerned as they were with mental interiority, were prolific users of this technique, and of course the technique remains popular today, though perhaps not so much with Australian novelists. But can any claim be made for this technique as a means of representing consciousness of

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131 Frye’s basic assertion that the narrating ‘I’ is the only option available to female writers who seek to portray women realistically is perhaps now outdated and, as far as creative writing praxis is concerned, far too restrictive and proscriptive.
female characters in particular? To make such a claim, it is necessary to return to Bakhtin’s theory of the novel as dialogic discourse.

Cohn writes of the ‘seamless junction between narrated monologues and their narrative context.’ The presence of both narrator and character in narrated monologue allows the fusion of outer and inner reality, gestures with thoughts, and facts with reflections. In the above paragraph from Dissection, passages of narrated monologue (italicised) alternate with ‘external’ events in the narrative. Two voices are present: one of the narrator who reports external events and the other of Anna McBride, whose figural mind is voiced through the narrator via the technique of narrated monologue. Cohn writes that, in the narrated monologue, ‘the coincidence of perspectives is compounded by a consonance of voices, with the language of the text momentarily resonating with the language of the figural mind.’ It is this consonance of voices that recalls Bakhtin’s theory of dialogic discourse in the novel.

As previously discussed, according to Bakhtin, it is the novel—rather than the epic or poetry—that is the site of dialogism because, unlike the latter two literary forms, the novel records ordinary ‘speech’. Sotirov suggests that, in Bakhtin's view, the style which he calls ‘quasi-direct discourse’ is a key site of dialogic relations in the novel, because it is within this single syntactic

132 Cohn, p 103.
133 Ibid, p 111.
134 ‘Speech’ in Bakhtin’s terminology does not only mean direct speech with orthographic cues. Bakhtin interprets the viewpoints of characters as ideological positions presented vis-a-vis the narrator's, and he sees the different viewpoints wrought in the tissue of the narrative very much as ‘rejoinders’ in real conversation, although not spelt out in direct speech. Sotirova V, 2005, ‘Repetition in Free Indirect Style: A Dialogue of Minds?’ Style. DeKalb; 39 (2): 123-38.
135 ‘Quasi-direct discourse’ is also called ‘free indirect discourse’ in the literature and is therefore another term for Cohn’s ‘narrated monologue’.
construction that two voices representing two worldviews—that of the character and of the narrator—are heard. That narrated monologue reports a character’s thoughts in her own idiom is evidence of the double-voiced nature of this technique. Because the character’s voice is heard through that of the narrator, narrated monologue acts to disrupt the dominance of a singular narrative authority. As Rimmon-Kenan expresses it, narrated monologue ‘enhances the bivocality or polyvocality of the text by bringing into play a plurality of speakers and attitudes.’ The feminist literary implications of this polyphony have already been briefly discussed in Chapter Two (in reference to the use of multiple voices in Brief stay). Such implications also exist for the technique of narrated monologue, as its inherent double-voicedness calls into question the monologic, patriarchal nature of language. Just as Anna’s constant questioning of her actions and motives threatens to disrupt her sense of self, the use of narrated monologue threatens the notion of a unified, monologic voice, both in Dissection and elsewhere.

So, in summary, narrated monologue, through its third-person stance, its non-intrusive figural narration and its dialogic qualities, is a fitting technique for the representation of Anna McBride’s troubled and questioning consciousness.

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136 Sotirova, p 125.
137 Rimmon-Kenan, p 112.
138 Given the argument that narrated monologue is by its very nature dialogic, Cohn’s nomenclature is perhaps a misnomer and the name free indirect discourse is more appropriate. However as I have already used Cohn’s terms throughout this exegesis, I will continue to do so.
CONCLUSIONS

The need to reconcile the first person and third person accounts of the universe . . . is the single most important problem in science.

(VS Ramachandran, neuroscientist)\textsuperscript{139}

Is there a female writing? Can women bring along new ways of seeing things, or bring new viewpoints to politics? The questions are far from answered. I don't have the answer. But I think it is good to reflect upon this, if it doesn't help in any way but in making the world more complex. Because then you would in no way end up in a monolithism that crushes creativity.

(Julia Kristeva: semiotician, novelist, psychoanalyst)\textsuperscript{140}

The representation of consciousness in fiction is a well-researched topic. The representation of the consciousness of specifically female characters is less so.\textsuperscript{141} Does this matter? Is a default to 'consciousness in general' near enough, good enough? My answer, given in the context of creative writing praxis rather than in a wider socio-cultural context, is this: As a female novelist who has written and intends to write further about the interior worlds of female

\textsuperscript{139} VS Ramachandran in Lodge, p 28.
\textsuperscript{140} Midttun BH, 2006, ‘Crossing the borders: An interview with Julia Kristeva,’ Hypatia 21(4): 164-177.
\textsuperscript{141} In preparation for this exegesis I have read a cross-section of the female and feminist literary critics of the past thirty years. Many focus on the thematic and political content of women’s work rather than the narrative techniques employed by women. Susan Sniader Lanser stands out as a narratologist interested in the narrative strategies used by women writers, but she takes a broad approach to this subject and does not focus on the representation of consciousness of female characters.
characters, a study of narrative technique in relation to representations of consciousness of female characters seems entirely appropriate and worthwhile. But it is also disingenuous of me to pretend that the above answer steers completely clear of the influences of culture and society. I am, after all, talking about female consciousness in the novel, which as Bakhtin has noted, is, almost by definition, the fictional genre that both reflects and critiques the society from which it is generated. Novelists of either sex cannot write in a vacuum: their use of language and narrative structure is a product of the degree to which they accept/reject/are authorised by their dominant socio-cultural codes and practices. As Lanser states,

. . . both narrative structures and women’s writing are determined not by essential properties or isolated aesthetic imperatives but by complex and changing conventions that are themselves produced in and by the relations of power that implicate writer, reader, and text.  

According to Lanser, in modern Western societies these constituents of power must include race, gender, class, nationality, education, sexuality and marital status, at the very least.

This study of female consciousness in fiction has taken as its focus narrative voice. While I have arrived at this focal point via a circuitous route, I am pleased to have eventually done so. Before commencing this study my knowledge of narrative voice was more or less restricted to the concept of

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142 Lanser, p 5.
third-person versus first-person ‘point of view’. Yet, as a reader, I instinctively understood there was more to the matter. How was it that the authors I most admired—Virginia Woolf, Alice Munro, JM Coetzee, to name a few—captured the consciousness of their characters so convincingly? What sleight of hand did they employ to move so seamlessly between internal reflection and external action? Now, having completed this study, I have a much improved understanding of how these writers achieve such effects, as well as a sound technical grounding for my future work.

Under the heading of narrative voice, I have examined the techniques of autonomous monologue, communal narration and narrated monologue. Can I make any claim for these techniques with respect to the representation of female consciousness? I believe I can make some qualified claims. I have already argued that each one of these three aforementioned techniques is effective in the representation of female consciousness. Am I now prepared to favour one over the others in this regard? Here is where my qualification resides: as this exegesis has already shown, different narrative situations call for different narrative techniques. Darrieussecq’s novel is concerned with a family of four women, fractured yet bound—and, to a certain extent, disauthorised—by grief and guilt. Darrieussecq’s use of communal narration both defines these four characters as a group and challenges the conventional narrative privileging of both the individual, central character and the heterosexual couple. As Lanser has noted, the communal narrative appears to be a technique reserved for female characters, presumably because the ‘I’ of
male characters stands for the hegemonic ‘we’, at least in modern Western societies. Thus, in the context of the narrative situation of Brief stay, communal narration is a very effective technique.

But of course this is not to say that communal narration should be used in every narrative situation involving female protagonists. In the case of Dissection I have intentionally privileged the individual consciousness of Anna McBride over other characters, female and male. A communal narrative in Dissection would have been out of keeping with the central narrative situation; that of an isolated and ashamed individual who, in her own eyes, has ‘broken the rules’ and must be punished. As the transgressor, Anna McBride does not grant herself nor seek from others the authority to tell her story. Instead, through the closely related techniques of figural narration and narrated monologue, both her external and internal worlds are made known. The figural narrator of Dissection is empathic, unobtrusive and non-judgmental: there is a poignant irony in the observation that the role of the narrator in Dissection closely resembles that of the ideal therapist or counsellor whom Anna refuses to seek out. I would like to think of this unidentified narrator as female: an empathic, intelligent woman who listens closely to Anna’s unspoken thoughts and records them with care.

The double-voiced nature of narrated monologue, with its voices of narrator and character so closely interwoven, resists the notion of language as monologic and patriarchal, just as Anna McBride resists the patriarchal
constructs around her. For these reasons I have found narrated monologue to be a very suitable narrative mode for *Dissection*.

While it is clear that autonomous monologue is the most mimetic mode of representing consciousness, male or female, I want to make a claim for autonomous monologue as a technique particularly suited to the representation of female consciousness. It is perhaps no coincidence that Dorrit Cohn chose the ‘Penelope’ chapter of *Ulysses*—that is, the representation of the consciousness of Molly Bloom, a woman—as the best example of autonomous monologue that Western literature had to offer. The portrayal of Molly Bloom’s consciousness evokes women’s time according to Kristeva; time perceived as cyclical and monumental, more akin to psychic space than linear chronology. The notion of ‘language-for-oneself’, in which ‘speaker and listener coincide’ marks autonomous monologue as the most private and intimate narrative mode. Such a mode authorises a female character to ‘voice’ her deepest thoughts, without fear of censure, just as Jeanne does before her death in *Brief stay*. Because it is by nature self-generative and self-enclosed, autonomous monologue enables a female character to think about her body in a surprisingly different way. With this mode the link between body and consciousness is immediate: the relative lack of narrative intervention enables a unique frankness and matter-of-factness in the language concerning female bodily functions. While Molly Bloom’s monologue ‘thinks through’ the act of attending to the onset of menstruation, I can also envisage the effective use of autonomous monologue in the representation of the consciousness of a woman.
as she experiences the thoughts, sensations and emotions surrounding the bodily changes of pregnancy, miscarriage or childbirth. Although some might view this as a biologically essentialist position, I do not apologise for it. Intrinsic to an effective portrayal of female consciousness in literature is the portrayal of the female body as seen by the consciousness that presides over that body.

Throughout this exegesis I have tried to sidestep the wider socio-political implications of the term ‘female’, instead focusing on creative writing praxis. But in closing I want, as a female writer, to comment more broadly on narrative practice. Since the inception of the novel as a literary form, the narrative strategies employed by novelists have been, and continue to be, influenced by the culture from which they are derived. This is no less true for male than it is for female writers, except that, in Western society, male writers have usually identified with and been part of the dominant culture to a far greater degree than their female counterparts. Just as the female novelists of the early 18th century, in reaction to the authorial male voice, wrote in a disembodied third-person voice that paved the way for Jane Austen’s exemplary use of narrated monologue,143 so too Virginia Woolf and Dorothy Richardson, rebelling against the constraints of the late 19th-century novel, developed innovative ways of representing women’s inner lives. Now, challenging female writers, such as Marie Darrieussecq, strive to capture the subjectivity of contemporary women as they negotiate the difficulties of the

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modern world. Darrieussecq herself has, at times, endured negative criticism for her experimental approach to the representation of female experience, but the changing of cultural expectations is never easily achieved. As a female writer who intends to continue writing about contemporary female experience, it is essential that I consider my choice of narrative form as seriously as I do the content and themes of my work. This exegesis has provided me with a greater capacity to do so.

144 As previously stated in Chapter One, Jordan (2004) notes that the critical reception to Le Bébé, Darrieussecq’s hybrid diary-novel about her own baby, was ‘complex and suggested in particular a high level of intolerance for writer-mother blurring . . . a broadly hostile literary community pilloried the book for its lack of literary merit and its aberrant status.’ Jordan herself has this to say of Le Bébé: ‘Its exploration of babies, mothers and writing combined with its meditations on the construction of babies and mothers in language, raises complex issues about the difficulties of writing and thinking ourselves out of old positions and into new ones.’ pp 43-44.
I am looking to invent new forms, to write new sentences, because it is the only way to realize the modern world, whose movement otherwise surpasses us incessantly, staying unreadable, incomprehensible. (Marie Darrieussecq)\textsuperscript{145}

The above quote from Darrieussecq could just as well have come from Virginia Woolf. In her essay, ‘Women and Fiction’, Woolf urges the female writer to ‘reject the sentence made by men’ which is ‘too loose, too heavy, too pompous for a woman’s use.’ Instead, the female writer must make her own sentences, ‘altering and adapting the current sentence until she writes one that takes the natural shape of her thought without crushing or distorting it.’\textsuperscript{146}

The prose style of Brief stay—fragmented, experimental, poetic—and the novel’s preoccupation with consciousness, subjectivity and ‘death in life’\textsuperscript{147} beg consistent comparison with the works of Joyce and Woolf, two great writers of the Modernist period. But why is it that Modernist works are seen as relevant comparisons for a novel written in 2001? The answer, it appears, is partly concerned with the representation of consciousness in fiction.

\textsuperscript{145} Miller and Holmes interview.
\textsuperscript{146} Virginia Woolf, ‘Women and Fiction,’ Collected Essays (vol 2), 1967, Harcourt, New York, pp 145-146. (my italics)
\textsuperscript{147} Jordan (2005) sees the entire novel ‘as marked by a Woolfian awareness of the presence of death in life.’ p 66.
Modernism as an artistic movement, though extremely difficult to define and circumscribe, arose around the beginning of the twentieth century, at least partly as a response to the ideas of ‘the great triumvirate’: Marx, Freud and Nietzsche.\(^{148}\) Freud’s theories of consciousness—‘subconscious or unconscious motivation, suppressed or repressed [and often sexual] drives and desires which lie behind overt behaviour’\(^{149}\)—were particularly influential with writers of the period. According to Lodge, the layered Freudian model of the mind—unconscious, ego, superego, in ascending order—‘encouraged the idea that consciousness had a dimension of depth, which it was the task of literature, as of psychoanalysis, to explore.’\(^{150}\) Lodge notes that the efforts of Modernist writers to get closer to psychological reality paradoxically entailed an abandonment of the techniques of literary realism. The traditional linear, logical plot is ‘discarded or destabilised’ and ‘poetic devices of symbolism and intertextual allusion are used instead to give formal unity to the representation of experience, which is itself seen as essentially chaotic.’\(^{151}\) Thus writers of the Modernist period, in their striving to capture the chaos of consciousness on the page, can be seen as the proper literary forebears to *Brief stay*.

Virginia Woolf’s exhortation to ‘reject the sentence made by men’ is also of relevance to the genesis of Modernism. Historically the rise of Western Modernism paralleled the first wave of feminism and the suffrage movement. Dekoven sees such socio-cultural changes in gender relations as producing

\(^{149}\) Lodge, p 58.
\(^{150}\) Ibid, p 61.
\(^{151}\) Ibid.
within Modernist writing both a reactive ‘masculinist misogyny’ and a ‘fascination and strong identification with the empowered feminine.’ Woolf herself was instrumental in associating Modernism with femininity. Her many essays argued for ‘the subversiveness of modernist form, its ability to penetrate and represent the underlying multiplicitous truths of consciousness and psyche beneath the outward, unitary, coherent appearances of social, and realist fictional, convention,’ an argument that Dekoven claims is linked to feminist psychoanalytical theories of the repressed maternal feminine. Dekoven states:

It is in modernist forms themselves that the repressed maternal feminine unconscious of Western culture actually emerges into representation. Irigaray and other psychoanalytically oriented theorists of gender in language, usually known as ‘French feminists,’ such as Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous, find the inscription of the de-repressed maternal feminine in non- or anti-realist deployments of language and literary form, which are precisely the defining formal features of Modernism.

Thus, in their attempts to represent consciousness, Modernist writers of both sexes developed literary forms that also gave expression to the feminine.

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152 A classic example of this ambivalence is to be found in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* where Africa symbolizes the maternal feminine. See Dekoven, p 181.
153 Dekoven, p 187.
APPENDIX II: A definition of narrative terms

Focalisation

Focalisation is the term favoured by the structuralist critic, Gérard Genette, to denote who sees in the narrative, rather than who speaks. Genette describes, in essence, three types of focalization techniques: zero, internal and external focalization.\(^{155}\) *Zero focalization* corresponds to the omniscient narration of the classical narrative: ‘the view from Nowhere’.\(^{156}\) *Internal focalization* is the term Genette gives to the narrative in which ‘the narrator says only what a given character knows.’\(^{157}\) Internal focalization can be *fixed* or *variable*. *External focalisation* is Genette’s term for the narrative in which the ‘narrator says less than the character knows; this is the “objective” or “behaviourist narrative”.’\(^{158}\)

Genette places focalization under the heading of ‘mood’, whereas his analysis of ‘voice’ includes ‘the categories of time of the narrating, narrative level and “person” (that is, relations between the narrator – plus, should the occasion arise, his [sic] or their narrate[s]—and the story he [sic] tells).’\(^{159}\)

Genette’s category of ‘person’ overlaps in some respects with the concept of ‘point of view’.

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\(^{155}\) Genette, pp 189-90.
\(^{156}\) Choi, p 642.
\(^{157}\) Genette, p 189.
\(^{158}\) Ibid.
\(^{159}\) Ibid, p 215, Genette’s emphasis.
**Point of view**

Genette eschews the term, ‘point of view’, claiming that many analyses of point of view (prior to his work):

suffer from a regrettable confusion between what I call here *mood* and *voice*, a confusion between the question *who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?* and the very different question *who is the narrator?* – or, more simply, the question *who sees?* and the question *who speaks?*\(^{160}\)

Thus Genette makes a clear distinction between focalization and narrating.

The post-structuralist narratologist, Susan Sniader Lanser, does not reject the term ‘point of view’ as Genette does (at least not in her earlier work) but she admits there are difficulties in its definition. Hinting at both its technical and political implications, Lanser writes:

At the very least, the notion of point of view subsumes those aspects of narrative structure that concern the mode of presenting and representing speech, perception, and event; the identities of those who speak and perceive; their relationships with one another and with the recipients of their discourses; their attitudes, statuses, personalities, and beliefs.\(^{161}\)

More recently, however, Lanser (1992) gives preference to the term, ‘narrative voice’ (see below). Although the term ‘point of view’ is still used in creative

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\(^{160}\) Genette, p 186, Genette’s emphasis.  
writing practice in this country\textsuperscript{162} I will avoid this term as, like Genette, I find it both too overarching and too inconsistently applied to be useful in the context of this particular discussion.

**Narrative voice**

As previously outlined, Genette uses the rubric of voice to deal with what he calls the *narrating instance*, which he again divides into the categories of *time of the narrating, narrative level* and *person*.\textsuperscript{163} While it is not my intention to elaborate on these definitions here, it can be said, in summary, that Genette’s definition of narrative voice encompasses the temporal aspects of narration and the hierarchical relationships between narrator and characters, and narrator and narratee.

Lanser, while acknowledging structuralist theories such as Genette’s, also draws attention to the feminist literary interpretation of voice, an interpretation much more concerned with the sociopolitical context in which a particular text is generated and the social situation and gender of the character(s)/narrator(s) within the text, than with structuralist definitions of narrative. Indeed, in her earlier work, Lanser (1981) has criticized structuralist narrative analysis for its intentional ignorance of extraliterary context:

I would like to note several drawbacks to the formalist-structural approach: a concentration on the quantifiable and on


\textsuperscript{163} Genette, p 215.
binary oppositions; avoidance of what appears at this stage of 
research to be ‘intuitive’ because its definition is still imprecise; 
a tendency to grapple primarily with surface structures of the 
text; adherence to a supposedly value-free methodology; and, 
most critically, an isolation of texts from extraliterary contexts 
and from their ideological base. 164

Rather than completely abandoning structuralist theory, Lanser (1992) argues 
for an approach to narrative that incorporates both feminist and structuralist 
principles: ‘With a few exceptions, feminist criticism does not ordinarily 
consider the technical aspects of narration, and narrative poetics does not 
ordinarily consider the social properties and political implications of narrative 
voice . . . These incompatible tendencies . . . can offer fruitful 
counterpoints.’ 165 According to Lanser, such counterpoints are highlighted by 
Bakhtin’s theory of the novel as a social and dialogical discourse:

When these two approaches to “voice” [the structural and the 
feminist] converge in what Mikhail Bakhtin has called a 
“sociological poetics,” it becomes possible to see narrative 
technique not simply as a product of ideology but as ideology 
itslef: narrative voice, situated at the juncture of “social position 
and literary practice,” embodies the social, economic, and 
literary conditions under which it has been produced. 166

Lanser argues the case for a broad approach to narrative voice; an approach

166 Ibid, p 5.
which includes an appreciation of the historical and political factors that might have influenced not only the themes of the text but also the narrative style.
Brief stay chronicles a twenty-four hour period in the lives of a family of four women; Mrs Johnson and her three adult daughters, Jeanne, Anne and Nore. Through access to each woman’s thoughts as they go about their daily routine, the reader gradually uncovers a family tragedy that occurred some twenty-seven years before, when three-year old Pierre, the younger brother of Jeanne and Anne, was drowned at sea while in their care. (The twenty-four hour period of the novel in fact turns out to be the anniversary of the day Pierre’s mutilated body was washed to shore.) Mrs Johnson now lives in a state of permanent anxiety, often displaced onto her three daughters and the general state of the world. Her second husband, Momo, a slightly menacing background character, has a partially disfigured face, the cause of which no-one in the family, not even his wife, seems to understand. Jeanne, having for years travelled the world as a humanitarian worker, has settled in Buenos Aires with her husband, Diego, and is trying to become pregnant. Anne lives alone in Paris, where she works as a researcher in the area of neurolinguistic programming, testing the ability of babies to recognize the phenomes of their parents’ language. She also experiences psychotic delusions about being recruited by aliens and waits to be one day summoned to the ‘mothership’. Nore, the youngest, was born after Pierre’s death and, although never told of the existence of a brother, is subconsciously aware of some collective family history to which she is an outsider. She lives with her mother in Momo’s house on the Basque coast but
takes her newly-met lover to the old Johnson family home, now empty and haunted, presumably by Pierre’s ghost. John Johnson, the Irish-born father who left the family when Nore was young, now lives an isolated existence in Gilbraltar, where he supervises a wind-generated electricity plant. The family are geographically, temporally and emotionally fractured and it seems the wounds will never heal. The novel climaxes with Jeanne, during a momentary lapse of concentration following a session with her therapist, driving her car into the Tigre River and drowning. In the final scene, the reader leaves Mrs Johnson poised to answer the phone call that will bring her the news of Jeanne’s death.
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