

'The Mother of All Crimes': Infanticide in the Antipodes

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SUMMARY

Our understanding of historical fiction as a genre has grown immeasurably since work of early theorists like Georg Lukacs and Avrom Fleishman, evolving with the late twentieth century innovations into novels that were not only historical but also post-modern, feminist and re-visionist. Such developments have increased the critical prestige of historical novels, affording them greater cultural value for literary analysis.

Feminist scholarship, in particular, has increasingly recognised the silencing and misrepresentation of women in history. The historical novel is often seen as a means of redressing this silencing. My research asks why historical fiction is so fruitful for writers addressing the misrepresentation or silencing of women's voices from the past.

More specifically, my project deals with reclaiming a voice for one such silenced woman. Mary McLauchlan was transported from Scotland to Van Diemen's Land. She became pregnant while on assignment as a domestic servant and was sent back to the female factory for that crime. She was tried and found guilty of infanticide after the death of her infant and became the first woman executed in Van Diemen's Land in 1830.

This thesis consists of a creative work in the form of a novel, *Precious Little*, and an accompanying exegesis. The exegesis details the initial questions and concerns I had about writing a historical novel based on the life of a real woman from the past. My exegesis documents my creative journey from the initial topic selection to the completion of the novel. It deals with questions of how a historical novel, written to give a voice to a woman who has been silenced, should deal with the inherent tension between truth and fiction. I analyse the growing representation of women in Australian historical novels, as well as case studies dissecting three novels that deal with murderous women. This research reveals a wide range of methods for writing and representing women in historical novels and that the motivations for choosing these methods may differ widely. Finally, I dedicate a chapter to detailing the archival research on which my novel is based.

The issues identified in this critical work are then applied to the creative work in the form of the historical fiction novel *Precious Little*. My thesis identifies the different ways women are represented in historical fiction and what the genre can offer in regards to depicting women in more nuanced ways. With the increase in feminist scholarship and the deepening in understanding of history itself as a text rather than an unbiased record of how things happened, writers of historical novels have been able to reinsert strong female characters into their novels. Women are given the space to be complex and human in historical fiction in ways that traditional history has not always allowed. Exploring the methods and motives of writers who have similar aims to mine has helped me to make the narrative choices necessary to complete my novel and provide a more complex and nuanced exploration of the life and death of Mary McLauchlan.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed.....

Date.....

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EXEGESIS

1. Introduction

Alessandro Manzoni describes the endeavour of writing historical fiction as re-creating ‘not just the bare bones of history, but something richer, more complete. In a way, you want him to put the flesh back on the skeleton that is history.’¹ These words resonate with what I am trying to achieve. However, as Manzoni notes, this task is problematic for a fiction writer. As Jerome de Groot says, ultimately coming to agree with Manzoni, ‘[t]he genre is fundamentally fractured, contradictory and flawed.’² During the years I have spent writing this thesis, I have begun to feel that way too; fractured, contradictory and flawed. The inherent contradictions involved in the writing of a historical novel have forced me to think deeply about a number of issues centring on historical fiction. The resulting thesis covers a lot of ground, as each path I took to with purpose seemed to fork before me. Instead of traveling down one path and answering one question, it was more useful for my creative practice to travel many paths and cast a wide net.

Ultimately, I kept coming back to Manzoni’s words. In the wake of the history wars, and *The Secret River*/Kate Grenville furore the writing of historical fiction in Australia has become fraught with tension. I am well aware that there is a difference between the actuality of the past and the narratives we shape it into – both in novels that fictionalise history and in more traditional historical texts. I do not wish to rehash the Kate Grenville saga, (many people have done so, including Sarah Pinto³) but will state that I find Grenville’s response to the debate problematic. As Tom Griffiths has said: ‘In her public commentaries, she seemed to want it both ways – to wield the oblique power of fiction and the cachet of a researched past. She wanted to join the game of history but to play by different rules.’⁴ In writing my novel, I wanted to put the flesh on the skeleton – definitely not write history.

In my case, the skeleton was the story of Mary McLauchlan, the first woman hanged in Van Diemen’s Land (now Tasmania) for the crime of infanticide in 1830. Mary

¹ Alessandro Manzoni trans. Sandra Bermann, *On The Historical Novel* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984) p.67-68

² Jerome de Groot, *The Historical Novel*

³ Sarah Pinto, ‘Emotional histories and historical emotions: Looking at the past in historical novels’ *Rethinking History*, Vol. 14, No. 2, June 2010, 189–207

⁴ Tom Griffiths, ‘On the frontier: the intriguing dance of history and fiction’ online at <http://theconversation.com/on-the-frontier-the-intriguing-dance-of-history-and-fiction-40326> accessed 25/1/17

was a Scottish convict transported from Glasgow for theft by housebreaking. Mary became pregnant while assigned as a servant, and when the pregnancy was discovered she was sent back to the Cascades female factory. She gave birth in the privy to a child that did not live. She was charged with infanticide, found guilty and then hanged.

In this PhD I have tried to give a nuanced representation to a woman from the past, adding the ‘flesh’ as Manzoni describes. Starting with the known details, I created a character. In doing so I offer an interpretation of the way things may have been. We know that Mary gave birth to a child but we can’t know absolutely who the father was, or what circumstances led to the infant’s death.

I am frustrated by my inability to know how things were. How things may have been is as close as I could get. The past happened in a specific way. The narratives of history don’t necessarily represent that specific way. There is a difference between what happened and what has been recorded. There will always be gaps in the historical record. Margaret Atwood has said of the historical record and her writing of *Alias Grace* that ‘in the parts left unexplained-the gaps left unfilled-I was free to invent. Since there were a lot of gaps, there is a lot of invention.’⁵ If I had not filled in gaps when writing the novel the narrative that results would not have been as satisfying to a reader. In fact, the novel may have been even more satisfying had I been able to let go of my frustrations at my inability to know the events. Then I could have made intuitive leaps to answer questions that remain unanswered in the text.

I set out to write a novel steeped in truth and had intended to be uncompromising about this, but in the end, I know my novel is not the truth. In addition, my Mary McLaughlan is not the same as the one that lived – but I hope that she feels real and that I have resurrected something of her, even if the real woman may be lost to us forever. In the writing of my novel I found that while filling gaps *may* be necessary to construct satisfying narratives, resurrecting women’s voices also has the important function of disrupting the patriarchal narrative of grand national histories and reminding us that the women were there too.

⁵ Margaret Atwood, ‘In Search of Alias Grace: On Writing Canadian Historical Fiction’ *American Historical Review* December:1998 p.1515

I came across Mary McLauchlan's story early in my research. In truth, her story made me uncomfortable and still does. It was the briefest mention in Kay Daniels' *Convict Women* that introduced the story to me. Daniels made it clear that she didn't condemn Mary's actions rather that she saw her infanticidal actions as a refusal to be a passive victim.

Contemplating infanticide is unnerving. It is one of the most serious taboos of society: something that goes against the maternal nature that women are supposedly born with. And yet, in thinking about the possibility that it was rape after rape that led to Mary's pregnancy and that society didn't care about the risks convict women faced in domestic service, I found myself dwelling on the story —on all of the possibilities that could have existed in her story.

At first, I thought about what scenario was most likely to have influenced her actions; and then I questioned whether she had indeed committed the crime. In the end, her guilt or innocence in the infanticide case is not my primary interest. I wanted to reclaim space for this story, and for this woman that history barely remembers.

As a result, the creative component of the thesis is *Precious Little* a novel about Mary McLauchlan, which was written using archival evidence as primary research.

In Chapter 1 of the exegesis I will provide a brief overview of the problems women have faced in historical representation such as a lack of archival evidence and why they have turned to the historical novel to combat the problem.

In Chapter 2, I will analyse *Alias Grace*, *Burial Rites* and *Slammerkin*, three novels that exemplify the work in Chapter 1. The three novels clearly demonstrate why the historical fiction genre can be of value to writers wanting to put women back into history. I chose these three novels because while they vary in scope and how much historical evidence was available or was considered by the authors, they bring into focus the issues of chapter 1 and then build further upon those ideas. Toni Morrison's powerful and redemptive novel of infanticide and slavery *Beloved* does not appear in this analysis. Being a slave and being a convict, or criminal woman, are not the same thing – one involves choices the other just being born. *Beloved's* dedication to 'Sixty

Million and more'⁶ speaks to the devastating enormity of the history it details. While being a truly incredible novel, it doesn't fit as well as a case study as it is less aligned stylistically with what I set out to achieve in my own work. Had I chosen to focus on novels that deal with infanticide, *Beloved* would have been the most important text for me, but I chose to focus on novels that present the most fruitful case studies when considering how I want my own work to be read. I want my work to be more about Mary's whole life and the representation of her as a 'criminal woman' than just about the infanticide. The infanticide isn't intended as the focus of *Precious Little*.

In Chapter 3, I will focus on the problems of women's history in Australia. I look at women's representation in history and note the increase and varied interpretation of our nation's women. When looking at early Australian historical novels and comparing them to recent texts I discover that the representation of women in our historical novels has not progressed as much as expected, or some have allowed nuance in some female characterisations at the expense of other characters both female and male. Particularly when discussing convict women, it is interesting to note why some are allowed depth and others reduced to cliché and surface representation, (even sometimes in the same text). This is where convict women and criminal women may differ. Criminality allows a writer scope to work with psychological depth and really examine what motivates a character. Convicts in fiction are still often labelled as deviants or victims and perhaps limiting writers from delving any deeper.

In Chapter 4, I will look closely at the story of Mary McLauchlan and examine the archival records that tell us her story. I travelled to Scotland and Tasmania to conduct my research. I found some information that contradicted previous accounts of Mary's life. As a result, I double-checked all information to see what I could substantiate myself. The information relating to a second and separate instance of theft by housebreaking that Mary was charged with before she was transported is one of the most significant finds. This tells me that she was not the victim of an overly harsh sentence, which is what has been suggested about her conviction previously. This information certainly coloured my depiction of Mary and how I came to think of her crimes. It also indicated just how unstable the historical record, or the interpretation

⁶ Toni Morrison, *Beloved* 'Dedication' (London: Picador, 1988)

of it, can be. The more I wrote the novel the more I had to let go of the fear of veering from known fact—or else run the risk of writing a novel that illuminated no more of an idea of Mary the person, or her story than the historical record did. In putting the flesh back on the bones, the act of writing the novel becomes a purely creative work rather than true history or creative non-fiction.

2. Women in Historical Discourse

Women are not central in traditional grand narrative histories. Many feminist historians, from Sheila Rowbotham to Laurel Thatcher Ulrich to Clare Wright, have noted that until recent decades women in history, when represented at all, are fleeting apparitions. When women are acknowledged in historical texts, the focus is rarely on them. In part this can be explained when we realise that our history is one of emperors and kings, of admirals and generals, of landowners and powerbrokers. In a patriarchal society, which has explicitly excluded women from positions of power, it is small wonder that women have had difficulty finding their place in history. There are of course, notable exceptions, where women of prominence are discussed at length, although these women seem to be the exceptions that prove the rule (such as Mary Queen of Scots, Anne Boleyn etc.).

In Australian history, this lack of representation is apparent. We know about some notable women from our nation's past. In terms of convict history, we know a little bit about a few women. Examples include Mary Reibey (featured on our \$5 note – although people still may not know who she is), Mary Bryant (famous for escaping), and Margaret Catchpole (her life story forms the basis for the novel *Scapegallows*). However, their representation and familiarity fades to insignificance compared to their male counterparts like Arthur Phillip, George Arthur or Alexander Pearce. Scan the index of any history book and you will find more female names attached to ships and places than for recognition of their historical roles.

Glenda Sluga calls for us 'to remember that women were there, even in the High Politics of international history, and that historians have been responsible for eliding them from our memory of the past each time they have failed to remember to look for them. The project of adding women and stirring is about exposing the processes by which they were made absent; about forcing state, non-state and personal, national and international archives into conversation; and about integrating the evidence of women's presence into the narratives we have of international history, politics, and ideas.'⁷

⁷ Glenda Sluga, 'Add Women and Stir' *Humanities Australia* 5:2014 p.72

While maybe not direct attempts to ‘add women and stir’, there are examples of an increased focus on women in many history books in Australia. Clare Wright’s recent book *The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka* is an example of the growing quest to bring Australian women in historical periods to prominence. In the convict field Sian Rees’ *The Floating Brothel: The Extraordinary True Story of an Eighteenth-Century Ship and Its Cargo of Female Convicts* is an example of this quest. Work like Wright’s and Rees’ shows that there is an unfair divide between how much we know about men that were not that remarkable when compared to what we know about everyday women. The attempt to address this imbalance is reflected in recent fiction, with increasing focus on female historical protagonists. Historical novels can be used to reinsert these forgotten women from history and their stories into our understanding of the past.

Since Hayden White established that the historian acts as interpreter of facts to produce narratives of the past, and consciously or unconsciously changes them in so doing, we understand that narrative history becomes different to the actuality of the past. In his book on Hayden White, Herman Paul simplifies this concept: ‘Instead of revealing the true essence of past reality, historical narrative imposes a mythic structure on the events it purports to describe.’⁸ Australian historians Ann Curthoys and John Docker wrote *Is History Fiction?* which addresses this very question. However, an historian should approach the construction of narrative from historical facts in a very different way to a novelist.

In her essay ‘When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision’ Adrienne Rich writes that ‘Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival.’⁹ If we consider history as that text that needs to be viewed with fresh eyes and entered from a new critical direction we see how the historical novel becomes an important genre for women’s writing in offering a space where women can be central rather than the ‘other’ that they become in historical discourse.

⁸ Herman Paul, *Hayden White: The Historical Imagination* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011) p. 113

⁹ Adrienne Rich, ‘When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision’ *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978* (London: Virago, 1980) p.35

We need the new direction that Rich speaks of because of the lack of historical evidence, or the bias in existing historical sources, which makes representing women's stories more difficult. Lack of non-biased evidence has limited the completeness of representations of women in traditional historical writing. It may be diminishing other aspects of the historical novel to refer to the idea of 'gap filling' as the main area where historical novels differ from other history texts. It would, however, also be negligent to underestimate the importance of this filling-in of the unknown and the use of imagination in historical novels to recover these forgotten spirits of the past. The picture of women in the past can be more complete in historical novels because of the opportunity to invent in the gaps of the historical records.

To understand the value of the historical novel for women we first need to appreciate, as Eric L. Berlatsky has stated that, 'history is not merely a representation of past reality, but is also a discursive production of a patriarchy that defines what is important enough to be considered history.'¹⁰ Berlatsky explains further by saying, 'historical discourse makes what is selected *seem* essential, while omitting other potentially important facts.'¹¹ This idea becomes central to the writing of much historical fiction. Such an argument, spotlighting the constructed nature of narrative history itself and showing that the recording of history is a selective process where decisions are made about what to include and exclude, can be used to refute claims that women are not seen in history because they did little of importance. Common responses to critiques of the absence of women have been for historians to say that men are the nation-runners, the fighters of war and the rulers of the world. Such responses imply that if women are invisible in historical narratives that is because they did not act in ways that were important enough to be recorded. Not only do we now see that narrative history is constructed, and therefore the lack of women's stories stems from a choice to omit (even if a subconscious one), but we also recognise that often women were deliberately and systematically excluded from

¹⁰ Eric L. Berlatsky *The Real, The True and The Told: Postmodern Historical Narrative and the Ethics of Representation* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press:2011) p.44

¹¹ *Ibid* p.41

positions of power and positions that would allow them to be celebrated in histories of the victors.

Diana Wallace has noted her own 'disillusionment with history as it was taught in school because it seemed to include almost no women at all.'¹² Wallace offers this as a key reason as to why women have turned to the historical novel 'as a discourse within which women can be made central.'¹³

However, when looking at any number of historical novels it becomes difficult to neatly assess women writers and women characters in historical fiction. In reference to *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, *Alias Grace* by Margaret Atwood and *The Kitchen God's Wife* by Amy Tan, Kon-yu says, '[i]n the broadest sense texts such as those listed above, use fiction to tell stories about women whose narratives have previously been misrepresented or marginalised within our culture, although they vary greatly in both form and style.'¹⁴

This variance is not surprising. As Wallace notes women use historical novels to cast light on the 'unrecorded lives of marginalised and subordinated people, especially women ... and to shape narratives which are more appropriate to their experiences than those of conventional history.'¹⁵ Different forms and styles will be required to tell each story and this is something that a writer can adopt even within the historical fiction genre.

Concerns of the present in historical novels

Historical novels have been used to address taboo subjects like the infanticide and slavery in *Beloved*, and to examine the present through the guise of the past.

P. N. Furbank suggests:

The historical novelist can hardly hope to illuminate the past. What he or she can do, on the other hand, is use the past to cast light on the present – to highlight those

¹² Diana Wallace, *The Woman's Historical Novel: British Women Writers 1900-2000*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) p.ix

¹³ Ibid p.ix

¹⁴ Natalie Kon-yu 'The recounting of a life is a cheat': Unreliable narration and fragmentary memory in historical fiction' *TEXT* 16:1 April 2012 <http://www.textjournal.com.au/april12/konyu.htm> [Accessed 12 September 2015]

¹⁵ Wallace, *The Woman's Historical Novel: British Women Writers 1900-2000* p2

parts of our way of thinking that were not known to a past period – and this is the secret of historical novels that succeed.¹⁶

While I don't agree that the historical novelist cannot illuminate the past it is true that the present is always at play in some way in historical novels. Margaret Atwood has made similar claims when saying that 'we have to write out of who and where and when we are ... and disguise it how we may.'¹⁷ Katherine Cooper and Emma Short write that 'It is through maintaining this co-existence of two different historical moments that historical fictions reveal something crucial about each – the moment of production and the moment being (re)produced.'¹⁸ Historical fictions are necessarily of the time in which they are produced. Feminist writers can write about an issue that may be of great import in their own times but by choosing to write about it as a historical novel and using the past as a mirror to their own times, they can show that the issues that we may believe to have been resolved or moved on from are still prevalent.

This is of particular importance in historical novels where feminist writers can explore issues of the present that may be too politically charged to discuss using our current times. The use of a historical setting might be a way to address current issues through the framework of the historical novel. Examples of the types of issues being addressed in historical novels include the continued policing of women's bodies by governments and censorship bodies, rights to contraception, abortion, sexual freedom as well as violence against women, race issues, religious intolerance, political corruption and the impact of war.

Characterisation and Historical Accuracy

The way in which women are represented in fiction is reflective of broader social and cultural attitudes towards women. As a result, characterisation in historical novels is important for women writers. In life, women are driven to their actions by a wide range of motivations and yet in fiction, female characters are not always depicted in fully rounded, complex ways. Women may very often be depicted as lacking agency, being constrained by convention or conforming to simplistic stereotypes in ways that

¹⁶ P N Furbank, 'On the Historical Novel' *Raritan* 23.3 (Winter 2004) p.112

¹⁷ Margaret Atwood, 'In Search of Alias Grace: On writing Canadian Historical Fiction' *The American Historical Review* 103:5 (Dec., 1998) p.1504

¹⁸ Katherine Cooper and Emma Short *The Female Figure in Contemporary Historical Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) p.7

may be seen as reflecting historical or current assumptions. Historical fiction can offer writers the chance to draw deeper characterisations.

The historical records often provide limited evidence of women's history, and sometimes the records that do exist are informed by bias or apathy towards women. As Emily Sutherland has written that '[w]riters' imaginations are instructed and stimulated by their research, but it cannot then be assumed that all the accounts found in primary or secondary sources faithfully depict a person. Such descriptions may be coloured by politics, gender, malice or admiration.'¹⁹ The records detailing the lives of women who transgress are often coloured in these ways. For my novel I know that when I look at archival sources, convict women were seen as lower creatures and it was assumed that they were all prostitutes. Therefore, I must question the validity of the reports they offer on convict women, and Mary McLauchlan specifically.

On the process of writing a PhD novel about three famous historical women, Heloise d'Argenteuil, Hildegard of Bingen and Eleanor of Aquitaine, Sutherland says

I can research the writings of my three women, read accounts by contemporaries, and subsequent academic papers, as well as biographies and historical novels and while from these I glean and reap, the final depiction of the women is my harvest.²⁰

This ownership of the characterisation is important to mention. I feel freer in the novel to create Mary knowing I am writing fiction. While I have conducted research to write this novel when it comes to creating Mary so little remains of this woman and nothing in her own words that were I not free to invent writing about her would be almost impossible. Although it is a difficult task, there is a certain pleasure in the reconstruction and it might be part of what attracted me in the first place, as Margaret Atwood has said, 'the less is truly known, the more room for a novelist.'²¹

In talking about historical accuracy Sutherland says, '[w]hile the writer of historical fiction has a responsibility to respect the truth as far as it is known, it is in taking the story beyond what is known that creativity is called into play. Part of that creative

¹⁹ Emily Sutherland, 'Historical Lives in Fiction, Characters in Fiction: Are they the same people?' *TEXT* 11: 1 (2007) <<http://www.textjournal.com.au/april07/sutherland.htm>> [Accessed 12 September 2015]

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Margaret Atwood, 'Bring Up the Bodies by Hilary Mantel – review', *The Guardian* 5 May 2012

process is the creation and depiction of the historical character in the novel.’²² Many writers including Sarah Dunant, Margaret Atwood and Hilary Mantel argue that writers do have an ethical responsibility when writing about real people. Mantel has spoken several times of her writing process and the need for accuracy to historical records, saying ‘I owe these characters as much scholarship as I can contrive, and all my care to try to get them right.’²³ For me, when I chose to write about a real woman I decided to be as true to the records as I could. While I still question why a writer would choose to write a historical novel with no intention of remaining accurate to the past where possible, I understand now how difficult a prospect this is and while I will not knowingly misrepresent the past I will undoubtedly make mistakes unknowingly. Therefore, I would no longer judge a historical novel as successful or otherwise based on an adherence to known facts. If the author has changed well-known facts the expectation would be that there were specific reasons to do so. When dealing with lesser-known historical figures, the accuracy may be hard to judge as a reader anyway. Writers can also draw attention to the inconsistencies in the historical material in the novel. Atwood does so in *Alias Grace* by including contradictory newspaper reports from Grace’s trial – one that represents her as the scheming whore using her sexuality to convince McDermott to do her bidding, while the other represents her as an angelic dimwit easily coerced by McDermott into committing the crimes and too stupid to have conceived of them herself. From the inclusion of both views, we see that it is unlikely that she is either. Her true character more likely falls somewhere between the two.

Ethically, a fiction writer doesn’t have the same responsibility to provide evidence or be transparent about inventions in their text, providing it is represented as fiction. Many historical novelists want to have it both ways though – they want to claim accuracy and authenticity for their representations and also want to be free to invent and claim that as their artistic truth. How much credence we give to their truth claims then should come into consideration.

²² Sutherland, ‘Historical Lives in Fiction, Characters in Fiction: Are they the same people?’ *TEXT* 11: 1 (2007)

²³ Hilary Mantel, ‘About the Author: Making It New’ *Wolf Hall* (Hammersmith: Fourth Estate, 2010) p.7

Historical novels are always going to be untrue in many ways. Even history itself may be seen to be inaccurate and therefore questions of how one can be accurate to a flawed medium can be raised. Some writers may be doing something more complex than just trying to rediscover a lost story from the past. For these writers using the historical novel as their foundation, historical accuracy may not be as important. Hermione Eyre's *Viper Wine* is an example of this. Eyre deliberately includes anachronisms – the front cover portrait of Venetia Stanley shows her holding a smart phone. She also uses quotes from modern women and one of her main characters quotes Bowie lyrics. These intrusions of the present tie Venetia's pre-occupation with beauty to the modern day. We read about the Viper Wine concoction Venetia takes and think it's vile – but then we read about liposuction or collagen injections and realise that we haven't advanced as far as we'd like to think.

In many types of historical fiction from historical romance through to re-visionist novels, writers often allow female characters a greater level of agency than would have been historically permitted. They may not be able to choose entirely for themselves as the patriarchal power system will always limit their options, but choices can still be made by female characters, and are made that seal their fates. The system may remain unfair in its treatment of women but those who transgress and continue to make choices (even when no good choice is available to them) are sometimes the most interesting characters to write about.

Postmodern historical novels

The historical novel is a fertile space for women's imagination and for re-thinking ideas about history because of the gaps that the official record leaves. Historians can use their craft to talk about what the gaps in the records *may* indicate but historical novelists are free to invent. Much has been written about the post-modern nature of many historical novels. Linda Hutcheon questioned whether the past existed as one all inclusive-experience and whether it was a stable thing. Then the new historicists argued that the past did exist in a stable realm but our ability to know that past from our present through the texts of history may not be possible. Faced with this understanding of the past, historical novelists can only tell the stories they feel able to, and post-modernism is a theory through which these writers can explore these

ideas. Postmodernism offers new possibilities for representing the past and new stories can be told following its principles.

Theorists, such as Jerome de Groot, note the obsessive inclusion of real documents in postmodern historical novels. Even historical novels that don't align with the more experimental aspects of postmodernism may include real historical documents that draw attention to the artificiality of the world of the novel as well as make the claim that the story they are telling is based on real events. In the case of a novel like *Possession*, the material that may be perceived by readers as evidence that the story is based in truth, such as the letters and writings of the poets Randolph Henry Ash and Christabel LaMotte, is itself an invention. Without these invented artefacts, the two modern protagonists would not collide. This invention adds another layer to the complexity of the novel that Byatt has created.

Many of these post-modern novels are also feminist texts. Once women lost trust in history's ability to accurately present their past to them, postmodernism offered a new way to think about the past. A chance to be consider history as subjective, not objective, to consider multiple truths instead of one overarching truth and the possibility of telling histories of the subaltern. This is important to me because I set out to write a novel based on a real person from the past. My plan was to use the historical records to discover as much 'truth' as I could (this research is detailed in Chapter 5). What I found was that 'truth' becomes a complicated concept especially when viewed with the ideas of postmodernism in mind. This meant that the evidence that I did find couldn't be taken at face value. It made me call into question the instability of the historical representations and question the biases of those who were in charge of the way convict women were represented.

There are many kinds of historical novels and while mine isn't explicitly postmodern this genre provides some of the most interesting examples of historical fiction. Ansgar Nünning says 'the high estimation in which both the postmodernist historical novels that have won the Booker Prize ... and other innovative examples of this genre ... are currently held, may in part be attributed to the fact that the crossing of boundaries and the blurring of genre distinctions have opened up new possibilities

for representing the past.’²⁴ These new possibilities may also allow for the representation of new stories. As Nünning notes ‘Such postmodernist historical novels remind the reader that history, while it exists as a continuous collective process, is accessible to men and women only as a narrative produced by human beings who remember and interpret events from their particular points of view.’²⁵ The point of view of most traditional history is from above, while the historical novel offers the chance to tell a version of history from below.

Jerome de Groot has observed that ‘[h]istorical novels are obsessed with paratexts: footnotes, additions, acknowledgement, bibliographies, author information, maps. From these materials we can gather a huge amount of information about the text itself, how it is being presented and represented.’²⁶ This is definitely true of historical novels with feminist agendas as they use the interplay between texts, sometimes fictional like poems and novels, and sometimes archival records which lay closer to factual, or even newspaper accounts from the time they write of (these are sometimes hard to label as fiction or fact and it is common to find contradictory newspaper articles on the same subjects). The effect of these multiple texts being laid together can be to encourage readers to think about the reality of the past and how this aligns with the idea of the past represented in ‘grand narrative history’, how we access the past through the records and at the potential for multiple representations of the past and the people who lived in it.

Drawing attention to the postmodern features at play in these novels Nünning mentions the use of ‘fragmentation, discontinuity, indeterminacy, plurality, metafictionality, heterogeneity, intertextuality’²⁷ as shared features. The reasons for using these techniques may differ. Nünning however points out that ‘[t]he revisionist impulse to rewrite history from the point of view of those traditional historiography tended to ignore becomes particularly apparent in some historical novels by women authors.’²⁸ Several novels are included in Nünning’s argument including Pat Barker’s *The Century’s Daughter* and Zoe Fairbairns’s family saga *Stand* as well as

²⁴ Ansgar Nünning ‘Crossing borders and blurring genres: Towards a typology and poetics of postmodernist historical fiction in England since the 1960s’, *European Journal of English Studies*, 1:2, 1997), 217-238 p.217-18

²⁵ Ibid p.227

²⁶ Jerome De Groot *The Historical Novel* (London: Routledge Taylor& Francis Group, 2010) p. 63

²⁷ Nünning p.218

²⁸ Ibid p222

Eva Figs' *The Seven Ages* and Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry*. Although these novels are quite different from one another, Nünning nonetheless notes

Instead of contenting themselves, however, with reconstructing specific areas of women's history, these novels exemplify a specifically feminist approach to history, politics, gender, and historiography. Fairbairns's novel puts special emphasis on such feminist issues as women's rights movements, the sexual double standard, women dying in child-birth, and the inequality of men's and women's education²⁹

Dealing with these issues in historical novels sometimes draws attention to their lack of representation in traditional narrative history, or through the use of post-modern techniques allows them to be considered in a new light.

When he talks more specifically about *The Seven Ages* and *Sexing the Cherry* Nünning writes

Approaching the past from a feminist point of view, these revisionist historical novels describe and polemicize not only against the discrimination against women in former periods, but also against the thoroughness of the erasure of women from the historical record.³⁰

Historical fiction lends itself to the feminist agenda in that it allows writers to rediscover forgotten histories of women, and give voices to those who have been silenced and ignored or marginalised in the written records of history. As such, many historical novels are based on the lives of real women. *Girl Waits With Gun* by Amy Stewart fleshes out the story of the Kopp sisters, and in particular Constance Kopp who became one of the first female deputy sheriffs in America. Carrie Brown's *The Stargazer's Sister* is based on the life of Caroline Herschel, sister of William Herschel. Both were astronomers, but he is the one with name recognition. Tracy Chevalier's *Remarkable Creatures* delves into the life of Mary Anning, a female pioneer in palaeontology. In these richly imagined novels, we see how these women deserve more than the footnotes they are given in traditional history.

Other novels bring the devotions of long past women to life like Robyn Cadwallader's *The anchoress* with its focus on anchoresses, nuns who lived their lives in a single room. Further examples include Sarah Dunant's three Italian Renaissance novels *The Birth of Venus*, *In the Company of the Courtesan* and *Sacred Hearts* with their close focusses on unusual young women – one who wishes to paint,

²⁹ Ibid p.222-223

³⁰ Ibid p.223

one a courtesan, and one who has been forced into a convent as a nun. Anita Diamant's *The Red Tent* is a rewriting/reworking of a Bible/biblical story from a female viewpoint; Tracy Chevalier's *Girl With a Pearl Earring* offers an answer to the mystery surrounding the model of one of the world's most famous paintings and is told from the viewpoint of a young maid. These novels show the breadth of settings and women historical fiction can be used to rediscover. They demonstrate that feminist historical fiction writers often choose to privilege subaltern subjects, those whom the dominant patriarchal historical discourse has ignored or marginalised. They aim to give life to the stories of women who could have existed.

In her book *Human Remains: A History of Dissection* Helen MacDonald despairs of her inability, as a historian, to bring the historical character of Mary McLaughlan back to life, arguing instead that she must be content to reveal 'something of the 'muddy actuality' of things.'³¹

Such 'muddy actuality' is the starting point for feminist historical novelists, who often have minimal archival material to begin their resurrection. But even when dealing with subjects with many archival records, a feminist resurrection will be different to someone who does not wish to reclaim forgotten characters of the past. This difference stems from the idea that '[h]istory seen from above and history seen from below are irreducibly different and they consequently impose radically different perspectives on the question of hierarchy.'³² This may be why as Sharon Marcus writes, '[w]omen writing historical fiction evince a willingness, typically associated with men, to tackle abstract questions of history, economics, and power, which they combine with an affinity, usually considered female, for portraying everyday life and personal relationships.'³³

The next chapter features a close analysis of three historical novels. These novels feature protagonists who are based on real women. The lives of these real women were all impacted by the legal system. Following on from the discussion in this

³¹ Helen MacDonald. *Human Remains: Episodes in Human Dissection*. (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, Australia, 2005) p. 53

³² Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1986) p.4

³³ Sharon Marcus 'Feminist Criticism: A Tale of Two Bodies' *PMLA*, 121:5 (Oct., 2006), p.1727 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25501653>.> [accessed 2 May 2014]

chapter of the possibilities historical fiction opens us for new stories to be told about the past, the next chapter will apply these ideas to the three texts as concrete examples of this theoretical framework.

3. Murderous women: An analysis of three novels

Introduction

This chapter will focus on a structural analysis of literary devices. Historical fiction allows writers to reinsert or readdress forgotten or misrepresented women from the past. As a result, feminist writers have been able to recast the view of criminal women in historical novels. In this chapter, I will analyse three novels to see the possibilities the genre holds for women writers and readers, particularly when dealing with criminal women. While these novels can be analysed through the lense of a wide range of schools and models, for the creative writer, a structural analysis of literary devices is the most pertinent to the construction of effective text. Therefore, this chapter functions as a case study for novels that are situated in the modern tradition of the feminist literary historical novel. It is not intended to examine the relationship between text and culture and politics.

Burial Rites by Hannah Kent, *Slammerkin* by Emma Donoghue and *Alias Grace* by Margaret Atwood are three examples of overtly feminist historical novels. In three very different settings and with three different characters we see how feminist historical novelists can use the form to tell new stories or offer a more complete version of stories where truths have been buried. They all feature strong female protagonists: Agnes Magnúsdóttir, Mary Saunders and Grace Marks, respectively. A close reading of these works shows how feminist historical novelists can use the form to add depth and complexity to female characters that have been represented in less detail previously, they draw attention to the instability of historical truth in traditional patriarchal history, they privilege the female experience and the female body while offering a kind of agency that these women have been robbed of historically. All three writers have attempted to shed light on a story about a woman from history where the full story is unknown.

Burial Rites by Hannah Kent is based on the last case of capital punishment in Iceland in 1830. The novel details the story of Agnes Magnúsdóttir while she is kept by a family as she awaits her death sentence. Agnes was found guilty of murder and was executed. She tells her story over time to the family who have been forced to provide a roof over her head until her execution is carried out.

Slammerkin by Emma Donoghue is based on a newspaper report of a young woman who brutally murdered her mistress with a cleaver in 1763 London. Donoghue invented freely as the true back story of this woman was largely unknown. A *Slammerkin* is an eighteenth century slang term with two definitions: a loose gown is its first meaning and a loose woman is its second. Mary is young when she loses her virtue for the sake of a ribbon. She is taken advantage of but her mother doesn't care and won't listen to reason. Mary becomes pregnant after the act and her mother makes her leave home. As Marisol Morales-Ladron observes, '[w]ith this novel Donoghue is making a case for a clearly transgressive female figure who stood out precisely because she did not fit in with the restrictions of eighteenth-century patriarchal society, and whose life was reduced to a brief and inaccurate record in the historical annals.'³⁴

In *Alias Grace* Margaret Atwood explores the story of a famous Canadian trial, where a young servant girl, Grace Marks, was tried in 1843 for murdering the gentleman and housekeeper from the property where she was working. Atwood details the Marks' family's journey from Ireland by boat, and the circumstances from which Grace arrived at the Kinnear house. In the novel Grace recounts her story to Dr Simon Jordan, an entirely fictional character. Throughout the novel we are never sure what Grace is saying out loud to Dr Jordan and what remains only in her mind. There are hints that Grace withholds certain details and is enjoying stitching together her own story from patches of her past. Atwood brings in the spiritualism that was popular at the time and creates a complicated and many layered novel from the story of Grace Marks' life.

Narrative structure

Narrative structure provides an insight into how a writer is positioning their work and the things that they hope to draw attention to in how they present the story to us. Part of this also relates to the scope of the stories in each of the novels. Again, with the scope of each work we can see what a writer might be trying to establish about the relationship of the novel to the real world events it represents.

³⁴ Marisol Morales-Ladron, 'The Representation of Motherhood in *Slammerkin*' *Irish University Review: a journal of Irish Studies*, 39:1, (Spring-Summer, 2009), p.111

Burial Rites is a focused narrative that spans the time that Agnes spends on the farm while she is waiting to for execution. Although we do learn about the past events that have shaped Agnes's life in flashbacks the main action of the story takes place after she is sentenced. The focus of the story is quite tightly on Agnes, although we do have a few scenes with the other characters where Agnes is not present. There is one with the priest, Toti, and his father. Toti has been sick and upon waking feels that he needs to get back to Agnes. His father tells him that Agnes is 'not worth the time you give her.'³⁵ This view reflects the way people seem to have felt about Agnes at the time. It helps to explain how she came to be recorded in history as a one-dimensional character. This simple quote could be applied to the subjects of many feminist historical novels. People probably felt the same about Mary McLauchlan. This is part of what motivates me to write her story. Ultimately, the narrative structure allows us to learn along with the family the truth about the events that have seen Agnes condemned to die. The narrative drive is established by the slow revelation of facts until we know what happened.

Alias Grace is a long novel and covers a greater period of time in detail than *Burial Rites*. We do read information about Agnes's early life in *Burial Rites* but in *Alias Grace* Atwood takes a lot more time with the story of Grace's early life. While it is still focussed on Grace, the world of the novel in *Alias Grace* feels more inclusive of the wider world – whereas *Burial Rites* is quite insular. When you read *Alias Grace* the world seems to expand and this allows us to know a lot about the time in which Grace lived and there are numerous characters featured – even if many are minor characters. *Burial Rites* on the other hand keeps a tight rein on the story – with precise language and period details that build the inner world of Agnes and the family. This suggests to me that Atwood is interested in Grace's story as more than just the story of a woman who was wronged by the social mores of the time she lived in. Grace's story becomes one that resonates with the story of the Canadian nation and its postcolonial population. The political situation plays more of a role in this as do the alliances of the newspapers that relate Grace's crimes, however unstable and fragmentary these accounts may be.

³⁵ Hannah Kent, *Burial Rites* (Sydney: Picador Pan Macmillan Australia Pty Limited, 2013) p. 290

Slammerkin falls somewhere between the other two novels in terms of scope. It tells of Mary's childhood quite quickly in comparison to the time spent on her story after she has been sent away by her mother. The longest section of the novel which takes place in Monmouth spans quite a short time frame, more similar to *Burial Rites* than *Alias Grace*.

The tight focus on Agnes allows Kent to create a very plausible version of this individual woman. Atwood's scope is much wider which suits the larger ideas at play in her novel. Donoghue chooses to focus mainly on Mary's life after the attack by the peddler. This attack proves to be a liminal moment in her life. The tension builds as we deal with less time in more detail in the final section of *Slammerkin*. All three techniques create narrative space for the writer to offer detailed characterisations of their historical women within the scope of the story they wish to tell. In this space the characters become three-dimensional, rather than caricatures, allowing the reader an opportunity to empathise with them. The broad sweep of the historical record offers little capacity to set the context of individual stories in this way but in historical novels writers can utilise the framing device of narrative structure to focus on particular aspects of history, at particular levels of detail, to create memorable versions of people who really existed.

Issues of authenticity

Burial Rites and *Slammerkin* offer definitive answers about exactly what happened in the past, however in *Alias Grace* Atwood refuses to do so. Kent has spoken about her feeling of connection with Agnes and her compassion for her, and perhaps this also forms part of the wish to forgive her sins, and even make excuse for them. Donoghue gives us an impetuous young woman, quick to anger and violence who pays the ultimate price. In *Slammerkin* Donoghue creates a memorable character born to a world of strict social laws. She is too intelligent to be happy with what she is given but proves unable to rise to her potential. In the end it is a tragedy of sorts and Mary Saunders' own understanding of how her choices have contributed to her ruin give the story more gravity. Atwood recognises the story of Grace as one of importance in Canadian history, and her frustration at not being able to discover what actually did happen at the Kinnear property led to the writing of a complicated work.

These writers all include archival material in their text, although the material functions differently in each novel. In *Alias Grace* the archival materials further complicates the reader's notion of what really happened. There are asylum records, newspaper accounts that contradict one another, snippets of Moodie's writings about Grace as well as quotes from a number of other novels and poems. *Alias Grace* is more of a palimpsest than the other two novels, bearing the traces of the story's rewriting, the evidence of its reconstruction. The chapters are named after the patterns of quilts – and these quilts have separate meanings. The inclusion of the newspapers records that contradict one another tear down meaning rather than help build it. The trial material included gives us yet another version of the story to digest. Then there is the writing of Susannah Moodie that shows Grace to be 'running mad' in the asylum. Then we have the fictional texts that Atwood quotes. These separate layers along with Atwood's prose all combine to create the palimpsest that is *Alias Grace*.

By contrast, in *Burial Rites*, the historical records serve to clarify and reinforce the authenticity of the story that Kent has begun with, and in a way to drive home that she has started with the bones of a true story. They indicate her research and aim to cement her authority to tell Agnes's story. *Slammerkin* makes lighter use of these records. Mary Saunders herself reads one of the tabloid representations of her life story. In response to this Donoghue writes

What did it matter what was written or not written on some smeared broadsheet, she told herself, when soon enough everyone would forget the details? Strangers might remember a trip to Monmouth to see a girl hang, but who would spare a thought, in time to come, for the whos and hows and whys? Children might remember the taste of oranges, and the greedy breathings in and out of the crowd, but nothing else. Not her name. The thought made Mary bite her lip with distress. Nameless. Oblivion. Unless her obscure and brutal story survived in some form, what proof was there that she had ever lived at all?³⁶

Donoghue's inclusion of these newspaper reports may be mainly to discredit them. As she writes in the book [t]hese men didn't want truth, they just wanted a sob story. But when they wrote down your life in their books, the terms were always theirs.³⁷ These intrusions simultaneously serve to remind us of the historical basis of the story, whilst also demonstrating that texts that we may consider to be truthful, such

³⁶ Emma Donoghue, *Slammerkin* (London: Virago Press, 2012) p.417

³⁷ *Ibid* p.403

as newspaper reports, are really only representative of what the writer of the report believes or what would sell a paper or the political affiliations of the paper itself. The idea of a story told with no bias is something that we barely have in the media today, let alone hundreds of years ago when fact-checking would not have been anywhere as easy as it is today. And yet when people read something in a newspaper, something that is presented to them as non-fiction they may be more likely to accept what is presented as truth than to question the inherent bias of the journalist.

In 1974 Atwood wrote a screenplay called *The Servant Girl* for the Canadian Broadcasting Commission (CBC) that also centred on the Grace Marks story. Relying heavily on certain representations of Grace from the past, Atwood went little deeper than characterising Grace as the *femme fatale* that some papers from the 1840s claimed her to be. While Atwood does not identify herself as a feminist the layered representation of Grace in the novel shows that she has considered that the story must have been more complicated than that in the intervening years between the CBC production and her writing of the novel.

It is a powerful thing that Atwood doesn't reveal whether she believes Grace to be innocent or guilty. When Dr Jordan goes to visit the Kinnear house at Richmond Hill to try to find evidence that Grace is either lying to him or is being truthful, and as such decide whether she is innocent or guilty he finds, like we as readers, and no doubt like Atwood as researcher that '[n]othing has been proved. But nothing has been disproved, either.'³⁸ Rather than take away from the authenticity of Atwood's representation these factors show that she has weighed up the all the evidence, which is more than the journalists of the time may have done, and this can only add to the perceived authenticity of the novel.

Kym Bryndle has written on the idea of Atwood seeking to break down the diary device in *Alias Grace* – she says Atwood has questioned who the diarist writes for in the past, which begs the question who is Grace recounting her story for?

She also draws attention to the sections where Grace refuses to, or perhaps can't, identify the truth about the complicated history that is her own past. Her recollections grow confused and, as Bryndle notes, become almost stream of consciousness as she

³⁸ Margaret Atwood, *Alias Grace* (London: Virago Press, 1997) p.451

approaches telling the reader, and Simon, a version of what ‘really’ happened with Kinnear, Nancy and McDermott. Bryndle suggests that this is Atwood’s way of drawing attention to the ultimate unreliability of the historical record and therefore the impossibility of getting to the truth – which is the exact same struggle that Atwood herself faced when she set out to write the story of Grace Marks.

Postmodernist influences

Many feminist historical novels may also seem to have postmodern elements. Although *Alias Grace* reads as far more post-modern than *Burial Rites* or *Slammerkin*, all of them contain postmodernist elements. In *Slammerkin* Mary reflects on her story being told in a newspaper article, at the end of the book when she is on her way to her execution. She is handed a paper upon which the ink is still wet. The heading is ‘*The Confession and last Dying-words of Mary Saunders*’. Mary is confused and then almost laughs at the idea that ‘It was her, a heroine in print. This was her free copy. Some scribbling hack had made it all up, every word of it.’³⁹ Mary also notes a short time later in the scene: ‘Books are full of lies.’⁴⁰ While not being extremely challenging post-modern techniques these inclusions can be read as both Donoghue’s own refutings of the reliability of the original representation of Mary in the newspapers, and also as somewhat of a confession that she has invented much in the story.

Mannon argues that in *Alias Grace*:

The incorporation of a multitude of sources, which at times contradict and at other times corroborate each other, questions the idea of ‘knowing’ and the stability of the historical record. Where these contradictory sources detail ideas about femininity in general or Grace’s character in particular, they appear to document fragmentation of identity and reflect Atwood’s interest in the debate between the idea of a knowable, unified self and a ‘more postmodern concept of an inessential self comprised entirely of influences and experiences’.⁴¹

Burial Rites encourages a stronger connection to Agnes and as such lingers with a deeper emotional resonance than that found in *Alias Grace*. We feel we can trust Agnes, whereas we know that Grace is deceiving the Doctor, and is very possibly deceiving us so while we empathise with them both, we are more likely to

³⁹ Donoghue, *Slammerkin* p.416

⁴⁰ Ibid p.416

⁴¹ Bethany Ober Mannon, ‘Fictive Memoir and Girlhood Resistance in Margaret Atwood’s *Alias Grace*’, *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 55:5, (2014) pp551-566, p.552

sympathise with Agnes. In knowing that Grace might be an unreliable narrator, we read everything with a touch of scepticism. This includes the archival materials that Atwood includes such as the newspaper accounts, and reports on Grace's behaviour from prison officials. Grace becomes just another text that we aren't sure we can trust, and don't always know how to read. Thus, Atwood highlights clearly the potential that we can never 'know' Grace just as we can never know what truly happened from our modern viewpoint.

Despite its more conventional structure and approach, Kent also conforms to the postmodern feminist strategy of 'writing beyond the ending' and drawing our attention to the gaps and silences embedded in the historical record by interleaving her fictional account with fragmentary remnants of historical texts⁴².

Historical fiction as a feminist reworking of history

There is a tradition in historical novels of women coming to their downfall by seeking to live outside of (and usually above) their station. A wish to rise in class or to become more than their parents often leads to disgrace. In *Slammerkin*, Mary notes that '[o]ther girls seemed unburdened by ambition'⁴³ and her mother's attitude was that she and Mary's father should never have left Monmouth, but that they also couldn't go back. Her mother believed that you make your bed and lie in it. Mary also notes that '[s]he suspected ambition was what was making her legs grow so long and her mouth so red.' Her red mouth is noted many times throughout the text – it seems that she gives people the idea of being a forward young woman just because of the mouth she was born with. Mary tells her mother and step-father that she has 'a wish to be something better than a seamstress or a maid.' They do not encourage her but take umbrage, thinking that she believes herself better than them.

Bethany Ober Mannon says that '*Alias Grace* has also been read in a feminist mode that critiques patriarchal society and celebrates the reclamation of lost histories that give voice to silenced women of the past.⁴⁴ By breaking down the idea of one unified historical account feminist writers make room for their own versions of history, with

⁴² Rachel Blau Duplessis, *Writing beyond the ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth Century Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985)

⁴³ Donoghue, *Slammerkin*. p. 20

⁴⁴ Ober Mannon 'Fictive Memoir and Girlhood Resistance in Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*' p.552

female narrators and privileging of female stories becoming commonplace. These narrators and the privileging of their stories become more acceptable and believable as the understanding of history as a text grows.

Atwood also sheds light on the public's voyeuristic interest in hearing about whether Grace and McDermott were in fact lovers. It seems that then, as now, sex sells. Grace notes that Dr Jordan will be very interested in those parts of the story where McDermott tries to take advantage of her, and the stories also where other gentlemen attempt to interfere with her. The public at the time were less interested in whether Grace murdered Nancy and played a role in the murder of Kinnear, and more interested in whether she used her feminine wiles to convince McDermott to act on her behalf: whether she was the *femme fatale* using her sexuality to her own ends.

Grace muses on the word murderess near the beginning of the novel. She says she'd rather be a murderess than a murderer, if they were the only choices. She also says, 'It has a smell to it, that word – musky and oppressive, like dead flowers in a vase ... It rustles, like a taffeta skirt across the floor.'⁴⁵

In becoming obsessed with Grace, Dr Jordan notes that he wouldn't have been so taken in by her had he met her before the murders had occurred. He whispers the word murderess to himself and notes that it 'has an allure, a scent almost. Hothouse gardenias. Lurid, but also furtive.'⁴⁶ This is an interesting comparison of the way the female Grace and male Dr Jordan feel about the word murderess. This also speaks to the cultural traditions of men believing women to be dangerous because of their sexual appeal and appetites.

In a section of the novel Atwood draws attention to the writings of Susannah Moodie. She visited Grace Marks at the asylum in real life and wrote about her experiences in a book. Two characters in the book, Reverend Veringer and Dr Simon Jordan discuss the work of Mrs Moodie:

“Mrs Moodie is a literary lady, and like all such, and indeed like the sex in general, she is inclined to —”

⁴⁵ Atwood, *Alias Grace* p.25

⁴⁶ Ibid p.453

‘Embroider,’ says Simon.

‘Precisely,’ says Reverend Verringer.’⁴⁷

In this section Atwood is undermining the veracity of Susannah Moodie’s writings on Grace Marks. She is also showing how men felt about women writers, and perhaps still do, in the quick way in which Moodie’s work is dismissed so easily by the two gentlemen.

In *Slammerkin*, it has been argued that ‘being a prostitute turns out to be an act of liberation that allows Mary to sidestep the roles of daughter, mother, and wife, subverting the gender and social expectations of women.’⁴⁸ Mary thinks about her clothing and make up as a mask or a disguise and doesn’t see her actions as giving anything of herself away to the men who buy her services. For someone who has longed to dress in colourful fabrics, and to avoid the types of jobs that many women had at the time, (we know of her disdain for becoming a servant or seamstress) going on the town, while seeming horrible at first, in the end becomes a profession that she doesn’t hate. ‘It was the bargain most women made, whether wife or whore, one side of the sheets or another.’⁴⁹ Mary would rather sell her body on the street than marry. She believes that ‘it wasn’t herself Mary sold, she was sure of that much. She just hired out a dress called skin.’⁵⁰ This establishes the lot of women rather economically. At the time, there were few liberated women who could live as they wished. The social mores of the time called for particular behaviours.

When Mary and her friend Doll go to watch some executions Mary notes that ‘evil women always drew a crowd.’⁵¹ This fits well with the quote from feminist historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich that ‘Well-behaved women seldom make history.’ Like in historical fiction, there is an eagerness to discuss women from the past who transgressed in straight history texts too, however in more traditional histories, these women rarely receive the even-handed approach that historical novelists take in attempting to create fully-realised characters from their traces in official documents.

⁴⁷ Ibid p.223

⁴⁸ Morales-Ladron, ‘The Representation of Motherhood in *Slammerkin*’ p.115

⁴⁹ Donoghue, *Slammerkin* p. 59

⁵⁰ Ibid p. 70

⁵¹ Ibid p.79

While Atwood deliberately doesn't state in any clear way whether she believes Grace to be guilty, it is clear that Kent believes Agnes to be largely innocent. The scene in *Burial Rites* that shows us what really happened the night the murders were committed comes towards the end of the novel. Fridrik appeared in the barn where Natan had forced Agnes to sleep. Fridrik had weapons and said he was going to kill Natan. Agnes did not believe him so went back to sleep. She awoke and noticed the light in the croft had gone out. She made her way inside and found Sigga and the child huddled together in a corner. Agnes moved into the badstofa, terrified by what she'd find there. She brought her lamp to where Fridrik indicated and 'as the light crept across the bed I saw that Petur's head was crushed. Blood darkened the pillow.'⁵² Petur is already dead when she happens across his body. As the scene continues Agnes and Fridrik shine the light over Natan where they notice that he 'was bleeding also. One side of his face looked strange, as though his cheekbone had been flattened, and what [she] thought was Petur's blood was pooling in the cavity of his neck.'⁵³ They try to communicate with Natan but they don't get much sense from him. Fridrik says that he didn't mean to do it, which is ridiculous, he came to the farm with that specific intent. Natan pulls himself off of the bed and when he's slowly moving Agnes notices, 'the way his skull had swollen, the blood that had poured down his back ... [she] cradled his head in her lap'⁵⁴ and 'saw that he would not survive the night.'⁵⁵ So Natan is already half dead and will die a slow and painful death if Fridrik or Agnes do not do something to put him out of his misery. Fridrik refuses to do anything. Then Agnes says

Natan looked up at me: his teeth were red from blood. His lips moved silently, and I understood what he was trying to say. The knife went in easily. It pierced Natan's shirt with neat rips, sounding like an ill-practised kiss – I couldn't have stopped if I'd wanted to.⁵⁶

So while Agnes did in fact deliver the final blows to Natan, they are shown to us to be an act of mercy more than anything else. This is made even clearer when, after the knife has been plunged into his flesh and left there, Agnes says, 'For a moment we stared at each other. The light from the candle caught the edge of his forehead, his

⁵² Kent, *Burial Rites* p. 300

⁵³ Ibid p. 300

⁵⁴ Ibid p. 301

⁵⁵ Ibid p. 301

⁵⁶ Ibid p. 302

eyelashes, and I was suddenly overwhelmed with gratitude – he regarded me clearly. It seemed like forgiveness.’⁵⁷

This scene offers closure, unlike in *Alias Grace* where we are offered little in the way of closure, and of which Atwood has noted that Grace Marks has ‘strong motives to narrate, but also strong motives to withhold; the only power left to her as a convicted and imprisoned criminal comes from a blend of these two motives’⁵⁸

In *Slammerkin* Donoghue also writes the murder scene. Mary Saunders discovers that her money earned by secretly prostituting herself at the local pub has been put in the church poor box by her mistress. She loses her temper and reveals the deceit with which she tricked her way into her mistress’s house. The murder isn’t premeditated and knowing Mary as we do from the book we know that she will put on a face of defiance after the fact to hide her regret. However, Donoghue doesn’t try to argue her way out of Mary’s guilt. The point seems to be telling the whole story rather than revising it and to give Mary a well-rounded characterisation rather than a single sentence explanation for why she committed the murder.

The point is not necessarily the innocence or guilt of the protagonist but the opportunity to give the story room to breathe and the characters the chance to come alive.

Privileging the female body

Writing the body has become a way for female writers to address the silences around long considered taboo subjects in their work. Men’s bodies are still not subjected to the same kind of censorship that female bodies are due to the increased sexualisation of the female form.

Women’s bodies are powerful – both as they are avoided by male writers and often represented by women writers. Women usually have the ability to carry children and give birth, although childbirth has historically been fraught with danger for women and can still be life-threatening.

⁵⁷ Ibid p. 303

⁵⁸ Margaret Atwood, ‘In Search of *Alias Grace*: On Writing Canadian Historical Fiction’ p.1515

In *Slammerkin* Donoghue notes that Mary has become a woman by saying ‘Mary had bled two months in a row now.’⁵⁹ Mary’s sexuality is something that she uses to her own advantage when she turns to prostitution. Much later in the novel when she has travelled to Monmouth she is almost happy working as a seamstress for an old friend of her mother’s. When a stranger in town knows of her past she again uses her body to prevent him from telling her new family her secret, which is her only real choice – she plans to leave eventually but needs the money she will earn as a prostitute to do so. However, upon discovery by her master she turns her back to him and lifts her skirts. She wishes him above the temptation but at the same time she knows that he might not be. She’s still disappointed when she feels him move behind her and assume the position.

Burial Rites deals with the nitty gritty of daily life – and many bodily fluids. There are numerous mentions of blood, and there’s a vividness to the writing with these inclusions. Some feminist writers mention menstruation, sex from a woman’s point of view, or like in *Burial Rites* the blood, mucus, spit and the sickness of the young girl’s mother. These bodily representations fit well with the lives of the characters in the stripped back world of their existence.

Grace says at the very end of the novel,

in less than a month I will be forty-six, and I’d thought I was well past the time for child-bearing. But unless I am much mistaken, I am now three months gone; either that or it is the change of life. It is hard to believe, but there has been one miracle in my life already, so why should I be surprised if there is another one.⁶⁰

Then she goes on to say that it might be a tumour and that she has a funny feeling thinking that she carries life or death within but doesn’t know which. If we believe that Grace is pregnant at the end of the novel this is a hopeful idea to end on. This also ties in to ideas of representing female bodies and menstruation or menopause. While Atwood refuses to definitively say whether she believes Grace committed the murders, by choosing to end on such a positive note it is possible that she is offering redemption to both the fictional character and the historical woman Grace Marks, if she did commit the murders. If the story was bound by the accuracy we expect in

⁵⁹ Donoghue, *Slammerkin* p.19

⁶⁰ Margaret Atwood, *Alias Grace* p. 533

history texts, this positive ending would not be possible as it is not known what became of Grace Marks.

We know that Mary Saunders troubles began when she became pregnant after she was taken advantage of for the sake of her red ribbon. We also know that she had an abortion and as a result can no longer carry children. As Mary Saunders is executed at the end of *Slammerkin* it doesn't end up a significant point whether she can bear children or not. However, it is not a judgement on Mary for being wicked and procuring an abortion. Her mother's old friend Mrs Jones has also had trouble carrying her children to full term and when they have been born not all have survived. Mrs Jones is by all representations a 'good girl' and as such we can't read the novel as punishing the 'bad' Mary for her life of sin. Mrs Ash, who nursed the Jones's only still living child, Hetta, and still lives with them also had a child die and has since become very religious. Donoghue's choice to include backstories for the other female characters relating to their ability to produce children and not making Mary the only one unable to do so, shows not only a realistic example but demonstrates that motherhood isn't something that good women are allowed and bad women excluded from.

Kent's Agnes Magnúsdóttir was a passionate and a sexual being. We don't get this insight into Grace Marks as much as the idea that her attitudes towards sex are not as free. This could be due to their big age difference. Agnes is a woman and Grace was a girl still when imprisoned and it sometimes seems as though being in prison the whole time has stunted her growth. At other times she seems canny as a fox and highly aware of the role people's opinion of her sexuality has played in the shape of her life. Whether people believe Grace innocent or not is connected to whether they see her as an intelligent but wicked woman who used her sexuality to get a man to do her bidding, or whether they see her as next to an idiot and too weak-willed to go against what a man told her to do. Atwood's decision to have Grace portray elements of both scenarios leaves much room for conclusions about her sexual nature to be drawn. In *Burial Rites*, Agnes was treated differently because of her sexual desires because she wasn't free to express them without condemnation as a man would be, and indeed as Natan did. Women that transgressed the social rules of their times, like

Agnes, Mary and Grace are judged severely by history. In historical fiction they are given some kind of absolution, despite their transgressions.

In *Alias Grace*, Grace's friend Mary Whitney became pregnant by one of the sons of their master and then procured an illegal abortion. She died as a result. The father of the child was the son of her master and mistress. While Mary Whitney appeared wiser than Grace she was taken in by this young man. He received no punishment at all for their dalliance, while she paid with her life. Atwood uses the historical novel to display this unjustness.

Mary Saunders' mother blames her becoming a woman so early, on life in the city. Life in the city can also partly be blamed for why Mary does the things she does (feeling intrigued by the girl with the scar on her cheek at Seven Dials who she knows is a harlot, approaching the peddler about the ribbon, turning to prostitution) but, Mary also turns to prostitution when she moves to Monmouth so the city isn't completely to blame, or the only place where Mary sells herself.⁶¹ Morales believes that, '*Slammerkin* ultimately poses the question of whether milieu plays a determining role in the development of the self. In fact, not seeing the novel in such a way would mean to agree with the ideologically dominant – and male-oriented – interpretations of the narrations of history, which have traditionally rewarded 'good-girls' meaning, respectable, and honest women and punished the 'bad ones', those who earned their livings through dishonest professions or whose morality was questionable.'⁶² Donoghue goes against these conventions several times in the novel, in detailing motherhood as previously discussed.

Women's work

Clothes (and needlework, or the ability to sew) become important in the feminist historical novel as they are demonstrated to be in *Alias Grace* and *Slammerkin*. 'Clothing not only endows Mary with the possibility of making up alternative identities, it also fulfils her ruthless wish for power.'⁶³ When Doll teaches Mary her rules the second one is 'Clothes make the woman.'⁶⁴ In another section we are told

⁶¹ Morales-Ladron, 'The Representation of Motherhood in *Slammerkin*' p.111

⁶² Ibid p 111

⁶³ Ibid p.116

⁶⁴ Donoghue, *Slammerkin* p. 76

how Mary is using her spare money to buy clothes as; ‘Clothes were as lasting as money, and sweeter to the hand and eye; they made you beautiful and others sick with envy.’⁶⁵ Clothes and women being obsessed with them could be considered frivolous, however, novels with feminist intent show that they are anything but for the women of historic periods. In a time when class was so easily discernible based on what people wore, and when sewing was one of few marketable skills that women had we come to read clothes as being very important.

In *Alias Grace* we have a sewing metaphor that ‘stitches’ its way through the whole narrative, but we also have the appearance of peonies that are made of cloth. As mentioned earlier, the structure of the novel includes sections that are named after traditional quilting patterns and each pattern had a distinct meaning and symbolises different things. *Alias Grace* becomes even more striking as a historical novel when these complex details are recognised.

At the very beginning of *Alias Grace* we have a description of Nancy’s clothes: ‘a pale dress with pink rosebuds and a triple-flounced skirt, and a straw bonnet that hid her face.’⁶⁶ Later when Grace finds out that Nancy and Mr Kinnear share a physical relationship she says that they are the wages of sin. However, that doesn’t stop her from taking Nancy’s clothes with her when she and McDermott leave. Many people believed Grace guilty because she was wearing Nancy’s clothes when they were captured. Grace certainly admired the outfits that Nancy wore.

The richness that Atwood brings to the genre and this particular story is something that straight history texts may not be able to equal. *Alias Grace*’s sewing and quilting metaphor is not only used to break down ideas of one grand narrative all-encompassing patriarchal history, it also calls attention to patch-work quilts and sewing as things that can rise to an art-form, which is a feminist idea, as in the past they have been considered just women’s work and of no artistic import.

Not only does Atwood use these sophisticated signposts to give structure to her novel, we see in many historical novels that clothing was a marker of social status. In *Slammerkin*, Mary tucks the back of her skirts up to indicate her profession. She is

⁶⁵ Ibid p. 89

⁶⁶ Atwood, *Alias Grace* p.5

surprised when she travels to Monmouth and the ladies there dress in similar attire (but don't tuck their skirts up). When she finds out, 'Mary hid a grin. The harlots all wanted to dress like ladies and the ladies returned the compliment, it seemed.'⁶⁷ This shared sense of style may indicate that these women who at first seem very different from one another may have more in common than is first thought.

Characterisation

Turning our attention to the characterisation of the three central characters in these novels is one way to observe these different perspectives. Marisol Morales-Ladron has said that Mary Saunders in *Slammerkin* becomes easier to dislike as the novel goes on, because she is manipulative, tells lies and practises expressions in the mirror to trick people.⁶⁸ Ladron further argues that Mary 'is complex, contradictory, and essentially human, no matter how self-conscious she becomes of her ontological position in the text.'⁶⁹ Not all readers, however, will find Mary all that unlikeable (I did not). It is refreshing that Donoghue doesn't seem overly concerned with attempting to craft a likeable character. Allowing a female character to have such depth shouldn't be a subversive feminist act but it is, particularly in the context of a historical novel as women in the past have been so marginalised. Similarly, Grace Marks in *Alias Grace* is shown to be a calculating character and to have more than the face that she shows the outside world. We know that she wilfully represents herself and her story in certain ways. She tells us at one point 'I have a good stupid look which I have practised.'⁷⁰ If we think about how these women are represented in historical texts we see that there is little in the way of even representations, or women being shown to be complex. Less time is spent trying to explain their actions. In history they are angels or whores, not characters shown capable of being both.

In fact, *Alias Grace* plays with storytelling itself. Grace Marks tells her story to us, the reader, and to Dr Simon Jordan. There is always uncertainty as to whether she is telling the whole truth or withholding things. This is shown in the following quote:

'What should I tell him, when he comes back? He will want to know about the arrest, and the trial, and what was said. Some of it is all jumbled in my mind, but I

⁶⁷ Donoghue, *Slammerkin*, p.178

⁶⁸ Morales-Ladron, 'The Representation of Motherhood in *Slammerkin*' p. 114-115

⁶⁹ Ibid p.115

⁷⁰ Atwood, *Alias Grace* p.43

could pick out this or that for him, some bits of whole cloth you might say, as when you go through the rag bag looking for something that will do, to supple a touch of colour. I could say this ...⁷¹

It isn't always clear whether she is speaking out loud to Dr Jordan or only to the reader. She certainly doesn't tell Dr Jordan everything that she tells us. Allowing a character to tell their own story is something that traditional history texts don't often do. In the novel, Atwood uses a version of a confessional, or a diary technique, to have Grace appear to tell us what happened. When we read closely though we become aware that this idea of what actually happened is one that Grace dances around. She isn't completely forthcoming and it is this sense of what is left unsaid that stays with us.

We find out early on in *Slammerkin* that when Mary was at school '[n]one of the tasks set demanded more than a fraction of her mind, that was the problem. The Superintendent called her proud, but Mary thought it would be nonsense to pretend she didn't know she had quick wits.'⁷² Despite this intelligence, or maybe even because of it she knows that her little baby half-brother (they share a mother but not a father as Mary's mother was widowed and then found a new husband) is valued more than her. Donoghue shows us this clearly, '[a] boy was worth ten times as much as a girl, Mary knew that without ever being told.'⁷³ This shows that the world then (and now, one could argue despite progress being made) values men more than women. Mary's knowledge of this may have played a part in how her life turned out.

We also know very early on that Mary longs for pretty clothing and when she thinks '[t]hat Immortal Soul the teachers harped on so much – Mary knew she'd swap it quick as a blink for the merest inch of beauty. A single scarlet ribbon.'⁷⁴ We surely already know how this story will end. We see her desire here for the finer things in life, and her willingness to step outside the role assigned to her by society to get it.

Mary has often seen the prostitutes or harlots as she calls them at the Seven Dials. She has even admired their clothes on occasion. One of these harlots, Doll, takes Mary under her wing after her mother kicks her out of home. Through this plotline

⁷¹ Ibid p.410

⁷² Donoghue, *Slammerkin* p. 12

⁷³ Ibid p. 12

⁷⁴ Ibid p. 13

we see the importance of female friendship, and without Doll we know that Mary may have met her end earlier. This end probably would not have been remembered by history at all. In *Alias Grace* the character of Mary Whitney is very important in Grace's life. Emphasising the importance of female friendship is something that female writers can do. By doing so, they allow even more focus to be placed on women's lives and the representations grow richer as a result.

In *Slammerkin* Donoghue presents a character who, while young and naïve, lost her innocence but proves to be tough, and desperate to survive. Mary is ambitious, intelligent and also displays at times a certain ruthlessness. The creation of a character like Mary would not be possible in a straight history text as too little information was recorded on the historical record about this woman. Donoghue's choice then to make her a strong-willed, but sometimes foolhardy girl, with a high level of intelligence, and the desire to behave unscrupulously at times can be seen as stemming from a wish to show that females are capable of being just as complicated as their male counterparts.

Agency

In historical fiction agency can be rediscovered for characters who we don't think of as having any historically. When we give female characters agency, even if they use this agency to act unlawfully, we recognise their actions as true to life. As a result, we see that robbing women of choice, as so many stories and histories do, leads to an inaccurate representation of women. Particularly in the case of women who are remembered, albeit in little detail, because they transgressed we see that they did have agency. To allow them this in historical novels isn't a bridge too far.

Kent, Atwood and Donoghue all allow these characters some sort of agency. Kent and Atwood both allow the characters the chance to speak and tell their own stories. This is something that we see little of for both of these women on the historical record. This is one of the most compelling things that historical novels with feminist agendas can do. Not only do they give women who have been denied a chance to speak, a voice but, they also allow these women to be fully-rounded people. The binary of women as good/evil or angel/whore is broken down in feminist historical novels.

In *Slammerkin*, in the scene where Mary becomes a ‘fallen woman’ she doesn’t seek the peddler but comes across him while walking through town. She has previously asked him the price of the ribbon and asks him again. He replies that it is more money because, ‘[t]imes is hard, my dear. Getting *harder* every day.’⁷⁵ The sexual innuendo here is obvious to the reader but it is clear that Mary herself doesn’t understand – she knows, however, that she is missing his point. Then he offers to trade the ribbon for a kiss. We know that she should run away as his intentions are not good. Mary herself knows this too so it becomes clear that even though she doesn’t entirely understand the peddler’s meaning on the term harder, she knows enough. Mary obviously doesn’t enjoy the kiss. ‘It tasted like a burnt thing. It thrashed like a dying fish and bruised the roof of her mouth. She thought she might choke.’⁷⁶ When the peddler pushes for more she doesn’t accept, and it is certainly an attack and against her will but there is the strange line that ‘[w]hat surprised her was the dull absence of surprise.’⁷⁷ Donoghue walks a fine line here and doesn’t fully allow that Mary was at fault. At the same time to rob Mary of any agency is to do what the historical record has already done to her. It’s a scene that needs to be strong, as it is the basis for the rest of the story. The absence of surprise suggests that Mary knew that she was making a mistake and potentially knew that bad things could happen as a result. However, the punishment here is of such magnitude and doesn’t fit the crime.

When she is attacked again – this time when she has been kicked out of her home by her mother and is sleeping in the street – she wakes up during the attack. Donoghue writes, ‘Mary screamed then, belatedly, the way she should have done five months before, in the alley. She found her voice, the depth and fury of it, and what she roared was “No!”’⁷⁸ In this, we know that both of these attacks were obviously rapes, the second of which is described in brutal detail. After this second, and most-horrific attack, Mary becomes hardened. From the text itself we are told ‘[h]er soft stuff had been fossilised into something stony during the night in the ditch.’⁷⁹ Later readers see

⁷⁵ Ibid p.27

⁷⁶ Ibid p.27

⁷⁷ Ibid p.28

⁷⁸ Ibid p.36

⁷⁹ Ibid p. 38

that while Mary knows that she is hardened, she would rather be hardened than ‘crushed to nothing.’⁸⁰

The issue of agency arises again when Mary thinks

‘[h]ad she chosen to kiss the pedlar, to be kicked out of home, to go on the town? Maybe not, but she hadn’t stopped herself either. She struggled to think of one day in more than fifteen years of life when instead of drifting along like a leaf on the river she’d simply grabbed what she wanted.’⁸¹

Mary perhaps had the opportunity to change her path had she stayed on at the Magdalen centre but she felt stifled by the strict rules and lack of freedom. The reason for her departure that she gives the Matron to write in her book is ‘[u]neasy under confinement.’⁸² Mary ultimately preferred the freedom she felt as a prostitute to life in the Magdalen where everything was set out before her and she had no liberties or choices to make. Donoghue explores in her characterisation of Mary what could lead her to commit such a crime in the end. She shows the limitations of what the world had to offer a bright girl like Mary who was restless and couldn’t settle to a life with such severe boundaries. Mary herself questions what is the ‘tapeworm in her stomach that always made her hunger for more.’⁸³

Agnes definitely acts in *Burial Rites*, even if it isn’t for her own good. She goes to work for Natan which the reader knows is a bad idea, due to the circumstances Agnes finds herself in when the novel begins. It is unclear how much Grace acted, or acts in *Alias Grace*, but Atwood gifts Grace with the agency to tell her own story in the novel, and the ability to conceal and reveal that this entails. Mary begins her story by passively accepting the attentions of the pedlar because her desire for the red ribbon is so strong. These women do have some agency in their stories, but they are also victims of circumstance.

Conclusion

Ultimately, I find the representation of Grace to be much more layered than that of Agnes. This is because things are left much more ambiguously in terms of Grace’s innocence or guilt and indeed, her culpability if she did do it. By dealing directly

⁸⁰ Ibid p.104

⁸¹ Ibid p. 110

⁸² Ibid p.115

⁸³ Ibid p.307

with Agnes's view of what happened Kent closes the door on that kind of ambiguity. I think that we as readers know that Kent is full of sympathy for Agnes and this shows when she absolves Agnes. I know that she wrote from the record but believe that she invented this scene in her own mind. I don't think Agnes is on the record as explaining her actions, and indeed, if she was then she would not have been demonised as she was if the scene played out in reality like the one in the novel. It is easy and tempting to like a character so much that you don't want to believe them capable of the magnitude of wrongdoing they were accused of but to resolutely close the door on the idea of their guilt felt slightly disingenuous to me. Mary Saunders doesn't tell us her story in her own words but she isn't so much redeemed like Agnes, and there is not ambiguity – she did commit murder. The novel explains how this might have happened. That it was the rash decision of a moment, as her life came crashing down around her, to pick up the cleaver and wield it.

Alias Grace, *Burial Rites* and *Slammerkin* retell stories from history. They all recover more humanity in their central female characters than the historical record has typically allowed them. In very simple terms, these texts are works of fiction, even if they are grounded in historical research. While some may think that this cannot be stated as unproblematically as it is here, many historians applaud the bold writers who claim no historical veracity for their fictions. In her essay on history and fiction Inga Clendinnen mentions how Peter Carey won her heart at the Brisbane Writers' Festival when, in the face of aggressive questioning from historians who felt he'd written history, he sank in his chair and responded 'I made it up'⁸⁴ when discussing *The True History of The Kelly Gang*. However, as is the case with Carey's novel, while these novels are works of fiction, how they interact with the historical record and the notion of truth is more complicated. Nevertheless, the focus of this chapter has been how the historical novel genre has given these writers space with which to craft stories that allow female characters to take centre-stage, unlike traditional patriarchal history texts. They also represent these women as complex people. People who are capable of both wrongdoing and good behaviour. These characters are limited by the time and place they lived in but strive for freedom. They sometimes follow base impulses, but are not condemned for doing so. The historical

⁸⁴ Inga Clendinnen, 'The History Question: Who Owns the Past?' *Quarterly Essay*, 23:2006, p.32

novel allows them freedoms that traditional history texts do not offer. These writers make the most of these freedoms when it comes to including archival evidence and newspaper articles into their text, crafting characters, depicting sexuality, employing unreliable/reliable narrators, privileging the female body, depicting female friendship, and deciding whether their stories remain ambiguous. In the next chapter I will expand upon these ideas as the discussion moves onto talking about Australia historical writing and the representations of women therein.

4. Representations of women in Australian historical writing

Claire Wright lamented in *The Guardian* in 2013:

Our national bedtime story – the popular imagining of our past – remains a stubbornly closed book, refusing to fracture the male, militaristic fairytale of virile adventure and blood sacrifice. Discordant female voices still belong to wicked witches and evil stepmothers not unassailable and frankly pissed-off women grabbing the reins of nation-building.⁸⁵

Wright's evident frustration is warranted. The idea that historically, women are under-represented or misrepresented has already been established. Australian history is no different to that of the rest of the world on this front. Despite a great number of texts that seek to insert women into our nation's past or to change the perception of women, convict and free, widespread change in the way we view our nation's history has not occurred.

Miriam Dixson's *The Real Matilda: Woman and Identity in Australia - 1788 to the Present* and Ann Summers' *Damned Whores and God's Police: the colonization of women in Australia* were two important texts for Australian women's history. Both of these texts sought to break down stereotype and view women in a more realistic way. Summers writes that '[o]nce we espouse model behaviour, we logically create categories of deviance from it.'⁸⁶ For convict women in historic representation the opposite is true – their behaviour was considered deviant by default. As such, the way 'good women' or, as Summer's would have it 'God's Police', behaved was in the opposite fashion.

A number of books aimed to challenge these dichotomising earlier representations of female convicts in history. Some of these texts look at female convict sexuality like Sian Rees' *The Floating Brothel: The Extraordinary True Story of an Eighteenth-Century Ship and Its Cargo of Female Convicts* which examines one particular vessel, *The Lady Julian*, and the prostitution on board Joy Damousi's influential *Depraved and disorderly: female convicts, sexuality and gender in colonial Australia*

⁸⁵ Claire Wright, 'Women are central to Australia's history. Why have we forgotten them?' *The Guardian* Wednesday 30 October 2013 online at <<http://www.theguardian.com/culture/australia-culture-blog/2013/oct/30/women-central-australian-history-forgotten>> [accessed 1 March 2016]

⁸⁶ Anne Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police: The colonisation of women in Australia* (New South Publishing: Sydney, 2016) p. 92

examines the important role convict women played in public and private spheres which also traverses sexuality but within a different framework. Helen Daniels' even-handed examination in *Convict Women*, looks at both the years where the Assignment system was in place and then the Probation system that followed. She uses Maria Lord as a case study to open the book and she spends time looking at sexuality and prostitution. Deborah Oxley's *Convict Maids: The forced migration of women to Australia*, looks at the economics involved in a statistical and table-heavy volume that shows the contribution of convicts to the success of the colonies. Portia Robinson's *The Women of Botany Bay: A reinterpretation of the role of women in the origins of Australian society*, Babette Smith's *A Cargo of Women: Susannah Watson and the Convicts of the Princess Royal* and many other texts explored convict women's history in Australia. These texts have aided in the reassessment of our convict forebears.

If we now have a wider literature to learn about the history of convict women, is this reflected in historical novels with female convicts as characters? A reading of this literature would seem to refute such a claim. A survey of women in convict texts in Appendix A shows that the new thinking about convicts doesn't necessarily follow through into the historical fiction. This may be because the damned whore/God's Police dichotomy is so entrenched in our national consciousness. Even the texts that may be more literary emphasise the idea of the Aussie battler and the determination that the women have, but they still accept the basic underlying idea of the world being divided into good and bad women at worst, or merely don't set out to break this template at best. When we look at how writers like Atwood, Donoghue and Kent use historical novels to reinsert forgotten or demonised women, we see the room that exists for convict women in Australian historical novels to come to life as complex beings not one dimensional stereotypes.

This chapter looks at three colonial texts and then more contemporary texts to assess how the representation of convict women in fiction has developed over time. Two of the texts in the contemporary section address criminal women rather than convict women. This was because it wouldn't be as useful to examine texts that don't show growth in female characters, and the convict women in contemporary novels weren't

as well developed as the criminal women were. A discussion of why this may be the case follows the analysis of the contemporary novels.

In this chapter I will examine three colonial era convict novels for their depiction of women. These novels are Henry Savery *Quintus Servinton: A Tale founded upon Incidents of Real Occurrence* (1831), Caroline Leakey *The Broad Arrow: being passages from the history of Maida Gwynnham, a 'lifer'* (1859) and Marcus Clarke *For The Term of His Natural Life* (1874). Then I will examine contemporary historical novels concerning convict or criminal women. These novels include Deborah Challinor's 'Convict Girls' novels (2012-2015), Jean Bedford *Sister Kate* (1982) and Courtney Collins *The Burial* (2012). I wanted to see in what ways the depictions of women differed in the two time periods to see what changes time had wrought.

Women in colonial texts

Novels concerning convicts have long played an important role in the Australian literary tradition but women, as in history, have rarely been the focus. In 1831 the first novel published in Tasmania was the convict story *Quintus Servinton: A Tale founded upon Incidents of Real Occurrence*. Written by a convict and dealing with a convict as a central character (who may be only a poorly disguised version of the writer himself), this was the beginning of the immortalisation of Australia's convict history into literature. As the first convict novel looking at the representation of women in this book is a useful starting point to chart the representation of women in Australian historical novels, particularly those featuring convicts. Two other commonly considered convict texts from the same period are Caroline Leakey's *The Broad Arrow: being passages from the history of Maida Gwynnham, a 'lifer'* (1859) and Marcus Clarke's *For The Term of His Natural Life* (1874) (originally appearing as *His Natural Life* but commonly referred to as the former). These novels provide a diverse starting point for examining convict fiction in Australia, and Van Diemen's Land more particularly.

Quintus Servinton – Henry Savery

Quintus Servinton has received much critical attention due to Quintus's similarities to his creator Savery but I'm more interested in the difference between the depiction of Quintus's wife to what we know of her real-life counterpart. When Quintus's wife

Emily comes to Van Diemen's Land she continues to offer her support and it is largely through her support and her moral encouragement that Quintus is redeemed. This varies significantly to the role that Savery's wife played in real life. While his wife did follow him to Van Diemen's Land, they were separated after she realised, upon her arrival, that he had misrepresented the circumstances of his life to her. Savery's wife did not embody the gentle, moral, and supportive conduct for which Savery longed.

We see evidence of Savery's belief that his wife should serve only him in the novel. An example of this expectation is when Quintus's mother remarks that 'a woman, once married, has duties to perform; — and certainly her highest duty, as well as her chief pleasure, ought to consist in contributing to the happiness of her husband'.⁸⁷

While Emily is expected to be entirely accommodating to Quintus, she does not have the right to reciprocity. When Quintus and Emily quarrel he later sees her on the staircase:

he could see by her countenance that she had been weeping, but there was an endeavour of composed serenity in her expressive features, as she said,— "Don't leave me, Quintus, as if we were bad friends. Kiss me before you go, won't you?"— at the same moment affectionately bestowing the caress, which was returned by him, although less warmly than usual.⁸⁸

The reason for their quarrel was that Quintus had not told Emily that he was going out for dinner and she had prepared a meal especially for him. She expressed her annoyance and Quintus reacted by also losing his temper. Even though he is the one at fault, for not informing her of his actions, after they argue it is she who must attempt to mend fences.

There is also a difference in how the wives' relationship with other gentleman are described. In real life Savery's wife not only left him, afterwards she began a relationship with the man who had accompanied her overseas as a kind of helper, Algernon Montagu. In the novel, this man is given fictional characterisation in the role of Alverney Malvers, who does seem to have feelings for Emily. However,

⁸⁷ Henry Savery, *Quintus Servinton: A Tale founded upon Incidents of Real Occurrence*. First published 1831 Prepared from the print edition published by The Jacaranda Press Brisbane and Melbourne 1962 available online at <<http://setis.library.usyd.edu.au/ozlit/pdf/p00101.pdf>> p.69

⁸⁸ Ibid p.197

Quintus says, ‘I know very well that you can have no other feelings towards him or any one else, than such as I might entertain for any young lady, without disturbing your peace, and I have no right to, nor do I expect more.’⁸⁹ This is further example of the wish fulfilment Savery found in the fictional creation of Quintus’s heavenly wife.

Emily saves Quintus towards the end of the novel when Quintus’s health takes a downturn and he is bedridden. He has had another quarrel with his wife, but she comes to his side and shows that she is ready to perform her fragile and feminine wifely duties:

at the moment that his wife advanced close to the bed-side, leant forward, and imprinted upon his pallid lips an affectionate kiss, the balm ran through his frame like electricity, and he became altogether a changed and different man. He tried to soothe and comfort, where he saw it was so much needed, instead of having a comforter himself in his visitor; and it was soon feared that the excitement might be too much for his strength. A speedy end was therefore put to the interview, by the authority of the surgeon, who approached and beckoned Emily to withdraw. “You are not going to leave me again, are you, Emily?” said her husband, as he reluctantly parted with the hand he was fondly holding. The warm tear dropped from her eye, as she replied, half choked with feeling, “Only to get some tea ready for you, and to come back and nurse you — but do not say those words to me again. I have suffered quite as much as you.”⁹⁰

Emily’s kiss is shown to be instrumental in healing Quintus and their reunion is the catalyst to his redemption:

With this stage of his life, however, came a newness of man — the stains that had marked him were removed by the discipline he had been made to endure; and it was a satisfaction to Emily through the remainder of her life, that the good work she had accomplished, was well requited; and she was permitted to feel that, notwithstanding all that had passed, her heart had not been bestowed unworthily.⁹¹

These examples show that Emily and Quintus’s mother, two of the most important women in his life, believe their main purpose in life should be the fulfilment of their wifely duties by ensuring a happy husband/son. These women do not have identities outside of wife and mother. This depiction does not rob them of all power as they do have the power, particularly Emily, to guide their husband’s redemption but it is a very narrow portrayal of women.

⁸⁹ Ibid p.368

⁹⁰ Ibid p.394

⁹¹ Ibid p.413

The Broad Arrow – Caroline Leakey

Caroline Leakey's novel *The Broad Arrow: Being Passages from the History of Maida Gwynnham, a Lifer* (1859) also has strong auto-biographical elements. Many of the novel's characters are easily recognised, as in Savery's novel, as fictional representation of people whose society Leakey kept in Van Diemen's Land. Leakey lived in Van Diemen's Land for five years. Despite being bedridden for much of that time, her first-hand experiences lend the novel a kind of verisimilitude notwithstanding the melodramatic nature of many of the events. *The Broad Arrow* is one of a precious few novels that privileges female experience. As Gillian Winter observed, *The Broad Arrow's* value lies as much in its historical as its literary merit.

One of the earliest examples of the convict novel genre, *The Broad Arrow*, whatever its merits as a work of fiction, as a historical document has much to tell us about Hobart society in the late 1840s. Caroline Leakey was an acute observer of the colony in which she spent five years of her life; she lived in a circle that was not only well informed about local events but which was, in itself, cultured and intelligent; and many of those people and events not only influenced her writing but form an integral part of her work.⁶

The story relates the life of Maida Gwynnham a young lady who covered up the crime of her lover and suffered for it. At the novel's beginning Maida has fallen due to her relationship with her lover which has produced a child. She has no money and her baby starves as she cannot feed it. She is found with the dead child, charged with the crime of infanticide and eventually transported for it, despite her innocence. Maida's true crime, we learn, is that she is too proud to accept God as her saviour.

Dorice Williams Elliott writes that:

Despite her evident good breeding and femininity, however, Maida has fallen and is now not only a convict, but a servant. Like other Victorian fallen women, Maida has come to this position because she gave in to her sexual desires for an unscrupulous seducer. Convicted in order to save her lover Norwell from judgment, she early displays both selfless and selfish desires. Throughout the course of the novel, however, Maida gradually learns to relinquish her own desires and become submissive and passive.⁹²

The Broad Arrow, like Quintus Servinton, is in the end a moral text. Maida's trajectory from sinner to redeemer (she helps redeem Lucy Grenlow) would be

⁹² Dorice Williams Elliott 'Convict Servants and Middle-Class Mistresses' *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory* 16:2 (2005) p.180

viewed by many, most significantly Leakey and her middle-class audience, as positive.

Despite the overly religious side of the text, and her eventual supplication Maida begins the novel as an interesting character and the breadth of representation of women in this text is wider than in *Quintus Servinton*. However, unlike *Quintus Servinton*, *The Broad Arrow* is critical of the convict system. Maida's background is not that of the stereotypical female convict. 'A convict servant with the bearing, education, and breeding of a lady, Maida's position in the convict system is already complicated and anomalous, demonstrating that not all female convicts are alike or inherently different from their middleclass mistresses.'⁹³ Positioning Maida as a fallen woman of class invites further consideration of the nature of convict women.

Williams Elliott argues that:

The Broad Arrow complicates both common male representations of female convicts as all depraved and profligate and simpler portrayals by other women writers of middle-class mistresses reforming lower-class convicts. This more complex view of the nature of female convicts threatens to collapse the difference between them and middle-class women.⁹⁴

There is diversity in *The Broad Arrow's* female characters and the women don't all share the same goals despite their shared gender. Lucy Grenlow is eventually married and moves up the social scale with the help of Maida, while there is a convict nurse who is represented as a horrible woman conforming to the views that many had of convict women at the time. Mrs Evelyn is Maida's mistress and is shown to have less sympathy for convicts that one might expect. Emmeline, Mr Evelyn's niece (possibly representative of Leakey) is quite sickly but she encourages Maida to turn to religion. Shirley Walker has argued that Maida and Emmeline are complementary figures that dramatise a split in the feminine psyche with Maida representing rebellious and wilful characteristics and Emmeline true Christian resignation and humility.⁹⁵

⁹³ Ibid p.175

⁹⁴ Ibid p.181

⁹⁵ Shirley Walker, "“Wild and Wilful” Women” Caroline Leakey and *The Broad Arrow*' *A Bright and Fiery Troop: Australian women writers of the nineteenth century* (Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1988) p.90

Walker also suggests that this split may be one that Leakey felt in her own life – the pull of her own passionate nature against the push to be a good Christian woman.⁹⁶

The characterisation of the supporting characters is still largely one-dimensional. In her own life, Leakey once ‘threw a handbell at the Bishop, and concealed a knife in the bedclothes to deal with the doctor.’⁹⁷ If she had allowed some of her ‘good characters’ like the saintly Emmeline to be similarly capable of acting in these less idealised ways then they may have felt more real.

In offering a range of female characters with different agendas Leakey shows that women are capable of fulfilling more than wifely duties. However, in using a good/bad binary system to portray her women Leakey does not allow for these women to be truly complex as characters. Ultimately, the novel and many of her ideas about women are representative of attitudes of the time rather than hinting at the modern.

While less well-known, *The Broad Arrow* can be seen almost as a feminine companion to Marcus Clarke’s convict novel *For The Term Of His Natural Life*. Of the two writers Leakey perhaps brings more authority to her representation of life for many convicts in Van Diemen’s Land, given that she actually lived there for a number of years while transportation was in place.

For the Term of his Natural Life – Marcus Clarke

Marcus Clarke wrote *For The Term Of His Natural Life* after becoming interested in convict records he had come across in the Public Library of Victoria. In 1870 he travelled to Tasmania to conduct research. While in Tasmania he visited Port Arthur. Although transportation had ended two decades previous, ‘old and infirm convicts’ were still being housed at Port Arthur.⁹⁸ Clarke wrote of feeling ‘a horrible gloom, as though the sunlight had been withdrawn,’ while he was there.⁹⁹ This feeling seeps into the novel.

⁹⁶ Ibid p.90

⁹⁷ Ibid p.87

⁹⁸ Gleeson-White, *Australian Classics: 50 great writers and their celebrated works* (Crows Nest: Allen and Unwin, 2007) p.34

⁹⁹ Ibid p.34

While the plotting of the novel is intricate, the female characters therein are not. One of the villains of the story is a character named John Rex and his partner in crime is the *femme fatale* Sarah Purfoy. Sarah Purfoy is a villain willing to use sex as a means to get what she and her lover John Rex want. Purfoy shows a willingness to seduce another man despite being in love with John Rex. There is no psychological depth given to this episode, we get no insight into her choice. She is little more than ‘damned whore’ in Clarke’s representation.

Sylvia, the heroine of the novel, is a mainly sympathetic character, but like Sarah Purfoy, she lacks psychological depth. Clarke represent Sylvia as ‘poor little Sylvia’ for much of the first two sections of the novel when she is a child. She is a spunky little thing when young, but soon learns to behave like a lady. Eventually she marries Maurice Frere, who she believes has saved her life. However, it was really the novel’s protagonist Rufus Dawes who saved her. As a child, Sylvia has a strong dislike for Frere, even going so far as to tell him ‘I have no Affinity for you. I can’t help it, can I?’¹⁰⁰ On the other hand, she feels sorry for Rufus and believes him a gentle soul.

Like Emily in *Quintus Servinton*, Clarke paints Sylvia as having a redeeming influence on Frere:

Sylvia, in her purity and excellence, was so far above him, that in raising his eyes to her, he lost sight of all the sordid creatures to whose level he had once debased himself, and had come in part to regard the sins he had committed, before his redemption by the love of this bright young creature¹⁰¹.

However, Frere isn’t really redeemed, and he is still capable of great misdeeds and is still claiming recognition for saving Sylvia when Rufus Dawes actually saved her.

Sylvia shows her feminine gentleness as she pities the convicts, despite having grown up in a household that believed in the efficacy of the convict system, and being taught from a young age of their animal natures. This gentleness is shallow though as Sylvia refers to the convicts as animals and creatures. She cannot see their innate humanity, but hers is demonstrated in that she is still sympathetic. In this she

¹⁰⁰ Marcus Clarke, *For The Term of His Natural Life*,
<[http://www.planetpdf.com/planetpdf/pdfs/free_ebooks/For the Term of His Natural Life NT.pdf](http://www.planetpdf.com/planetpdf/pdfs/free_ebooks/For_the_Term_of_His_Natural_Life_NT.pdf)
≥ [Accessed 1 December 2015]p.280

¹⁰¹ Ibid p.379

fits the 'angel' stereotype of the Victorian era more than she does Summers God's Police.

Frere and Sylvia quarrel about her sympathetic feelings towards, and his harsh treatment of, the convicts. Upon their marriage earlier in the novel Sylvia makes it clear to Frere that she wouldn't sew any lost buttons back onto his shirts. This is a moment of levity between them but underlying that is Sylvia's frankness about not wanting to adhere to the ideals of wifedom. But Clarke forgets that inclusion, as after her argument with Frere, Sylvia, 'went to her room and occupied herself with some minor details of clothes-packing (it is wonderful how women find relief from thoughts in household care)'.¹⁰² While Clarke allows Sylvia to be a strong-minded character in some ways, examples like this show that in other ways he represents her as women are supposed to be – preoccupied and comforted by the chores of the home. A wife who has told her husband that she is rejecting the mending of his shirts as her wifely duty is not likely to find relief in clothes-packing.

Sylvia does have a bit of backbone. She asks at one point in the novel when Frere is discouraging her from reading, 'When did two men ever disagree upon the subject of wifely duties? However, I shall read in spite of you.'¹⁰³ The two men she is referring to are her husband and Mr North, a chaplain. Eventually Mr North and Sylvia develop feelings for each other.

Mr North is a surprisingly complex and nuanced character in a novel that is more about melodrama than accurately depicting human nature. If only Clarke had allowed his women to be as multifaceted as Mr North who tries to do good but is suffering from alcoholism, this novel may reflect women more realistically.

Women in contemporary historical fiction

When reading contemporary historical novels to analyse the representation of convict women therein I thought that I would find many more nuanced female characters in these contemporary novels than in those written many years ago, during transportation or in the period directly after. But, while convicts have remained of interest for writers, the female characters haven't become as well-rounded as

¹⁰² Ibid p.836

¹⁰³ Ibid p.761

expected. In the wake of a large number of texts that recast how Australians look at their convict past and the convicts themselves, particularly women, we see some growth in the representation of females in certain historical convict fiction novels. There is still more progress to be made. Sometimes instead of removing or seeking to collapse the good/bad binary, some writers just shift the representation from bad to good for convict women. This doesn't show that women are every bit as complicated as men.

Convict Girls series – Deborah Challinor

Deborah Challinor's Convict Girls series is an example where the central female characters are convicts but are presented as good people. Upon meeting in Newgate prison they form a steady friendship and this helps them cope with life in prison, aboard the ship and in the colony. Friday Woolfe is a red-head with a temper to match and is unapologetic about her career as a prostitute. She is also unapologetic about robbing a customer while he was intoxicated. Harriet Clarke is a seamstress who was tempted to steal a bolt of fabric. Sarah Morgan was apprenticed as a jeweller but found herself forced to join a gang of thieves when she lost her position. Rachel Winter eloped with a soldier and found herself abandoned and unable to pay for her rooms. She stole from the landlady and was caught. So they are all thieves. Challinor doesn't deny their crimes – none of them are wrongfully convicted which is so often a plot device used in convict novels. However, she doesn't condemn them as all bad because they have committed crimes.

Challinor does not avoid the worst parts of life as a convict. Rachel Winter is brutally raped by Gabriel Keegan, an Officer on board the ship. This rape was premeditated and facilitated by Bella Jackson, an enemy of the central characters. Rachel becomes pregnant as a result of the rape and dies in childbirth in the colony. Friday, Sarah and Harriet find the man who had raped her in Sydney and beat him to death in the street. Challinor describes their pursuit of the gentleman and their lack of communication as to what they were going to do once they caught up with him. Then, when the moment for action comes they are all in it together.

'And then they were all doing it, a flurry of boots driving into him, no noise except for muffled thuds that grew increasingly wet, and the occasional breathed-out grunt.

At last, long after he'd stopped moving, they stood back, panting and gazing down at him. He was on his side and his eyes were open. Or one was: the other was a mass of pulp. He stank like shit and his pale trousers were stained.¹⁰⁴

Challinor doesn't imbue all her characters with depth. There are many characters in the novels who occupy one side of the binary opposition. Janie Braine is an example of a 'good' character as she is friendly with all four main characters but never really a proper member of their gang. She isn't developed beyond that. Liz Parker is a 'bad' character largely because Friday doesn't really don't like her. When she dies the main characters are happy about it. This seems only possible because of the lack of depth to Liz's characterisation.

In Challinor's depiction, Gabriel Keegan is not allowed any redeeming features. He is a chauvinistic pig, and he doesn't regret seeking Bella Jackson out to trick Rachel into visiting his quarters under the belief she was to clean for him and do his laundry. He doesn't regret the violent rape. When his attackers tell him why he is being attacked he says 'Oh. That.'¹⁰⁵ Challinor further describes him saying "'She was useless anyway.'" He coughed and spat. "I paid well over the odds."¹⁰⁶

While Challinor allows her villain only one facet, the murderous act committed by these women whom she has crafted as individual characters and whom she invites us to sympathise with as good women could be a catalyst to further the breakdown of the good/bad binary. The fact that this is essentially a popular genre novel and Challinor was willing to cross that moral boundary with her characters shows a change in the portrayal of convict women, as readers are still meant to sympathise with them even after they commit a horrible crime. There is further to go, and even deeper characterisations that need to be drawn, as little of the psychological weight of this act is explored in the novel, but it still shows significant change from the novels of earlier times. It shows an understanding that sometimes people can be coerced into behaving badly, but this does not mean they are entirely bad. Unfortunately, this opportunity to explore the complicated nature of her women is in the end not as well developed as it could be as Challinor brushes the implications of murder aside.

¹⁰⁴ Deborah Challinor, *Behind The Sun* (HarperCollins Publishers: Sydney, 2012) p.440

¹⁰⁵Ibid p.439

¹⁰⁶Ibid p.439

Challinor's novels offer some of the complexity for women that I expected to find in contemporary convict novels but ultimately she just recasts her characters as good despite their violent actions and does not remove the binary altogether. She allows them the freedom to act but doesn't delve deeper into their psyches to try to understand why, and as a result the characterisations are ultimately superficial. This is why the inference that other female convict characters in the novels who behave in much the same way are the stereotypical 'Damned Whores' history thinks of them as rankles so much.

The next examples are about criminal women rather than convicts, as they have female characters that are more nuanced than those I found in other convict novels. Given the absence of well-developed female characters in contemporary convict novels, I found it more helpful to explore the more nuanced female criminal characters in early Australian history than continue in the strictly convict-era genre.

Criminal women are more often the topic of novels than convict women. Many novels that do concern themselves with convict women begin with the caveat that their protagonist is innocent of the crime for which she was convicted. Partly this is explained by the genre expectation of historical romances. Partly this is to do with the damned whore/God's Police dichotomy – if guilty convict women are Damned Whores then innocent ones can come to Australia and be redeemed and be the good wives and mothers and therefore fit into the parameters of the God's Police. Another aspect though may be that we now view the crimes that many convict women committed as petty. We have a view now of the woman who stole a loaf of bread to feed her starving children in our minds. This means that writers who would reclaim or rewrite the stories of the so-called damned whores may not find inspiration in the lives of convict women. Criminal women however, give a writer license to delve into the dark spaces of the female mind and to try to understand what drives them to their criminal behaviour. Roxane Gay writes 'It is a seductive position writers put the reader in when they create an interesting, unlikable character- they make the reader complicit, in ways that are both uncomfortable and intriguing.'¹⁰⁷ This is something

¹⁰⁷ Roxane Gay, *Bad Feminist* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2014) p.90

it seems easier to do when writing of a criminal character who isn't a convict woman.

Tales of convictism are full of oppression and drudgery too. It is easy to feel trapped by a narrative that you can't really control as both a writer and a reader. Convicts don't have agency – as soon as they are sentenced to transportation they lose even the right to choose where they live. Stories of this kind may offer little excitement for writers.

In general Australians are more interested in the rebels of the Eureka stockade (only recently are Wright's forgotten ones included and this is still not on a wide scale) and in the idea of the Aussie larrikins and the Aussie spirit with the ANZAC's displaying this, and of course, the shadow-casting figures of Ned Kelly and his gang.

Convict women then are doubly deprived of agency. They are deprived of agency at first as women and are condemned if they dare to rebel and then by becoming convicts they are robbed of agency anew.

Sister Kate – Jean Bedford

Jean Bedford's *Sister Kate*, provides a further model for the depiction of women.¹⁰⁸ Bedford tells the Ned Kelly story through the eyes of his sister Kate Kelly. The Ned Kelly story and the myths that surround has been thoroughly incorporated into the idea of Australia as a nation and one that is mainly considered to be masculine (like the Anzac story one could argue). This novel repositions Kate Kelly, Ned's sister and the would-be wife of Joe Byrne one of the members of Ned's crew, as the central character. Lin Bao notes that '[t]hrough the experiences of the Kelly women, we learn about the "victim of victims" position of Irish women in colonial Australia.'¹⁰⁹

In *Sister Kate*, Jean Bedford's focus is not solely on the Kelly gang but on Kate's life in the shadow of her brothers and her lover Joe Byrne.¹¹⁰ This is a privileging of a story that we do not often hear, that of the women in Ned's life who were always in the shadow of the men and had to live with the results of the Kelly Gang's actions.

¹⁰⁸ Jean Bedford, *Sister Kate* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1987)

¹⁰⁹ Lin Bao, 'Modern Ideologies and the Ned Kelly Myth: The Interpretation of The Ned Kelly Story in Jean Bedford's *Sister Kate*' *Studies in Literature and Language*, 1: 5, (2010) p.72

¹¹⁰ *Ibid* p,73

This makes it interesting to those looking at recovering women's history in Australia and in Australian historical fiction. However, Bedford shows that while they may have been aware of their position, Kate and her sisters and mother didn't attempt to change it, as it was culturally appropriate at the time. The women chose to help the gang. Kate herself is enthralled by her brother Ned, and her lover Joe Byrne. So, while Bedford encouraged people to look at the Kelly Myth from a different perspective, she does not radically reinterpret or revise history. This is not to take away from the achievements of Bedford as casting light on the forgotten story of the women in one of the most famous stories in the nation.

Kate's story continues after the demise of the gang. Usually the gang's end is the end of the story. Kate is destined to live an unhappy life. She takes little pleasure in motherhood commenting, 'my flesh crawls at the thought of an infant once more suckling blind-eyed at my sore breasts ... the bleeding and the messiness of it all...' ¹¹¹ Kate hides her identity when moving away from the family home, not wanting others to know of the infamy of her family. After the excitement of life with the Kelly Gang, the quietness of normal life is stifling to Kate. She floats from man to man and drinks to escape the realities of her existence and eventually loses her senses and then her life. Ultimately, this novel is a sad meditation on the life of Kate Kelly. Bedford imbues Kate with a sense of wanderlust but also of fatigue with the world.

The Burial – Courtney Collins

Courtney Collins' novel *The Burial* explores the life of Jessie Hickman, an ex-circus performer who steals horses. Collins takes the innovative approach of using her protagonist's own murdered child as the narrator of the story, a risky strategy that denies the reader the opportunity to condemn the protagonist directly for the infanticide, as the narrator and victim itself refuses to do so. In the novel, we come to know Jessie incompletely but Collins' refusal to sum her character up neatly is one of the book's strengths. Jessie's wrongdoings are not the main point of the novel. Jessie is comfortable with horses and her ease in the traditionally masculine space of the bush show us that she belongs more to that world than any other. Jessie comes alive with Collins' lyrical prose as a three-dimensional character. Collins' doesn't

¹¹¹ Bedford, *Sister Kate*, p.119

question Jessie's innate goodness or badness – just offers us a glimpse into the life of this complicated woman.

There are obviously other novels that deal with criminal women. *Anna Haebich's Murdering Stepmothers: The Execution of Martha Rendell* is based on the true story of Martha Rendell who was executed for poisoning her stepchildren. The novel is split into five sections each with a different narrator: The Photographer, The Detective, The Doctor, The Reverend and The Researcher. Four out of five are males and The Researcher is Haebich herself. This structure meant that while the points of view said a lot about the way men viewed women in 1909, Martha herself didn't speak. While I found the last section interesting, following Haebich's own exploration of the case, overall the novel didn't create enough of a character in Martha for me to focus on in any great detail. Another novel worth mentioning is *Long Bay* by Eleanor Limprecht. It fictionalises the life of Rebecca Sinclair who was incarcerated in 1909. Rebecca was incarcerated for manslaughter after a woman died following the illegal abortion Rebecca had performed. *Long Bay* fits the scope of this chapter more readily than Haebich's text in that it offers a detailed representation of the protagonist of Rebecca Sinclair. Unfortunately, I could not discuss every novel that deals with criminal women in Australia in depth, and the examples I chose reflected the varying levels to which writers have fought against the dichotomies by which women have historically been defined.

Conclusion

Challinor's books are driven by the need for likability in her central characters, while *Sister Kate* and *The Burial* don't rely on this. They create more nuance, and don't buy into ideas of Australian women as Damned Whores and God's Police.

By comparing female characters in *Quintus Servinton*, *The Broad Arrow* and *For the Term of His Natural Life* to those in *Sister Kate*, *The Burial* and Deborah Challinor's *Convict Girls* series, we can see more nuanced female characterisations in the contemporary novels than in the earlier novels, but the change is not as extreme as I thought it would be, or as prevalent in other novels.

As discussed in Chapter 2, writers of historical novels often allow their characters more agency in their novels than may have been the reality. In my novel I sought to

show that Mary made choices before she was convicted, whether she herself wants to admit that she had any control over her life notwithstanding. While there were many ways in which her life was controlled by the authorities after she was convicted in Scotland in my novel I tried to give her the chance to act not just react. This is important to me as I want my characterisation of Mary to create for a reader a woman of depth, who feels real.

In her book *Human Remains: A History of Dissection* Helen MacDonald writes:

I am caught in the historian's impossible dilemma: longing to write this history so well that Mary McLauchlan will live again in its pages, yet knowing the belief such a thing can be accomplished is an impossible one. No historian can really make people live again. We are not resurrectionists. Nevertheless, I can not leave Mary McLauchlan here, disintegrating beneath these men's hands and words. Like Greg Denning and Inga Clendinnen, I believe that historians can be sufficiently thorough to reconstruct something of how people in the past experienced their lives, in a multitude of contexts, which reveal something of the 'muddy actuality' of things.¹¹²

This 'muddy actuality' of the past reflected in history has become the focus of writers of history and of historical fiction as the grand-narrative histories have been increasingly challenged by subaltern histories, by histories and herstories from below. Historical novelists can be resurrectionists: they resurrect the characters for as long as a reader is immersed in the text. In my novel I want to resurrect Mary. In attempting to depict a woman convicted and hanged for infanticide, I wanted to go deeper with her characterisation. I wanted to create a character who felt real and not shy away from the darker aspects of her nature – but I didn't want to focus on them either. But first I had to separate fact from fiction, delve into what the contemporary accounts said, failed to say, twisted or distorted. In the next chapter this research is discussed in depth.

¹¹²Helen MacDonald. *Human Remains: Episodes in Human Dissection*. (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, Australia, 2005) p. 53

5. Mary McLauchlan's story

Background

Mary McLauchlan was a Scottish convict who was transported from Glasgow to Van Diemen's Land, now Tasmania, in 1828. She was the first woman to be hanged in Van Diemen's Land, on 19 April 1830. She was born in Saltcoats, Scotland before marrying and moving to Glasgow. In Glasgow she gave birth to two daughters. She was tried for two cases of theft by housebreaking and transported to Australia as a result. Assigned to a Scottish settler and his family as a servant she became pregnant while at the property. Brought before the superintendent of convicts she was sentenced to six months in the crime class at the Cascades Female Factory, and then would have been reassigned in the interior. This further punishment never eventuated as Mary went into labour and gave birth in the privy at the factory. The child was found dead in early December 1829. Mary was tried for infanticide, found guilty and executed.

I first came across Mary's story in the book *Convict Women*¹¹³ by Kay Daniels. Mary was barely mentioned but the facts that were revealed piqued my curiosity. The story was confronting in this initial form. Daniels presented her as a convict woman who was most likely impregnated by her master and then executed for killing the child after it was born. Daniels' explanation of her as 'the ultimate victim of laws which exacted harsh penalties but refused protection, but like the women who used abortion to stay with their lovers, she was not a passive victim'¹¹⁴ roused my interest. Initially I didn't want to pursue this as my topic. I worried how people would judge me for choosing it and trying to claim some kind of humanity for a woman that had potentially killed a child. I worried they would judge Mary for her actions and condemn her as a monster, and think me one too for wanting to find a way to give her a chance to tell her story. As time went on though I could not shake the story and wanted to know more. The small, silent figure of Mary in her white dress and black ribbon—the outfit in which she was hanged— would rise to the front of my mind and demand attention.

¹¹³ Kay Daniels, *Convict Women* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 1998)

¹¹⁴ *Ibid* p.86

When she was found guilty of infanticide and executed Mary became the first woman to be hanged in Van Diemen's Land. Further research revealed that there were other women who committed the same crime but were found not guilty, or if found guilty, received far less severe sentences. The men who were on the jury during her trial were known to Mary's master Mr Charles Ross Nairne. Many believe that he was the father of the child. Did the friendly feelings of the jury towards Mr Nairne influence their decision to find Mary guilty? After reading the minutes of the Executive Council meeting it is clear that Mary, as G P Shaw writes, 'went to the gallows ... under circumstances which suggest that a firm plea for mercy could have saved her.'¹¹⁵

Early into my own research I found two other researchers who have written about Mary at length. Helen MacDonald's paper 'A Dissection in Reverse: Mary McLauchlan, Hobart Town, 1830'¹¹⁶ centred on Mary's story and was published in *Lilith magazine* in 2004. She also included a chapter on Mary, expanding on this paper, in her book *Human Remains: Episodes in Human Dissection*¹¹⁷ in 2005. Nicola Goc has also written extensively on Mary in her book *Women, Infanticide and The Press, 1822 – 1922: News Narratives in England and Australia*.¹¹⁸ Both of these sources, however, raised many unanswered questions and prompted me to return to the primary source material for Mary's story. Was she harshly treated by the Scottish legal system, as has been suggested? Was she married before she left Saltcoats for Glasgow?

My research seeks to clarify the concrete facts that we can discover about Mary's life through the records. I have found some archival evidence that conflicts with conclusions that have been drawn about Mary previously. In 2011 I funded my own trip to the National Archives of Scotland in Edinburgh (currently National Records of Scotland) where I searched for historical records about Mary. In the case notes relating to Mary's trial there is a lot of information to be obtained. There are multiple

¹¹⁵ George Peter Shaw, *Patriarch and Patriot, William Grant Broughton 1788-1853: Colonial Statesman and Ecclesiastic* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1978), p.33

¹¹⁶ Helen MacDonald, 'A dissection in reverse: Mary McLauchlan, Hobart Town, 1830' *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal*, 13 (2004) 2-24.

¹¹⁷ MacDonald. *Human Remains: Episodes in Human Dissection*.

¹¹⁸ Nicola Goc, *Women, Infanticide and The Press, 1822 – 1922: News Narratives in England and Australia*, (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013)

declarations given by Mary in one of the files and many details below are to be found there¹¹⁹.

The files about Mary in the archives were often difficult to follow and sometimes there were doubles of documents in different files, but each file often had additional information that was not to be found as a duplicate in another file. As a result, every file needed to be checked throughout – even those that did not seem relevant at first.

I also spent time at the ScotlandsPeople¹²⁰ Centre searching Parish Records and the like, for references to Mary, William or their daughters.

In August 2012 I funded a research trip to Hobart. During my time there I searched the colonial archives for references to Mary at the Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office. While there I visited the Cascades Female Factory Historical Site to see where Mary, and the other convict women had lived. Unlike the very well preserved Port Arthur, the site requires a well-exercised imagination in order for a visitor to glean what it might have been like during the 19th Century. I also travelled to Richmond, as I believe that Glen Nairne, the property Mary was assigned to was somewhere in that vicinity.

During both of these trips I found that, while there are significant records relating to Mary, the historical record can be patchy and contradictory. While I was able to resolve some questions others remain unclear. Some claims in the literature about Mary's life have been made without sufficiently detailed references. Without references to the original source material, I was unable to verify the claims. In some cases, my archival research directly contradicts information given as fact. Without references to the original source material (or sufficiently detailed references) for these details, I have been unable to verify the claims or find the records and identify the source information. Ultimately, I have aimed to rely only on the sources and details that I have been able to verify in primary literature.

¹¹⁹ 'Mary McLauchlan statement, 9 November 1827' Precognition relative to a charge of housebreaking and theft or reset of theft by Mary McLachlane on the 23rd October 1827' National Archives Scotland (hereafter NAS) , AD.14.28.203

¹²⁰ Website for ScotlandsPeople <http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>

For example, in her book *Human Remains*, MacDonald states that Mary was sentenced to 14 years transportation for her first offence. This was almost unheard of in Scotland where first offenders were dealt with leniently and only reoffenders were usually transported. Scottish women typically committed more offences before transportation than English women, perhaps as a result of the leniency shown to first offenders. MacDonald reasoned that perhaps Mary's heavy sentence may have been because her theft included a crime against property, which was being dealt with harshly by the Scottish courts at the time. Nevertheless, it seemed shocking that Mary was dealt with so severely. However, upon finding a second case of theft by housebreaking when I researched in Edinburgh, and considering that the evidence for both cases is quite convincing, Mary's sentence seems more standard for the times and circumstances. To try to claim that Mary should not have been transported for her crimes is difficult. Many were transported for less.

Mary's birth and background

Mary McLauchlan was born in Saltcoats, a small coastal town in Scotland, around 1804. Saltcoats is 'situated around the beautiful, beachy bay of Brodick... and found just to the North West of the area of Kilwinning'¹²¹ and around fifty-two kilometres from Glasgow. Parish records at Scotlands People showed there was a Mary born November 23rd or 29th and baptised December 10th to a [unable to decipher] McLauchlan and an Elizabeth Smith.¹²² These records were from 1805 and the notes from Mary's statements made in court suggest she was born in 1804. Nicola Goc writes that she was born in 1801¹²³ but gives no reference for this, so I will take Mary at her word (and keeping the Parish Record entry I found in mind) and assume that she was born between 1804 and 1805 more in keeping with archival evidence.

According to the township website, Saltcoats has:

always been a trade-laden town. Whether it was salt, coal or weaving then, or today's importing timber and exporting coal, trades seem to be what has predominantly been dealt with. There are a great number of people who work as weavers through agents and there are also dairy and agriculture farmers as well. The production of

¹²¹ Saltcoats website. Posted on 23 August 2009. <<http://www.saltcoats.co.uk/40/getting-to-know-the-three-towns/>> [Accessed 21 February 2011]

¹²² Parish Records available online at Scotlands People login required.

¹²³ Goc, *Women, Infanticide and The Press, 1822 – 1922*. p. 102

dairy products, wheat, oats and potatoes are considered quite a valuable commodity.¹²⁴

This puts in mind a town of industrious people who aren't afraid of an honest day's work. I visited Saltcoats while in Scotland in 2011. The buildings' stone works alter in colour due to the salt from the water and the area still felt peaceful. There are many Catholic churches that line the streets of the town.¹²⁵ 'Around 170 years or so ago, the town had few settlers living and working in humble, small cots or cottages, salt making in kettles. The salt was made for a various number of reasons, one was ... to cure and preserve fish that had been caught.'¹²⁶ These were the 'Salt-cots' that gave the town its name.

Mary grew up in Saltcoats and married a man named William Sutherland. It has been claimed previously '[w]hether she married William Sutherland before she left Saltcoats, or met and married him later, is unknown.'¹²⁷ A note in the Parish Records says that a William Sutherland and Mary McLauchlan were proclaimed married on January 16th 1824.¹²⁸ However, according to the statement by the Parish Minister presented at Mary's trial, William was from Glasgow and only lived in Saltcoats from January 2 1824 until May 30 1825¹²⁹ when the two moved from the small town to the larger city. This information places his arrival as only days before they were wed. It may be that they had already met before he officially resided in Saltcoats. Perhaps it was love at first sight? These are things that the records do not show. Furthermore, Mary's court records reveal:

'A certificate in favour of Mary McLauchlan. That William Sutherland and Mary McLachland [sic] married persons, she a communicant but he not, resided in this parish of Steventon, she mostly from infancy, but he only from January 2nd 1824 till May 30th 1825, and were free from any scandal or ground of church censure, when they left this parish is certified of Steventon this 2nd of May 1826.'¹³⁰

According to the court records, William had a weaving business in Glasgow that he and his brother George shared. I am not sure whether they shared the shop when

¹²⁴ Saltcoats website, Posted on 21 August 2009. Online at <http://www.saltcoats.co.uk/31/the-history-of-saltcoats-scotland/> [Accessed 21 February 2011]

¹²⁵ Saltcoats website Online at <<http://www.saltcoats.co.uk/31/the-history-of-saltcoats-scotland/>>

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ MacDonald, *Human Remains* p. 54

¹²⁸ Parish Records, Scotlands People.

¹²⁹ John Crawford, 'Certificate in favour or Mary McLauchlan 28 November 1827' *Inventory of Precognition* NAS, AD14.27.326

¹³⁰ Ibid

William was in Saltcoats or whether it was arranged that they would go in to business together when he and Mary moved.

There are records of several William Sutherlands born in Glasgow that may be the William Sutherland who was married to Mary. There is also a record for a girl named Margaret born to a William Sutherland born on February 27th and baptised March 7th in 1825 that may be one of Mary and William's daughters. I know that Mary and William resided at a minimum of two different addresses while in Glasgow. They may have moved around more and this added to the difficulty of knowing in which exact Parishes to search for records relating to them and their daughters.

Life in Glasgow

By the time William and Mary moved to Glasgow, technological advances in the mechanised production of cloth had taken a toll on hand weavers. From the court records and her convict indent we know that Mary and William had two children to feed and clothe and making ends meet would have been difficult. To help her family Mary had to find work. In her statement Mary explains she found a position at William Dunlop's cotton mill as an overseer watching ten children work. Her day began very early in the morning and she wore a plaid when she walked to the mill most days. While Mary was at work a lady named Mrs Tennant who lived nearby watched Mary's children. Goc states that Mary and her husband had no income¹³¹ but this conflicts with Mary's statement at court. Goc may be implying that with two children to support and William struggling to find work as a weaver that times were hard for them and this may have lead them to criminal action. Mary probably didn't make a great deal at her work, and no doubt times were tough, but to ignore her job feels inaccurate.

At some time in her life Mary began taking things that were not hers. Whether she began as a pick-pocket and worked her way up to more serious crimes is not known. The Archives in Edinburgh show that she was questioned on November 9 and 10 for 'theft by housebreaking', and then questioned again and detained in the Glasgow Tolbooth on November 16 1827. She was being detained for a theft that occurred on

¹³¹ Goc, *Women, Infanticide and The Press, 1822-1922* p.102

October 23 1827. The home of John Kilpatrick and Sarah Fraser (his wife) was broken into, or in the words of the court:

by forcing open the door of said house by means of a false key or otherwise to the informant unknown and having obtained entrance in manner foresaid, she did wickedly and feloniously steal and theftuously carry away from the said house a red silk shawl with a black and red border, two pairs of scotch blankets, two pairs of cotton sheets, two cotton Bolster shifts, four cotton pillow slips, a white Marseille mat, a printed cotton gown with a drab ground and red and white flowers, a cotton gown piece consisting of eight yards or thereby with a white ground and yellow and brown flowers, three cotton petticoats, a white flannel petticoat, a black bombazeen petticoat, a pair of black silk stockings, six pairs of white cotton stockings, a pair of lead coloured silk gloves, two lace frills, two muslin frills, a woollen or toillinette vest, with French white ground and purple stripes, ten linen towels, a leather pocket book containing ten shillings or thereby in silver money and some copper money, a blue a white checked linen apron, a blue and white checked cotton apron, a claret coloured cloth great coat for a boy, five brown and white checked cotton neckcloths, two lilac and white checked cotton neckcloths, seventeen white cotton neckcloths, a red and white cotton shawl with red and white coloured flowers, half a yard or thereby of ruby coloured cloth, two linen pocket handkerchiefs, a cotton handkerchief with a coloured border, five white muslin caps, a muslin handkerchief with a frill round it, a leghorn bonnet trimmed with pink coloured ribbons, and two yards or thereby of course muslin all the property or in the lawful possession of the said John Kilpatrick and Sarah Fraser his wife and six linen shirts marked J W the property of James Wallace and in the lawful possession of the said John Kilpatrick and Sarah Fraser.¹³²

So, Mary's case is not that of someone who stole a loaf of bread to feed her children.

The court heard testimony from thirty-three people. Mary was arrested and detained after some of the stolen items were found in her possession. According to the court reports Mary gave several 'introductory accounts of the manner in which she came by them there is reason to believe that she has been guilty of the said theft aggravated by housebreaking, or at least of resetting the said articles knowing them to have been stolen.'¹³³ This seems to suggest that the officials may not have believed that she acted alone or even that she definitely stole them alone but that she had accepted the goods and was aware that they were stolen. It seems they might have thought she was a fence, someone who accepted stolen goods and sold them on, or who pledged goods at pawn shops under her name on other's behalf.

Mary's defence of her actions was strange. Over several testimonies she gave several different versions of events. She said that she found the items in a package on the corner of Great Hamilton Street when she was on her way to the mill one morning.

¹³² George Salmond, 'Presentment' *Inventory of Precognition as to Mary McLachlan Theft or Reset 1827 NAS, AD14.27.326*

¹³³ Ibid

She opened the package and looked inside and then took it with her to the mill. At the mill she put it down with her plaid and when two of the girls that she oversaw noticed it and asked her about it she didn't tell them what it was or how it came to be in her possession to discourage them from asking such questions. Then she kept the items in her house until she wore one of the caps to her neighbour Agnes Craig's house. Mrs Craig recognised it as belonging to Sarah Kilpatrick and asked Mary about it. Mary then told her she'd borrowed it from Mrs Carmichael. Mrs Craig left to find Sarah and tell her and Mary then realised that she was caught in her lie. So she went to Mrs Carmichael and told her the whole story and asked her to lie for her, which Mrs Carmichael either said she would do and then didn't or refused to do lie. When Mary found out Mrs Carmichael had not corroborated her story she went to ask the advice of her friend John Gibson. He advised her to tell the whole truth about what had happened and the two of them went to Sergeant Leckie at the Calton Police Office.

Mary also says that the evening before she found the items she had seen Sarah Kilpatrick arrive at Mrs Craig's house quite agitated and declare that her house had been broken into and 'her bonnet, shawl, blankets, sheets and other articles had been stolen from it, but she did not mention whether there were any caps taken away.'¹³⁴ She then said that this was why she didn't think that the goods she found were Mrs Kilpatrick's. Mrs Craig said that this wasn't the case as Mary was aware that caps were among the stolen items. Mary then said that she did know that caps were stolen but she believed they were lace caps that were taken and the ones that she had found were muslin, and that was why she didn't think the items she found were Mrs Kilpatrick's.

Mary knew that Mrs Kilpatrick was not at her home the night of the theft but at Mrs Craig's house as she had called on Mrs Craig on two occasions to borrow a light and to ask after her husband. Mary also did not mention to Mrs Craig that she had any other items when she was caught with Mrs Kilpatrick's cap. She even said that she had none of the other stolen items in her possession and that people could search her house and as she believed that Mrs Carmichael would back her up she had no reason

¹³⁴ 'Mary McLauchlan statement, 9 November 1827' *Precognition relative to a charge of housebreaking and theft or reset of theft by Mary McLachlane on the 23rd October 1827* NAS, AD14.28.203

to think that any more would come of it. It was only when Mrs Carmichael did not confirm her story and she went to John Gibson that Mary took the other items to Mrs Kilpatrick. In both statements she denies the initial theft by housebreaking and also denies receiving property that she knew to be stolen and also denies the reset (or selling or pawning) of the property. Mary also said that she knew that Agnes Craig and Sarah Kilpatrick were 'in habits of strict intimacy' and that they would recognise each other's apparel, so why would she have gone to see Mrs Craig while she was wearing the cap she had stolen from Mrs Kilpatrick knowing that it would be recognised by Mrs Craig.

Mary also says that on the night of the theft she went to Mrs Tennant's house and collected her children after work and then went to William's weaving shop to seek him but he was not there, only his brother George. George said William was not there and hadn't been there that day at all. That is why she visited Mrs Craig to ask her if she had seen him. However, when questioned, George said that while she did often visit the shop he could not remember if she had visited on that particular evening.

Some things that were stolen were found in the coal cellar near Mary's house but she claimed she had no use for her coal cellar as she kept her coal inside the house and said that she didn't use it as it didn't lock and therefore anyone could have put the items there. Mary had also taken some material to a dress maker named Mary France in Great Hamilton Street and asked to have it made into a dress. She had to go back in a few days however and delay the making of the dress, as she couldn't afford to pay for it. Eventually she found out that the gown piece too was stolen but thought it better not to mention it as she hadn't mentioned it from the beginning, and that she would wait until she was asked about it.

At some stage while she was imprisoned in the Tolbooth the authorities connected Mary to another case of theft by housebreaking. A letter dated February 21 and 22 1828 was sent by George Salmond to the authorities detailing the second theft¹³⁵, which had actually occurred first in chronological time. The first theft occurred on January 16 1827. Again a private residence was broken into, this time it was

¹³⁵ 'Precognition against Mary McLachlan Housebreaking Glasgow 21 to 22 February 1828.' NAS, AD.14.28.161

Alexander and Mary Wilson's. In this case Mary McLauchlan was also accused of forcing open a chest of drawers inside the property. Once again a long list of items was taken from the property:

a black sarcenet gown, a brown silk gown, a wine coloured silk gown, a white corded petticoat, a blue cloth Pelisse, a large red silk shawl with a flowered border, a fur whippet, Seven [harn?] shifts marked in the breast M R, a linen shift marked in the breast I.M.C? the skirt of a bombazeen gown and white silk plaid, and a Delft Cup containing thirty shillings of silver money, or thereby – as also from a board or shelf in said kitchen a cheese or the larger part of one, from a plate rack there six horn spoons and from the mantle piece there a pair of brass candlesticks, a pair of steel snuffers and a black japanned snuffers tray.'¹³⁶

Later in the file the stolen cheese is said to have weighed almost 25 pounds. Again, Mary is accused of having stolen or of having received the goods in full knowledge that they were stolen. At the time of the Kilpatrick theft it is believed that Mary and William were living in Patersons Land, Gallowgate Street but when she was apprehended they were believed to be residing in Sweets Land, Great Hamilton Street. The theft from the Wilson's was from their house in Mill Wynd of Rutherglen, at the time of theft Mary and William were residing in the same street. A candlestick that was stolen from the Wilson's was found and possession could be traced back to Mary even though the item had been sold on from the original person to whom she had sold it. Mary claimed that she had bought the candlestick from a packman as she was planning on refurnishing her home to entice lodgers to lodge with her and her husband. However, their money had become scarce after her purchase and she didn't wish for William to know about the candlestick 'lest he be quick to anger' with her. That is her explanation as to how it came to be in her possession and why she sold it. When she had sold this candlestick she had also attempted to sell the large red silk shawl with the flowered border.

Again, a large number of witnesses gave testimony. Agnes Craig¹³⁷ said that Mary showed her the 'two brass candlesticks which she said had been given to her in a present at the time of her marriage by one Mrs Scott who had sent them to her by the

¹³⁶ Mary Robertson's Statement, 'Precognition against Mary McLachlan Housebreaking Glasgow 21 to 22 February 1828.' NAS, AD.14.28.161

¹³⁷ Agnes Craig's Statement, 'Precognition against Mary McLachlan Housebreaking Glasgow 21 to 22 February 1828.' NAS, AD.14.28.161

Note: Agnes Muter is the name in this particular file, however, she is the wife of John Craig, and I have referred to her as Agnes Craig in the earlier sections so will continue to do so for ease of comprehension.

prisoners mother. That the prisoner said she had kept them out of her husband's light but she did not say for what reason. That she also shewed the Declarant a silk shawl with a scarlet coloured middle and a broad border of different colours.'¹³⁸ The same large red silk shawl with the flowered border? Agnes Craig also said that she once saw Mary wearing a black silk gown. Craig's testimony also reveals that Mary visited Saltcoats again, and stayed for a few days,

during which time the declarant took care of her house. That the prisoner insisted on the Declarant taking from her for her trouble in doing so a black japanned snuffer tray and a horn spoon. That when she gave her the spoon the prisoner shewed her other five horn spoons and they as well as the one the declarant got appeared to be quite new. That the prisoner also shewed the Declarant a small shift of homemade linen and she remembers of observing the letter "M" sewed in the breast of it. That the prisoner told the Declarant that she had a blue cloth pelisse which she had given to Mary French mantua maker somewhere about Well Street Calton to make into frocks for her children and the Declarant saw one of the children shortly afterwards wearing a dress of that description. That after the prisoner was taken into custody the Declarant being suspicious that the snuffer tray & spoon given to her were not honestly come by she gave them to the prisoners husband by setting them down in his kitchen. That William Sutherland when the Declarant returned these things seemed to have been ignorant of where they had come from but said on looking at the snuffer tray that he thought he had seen it somewhere before. That the following day the Declarant could not see these things in the prisoners house and as the prisoners husband deserted his house within three or four days after that she has not seen him since.¹³⁹

The gaoler at the Glasgow Tolbooth reported Mary as being 'troublesome'. There is no other insight into what was meant by this but it makes me think of her as spirited.

The bitter history between the English and the Scottish would cause a bias against the wild and barbaric Scots but for convict women there was more to it than that. Scottish convict women have been described as 'the most abandoned' of convict women, if 'the number of former offences is taken as the criterion of criminality'. Their criminal records reveal they had committed more offences before transportation than their English counterparts.¹⁴⁰ These figures need some explanation. Unlike English and Irish women, Scottish women were generally shown more leniency for a first offence, which provided them with an opportunity to offend again, while their Irish and English counterparts may have already been shipped off to the penal settlements before they had the chance to reoffend. Mary did not have the opportunity to be 'scared straight' by having her first crime come to the court's

¹³⁸ Ibid

¹³⁹ Ibid

¹⁴⁰ Lloyd Robson in Daniels, *Convict Women* p.57

attention. As a second case was discovered while she was being tried for her first she was found guilty of both and sentenced to transportation. From the records we do know that there were two crimes committed, and that they both involved the theft of many items potentially worth a great deal of money at the time. Although the previously published literature often describes Mary as being transported for her first crime we now know that Mary was tried for two individual cases. The fact that there were two thefts changes our view of her circumstances and conviction – one theft may indicate a criminal act committed out of sheer desperation but another with such a similar *modus operandi* implies different things about her character and her situation.

MacDonald says that in ‘the records relating to her trial, it seems clear that William Sutherland, not his wife, was the chief suspect.’¹⁴¹ I have read these same records along with additional records, and I do not necessarily draw the same conclusion. In the evidence presented in one of the cases of housebreaking it could certainly be seen as suspicious that William quit the house so soon after Agnes Craig showed him the stolen items she had received from Mary. He also seems extremely reluctant in his own testimony to offer his wife any sort of alibi or protection:

he was told that Alexander Wilsons house had been robbed, after which he went home & found his wife there. That he does not know whether his wife had been out that night or not. That neither the declarant nor his wife to his knowledge had any thing to do with the Theft from Wilsons house. Declares That he never knew of a pair of brass Candlesticks being in his house, belonging to him or his wife, nor a Snuffer tray. That he never knew of his wife having any silk gown except a black one, and the last time he saw it was when they lived in Rutherglen. That she never had to his knowledge a red silk shawl or a white silk plaid, but she had a blue cloth great Coat, which was made down for clothes to the children by Mary France a preceding declarant. That within a few days after his wife was taken up Agnes Muter a preceding declarant brought into his house & laid down a horn spoon seemingly new & a snuffer tray, black Japanned saying that she had got them from this wife and did not like to keep them on account of her having been taken up. That the Declarant told her he was equally unwilling to have any thing to do with them, & the declarant thinks that Muter laid them down in his house. That the declarant gave up his house at the time to a person who had become bound [sic] for his rent & having left the house the declarant has not seen said articles since & does not know where they are. And all this is truth. [Signs]¹⁴²

I can see why MacDonald may think that William was involved in, or even to blame for, this particular theft. However, in the other case there is no mention of him at all,

¹⁴¹ MacDonald, *Human Remains*, p.55

¹⁴² William Sutherland’s statement ‘Precognition against Mary McLachlan Housebreaking Glasgow 21 to 22 February 1828.’ NAS, AD.14.28.161

and had he been guilty then why didn't he abscond before they had a chance to find this second case of theft? Many of the other witnesses make reference to Mary saying that she had items that her husband didn't know about too. An alternative, and equally compelling explanation, is that Mary was hiding things from William.

Mary refused to tell the court where her own red silk shawl was in her own statement during these proceedings. MacDonald also claims Mary denied stealing the items but admitted to receiving them.¹⁴³ This is something that I have not been able to verify.

Conviction and transportation

Mary was sentenced to fourteen years transportation to 'places beyond the seas' on 22 April 1828. Mary did not take her children with her when she was transported although it is clear from other that this would have been possible. Perhaps it was the over-land trip before the sea voyage that led to her deciding to leave the children behind. Or perhaps she had no say in the matter and William disappeared with them without her knowledge. This is suggested by MacDonald¹⁴⁴, but, without a reference I haven't been able to verify this information from the records.

After sentencing, Mary was transported to Van Diemen's Land on the *Harmony*. The *Harmony* sailed from The Downs, the coastline area near Kent in the south east of England. This meant that the convict women from Glasgow had an arduous journey by enclosed hackney coach down through England before boarding the vessel. This extra travel may be a reason why Mary would choose not to take her children with her. The ship's journey began on September 15 1828 and it arrived in Hobart on January 14 1829.

Upon arrival the women did not disembark immediately. The settlement in Hobart was predominantly made up of men. The influx of so many women at once was something that worried the authorities. As a result, the women of the *Harmony* remained aboard at anchor for eight days. They were all interviewed while on board by Josiah Spode who was the Muster Master (he was promoted to Superintendent of convicts at a later date). The information that the women gave was copied down by a

¹⁴³ MacDonald, *Human Remains*, p.55

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid* p. 61

clerk for their indent, the inventory of transported convicts, and a physical description was also written of each woman. When they did finally leave the ship it was under cover of darkness at about four in the morning¹⁴⁵. They were wearing their new convict dress (a brown serge jacket, a petticoat, a linen shirt, a linen cap, a pair of worsted stockings, a pair of shoes and a neck handkerchief¹⁴⁶) and were taken in smaller ships to shore and then walked to the newly established female factory at Cascades.

In this female factory Governor Arthur had decreed that there would be three classes of convicts. Women in the first class would be assigned to settlers who came to apply for servants. Women in the other two classes would work doing laundry, picking oakum, sewing and in the convict nursery, with the third class or crime class completing the least desirable of these jobs.

Assignment to Glen Nairne

With women being so scarce in Van Diemen's Land those from the *Harmony* were sought after to become servants in the homes of free settlers. Mary was quickly assigned to Charles Ross Nairne. Charles Ross Nairne and his wife Katherine (nee Stirling) came as free settlers from Paisley with their son, Charles Jnr. A record has a Charles Ross Nairne marrying a Catharine Stirling Cameron on 25 Nov 1816 in Gorbals, Lanark, Scotland.¹⁴⁷ There is an arrival announcement in the *Hobart Town Gazette* (also known as the *Van Diemen's Land Advertiser*) on Saturday 22 1822¹⁴⁸ for them. All three arrived on the *Castle Forbes* the day before the paper was published. It also says that the ship's journey was quite arduous as it took six months to arrive.

The land that was to become Glen Nairne was granted to Charles Robert Nairne (this is the name in the record) on the 30th June 1823.¹⁴⁹ Robert being noted as the middle name was likely an error. The land was five hundred acres and the border on one side

¹⁴⁵ Ibid p.62

¹⁴⁶ Ibid p.61-62

¹⁴⁷ Charles Ross Nairne and Catharine Stirling Cameron, 25 Nov 1816' FamilySearch *Scotland, Marriages, 1561-1910*, database, <<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:XTBX-5LN>> [Accessed 26 October 2015],

¹⁴⁸ 'Ship News' *Hobart Town Gazette and Van Diemen's Land Advertiser 2 March 1822* p.2 <[http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/1089648?searchTerm=castle forbes&searchLimits=1-state=Tasmania||l-title=5](http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/1089648?searchTerm=castle%20forbes&searchLimits=1-state=Tasmania||l-title=5)> [Accessed 8 September 2015]

¹⁴⁹ Tasmania Archives and Heritage Office Record of Land Grant AC384 TA1027

was the Coal River. They lived on a property named Glen Nairne, which was in the Coal River Valley, near what is today the town of Richmond. At this time, it was quite an isolated property nearly thirty miles, or around a day's ride, from Hobart.

In the land grant it also gives him the right to apply for the service of five convicts to work the land. It would be the Nairne's obligation to clothe and feed the convicts, and fulfilling this obligation was a requirement of them being allowed to keep the land. This is particularly relevant to note as later Mary would claim that she did not receive her correct clothing allocation.

A letter from Charles appeared in the *Hobart Town Gazette* on Friday 8 July 1825¹⁵⁰ stating that he had applied for a recently vacated Cashiership at the Bank of Van Diemen's Land. In the letter it also says that he served many years in a Banking House in Scotland. It seems puzzling that a man who had held such a position would travel half-way around the world to apply for a grant of land and raises that possibility that Charles may have come to Tasmania to escape other issues. As there were others cases where domestic servants absconded while in service to the Nairnes, one wonders whether perhaps Charles was motivated to leave Paisley to escape some skeletons in his closet. How much did Katherine know about her husband's proclivities for the help? Did she suspect and then have her suspicions confirmed when she discovered Mary's pregnancy?

Although the property itself was quite isolated, Charles was very well connected in the local community and spent much time on various committees, one to bring the Presbyterian Church to the colony. Katherine surely would have felt cut off from society on such an isolated property, effectively a day's ride from Hobart, and with Charles often away. When Mary arrived perhaps it was a relief for Katherine at first to have some female company. Katherine was eight months pregnant at the time and surely having Mary there was a great help. Katherine must have been struggling to upkeep the house before Mary arrived and surely yearning for company or assistance.

¹⁵⁰ Charles Ross Nairne, 'Classified Advertising', *Hobart Town Gazette*, Friday 8 July 1825 p.1 <<http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/1090875?searchTerm=charles%20ross%20nairne&searchLimits=1-decade=182>> [Accessed 9 September 2015]

At the time of Mary's arrival, the Assignment System was in place. This meant that convict women would most likely be assigned as domestic servants in the homes of free settlers. Domestics were very much in short supply at this time as the colony in Van Diemen's Land was still in its early stages and few women had chosen to come of their own accord. Having a convict woman serve in your house must have been unsettling for the women who had come free with their husbands. A servant might normally have been someone that they felt they could trust and feel that their belongings were in reasonably safe hands, or safer hands than those of women already convicted of crimes, quite often theft. Convict women had already proved that they were not to be trusted with other people's possessions, as that is what led them to become convict women in the first place.

Pregnancy

Mary was at Glen Nairne for only two months before she became pregnant. Her pregnancy wasn't discovered until August. When discovered she was charged with being absent without permission and brought before Josiah Spode on August 10 1829. Mary made a complaint that she was not given her correct clothing allowance by the Nairnes. As previously noted, it was the settler's responsibility to ensure that the convicts were given the correct uniform. Upon hearing the complaint Mr Spode wished to speak to Katherine who, as the lady of the house, would have been the one in charge of clothing the servants. Charles asked to speak to Mr Spode. Their conversation was not recorded but as a result not only did they never consult Katherine about the clothing but Mary was sent back to the factory to solitary confinement and then the crime class.

It seems probable that Charles was the father of Mary's child, although this cannot be stated definitively based on the records. There were likely to have been a number of men working on the property. Charles was allowed to have five convicts working on the property as per his land grant. It was reported at the time that there were people who knew who the father of the child was and that this man was above her in station. Another convict would not be considered above Mary's station and so I do not believe that should be a serious consideration. Although, the neighbouring property of the Parramores was close by, the properties were separated by the river. It seems unlikely that Mary would have been able to travel the distances to the neighbouring

properties on a regular basis. I would not go so far as to state categorically that Charles was the father in this chapter. It does however, seem to be the most likely explanation. It is the one that is most suggested by the sources of the time and will be the one I suggest in the creative work.

So, Mary was sent back to the female factory. As it was a crime for a convict woman to be pregnant, she would have entered the Crime Class. This would not occur until after she had served a sentence in the solitary cells. These cells were pitch black at most times of the day, and while a prisoner was incarcerated there they would exist on a diet of only bread and water. After the solitary cell and serving her six months of hard labour in the crime class, Mary was to be reassigned to the interior.

The Cascades Factory was criticized by the local newspapers before it even opened for business. It sat in a swamp at the bottom of Mount Wellington, was always cold and damp and received very little sun.¹⁵¹ The rations were:

‘for breakfast, a quarter pound of bread and a pint of gruel; for dinner, half a pound of bread and a pint of soup; and for supper, a quarter pound of bread and a pint of soup. For the soup, there were to be 25 pounds of meat to every 150 quarts of soup, which was to be thickened with vegetables and peas or barley. This diet, even if fully supplied, was totally inadequate for pregnant and breastfeeding mothers.’¹⁵²

In correspondence with the Lieutenant Governor the Superintendent said that he was “‘unable to comply’ with the regulations because no vegetables were available.”¹⁵³

While at the female factory and serving her time in the Crime Class, Mary was not given lighter duties than anyone else and she was not given any extra rations, despite being pregnant. She was also heard by others stating that she wished her child would not be born alive¹⁵⁴. But wishing this and killing the child are two different things.

After months of hard work and surviving on these rations despite eating for two, in early December 1829 Mary went into labour. She retreated to a privy, and her friend

¹⁵¹ Rebecca Kippen ‘And the Mortality Frightful’: Infant and Child Mortality in the Convict Nurseries of Van Diemen’s Land (seminar paper, Australian National University, online at <http://www.femaleconvicts.org.au/index.php/convict-institutions/children/infant-mortality>) [Accessed 1 May 2012] p.3

¹⁵² Ibid p.3

¹⁵³ Ibid p.3

¹⁵⁴ ‘On Monday’ *Hobart Town Courier*, 24 April 1830 pp.2-3

<<http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/4208894>> [Accessed 9 September 2015]

Mary Cameron (another woman who had arrived on the *Harmony*) at some stage joined her there.

The baby did not survive and was found dead in the privy. Whatever Mary's reasons for going there, for privacy or otherwise, they were assumed to be of a sinister nature when the child did not survive. She was charged with infanticide. MacDonald says that Mary pleaded not guilty.¹⁵⁵

On the 24th April 1830 *The Hobart Town Courier* reported that 'also discharged, Mary Cameron charged with the murder of her infant child.'¹⁵⁶ It is unclear whether this means that Mary Cameron was also discharged for murdering her own child, or for assisting in the murder of Mary MacLauchlan's child. The records do show evidence that authorities suspected that Mary had an accomplice. In trying to get Mary to confess the night before Rev. Bedford also wanted her to name the person who had helped her.¹⁵⁷

'Civil registration of births, deaths and marriages began in Van Diemen's Land in 1838.'¹⁵⁸ As Mary's case is before this the records are not recorded in the registers. At Cascades Female Factory there is a folder where all the births and deaths of children in the Factory were recorded. Mary's child was not to be found there when I visited in August 2012 and when I asked why, the staff were not able to tell me.

There were two others convict servants who became pregnant while in service and were charged with crimes relating to that: Elizabeth King, who was charged with the crime of concealing a birth, and sentenced to two years imprisonment for the crime in 1842, and Elizabeth Lee who was also charged with the crime but I could not find any further information about her. There was another convict named Mary O'Donnell who was tried for the same crime but, with the support of her master (he was not thought to be the father of her child), she was not convicted. MacDonald notes that during O'Donnell's infanticide trial three medical men testified. Only one testified during Mary's.¹⁵⁹

Infanticide trial

¹⁵⁵ MacDonald, *Human Remains*, p.72

¹⁵⁶ 'Criminal Court' *Hobart Town Courier* April 24 1830 p.3

¹⁵⁷ MacDonald, *Human Remains*, p.82

¹⁵⁸ Kippen, 'And the Mortality Frightful': Infant and Child Mortality in the Convict Nurseries of Van Diemen's Land' p.2

¹⁵⁹ MacDonald, *Human Remains*, p.75

Mary was tried for the crime and found guilty, the sentence for which was hanging. The trial took a day and many witnesses were interviewed. A woman had never been hanged in Van Diemen's Land at this point in time. Women at the same time in England who were found in similar circumstances were often tried for the lesser crime of concealing a birth which did not carry the possibility of a death penalty. When a person was sentenced to be executed members of a special council the 'Executive Council' would meet to discuss the case. This also happened for Mary. Originally sentenced to be executed on a Friday, after the Executive Committee met, she was given a stay of execution for the weekend. The minutes for this meeting are available at the archives in Hobart, Tasmania. However, this record lists the meeting start time at 2:30pm and the end time as 6:30pm and only 286 words are recorded. I think it likely that much more was said in the four-hour time period than has been recorded on public record. In this meeting two members of the council Colonial Treasurer Jocelyn Thomas and the Colonial Secretary John Burnett wondered at the supposed lack of 'adequate motive' for Mary to have committed the crime, and they worried that she had been coerced to commit the crime by the father of the child, who was 'supposed to be a person of better education and higher rank in society than herself'¹⁶⁰. They wished to stay the execution while they tried to find out whether there was any truth to their theory or coercion. They also said it was 'in the hope that something might come to light extenuating the enormity of the crime.'¹⁶¹ They wished to avoid executing the first woman in the colony. In this meeting Chief Justice Pedder said that he did not recommend that they interfere with the course of the law in this case. Lieutenant Governor Arthur said that he wished to find out what happened in cases of a similar nature in England and agreed to reprieve Mary until the Monday. On Monday the execution would take place if all members of the committee did not agree that mercy should be shown.

We know that Jocelyn Thomas would later have financial troubles in the colony. He found himself in debt due to purchasing land that he couldn't afford and although he denied ever taking money from the Treasury chest, a surprise search showed that

¹⁶⁰ Minutes of Proceedings of the Executive Council, 16th April 1830, Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office (hereafter TAHO), TA62 EC4/1/1

¹⁶¹ Ibid

there were missing funds and it was assumed he was the culprit.¹⁶² John Burnett was also involved in ‘corrupt land dealings.’¹⁶³

Intriguingly, Chief Justice Pedder is described in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* in terms very different to what one might expect when viewing his conduct in Mary’s case. The entry describes his actions thus:

Pedder's judgments and reports to the Executive Council on capital cases show that he was appalled by the severity of the criminal code and diligent in giving prisoners the benefit of every possible doubt. In many cases, and often with difficulty, he succeeded in persuading the lieutenant-governor to pardon prisoners or commute their sentences.¹⁶⁴

Governor George Arthur was also on the record regarding Pedder: 'Though a man of great talents and unbending integrity, of the purest intentions and a very safe adviser, he is so tedious and so minute that life is much too short to wait for his opinions and decision'.¹⁶⁵ Unlike Thomas and Burnett, no scandals attached themselves Pedder’s name in the colony.

If Lieutenant Governor Arthur wanted to find out what happened in similar cases in England at the time, surely he understood that this was something that would take more than a day or two to discover unless there was someone in the colony he could consult with on this matter. As there is no mention of this at the next day's meeting, he seems to have dropped this whole idea in favour of sending an envoy to ask Mary whether the father of the child encouraged her to commit the infanticide.

The next day the Executive Council met again at 2:30pm after a letter was received from the jury begging for leniency to be shown as ‘they believed she had been driven to commit the crime by a sense of desperation and shame from the fear that the birth of her child would become known to her relatives at home, and that her deportment at the trial was submissive and resigned.’¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² H. R. Thomas, ‘Thomas, Jocelyn Henry Connor (1780–1862)’ *Australian Dictionary of Biography* <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/thomas-jocelyn-henry-connor-2726>> [Accessed 29 September 2015]

¹⁶³ Goc. *Women, Infanticide and the Press, 1822–1922*, p.107

¹⁶⁴ P. A. Howell Pedder, ‘Sir John Lewes (1793–1859)’ *Australian Dictionary of Biography* <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/pedder-sir-john-lewes-2542>> [Accessed 29 September 2015]

¹⁶⁵ Ibid

¹⁶⁶ Minutes of Proceedings of the Executive Council, 17th April 1830, TAHO, TA62 EC4/1/1

A gentleman named Mr Hone was also present at this meeting as Lieutenant Governor Arthur had sent him to question Mary as to the matter of coercion in her crime. Mr Hone 'stated that the prisoner had declared to him that no person outside the House of Correction had endeavoured in any way to influence her to commit the crime.'¹⁶⁷ MacDonald makes the point that when Hone was sent to ask her whether anyone had incited her to murder the child, 'how she could have made any other response, for Mary McLauchlan had declared herself not guilty of the murder, and Hone's question assumed her guilt. How could she take this opportunity to shift the blame to the man who had made her pregnant, when to do so would mean admitting she had murdered the child?'¹⁶⁸

At this meeting Jocelyn Thomas, one of the two men who had previously argued for the reprieve gave this impassioned speech:

'I beg leave to advise your Excellency to attend to the recommendation of the jury – the crime is one of rare occurrence – no female as ever suffered the extreme penalty of the law in this Island. If example is the great objective of the awful punishment of death, that I conceive has been fully answered by the great interest and strong feeling excited in the minds of the inhabitants by the short reprieve already granted by your Excellency. And had the sentence been carried into effect this morning I do believe it would not have [had] the same anxious, deep-felt sentiments of mingled pity and terror which at present pervade all classes. She would have gone to her grave and her crime would hardly have been known.'¹⁶⁹

But Thomas's plea fell on deaf ears as the Colonial Secretary Burnett and Chief Justice Pedder did not advise that mercy be shown. I would guess that Mary's denial of anyone inciting her to commit the crime was enough to change the Colonial Secretary's mind and the other two were not moved enough to intervene. I find it interesting to note that this meeting, despite including the reading of the letter and the presence of Mr Hone, broke at 3pm, only half an hour after it began. This seems a very short time considering the length of the previous day's meeting. There were also more words recorded on public record at this meeting than the earlier one. It seems likely that they had all decided whether to vote for leniency or to send Mary to the gallows before this second meeting even began.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid

¹⁶⁸ MacDonald, 'A dissection in reverse: Mary McLauchlan, Hobart Town, 1830' *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal*, p.20

¹⁶⁹ Minutes of Proceedings of the Executive Council, 17th April 1830, TAHO, TA62 EC4/1/1

Obviously, there was much that was said in these two meetings, particularly the first one, that wasn't recorded. There would have been so many factors at play influencing these men's decision in this case. This is one of the times when even though we have a written archival record, we know that we still do not have the whole truth. When we consider that Justice Pedder did sometimes suggest a mitigation of the sentence we have to ask why he was so adamant that they should not reprieve Mary in this case.

What we do have is some clear evidence that Mary could have been saved by these men, and the knowledge that they chose not to save her is something that will inform my characterization of them in the novel. Nicola Goc and Helen MacDonald think that part of the reason they refused to intervene was because they wished to protect the man who had made her pregnant in the first place.

Public response

Mary's execution was reported in the colonial press. It was clear from the way it was reported that different papers had different agendas alongside that of reporting the news. Politics were central to how the events were detailed, and as to whether sympathy was shown for Mary. Nicola Goc has written extensively on this topic in 'Chapter Four: Infanticide in the Van Diemen's Land Press' in her book *Women, Infanticide and the Press, 1822–1922*, where she writes 'in the case of Mary McLauchlan a newspaper editor found a creative way to expose corruption amongst the elite in the penal colony while preventing himself from being the respondent in a libel action.'¹⁷⁰

Goc argues that when publishing Nairne's name in capital type in the centre of the words 'She had been in the service of' and 'Having there become pregnant...' Murray was leaving 'no doubt as to the author of her fate,'¹⁷¹

Goc goes on to say:

Nairne's name amplified in capitals exposed him to the colonial world of Van Diemen's Land as the metaphorical 'author' of Mary's 'destruction'. Murray had turned to a well-used typographical discursive practice in the use of capitalized letters for emphasis, and significantly, this strategy was understood by newspaper readers as connoting special significance. Typographically buttressed between the

¹⁷⁰ Goc, *Women, Infanticide and the Press, 1822–1922*, p.98

¹⁷¹ *Ibid* p.114

phrases ‘in the service of’ and ‘having there become pregnant’ the connotation of the capitalized ‘Mr C.R. NAIRNE’ became apparent. Murray had used the stylistic typesetting device of the compositor to amplify meaning in a way that placed him at no risk of libellous action, leaving Nairne with no legal recourse.’¹⁷²

While newspapers did often capitalise names on other occasions, I find Goc’s argument about Murray’s intentions in doing so persuasive. She also mentions an editorial published by Henry Melville in the *Colonial Times* in May 1830 where he draws attention to the ‘heartlessness and cold blooded inhumanity of the seducer of the unfortunate Mary McLauchlan’ continuing on to say that he:

deserves nothing better than that his name should have been held up by the Press to the scorn, contempt and hatred of all classes ... nor should we shrink from doing this, had we not reason to believe that he is already sufficiently punished by the manner in which his society is universally evaded.¹⁷³

This is not justice. Mary was executed for her crimes while the believed originator of them was merely shunned by society. This does however seem to point to the fact that Charles Nairne did not escape his role in these events unscathed. Goc notes that he fell from his prominent position in society, his marriage was damaged beyond repair, and he was to die alone in Victoria twelve years later.¹⁷⁴ An article in *The Cornwall Chronicle* seems to report his death differently, in the Family Notices/Deaths section as such: ‘In Sydney, on the 3rd of February, 1842, Charles Ross Nairne Esq , formerly of Launceston, aged 46’.¹⁷⁵

The weekend before she was hanged, Mary was ‘offered comfort’ by the Church of England’s Reverend William Bedford. Reverend Archibald McArthur, from the Presbyterian Church that Charles was involved in bringing to the colony, was also there. McArthur, or the ‘kissing’ parson could not be trusted alone with women¹⁷⁶, just like Mr Nairne it would seem. So, perhaps his ‘comfort’ would have come in a different manner had Bedford not been present.

¹⁷² Ibid p.114

¹⁷³ Henry Melville editorial *Colonial Times* 7 May 1830 in Nicola Goc, *Women, Infanticide and the Press, 1822–1922*, pp115-116

¹⁷⁴ Goc, *Women, Infanticide and the Press, 1822–1922*, p.116

¹⁷⁵ ‘Deaths’ *The Cornwall Chronicle* Saturday 19 March 1842 p.2

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/66017833?searchTerm=charles%20ross%20nairne%20death&searchLimits=l-decade=184>

¹⁷⁶ ‘Mr McArthur’ *The True Colonist* Friday 18 March 1836 p. 87

<<http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/203145856?browse=ndp%3Abrowse%2Ftitle%2FT%2Ftitle%2F945%2F183%2F1836%2F03%2F18%2Fpage%2F22311661%2Farticle%2F203145856>>

[Accessed 15 June 2016]

Mary may have told the Reverend that Mary Cameron helped her. Perhaps he offered an assurance that Mary Cameron would not face any punishment, and would be found not guilty of any charges raised against her. This would be in keeping with the notice in the paper that Mary Cameron was released from the charge of infanticide.

Mary McLauchlan did not repent from the gallows. When she was hanged she 'evinced that firmness, which sometimes is so much required of men in similar cases', according to *The Colonial Times* 23 April 1830¹⁷⁷. Her last words were, 'Oh. My God.'

* * *

After she was hanged Mary was dissected. This was something that frightened many people at the time and as such was another reason for people to try to keep on the right side of the law. It was also a way for the medical practitioners at the time to learn what they could about the human body.

While we can learn a great deal from the records that do exist, there are many other facts that were never recorded. While I wish that I could discover everything about Mary in the historical records, this is an impossible endeavour. History is written by the victors, and a convict woman who was hanged for infanticide is certainly not a victor in anyone's opinion. By writing a historical novel about Mary I hope to reclaim her story and give a voice to someone that history has forgotten. In my work I am not overly interested in Mary's innocence or guilt, but in providing a more nuanced portrayal of the character. If I was to proclaim her wholly innocent or to attempt to absolve her of any blame, then I think that would just be reinforcing the angel/whore stereotype about women. Historical fiction can be so successful at both drawing attention to and destroying this binary notion. Mary was a real person who was not just good or evil. All people are complex beings and I hope to represent her as such. The records presented here certainly prove that she, and the others involved, were complex.

¹⁷⁷ 'Execution' *The Colonial Times* 23 April 1830, p.3
<http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/8645092?browse=ndp%3Abrowse%2Ftitle%2FC%2Ftitle%2F24%2F1830%2F04%2F23%2Fpage%2F666722%2Farticle%2F8645092> [Accessed 5 January 2011]

The reasons that Mary was transported are clear and logical. I would not argue that she should not have been transported for them. Once in the convict system however, in which gender played such a large role, we see that there was little protection against sexual assault for women assigned to serve in the homes of settlers. If a convict woman were sexually assaulted she would not be believed if she reported it, even if it was obviously true; or worse, it would be believed that sexual relations had occurred, but it would be claimed that she was a prostitute and so she would be punished for being raped. Daniels gives us the example of Mary Ann Brock, a convict transported to Van Diemen's Land. After being 'savagely raped' Mary Ann was

so badly injured she could hardly speak, and the Hobart *Mercury* reported that the assault had occurred in "circumstances of unusual atrocity". Although the case was proved and Fisher [the rapist] sentenced to hang, petitions that alleged that Mrs Brock's character was "far from good" convinced the authorities that she was 'nothing else than a common prostitute'. Fisher was freed and Mary Ann Brock was sentenced to two years' hard labour at Cascades for perjury. She said of her situation that she "had no one to speak up for her": it was "a made up case amongst the men."¹⁷⁸

In Mary's case too, it seems as if a patriarchal clique, who were friendly with the man who was likely responsible for her pregnancy, took the opportunity to permanently rid themselves of the risk of her speaking out against them. The historical record may not have privileged Mary's story but, in using these records and building on them my novel can.

¹⁷⁸ Daniels, *Convict Women* p.206-207

**CREATIVE WORK:
'PRECIOUS LITTLE'**

1.

Hobart Town Gaol. April 19, 1830

I run my fingers over this white dress that was made special for the occasion. I would have one day made a dress for my wee *bairns* once they weren't so wee anymore. The ones I made wouldn't have been white, but perhaps a nice green to complement their eyes. Or maybe one would insist on a fiery red that would clash awfully with her hair, and the other would want blue, like a seaside sky. I would have made them with a mother's love for her children.

Mrs Bisdee, the gaoler's wife, made this dress for me. I wonder why it is white. The colour of purity which I cannae lay no claim to and the colour of innocence, which is never as easy to define as it seems at first. Perhaps they hope I will find some salvation wearing white. I don't know what Mrs Bisdee felt upon making this outfit. Whatever her feelings were, kind or other, seeing it fills me with a darkening like the gloaming. How could it not – for it is the dress that I will die in.

I don't know whose idea this black ribbon that I've been ordered to tie around my waist was. With it tied I appear more like a child than like someone who has been found guilty of murdering one. Maybe that's what the papers will say. I'm sure to be big news. The first woman to be hanged in this colony. What a tiny waif I will look as I step onto the platform. How theatrical this outfit will look as I hang from that rope, limbs limp as I finish my last dance.

I wonder what the dead child is wearing now. I will see it again soon. How will I recognise it when I don't know the clothes that will cover what is left of its flesh? Or

will its flesh be rotted and fall in clumps? Will its hands scratch at me with a strength they should not own? Will it be nightmarish and grotesque, another condemnation?

They will give this gown to the hangman when it has served its purpose for me. He will be able to sell it or keep it as he desires. I wonder who would want to buy such a garment? The only way to sell it is perhaps never to reveal its previous owner ... although, there is a certain morbid fascination attached to the clothes one wears when one leaves this earth. Someone may want to keep this grisly souvenir.

Underneath our coverings, where only our bare bodies breathe there are truths written that we would never willingly show to the world. When they take off my clothes and get ready to cut me up they will see the secrets and the markings of a body that has lived a hard life. Will they feel sorry for me as they peel back the layers? As they unpick the threads that my life has woven? Or will they think that I got my due? I have to believe they will feel something. How can they do that to a body and not feel?

What is it that they will be looking for when they cut me up? What makes me different to any other body that has lived a good and well-meaning life? A body that will not be delivered from this world while underneath a hood to make them blind, and with a rope around the neck to hold them as they dance their last jig. Is my skull bigger? For I heard James Scott talking to Charles about how there are some people who think that the way we look can show whether we are going to do bad things. Do I have the forehead of an evil-doer? Is there a black spot upon my very soul marking me for a life where nothing but danger is in store and nothing but despair is the end result?

For a small period of time I thought I may be granted a reprieve. There were applications to delay my execution, pleading for leniency to be shown. For I will be the first woman to be punished to the most extreme measure of the law. Some are sympathetic towards me but many are eager to see me punished. They say this will teach the women a lesson, this will show them that they aren't safe. When were we ever safe? When were we ever spared?

I can't help but wonder if Charles tried to help me. I don't think he would have. I don't know for certain but I think I know him well enough to know that he will be hiding. He will not show his face as he is afraid to see what he has done to me. He will lie to himself, most of all, about how things were. He will say that he did no wrong. Some people will believe him, but others know, others understand. It is better here in Van Diemen's Land in some ways, but it is the same sad world in others too. You don't discriminate based on actions, only on social standings. In the end, it doesn't matter if he is there or not. His part in the story is finished, and my own role draws near to its conclusion. I have lived my last weekend. Tomorrow is Monday. The day I die. I say no more.

2.

Hobart Town Gaol. April 19, 1830.

Mary McLauchlan stands on the scaffold in front of the crowd. A large concourse are present to witness the spectacle. Some have abstained from attending, due to either embarrassment or delicacy, not wishing to see the first woman in Van Diemen's Land to be hanged. Those that have congregated to bear witness are solemn. The carnival atmosphere that usually accompanies such events—both on the other side of the world, and here in the colony—is missing. Instead of raucous the crowd remains subdued. Instead of clamouring for blood, as if the loss of another life will enrich theirs, many are in mourning for the sweet-faced Scottish girl whose life is to be ended.

Colonel Surgeon James Scott stands in the crowd. He is watching and waiting, attempting to hide his eagerness for he will dissect this woman. Pull her apart, and come to know her in a way entirely other to the emotional reactions that stem from dealing with living people. She will be his for the taking.

The St David's church bell tolls as William Bedford reads from his bible. John Dogherty places the rope around the small woman's neck. This action marks the first time he has ever set about taking the life of a woman. He ties the knot to make the noose and says a brief prayer begging forgiveness for the act he is about to commit. He lowers the hood over her face but it does little to erase the memory of it. The crowd knows what hides beneath. A face with its expression blank, a face that doesn't flinch, not even as the world goes dark. A face of determination as Mary has refused to repent publicly. The women who stand in the crowd turn their faces away,

perhaps considering themselves lucky not to be in Mary's position. While their faces are averted, Dogherty kicks the peg that the trap door rests on. The ground falls away from Mary as the rope tightens around her neck. As she drops she breathes her final words. 'Oh. My God.'

3.

All I have now in the darkness is time to think. If I could have one last day of freedom I would spend it on the beach at Saltcoats. The place I always wanted to leave, my hometown and birthplace, now shines in my memory like a lighthouse beacon of safety. I got to be a certain age and I just knew it was not the place for me. But I did love the sea. I could sit for hours and while away every afternoon of my life I reckoned, just watching it. How still it was most days – but even in calm I could watch a single swell work its way towards the shore. And on the few days that it was rough I felt like the ocean was a reflection of what was going on inside me. For I was not always as calm inside as I looked like from the outside. Sometimes I was a raging storm and I wasn't sure what I could do with all my extra energy. But even when I felt that way, I was always calmest at the seaside.

On my eighth birthday while we were down at the water, I saw a beautiful horse and carriage pass by the beach. I have never forgotten the way the dabs of cherry red along that shining brown wood burned themselves into the air; the way the red oh-so-soft looking curtains danced in the breeze; or the way the single white-gloved hand gracefully came to rest just beneath them. The road was smooth so the carriage travelled in a hush of quiet and attracted little notice from the rest of my family, but I was rooted to the spot and longed to follow – to find where they were going. To sneak up and climb into the carriage when no one else was nearby, or just to touch that pristine white glove. It wasn't the first well-to-do vehicle that I'd seen pass through town, and it wouldn't be the last but from that day I knew that I was meant for a regal carriage one day. It almost makes me laugh to think of the surety

with which my newly eight-year-old self felt that. The cart that may carry me to my death, I wonder, is that regal enough for that long passed child?

After that day all the things that I took pleasure in lost a little of their lustre. I was still a happy child, I just wished for finer things such as a nicer dress to run around in. I know it is human nature to feel this way, but I also felt somehow that it was what I deserved. Where does a child get these ideas?

No one who lived in Saltcoats was taking white gloves off at night. No one there was stepping down from that carriage with the help of a dashing young man. Those that had all that finery, they were only ever passing through our sleepy little town, or catching a brief glimpse of the seaside to have a break from city life. And from then I decided, that while my childhood would be in Saltcoats, I would leave one day, and if I ever came back I would only be ‘passing through’. I know now though that I will never be going back. There are some moments that chop your life up into pieces and after they’re separated you can’t go back no matter how you long to. The moment with the carriage wasn’t one of them, but it was the start of the thoughts that would lead to all of the chops that would follow.

Da despaired for me when he saw that I would covet that which was ‘not of our station’ as he’d say. I was determined to get a whole new station of life. I would not be this small girl forever. One day I would be the one making the decisions about where this life would take me.

*

Not long after my fifteenth birthday, I was breathless in the street from playing tig with Andrew. He lived a few houses up the road and his father was a fisherman. His

mother did piecework from home. Andrew was teasing me, for even though I was quick he was quicker and could easily dart around my outstretched hand. He would slow to give me hope that I could catch him and then at the last moment, quick as anything he would be off and to the left and my fingertips would sweep through thin air. The sea breeze carried Ma's voice to me and I turned to see her calling for me—half her body leaning out into the street. Andrew came closer to say farewell and I held back my laugh as I flicked my fingers out to make contact with his chest,

‘Tig,’ I whispered, catching him by surprise, before fleeing for home.

When I arrived inside to the table, I knew from Ma's tight mouth that she had seen me touch my hand to Andrew's chest. I felt colour rise in my cheeks. She was always getting the wrong idea. I didn't know whether it best to say something myself or just to sit down and hope she wouldn't say anything.

Da looked up as I took my seat. I met his eyes and smiled, a real, full smile. He was helping at the ship-building yards and hadn't been home to a meal with us in a few days.

‘Andrew's almost a grown man now,’ Ma said, as she ladled the tatties and neeps onto a plate.

‘Ma, I told you afore, we are friends.’

Lachie and Margaret came skidding to the table and Ma raised her eyebrows at them, so I could avoid her haiverin' on about it anymore. I would marry a man who could take me away from this place. I liked Andrew, I even loved him in a way, but not the way to marry, and not enough to give up my dreams of leaving Saltcoats.

If I had known, then what path my life would take I may have been willing to stay with Andrew instead. Sometimes I think about him now. There was a quietness to my fondness for him. Life would have been steady with him. But I didn't want a steady life. I wanted red velvet. I wanted white gloves. I wonder whether it did have to be one or the other now. It felt like it at the time.

Days in Saltcoats were never varied. I often pictured the clothing that would be the literal form of the name of our small village. A coat made from salt. I wondered whether it would keep one warm and decided that it wouldn't. It would be course to the touch and hard against the skin, the individual grains rubbing away, you'd end up red raw by the time you took it off after a morning's wear. And if it should happen to rain while you were wearing it you would end up a walking sea, covered in the salty water, taking it with you wherever you went. I found some comfort in the thought of taking the large ocean with me wherever I was to go. Something about the notion made me feel that so long as I was near the sea, then there was a part of me that would always be near my Da.

In the end it was like I was wearing a coat of salt that was chafing my skin with the need to escape.

*

These days when I wake I feel utterly spiritless. I have endeavoured to keep my spirits up but one can only do so for a short period of time when there is no hope left. When there is nothing to wish for but a swift demise when the door opens beneath one's feet. I do sometimes wonder what word of these terrible events will reach the ears of my beloved children back at home. I don't know where they have gone. I get no word here, and they had disappeared before I sailed from my home shores.

It hurts the most that I won't ever know what becomes of them. They should have been my all, but now I won't lie and pretend that I lived for them. I wish to God that I had but it is far from truth to speak such. If I had truly had them in mind I would not have ended up here. I would never have been sent so far from my home and away from their angel faces.

I dreamt of William last night. In the dream he was just as when I first saw him in the street at Saltcoats, from the jaunty angle of his cap, to the dishevelled, molasses-coloured hair that was visible beneath it, to the shiny boots he wore. If I'd stared into them I would have near been able to see myself. It would have been a gift to see myself from the outside in as others did. If they were to glance my way, that is, which didn't happen often. I could pass up and down the street and not turn one head. I was just that rag-tag Mary McLauchlan gallivanting around the streets again. I was nothing to take any interest in. Why, my own Ma didn't take an interest in me so why would anyone else?

But the second time I saw William I caught his eye. He saw something that, from the way he smiled, I knew he liked. I didn't know how to act around a man I hadn't met before. Certainly not how I would've acted if it was my Da, or even Andrew. So, I pretended that I was too busy to be bothered with him. But then I worried that he would think I really was too busy – that he wouldn't know I was really longing to ask him how he got his shoes so shiny and where he got his vest from. There were too many buttons for it to be from anyone in town, it was too flashy. Pointless adornments were not something Saltcoats people held with. We worked hard to get by. We didn't have extra. I longed for the frivolous and pointless,

for the impractical and the fanciful. If there was one thing we had in spades in Saltcoats it was common sense and an eye for being thrifty.

William was the opposite of everything my parents, my Da especially, wanted for me in a husband. He was quick-tempered and fool-hardy, but he could make me feel like I was the only precious thing in the world, and he could spin a yarn that would have me believing anything was possible.

My William was a weaver. He worked hard to provide for the family, but then forgot that on his way home when he would stop in at the pub for a dram of whisky. He had a rotten foul temper when he was angry, the dirty *gommerel* roaring round my home causing a carfuffle at all times of the night and never caring who heard him. It is and it isn't his fault that I'm here. He did what he could do, and I did what I did, and now here I am. Sentenced to death for killing a child. A life for a life.

*

Growing up it was hard to feed all of us for Ma and Da. We all knew it was difficult but that didn't stop our bellies from aching, and didn't stop Lachie and Margaret from complaining. There were good times when we had plenty. But we often got by with less than we needed. I guess not having enough is something I got used to, as it didn't bother me over much most of the time. And even later on, in Glasgow, I remembered from when I was a *wean* that it probably didn't matter most of the time whether you had enough, that you needs must get by on less. I knew that many people spent a lifetime with not enough. But when we were growing up we went without things as Da didn't have the means, not because he misspent what he earned. My Da didn't drink or smoke or gamble. He was a God-fearing man and he taught me to fear Him too, but somehow along the way I lost His teachings.

*

In this cell I think about kneeling to pray. I remember once when I was a wee thing I saw Da kneeling afore the fire, praying that the few pieces of coal glowing red in the belly of the flames could last the eve as we had no means to buy more fuel until later in the week. His lips were moving so fast and solemn-like that I knew it was a serious business and that I should keep out of it till he was done but he must have felt my presence as the words slowly became more of a mumble, and then gathered strength until I could hear them from where I was across the room. Then his eyes slid open and he beckoned me forward with a finger and indicated the space on the ground next to him. I sank gratefully to my knees, having been uncertain whether I was to be yelled at, and with the relief I felt glowing like the red sparks on the coal, down in my belly, I thanked God for the blessings he had chosen to make me privy to and asked humbly for the fire to burn slow and allow us to keep moderate warm through the night.

I wish for that warmth from Da's love and the fire now, in my lonely, cold cell. I wonder if anyone is thinking of me. Sometimes I manage to convince myself that I do not care whether people will remember me or not, once I'm gone. But then I think of my two girls and how they should know something of their mother. Of how I would have been such a good mother to them if only I was given a second chance. I didn't know how to be one before because my Ma was not so kind to me. I never ate and saw them go hungry like Ma did with us sometimes, when food was scarce. I never kept warm in a coat while they froze in their shirt sleeves like Ma did with us sometimes. But I got myself shipped away from my bonnie girls forever. How hard it is to think these things while I sit alone in the dark. The air is growing putrid and

stale in here. If I were to light a candle it might just snuff itself right out again and refuse to burn. Like me.

Now all I have is darkness and silence. When I first went there, waking up in the mornings at Glen Nairne it was hard to get used to the silence. Sometimes I'd wake and feel disoriented wondering where I was for the first few moments before I came fully to my senses and realised. I was 'one of the most discredited creatures at the world's discredited rump' – I had heard the talk of the farmers. Home was now that shining trinket at the bottom of the world. A land of beauty and brutality. For I could not look outside and deny that Van Diemen's Land was bonnie. Sometimes I felt I could get lost in its beauty. My mind would roam and I'd think there's nothing out there to bounce my thoughts back to me, no coal-laden sky pressing down on us. It was as if there was no boundary to this place. It just went up and up to the heavens. Pure and unsullied. But if that was what the land was like, the people who populated the land were much different. They were often very much in drink, but for me to get a drop was a handsome treat. If I could tell my childhood self to stay in Saltcoats where life was not sprinkled with treasure but nor was it full of rough characters, if I could shake those wishes to roam from my little self, I would embrace the first opportunity to do so. Sometimes on the boat on the journey over I'd have dreadful sea-mares, where I wasn't quite awake or asleep but I'd be staring, lost in the thought of all that ocean spreading right round us, and I'd think that somewhere this same ocean touched the shore that I'd played upon so often with Da, and it was almost like I could imagine another self that had stayed there, and maybe this other self hadn't quarrelled with her Da like I had done with mine. But then the ocean would turn rough and red, waves would leap against the shore and pull this other me down below them and while I would raise my arms to the surface I could never get my

head above water to breath the air again. I would shake myself out of these sea-mares with a gurgling sound as if I'd really been suffocating and not just thinking of this imaginary self being pulled beneath the throbbing sea. Swallowed whole and no longer existing.

When I was in the solitary cell sometimes it was hard to remember that I really did exist. The darkness dissolved itself into more darkness, forever shrinking the sphere of my existence, until it was only the two inches in front of my face that I had, until there was nothing but the dark and nothing to separate me from it. Day after day of this, only I no longer knew a day as a day. Each minute was an eternity where I was trapped. There was nothing left in the world for me. No hope. Just black. My mind raced. Bugs crawled on me, real or imagined, which is worse? Nothingness would be a blessing but I never really slept. I was never really awake though either. Bread like rocks. Throat dry as dirt. Hunger pressing in. Devil creature inside clawing at me. Stretching and stealing whatever passion for living that I still had within. It felt like a changeling was growing inside. Something evil and foul and desperate to drag me into hell. I felt death with me as a constant presence. I knew not how to keep it at bay. I tried to cry out but did not know whether I could still make a sound. Who was to hear me if I did? I felt then that death would be a blessing, and maybe I still do now. I waited then for the blackness to devour me. I thought about what had led me to that despair.

*

What I liked most about those dresses that they said I took was the fabulous way, the magnificent way that they rustled when you ran your hand over them. The one with the white and red flowers was my favourite. Oh I could just lay here dreaming about

them all day. The way they were cold when you slid them over your skin at first but soon warmed up still sends delicious chills through me.

4.

We never had a glass to look into and see what others saw when I was a *wean*. Not when I got older neither, so when I met Mr William Sutherland and he paid particular attention to me out of all the young women, and told me I was beautiful I didn't know whether he was just after what all men are looking for or if he meant what he said. We didn't get many new people in such a small town like our Saltcoats and the favour of a new man was even less likely to come to any of us; usually a new man in town was leaving a bit of bad business behind or was swanning around town with a lady on his arm, showing her the seaside and acting like it was he himself who made it so pretty. I always lowered my eyes and burned with envy at the creatures that were always on these gentlemen's arms.

William was different though, he seemed a nice man and gentle too, but I didn't want to go and get myself ruined so I made him wait until I was sure. I gave him more than I should have, earlier than I should have though. He told me that one day he'd buy me a glass so I could see just how pretty I was.

Ma told me that she'd had a glass once and that it'd made her feel like she was really there. To be able to look in it and see herself as others saw her, and that she would try and make the reflection something she could be proud of. Until one day when her father saw her looking at herself in it, and had felt it vanity and vanity was one of the deadly sins, and so he'd smashed his hand into that looking glass. Ma said it was seven years of bad luck but really for her it was an eternity of bad luck, of never being able to see herself except through the expressions of other people again.

I wanted to feel like I was really there, like I was enough of a person to escape and have dreams come true. I imagined gazing into a looking glass with a golden handle that would sparkle in the candlelight and I longed to wear a beautiful gown and be thought pretty by others. William did indeed buy me the glass, or he said he'd bought it... I could not help but feel disappointed when I looked into it. I felt no more there than I had done before. And while I guess what I saw was pleasing enough I couldn't really say that I thought myself a great beauty. That feels so long ago now, back before I knew that in the end it is your spirit alone that matters and no other will come and show themselves at the final hour.

Today a small glass awaited me when I woke, placed just inside the bars of my cell, and I sat and looked at it for a time before I could decide if I wanted to lift it up and see what I'd become. Would I now look like the evil and immoral *besom* they thought me? The glass glinted at me like it had plans of its own and I wondered who had left it for me and what was their purpose. To show me how haggard I was? To know what they would all see when they came to watch me hang? Or to help me keep my wits and know that I'm alive at least for one more day. A kind gift from Mrs Bisdee perhaps, seeing as I am to have none but the company of men till my dying day. One last concession to the fact that I am still a woman, despite what they may be calling me, despite the fact that I am nothing more than a convict. Perhaps it is meant to show me that I am more than just spirit, for I am sometimes not sure of what it is that I am. Whether I am still here or whether I am just a mist, or a vapour hanging in the air, or something even less substantial, like the speckles of dust I used to see fly up into the air when I would clean the house at home or when I would beat the Wilton carpet at Glen Nairne, before. Or maybe I am still solid but being erased

slowly, bit by bit, and so when I hang I'll already be mostly gone, so insubstantial that I'm transparent.

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William was always tracing his fingers in little circles on the palm of my hand when we sat together. Sometimes the circles would stretch out from a teeny tiny centre into larger and larger circles when he was feeling hopeful about things and it seemed as if we could build our way out of the past, at least that's what I thought, and sometimes when he was feeling more like we were hemmed in he would start with the larger circles and they would get smaller and smaller until there was less space for his finger to move, until everything was so turned in on itself that it was useless trying to do anything about it. I don't know when I realised that his moods could be gauged by the direction of the circles – big to wee or wee to big, but it was something that I could always rely on to tell me the truth about what he was thinking. So much of the time he told me lies, whether on purpose, or by leaving things out or glazing over something important that had happened and making it seem like nothing instead, a mere trifle. When I really think about it I shouldn't blame him, for he was doing what every man would do before his wife in saving his pride and trying to protect me. But he also made our situation worse than it had to be, and I can't find it in my heart to forgive him fully for acts that he knew would lead to nowhere but trouble and committed anyway. The world doesn't forgive me for the choices I have made, so why should I forgive him?

When I was younger I had no idea that I was attractive to men. But in Glasgow I learned the looks that were assessing me. Men tried to get at my character— would I let them do this or let them do that, kiss me here, or touch me there. Many were

frustrated that they could not judge better when they discovered that I was not theirs for the taking and was not one of those women forced to earn her money in that way. For I was not ever wanting that life. I had my William for that sort of thing and I had my work at the mill to make sure I didn't have to do that. Not that I enjoyed my work at the mill either. But it was better than being on the town I knew. It had to be. I clutched to these ideas and rose before dawn and worked those many, many hours until past dark and would leave in the bitter cold at both ends of the day. And each day was more like the one before it. And I knew that the one after would be just the same. But there were amusements to be had. You just had to know where to find them and when to take them. For too much of a good thing could turn it sour and not enough was what I had most of the time anyway. I found ways to enjoy myself. I did what I could to ease the struggles.

When I got taken to the Tollbooth I saw the cold, stone floor that I would have to make my bed on, the thick iron bars that held us in. Over in the corner there was a game going on. I stayed well clear of that. Kept to myself at first. I didn't want to make the wrong sort of friends in there. I'd been there a couple of hours before I came to anybody's notice. I was just sitting and staring. Thinking about how I'd come to be in this mess when a hand waved in front of my eyes with an accompanying call

'Wakey wakey, is there anybody home?' the voice was neither kind nor unkind and I blinked my surprise looking up to discover the person that this voice belonged to. I stared silently.

'What's the matter, cat got your tongue?' I was dressed in a plain black cotton dress, and this woman was wearing linen. It was freezing cold and she must

have been frozen in the outfit but I was impressed with its fine lines, its careful look of rumpled elegance. I wondered how such an item could have been hers. Or how such a person who wears such an item could end up in here.

‘I’m Mary, what’s ye name lass?’

‘I’m Mary too. McLauchlan.’

‘Cameron.’

‘So what are ye in for then?’

‘I didnae do nothing, you?’

‘Oh, of course, same here lassie, I’m innocent as the day I was born,’

Cameron replied, with a cheeky wink. That wink brought the first smile to my face in quite some time.

I eventually got the full story from her. I couldn’t put a black mark against her name for that though. She showed me how things worked in here. With her I almost remembered what it was like to have fun. We got up to a bit of mischief, we did. We were a pair, a pair of Marys and we caused as much trouble as that famous Mary did and we enjoyed it together. It was fun to run amok. To boss others, to feel like we had some control over the others in there. If it hadn’t been us it would’ve been someone else – that’s one thing we knew for sure. Where there isn’t someone in charge people will put themselves in charge. That’s how we work. And even if there is someone in charge, they’ll not be there all the time and when they aren’t there someone else will put themselves in charge, that’s how it will always be. You’re

either a leader or a follower. A victim or a torturer. I'd had enough of being a victim and with Cameron by my side I didn't have to be one anymore.

And that gaoler said I was 'troublesome'. And I don't know what he means by that for I was no more troublesome than many of the others. It reminded me of way back when I was in Saltcoats, bunking with that many people and I think I did start to go a little potty while I was in there, I started to play tig with those that didn't want a bar of it, the way we'd played just by the sea when I was young.

'Tig, you're tig!' We'd yell while running away, the words shouted over our shoulders in voices high pitched with excitement. And whoever it was that was the unlucky tig would come running after us, I was fast and so I was rarely caught, but when I was I didn't mind it so much. I was happy to run and follow, to give chase as it gave your mind some time off from planning where you would run to next. And how I used to laugh when I was being chased, and how I'd dodge forward and back and left and right, just staying out of reach of the tigger.

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William and I played Tig. We played at the sea too, but I was too tricky, too quick for him. We played tig in a different way too, but eventually we both knew that he would catch me, and at first that anticipation made the game exciting, wondering just when it would be. But then it made it seem fated and I could never settle when it felt like I had no choice. And I probably did have a choice about William. And how I wish my mother had come to me and told me to watch out and given me all the advice that she could. For it would have been useful both with William after we were married but even more so when I came to this place and it was all against my will.

5.

In the Tolbooth, there were other lasses that I got talking to, Ann Dunlop, who was sentenced to life in that dreaded place on the other side of the world. However, even though my sentence was only that of fourteen years it was as good as life for me I used to think, and now I know just how right I was in those thoughts. And we had a group of us Marys, always the innocent though we liked to say, always only part of a bigger plan like the holy mother.

But it was good to have a group of women to travel with, safety in numbers and also we got to have quite a good sense of friendship among us, fourteen of us all convicted and sentenced within a few days of each other, and together we tried to stay cheerful, to stay hopeful and to try to prevent the crushing fear and terror settle in thick like the close air on a cool winter's night, always seeming to cling to you and press down upon you, and not like the reeking air on a hot night with your body desperate to escape the scent of it, the feel of it against your skin.

We had a long bit of travel to do before we even got to the ship that was to take us to that far off unimaginable place. On a wooden bench sat up high atop a stage coach and unprotected from the weather, being kept quiet, so as to stop us from contaminating any of the paying passengers inside the coach, who tried their best not to see us anyway. The coach driver didn't even want to touch my flesh, covering up his hand very deliberately before he offered it to me to help me up onto that plank that would offer no comfort and through which I would feel every bump of the path beneath us, as if touching my bare skin would be to risk being contaminated by the evil that I must have held within. Lucky for us the weather was fair when we set out,

it being in the end of the summer months of the year, for how dreadful that journey should be in the depths of winter with no walls around you to keep out the cold. Our bums went numb within the first hour of travel still and yet we could feel every single bump course through our spines as we sat atop the coach out in the open. On the journey we would stay overnight at halfway houses that we came across along the way, or rather the passengers and the coachman would. More often we'd be left in the barn or stables along with the animals. While the good were let in to swallow a hare at the pub, we were left with rations of bread and water. The bread stale before we started out on the trip and who knows what state it'd be in when we were arrived. And sometimes when we passed through a town the people would be all a gawping at us as if we were a touring penny geggy. It was tempting to put on a show for them and spit and hiss or maybe hop up and lift your skirts to relieve yourself over the sides if you really wanted to show them what a depraved and wretched lot we were. All while the others were egging you on to your theatrics. Many a shocked face did we laugh over hours later, when the travel was so tedious and the time passing so slowly. The country we were driving through could be beautiful, but the beautiful things in the world weren't for us anymore, not for our kind. So as we travelled south we sometimes stared and stared at the beauty of nature and our surroundings but not without knowing the sombre feeling that it wasn't for us, not anymore. But it was not an easy journey south. We travelled in irons. They made escape impossible or near enough to it. Not that we planned on trying to escape, not really. A few foolish words here and there. A few half-baked schemes where we would get away and they would get their just desserts. But we knew that they would never hatch. So we made our slow way south where we would meet the others, our brethren who would sail with us to that far away land, who would steal the oxygen that we needed to breathe and

who would clog up the hold with space that could have been ours. The last section of our journey was in enclosed carriages. We were unsure whether this was for our own benefit or for the benefit of others. Regardless, we were hidden from prying eyes. And our probing eyes were hidden from the outside world.

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The *Harmony* did not set out until we had been visited by Elizabeth Fry and her British Society for the Reformation of Female Prisoners. Elizabeth tried to maintain her dignity as she stepped from the small boat up onto the deck but it was a hard task for anyone to manage. We women on board did not hide our snickers as she lurched onto the deck unsteadily. The harness around her midsection to heft her aboard made her seem ridiculous.

‘Ladies, I beg of you, turn your lives around. There is no need for you to live these lives of sin.’ She paused as we all muttered to one another and she realised that her words were not having the desired effect, but still, she went on, ‘Continued unlawful behaviour will not see you receive the Lord’s salvation. Abandon your evil ways and become useful members of society. You are being given a great chance to travel to a new land and start fresh. Don’t make the same mistakes you have made here.’

I couldn’t help it, I threw my head back and laughed at the futility of this speech. It may be easy for some to live their pious life, and all the women were set to try to make a better life in Australia, but if this Miss Fry thought she was going to have anything to do with it, swanning aboard like Lady Muck then she had another think coming. No doubt her speech came from a compassionate place of a kind; but it also came from a place of preaching, and one that showed no level of understanding

for the lives of us women that she was talking to – as if we'd all decided that we would be born paupers.

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From time to time I would sit and flick through my bible. A gift from Miss Elizabeth Fry. Sometimes I did an impression of her that had the others cackling. I couldn't read any of this bible though. Nor could most who were aboard that wretched ship so I don't know why she bothered giving them to us. I guess it was meant as a kind gesture to save our souls but it really just shows how ignorant she was of who we really are and where we have come from. It was outside her imagination to think what it would be to live like us. Out of all reasoning for us to believe that she could ever understand. Hailing us as sinners who must repent. When most of us feared for our God-given souls but found there was no way to avoid our crimes. Or no reason to restrain ourselves even if we could. Life wasn't a picnic before we were on those boats. For some of us, at least we knew where our next feed was coming from, something that wasn't so certain in the past.

I got some air one day and there wasn't a cloud in the sky. I had never seen such a blue and certainly not up in the sky. I could feel the wretched sun beating down, unrelenting. I could smell the filth of the months long journey being caked onto my skin, could already sense how for the men maybe the filth could be washed off one day but how for us women we were convicts and we would never be anything other. Until we were wives and even then we would be convict wives akin to concubines only without the splendour. And the splendour was all we really wanted. The silks so fine that my hands had clutched what wasn't mine.

The ship was so cramped I could barely get air enough to fill my lungs and when I did I would wish I hadn't for the putrid stench that engulfed and I learnt to breathe shallow while I was down there and sometimes I were half crazy with longing for an icy gust of wind like would blow on the winter's nights back home when I would reach out a hand to see if my husband was in the bed yet, and if he was I'd reach for the warmth he could provide. Or I'd wonder where the scoundrel was if my hand just met the coolness on the other side of our cot.

The sunlight danced over the water, radiant gold on crystalline blue. Sometimes I thought that you could go blind staring at the sun's reflection on the water, just like you could from staring at the sun. It was brighter, floating over the middle of the world. Brighter than in my homeland. My skin became dry and roasted. And then I began to peel like a snake. Shedding my old skin and becoming new. There was a fleshy underside to this new skin. A fragility that didn't last. Like a newborn. Dependent but not for long. They're crawling before you know it.

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‘—Not Botany Bay at all lass.’

‘The name of the place don't matter. It may as well be hell.’

I let out a sigh. Then those two shut up. Good. Some peace at last. Nae, not really. There was still the constant movement. That's what I remember most about the time aboard the ship. Never being still. Always swaying, sometimes gently, sometimes fiercely, but never in control. Sometimes we huddled together for warmth, by choice, but when we wanted some space we could not get none for ourselves.

It was dim down in the hold. Not pitch black mind you. We could see a few feet around us at night. Shadows filled the corners though. They always seemed to fill the corners of my life.

Sometimes we would be allowed out on deck and grateful though I always was for the fresh air, after I'd been up on deck, returning down there to our wooden prison sometimes felt like I was climbing down into my own grave. And it was then that I could smell the rottenness of us. The smells of sweat, human waste, our monthlies and damp wood all mixing together.

If it hadn't been for the bells that rang, we would have lost track of whether it was day or night down there. Not that there was much change for us between the two. There wasn't nothing to do down there by day or night. Nothing to do but wait.

About the most exciting thing that happened the whole time we were sailing is that Ann told the ship's surgeon to kiss her on the cunt. I wouldn't usually use that word when in control of myself, but when I am in liquor there is all manner of words and deeds that I wouldn't do normally that find their way into me. Still, I felt the small thrill of rebellion and wonder at one of us daring to speak to him so. But then I felt bad for him too because he had a caring manner and did his best for us. We had few complaints from our treatment on-board and that were down to him. He tried his best for us.

Sometimes I would use the sewing kit that the high and mighty Miss Fry gave me. It would frustrate me though, that I could never produce anything pretty with it. We had nothing nice on board to sew – no silk or satin to be found. But I had cause to feel bad about how we had treated her, for while it was true that she did not understand really, what our lives were, without the few items she gave us to occupy

our mind's with we would have all been running mad by the time the *Harmony* arrived in Van Diemen's Land.

Water would sometimes slosh into that ship somehow and our feet were always wrinkling with the moisture, our eyes watering, our bodies heaving with the stench and the movement and the lack of air. It was when they trapped us all in together that people fell ill.

How quickly we forgot what the sun felt like on our skin and what being warm and on dry land felt like, and even the small pleasure that many of us treasured – that of a good night's rest. They fed us well on our journey though. I got more food than I used to most weeks in Glasgow.

When we had the monthlies we had to use whatever ripped rags we could get our hands on – Mrs Fry gave us nothing for this and we might've benefited more if she'd given us rags instead of bibles. If there were no rags to be found there were none to be had and we had to let the blood drip and they called us filthy but it was not our fault. After we had washed the rags the next time they were used they would be coarse and stiff with salt, scraping between our legs and then it would sting if it rubbed too much and salt got in the wound. Rubbing salt into the wound was considered a good thing in the Godforsaken place we were heading to – or that's what we were told.

After the cat had licked up and down the back, and created the scars that would never heal, then came the salt that would stop the blood but never the pain. They'd told me a story, about this cat. How it made the toughest of men weep, how chunks of meat from men's back were caught in its strands, how when it was finished a back would look like a piece of beef that had been pounded with a cleaver,

and about how after the first few strokes you would be wishing you were dead. And how afterwards the skin was all torn, looking like it had shrunk, like it was not enough to cover the back, or looking as if there were rips because it was pulled too tightly, as if the man within had flexed his shoulders and forced his way out, or some evil creature with wings had been set free from within. The stories told of how if you could not stand there and endure it all day then they would hold over the rest of your punishment until you could endure, the whip again cutting into semi-healed wounds. This cat was no friend of ours. I knew that we would not get the cat, women did not, not anymore anyway. But it scared the living hell out of me. I knew how bad a place must be if they used that there. The thought of this place grew so large in our minds when we were in-between our old lives and our new ones.

There were times when we almost forgot where we came from and where we were going. But they never lasted long; the ship had bosses just the same as the real world, and they reminded us soon enough how life is. On their good side you could get extras, but if you got on the wrong side of them then your time aboard was made that much worse. I was not one of these boss types on the ship not like I had been in the Tolbooth, but I could look after myself. In this life I have had to get good at looking out for myself.

We were divided up into groups and there was a mess master of each group, someone who made sure that the others kept in line. We shared our space aboard with our mess and we didn't have much of it. We were squashed in, no but-and-ben for us, no privacy. We all had jobs to do, and we all did them. That we were together was the only thing that we could take any comfort from. I didn't know where my real family were, hadn't seen William since court, and hadn't seen my wee ones for longer still. These ladies felt like my family then. I had to get used to answering to

my maiden name again. My married name was another of the things they had stripped me of, along with my married life, my babies and my home.

Many women on the boat couldn't swim. Imagine that. Being thousands of miles away from home, floating in a rat-ridden, sewer-smelling vessel and hoping to God that it didn't run into trouble. Knowing that there was no way you were getting out alive if it did.

I always liked swimming. Living by the sea Da taught us, even when we knew that it was considered unladylike by some to be able to swim. Da taught us on days so cold no one else would dare enter the water. He taught us the motions lying on the sand first. He didn't explain how it worked, how that could keep us afloat. I don't think he understood it really and lord knows I don't either. But once he thought we'd mastered the stroke he'd lead us in, one at a time, to give us a go in the water. He told me that if it was cold and windy then once you were wet you would be warmer in the water than with the cold air blowing on your shoulders. I got the stroke first, and then I was flying through the water. And soon I was a better swimmer than Da and I would go out past the first break of the water, where I could barely see the others waiting on the beach. Where they were like small ants and I was meant for this big wide world, while they were only ever meant for the shore and Saltcoats.

So I had known that if the boat went down it wouldn't take me with it. I could probably swim as well as, if not better than, half the men aboard that sailing hulk and I was glad for it. I considered jumping overboard a few times. Knowing that it would be the end of me. Knowing that no one would be able to rescue me and that I'd never swim all the way to land from the centre of the ocean after jumping in. But sometimes the idea of going out in my own way was tempting. Leaving this earth

before they could parade me around the new colony as a convict and a most depraved female. I could have washed up on an island and lived out the rest of my days there feasting on fresh fruit and never worrying about doing a hard day's work again. I knew that this was all fairy stories though. That I would probably be eaten by sea creatures or freeze to death. But sometimes it seemed worth it just to have the chance to swim through the icy cold waves again and feel free.

We had so little room aboard the ship that I fear I became rather tyrannical about mine. Everything had to be just so. Nothing out of place, nothing unnecessary and everyone knew better than to trespass into this small area that was mine. I had to scratch and claw to show that I meant it when I said no one could take liberties with my person or with my space but I earned myself some level of respect down there, and no one wished to trouble me. I was not to be trifled with. I had hoped that we would all fare well once we had said our farewells to each other. But there was a small thought in the back of my mind that all would not end well. And now I know that it won't.

I would have taught my little ones to swim if I had been given the chance. They would have felt differently about the ocean though. I had grown up always knowing it, always seeing and smelling it. In Saltcoats each morning I'd greet the ocean and at night I imagined it serenading me to sleep. The ocean was a friend, and one that would never do me wrong.

When William had come courting and I'd suggest a walk down by the ocean and we'd gone I'd seen his unease and when I told him I loved to swim I could see that the idea enchanted him but that he'd never have had the courage to go in. I found it endearing then, but now I find that it does offer a fair representation of his

personality. Enamoured by an idea but not daring enough to strive for it, happier just to live with what he has and complain every chance he gets that things aren't different.

6.

Now, while I wait to die I still worry about my little ones. Where are they? Is William loving them enough? Is he a good enough man to care for them well? But apart from all his faults, and Lord knows there are many, I believe that he loves his daughters. Sometimes I dream that they are come to me and they're crying and asking me why I did it, didn't I love them enough to stay with them and stick it out? Didn't I care that they would die without me? And then their bodies start to shake and shudder and their little voices become high-pitched screams, and then their screams become wails and I want to put my hands over their mouths, and for one split second I'd rather them be dead than them be haunting me like this making all that racket and I am ashamed with myself for ever having these thoughts and even though it was only for a second and not my fault and came to me unbidden I feel that I have had the thought now and that I can never take it back.

In the early days I remember how William hefted me onto his back and ran with me down the beach whinnying like a horse and snorting every few steps. I yelled, 'Faster boy, faster' from my position high above his head and pretended a whip in my hand to slap him with. The sea was calm, not a wave to be seen and the slight breeze played off of our sweaty faces and cooled us on the outside. On the inside, my heart was racing and I could hear the whooshing of my body's workings beneath my skin. The pulsing of the blood and the churning of the stomach. No one but Da had lifted me onto their back, no one had made my giggles spurt forth so freely, till my belly ached and the idea of more laughter almost brought tears to my eyes. No one had made me feel special but my Da and so William had it easier than most when it came to winning the heart of his bride to be, for with so little competition he had no

need to bend over backwards to impress. I felt that I should put up some resistance. William tried and I pushed back against him for as long as I could, holding out. If he sensed that I was just playing the game, that my resistance was an act he didn't let on. I think he enjoyed the idea of trying to win me. For he said at times that he had never met another girl like me before and I suppose that that was the truth, for I was an unusual girl, or so my Mum said. I was given to my own quiet times, where I would live out other lives in my head, but then I could also be raucous and cause a scene, make a bang for nothing other than the fun of it. No plan but the act itself. Maybe if I'd planned better I wouldn't be here, now, on this boat rocking endlessly back and forth and with nothing to do but to think of how it is that I came to be here.

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I regret now more than anything quarrelling with Da. It was my fault that his heart gave out. We had been arguing again. I was showing Ma the brooch that William had given me. Da said something cruel, about it being a harlot's trinket. I sprung up and started screaming. I said that he was jealous that I had someone's love, that if he thought me a harlot I would go and prove him right, and I ran from the house. I ran straight to William and cried while he rubbed his little circles on my back, soothing me like he would a wild mare. And then it was too late.

Da was gone and Ma was furious and never forgave me, and so William was all I had.

But William told me a bunch of lies. That's the truth of it. He told me that we would be better off in Glasgow, that if needs be, I could find a job and earn a decent pay and we would soon have some money saved and then we could afford all the nice things in the world that I wanted so much. William was clever. He knew what to

say to get me to do what he wanted me to. Few people in life have had that power over me, but it was wrong of him to use his power and to tell me lies when he knew that nothing would come of them. He knew that he was telling me untruths, but he didn't care. Or maybe he just wanted things to be the way he was saying they were so much that he thought if he told me enough times he would believe them himself.

There was little I could do to prevent our leaving anyway. Once William had made up his mind that we were to leave Saltcoats and go back to Glasgow there wasn't anything that I could have done because eventually it would all end up the same, with him getting what he wanted one way or another. The same as it always was. He'd been in Saltcoats hiding from the trouble that he'd got himself into. Waiting for the heat to die down. George sent word that things were looking up and off we went.

Sometimes I wondered when it would be my turn to get what I wanted. It seemed the longer I waited for what I wanted the further away I got from getting it. Isn't that the way of life though? Things getting forever further away from you until you were so far from where you started that there was no real way to trace exactly how you'd got there anymore, and certainly no chance of going back. It seems to me now that my life was nothing but a series of doors closing behind me, never to open again.

When I got locked up in the Tollbooth in Glasgow, I didn't know yet how bad things was. I was restless for days and I don't think the people who I was sharing my cell with were liking me much. There was this one *besom*, she was always looking at me and smiling in a *sleakit* way. I did not like her looks. Did not like her at all.

So, one morning when I woke up and opened my eyes to another miserable day and I saw that *sleakit* smile on her face I lost control. I ran at her and started to scratch and bite and slap any part of her as I could. I felt guilty afterwards, I really did. I even tried to apologise to the poor lass, maybe she did not really smile at me like she did. Or did not mean to. For I do know that sometimes what you think you show and what you actually show to the world are two different things. And then when you add in what you'd like to show to the world you get a new thing again. What I'd like to show to the world are the good things so that they would know that I am not a scum-rat like some others are. So they could see that I was not so different to them, if I'd had a different birth I'd be one of them maybe. The toffs. Not to be though. What can you do when what you want in life is not to be? Precious little.

When William disappeared along with my lassies I thought the grief would kill me. I knew that it may be better for them that way, knew that life in a place full of scoundrels that people wished to be rid of forevermore was more than likely the very worst place for my two beautiful wee lasses to be raised. Such pretty little girls they were, had all of mine and William's best features, both of them different in looks and personalities but the two best products that could've ever come from our match of that I'm sure. And what kind of example would coming to live with me, and seeing the horrible life I had been condemned to, have set for them? There would have been no luxuries available to them in Van Diemen's Land. I try to make myself feel better thinking thoughts like these. To pretend that I decided that it was for the best that my wee ones stay with William. But it just isn't true. William ran away after he realised I was in real trouble and took my wee ones with him, leaving me with no hope of finding him or seeing them ever again.

In the Tolbooth I used to tell stories when I was asked.

‘Mary, tell us the story of how you and William met again.’

‘Eh, I’m too tired tonight.’

‘Aw, go on.’

‘Right then. It was when I was a younger lass than I am now and I was making my way down the street in Saltcoats as I often used to do, just out ramblin’ away the time of an afternoon. Now, I was probably a wee bit old to still be ramblin’ about so, but we didn’t grow up so fast in our town as you would in the city. I was still an innocent wee thing. Everything was usual and all the people I passed I knew, and I was so desperately bored with the whole grey colour of it all when I saw a stranger. He was wearing a gold fob watch. It shone when it caught the light as he walked. He had a cap on. A fancy vest with more buttons that were needed. His pants were corduroy – I could tell even from the distance for I’d quite the eye for fabric-’

‘Of course you did, still do lovie, that’s what wound you up here’

‘Do you want to hear the story or don’t ye? So, I saw that the pants were corduroy and his shirt was a bit bunched up underneath his vest, and he wore a coat – his lovely frock-coat. And I felt that that was what I’d been waiting for. Something different to come into my life. It felt like he was my ticket out of that town. Oh how right I was and how much I should have avoided him at all costs. Should have stayed right where I was in my own little town.’

‘Come on Mary, get to the part where you meet.’

‘No, love, not tonight. The story is making me feel down tonight. Maybe tomorrow I’ll finish. I want to have a moment to think to myself now.’

And I sit and wonder to myself whether that was really how the story happened or not. Whether he really was wearing a fob watch – for where would he have got the money for one? Maybe he had lifted it – but I don’t remember seeing it on him at all. I think the fob watch planted itself there in the story one day and has been planted there ever since. It does make the story sound very grand indeed if the gent had a gold fob watch. But maybe that isn’t real – maybe there was no watch at all. How many times have I told this story in my head with the watch being in it that maybe wasn’t there at all? How different have I made the story? For now when I remember it I clearly see a gold watch twinkling in the light but I also know that it was probably never there. How often do we trick ourselves into believing things that aren’t real? Maybe I am being unfair to myself and the watch is a real thing, and was really there. But if that isn’t real then I have to ask what else isn’t real that I’ve always believed to be?

William once gave me a beautiful brooch, he did. It was flat and in the centre shone a shocking, blood-red stone, with a delicate silver rose at the top of it and at the lower part of it three smaller stones. Its worth to others I do not know, but its worth to me as a girl who had never had such trinkets was everything. The brooch led me to thinking that there would be plenty more gifts to come from him. Though, there were few gifts after that one. He thought he had me and he didn’t need to continue to try to buy me, and he did have me if truth be told. I would not have disappointed him after that gift. It was my only piece of adornment that I owned and felt proud to wear. So if William gave me little else, at least he gave me something

that I could feel myself to be of some worth, while wearing it. He also gave me the names wife and mother. They became part of how I knew myself. But now those names are gone.

Here I am nobody's wife, though I do wifely duties sometimes, and I am nobody's mother, though I think how glad I am to have been given my girls and not boys when I look at Charles Jr, their son, with his lurking and listening. Where are my girls now? Do they know much of their mother? Does their father tell them I did bad things and got sent away, because I didn't love them enough to stay aright?

The Tolbooth wasn't so bad really. I had Mary Cameron with me. It was much better than the time we spent aboard that heaving ship, where many of us had the sickness worse than when we were pregnant. That ship where men bullied us and we women did as we were told, some say that's just like always though, that time when we couldn't get no privacy no matter where we went to try to find it. That ship where there was always a wandering eye and a dirty mind for every kind lassie and saintly lad. Where the minutes turned to days and the days to months, and the months seemed never ending, like the rocking of that ship. Not all of that rocking was the ocean, not all of the sighs was the rigging, not all of the rubbing was the decks and not all of the spray was fresh. But you can't blame 'em really, most said, for it was a nice way to pass the time. They used to say a bit of tomfoolery never hurt anyone.

7.

I never really played growing up. I imagined things. But I could just sit still and imagine. I didn't have to act them out like other kids did. My imaginings were largely just for myself, just in my little head. No one else needed to know about them. As I got older sometimes my imaginings escaped. Sometimes I thought about how a particular item that someone wore would be well-suited to me, and often of how it would suit me so much better than whoever wore it. Like once, I was walking down Calton Mouth in Glasgow, and I saw a lady with a lovely, cashmere shawl. It was a pale blue, and I imagined wrapping it round my shoulders and how it would stop the wind blowing straight through me, and how it would be so soft where it sat on the nape of my neck. And then, before I knew it the soft sensation of cashmere was there, snug in the very position I was imagining, and I was as far away from that lady as I could get. My chest heaving up and down and my breath coming in short bursts as I wriggled my shoulders and enjoyed the lightness and warmth. The warmth spread inside too, like the coal glowing red at the centre of a fire.

There were other times that this happened, but at first, each time it happened I just remember seeing and then having and not the bit in-between.

William never asked where I got these new things. He didn't even seem to notice them. But I know he did. I know he didn't ask because deep down he knew the answer and didn't want to admit it. William didn't want to admit a lot of things. Didn't want to admit that the life he had in store for me when we left Saltcoats was not the same one that he was advertising. Almost like he thought that if he could convince me that things would be better he could convince himself. And if we were

both convinced then maybe we could make it true. But if all it took to make things true was to believe them, we would live in a very different world.

Sometimes I would walk by The Clyde in Glasgow and wish it were the sea of my real home. Its waters were dirty and it smelt rotten. Not like the sea that I was so used to. It was also so still, while it did run it was never rough. Not like the sea could be sometimes. And the waves crashing and smashing against each other is something I always enjoyed watching and something that never could I enjoy while near the river. It was another reminder that where I rested my head at night was no longer my dear Saltcoats. Yes, I had never been fond of that place but as soon as I left it I wished to return. How cruel this world is that I couldn't see how good a place it was until I had left it.

Perhaps it is an exaggeration to say that as soon as I left it I wished to return. For when we first arrived in Glasgow, after an initial disappointment, life had an excitement brought on by the change in location that it had never had for me before. I was looking forward to starting this new life. I was relishing the thought of having the chances to get ahead that I had never had before. I was moved to think that life could hold opportunities that I had long thought shut off to me. I was believing wholeheartedly in the lie.

Now that I recognise it as a lie I am not sure that I would change my belief in it. I did get some pleasure from believing it after all. There are worse things than to find yourself tricked into believing in a better world. The fact that you can believe means that the world has not trampled down your heart yet. It will. It is when you can no longer be taken in by people's foolish words and schemes that life has wrung

you out and left you to dry. While those days were not happy the idea that I could be kept me going. Without it I do not know how things could have continued.

I never got used to Glasgow as home; it was always only where the next chapter of my life was taking place and never was it home. I wish now that I had gone somewhere else before things got to where they did. What did I think would happen if I stayed there? And yet stay there I did. Perhaps William would not have let me leave even if I had wanted to. He would have some sort of rights in where his wife lived I knew that. But that is just another excuse if I am honest with myself, which I try to avoid being a lot of the time. It's often the lies we tell ourself that we wish the most were true.

We were all so crammed in on one another and those who had never been anywhere else but Glasgow had no notion how bad the life really was. Had I been as unaware as those others then maybe I too would have taken to the drink to ease the trouble and lived a life always wanting more but never doing anything to try to get it. Perhaps I would have been exactly the kind of woman that I most despise today. If I didn't think so much I'd no doubt be happier. It is with the constant thoughts about who might have life better than I do, and the constant reminders that I have done wrong. The guilt. And the worry that this black stuff inside will one day overflow. Everything I touch will eventually rot. How am I to put on a brave face with thoughts just as these in my mind?

But that's what everyone else does. Puts on a brave face and pretends that the rot isn't within us all, eating us away from the inside. We don't even know what happiness is most of the time and it isn't that that we want for. It's to be free from our sins. At least that's what I find myself pining away for. Sometimes they seem so

many, as if they are mounting behind me and it will be the weight of them when they fall that eventually crushes me. Other times I know that there are others who have done far worse than I, whose sins are far greater and who should therefore suffer long before I do. But that will not happen. It is I who will pay I feel sure. Others too will sin and get away, but only the poor seem to be called to settle their debts. I did so hate to be in debt to anyone. I hated that feeling of owing, that feeling that they could take what they wanted at any time and I would be powerless to stop it because I was in their debt. I liked when people were in mine though. I enjoyed the feeling that it could be me who chose to strike them at any moment and collect on what I was owed. Whenever I had the slight opportunity to claim some power or mastery over someone else I took it, grasping it to me with both hands and holding it close to my chest like a treasure. For these times were so few for one like me, someone who life again and again stole power from in any way that it could. Where I was to live was not my choice, who I was to belittle myself and become a servant for was not my choice, who was to share my bed was not my choice. Precious little was up to me. Precious little.

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‘Sing us a song Mary.’ The girls all call sometimes, and depending on my mood I might give them that small pleasure. For my Da used to tell me often that my voice was good, and he was right about that, like he was right about many things. My voice was strong and pure. I knew the words to many songs that I could sing. I could have people howling with laughter or howling with tears depending on which I chose. Sometimes they would ask for a particular song and when they did that I

wouldn't always give them what they wanted. When I just want them to stop
haiverin' me I sing *Women's Work Will Never be Done*.

Woman's wark will ne'er be dune,
Although the day were ne'er sae lang;
Sae meikle but, sae meikle ben, -
But for her care a' wad gae wrang:
And aiblins a poor thriftless wight
To spend the gear sae ill to won,
Aft gars an eyedant thrifty wife
Say "Woman's wark will ne'er be dune."
We little think, in youthfu' prime,
When wooing, what our weird may be;
But aye we dream, and aye we hope,
That blythe and merry days we'll see:
And blythe and merry might we be.
But when is heard the weary tune,
"The morn it comes, the morn it gaes,
But woman's wark will ne'er be dune."

I've been at bridals and at feasts,
When care was in the nappy drowned,
The world might sink, or it might swim,
Man, wife and weans were a' aboon't:
But-wae's my heart to think upon't!-
The neist day brought the waefu' croon,
"Come bridals, or come merry feasts,
Woman's wark will ne'er be dune."

Twa bairnies toddlin at the fit,
An' aiblins ane upon the knee,
Gar life appear an unco faught,
An' mony hae the like to dree;

But cherub lips an' kisses sweet
Keep aye a mither's heart aboon,
Although the owrecome o' the sang
Is "Woman's wark will ne'er be dune."¹⁷⁹

I sing that song because it seems the truest song that I know.

*

People might judge my parents harshly because of how I've turned out. But Da did teach me the stories where people do wrong and suffer and do right and things end up well for them. That makes me to blame does it no? Because when I knew that I was doing wrong I should have stopped. Should have had the canny to think about where that road I was walking down would lead me, and it would lead down to hell I

¹⁷⁹ Meaning of unusual words:

Sae meikle but, sae meikle ben=so much at one end of the house, so much at the other
a' wad gae wrang=all would go wrong
aiblins=perhaps
wight=human being
gars=makes
eyedant=diligent
weird=fate, destiny
aye=always
nappy=drinking bowl
weans=children
aboon't=above it
wae's=sorrowful is
neist=next
wae'fu' croon=woeful song
bairnies=children
Gar=make
unco faught=awful fight
dree=fear
aboon=above
owrecome=overcome

knew and not up to the light. But when I saw something in the street I wanted I could not help but buzz it as I passed by. And if a rank swell ventured into our filth infested part of town I could do him the favour of lightening his coin purse a little, and caution him from coming down our way again when someone else would lighten it by a lot. It was really a good deed if they looked at it that way, and besides I was too good at it to be noticed and caught. It was when I tried to go for the more precious items, when the fizz in the limbs from the regular stuff wasn't enough for me to get by on no more that I was led even further into temptation. The fire in my belly had gone out on the little bits here and there. I wanted more. Lots of things. And I saw a way to go and get them. I knew some things about people's comings and goings from their wee homes, I knew how I could get in to a few of them. I wanted what they had. There was not much time I spent planning before I was going after what I wanted and what I thought I deserved. Just as much as those that had them did anyway. Life was wrong to play favourites, God was wrong to give to some while keeping from others. I was out to even the score. Was there so much wrong in that?

8.

When they let us up on the deck of the *Harmony* we got our first look at Hobart. The buildings perched on the edge of the water seemed like children's houses of cards. They were so new that they appeared temporary, as if a gust of wind would topple them. Most of this land seemed wild and untameable and I thought that perhaps we who had proven to be wild and untameable belonged there.

A mountain lurked over the town. I felt my gaze drawn to it. It too cast a shadow over my life. Van Diemen's Land. I wished it had a different name. I had hoped for no more demons in my life. They said that I could earn my freedom, but I knew that in this land, there would always be demons. I wondered how this place would change us from the outside in, as I stood on the ship looking into the future. The high, and pale blue sky brought to mind the colour of that cashmere scarf I had stolen in the wynds of Glasgow. And even then, knowing what my clever fingers had cost me I couldn't quite find it in myself to regret having felt its softness against my neck. And even now knowing that I will hang, the memory of those dresses against my skin is a comfort.

As we waited on the deck, small row boats made their way to us across the calm waters. When the boats reached us we saw the redcoats of officers and understood that this was not a welcoming party. We were ordered to stand in lines.

One by one they called us up to question us, and there was nothing to do but wait. I could not stop sucking in the sights of this upside down country. Everywhere I looked I saw green but it was not the green of home. Or maybe it was, and I had changed so that I could no longer recognise it. How this trip had changed us all, had

stripped us of the love and comfort we knew at home. We offered each other what little love we could, but it was slim pickings.

The air was all salt and moisture, the two fighting for supremacy as it ruffled around our bodies, trying to settle into the pattern it once held before our intrusion. Trying to deny our presence, like everyone.

They called this the muster we were told, and I did have to muster up all of my strength not to show my contempt. There was a man who sat at the desk, his back as straight as a ruler and his hair pomaded into one greasy, immoveable object. Next to him sat a clerk who was writing our responses in a large ledger. The man who asked the questions had an unpleasant voice, and the way he wrinkled his nose at us as we approached set my fists to clenching. I am sure that we would have benefitted from a spot of rose water dabbed behind our ears but it was as if he thought this was our doing and we chose to smell that way. I doubt he had any understanding of how difficult it is to try to stay clean when you are locked together like rats in a sewer. Or maybe he was just worried that he would catch our deviance, as if we were a disease spreading across the world.

He introduced himself to us as Josiah Spode, and it seemed a fitting horrid name. I believed him to have never committed an act of passion, but maybe in that I was wrong, as I have had reason to learn that it is often those that seem the most respectable that hunger for the strangest acts behind closed doors. And now I can't mull over my first sight of Spode without thinking of when Charles took me to see this same Josiah Spode and remembering how he and Charles spoke privately and how after that I was the one in trouble – even when it was clear that Charles was guilty of wrong-doing.

On the *Harmony*'s decks, Mary Cameron and I whispered in each other's ears while we waited. I felt sweat start to sneak through my skin and drip down my sides. It was hot in the sun. They offered us no shade and no respite from the heat. Eventually it was my turn.

I walked forward at my own speed, in no hurry to reach the men at the table. When I reached the space just in front of the table Mr Spode raised his eyes to mine, for just a second and I refused to look away. This open look of mine caused his eyes to narrow with, I assumed, distaste.

'Name?'

'Mary Sutherland, born McLauchlan, wife of William Sutherland.'

'And what is the occupation of this Sutherland?'

'He's a weaver in Glasgow.'

'Why are you transported?'

'Theft by housebreaking, Sir.' I dragged out the sir so he would know I did not mean it to carry the respect that it normally would. At this he grit his teeth and flexed his jaw. He did not like me, already, this Mr Spode. Maybe if I had shown more respect at that time he would have given me a chance to speak later when we saw each other again—if he had even remembered me that is—there were a lot of convicts to be mustered and I'm sure we were all one and the same to the authorities.

'And what is your sentence?'

‘Fourteen years. Those people they got to tell lies about me did their jobs right well and now I am here and left to rot.’

‘Do you have children?’

‘I have two wee lassies. One is three and the other is five. I miss—’

‘That will be all.’

‘I understand, Sir.’ The words may have been meek but I was on fire within. How dare he? What did he know of me? So very little, and what did he care to find out? Only numbers to put next to my name. Nothing more. I was to be nought but a few words on a flimsy piece of paper forever.

Despite all that I said, this man’s clerk only wrote down what he wanted to. There was much I said that he didn’t write. I could see that his hand didn’t move quickly enough to capture all my words. I wonder now how I appear in their ledgers. And how I will be thought of years from now. Will I be thought of at all? Would I prefer to be remembered how they see me – as a thief and a child murderer, and probably a whore as well – or would I rather just be forgotten if I am only to be thought of in those harsh terms? It doesn’t matter what I would prefer though. People will remember me or not as they will, and I can do nothing about it now.

After I answered their questions I was measured and pulled about so they would have a record of what I looked like. It was like a cattle auction where they checked the stock. I tried to bite the fingers of the man as he prodded inside my mouth to get a look at my teeth.

*

It is a strange thing how this life unfolds. Before my arrest I did not know any of the women I was in the Tolbooth with or that I travelled with on the *Harmony* and after I was as close to many of them as I have ever been to anyone in this world. Mary Cameron knew many of my secrets, and I also knew many of hers.

*

They gave us clean clothes to wear when we disembarked. We were all given the same items: a brown serge jacket, a petticoat, a linen shirt, a linen cap, a pair of worsted stockings, a pair of shoes and a neck handkerchief. All of these items rough and plain and nothing so nice as that bombazeen gown I once felt slithering next to my skin. They let us keep what we had brought from home with us, what hadn't been lost or stolen that is, but I had not brought much. Besides a good blanket that I had taken with me from Saltcoats, I had the brooch that William had given me, even though I knew by then that it was probably stolen or bought from a pawn shop, and I had a lock of each of my lovelies' hair my Margaret and my Ailie. Their names bring me the pain of our separation now. I try not to think of their names.

It was dark when we got down into those little boats and were rowed into the shore. We were told it was for our safety; the men of the town couldn't be trusted with a hundred fresh women being delivered. We were grateful for the cover of darkness, as some of us wept for the homes that we would never see again, while others said final goodbyes to the crew of the ship. From the boats we had to walk to our temporary home.

We crept into Hobart in the dark of the night. Like thieves. Most of us on the *Harmony* had been thieves. So this sneaking, scurrying way of moving was nothing new to us.

I noticed that Hobart Town was small and it felt more like my old Saltcoats than like a city. It wasn't a city at all. It was the largest settlement on the island but that didn't make it a city. There was not much of a hubbub of noise, not many shrieks of excitement down the side streets and no crowds of people surging along the main streets. Even though it was the dead of the night when we struggled our way from the ships and into the town, passing through to where our new home would be, I couldn't imagine that it would be much different during the day.

We all laughed at one another when we first put our feet on dry land again. It didn't feel still, it felt like it was rising and falling beneath us, like the ship had felt before we were used to it. It wasn't until we put our feet on to the land that we realised how used to that rocking we had become, how comforting it was in a way, as if a giant hand was reaching down from the heavens and rocking us to and fro while we passed our time sleeping, or sewing, or swapping our stories of valour and shame. I would miss that rocking. Life on land was so stationary. I liked the feeling of always moving. Life struck out at you when you were still in one place for too long. It was harder for it to catch a moving target. It was easier to blend in when it was a crowded place too, so I didn't hold much hope for this place that seemed deserted on such a night as this, where the balmy breeze made the flesh rise in little bumps but was not really cool, if we weren't so sweaty then we wouldn't have felt any kind of a chill. But we were sweaty with our fears as to what this place would bring, and sweaty with the walking. We had tried and we were ordered to get some exercise aboard the ship but it was easier said than done in the space. The sailors got their fair share of exercise scaling the ropes but we were never going to do that with them, not that it would have been allowed anyhow. And there was other exercise the sailors could help us with but even that was not enough for most, and I myself, never did go

in for that. It had led me in one way or another to where I was and I was done with the in and out game. Done with men. Or so I thought.

Rising up behind the small township that would never pass as a city in my eyes was a giant of a rock. Its silhouette cast a shadow over us all as we walked towards our new prison. We were to be little more than slaves it seemed. I would not have been deemed good enough to work as a servant for the quality in Glasgow, but here, they were so desperate for help that they'd accept what they would not on the other side of the world. Heaven forbid they not have someone around to think themselves better than. It would be unheard of, and while they were certain to suspect us of everything, from theft of both the silverware and of the physical attentions of their husbands, these mistresses would put up with it all rather than empty their own chamber pots.

Van Diemen's Land was clean but after a while anyone could see its few streets were filled with vice. It would take hundreds of years for them to look anything like the wynds and closes of Glasgow that I had become so used to. Even at night I could tell that this town was one very different to where I had grown up, and even more different to Glasgow, where I'd really had to grow up, and learn the mean facts of life. Coal didn't fill the air with grit here. I thought that maybe in sunlight the air would be clear, not like back home where even the sun couldn't beat its way through the grey of the world and the clouds of muck that we lived beneath. Where you'd cough up black lumps with a chesty cough and you could feel all your lungs in your chest turning dark and your heart turning black along with it. It were a hard fought life we were living, and our basic survival instinct kept us alive.

The streets are wider here, and the way is clear to move, not the endless struggle to get halfway up the road that I was used to. I began to think that maybe despite everything this would be the kind of place that I could be happy in. A place for me in the world at last.

Mary Cameron and I walked together, lending strength to one another as we gazed, eyes wide at this new place we had come to. Looking up the sky seemed so very far away and the space between scared me at first. It was like you could just let your mind float up and up and up and leave your body empty beneath you forever. The sky was full of stars and they shined so brightly and they looked different to those at home. This brave new world: the antipodes. They had little faith in the men in this part of the world that much was clear. Perhaps they have become like beasts, I thought, after they have been removed from the cities of Britain. I asked myself, are they really so out of control here? But then, I know that men are very rarely under control anywhere. The urge to rut and conquer strong in them all, to plant their flags in that which they think they own, to take ownership of bodies like they do land.

The night smelt fresh and the trees breathed out a different scent here. There was only a slight breeze and it was balmy. It began to feel that we are forever going uphill too, but then we reached a peak and started down the other side. How would we ever find balance in this new world that refused to let us find our bearings and see further ahead than just the distance to the next hill rising before us? As we approached our new home the chatter died. The sight of the high gates and walls of the factory filled us with unease.

I also felt topsy-turvy, in this place that was so utterly different to home and also so similar at the same time. They tried to make it the same. But it would not be. How

could they force a country such as this to be bound by the natural laws that apply in one so different? The seasons did not even come at the right time here. The crops do not grow the same. One day maybe they will learn. But they hadn't when we arrived, and that day is still not here yet. And while they are trying to make this country into that which it will never be they are making their laws as strict as those back home. They will see us behave. They will do whatever they can to ensure that it happens. But how much can they really control? If we chose to live the lives we chose before, as they want to believe, then what is to stop us from choosing to live those same lives here? And maybe that is the real point of transportation, perhaps we did not choose to live those lives we led before. And if we did not then given the opportunities here it is not surprising that we would choose to toe the line where it suits us? Will people be good if they have plenty? Is not having enough what drives people to do wrong?

9.

The Cascades Female Factory. Where they kept us when we arrived and where I was when the events that have me waiting to die now, occurred.

They said they built this place for us. As a place where we could live before we were assigned. They said that it wasn't really a prison, not like the ones we would have been left to rot in back home. But it looked like a prison to me with its big stone walls all cold and rough, reaching up into the heavens. And it didn't take long before the place was full of fleas and ratties and all other manner of creature small enough to crawl about on your flesh and bite.

We were all herded inside and asked our names from a big line. Then we were told we'd be called by our police numbers in that place. Not even good enough for a name anymore. No use for one apparently. I tried not to let it get me down for by any other name and all those lovely thoughts. Some did take great offence to this stripping. I jostled and shoved as we all tried to get to the front of this line. When I got to the front and was told,

'You will from now be known as 86 inside these walls.'

'What, not by me own name but by some wretched bloody number?'

'You will address me as Sir. We have no use to know your individual names. You will all be treated the same in your classes. Watch yourself, or you'll be headed straight for that crime class.'

'Sorry, Sir. What number shall we call you by? Number One you'd be reckoning on wouldn't ye?'

All my shipmates enjoyed this little bit of theatre. But we were all tired and wanted to get to sleep. The doctor wanted to examine all of us. They took away the horrid rags most of us were covered in. But there were a few of us who managed something nice covering us still – Sarah with her delicate muslin bonnet that she'd somehow kept almost free from salt wear while travelling, and Janet whose leather shoes were still quite lovely although slightly scuffed on the toes.

'But sir, those clothes are my own good ones. I shouldn't have bothered to keep them so nice on the trip over if I'd known they would be dumped like that here.' Some girls complained.

'You shall receive them back when you are assigned, enough of that whining.'

I glanced around at the others and thought this was more fair than we'd come to expect from these types. I wondered whether they'd keep their word.

Even though there was no one else inside those walls but us the place gave me a weird feeling in my bones like bad things would happen there. It had been a brewery before and sometimes I swear I could smell the fumes lurking still. I could feel the bugs crawling on me and God knows what else. We slept more than one to a cot, even though, for the first and only time in the history of the place we didn't have to. It wasn't that overcrowded yet. But we knew that it would get to be so you couldn't spin about without bumping a body. There were many more where we'd come from and this is where they'd all come before they were sent to serve someone else.

When they'd forced us all into their horrible idea of clothes and read us all their rules we had come to the cells to sleep. Over in the far corner I could see different cells. That was where the bad ones would go. Some of them had the doors open but some were shut closed and had the look that they would always be so. If you ended up alone in one of them something told me, you'd be in the dark forever after. And now, after spending a week inside one, I know this to be true. The cots were small and made of iron with little in the way of a mattress to make sleep a comfort. We clutched at whatever hours of peace we could get.

Morning came next, just like it always does. We had to be up and out of bed by six every day. They would get two hours work out of us before we broke our fast. There are always clean clothes for the gentry in town, or for those who pass for gentry in this place, due to our labour in the factory. Such a relief to us, that those who consider themselves better than us won't be left to wear sullied garments, I'm sure you can imagine. Some of us were at the tubs. Bent double with the effort of it and even worse – never to experience the results for ourselves. The soft fabrics the other people wear are nothing like the coarse hessian-like sacks we are left with.

The factory sits outside the township. When we arrived I thought how you wouldn't really know that there was a town purporting to be civilized just down the road unless you had already been in the knowledge, for there is nothing to suggest it once inside. Now that I have left it and been forcefully returned I can say that it is better in here as a first class prisoner than outside the walls. But there are things that I enjoyed about being outside. When we first arrived I began to wonder if perhaps there wasn't really a town there at all. If perhaps the factory was all there was. I was

not sure if I would have minded staying at the factory and working there every day. Not that it mattered what I wanted, ever really, but once I was a convict especially.

*

I found the weather in Van Diemen's Land usually quite mild but I did get to feeling a bit chilly with my arms elbow deep in a wash trough for two hours. They wanted us to be silent in here. But you could have a chat with a neighbour over the tub if you got the water chattering too.

We broke our fast with this slop, this gruel. It was, I think, much lower quality food than what they gave us on the ship on the way here. We'd been grateful for three square meals a day then, but after those months we were used to it. We wanted more.

We were not to speak unless we were spoken to by a member of staff. That is what they said. But we found our ways to communicate around that. We still managed a word or two whispered in one another's ears. They couldn't take the friendships we had built away from us.

The building we ate in had higher ceilings than I would have thought. There were long tables with wooden benches where we were to sit and eat in silence. Everything in silence. The faces on the other side of the table blurred into one. We all wore the same clothes. We ate the same food. We did the same work. It was as if we were all turning into one person. The days went by with work and sleep and meal time and church time. We listened for the chiming of the bell that told us what to do at all times of the day. Ding, ding, ding.

*

Some women can do very well out of this situation no doubt. Particularly those women who have no husbands back home or who lied and said that they had none. They can have an easier time here than any of us by getting married to one of the men here and getting their Tickets and setting up shop or continuing work as a servant, or as their own housekeeper if their man has work enough to support the two of them. I've no doubt that many will take this road and good for them. They will get what they can from this transportation system.

Some might save the money for a return berth and sail that journey we made in reverse. If they've made a living well enough here, they might even be able to stay on the straight and narrow and make a go of it there. But some won't. Some will fall back into old ways and be sent out again. I wish those that make it home well. I hope that they get to see their *bairns* again and that all is forgiven.

But for me, it would be different. Were I not in this cell, waiting to die, I would still have no hope of marrying unless William were to die and word of it reached me. But after I got my ticket of leave it would be a life of work for me still. It wouldn't make no difference whether I was considered 'free' or 'government' I would do the same work, just the same. Although if I were free I might have some choice as to who I served. But even this is only a possibility for what if there were only one place that was willing to have me? Then the choice I'd have would be to go and serve there or starve, so it isn't really a choice to make at all.

Life trudged on.

Until.

There were settlers there at the factory to take us to work for them. We knew that not all of us would be taken, but many would. I wondered whether I would be one of those taken. Did I want to be? For I hardly knew any more if I would prefer life outside these walls. At least I knew what to expect with this one inside of them. And while the work was hard at least I knew how to do it. Certainly, life was not easy inside these walls. But life outside of them may be even harder, I knew. It didn't matter anyway. If a settler chose me then that would be that. I would his.

I hoped to be sent to a good home, with a kindly couple who would help me find my feet and who wouldn't mind if I spilled some tea, or made a mistake while I was learning. Having only ever kept house for my family I wasn't sure if my housework would be permissible for another family. I didn't know whether I would be a good maid or a bad maid, or how much choice I would have in the matter. I wanted to be good. I've always wanted to be good, like my mother said I should be. I've always tried to be good but there have been temptations. Sometimes I have resisted, sometimes I haven't. Sometimes I have been forced to do things I didn't want to do and sometimes I have protected others. And sometimes I have been bad, but even when I was bad I tried to be good at it.

10.

‘Stand in line. Eyes down. If the man drops his kerchief in front of you, you will bend and pick it up. This is a test that you can be obedient, and defer to him in all matters.’

‘But Sir, why do the stupid gits drop their kerchiefs? I don’t think I want to go to work for anyone so foolish.’

‘I am warning you number 86 if you do not stop with your insolence I will assign you to the crime class and you will not be going anywhere for quite some time.’

I lined up with the others and looked down at my feet. There hadn’t been much time to get ready for this. My heart pounded. A smell seemed to come off of the stone walls. I couldn’t quite put my finger on what it reminded me of. The ground seemed uneven beneath my feet. Sometimes I imagined it rolling and pitching like the ship did. Sometimes while on board I’d wish that it would never reach this place and that I could just live with the others like that forever. We should have mutinied. We should have taken the ship where we wanted to. We could have settled on an island somewhere. Once we’d gotten rid of the officers, the crew would have worked for us maybe. If not, we could have learned to steer that ship ourselves. We could have learned the rigging and the sails. It would have been tough labour but that is what we have here too. There is no doubt about it.

There were some birds singing in the distance. I could hear them. I wondered whether they were speaking to one another, like we talk to each other. Perhaps when they sing it is not language at all, just sound for the sake of sound. I saw brown boots

appear. Good quality boots. They looked like they could be from the old world. I had seen little that was made here but was led to think some of it is good quality still but found it difficult to believe. The boots had mud caked thickly on their sides. There was a scuff mark on the toe of the right one. They could have used a good polishing. He had been standing in front of me for what felt like some time, but was probably just moments, and then I saw it.

Fluttering like a butterfly down to the ground, catching on the slight breeze and willowing this way and that before coming to rest at my feet. It was his handkerchief. I bent down to retrieve it. I bent my knees rather than just bending over in half with straight knees but this was difficult in the frock we wear and felt much clumsier than I had intended it. It was a wobbly kind of curtsey I gave my new master, and then I handed over his kerchief into his outstretched hand. He stopped me from withdrawing my hand quickly, as I had intended, grabbing it in his instead. He held it fast and I raised my eyes without any plan to do so.

His green eyes seemed to have a humour to them. His face was pleasing. He had dark russet hair, which looked coarse, not soft to touch. He had small wrinkles around his eyes but they were there too young. He could not be much older than myself. His expression seemed kind but also shrewd. I was not the only one trying to decide what sort of time I might have with my new companion. He wore cavalry twill trousers but he was not a soldier. His stance not stiff enough for that. His shirt looked entirely too dressy underneath his coat. The coat looked warm and soft. I thought about what I would do to feel that lambskin against my own skin...

‘Very good Mr Nairne. Very good. Will you step into the office for a quick tot before you set out?’

‘Aye, I shall,’ Mr Nairne replied, finally letting go of my hand but holding my eyes for a further moment still. Upon hearing his voice I knew that he, too, was from Scotland.

So I waited while he had his drink. Nothing was new though. It felt like I was always waiting. I must have looked like one of the beggars I’d pass every morning on my way to the mill in Glasgow as I stood in the factory yard with my meagre possessions all gathered together around me.

It wasn’t hard to admit to myself that my possessions were meagre; at least among them I had a few petticoats that I managed to save on the journey and a decent, sturdy pair of shoes. The shoes were not much to look at but I knew that even as I admired the fancy ones that the ladies wear, that my plain and sturdy ones would serve me better in my new life. They were shoes for a working lassie. There had been no shirking of work for me in the past, nor would there be now.

But I knew how pathetic I must look standing in the middle of the yard, in my convict garb, clutching that bunch of rags to my chest. I was holding on desperately so the whole world could tell that I couldn’t bear to lose even those cast-offs. I knew I was better off than some, like poor little Elizabeth McLain who had not even a single spare gown to her name; she was happy to have what government clothes they had given her, as at least they meant she had something to cover her skin and bones. And who was there to impress within these walls anyway? They all knew the situation I was in. They were in it too. We were all as desperate as each other. I did not slouch down though. I stood straight with my shoulders back and lifted my chin staring out at the world.

I felt the sun warming my face while I waited. A few lone clouds were like couples dancing a reel and then merging into one as they crossed the sky. I tilted my head back and my breath caught once again at that impossible blue. It was a fine day that day. I never used to notice fine weather. That could be because there wasn't much of it to be had in Scotland, or because bad weather demands noticing. I noticed the weather while I waited too because that day was important. I remember the feel of the sun as I stood and waited for this man to carry me into a new life. I wondered whether the sun was a good omen – a sign that all would be well with these new people I was to go and serve.

At least I did not have to break my back at the wash tubs while I waited. Some of the others who were chosen had already left for their new lives, and were I to start on a task now I would most likely not have it finished before it was time to leave. I looked around at the activity of the yard. It was unusually quiet that day. The silence expected of us at all times was being kept.

The sun had dried up most of the water on the ground and so my feet were almost dry for a change. In the separate cells I could see those that were picking at oakum. My hands started to tingle with the unpleasant memories of this job. How they would crack while at the task, and then the sting of salt in the cracks comes back to me and I rub my hands together to shake off the imaginary traces.

The sun brightened up the cells and must have been a relief to the eyes of those working within. Usually it was dark in there even as they were allowed to keep their doors open – not like in the dark cells.

My head used to ache something terrible after a day in the separate cells and my eyes felt strange as I would emerge into light, and I would need to narrow them

to a squint until they were used to such brightness. A strange kind of a bubbling feeling filled my chest at the thought of never having to pick at those salt encrusted ropes again.

Standing in that yard I was so motionless and quiet while I waited that after a while I could hear the whispering between those that were to be left behind. They weren't as silent as I thought, just being more cautious than usual. There were fewer bodies to offer a cover to the sounds. I tried to see if there was venom or honey in the whispered tones – whether they were happy to be left or whether they wished they too were chosen. I couldn't tell. It made me uneasy knowing that we were once all friends and all the same, all 'in the same boat' as they say, only for us we really had all come here in a boat together. From that day on though, we were split up and changed and we would not all share the same lives in this place. We would make our own ways forward now, and be truly on our own. Except for the lucky ones who were staying there. They would work hard but they would have each other still. And it was in this fact that I envied them. Maybe where I was going life would be better. But even if it was better, I would still be alone and apart from these women who had become like my new family. I was scared. The waiting had given me time to realise it. I had never been really alone before. The thought was terrifying.

I heard footsteps approaching from behind, and I knew it would be the man who had chosen me coming to claim his prize even before I turned. He beckoned with one finger for me to come, and I nodded to him once and followed behind silently as I left this place.

'The journey shall take us the best part of a day, perhaps longer,' Mr Nairne said as he held my hand and helped me into the gig. And it was then that I really

wished to stay where I was, and not to go with him at all. I thought back and there had been something else in his eyes, something that I didn't like in that look we'd exchanged earlier.

But it was too late for those thoughts now; and I had no choice in the matter anyway. I swung my legs up into the carriage and settled myself into my seat. Once again I thought on this fine weather – how good it was for a day of driving. If I tried hard enough perhaps I could even pretend away my outfit and imagine that I was a lady being taken on a jaunt in the carriage with her husband. The thought brought a smile to my face.

11.

As we set off in the carriage I got my first good look at Hobart Town from dry land in the daylight. Everything was so neat and orderly with its streets running in a perfect plan. I was now well enough schooled in the ways of men and women to notice that a man was paying a little too much attention to me. As if working off a list Charles was doing nearly every one of the things to alert me on the ride out to Glen Nairne.

His hand on my leg.

‘We have a son, named Charles after myself and we have another wee *bairn* on the way. Katherine is quite well along in her time and the *bairn* shall not be too long away now.’ He held my eyes just a little too long.

‘Not long until I get my wife back to perform all the duties a husband can expect, and has right to.’ He winked as he said this, just to make sure that I knew exactly what he was speaking of.

His hand was back on my thigh, my flesh beneath the worsted cotton dress rising in goosebumps that only I knew of, and even I did not know whether they were from pleasure or fear. Perhaps both. He continued to hold my gaze, as if trying to gauge my temperament. His expression as if he were wondering, is she a filly who is trained to accept, or is she a wildfire who I will have to tame with my whip? Whatever he thought, his language, and his obvious meaning should have brought a blush to my cheeks. It would have years ago, when I was still in Saltcoats. Still a young girl who did not know the ways of the world, and who did not know where

bairns come from. I know now. I cannae give back this knowledge. My cheeks did not colour, and my gaze did not waver.

I found it crude of him to speak in such a way to someone who was to be a servant in his home. I did not feel the shock that perhaps I should have, or should have feigned. Already I was thinking how I could work this fact to my own advantage. I was not always so prone to scheming but since I left Saltcoats I had become quite a master in the arts. Although, obviously not master enough as I still found myself there in this part of the world, and find myself prisoner again now.

The journey to Glen Nairne was a long one. It was an isolated place. I shivered at the thought of how far away I would be from the only people in Van Diemen's Land that I knew. Charles, I mean, Mr Nairne, mistook my shivers for coldness and wrapped a blanket around my shoulders. He had tried to get me to call him Charles. I could come round to doing so in my thoughts but never yet could I call him it to his face. It seemed so familiar of me to do so. I may have only had a small idea of what the appropriate behaviour of a servant to her master was, but I was sure that my using his first name to address him was not correct.

We chatted on our journey, of home. Of our real home, Scotland, and then of Glen Nairne which was to be my new home, and where Charles worked hard to ensure that things ran to his liking. He told me that it was a nice property, a large one and almost as green as Paisley, where he'd grown up in Scotland. We hadn't lived too far from one another in one way and yet in another we may as well have been worlds apart. Our accents were almost the same though. This was something I'd worried about, realising on the trip over that it would be hard to ever settle in unnoticed when every time I opened my mouth to say something it would become

clear that I was different, not only a convict, not only a woman, but also Scottish. Having the comfort of a familiar accent around me would be something that would help me settle in, I thought.

As we drew nearer Charles mentioned the names of those who would be my new neighbours; across the river the Parramores, someone named McMullen on one side, Harding on another and Pitcairn on the other.

Like most times in life, despite the journey, I was not prepared when we finally arrived. The homestead was smaller than I expected. Nothing grand at all. Quite ordinary. No doubt a larger home would require more cleaning but even though my workload was sure to be smaller there my heart sank a little at the plain-ness of this place. There was a small verandah area and the white wash looked recent. I knew that someone had taken care to make the outside look well-kempt.

Once the initial shock was gone, I could see that while it was only a small home it was still quite smart. Still, it was nothing compared to the many houses we had passed not that long back on the drive, that were quite lovely. Why could I not have been chosen to serve in one of those? Where I might hear all the gossip of the colony, and even meet the right people, so that when I was done with my service there might be the possibility of getting a decent place in the world for myself.

The lady who came out of the house to greet me was a disappointment too. She did not try to make herself grand to impress the new servant, but even if she had I do not know whether she would have succeeded. She was no thing of beauty. She had the face of a sensible woman. Her hair was pulled back severely from her forehead and worn in a tight bun. She would have been better served had she left a hair or two loose about her face. The gown she wore was serious looking, buttoned high up on

the neck and austere. Why would anyone choose to wear such a stuffy thing as that in this land? No one could be coming to call but us, so why would she feel the need to dress so stiffly.

I did hope that she wouldn't be so stiff in all things. If she had no flexibility at all then life would be even worse living and serving here than I'd thought before. But this was meant to be a punishment, and sometimes I forgot that.

As she stepped out from behind the verandah post I saw her belly ripe with child. Charles had been right – she looked very close to her time.

'Katherine, this is Mary McLauchlan.' Charles's introduction was so perfectly unruffled I could not believe it. Where was the sound of guilt in his voice? I knew that he had been making advances on the journey there.

'Hello Mary. I run a fair house. Do right by me and I'll do right by you. There are some rules. No fraternising with the male staff. No drink. No being away from the house unless on a specific errand or unless you have asked permission. Do you understand me?'

'Aye Missus,'

'Aye, right then. You must be dog-tired from the drive. I'll show you to your room. I have need for a servant who will work. I expect you up before me on the morrow and to be tackling the things that you see need to be done.'

'Aye Missus. Thank you Missus.'

And with that I was hurried off into my own place. The bed seemed in that moment the softest thing I'd ever felt. I knew that it weren't really but it sure felt that way as I

rested my head. Katherine spoke true – I was right worn from the drive, and not just from the reasons she might suspect. I did not want to think on those other reasons anymore. I just wanted to close my eyes and fall away from the world.

On my way to the back of the house where my room was tucked away with the other things they wanted to hide, I had noticed a hall cabinet that was a rich mahogany that I longed to run my fingers over when we entered. The wood gleamed where the light hit it and this reminded me of warmth and home and all the things that I wanted in the world. Why couldn't this wooden hall cabinet be mine? I was curious to know what lay in its locked drawer, if anything. That's where people put their secrets. The objects and documents that they wanted no one else to see. The documents in there would mean nothing to me – I wouldn't know what they said at all. But, the objects were a different matter. And if there were no forbidden objects in there then I'd know that the people I was to be serving were boring and unadventurous – for everyone had to have a little drawer where they snuck all their goods that they wanted no one else's eyes to find. I wanted to look inside. But putting hands on things that weren't mine was how I'd ended up there and I resisted. Now I wonder what I would have found had I looked like I wanted to.

The house at Glen Nairne was made of wood. Solid but probably not dependable. It felt different inside though than the sandstone did in Glasgow. It was easier to breathe the air and there wasn't a sucking presence. Sometimes in Glasgow it had felt like the walls were stealing my breath. When I ran my hand over the walls at Glen Nairne there was no faint moisture. The house felt dead. The wood had come from trees that were once living and breathing and now they no longer did so. They were lifeless. It took me some time to decide whether I liked this kind of house or

not. In the end I decided that when I could forget that it was wooden and that the wood was dead, I did like it. Not that it mattered to anyone what I thought. It was as pointless as it had been when as it had been when I was at the supper table with Ma trying to tell her I didn't care for sardines and having her force me to eat them anyway.

At Glen Nairne, the room that was mine was sparsely furnished. A threadbare rug in the centre of the room did little to hide the holes in the wood that were already rotting through even after so few years. The timber was not good enough to withstand the weight of the lives that would tread on it. The room smelt like it'd been shut up for years even though the house hadn't been built for that long and I barely had room to swing a cat in there. But it was meant to be my special place. The place where I could be alone. Mine. In this new country where nothing was ever ours and we were all living in neat little rows trying to win a battle with the wilderness that was pulsing and pushing in on us from all sides. But there were stains on the sheets and I knew when I saw them that there had been bad happenings in the room and I could feel the presence of a-million-and-one sadnesses that had been felt by the girls who had slept there before me. I thought then, as I know now, that it would never be my sanctuary.

Charles had spoken a lot on our journey, but of the difficulty the Nairne's had had keeping their servants, Charles said nothing.

12.

Looking back at all that now I realise that from the first time we met I knew the truth of Charles in a way that should not have been possible. In a flash I saw the desperation to become a new man, a man to make his father proud, a man to continue the respectability of the family. He had vowed to himself that he would no longer be a constant disappointment in this new land. However, what a good man, or even a man who is trying to be good, can do, when he is confronted by a wild land full of inconsistencies and opportunities to do wrong, might fall very short of his noble intentions.

Charles loved his God but never could resist the temptation to sin that sidled up next to him with an almost silent whisper to do wrong, to give in to every evil impulse. A good man can do evil the same as an evil man can do good.

Charles is an attractive man. His brown hair is unruly and never stays flat but this just gives him the roguish air that many women like. His eyes are a lovely dark green and most of the time they are filled with a warmth but when they grow cold to match a cold feeling he is having they are menacing. I feared the cold looks he got sometimes, when he forgot to mask his thoughts from the rest of the world. When they turned that way it seemed that that was how he truly was and that the rest of the time he was holding up a well-practised expression like a mask that the world sees. A small man, who couldn't make it in the real world so ran away to try to start anew in the new 'new world'. A man who chooses to live his life with his feet on the bottom of the world and his hands forever on women who aren't his devoted wife.

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My first night at Glen Nairne was a beautiful serenade. The bed was so soft and I heard chirrups and humming, the conversations of more creatures than I can name filling the world with music. I was full of their song too. It was a comfort. Until, the door to my room opened like a mouth and I exhaled and with my breath the melody left me. I waited for a touch that I was powerless to stop. I waited for a touch that never came. Not that night. I felt like a boiled sweet in Charles's fingers. Like he was running his fingers over one in its bag, getting ready to place it on his tongue and taste it. Like he was savouring the thought of devouring me. He was a dark shadow in the room and I tried to breathe normally. Not too fast, but not holding it in either. I wondered if he sensed my wakefulness, and what he made of it if he did, and what he made of my silence. Did he believe it an invitation? I don't know. Quietly, almost silently he moved a fraction closer and then he stood so still again that I was not sure he ever actually moved. Then quickly and with purpose he turned on his heel and left. The crescendo reached, the song became gentler, and more soothing and I breathed in deeply, gasping and desperate to be full of sound again.

Morning had a tune of its own. It came too soon, breaking the peace that had descended. I was awake, before even the sun. And up, out of bed. Not really sure whether I should have been or not. But something inside me was uneasy at the thought of being gotten up to begin my servitude. I was unsure of the new boundaries, I peered cautiously from my doorway but saw no one. I closed the door before I dressed for the day, pulling my coarse dress over my head and tucked my hair into a kerchief. I pulled up the covers of my bed and left the room. The day was bright even without the sun fully risen, and I tried to convince myself that I would eventually become accustomed to this crystal clear light.

I was in the kitchen making tea. I wasn't sure how to get them to come to the table. In my own home I used to bang the pots about and cry for them all to come and eat. I had to take the girls to Mrs Tennant to mind them while I was at the mill, so they had to be up.

I didn't enjoy the uncertainty of my new situation. But I preferred to feel the uncertainty alone. Charles and Katherine came to breakfast and we were stiff with one another. I felt my words catch in my throat and decided holding my tongue would be better. I did not know where to stand, or how to serve them. I poured the tea. I sliced some meat for them. I backed up against the wall and pushed my hands together behind my back. They made conversation that sounded overly polite. Perhaps that was how they always were together.

William and I, when we broke our fast together, we laughed and teased. Sometimes the teasing in good fun but others not so. Still, it seemed more natural than how this breakfast was unfolding.

Charles watched Katherine as she raised the tea cup to her lips and jerked her head back so slightly that very little tea could have found its way down to her belly. There was something wooden in the way she moved. As if she was so fearful of moving in the wrong way that every motion was deliberately controlled, like she was at a fancy dinner and was struggling to remember her table manners but this was just a meal in her house with her husband and son and she couldn't relax. How exhausting her life must have been.

Charles was the opposite. Over-cheerful and large, in a way that I could abide even less than her wooden-ness, if he had been my husband.

‘I must go to town today.’

‘Again? So soon?’

‘I have a committee meeting for the First Presbyterian Church in Hobart. I’m sorry to leave you again so soon.’ His tone was still cheerful and did not match these words at all. I felt my eyes begin to roll and looked down praying that neither of them had seen.

Katherine had been looking my way and there was something of a smile around her lips and I wondered whether she caught my derision earlier.

Charles sat at the head of the table, Katherine was to his left and a small boy to his right. The boy was clearly Charles’s son – the physical resemblance was unnerving. Soon there would be another child to make them an even number. With me forever the odd one out.

I found myself in the early days trying to be near the child. It caused both pleasure and pain within. The instinct was there both to protect and to mother. I tried to shut it off like a pump on a well. I wished I was run dry. I had thought I was. After a while though I found that I did not like Charles Jr. He was spoiled and smug. He made messes deliberately and I would see him smirk at me as I bent to clean them.

How quickly I adjusted to life there. Up at the crack of dawn to get a billy on to boil for the master and madam’s breakfast tea, then it was out to collect the eggs and some days there were blankets and rugs to beat and some days it was sweeping to keep me occupied. Poor Katherine almost had a fit when I arrived and she realised that I knew nought of how to keep a good home. I’d never had reason to learn the beating of rugs – we’d never had none. There was much I’d never had before that

Katherine called her own. She was kind and gentle with me at first – she knew that she'd catch more with kindness than nastiness. But if anyone came to call it was me to be on my best manners and for us to pretend that we could barely cope being in the same room together, let alone that sometimes we were almost as friends when no one was looking. For it was always about who was looking and what it would appear to them to be at that time. They, and I, must look respectable. They barely seemed to care whether I was respectable or not, only that I didn't ruin their chances at appearing so. And they weren't so respectable themselves.

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Charles was slow and deliberate when he picked up his new trinket. He thought me lovely. He handled with care. It seemed to me like he thought of me almost like my Da did. But then it all changed.

I started awake at his touch. Gentle, like William was at first. I was frozen, unsure of what to do. If I fought would he stop? If I screamed for help who would come to my aid? Katherine may have, or she may have laid awake in bed and listened. Or Charles might have somehow turned it all around on me, and Katherine may have come running but thought that it was my own doing. The thoughts whirred across my mind and I opened my mouth to scream but Charles was there, forcing his tongue inside my mouth and swallowing my scream, my breath, my everything. Part of me tingled with the pleasure of his forbidden caresses. It was a bodily reaction, not a conscious one. I was aware of it and aware that I could do nothing to stop it. But I didn't want it. Not that first time. His hands grazed my thighs and fear gnawed on me from within. He raised my nightdress and I came to life, no longer a statue but a person who would try to stop this. I grasped his hands in my own and threw them

from myself, away from my thighs. I tried to push him off while my body was waking up and feeling more alive than it had in forever. It craved more while I, in my right mind, wanted none of it. Charles slapped my face, making me cry out and as I brought my hands up to touch the sting he forced my nightie up and himself inside me. He knew then. Knew how my own body had betrayed me, and that made him thrust fast and hard, too excited by the idea of my arousal to slow himself. It was over quickly. He didn't collapse on top of me as William used to but hefted himself up onto his knees. And then he leaned forward and kissed me on my hair, as Da used to do, pulled my nightgown down and left.

I lay there. Numb. Running over what just happened in my mind. Trying to stop, trying not to think about it. I tried to imagine the events into a different end result. One where I won. One where there was a future that didn't look black. When I thought about the final moments of the attack, that kiss on my hair, my stomach churned and I leapt from bed and vomited until I was dry retching, trying to stop the sobs that I realised were wracking my body. I dragged myself back into bed and closed my eyes but I knew that I would not be getting any respite that night.

The second time he came his hands were cold, and I struggled to stop myself from flinching as he touched me. I decided to lay still and let him have his way with me. He did not like that. He demanded that I move underneath him. If he wanted a stiff, lifeless bed mate he would have gone to his wife, I daresay. I would have said not tonight if it had been William, and he may have even listened.

During my day I thought about Katherine and whether she had wanted to come here with Charles, or whether she had no say in the matter. Almost as if she were just like me. Well, not exactly alike. She was not marked as different with

convict status like I am, but she was an outsider here, and one that did not choose to come. I felt it in my bones that she would not be here could she help it. Sometimes I wished that I could ask her things about her life, but I didn't. I feared she would think me impertinent and that was not my desire. I just wished that we could be closer. In the town maybe when women had other society to keep, and even when the convicts had company in other convicts I could understand the two being kept separate. But at Glen Nairne we were in the middle of nowhere and we did not need to put on airs and graces. Perhaps it was only me who felt lonely and a longing for the type of kinship that I experienced with Mary Cameron and the others on the boat on the way here. I lost myself in these thoughts while I was washing the floors. I had to tuck my skirts up to do this so my legs to the knee are visible. I did not like when one of the men came across me like this. I felt their gazes burning into the bare flesh of my legs. I stared right on back and refused to cover them immediately. I did no wrong with my legs on display; for it is how you must wash a floor. How impractical long dresses are when one actually has work to do around the place. If one could just lounge about, occasionally take tea and occupy her mind with books and things then I understand the wearing of such clothes as these. But for a working life these skirts only get in the way and tread more filth through a house. And most houses have filth enough.

Katherine must have been relieved that I am also Scottish. For if I was English I would think myself a class above her just because of where I come from. She would have far more trouble in some regards were I English. But maybe had I been, Charles would not have taken a fancy to me, and if he hadn't then none of this would ever have happened.

13.

When we were all together at the factory wearing those outfits that we were given it wasn't so bad. We all blended in and at least it made it harder for someone to target you personally when you were all wearing the same thing. But once I was at Glen Nairne I began to loathe that coarse fabric that coated my flesh and marked me as lesser than the rest of people. That marked me as different, that stole my freedom and allowed me no rest for I was wicked. Those worsted stockings itched in the summertime when the weather was warm enough that they would get me sweating and then rubbing beneath my clothes as I went about my daily chores. And I had enough rubbing beneath clothes after my daily chores were finished, when Charles would come visit.

Even though I say it wasn't so bad when we were all together wearing it, I know that when I first saw it and felt the hard fabric of that dress it was another reminder that life was hard. That I was further away than ever from where I wanted to be. The clothes that I so longed for, with the fashionable cuts and the soft, warm fabric were more out of my reach than ever. And there is nothing quite as soul-destroying as trying your best and still not getting where you want to be. Nothing to make you lose sense of your own self more than feeling like you will never measure up to the spot that you would like to reach.

As I was caught in Glasgow I was diminished and as we sailed to Australia more and more pieces of myself were washed away. The convict dress was yet another way that I felt myself further away from the person that I used to be. The person that the people back home knew and loved. Home. It was strange think of home when I

was floating between two worlds and would never go back to my true home. It left me feeling sad about what would happen to us all one day. There was no way around that knowledge of what would one day transpire. I would die and the world would swallow me up whole. I would be less than a memory at the end of it all. Less than dust.

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At night we heard the most ferocious growling noises but Charles insisted that we had nothing to worry about. That he was the wildest beast to enter the house. And that is also partly what I was afraid of. For how could I fight off such a beast as he? How could the standings ever be level between us? I had little to barter with. Katherine always laughed when Charles said this as though she thought it enormous fun to hear him refer to himself as a beast, whether it brought to mind him ravaging her in the bedroom I don't know. Maybe he didn't ravage her and maybe that was the joke. Or perhaps she ravaged him? Perhaps she was a wild beast in the bedroom, but I can't imagine that.

If the animals that shrieked in the night were all that there was to be afraid of there I could have found my ease, but I knew that they weren't and so I could never find myself really able to relax.

No one cared if I was comfortable or not though. I was there to serve my time for those crimes that I committed that were supposedly so unimaginable. I, who deserved to be punished, had no right to claim myself unable to relax for there is no rest for the wicked. That's what we are taught and now I know it to be true. Although I do but wonder at the reason for my situation before I was so wicked. For I have always had to work and never enjoyed the play of others so I guess that I have

always been wicked. Some of us women are, people say. Maybe it's like one mouldy apple in the barrel and eventually the others all turn bad. Maybe inside me there was one bad bit and then slowly it's making all the rest of me rot too. Maybe they'll find it when they cut me open.

Often of an afternoon I wished I could sit down and enjoy a pot of tea but that was what Katherine did, although there was rarely conversation to be had for her. Charles seemed constantly busy and I was kept busy too, scouring the floor every second day despite the need to do so only once a week at most. I took pride in the cleanliness of the house. That pride should not have been mine but I found I could not prevent myself from feeling it. For I found myself imagining that their house was mine in this new country, and in that I found that it was not the work itself that rankled me but the idea that I was doing it was someone else and not for myself, and my own family. And especially for someone who took it for granted that I would continue to do this work even though at any time I could have refused and been sent back to the factory for insolence. But then they may have just asked for me back again and I was scared that Charles would become more violent with me as a result. I knew that he could hurt me for his own pleasure if he chose to. And I will admit that I was frightened also that there were worse places than Glen Nairne that I could have been sent to, and with worse masters and mistresses and worse chores to face. It was only Charles I had to worry about there after all – but somewhere else there could be many more men who would wish to show their weapons to me and have me house them. Somewhere else the troubles that awaited could be worse.

And the small bedroom at Glen Nairne was the first space I had been given to call my own since I was caught in Glasgow. There was a pleasure in that. Katherine

said that she would respect my privacy as much as she could – that from time to time she would inspect the room to make sure I had no forbidden objects in there but that she would never barge in unannounced while I was inside—that she would always knock.

Katherine wasn't like some of the other women who had convicts in their home but who never wanted them really and as soon as unbound servants became available they would give them the old heave ho and get the ones that had good characters, for all us convicts were robbed of anything that could have been called a good character almost before we even committed our crimes. This idea of a space that was mine made my toes tingle—I could do what I liked in there—Charles took that away from me with his visits. I hardly had the chance to feel the luck of it all before he came and demanded my body for his whims.

Sometimes I wondered how Katherine felt knowing that I was privy to her body's secrets. I saw what went into that pot at night time. She never seemed to have big feelings though. Usually she was even-tempered and not prone to becoming cross or to out-of-the-ordinary kindnesses. She found that the way to rule me was with a lack of feeling. As if nothing I said or did, or didn't do made her happy or cross or feel anything at all. As if I was barely there in her house at all. But I knew that my presence was felt by her most keenly. I saw the way her shoulders tensed when she heard the familiar tread of my foot entering a room behind her. I saw how she bit her lip to keep from laughing when I said something that amused her—for it would not be proper to giggle with the convict servant. So while Katherine tried to hide her feelings from me, and never gave voice to them, I found myself perfectly able to discover them for myself much of the time. I wished often that we could be friends,

her and I. I could not reach out to her though. How could I have been her friend and kept from her what a scoundrel her husband really is? Poor wee Katherine, I did pity her in a way. She had a husband who was sharing criminal conversation with the convict servant while she was in the family way and needed his love and support at that time more than any other. That he continued the conversation long after that child was born, and with the same hands he held that precious babe to his chest he also held the servant many a night. But she was a fool just the same. If I had been her I would not have tolerated such behaviour from that man. I would have used all the power at my disposal to make him act how I saw fit and in a manner that one had the right to expect in a husband. Even William, who was far from a model husband, would not have dreamed of treating me that way.

I sometimes told Charles so, 'Sir, you should be ashamed of yourself. You with a new baby and a loving wife so near.' And sometimes he would answer

'Oh Mary I am ashamed, but the shame does not keep the wanting away for long.' Sometimes his voice would be grave when he would answer my accusations, but other times it would be filled with a humour that usually only he felt, although sometimes I only said the words for their effect, not because I felt them keenly on every occasion. Sometimes I admit I felt a sizzle up my spine as I said them, a delicious flurry in my stomach at the truth of the words he said in return. Sometimes I felt like I was irresistible. Like Charles was not so bad for behaving as he did, for he was only a human man and how was a man supposed to stay away from one such as me? Who could offer so much while asking so little in return? But these times were not often, you must understand that. I hated him most of the time. Only every so often would these other thoughts creep their way into my head. Like many

thoughts, unbidden, and I knew them to be wrong. I could be held no more responsible for having them than anyone can be held entirely responsible for their thoughts that slither around like snakes in their heads.

For we don't always control our own minds like they say we control our own actions. I don't think that I did always control my own actions. Sometimes I think things happened or I did them with no intention of doing so and with hardly the thought in my head that these things were up to me. But perhaps I am not like other people. I have thought this before. Other people seemed able to accept that they were not of a certain type of people and never felt like they wanted to try to rise to be equal. They were happy to be where they were, down the bottom. With all the debris of life stacking itself around them. They wanted to stay where they were, where they were comfortable. I never wanted that. I always strove to take myself higher. To drag myself upwards to a world that I'd glimpsed so young and that had burned itself into my mind when the quality would visit Saltcoats.

Sometimes I think that the world is a black place and that there is nothing we can do to rise out of the bog. I have always had these turns and they usually right themselves. I feel so low I can barely go on and then suddenly the black cloud is gone and I find myself feeling better and able to do the things that I want to. Or if not what I want to, as is the case now, then the things I need to at least. When these black moods would hit while I was at Glen Nairne, Katherine was far from sympathetic, as if she thought that I had no right to any feelings anymore. As if, the fact that I was her servant meant that I was less human, and did not deserve to have my feelings entertained.

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I awoke one morning with my brain foggy from too much of the gin that Charles provided me with the previous night. I was not given to being much in liquor those days, as I felt that it robbed me of my precious senses, and also because it wasn't as if I had a ready supply. But sometimes I would drink more than I should have, when Charles was kind to me, and brought it to my room, and I hungered for some kind of relief and my defences would drop down a little. I drank to fill the empty places within that would never really be filled again and I drank for the warmth, and to feel the burn of the liquid down my throat. To feel the burn was better than to feel nothing at all.

The main difference about being a servant was that I had no choice in how I behaved in the day and could not adjust the routine depending on my moods. If Katherine woke up feeling out of sorts she could choose to stay in her bed and ring her bell and have her breakfast brought in for her and she could while the day away in her thoughts, passing the time from sun up to sun down and never leaving that bed if that's what she chose. But, despite the aching of my head from the gin, and the furry feeling in my mouth I had to leave my comfortable bed and work.

I had to work extra hard that day to hold my tongue. Holding my tongue was something that I struggled with. It was not only a form of knowing my place and holding it in the presence of guests but also in my own best interests to bite back angry words that wished to spill out, or truthful words that I knew Katherine did not want to hear.

Katherine was already waiting at the table when I entered. I had been rubbing the back of my neck and moving slowly but when I saw her I had to pretend that all was normal. I was sure she could smell the fumes coming off me in sour waves from

the way she crinkled her nose as I passed her but she said nothing. I got the tea and breakfast ready. The smell of the bacon left my stomach churning and after I served her, I begged my leave to visit the privy out back. In the privy I was sick as a dog. It was strange as gin never usually left me with a rotten stomach, only a sore head but I had no reason to think anything of it.

I felt surly that night and thought to myself if Charles comes I shall play the part he likes the best—of she who puts up a fight but eventually relents. I wanted my play that evening but it was typical that he did not come. It was like he could sense when I might want the company more than he, and he chose not to come then. In case I forgot my place. In case I forgot that I was his for the taking but he was not mine. As if I could ever have forgotten that with the chores I did daily. I thought about how if he was mine for the taking, then I would have been Katherine and she would have been me. Then it would have been him that would be made to do the begging and the pleading, and her that would be made to do the chores, and me that could have strolled from room to room and all along the front verandah as if I was the queen of all the earth. And on days when my head hurt from too much gin I could stay abed and do nothing.

14.

Though we had neighbours it sometimes felt like we existed in our own little world. There was a natural order to things there that we humans could not interfere with even if we had desired to. They say that cities breed crime and disease but I felt more comfortable in the city than I did there. The quiet was all around and only at night when the wild animals howled did anything break the silence. It was like a spell was cast and we were in a world of our own there. Like they could do anything and be free from judgement and speculation from outsiders. They abused the power. For how they did things is not at all how things should be done. It was as if they chose the rules they wanted to observe and pretended that those they didn't wish to follow didn't exist. For they didn't give me the proper clothing allowance that I was entitled to, but there was nothing that I could do about that. Who could I complain to there in that wilderness? Who was there who would listen, who would have the power to do anything about it? I was forced to strip to my petticoats in my room at night after rinsing my house dress and just hoping that it was dry enough by morning not to give me a chill when I slipped it back on.

It didn't rain a lot at Glen Nairne but when it did the entire countryside looked half-drowned and even more beautiful. It made more work for me, the men trampling mud all about the floors and the clothes taking an age to dry, and being ever more dirty than usual. Particularly the white things. The stains were always hard to shift from them. The dirt seemed to get in so much deeper when you didn't want it to.

But there has always been difficulty in guarding things from the dirt.

Charles liked the dirt sometimes just as he liked the fight. And then the submission. The submission alone didn't mean anything to him without the fight beforehand. I hated him in part and in other ways it was more complicated than that. Hate requires more than love to maintain it. I wasn't sure he was worth that then, and I know that he isn't now. Such a small, sad man. Joining committees here and there, establishing churches while living in sin. He likes to think himself important but I know different.

After being imprisoned I became more aware than ever before of the power of my own body and of how my presence in a room changed things. One morning Katherine and Charles sat at the table together. The table that I had set, eating the food that I had brought in. I listened at the door for what snatches of conversation I might catch but I could hear nothing. Thinking that they were finished eating I went in to collect the remains but stopped short just through the door when I saw that they were still there eating. Not finished their food at all. They were just so silent. Two people, married and yet with nothing to say to one another. Charles tried to catch my eye but I just put my head down and retreated, I had not wished to interrupt their breakfast further than I already had.

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A knock sounded on my door but before I answered it the door opened and Charles was in my room. The knock was a habit, and contained none of the courtesy the action would have normally revealed. He looked at me, and I looked right back. If he wanted me to avert my eyes to make this easier for him this time he would be disappointed.

My room was still cold and spare. I was not given anything to decorate it, and had no creature comforts other than the blanket I was beneath, and even that was coarse and threadbare, but at least it was free of fleas and the room itself was usually free of vermin. I worked as hard in there as I did in the rest of the dwelling to keep things clean and free of disease. I may have had nothing available to me to put my female touch into my surroundings, but I could show my care for the few things allowed me by making them the best they could be.

Charles liked the bareness of the room, I thought, like he liked me bare. It brought to mind all manner of institutions and allowed him to pretend that there was nothing wrong with the attentions he forced upon me. I could have been in a hospital bed, and he was administering my ‘medicines’, or it could have been the factory and he could be doling out my ‘punishment’. He was always the one with the power. He reached out his hand and ran a fingertip up my arm.

That night we did not speak. There were nights when we did share a few words before the act but I think Charles sometimes found those little chats unnerving. He preferred it when I did not make him think on me as a person who did not like what occurred in that bed, on those nights. He preferred to think of me as an empty vessel eagerly awaiting the chance to be filled.

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It was Da who loved me more I always felt. Ma wished too much for things that could never be and though she went to church with all the rest I don’t know if she was a believer. It fills me with sorrow to wonder what my old Da would think of my present situation. The grief that would fill him from the belly up, and the way that

even while he was full of shame and remorse he'd probably at the same time be grateful to God for allowing him to feel as though his belly was full one last time.

But I was always Da's little one. From when I can first remember he'd lift me up by the waist and twirl me about in the air. He'd let me cheat in hide and go seek when I was playing with the others and he'd never be harsh with me unless I had done something very naughty, and even then I knew that I got less of a punishment than the others did. And while I know on the one hand that this was unfair, I always used to think it was God's way of rewarding me for being so good most of the time. And so I could put up with the taunts of the others for I learned the lesson that is hammered home to me more and more each day, as I sit in the cell and await my punishment, that it is easy to bear the criticism and dislike of others for your actions, if you yourself can be proud of them for even a small moment, if you can feel like you did the right thing. But it is the same for matters that you feel guilty in. No matter what the rest of the world says it is always yourself who will be your harshest critic when there is a stain of guilt on your conscience. And even when you know that you did no wrong, there is still a quiet voice that whispers to you in the dark of how you could have done things differently, you could have stopped it from happening.

But back to my Da, the only time he ever got really angry at me was over William. He was a 'good for nothing upstart from out of town' and I was to have 'no more to do with him.' Such harsh words coming from my father would have once been the end of me and my acquaintance with Mr William Sutherland. And since those fateful words were uttered I have wondered to myself many a time how differently my life would be today had I listened to Da, had I ended my connection

before it became too serious for me to do so and keep my honour. But I was seduced by the idea of William before I ever met the actual man. I'd been dreaming of leaving for as long as I'd been thinking of anything. I loved the sea. But I had no head for the life that women led there, settling down with a nice lad from a few houses down the road. That was never what I had in mind.

But Da took an instant dislike to William, and I didn't understand it as he was usually so good and easy with people. From the moment he laid eyes on William he was suspicious about his motives and 'had a bad feeling about that one' and then what could I say but that we were acquainted and I quite liked the man. Da warned me that I must needs be careful – that I wasn't quite the grownup I thought I was.

But as Ma would have said 'wishin and hopin for something different, you may's already be dead. Make best from what you have.' Well Ma, what should I make from my last few days on this earth while I sit, filthy, in a rat-infested cell?

Once I had a pet pig. She was a beautiful little thing, and she'd follow me round and from her happiness in my care she did grow to be a wee fat thing. And I knew the way of the world. I did. But I was hoping that God would answer the prayers I had been sending up to him since my little Gwen had come into my life. Always the same pleas to spare her. And even when I was at the hungriest I could ever get I never would have wanted to put my own needs before the life of my little friend. She was innocent. And I think I knew the whole time that eventually she would have to die. But I was hoping it would be after a long and happy life. That my family could make do with a little less meat for quite some time. And all who saw me with her gorgeous little self must have been able to see that she was a beauty and that we had a bond. And that is why I have never quite forgiven my mother for the

day that I came home and heard my poor little Gwen squealing. I will never forget the sound as I ran through our small house to the back where I saw her tied to the stake in the ground and I saw mother with the axe raised in her hand. Gwen turned her face to look at me, and I could see in her eyes that she thought that I would rescue her, and I ran to her but Ma's eyes flashed dangerously and I knew it was all for nothing. The look on my poor Gwen's little snouty face as Ma sank that axe into her neck. That squeal is still the saddest sound I have ever heard. And a thick spray of pig's blood squirted up and hit my cheek, sickly warm and with a smell like the rusted pump on the well. I stood and even though I wanted to move my feet to get away they were stuck to the ground, there was nothing I could do, and my eyes were fixed on my mother murdering my best friend. And being a country girl there was a point when I had known that everything would end that way.

But that night at the dinner table I did not say a word to my mother, and while everyone else ate the remains of my best and most innocent little friend, even Da who cast his eyes apologetically in my direction with an expression that said he wouldn't have killed her but seeing as she was dead...I sat there with a grumbling belly, and the way she smelt so delicious and made my mouth water almost made me gag, and it might have even been that day that I knew forever and without doubt, that this world we live in is not a nice place.

But now that I am in gaol I wonder, will I squeal that loudly with fear as I mount that hanging platform. I think not. But that small girl who is still inside me somewhere, that small girl who watched in horror as her pet pig was killed, she will be screaming like she never could that day, screaming and feeling safe in the knowledge that she was right that day— the world is not a nice place.

Things between my Ma and I were never quite the same after that. I did believe that she had not meant any harm to me, that her hunger had driven her to her mischief and that she could no more help that than a body could control their insides. But another part of me thought that she had done it to hurt me, that she was jealous that my Da and I were so close and that I didn't reach out to her for love as much anymore. Part of me felt that it was spite that drove the axe, not hunger, and that I could never forgive. So while I forgave my father who ate his share of Gwen, and Lachie and Margaret too, I turned cold towards my mother inside. And I grew more and more desperate to leave my small little town and find fine things in another place.

When I met William I would have asked advice from my Ma had we not fallen out over Gwen. William was a weaver. He was tall and broad shouldered, and I felt charming and small beside him. He told me I was enchanting. My Da told me he was bad news. That I'd be wise to have naught to do with him. But every time I thought back to that white glove, dangling ever so delicately from underneath that oh-so-soft red curtain, wise had nothing to do with anything. Da always said that I was something of a beauty and it was a wonder no one had come to ask my hand when I was still a tender thing but he also knew that however beautiful I might be we did not have much in the way of a dowry to offer any prospective suitors. In my mind then it was never clear how I would get out of Saltcoats, only that I would. And I know in a lot of things a young girl would go to her Ma about them but I did not go to my Ma for anything let alone to learn of women things. And while my Da was always good and kind he wasn't much help at a lot of the things that I could have used him for. When we got to Glasgow I came to think of Agnes like a mother. But

then her sworn testimony was used against me in my trial and I found out what she really thought of me.

I had been jealous of the strict habits of intimacy that Agnes and Sarah had. Their friendship was stronger than any that I had ever had for myself. I did not think that Agnes would speak out against me in the circuit courts. Not after she attended me when I brought my girls into the world, and not when I had told her what my life had been. All the sad details. When I learned that she had given sworn evidence that she thought I had taken all those items, well, I felt as betrayed by her then as I had felt when my mother murdered Gwen.

15.

Sometimes I wonder what it will be like after I have gone. Will I see my dear little Gwen again? And if I do, will she be mad with me, that I didn't protect her? Will she squeal with fear or excitement when she sees me? I hope she doesn't squeal at all, it will remind me of the blood if she does. And I don't want to be reminded of the blood. There was so much of it. It was all over the ground. It was everywhere. My dress was covered in it, and so were Mary Cameron's hands and I didn't hear cries like I knew I should have. Like I knew was right. When my other two girls had come out they'd had strong little cries and I'd known that life might well hold something better for them. I felt it in their strong little fingers that clasped around mine and when I looked down at their small little sweet bodies I knew that they'd be well. I wish I still felt that with the same surety that I did then. It keeps me awake at night sometimes wondering whether my little babies are well.

Wondering whether they are with their father or if they are off in some other place. But I didn't hear the cries in the privy and I knew that something was wrong, and it had been pain, pain, pain for so long too that I had thought that nothing good would come from this. It had been pain, pain, pain before that too. And fear, fear, fear. But fear has become a friend of mine as I am not without it at any second and I remember what my Ma used to say and I will soon be dead so I figure that I won't hasten it up any further. So I've tried to make best of what I have. Tried to make fear a friend and I think it's almost worked in all truth – at least I don't feel so alone when I am anymore. And sometimes I think that at least when I'm gone I won't be afraid anymore. I hope I won't be afraid. I don't know what I would do if the fear followed me. Although I guess I would make friends with it again, curl up with it at night. And

if I'm going to hell with the *deil*, well then he won't let me forget the fear. He'll make it keep crawling up my spine and stealing my words and breath. He won't let me rest ever.

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Down the wynds and closes of Glasgow we lived half-lives. We lived huddled together, stretching to survive in the stench of our own sin-filled flesh. The air reeked of musky remnants of long forgotten crimes and passions and my lungs were filthy with the black muck of others' and my own indiscretions. But I never did nothing that could warrant the severity of the bad things that happened to me. I mayn't have been the little angel that I would've liked, the little angels that my children were to me but I would never have let anything bad happen to them and for that I am proud. And there isn't much in this world that I can be proud of. Certainly not the way I'll leave it.

When we moved to Glasgow it wasn't like I'd imagined it would be. I thought there'd be opportunities for everyone and that if you wanted to better yourself you'd be able to. But what I found was too many people wanting to get ahead and no chance for them to do it. Poor souls who'd given up just lying in the street, and not enough work to go around for those that needed it. Not enough for anyone to prosper save a lucky chosen few and they got richer and richer while we got poorer and poorer. Of course, as we arrived in the town I didn't want to see it for what it was, couldn't bear the thought that all my dreams were already gone. I needed to fool myself into thinking that everything would be alright. I needed to keep my spirits up. If William was surprised by what he saw and if things had taken a great downfall since he'd last been in town he didn't let on. But I think he knew as

well as I did that it would be tough to last in such a place. But like me, he didn't want to know, he wanted to pretend for as long as he could that everything would be alright, and maybe he did believe it in some small part of himself.

Anyroad, we arrived at the place that was to be ours and I was surprised to see a very finely dressed lady leaving her home just across from us on the way. She was obviously doing well and I tilted my head towards her and asked William who she was.

'That'd be Sarah Kilpatrick,' he answered me. 'Her husband's John and they think they're better than all around these parts.'

'What a lovely dress she wears,' I said. He made a face like he'd bitten into a lemon. I didn't care if I bothered him. I turned around as she walked up the street and soaked in every detail of the gown she was wearing. Where the hemline stretched to, how it fit snug in the bodice, the neckline that was low but not so low as to be indecent. The colour and the wiggle of the bow at the back as she walked. I was almost salivating it was so lovely, how I wanted it for myself, how I could picture its folds loosely covering my own flesh, the colour it would bring out in my cheeks, I sat in silence imagining myself as Mrs Kilpatrick and William as Mr Kilpatrick and the two of us well to do enough to have those kind of clothes so that I could wear them even if I was just going on an errand down the street. William didn't notice my looks of longing – or if he did he didn't say anything, just let them go by, unchecked, unacknowledged.

My mother had said that my love of nice things would bring me down like my dreams to be living 'above my station.' Said I should be grateful for what I had and that I had no business wanting more. But Ma said a lot of things that went in one

ear and out the other – I had no longing to listen to just what she was saying most of the time. She didn't understand things like my Da did. And I would always say that if there should be bad times arise that I would handle them like my Da – and not lose my spirits and not like my Ma. And I promised that if I had wee ones of my own that I would never, never let them feel the way my Ma used to make me feel – like I didn't deserve what I coveted. Not just that I wouldn't get it because mostly I knew that I probably wouldn't get it but that I didn't deserve it – that was what did the damage. And then when I had my girls I saw something of how hard it was to be a woman and to show them how to be one, especially when life was so tough and I wondered if my mother had felt the same. I should have reached out to her then. I should have changed my ways to protect my daughters. Then none of these terrible things would have come to pass.

16.

Sometimes I think it funny that for so long I felt trapped in my small little town, and now I am actually trapped in a tiny little cell, and I think to myself if I had let myself be trapped in that small little town I would never have had occasion to be trapped in this tiny little cell. And maybe it was better the devil I knew after all, but I know these thoughts are useless and all they do is help me to pass the time until I have no time anymore. Or I have eternity. It's funny how you can have both. Sometimes I do giggle to myself and I know that none of these things are actually funny, but it's all I can do and if it isn't a giggle then it might be tears and tears never did a body good, but laughter is the medicine of the soul. And I don't know if I deserve to be able to cry tears for my sins but I also don't think I'm deserving of laughter most likely but what else is a body to do? I know I'm not the only one who mutters away to herself like one gone mad, maybe I have gone mad. I've felt like a madwoman before, and I will not be the last to be treated as such. I've told lies in my time. Sometimes I've told so many lies that I hardly remember what the truth is anymore. And if I can't remember what is truth then what is the point of telling the story? Sometimes a lie makes a better story, but it's normally the truth that is more interesting. When I was younger I would dream up these tales of how this came to be, or whether this, that, or the other was how something happened. But from my own life I can say that the truth is probably the most interesting. Even when I can't always remember what the truth is.

William and I were married. I was happy. At least for a short while. But I've never taken that happiness for granted and especially I don't do so now. He was attentive to my needs before the wedding. And even after for a short while I felt that

we could make a happy life together. That we could grow closer and love more deeply. But soon cracks appeared in our new perfect life. William lost some customers. He had to take work weaving by the bag and this was not a fair way to get a decent pay. But there were always more weavers to take the jobs should you complain too much. But soon we could nae get by on William's wage alone and I had to get myself a job too. This had never been a part of my plans for my new life. I got a job Dunlop's mill, managing several of the young girls who worked there. It was a good job though I had to be up frightful early in the morning and the walk to the mill was sure cold, so I was accustomed to wearing my plaid there. I enjoyed the company of the younger girls. Some of them reminded me of myself when I'd been their age, and I longed to pull a few aside and give them the special advice that I felt I could now provide, having been a wife for a little while and feeling like I knew a little bit more of the world. They were hard little workers too, not many of them were ever shirking their responsibilities and I would have found it hard to pick on them if they were, as their poor little hands would often be freezing cold as they went to work. I know it is wrong but I did have my favourites among them. I still tried to treat them all equal, I was always most anxious that I would not act on this favouritism as I knew what it would do to the friendships between the young girls, and especially as they were at such an age that friends and enemies made would be kept for many a year on from then. But William didn't like me having a job and bringing in money. He would demand it when I got my wages and claim that as it was his job to provide he should be the boss of the expenses. He didn't take kindly when I said that it was indeed his job to provide but seeing as I was also working to secure our daily bread that I should be able to manage my own money. I didn't blame him for the troubles he was having at his job, but I never did see why he thought he

could take my money. I had never had money of my own before and after I'd been working for it I didn't like to just hand it over. I didn't want to fuss too much but soon I discovered that William didn't bring all that he earned home to me, and so I started to do the same. What he thought I didn't know didn't hurt me and what he really didn't know wouldn't hurt him.

If there was one thing we had in common, it was that we both liked a little whisky or a little gin. Well I liked a little, he liked a lot, and as time went on I started to like more and more of it too. I knew that it wasn't good. Sometimes I'd wake up with a fearful headache and have to get to work. Those days I wasn't so tolerant of chatter amongst the girls, and I was harsh with them. I would always be extra agreeable on the next day though and I would wonder whether they knew what the circumstances were and if they did what they thought of me, and I felt bad and would try to stay away from the drink, but it was like magic and warmed me on a cold night all the way from my head to my toes. And if William had had a nip then it made it double hard for me to say no.

When I realised what it meant that I hadn't bled for longer than was usual I wasn't sure how William would react. Times were tough at his shop and we barely had enough as it was. But I also knew that he had known what might happen when we committed our acts. That he hadn't had any trick pulled on him. He would have to realise that if he would insist on taking his husband's rights that there would be the possibility of this consequence befalling us. But as it was, when I told him he was ecstatic. He thought that he'd been doing something wrong that it had taken so many months after we were wed for this lucky miracle to befall us. The relief swept through me; it was going to be fine. I just hadn't been sure that it was what he

wanted. And I felt good to be able to give him this prize that he would cherish. We went out and he got very drunk but I had a spinny head after my first dram and a spinny belly not long after that and so I never was so drunk as him. And he wanted to lay with me when we got home and for a start he was not in a state that would physically allow it and I was too worried about what was going on inside to let him. He tried to argue with me but he lay down and a moment later a drink stupor had washed over him and so he was not going to get any more words out.

During this time, I enjoyed the thickening of my waist and the warmth that I felt when he would touch my belly and talk to the wee one that was in there. And he was sweeter to me then than he had ever been before, and I felt that all was good.

But soon I was so big that I could barely move and every waking breath was agony, my feet and ankles had become swollen and no matter how I tried I couldn't get the blood to move properly through my body. It was my fault he said. It was my fault that there might be a problem. And I never felt that it was a fair accusation to throw at me; never felt that it was something that should have been said. But once he'd said it, even though I knew it wasn't fair, it played on my mind. And I began to blame myself too. And then the pains started to come and he was out and I didn't know where but knew that when he came back there would be the fumes of gin coming off of him and I knew that it wasn't fair but that I would have to do it alone if it came before he got back because there was no way I could get anywhere for help. It would just depend on whether anyone heard me and came to offer assistance but if most people in our part of town had heard they would have pretended not to, and gone about their business. It was that kind of place. It wasn't anyone's fault. That's just how it was. And I could hold no blame to anyone; for if I had been on my way

home on the street, I too would have fixed my eyes on the ground and hurried on. And I'm not proud to admit that, but I know that it's the truth.

When she came out and she was a girl I knew that she would grow up strong and determined. Lucky for me Agnes across the way was kind to me and when she realised how scant my knowledge of what was to come was she was very thoughtful in her giving of knowledge and advice. Without her I don't know what I would have done. She was so very important to my first little girl.

If there is one thing that shows that God doesn't like women it'd be childbirth. The pain of that is the worst pain that any living creature ever endures. It's sweating and grunting, my first little girl had me straining and pushing for at least a whole night to get her out, and the pain and that tearing. Oh how she ripped me open from the inside out and turned me into a new person.

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Sometimes I lay awake at night, dreaming up a feast of favourite things, and even while I'm doing it I don't know why I am because the thought of those morsels always makes my belly rumble and brings saliva into my mouth and makes it impossible for sleep to claim me. But even though I know all this I can't help it. I can't control the thoughts that come to my mind, unbidden at first. And eventually I give in and let them claim me in a sea of lard roasted vegetables and shortbread so thick with butter that it leaves a sweaty, greasy residue on your hands. And when I do finally fall asleep these nights the same dream always visits me and in it I am sitting on a tartan blanket, an enormous picnic basket at my feet and my daughters either side of me. And every time in the same moment wakefulness clutches at me and yanks me upwards from my dream and I never get to see what is in the basket.

Never get to taste a thing, have no words exchanged with my daughters, and not even hear a laugh as it escapes their lips. And when I wake from this, I always feel that the dream is bittersweet, like all my memories of my children now are. Like my life now is, as nothing will ever be just sweet for me again.

17.

One morning after I had been at Glen Nairne a few months, I awoke with Katherine standing over me. Her face curiously peering down at mine. I had never seen her face this closely before, the worry lines that creased her forehead, the blue bags beneath her eyes, the frown lines surrounding her mouth. And with this I realised that her existence in the colony was, just like mine, an unhappy one. And that at least for me I would always know my place as it would be paraded and explained to me time and again but how for poor Katherine, she too would long for the society back home and a place to belong, but here there would be none for her. No hope of dining with more than two couples. No hope for a varied and dignified society. Not for her. There would only be her loneliness and an assigned servant for company while Charles did whatever Charles saw fit to do during the day. But then I pulled these feverish thoughts into focus, noticing the brightness of the room and realising the lateness of the hour. Ma'am I'm sorry, I tried to find the words on my tongue to send them sprawling into the world but they wouldn't leave the void of my mouth. My throat. Katherine placed the back of her hand on my forehead and tsked.

'You're too warm, me girl.' She announced and left the room, returning in a few moments with a cool compress for my head. I sighed a sigh of relief when the cool damp touched my forehead. Then I went to push my covers back, needing to prepare a breakfast, not wishing to incur the man's wrath if I could avoid so. But Katherine firmly pushed me back down into the bed.

'Yeh're not well. You must rest. There is nothing that you can do to help me today.' And when I laid back and my head hit the pillow the room went fuzzy in my

eyes and when I closed them the heat took me and burned me from within and I knew that this was hell sucking me in for my wicked bad deeds and I could not feel any anger or hurt only remorse because I knew I was deserving of such treatment.

When I next awoke it was dark in the room and I was unsure of the time. My mouth was dry and I yearned for some icy cold water that would drip down my throat and cool me from within. I started when I looked up and saw Katherine asleep on a chair a little back from the bed. Her mouth hanging open and her chest rising and falling. I didn't wish to disturb her. I tried to tiptoe by her but her breath caught in her throat and she woke. She seemed confused but then smiled when she saw me out of the bed. Conscious. Told me that I'd given her a scare. That I had been out for two and a half days, that she'd tried to get the doctor to come but Charles had forbid her, told her that convicts do not need such luxuries as doctors visiting when they are probably just attempting to bludge off from work. Apparently Charles was concerned when he had tried to rouse me that evening and I was not coming to, but still he would not allow for a doctor to be called to examine me. It was as if he knew even before I did. I thanked Katherine for her attention and care and asked for a glass of water. She was very willing to go and get it for me, but I heard Charles moving through the house and he bid her to return to his bed, by his side, where his wife belonged now that the wretched convict woman was awake again.

Katherine was not always kind to me. But I think that she did try, like I did, to make the best of a situation that was not ideal for either of us. From time to time, I think that she would have liked to sit and talk with me of our home. Of what we missed and what we didn't miss. Too often I felt her pulling herself back from a kindness to me, trying to fulfil the role of colonial mistress and not wishing to allow

me to speak too freely, but the fact that she wanted to, made me feel for her. After breakfast was served I quite enjoyed my daily tasks. The beating of pillows and the shaking of the quilts. The scrubbing of the floors was something that I took pleasure in. I enjoyed making something clean out of something dirty. I felt proud that I could achieve these ideals of a cleanly home for my mistress.

My cooking greatly improved too, while I was in service. Charles had enough money to provide an adequate pantry from which to bake and an array of dishes that I'd only ever heard of were soon being prepared by Katherine and myself, and soon after I was able to prepare them alone. The kitchen should have really been my domain in the house but Katherine was very particular in how she liked things done. As such, she remained the chief person in control of its running and often she would give me jobs to do, only to do them herself, whether out of her own enjoyment of them or out of fear that I should get them wrong I was never quite sure. As time passed we started to chat more and more while we set about preparing the meals, or taking an inventory of the pantry shelves so that we would know what to have ordered in for us. Sometimes we chatted so freely it was almost as if there was no divide between us, like we were friends. But mostly there was always a wall there that we could not cross. So much as we would have liked to have reached out to one another and made good friends we found ourselves unable to, we were not the same. Our situations were not the same. I was her property for the time that my sentence ran or until I was returned to the factory.

There was also the matter of Charles, who was both of our bedmates, but maybe I alone knew that. I often wondered how it could escape her notice.

The manservant and I had very little to say to one another when we were in each other's presence, I do believe that he had some sort of knowledge as to what would happen when the master returned, and even though I think he knew me and would have realised how I felt about those matters, it was still a knowledge that could do nothing but put a barrier between us. But he didn't seem to bear me any ill will and I was grateful for that. I knew from the factory days and the gossip there that if the manservant didn't like you then that could be just as bad as if the mistress or master didn't like you. Not much was said about what happened if the master liked you too much but I guess these things were too obvious to mention. I did wish that I could speak with some of the old hands again who had been in and out of the service of many families. Maybe they could have helped me with the trouble I was having in mine. For I knew that I couldn't tell Katherine what was going on, and after the first few times when I struggled I knew that no good would come of it and that it'd be easier if I just let it happen. And then as much as I hate myself for saying it, eventually I think in some very sick way I started to enjoy it. Not only the feeling of it but also the knowledge that I was attractive to him. Sometimes I wondered whether he would take me as his own if something were to happen to Katherine. And all the while I think I loved that lady. Or if not love in the truest sense of the word I had a very strong affection for her, and that made me truly hate myself, Charles, and what we were doing to her. But even though I hated myself I hated him the most. He knew that I could do nothing, yet he would sometimes berate me for not doing anything about it. Usually when he'd had a nip of the mother drink. And then he'd offer me some as he knew it was a weakness of mine, one that wasn't becoming to a lady but that since my first sip I'd had a taste for. And sometimes then he'd yank it back and make me say things before he'd give it to me, or do things. Or both. And sometimes I

was strong enough to refuse and I'd just say to him, to leave me alone, but other times, I couldn't resist. And if I did tell him to leave me alone sometimes I ended up with bruises on my arms or around my neck and they were hard to hide at the neck. And on my arms it made my scrubbing and other chores painful to bear.

Katherine was tougher than she looked. When her and Charles had first come out, she told me, they had lived in 'what you would struggle to call a hut'. Katherine had never gone without luxuries before, but she had adapted. She had thrived. She lost her manners for a while she said, but it did not matter when there was no one else near enough to know. Only Charles. I wonder if he liked her better that way. He likes me well enough and I am far from having class. He likes me more when I play up and pretend to be a lady sometimes. When I make my demands.

I wondered if he would visit that night. Katherine had been cross all day, since the morning when the bread didn't rise. 'Mary, did ye check the bread?' she asked.

'Nay, I didnae, I didnae know that I was to,' I replied.

She crossed the kitchen and pried open the oven door, the bread was flat, if it had risen it was certainly not risen now. Her hands went to her stomach, she often laid them against the skin there when I first came and her belly was rounded. It was a gesture I'd become familiar with over time. Katherine didn't yell at me but it was obvious she was in a mood with me all day afterward. It was not my fault. Checking the bread had never been my job. It slipped her mind to check it and she wanted to shift the blame. I could tell I was not in her favour as we sat to table for lunch. The table Katherine took for granted but that I knew to value; the solidity of its construction and its unscratched surface. Like Katherine, it had had a good life; she

too had an unscratched surface. My small table back home had a slight wobble, and was owned by someone else before me. It had come to me already marked. Maybe like my life had too.

Katherine had brought the mutton stew to the table to serve, and placed on the side of my bowl the unrisen bread. I looked at it and said nothing eyeing the piece of yesterday's fluffy pale-brown loaf that graced her own bowl. She insisted on serving herself, which was out of the ordinary. Then she insisted on serving me. When she served me my soup she ladled only spoonful of liquid into my dish, I got none of the mutton or vegetables that were in the pot only the thin broth. She hummed to herself while she did it. As she handed me my bowl I saw that it was only a third of what I would usually eat. She raised her eyes to mine, and I returned the look but said nought. Some days we battled like this, silently, covertly, like all women must. She had scooped three ladles full into her own bowl.

The sun streamed in through the window in the kitchen where we ate. And while the soup was less than I was wanting, having worked up a hunger beating the rugs in the morning, I picked up my spoon and took a small amount of the soup into it and slurped it up into my mouth. I dropped my head back as the warmth slowly trickled down to my belly. I was determined to enjoy my lunch, the sun and the warmth, and to try to keep friends with Katherine. For I had learnt that there was nothing to be gained by causing troubles.

But considering Katherine's poor mood I thought that Charles would visit. As my belly wasn't quite full after lunch and dinner wasn't much more filling, I planned to bargain for something from Charles to get my fill. I would win my food from her kitchen, from her husband. Thoughts such as those did me a disservice, but how was

I to stay respectable when the world thought I was so horrid to begin with? I could not change their ideas, no matter how I acted. So sometimes I played the convict whore. Sometimes I even liked it.

Sometimes I would try to call out during Charles's visits. Sometimes in pleasure and sometimes to say no. It didn't matter where the call's motivation came from. Charles would place a hand firmly over my mouth and the look in his eyes was a warning to watch myself. I liked the small flicker of fear that was behind the warning though, the flicker which said I could do something about this. But the flicker was a lie. There was nothing I could do, not really. We both knew it. If I ran away I would be sent back to the factory and then back here again if Charles wanted me back. Or maybe somewhere worse if he didn't.

I rarely saw anyone other than the master, mistress and manservant. It wasn't that I had cause for complaint with two of them or that I expected varied society but it was an odd kind of feeling to count up the days and think that I hadn't seen another body in two weeks, or four days or however long it might have been at that time and to then think that back in Glasgow I would've passed at least fifty other bodies on my way to work every morning and that I supervised more girls in their work than I saw on a daily basis here. And then I realised that it could be an awful lonely life. Katherine sometimes mentioned the girls who had been here before me and I thought it seemed a lot but not being entirely certain of how many one would expect to have as servants I didn't make anything of the information. But now I am wiser. Sometimes Charles calls out the wrong name and that is the biggest insult of all. That he doesn't even know which of his government whores he has beneath him. That it doesn't matter to him. That we're all the same.

One day master came in to the room while I had my skirts tied up. I scrambled to make myself fit for viewing but it was too little too late. I had stoked the fire and I knew I would get a visit from him that very night. And he would be all heat and flame as he tried to keep that image in his head of me scrubbing the floor on hands and knees, with ankles and legs exposed. I heard Katherine talking once and she said that the best servants are bred as servants and that they know no different so don't resent their lives and that they also get strong from their first days so they never have a reason to feel tired or sore from their work. I thought I had worked hard all my life, but there was a certain tiredness right down to my very bones that I felt after a big day in the house. It made me grateful for my mug of ale before bed where I could sit at the table in the kitchen by myself and think. If they had had a bigger property I would have had others to be friends with in service and maybe I would have even shared a room and that would have no doubt made it difficult for master to visit had there been a witness. I would have liked to have had some company. It would have made me feel grateful I am sure.

18.

When the pains came for Katherine they claimed her with the savage nature that only another woman can understand – that feeling of your own body turning against you – that endless ripping feeling like you are being split in two from the inside out. They started slow as these things do. Katherine dropped the bottle of milk she was carrying up from the dairy and clutched at her tummy. Her eyes widened with the knowledge that again she was to be taken over by these emotions and these pains that would claim all of her body, mind and soul and would not let her rest till they had had their way. I saw her drop the milk from my post on the verandah where I was emptying the pan's sweepings. I ran to her quickly and placed my arm around her shoulders so as to share her burden as we walked slowly and surely back to the house. Someone would have to go for the doctor. Katherine gave my hand an almighty squeeze as she struggled to keep silent as another pain tore through her. I took her to her bed. I found some old blankets to rip up for rags and I set a pot to boil on the stove top so that we had clean water. I had been through this twice myself, but even watching her I felt the fears creep back. What if she were to die with this birth? What if there was something wrong with the child? I spoke calmly in even tones, hushing her now and again. Everything will be alright, Katherine, there be no need for you to worry yeself. We'll see that a nice new *bairn* is born on this day and that ma and child are healthy and safe. Somewhere in my mind I was bitter towards Charles for not being here to witness the event, though none of us had known it was come. Katherine had given birth before. I was not dealing with one who was so green as to not understand everything that was to come. It was this that was being a woman. It was the

knowledge that this act may cost us our lives. It was the hope that it would not that kept us up at night.

The room was reasonably light-filled and I asked whether Katherine would prefer me to draw the curtains or leave it as it was. She did not answer one way or another so I decided to leave them open. The world is better filled with light than left in darkness I've always thought. Perhaps the light would bring the good spirits in and keep the dark ones at bay. I had never been a superstitious woman but at times of great drama and peril they did find their way into my thoughts. I think everyone is the same really. Those thoughts that we would rather not acknowledge, that we would like to leave floating on the edges of our minds and never bring into the centre to be looked at thoroughly, they will leap out at us when we are not as in control of our minds as we would like to be. They will try to drag us down and with them when we are least able to defend ourselves. Lucky for me I had so much to do for Katherine that they barely pushed their way in before I could push them out again with a flurry of activity.

Katherine lay panting on the bed. Her eyes watered, with tears or from the pain I was not sure, but she was quiet apart from that when she could be. She did not want to break her character of mistress when I alone was helping her. But when the pulses came she was something else entirely, writhing and screaming on the bed it was as if holding herself together when she could led to the reactions to the pangs becoming more and more extreme. I tried to tell her to let herself go, that it was not good for her to strain so hard to remain in control of such a situation. But she would not have it. Just continued to remain buttoned in and then snap open when the pain hit. The bedclothes were soon drenched with her sweat. Her head felt clammy and I used a

rag dipped in cool water to try to calm her and make her more comfortable. She did not speak between attacks but I kept murmuring to her quietly, about how lovely her new child would be and how thrilled Charles would be to find a new member of his family upon his return and about how strong she was being and what a good job she was doing. Anything that came into my head that felt calming I let out my mouth with little thought of what I was actually saying and whether any of it was actually true. I feared that if I did not keep up my constant chatter that she would become more afraid and I thought it important to keep her as calm as possible in this trying time. She suddenly seemed more in control of the situation than I would have thought possible. It was incredible the clarity that she looked at me with. But in those eyes I saw something else too. She knew. She could deny it afterwards, and she would no doubt pretend to be unaware but at that moment I knew that she knew what was happening between her husband and myself. And in that moment it became clear that she wanted me to see. She was unwilling to let herself go because of the relationship between her husband and myself, not because of the mistress servant relationship between her and myself. For after all this was over, she would go back to giving the orders, and I would not mention this again. But it was the knowledge that the act that had brought this child about had been experienced by me too that gave her the strength to not go all to pieces.

I grew weary from the charged energy in the room and felt it to be surely unhealthy. I went to the window and opened it and leant out to feel the breeze on my skin. I too was sweating and the knowledge that she knew had an unbearable weight. The air was thick with the things we did not say to one another. I wished to be able to break the silence and come clean. But I was not sure what good could possibly come from that. And that would have been the most selfish act to unburden myself while

Katherine lay in two kinds of agony having her worst fears about her husband and the new servant proven and the pain of the birth on her too. I could do nothing but help her through. And I resolved that no matter what else I was, I would be good to her on this occasion and afterward mother and child would indeed be happy and healthy. If this was little to offer, it was all that I had and I offered it willingly, hopefully. I needed it to be enough for this time. The pains came quicker and quicker and she had less time to regain control between each sensation, I held her hand, I wiped her head as long as I could, but I eventually had to check how things were going below. I lifted her skirts but could not see anything and had to cut them away to get a view of things. I thought I could see the head. I knew that it would not be long now. I told her to breathe as slowly and surely as she could and when she next felt the pain to push with all her might. It would be two or three pushes and that child would be born. I glanced around the room. The oil lamp on the nightstand on her side of the bed was lovely and ornate. I had noticed it before but it had never seemed so beautiful before now. The coverlet was a lovely rose pattern and sadly it would be ruined after this. I could try my best but little would get the stains out. I kneeled on the bed between Katherine's legs and felt them clinch tight around me as she pushed and pushed. Yes, that was the head out, followed by some shoulders. The child was making its way into the world. The legs unclenched but the child remained half in half out. The next wave came over her and Katherine pushed and there it was. There that beautiful little girl was. Brought into this world by us. I took the knife that I had washed in the boiling water and cut and tied the chord, and handed her to her mother. I replaced the cold compress on Katherine's forehead and I slid the afterbirth into the empty chamber pot. I placed rags between her legs where she was losing a little blood and I looked at the two together on the bed, mother and child, lost in the

sweetness of that first embrace. I boiled more water and tried not to think about my darling lasses and where they were and that they were without their mother and would be without her forevermore. I took that boiled water up to the bedroom and I bathed the child gently with rags dipped into the pot. Katherine would not let her out of her arms. She was silent and fascinated by this lovely new addition that she had brought into the world.

I had thought that the baby would be with us always, but it was sent off to a wet-nurse in town until it no longer, according to Charles, ‘Screamed the house down and prevented sleep.’

Charles was more attentive to their son than he was to Katherine. His namesake gave him much pleasure. But even he, they do not call Charlie. I did not like the boy Charles, with his strange big eyes always looking at me, the way he crept up on me when I thought myself alone. Like a spy. I wondered whether he was reporting back my activities to someone and which someone that might have been. He never caught me doing no wrong. I’m smarter than that. I never did meddle with anything that I shouldn’t, didn’t touch what didn’t need to be touched and did my jobs as well as I could. I thought about doing wrong, and often too. But there would have been little pleasure in it and I knew that I would end up facing consequences more severe than what I’d done would really call for. Whether the punishment fit the crime or not.

19.

Glasgow felt like my wings were clipped and I could go nowhere and do nothing. The streets were crowded and I was not used to pushing past others to get where I wanted to go. No one cared though, no one minded that I was the one doing the shoving and pushing. If it were not me then it would be someone else they knew, and so they barely turned around as I squeezed through them.

We lived down a close and there were so many others living nearby that sometimes it felt like we had no privacy at all. The first time I saw that place I could not hide my disappointment from William.

‘What were you expecting love, Buckingham Palace?’

I just shook my head and looked down, unable to summon the right words to describe how I felt. If things looked poor from the outside it was only worse once we got inside. There was so little to see. A thin residue clung to the walls. It had a chalky sort of look to it. Like the walls were breathing out their very own kind of poison. This was no way to live. I crossed the room, which didn’t take long. There were a few belongings already inside. A table that had seen better days. Hadn’t we all. There came a point though, where you couldn’t turn back. I don’t know where mine was but I knew as I looked around in dismay at the place where I was to rest my head that night, and all of those that were to follow, that I was long passed it.

I looked at William and forced my lips into a smile.

‘It’s ours. That’s all that matters.’ There was a small ache in my chest as I knew that I was lying to him but there are lies that don’t hurt and truths that do, and I

had decided that now was not the time for brutal honesty. I know now, that I was wrong not to be truthful with William because it paved the way for lies upon lies to build their way into our relationship. We already knew little enough about each other and shouldn't have been adding things to our ideas of one another that weren't true. But we wanted to. I don't want to admit that I played a role in the building up of deceit between us but I did. I kept choosing to believe the best about William. He would leave in the morning to go to work with his brother George, or so he said, and I would wonder where all the money was going if he really was spending all of the time at work that he said he was but I wouldn't ask him these questions.

We lived but and ben with Agnes Craig. But even though we were closer to her in distance she would speak out against me in the end, and her words would cut me to the quick. In our dwelling there was only a main room and a side one for our bedchamber. We didn't mind the small confined space, well most of the time we didn't mind it. Sometimes it felt stifling. But so was everyone's near us. We didn't feel no shame in it. Most of the time we didn't anyway, but I'd always wanted more, and these things I wanted, this life I wanted couldn't happen where we were. I hadn't known just what William's circumstances were but in Glasgow we were worse off than what we'd been in Saltcoats. Time was hard for weavers but I'd thought that he owned his own successful shop. But he didn't own it all himself, his brother owned half of it, and so the profits were split both ways and as the profits began to shrink and the cost of keeping the shop became bigger we got less and less of what we needed to live on. And maybe if it'd just stayed us that we had to care for things would have been alright, but it wasn't just us for long, my first little girl was on her way before we knew it.

There could be a certain kinship found in the wynds and closes, but not all had it in them, some would have stolen the shirt off of your back if they could've gotten away with it. But some of us were friendly, like family and they gave me hope that things would be fine even when my heart could barely believe that life could go on. I tried for as long as I could to be strong and not give in to the urges that tried to influence my actions, I didn't want to take part in this art-form that my fingers were being called to commit. Snatches here, a slip into a pocket or two there, quick sticks.

I wanted to be a good mother, wanted to make my father who would be looking down on us from heaven a proud man and let him see that he'd done a good job raising me, even if mother did used to say that he was spoiling me and that I'd not amount to be the strong and able woman that he'd like to see me be, especially if he kept making excuses when I shirked my duties, and that even when I was in trouble he was soft with me. Ma wanted to see me punished properly, and more than that, she wanted to see me suffer. I'm surprised she didn't string me up on a cross or take me to the slaughter like a lamb. Maybe by saying nothing about my match with William she was doing the same.

When I was first caught I really did think that I could fix everything. And I went to my good friend to ask him for advice, knowing that I never would have been in the trouble at all if Kirsty had just said that I borrowed the cap from her. It was frustrating that's what it was – it was frustrating to me that I might really be in trouble and to me I'd barely done a thing wrong. I didn't say I'd found that package in the street like I would later and maybe because of that I'm going to meet the end that I will. And sometimes I feel the fear that arises with that knowledge that soon I'm to be nothing.

And sometimes it feels like the creatures from my bedtime tales are shaking the air around me in this cell. This putrid cell. It is small. But I can last in a small space, like I said our place in Glasgow was hardly bigger than this where I sit now. But it is so damp and dank. It saps the life out of me just as much as the hangman's rope, the hempen collar will when it is my time to go.

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The motto engraved onto the Calton sign, just up the road from where we lived, said 'By Industry We Prosper'. I should have taken heed of that warning. But even though the borough motto was such an industrious one I was still tempted to take things from my neighbours. And one of our neighbours, Sarah Kilpatrick had all sorts of lovely things. I had had occasion to notice her wearing them and it was not without a small twinge of jealousy that I watched her come and go from her home. She had many things that I longed were my own. Silk gowns in all colours; head coverings with fine details; handkerchiefs with the most delicate little stitches around their edges and such finely stitched initials. It was all I could do not to rip them away from her.

I'd never had a need to learn any politics. They really didn't touch a small town life very much. The only thing we'd learnt was where we belonged in relation to the quality and that was all we needed to remember to get along. Glasgow was a writhing hot-bed of politics. People believed in a cause, or they just believed in getting their opportunity to be wild and riot with those that did have political ideals. Life was hard for weavers, but still William wouldn't have been like Hardie or Wilson even if he had been in Glasgow at the time.

There were many hanged in Glasgow by the government. We soon feared the government, and knew that we couldn't trust those that we hadn't known for long, there were government agents everywhere trying to entice us poor to do something that would get us in trouble quick smart. It wasn't fair. They came and put ideas into heads that never would've got those ideas elsewhere and then they were punished as sorely as if they were the ringleaders of all the trouble in the city.

William was a wind-bag, full of the big things he was going to do but there were probably few times that he would have done anything about his situation even if he were given the chance. His brother, George, and he got along well enough but there was a tension there that neither one wanted to admit to, a jealousy ran between them, both of them wanted to know to who their dad had really left the business. It would be a stamp of who was the better son; the better weaver; better. They'd been competitive their whole lives. They didn't realise that their Da had tried to stop their competing by leaving the shop to both.

William certainly felt that I was the ultimate prize on his arm as he sauntered back into Glasgow after being awarded me for acts of daring, or rather acts of running away, whichever the case may be. In his head he'd taken the prettiest thing on Saltcoats beach and made it his own.

We went to church in Saltcoats, where mostly I would listen but sometimes my mind would wander so, and I would look about me at all the fine clothes that people in the town had saved for Sundays and I would look down at my own cotton frock and wish that it had more frills or a puffed skirt rather than just the plain stylings it offered. But I knew better than to let on to mother that I was worrying about a thing like that. Mother would not tolerate it that was for certain. She was a harsh woman,

cold, with a ram-rod straight back showing that she would bend for no one, if she didn't want to. She could be ingratiatingly sweet to some could my mother, and that made it all the harder to bare her practically flinching at the sight of me. I soon started to wonder why she hated me so, why she could not love me like she was meant to. I think that's a mystery even she doesn't know. She never met her grandchildren. Unless William was gone back to Saltcoats when he disappeared. That almost brings me a comfort to think of my girls at home at the sea.

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The crowded Glasgow streets gave the perfect cover for me to practise my art because I'd be gone and blending into the crowd far off by the time the rank swell I'd targeted even learned of their loss. And being such a woman as I am even when my escape should have been hampered I often found that I was not even regarded with a suspicious eye for a time. But eventually I built up a reputation that preceded me and while they didn't know precisely who I was they knew that a fine-featured woman was seen in the vicinity of a number of buzzes and they soon began to be more wary around women in general and so I had to become more careful and plan the getaway before I could practise the art that drew me to it with a hissing voice and a sped-up heart. My nerves were all a jangle when I realised what I was doing, but that never stopped me. The sense of danger almost made me want to take more to feel that tingle and feel alive. I felt more alive when I took things than I did at any other time. That may not be flattering to admit but it is the truth. And I wonder if I was given another chance whether I'd be able to stop for I was like the beggar who will not eat for the sake of a gill of gin, the red-eyed maniac searching for the next bit of opium, only the feeling I was addicted to was the rush of theft. What hope was there when I

liked the feeling of the act itself so much as well as the goods that were mine afterwards? If it had only been the goods maybe I would not have done anything, maybe I would have been able to resist, but it was the lure of that feeling that was my real undoing. A feeling of freedom that I had never felt in quite the same way before that propelled me forward. There is always something propelling us forward. It's just that most of the time we don't know what it is.

So, I know that maybe even if I had not been caught after the Kilpatrick's house, I would have probably been caught eventually. And if the court had somehow found a way to show me leniency, that I would have probably put that leniency back in their face with interest and come into that courtroom on some other charge, because that was who I was.

I do not know where the thirst for theft came from. I never knowingly took anything that was not mine in Saltcoats. Even when there was opportunity I had not taken anything and I had even gone out of my way to give things back to their rightful owners when they had lost them and I came across them. And some people I know wouldn't have done so. But I did. I never even thought about taking something that wasn't mine. There were many things that I wanted but I never actually considered taking that which wasn't mine. It wasn't until we were in Glasgow that the thought presented itself in my mind, and once there it floated about, if not exactly recognised. For I don't think that I knew what I was thinking and it was like I said, the first few times I didn't know what I was doing, it was as if an outside force was driving my body, as if I was possessed. It was only after I realised what I was doing that I became addicted to the feelings that came with it.

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Sometimes when I woke I prepared for the performance of the day's tasks. The monotony of them did not bother me so much. It gave me more room to perfect my portrayal of the convict servant. It can be a bitter pill to swallow, that even when I wish the curtain would close the role that I play continues on. At night sometimes it changed to be that of settler's wife. But then, I was never too convincing in that role, always something off with my actions, as if the whole audience, in fact everyone but me, knows that I can never be that woman that I wish so desperately to be. You could be forgiven for thinking I sound like a madwoman, but we all know the saying all the life's a stage and we're all merely players.

20.

Katherine entered the room like she always did when she was in a mood—stiff backed and haughty. The haughtiness usually faded, but was always there when she entered a room, as if she put it on like a mask. To remind me that she, not I, was the lady of the house. As if I could forget, I sometimes thought, but then I knew that was a falsehood and that at times when I was most tempted and most wanted to wish away my life, forget that I was not mistress of that house is exactly what I did. When the realisations came rushing back after I played such games of pretend I always regretted my momentary forgetfulness, for to learn again and feel the blow again, of where my place was in that home, and of how far I had fallen was not a pleasant feeling.

The kitchen table was sturdy. Katherine had a nice candlestick that sat at its centre. But there was only one. I often wished to ask where its mate was, but once I went to ask, ‘Madam,’ I began, the question obvious in my tone, ‘Yes Mary?’ she responded raising her eyes to me and then darting them towards the candlestick that I had raised one hand to point to, and there was something there in her eyes, a resignation that I saw little of from her at other times, and so I let the question of where the other was die on my lips and said instead, ‘that sure is a charming candlestick.’ Relief appeared in her features, but also a look of triumph. As if she felt that she had me. And in a way, she did. But every time I caught these glances from her, and the almost naked fear in her eyes I felt powerful. It was mercy that let the question die on my lips. Not the inability to raise such questions to such a one as her.

21.

I see a flicker every now and again from the corner of my eye. It is small and black. I fancy it may be a small sparrow or a bat. I wish it to be a sparrow so it will probably be a bat. Whether it is real at all. Which is another matter altogether. I feel a comfort thinking that it may be a sparrow keeping me company. But no matter how quickly I turn my head there is never anything there for me to see. But I know that there is something there and so I *cheep cheep* to myself to pass the time and I wait for something to answer me. Sometimes I *cheep* for half a day or more, and when I do I almost forget that it is me doing the cheeping and when I stop I find myself disappointed all over again to know that there is nothing beside me, no other being tweeting away. It is just me alone in my cell.

There was a small bird, similar to a sparrow but more colourful, sitting on the ledge outside my window one morning when I awoke at Glen Nairne. I longed to open the window and let it in but knew that I should be the one who would have to clean any shit it might drop inside and I didn't want to make more work for myself so I left it where it was outside and watched it as it ambled up and back. It looked at me once. Its black little eyes glowing as it stared. I felt quite unnerved by it. I'd never considered how a bird thought before. But they must think for how else would they move about? They probably think only of food. I left the room to go about my daily chores but all day long I felt that I was being watched and when I closed my eyes I saw that little sparrow's beady little gaze glowing so suspiciously and doing nothing but staring at me. And then when I lay myself down to sleep that night I swear that I could feel it at the window still looking in at me, always watching. I

could not fall away into sleep for some time for fear of what that little sparrow might do.

And now I sometimes fancy when I see that black flicker at the corner of my eyes that it is this same little sparrow come to wreak more havoc and enjoy his fun at my misfortune. But why can't I see it, if it is this same little bird? I wonder. Surely I should be able to see it if it is there? This thought makes me more annoyed than ever. It is frustrating when there are phantom birds sharing your earthly prison.

What if this same little sparrow shall haunt me forever? What if it comes to heaven with me or hell? I am probably bound for hell indeed. But will God look at my life and see me as to blame? If it was a just God, he would see that there is more grey in this story than many would think. That the black and white of right and wrong apply so little here as to be almost incomparable to the truth of my life.

22.

I was still hungry after my dinner one night. Katherine had sent me to eat in the kitchen alone. Sometimes I had been allowed to eat with them, but Katherine had been turning colder and colder towards me lately and this was yet another way that she could reinforce my place in the house. This was how she could let me know that I was lower than the low. Only fit to eat alone. Barely fit to serve them at the table with hands that they knew were never clean no matter how hard I washed them. And she had not allowed me my fair share of dinner, but had taken all but the scraps for herself. And to stop me from eating my share when I had been hard at work all day, that was not the way to go about things. I wanted to warn her so. I would bargain with Charles to have him bring me the things that I craved. If I was what he craved and he was allowed it then why should I not have been afforded a few small luxuries for services rendered? Except that what we were doing was wrong and I knew it, and I felt sorry for Katherine sometimes, when the guilt visited itself upon me more sharply than other times. She was not happy. Charles did his best to ignore her unhappiness, or maybe he really didn't see it. But I knew. I could see that she was not happy in this life.

Charles sometimes claimed to feel guilty. How sincere the guilt was I could not say, for if he really felt that guilty then wouldn't he have stopped what he was doing? What he knew he was doing? For I felt guilty but there was nothing that I could do about it. I could not stop what was happening because I had few choices available to me. He never even made the attempt to stay away from me for more than two nights in a row. And if he had stayed away he may have found it became easier and easier to do so. But without the effort in the first place how could he ever hope to put an

end to things between us. And perhaps it was only by putting an end to things between us that we could have appeased God and earned ourselves his mercy. And his mercy is what I most need now.

Sometimes I wondered what it would be like if Charles and Katherine were both away from Glen Nairne and I had time to myself. To think and to do what I wanted. I would have still done my chores, as I had come to like living in a clean house and if there was no one else here to do them then I would have done them myself. So then, why did I find them such a bitter pill to swallow with those two there in the house with me? It was because my own personal desire to have clean surroundings was secondary in my motivations to their constant nagging to get the jobs done. Did I just rebel naturally at anyone who would try to be the boss of me? Is that the person I was, that I am? A petulant child always fighting to gain control of my own circumstances? But when I think that I was there as slave to them and that there were not many duties I could shy away from, I found it hard to swallow down the lump of pride that built in my throat. Thought I knew that I had little to be proud of. Every time Katherine gave me an order, and every time Charles paid me an evening visit I felt that pride chipped away a little further.

Deep down I wanted Katherine to like me, maybe even love me as if we were good friends, as if there was not this cavity of transgressions between us, and as if she wanted me there in her life. But also deep down the resentment stretched, for she was not always kind to me and she could have been kinder. But I know that were our situations reversed I would not have been kind. And I would find it easier to blame the woman for that rather than my dear husband. Surely she knew that I did not wish for these acts in the way that would make them happen. Sometimes I may have even

enjoyed them, but I could not be blamed for that. No more than I can be blamed for the piss and shit that find their way out of me, and Katherine of all people should have understood this, as she would have taken mastery over these bodily actions of her own if she could. She would have kept it all bottled in until she exploded if she had the ability.

A great excitement was raised occasionally, when we would hear news that someone new had arrived in the colony, especially if it was someone important, or someone that Charles thought would help him to win some influence in some area that he was trying to gain importance in but failing. His precious church committee meetings always had him coming home in a jolly mood. He was always trying to be noticed by this or that person, to win the respect of this man or that one. He was never successful. His desperation became like a main sail, filling with wind the closer he got to his object, and so the idea that anyone wouldn't notice became a ridiculous one. Of course everyone knew that he was desperate for success. Desperate to raise himself above.

One day I had to ask Katherine what to do when I had the unfortunate luck to scratch down the table with my nail accidentally when I was washing it. I was so shocked that this had happened because I had hardly any nails left due to the scrubbing and polishing and beating that I had to do in my daily chores and so I didn't see how it really could have been me who'd scratched it up so. But I knew that it must have been for I did not see the scratch before and then after I was finished my polishing there it was, clear as day. Oh what a thing to have done.

When I found Katherine to tell her, she was lying back on the Grecian style chaise lounge in her day room, her feet covered only in her house shoes and dangling

over the edge as she lay with her eyes closed. Her face was all pinched up and I knew that I had the bad luck to have found her in the throes of one of her migraines. She suffered terribly from headaches. Oh how I thought for a second of just retreating from the room and pretending that I had not come at all, but the floor creaked under my foot and her eyes sprung open and flashed angrily, I had no doubt that she felt me to be spying on her and that she hated to be found in such a weakened state. She immediately went on the attack,

‘Mary, what do you mean by standing and spying on me? Have you nothing else to do with your time?’

‘Sorry ma’am. I have come to tell you that I have accidentally caused a scratch to find its way onto your table. I did not mean to and do not know how it got there but after I finished polishing I could see it there I am sad to say, a deep gouge in the centre of that beautiful piece of furniture.’

Katherine did not answer just clasped her head in her hands. I waited a further few seconds and then I retreated. There would be a punishment to come, I was certain. It was only the matter of what kind that was to be decided. No doubt I must seem a bold as brass kind of girl to you, how dare I think about my mistress in that way when I had just done damage to an item that was not only valuable financially but to which she was attached in a sentimental kind of way, as it was one of the only pieces that she had struggled to bring with her from Scotland. It was probably one of the only items that was worth the effort.

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Often life felt very complicated at Glen Nairne. There were few times when we could all three be in the room together without a thick air full of our own misdeeds claiming the space in the rest of the room and trying to call our attention to it.

It was hard to pretend like there was nothing going on that shouldn't be going on sometimes. Other times it was easy to pretend. But whatever else they were, whether things were easy or difficult, they were never precisely what they seemed. It was the deceit that made me the most tired. It was that that made me wish to run away sometimes. But where did I have to run to? My clothing marked me as convict. I could not seek shelter at another home. And I knew that I would not survive in the wilderness alone.

And things were bad at Glen Nairne in some ways, but in others they really weren't so. I worked but wherever I was I would have to work. That was just the life I had been born to. The work wasn't easy but it wasn't the hardest it could have been. In the crime class at the factory where they might send me, if I ran away and was caught, the work would be harder, I knew. And my rations would be less in amount and tastiness, for if I got peckish while at work I would often pick at something from the pantry and Katherine either didn't know or didn't care.

We both missed our real home. Although Katherine would never admit to so much out loud. And I would have admitted it aloud if anyone had cared to listen but no one did. I was not some fool who was still looking with rose coloured glasses at the world and thinking that I had a bigger place in it than I did. I knew that I was at the bottom of everything. That I may as well be a speck of dust for how much people cared about me or my lot.

My Da used to say it was better the devil you know. And so, I stayed there. I tried to make the best of it. Sometimes it was not so bad. Once when Katherine and I were alone in the house together and I had finished my chores for the day she asked me to come and play cards with her. She had a sneaky bottle of port on the table and she poured herself a glass and paused for a moment, then got up and poured one for me too. The thick currant-sweet liquid was glorious on my tongue and as it swished its way down to my belly. I could feel it in the centre of my being like a coal at the centre of a fire glowing red hot and radiating its warmth out. I could feel the flush of red creep into my cheeks. Oh how merry we were together then. So much laughter. But then things turned melancholy, like they sometimes do when the drink is involved. Katherine would not let me see the tears that filled her eyes so ordered me away and put herself to bed for the afternoon.

It was worse afterwards between us. It was like she was punishing me for her own mistake of letting too much show. But she'd enjoyed my company as we'd played together I knew it. We could be friends. If she was willing to take me as a friend then I would be willing to tell her about Charles, knowing that I would be believed and then those things would stop and I would be free to serve my time with them and all would be well.

Charles claimed to be a religious man. And at times he was worshipful but it didn't always seem like what he worshipped is what the Lord would wish him to. I thought maybe it was something about this country, the air here, or his settler status that allowed him the frame of mind to believe that he was entitled to those liberties. That he was here a free man and that that made everything he saw his to claim, and that no one could say anything about it if they valued their own livelihood. He could

say one thing and mean another. But most of us have that talent anyway, I guess. It's not many who say what they mean at all times is it? Not many who don't hide behind any convenient disguise or mask that they can find. I know, because every morning I put my own mask on and make out that this is where I belong. And I don't think about those parts of me that are being hollowed out inside, where affection for my children used to belong, or where the hope that I'll get out of here, be a free woman again is slowly being carved out by the bloodied knives of life.

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When it rained it sounded like the world was ending. And sometimes I wished it were. Anything to end that drudgery that was being a house-servant. There was nothing that I liked less than being a servant to someone else. A slave. For that was what we surely were. Everything about our lives suggested this. We did not choose where we lived, not even on which land or in which part of the world. We did not choose what we wore but were forced into sacks that scratched and itched something fierce. We toiled all through the day at someone else's orders and to reap no real benefit for ourselves.

The land could be frightening. It was eerily silent most of the time but then every now and then I heard the noise of wild beasts. It was as if the wilderness was pushing in on us; as if instead of us clearing the land, the land was growing further towards us, was going to gobble us up. We used to tell stories to my wee little ones to frighten them, but it was as if they were becoming real for me.

Sometimes Charles, Katherine and I would sit around the table in some grim façade of normal life, where they'd both try to act like I wasn't an assigned servant and I'd do my best not to say anything to ruin it. No mention of chain gangs, or the

topsy-turvy seasons. It was like they were pretending to still be at home in Paisley, and that I, with my close enough accent, was their servant and though we could pretend this all we liked we couldn't ever quite get ourselves to believe it was true.

It was the same as many things that went on between us all at Glen Nairne. There were lots of things that we pretended to and tried as hard as we could but still couldn't believe to be true.

23.

When I lay myself down to sleep one evening I felt something hard beneath me, digging into my spine. I reached a hand behind my back to feel what it was. I'd already blown out the candle and so had only this sense to discover the nature of the object. It was not difficult to tell what it was, a necklace of pearls that I had seen Katherine wear on special occasions. It was there as a trap for me. I knew that the whoosh of the door opening would sound as Charles arrived, and I knew that I would confirm all his opinions of me if I were to be wearing this necklace of his wife's, knowing that I would most likely never have one of my own. I knew that I would be giving in to all of his assumptions were I to put it on. I did it anyway. I fingered the pearls one by one and gently shifted it round my neck. The feeling of nature's precious gifts against my skin filled me with a fizz in the limbs almost like I had taken these from Katherine's jewellery box myself. It left me giddy inside. The heat of my skin transferred to the pearls and I felt like I took their beauty into me as they took my body's heat. As I lay there in the dark thinking about the events that would occur I imagined that they were really mine. That they were a gift from one of my admirers and how they would perfectly complement my cream taffeta gown, with the fitted bodice and the flowing skirt. How they would look just as good on my naked form as I undressed of an evening, removing them last.

I heard the door open but I did not open my eyes. I smiled into the blackness waiting for the fingertips that I knew would graze my neck first – to see if I had found my gift, however temporary it may have been. The touch came feather-light and my smile did not fade.

‘Mary, what is this you wear? Do you think yourself Queen of the Scots?’

‘Whatever do you mean dear husband, you know that these pearls I wear were a birthday gift from yourself these two years past.’

‘Why, how foolish of me to forget such a thing,’ Charles’s tone had a laugh in it, as if to indicate that he likes this game. He waited for me to lay hands on him, but it was never I who touched first. He pretended to want me to, but I knew he didn’t. I knew he wished to commit the acts, not have them committed against him. I was wearing my nightdress and felt his fingers at the buttons at its throat. I felt his hands tighten around my throat momentarily, just enough to show me that he had power, then he slid down my form in the bed and laid hands on the bottom of the nightgown at my feet. I wondered whether he would take it off or whether he would just lift it up. He liked to do both at different times. I lifted my hips as he pulled it up and up, and raised my arms like a child to allow him to pull it off over my head. Face to face and eye to eye, we could see little with only the light from the moon and stars filtering in, but when we couldn’t see we would always feel our way.

I woke the next morning and raised my fingers to my neck, but it was bare. As if the pearls were never there at all. Sometimes this life is cruel. It was a wash day I remembered and while I would have liked to close my eyes to the world again and curl up cosy and imagine again that those pearls were mine, instead I rose from the bed and pulled up its covers. The earlier I began my work the earlier it would be done.

Katherine had not yet risen which was nothing unusual, I was usually up before her so that when she came to eat the tea was waiting for her. Sometimes I would make porridge if the oats were plentiful. I was the one to do this. Much like I

emptied their reeking bodily waste. But that day I did so with the memory of the cool little rounds of pearls against my skin. The memory helped me when it was time to drop my eyes and curtsey. To be meek when my spirit wished to bellow. I did not think about what came after the pearls were pressed against my skin, only the pearls themselves. I had learned to never think about the price I paid, to only think about what I got in return. It wasn't the same as paying nothing, but I could almost fool myself that it was.

I missed the other women from the boat. I missed being looked at like I'm a real person not as though I'm beneath the person doing the looking. We were all on an equal footing on the boat. All of us the same vile creatures according to our betters. We knew that there was more to it than that and so we looked at each other with concern or friendship on our faces. We were not to be kind to everyone but kind to most who did not get in our way. Kind to most without a reason not to be. Even Charles looked at me like I had little worth when we were not alone together. Whether it was because he himself felt that he was worth little I could not say for certain, but I did know that he thought me worth a deal more in the night than he did in the morning. But that was not that unusual in a man.

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Life is not kind to us here. Not that it has ever been kind to most of us. We are here mostly because we were forced to act, to steal, or to trick or to do other wrongs. Life forced us to these actions. We did not wish to commit any of them. Life forced us. That's what we'll tell you anyway. For many it may just be the truth, but I wouldn't really know the truth about many of us anyway, no one would. For we who could tell it keep it to ourselves in life, and no one will be able to find it out in death. For how

can the truth about us be uncovered when we leave no evidence of it? When we work so hard in fact, to keep there from being any evidence that most people would be able to see. When all that survives about us now are whispers about things that go bump in the night and about other things that you wouldn't want to hear lest your hair go grey. For we inhabit the world in a different way to the rest of the colony. We want to pull you into our stories and make you believe that we never did no wrong, but we are trapped because we also want you to see that the wrong we may have done was forced upon us. That is the strange truth of it, we want to deny any blame but we also want to explain ourselves. How we are to do this we don't know. We don't even understand ourselves so how can we expect you to understand us, from afar and in places that are not like this one we live in, in our own version of today, which is most likely different to yours.

24.

What I felt were things to escape in Saltcoats—the space; the air; the sky—here, in this new country, I found them soothing. I found it pleasant to steal a moment or two outside when I was meant to be doing something else, and to bask in the sun a little. The extremes on the outside made me feel more even on the inside. So when my moods were dipping and peaking I felt myself steadier than the world around me and that gave me hope for my own sanity.

Which was comforting because I worried at times, that I was going mad. That I no longer knew what was really happening in the world. I saw myself from outside sometimes.

When Katherine was kind to me, after I knew that I was really in trouble, I wanted to confide in her, like once when I thought myself alone and rested my feet for a wee moment at the table. She came in to eat and I leapt to my feet, worried that she would think me lazy. She had a mutton stew to eat that I was to go and get and she couldn't spare any for me; she had to keep her strength up for after having the child she was quite weak, but she gave me a small piece of bread that wasn't hard as a rock only almost, and so it didn't make my teeth ache as bad when I tore through it, and a piece of cheese that I only had to scrape a thin layer of mould off to eat and she sighed and I knew she was wondering where her husband was and I remembered all the times that I'd wondered where my William was and I reached out a hand and put it on hers. And I could feel the sharp edges where her nails had ripped doing chores, and could see the raised areas from churning the butter with cold hands in between the last girl's leaving and my arrival and I could sense her sorrow. I wanted to ask for

her help and protection but when I opened my mouth to speak she hushed me and pulled her hand away and said, 'Be sure an clean up when you're finished' and I knew that the moment had passed and she was madam and mistress and I was servant and convict once more.

The walls were whitewashed perfectly in my room. They were bright, clean white and I laid in my bed at night and looked at them and even though I couldn't see that they were clean it gave me comfort to know it. Sometimes, even what we can't see, we can know. I felt clean and good as I snuggled down under my blanket. Nothing like a sound sleep after a busy day. If there was one thing that I liked about being there it was that most of the time I was so tired by the time my head hit that pillow that I didn't suffer every night from being unable to sleep or from bad dreams.

I laid in my bed and spread my legs out so that they covered it all. It was the largest bed I'd ever slept in alone. I was alone most of the time anyway. I felt grateful for it. Isn't that strange that I felt that way about something so small as a bed to call my own? It wasn't that I had never enjoyed sharing a bed with William. It was nice to cuddle up to someone in the night. It was particularly nice when the weather was rainy and cold as it so often was in Glasgow. It would have been nicer still if there had been no leaks to let water drip down the walls and sometimes onto our heads but that would have been too much to hope for in the part of town where we resided. All crammed in living higgledy, piggledy together. Most nights I would just hug myself further into William and try to forget about the drips. Many nights I could.

I did not have a lot of privacy but I wasn't supposed to need that anymore given that I was a wife and a mother. That's what people said anyway. I didn't mind that

there was only the one room. It would have been nice to have a wee bit more space but perhaps I should have considered myself luckier than I did. For there were many women and children living rough on the streets. Some with husbands and some without. Those that were without would have hard expressions in their eyes if I should ever catch them. I wonder when that hard expression started to live in my own eyes too. For I am sure that it did.

If the eyes are the windows to the soul as they say, then my soul was becoming ever blacker and that was where that hardness, that coldness crept in to the expressions. If William and the girls saw it, they never commented upon it. I hope that it did not become a frightening idea for those sweet girls to look me in my eyes. I think that when I was at play with them that surely my soul was a little redeemed then? And I do so hope that those hard looks were pushed out by the love that I felt for them. I hope that they could see just by the looking that I loved them dearly. For I did. Not even William would try to deny that. And there was much that that man would and did try to deny when things got bad. When the sky darkened over our heads, as I felt it surely did, not just an expression in my story but a curse from a God who was angry that I could not keep away from temptation: that I could not be led away from sin.

Sometimes I'd awake from a dream with the Saltcoats sea breeze still in my hair and the air of innocence still in my lungs and I'd try to hold that feeling for as long as I could. I'd try to push it down into something small that I could take with me, something that would settle at the base of my backbone and radiate outwards to fill me with a warmth that was hardly imaginable. On other mornings I would wake with the terror of a dream in which I had been about to die and the screams that I'd given

still tingling on my lips. For life was certainly a matter of inches for me. An inch this way and things would be good an inch the other and regret and despair would close in. My Da had thought it wrong to despair when there were so many in the world worse off than us. And I used to be able to remind myself of what he'd taught me and drag myself up. But many of the things that used to come so easily have become difficult to achieve. Not feeling sorry for myself is something that is mostly impossible these days. I know that that's not right and that there are still people worse off than me but somehow I can't feel the truth in the saying like I used to. My Da was a good man. But I do not think that I could call myself a good woman. I used to say that I was. But now, I think I know that a good woman would not do as I have done.

My arms had grown strong with the churning of the butter. Most people did not like the job but I didn't mind it. I liked the feeling of strength that came with it. The feeling of power that it started out one way and with the action of me turning and turning it became the butter that we all enjoyed so much. I also liked the solitude in the dairy. There was rarely anyone else there with me. Sometimes I took longer than I should to churn but mostly I got the job done in a good amount of time. I feared that if I took too long that Madam should take the job away from me and I didn't want that. I drew strength from the churning.

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A knock sounded at the door and Katherine could not see visitors that day. She was shut up in her bedroom with the light from the world firmly blocked out.

'My head,' she said, 'aches to eternity.'

So I did not disturb her. Instead:

‘Reverend,’ I said through the screen, ‘I’m afraid Charles is away from the homestead today and her lady is bedridden with one of her headaches.’

‘Ah, never ye mind Mary, you may be able to give me what I need to be going on with.’ But ever since I heard the stable boy call him the kissing minister I had not been able to look anywhere but at his lips when I saw him. Those lips that surrounded the words of our God and then went around locking with the lips of ungodly, or just impressionable young women. His grey eyes had a very wet look to them. His mouth would be horrid tasting, all filled with saliva and with stale snuff on the breath, the lips all cracked and thin. Thin-lipped men gave me the shivers.

‘I’m sure that I cannae help in any way sir, for it is surely Church business that brings ye here, and I am a wicked one or so I’ve heard tell.’ And while I said it with a smile I was not really joking. He reached for the handle to the door, and my foot shot out. I did not want to let him in the house. Katherine would not like it; she would not like me alone with a man even if it were this God-fearing one. God-fearing men always seem quite able to forget their fears for long enough to earn that same God’s wrath. Though their punishment is but rarely dished out in this world. Perhaps they face a tough time in the next. If there was any justice in the world this would surely be the case.

A solid step sounded on the verandah and it was Charles arrived home early, he took in the scene quickly, what with me holding firmly closed the door against his friend and confidant, the Reverend.

‘Mary, why is this poor man left like a beggar on the doorstep?’ Do come in,’ he said, wiping his boots on the mat and reaching for the handle. At this interference no course of action but to take my foot away from the door was possible. I didn’t fear the Reverend now though; Charles did not like to share his playthings.

‘I must be carrying on with my duties, Sirs,’ and the curtsey I dropped was perfectly executed, my eyes flicking up at Charles with what I was sure would be the slightest suggestion of a smile playing around my lips before I was off to the kitchen to regain my composure. I was tempted for a moment to listen at the door, hovering out of sight but what those men had to discuss was of no import to me.

I pushed Katherine’s door open gently but she started awake at the intrusion,

‘Ma’am, will you rise for a wee bit of luncheon?’ I had worked on my tone to get it just right. No sauciness or petulance passed my lips in her presence, but the tone could be just as upsetting to missus. Life was much easier when she was happy with me.

‘Nay, leave me be.’ She cried, but as I was just pushing the door shut,

‘Is there someone here?’

‘Aye, the Reverend has called’

‘Why did ye nae say so?’ Katherine flicked back her wool comforter, and made a show of pushing her hair back. It was an unruly mess and her fingers did little to tame it.

‘Ye cannae go down there in your nightdress Ma’am.’ The look that she fixed me with had its very own sharpness, like a shard of glass from a broken mirror.

‘Will that be all Ma’am?’ I asked as I scurried to the door and escaped the close air of that stuffy room.

Once I stretched out on their bed, as I liked to do on my own. I was fluffing the pillows and the blankets and a wicked thought did cross my mind, so I quick as you like plonked myself down on that marital bed and closed my eyes for a wee second and imagined myself Lady Macbeth. I could feel the rose petals that the crowd would shower me with at the close of my triumphant performance, only it would not stop there, I would continue to win their favour as I left my dressing room and became my true self. This true self would be even more dazzling than the one they were so far acquainted with.

25.

It wasn't long after that that I knew.

I did not usually keep track of when my monthlies came and went. It was something that happened and so when they didn't come I did not notice at first. It was only when doing the washing and realising that I had seen two rounds of rags from Katherine and realised that I had not had one round that things were not usual. Still, there were times before when the monthlies came less often than their name suggests and not just those times when I was back home and the lasses were on their way. There were other times when we had not food enough and I survived on mere morsels and fed the rest to my *bairns*, that they had not come with their usual regularity. But an ill feeling took up its abode at the bottom of my stomach and I knew that something grew there along with it. Whatever that thing was that grew there it would not be mine, I swore that many a time. It would barely be human I convinced myself. I would not suffer the shame of owning a creature that was borne of the assaults that I was being forced to endure. I would not raise in the world a demon who bore nothing of myself. I did not know what to do but this black thing could not live in this world. That creature coming to do me nought but ill. I was more certain of this than anything else in my life. I carried this black mood around me wherever I went. I never offered Katherine a smile anymore. I said as little to her as possible. My thoughts raced. Short of reaching up inside and tearing it out I did not know what to do. I would have poisoned myself and it too, had I had the chance. It would have been better to die than to bring a creature such as that into the world. The days passed slowly while the tension inside me built up, and I felt a tension in the environment outside of me too. I waited for a time to tell Katherine. I hated waiting.

Sometimes it felt that wait was all I did. I waited for change to come. And those changes that did come were always out of my control. For precious little did I control because I was both convict and servant. I was not able to choose my own whereabouts, not able to choose my own trade. Katherine thought that she was lady muck sometimes, but I knew that her frocks were not quite all she imagined or wished them to be, the threads were not always so superior in quality and most of the fashions were outdated or unbecoming on her figure. It was jealousy that spoke to me at those times, for while I knew that they were not the nicest and best dresses ever they were far superior to the rough fabric that I was forced to endure rubbing against my soft skin.

My hands were rough by then, but I could scarcely remember a time when I did not have to work to survive and they had never been as smooth as I would have liked. But my skin elsewhere was soft, beneath the frock where few hands had trodden lied smooth soft skin, which many have longed to touch.

Katherine who had already started to turn cold on me only became colder in response to my behaviour. I was sure that she had already begun to suspect what became apparent when she barged in on me while I was dressing. I was sure that she knew what had been going on. Charles had no idea she knew, or if he did then he did not let on. But evil had entered the house in the form of that heinous beast that had taken up its residence inside me. That my body could house something so determined to destroy all around it constantly enraged me. The fear became a constant companion. What would I do, what would become of me? I was powerless. Helpless. There is no worse feeling in this world than what I felt then. Even though I now know to fear my death at the hangman's noose, this fear is due to knowing. The

unknown was what made that time so horrid. So unbearable. My desperation just grew and grew. To think that a creature from an evil seed had taken root inside of me, was growing within made me feel as if my own body had betrayed me again. I did not want that thing inside me. That creature was pulling at my insides, leaching away my strength. Ruining the hopes I had of a new life here. It was a creature. Not a human like me. It was created from a bad act and there could be no good in it. I cried myself to sleep the night I accepted what I'd been suspecting for a little while. I clawed at the skin, longing to be able to claw it out of me. It was a beast inside.

With cracked lips I begged for no more. I knelt down and prayed for relief. But relief never did come. I begged for the blood to flow and rocked back and forth, and back and forth. I was done for. I knew like every woman knows that even when you're happily or not so happily wed that it comes down to you. It's always you way down at the bottom of everything. Alone.

26.

My tongue was sore. I ran it over my teeth at night while I thought about what I could do about the child growing within. My teeth hardly felt real anymore. They could be porcelain, and ready to break apart at any hard knock. Sometimes in the night I woke up scared that they would all fall out. I could not stop running my tongue over them, even though it hurt. The pain was part of the way I could tell that I was really feeling them. That they were really there, and not just some part of my imagination. I had managed to keep most of my teeth. There was one missing in the lower row. William did not mean to hit me so hard, or at all. But one night we'd had a few sniffs of the creature and we were both saying things that made each other quick to anger. William was often quick to violence too after he'd imbibed some liquid courage so I should have known to watch myself. But I'd had just enough of the creature that while I knew there was danger in what I was doing I didn't care, but not enough to fully dull the pain from the blow when it landed beneath my chin. A sharp upper cut that made me bite down on my tongue hard and then when I spat out the blood a tooth came too. I remember the feeling of the laughter bubbling out over my lips along with the flow of blood. I remember William's voice,

‘Ach, are ye alright ye daft besom. You're cackling like a witch at her cauldron.’ I remember the pain and the sense of panic as I realised that everything had spiralled out of control. Whatever hopes I once had that all would be well and that there was anything left in this world that I could control quickly left me. The dull ache in my face was the least of my worries. I remember the night being warm but that seems unlikely really, almost like my mind must be playing tricks on me. I feel more stripped than ever knowing that I cannae even trust my own mind anymore.

And in those times when Charles would visit at night sometimes I would go away to my own little space and let him have my body as he wanted it, and I would just close my eyes and not feel and would pretend that I was with my children and that we were all going to go on a picnic, and then we would play tig and everything would be right with the world again, and in a way I was grateful that he'd come because it was only when I really concentrated that I could see their little faces in my mind's eye and it was only when I needed to escape that I would concentrate hard enough... so I was almost grateful for needing the distraction.

Some nights there was a hunger in his eyes as he came towards me. I felt his hot breath against my neck, heard his breath catch in his throat. Felt his need. But what was never taken into account was mine. I wasn't even meant to have a need. I must've been bad to have felt the way I did inside. That even while I didn't want him to touch me and was repulsed by the thought of his hands, those finger tips grazing my flesh, somewhere there was a need deep down within, a cry for any kind of affection, the kind of affection I felt I didn't deserve anymore. And even if I didn't deserve it, there were others who didn't and still got it. The notions of being good and the world doing right by you and being bad and getting your just desserts, well those ideas had never come true in all the things that I've seen. Not once really. If you're rich enough it don't matter if you've got stains on your knees. People will keep their eyes fixed on yours and pretend that they don't smell a ratty. No need to keep yourself decent if being indecent and getting away with it is a birthright. But we do know that we are not the same as them. We know from birth what'll happen to us if we do the same misdeeds as them and so it's only an excuse for our behaviour for a little while. Then it becomes more fool us if we do wrong because we know what will happen to us alright. Times are tough. Back home they weren't getting any

easier, I do sometimes wonder what would have happened if I was born with a silver spoon in my mouth. If all of those pretty things that others had could be mine.

Sometimes I wished I could turn the need off. Just step out of my skin. To be free. Without a body. Sometimes I thought that was the only way to really be free in this world. Although, if you're a woman, you will never be free. Someone will always be laying a claim to your flesh, inscribing their ownership in the clothes you are made to wear, a big C on your chest if you're one of the naughtiest girls, or they will be watching your body as you move about, watching and staking a claim without even asking your permission. It doesn't matter whether you like it or not, whether you want the attention, if they want to give it to you, it will come regardless. You can lie back and think of home, and everything that seems so beautiful in memory but that you know deep down was the same old half-life for you.

*

I would leave a legacy in words if I could but I do not have the power to do so.

Sometime I wish I could explain to my daughters what happened. But how do you explain to the most important things in your life that you are going to leave the earth in the manner in which I am to go? How would I explain why and how would I justify a whole life of bad choices and mistakes and how could I make them see that any of it mattered on a bigger scale than just me and my life? That there are echoes in my story of thousands of others.

*

At least when I was in the Tollbooth I had other ladies to keep me company. And when we could forget about where we were going for long enough to have a bit of a

chat and get to know one another we had more in common than I ever would have thought. These terrible women that I'd heard so much about, those Tollbooth pollies, were nothing like we thought on the outside. I was nothing like they thought. We were loving, and we could be hard but life had made us just hard enough to survive whatever it had to throw at us.

Looking back there were choices I made and though they didn't feel like it at the time they led me onto the black path to death's door. The only one that I think I could have recognised was when William finally asked for my hand in marriage, and even that just felt like what was written for me at the time – I'd set myself up to get out of the town and that was the best way to do it. William wasn't as handsome as the princes who used to feature in my daydreams, whisking me away, and I had a premonition perhaps, that nothing good would come of our union, but the cogs of time were shifting.

When my Da didn't like him I should have known for sure that it was a bad thing that I was getting myself in to. I told myself it was just Da being jealous and that there was no reason that I shouldn't escape, how I wish I'd listened and stayed at my Da's side.

*

At night sometimes I played pretend, that my girls were with me and even sometimes William, but more often just me and my girls, and we're giggling and I'm tickling them as we lay down to sleep. Their faces are sweet, glowing like little angels and I want them to stay with me, but even while I was playing pretend, I knew it wasn't real.

Even when their giggles were shrill in my ears and I got goosebumps from the thrill of being near to them again, even when I let out a giggle myself, that I knew they might hear through the house, even then, I still knew that it was all pretend. Pretending is easier sometimes.

Charles liked a dram of rum. I liked the way it burnt on its way down and I felt alive, not numb anymore. But after we drank enough of the rum, I was numb again. Master didn't like me numb. Charles liked me soft, and responsive. Charles liked me the most. Too much.

I woke with a start. The candle light flickered across the room. I saw who it was.

'You shouldn't be here,' I said.

'I know.' But he was. And there was no one to protect me, there was no one to ask for help.

*

The sun shines differently in this part of the world. Fiercely. It matches the way we live. If I'd arrived into this country in the early days, I may have had to go on the town to survive, using my body as a type of currency, one that is, if not renewable, consistent. Only the soul dies. But women are always using their bodies as a type of currency, whether we want to or not, they are sometimes the only bargaining power that we have. They say currency lasses in this country, but that's not what they mean.

One night as I lay waiting I heard footsteps outside my room. I lay waiting for the door to open but it did not. I could hear heavy breathing just on the other side of the door, the breath coming fast as though strained through exertion, I did not understand why whoever it was standing on the threshold did not just open the door

and enter the servant's quarters. Why he didn't just cross the line. I heard a voice. A woman's not a man's, coming from a distance. The voice sounded again, closer this time. It was Katherine. I could hear the softness in the tone that was only there when she was tired at the end of the day, when she could stop pretending that life there was easy for her. I heard no clear voice that I could make out in answer, only mumbling. I was sure it was Master. Only Charles when we're alone. And never Charlie, I tried that once and he did not like it. Said it reminded him of the terrible time his brothers and his Da had given him when he was growing up. When I asked more about it he clamped up, and soon made sure I couldn't speak either. I wondered about what he'd said, thinking maybe he did not have such a good time as a child. Maybe life had been rough with him in its own way too. Maybe life's a bit rough with all of us.

Once I heard his dear Katherine call him Charlie. It crawled under my skin and made me itch where I could not scratch that she was allowed to call him such but I was not. I did not know whether it was all made up what he'd told me, whether he just hadn't wanted me to use that name because maybe it reminded him of her and made him feel awful guilty. Or whether maybe what he had told me was true, and that he had never been able to tell his wife so. Perhaps that was just part of me trying to convince myself that I was more important to him than just someone to satisfy urges with. Sometimes I could have felt sorry for him but I was never sure enough of the meanings and aimings of his words and his doings.

There was a map on the wall of the drawing room at Glen Nairne. I used to look at it and trace a line with my eyes from my homeland to this place at the end of the Earth. Then I would force myself not to look at Scotland, I would avert my eyes from

hope, from family, from home. Charles happened upon me once lost in a fog of memory standing in front of the world. He started sing-songing foolishly,

‘Mary Mary quite contrary how does your garden grow? With silver bells and cockle shells and pretty maids all in a row.’

The image of the map comes to my mind now and I’m thinking of lines traced in one direction that can never be traced in the other. Of events that could only unfold in one way once my secret had been discovered.

27.

Katherine was screeching like a banshee. She had barged into my room without waiting for me to permit her to enter. She had said that she would always knock, for just because I was a convict and a servant I still had a right to some privacy. She said if she caught me doing any wrong, concealing that which ought not to be concealed or thieving then she would not offer me this privacy. But until I had done such wrongs as to bar me from it she would extend this courtesy to me. And yet, there she was barging in despite all that she'd said before. When I brought this up with her though she just looked at me and said nothing. I knew that it was too late for me. I should have told her. If I had gone to her then maybe she could have done something for me but now that the truth was out in the open, in this way, there was nothing to be done.

I had been getting changed and I was caught half dressed. They had not given me my right provisions. I had less clothes than I should have been given and I had only asked for a new dress. One that was a little bit looser. I had needed something with more room in it. My condition was starting to show. But I was caught. Katherine saw for herself now, not just what she had figured out, how the flesh of my stomach was not flabby but pulled tight, like a freshly made bed – so tight you could bounce a penny on it. She saw the marks where my flesh had been forced to fill more space than was comfortable. She saw the swelling that was a to-be-born devil. That was not my fault. Not my doing. Too late for me to try to break the news gently, too late for me to confess and hope for kind treatment of any kind. It was already too late for me, from that moment.

Katherine was yelling, and though I did not try to listen I could still hear the words,

‘You are no better than your convict mates. A filthy whore. Taking advantage of those who have been kind to you. I will not have an abandoned woman such as you in my house. Charles will take you to the courts tomorrow.’ It was only at her own mention of her husband’s name that she faltered. A far-away look came into her eyes and I could see her doubting him. Silently, with no-one to confide in, she wondered if her husband was the man she hoped he was, or if he was less than that. A typical man. A liar. A cheat. A scoundrel.

My secret discovered I ran from the house. It was dark and cold. The ground was hard beneath my feet. Every step was jarring. I didn’t know where I was going. There was nowhere to go. Running felt good though. The cold air was stinging my lungs but even that pain was a reminder. The air tasted like freedom. I was drunk with it. I didn’t hear the footsteps behind me at first. I didn’t realise that my freedom would be so short lived, snatched away before I even became used to it. I tripped on a root and cried out as I pitched forwards. Half of me wished that the ground would open up and devour me. I landed heavily. Charles lifted me in his arms and swept my hair back from my forehead. His expression one I had never seen before. A storm of emotions was gathering in the distance of his eyes. He was fighting a war within himself. The final battle would be the next day, when he had to take me to the magistrate. When he had to say goodbye.

Charles drove me to town the next morning. The trip was not a pleasant one. It was passed mainly in silence, no amiable chatter like the journey to Glen Nairne.

When we arrived the courtroom was different from that in Glasgow and my mind was racing so that I barely listened. It was true, I had been absent from the family home. I had asked and asked when I would be getting more clothes. But he had never wanted to talk much when we were alone.

Charles used his big words, and told his story. I couldn't let him tell these half-truths to the court. If there was one thing more dangerous than the truth, I'd learned, it was a half-truth. I wanted it known that they didn't know the full story. I wanted to tell them. In the end the only protest I could make was about my clothes.

How could he stand there and say that I alone had done wrong? How could he not feel shame and guilt to bring me to that man and say that I was wrong and not say that he too had done wrong in this instance?

A blind eye was turned to Charles's involvement in my predicament. It must have been known that he was at fault. Causing a woman to become pregnant was not a crime, while becoming pregnant was. How was that fair? As if I would have chosen to have this happen if I had a say in the matter. A woman should not be punished for her body's automatic response.

They sent us all back if we got in the family way, whether it was because we had sought it or had it forced upon us. It was a crime and so we were to go back into the crime class and do hard labours despite our condition. We got no special treatment and no extra ration for food. It was the same as what everyone else got. No wonder so many of the babies born there died. How could they have been strong enough to live on what they were feeding us? They weren't. No one was well inside the factory, not even those who ran the show could claim that they were feeling healthy. Perhaps health was something that was so foreign to us we didn't even think

about it. I hope for the best for the rest of those ladies, but it is too late for me to hold hope of anything but that the rope is quick as the hangman sure of himself, that the job is done well the first time, and that I am not left strung up and jerking about while people look on. For they will come to watch, and who can blame them?

They've never hanged a woman here before, they've never done that in this colony, only back in the good old mother land have they seen a woman strung up by her neck, face turning blue and legs kicking out, the terrible face that a slow death brings about, when the hangman is incompetent, or the calculations for the rope's length incorrect. What a world we live in where we think that we are civilised where we come from when we treat people like that. When we visit a hanging as we would a fair, full of excitement to see the spectacle, and perhaps to feel the thrill that while a life is ending it isn't ours. I myself would probably like to go and watch the first woman hang if it wasn't me. I'll have a front row seat – but not one that anyone would want to trade for, none shall ask for that. I could name those that brought me here. But that list would be long and they would surely cut me off before I got to its bottom. What could I choose to say with my last words that would be of any consequence? I would like to name him to the world and see if he suffers at all. They think that their reverend has convinced me not to tell but I know that nothing would happen to him even if I did. If they wanted to know they would figure it out. It's usually the most likely suspect that did it. Though this isn't really a suspicion is it? Everyone knows what happened really.

*

In the factory again I heard whispers about another Mary who had done something bad but she got away with it. They said she had a baby and she killed it, they said it

was born dead. They said, they said. I wanted to know the truth of it. I thought there was a truth to know. And at night, when she thought no-one was listening her soft sobs could be heard, giving me cause to wonder whether she really was innocent and despairing at the loss of her child.

Those days at the tub were difficult. But the nights were worse. Trying to sleep, and being weary but unable to close my eyes for so long, and when I did close them my dreams were troubled. I had such strange dreams.

I didn't take no rubbish from anyone when I was in that factory with those people. I was not one who could be easily bossed, nor was I a boss. I looked after my own and stayed out of it when I wasn't involved. But my fingers were as sharp as anyone else's when I needed to dig them into a side of beef and fight for my rights. If you were weak in there you'd be eaten alive. I didn't want to make the fly's jobs easier for them by being a frozen carcass ready for the picking. I clung to whatever power I could muster, and nobody tried it on with me after the first few days. So that goes to show that we can learn from our mistakes. They learnt from theirs when they tried to get a piece of me. It was never going to happen.

I can claw my way out of most kinds of trouble. I have had to learn how to from this world where I was not going to be done any favours. But this time I am in trouble that no amount of clawing will escape. I pace sometimes. Not that there is much area to pace in, but I get up and move backwards and forwards to and fro across the cell, sometimes I mutter to myself – someone might think me crazy if there was anyone here to see me at all.

I muttered to myself while at the wash tubs in the yard of the female factory. It didn't bother me who heard me. I didn't keep my voice quiet. I had kept quiet too

long and that was why I was there. I wished that the child would be born dead. I got worked up some days and the other girls came to try to help me. They tried to calm me down. Mary Cameron kept her eye on me when she could. She found me one day washing tar from the ropes of a ship. My hands were bleeding which wasn't so unusual but she gasped and when I looked down I saw why. My hands were completely covered in the red velvety substance, encased like a pair of satin gloves. I hadn't notice. I had just been scrubbing, trying to scrub the devils out. Even after I saw I just kept on picking at the ropes. Mary Cameron had to shake me to make me drop the rope.

*

The small male child lay in the privy. How he'd come to be there they would never really know. I had wished that the baby not be born alive. There is a difference in wishing and acting – I had never claimed that I would kill the creature.

*

I was waiting in my cell. I was always waiting. Joseph Hone came to visit. I have had few visitors, but I preferred my solitude to his intrusion. He curled his lip as he looked at me. Scrunched his face up, like there was a bad smell in the air, but I couldn't smell anything. He looked at me with distaste on his face. I knew that he did not like me. He was the one that examined the child that died. He said that I had killed it. How could he have said that when he could surely not have been certain?

Why have you come here?' I asked. I did not like the way he was just staring at me with his beady little eyes accusing me of things that he believed I had done. Of things that I may have done.

‘Did anyone tell you to kill your child?’ he suddenly spoke forcefully, loudly, his voice echoing off the walls and I winced, unaccustomed to such a sound.

‘No. No one did.’ It seemed that they were still out to get me to name names. They always wanted you to name names.

‘Now Mary, if anyone helped you, they deserve to be punished just like you are going to be.’ Joseph grinned eagerly, thinking of watching me hang, no doubt, thinking of me getting what he thought I deserved. For a second he thought that I was going to speak, to reveal something to him that no one else knew.

‘I have nothing to tell you.’

My words were small and he shook his head in response. He did not like this answer. I could tell. Some had said that they were trying to save me. Even in this place the walls whispered. It was dark, and sunlight on my skin was something I remembered fondly, but missed only because of the brightness it gave. I could see more clearly out there in the light. Trapped in the dark it was hard to ever really know what was there. I knew that man though. He was friends with Charles. I didn’t think that he would believe me even if I told him that someone had ordered me to do it, especially not if I told him that Charles did. But I’m not saying that he did. I’m not saying that anyone did. I’m not even saying that I did it. I don’t think that I would be saved even if I did. Would Joseph tell the men what I said? I don’t know. But I was in control of this, for once I had some power, and I did not tell that little man anything.

28.

Stating my own case, I sometimes got confused. They would ask me questions and then say things that they claimed I'd already said or said differently but I couldn't remember doing so. There was no one to defend me. It hurt the way many of the people who told the court their views turned on me something terrible, even Mrs Agnes Craig who I'd considered to be a friend for a long time. I'd felt safe and protected with her right nearby and I'd never thought that she would turn tattletale on me, not after building the bond that I thought we shared. But maybe she never felt her share of affection like I did.

I longed to see my children again but was never given the chance to do so. All I have to remind me of them now are the precious memories that I hope can never be stolen away. But as more things happen and more distance comes between me and them I find it harder and harder to remember what their sweet angelic faces really looked like. It becomes hard to hold on to the differences between the two of them. I need to hold on to their faces in my mind before I can find rest each night. It is they who centre me in this dark I now live in. They who remind me that once I did something meaningful and they that mean I may be remembered as something other than a convict.

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It was different to William. With William there was an affection, how genuine and how deep it ran may have been less than what they should have been but there was some love I had for him. I had no chance to form an attachment to Charles before he accosted me. I fought back but there was no real chance of my escaping his

embraces. They would come one way or another. Sometimes he would come at me serpent-like and his hands would slither all over me, taking their time. Other times he would be all business.

I knew from the talk that I was not the only woman he'd had besides his darling Katherine. I like to think he liked me best. I like to think a lot of things that are probably not true.

As the days passed at Glen Nairne I found it impossible to stop thinking about the past. About the mistakes I'd made. About life's events and what particular thing marked the beginning of the end. I think it was probably when I started to remember how I did the buzzing on the street. I'd known it all along. But when I could remember the points of my art I knew there was trouble coming. I was a wonderful thief. It was probably what I was best at in my whole life, and I was a better thief than a mother. If I wasn't then how come I couldn't keep myself out of trouble for the sake of my precious angels? I was a better thief than a wife. William was a better drunkard than a husband though, and so we went together nicely hand in hand. I was a better thief than mill work overseer. Although, I was always kind to those poor little lasses who were in my charge. I did what I could for them. I was not too hard on them and I let them borrow my clothes for warmth when their fingers were so cold they could not get a feel for what they were meant to be doing. I was a better thief than I was at anything else. Sometimes I ask God why he gave me that gift and not others, for surely he is to blame for my design. He has given me such talent in that particular area. How can I be blamed for using it? He must have given me the talent to lead me into temptation. Temptation that I, like Eve, should have been able to resist but couldn't. If I had resisted, then perhaps God would not have

punished me like he does now. I would like to be able to pray for forgiveness but I find that difficult to do at this point. I find it hard to seek comfort from a maker who has made me into what I am. What I wish I was not.

But, we all have a free will and that is what will be said of me in the future. That I took things that weren't mine of my own free will. But, especially at first, there was no will that I was controlling. I was seeing and wanting and then having. It was when I started to see, want, and consciously take and have that the temptations got the better of me. I would hear of something that would help in my thievery and I would not hesitate to use this inside knowledge to take the things I felt I needed. I was compelled to take them. I do not know why I could not resist taking them, I knew that I could wear nought of it, well nought of the unusual that I took, and nought outside in the street—but it was enough to feel them against my skin at home. And I could wear things that would escape the notice of most – a neckerchief here or there would not come to the note of anyone I didn't think.

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Sometimes I felt that I may as well make the best of it all and just sit back and try to forget some of the facts about it and enjoy those that didn't bring me too much heartache. Like the satisfaction that I felt when I did get something done, when I removed a spot off the floor that had been there stubborn for days but that I knew I would wear down and away eventually. Or when I was stopped half way through a job so I only realised once I came back to it that I had made such a large difference – that the floor, unlike the world, showed clearly where I had been and where I had yet to go. When I cooked something I was able to enjoy it and think that I was the one

who cooked it and without me it would never have even existed. Thoughts like those could be enough to lift me out of my daily stupor at times.

But at other times there was nothing that could lift the veil of fog that I lived with daily. For that's what it was like – as if a layer of fog sat before my eyes wherever I went and there was nothing I could do to alter it. The fog was always there with me, dulling the world, dulling the senses to all but pain and sadness which I felt despite the fog sitting there trying to prevent it getting through. If the fog had been a solid thing I could have beaten it away, but the fog had no body, it found its home inside of me.

I have never told anyone about my fog before. I trail it around with me in secret. But it has been there for many a year. I wonder if I would feel lonely if it left me now? I wonder if I would recognise the world at all? But then what is so good in this world of mine that I would want to recognise it.

*

There was something unusual in the air that morning. I should have taken it as a sign that something bad was to come but I did not. The smell was like something rotting. I now know it was my own flesh turning bad inside. But if that was the case I was the only one who could smell it. The only one who was haunted by the idea of it. Haunted by the idea of flesh made enemy. Of the idea that something foul grew within.

I rose from bed and left my room to get myself a cup of tea before anyone else woke. I enjoyed the moments I had in the morning to myself. Katherine never minded if I had a cup of tea before my daily work began. Well, I assumed she didn't

mind. She may not have even known about it. If she did I had a hard time thinking it would be a problem for her, tea was not so scarce that we were on strict rations. And besides, I worked the hardest in that house and I deserved some small things to treasure in the days. Life drudged on and I began to see that it might not be so bad to live in this new country. I was without my children, but perhaps they were better off without me too. I did not set out to replace them in this new land. Life would be easier had I been able to say that I was widowed when I arrived. Now, I would not have the option to marry again freely unless William died. I should wonder whether news of such an occurrence would even find its way to me here in the wilderness. How life as a servant differed from life as a free woman was something that I could see clearly. It was only sometimes late at night when sleep would not come that I thought how good things could be if this house that I rested in at night were mine. And that I had my own servant to do my own bidding. That I had someone else to empty the pot. For apart from the chores that I had to do, that were draining physically, and that I would have had to do myself had I not been sent here free anyway life was not so bad. It was just Charles who became my problem. I would have hurt him in ways that a woman can hurt a man had I not been fearful of what my punishment for such would be.

*

In Glasgow I worked longer and harder than William did. My days began before dawn and I would rug myself up as warm as possible and walk to the mill where I would oversee the duties of the poor little dears. I always wore my plaid. When I left for work William would still be asleep in his bed usually. But I could not leave the girls with him. It would take time from his own day for him to escort them to the

babysitter's so that too fell to me. And it was my duty to collect them on my way home despite the fact that William would be home before I. The days at the mill were sometimes 14 hours. More than half the hours in the day spent at work. William would have worked harder had there been more work he said. What was there for him to do when the jobs were coming in fewer and further apart? And I did have sympathy for him, but he could have been out trying to get more business and he wasn't. He could have been anywhere but down at the pub drinking away his shrinking pay while I struggled through the days to provide for us all. Nothing takes the shine off a man so much as a woman realising that she would be better off without him. Indeed, I would have been better off without him but then I would not have had my lassies and that is a trade that even now I could not bring myself to make.

William who was once so shiny and new became another part of the problems in my little life. Whatever love there had been for him in my heart soon vanished. I became mean to him but I still clung to him in the night when I took my solace in one of the only ways I could find it. And at these times I could almost remember what it had been like when we had first found one another. How it had felt like we were two halves that fit together and that we could mend the cracks in each other with kindness and care. But we were too deeply chiselled away for that. There was little hope of anything else for us but a brief and bright love followed by a long smouldering corpse. Or maybe I am wrong. That is how I felt but maybe William continued to love long after I did. Perhaps he could hold onto those feelings in his heart better than I. Perhaps he did not turn so cold and hard to the outside world. If he did not it is because his lot was not so hard I am certain. I have but one small part of me that is left unbroken and that is the love for those two little girls I call my own.

It is a fierce love and I would take back most of what I have done to be given the chance to see them again and to hold them; to look after them and give them a life better than this one that I have had. But it is too little too late. I should have lived for them and then I would not be here in this cell waiting for them to take me to the gallows, string me up and watch me die with a rope cutting into the flesh at my neck. I hope my face doesn't turn blue and black like some that I have heard of. That it doesn't bulge and that I don't dangle neither alive nor dead but that horrid in between if the rope doesn't do its job immediately. I wish for a quickly broken neck and a chance to explain myself to God before he decides where I shall go for the rest of eternity. And oh what a long time that shall feel if he sends me down below and not up above. I will get the place that I deserve, but which that is I am not sure of anymore.

*

Da used to tell me poems. In those poems he would lose himself during the reciting and it was only when he was finished that he would come back to reality and remember that I was there hanging on his every word. Those poems meant something to him, they transported him to a new place that he liked where he felt free to be passionate and himself. Where he longed to live all the time. But life was not kind enough to allow him to stay there – it was only a temporary transport of delight – he could not hold that feeling through his everyday life. Sometimes I recite those poems now and they give me small comfort in the otherwise cold world. Sometimes after a storm when you'd go outside the world would have been washed clean with no trace of the bad that had come before and it looked like a world where a body could keep their innocence for many a year. Like there were possibilities in this big

wide world that you had only in your wildest dreams thought were real. I wasn't necessarily unhappy in my childhood there were times when I had what I most needed and I had the luxury of a loving father – I knew enough to know that this was in fact a luxury. But even when you are happy in your youth you can still want for more and it was this wanting for more that would get me in trouble. When Da was gone and couldn't protect me anymore that was when I knew that things would go bad.

Sometimes I would fall asleep dreaming of the touch of fine silk that I'd seen on a lady who was visiting town. I didn't need to have felt it at first to know that it was going to be so smooth and cool against the skin at first. It would warm up eventually but there would be ever such a thrill to the first time I slipped it on in the morning and felt that glide over my skin and ran my hands down my body to see how it hugged the figure, dipping and falling into the crevices. My skin would buzz to be encased in such beautiful fabric.

As a child I often dreamt of a room that I'd never seen – that I never could have seen for I'd never left Saltcoats and I felt sure that such a room as this could not exist in the small town that I lived in. In it a lady sat with her back to me gazing into a mirror and combing her hair. The comb glittered in the light cast out by the lamp next to her, the gold on the lamp also glittered and the room itself was dazzling. I thought to myself that in a room like this all my wishes could come true. I crept up behind this lady and the closer I got the less clear she became – I could never quite make out her face. She was placing a necklace around her neck and I made to grab for it and then she and the room disappeared and I found myself standing alone in a wooden chamber with nothing of the delicate furnishings of this room before. These

phantoms of the brain would continue to plague me I knew. These tauntings, that out there were better things – things that I could never hope to approach in my lifetime. But hope I did. And that story is right – sometimes it is the hope at the bottom of that box that keeps us alive and the sins flowing.

*

I have done wrong in this life of mine. But show me the man who hasn't. I have done no more wrong than others - some have done a great deal more than I but it is I who am to be punished. Punished in this way beyond all other punishment. I will wear one final adornment to my neck after all. If William knew where I was today would he grieve for me? I ask myself this question with weight, not lightly. I did love him so, even if only for a little while, but the life he led me into was not the one he promised and how quickly the love turned sour with my disappointed hopes. I was still largely a child when we were wed, even though I was well beyond the years that childishness could be tolerated in the city. That city was not the good life and big crowds I had dreamed of – it was nothing but disappointments there.

*

I was looking for William again. I knew where he would be. I pushed open the door and squinted through the smoke filled air hoping to see him quickly and be home to the girls before long. It wasn't to be. He was not in the first few raucous groups I passed. I had to venture further in. I saw Peter's balding head and recognised Alasdair alongside of him.

‘Ah, Mary lass, fancy seeing you here!’ Peter always had a kind word and a friendly greeting for me, and a quick glance at me to show that I was still attractive.

Alasdair nodded. It was a normal greeting for him also. William normally fell somewhere in-between the two of them, not raucous like Pete, not removed liked Alasdair. But I couldn't see William at all.

'I'm looking for William, have ye seen him?' I could tell by the way he turned his head to look at Alasdair first that he had. And then the two of them parted and I could see him; passed out against the wall on the wooden ledge that ran the length of the back of the bar. His hat pulled down over his eyes and what I was sure was vomit running down the front of his vest. Aye, I could certainly pick them...

I never wanted no one to feel that they had to help me. But there have been a few that have tried and I will always be grateful to them. And there isn't much in this life that I'm about to leave that I'll feel grateful for – for after all, I'm a proud woman and much was done to me to strip away my pride, to let me sit and rot here with no one to console me but foul men. Sometimes they look at me and I can feel their hatred itching to get out and them to do harm to me. Sometimes I think their looks mean something else. But I don't know that I'd want women here now anyway. Women can be so tender and I think maybe tenderness would not be good for me for now. Maybe it helps me to keep it all in and bottled away inside and if there was to be a sympathetic ear for me to sit and talk to I'd end up oozing everything out onto the cell floor. And they're always saying as us convict women are the worst that they've ever known and that we are marked for nothing but lives of trouble and that makes me wonder why they think that we are worse than the men, and why they think the other women are better than us when inside their hearts beat the same and I'm sure that most of the times they want the same things we do, but

they don't act on it and we can't wait to snatch at it all with both hands and big grins.

At least mostly that's how I see it.

29.

I had this rag doll when I was a wee *bairn*. I took her everywhere with me. She was the best friend I ever had. One day her eye came loose, and I didn't even cry. I knew that I'd be able to patch her up in no time. She was like me: full of resilience. It would take more than that to do away with her for any real length of time. I knew that I could fix her. It was harder to fix some things. But I know that my two girls will be alright because they got that same resilience that my little dolly had from me. It used to break my heart when they would cry for their hurts if they skinned their knees or stubbed their toes but I would give them one quick hug and then see to their knee or toes and let them be on with their day. Agnes thought me harsh I know but there was no point in keeping them quiet and letting them cuddle up to me for any longer than they had to. It wasn't that I had no sympathy for them, more so that I think my own mother acted correctly in situations like these: to let me think that I was really hurt would only be to encourage more tears. Crocodile tears my mother would call them sometimes. When she particularly didn't feel like dealing with me, and this is something I never did to my girls. Even when they were being bothersome I treated them well. That was another thing I learned from my mother. That you could treat people how you chose to regardless of how they chose to treat you. She taught me that I didn't have to let all my frustrations show. Not like she did.

Was I born with a mother's bones inside? And if I was, is that all I was born for? To do nothing other than breed? I can't believe that. I loved my own little wee things. I did not want my body to become the place for that devil to spawn. While part of me is relieved to think that death will put an end to my suffering another part entirely wants vengeance visited upon the man who did this to me. And yet another

part is dreadful afraid of where I will go when I breathe no more and of where they will bury me. But most of all, I am afraid of the black stuff that must be inside and that they will see when they cut me open. They call me a baby murderer, a whore and a thief. You can't always believe what they say.

*

I cannot really remember what happened in that privy. I know that they use the very fact that it happened in a privy against me. They ask why would I seek a private space if I wasn't to commit an act that I wanted none to know of? Well, I would ask them if I thought there was any chance of my getting an answer, would they want to show themselves to the world at their weakest? Would they want to moan and groan and writhe like a snake shedding its skin where those that might wish them harm could watch on? Where there would be no price of admission for the show they would enjoy? What person would want that? In their factory there was nowhere else I could go for a bit of privacy but to that privy. But I didn't say any of this. I didn't even raise my head to look them in the eyes when they took me to their courtroom. For they had already made up their minds, just like before, about what is to happen to me. I would not be listened to even if I tried to explain. And I wouldn't make that good a witness, when I admit that I don't really remember what exactly happened. Perhaps I don't remember because I did what they said and I don't want to remember? Maybe I don't remember because there is nothing to remember? What I do remember is pain. Terrible pain so bad that I wished I would be dead and alive no more rather than continue to feel it.

I woke and felt the pains and I sat up seeking Cameron's form in the beds in the room. When I saw hers I made my way gingerly across the room. I did not want

to wake anyone else. Reaching out my hands I put them on her shoulders. I flexed my fingers and took in the peaceful look on her face before I shook her awake. She never looked peaceful when she was awake. Full of mirth and full of mischief and sometimes almost happy were expressions I was used to seeing on her face, but peaceful and Cameron were not things that went hand in hand. Another spasm rippled through me and I shook her awake and then put a hand over her mouth till I was sure she knew it was me and no other who surprised her in the night.

‘That creature is coming.’ I said. Nothing else. Cameron was out of bed with her arms around me and we made our way to the privy. Cameron knew why I would want to be on my own, for she was rarely vulnerable herself and she hated when she was. I didn’t feel vulnerable in front of her. She would not try to do anything bad against me I was certain. It was awful cramped and then the pains overtook me and there was no room for nothing else in my mind.

30.

It isn't so bad in this cell. At least I no longer have to do the ropes like I did in the factory. My hands are even starting to heal up. But they will not be smooth again like they were when I was a wee thing. Such a long time ago now it seems. I wonder if they will ever be clean again? God could choose to wash them clean if he wanted. He could take them in his and take all my sins. Whatever happens to me now I will always be grateful and remember that Cameron never turned me away. I will not give her up. I will not let her come to harm.

The worst betrayal of all is when your own body lets something wicked take shape inside. When you quicken with the beating of a heart that isn't your own. When Charles would visit sometimes my own body would betray me with its own excitement equalling Charles's. It disgusted me the way my breath would quicken and my heart would pound faster, and my body would open for him, letting him slide his way inside. When my hips would rock to meet his thrusts regardless of how my mind did not want this physical act. The gasping pleasure followed by the shame every time. The shame of knowing that when he accused me of enjoyment I could not deny with my whole heart. I can't control my hunger or my thirst, no one can and no one is expected to so can I be held responsible for the goosebumps that rise of their own accord when his hot breath finds its way to the nape of my neck?

I wonder whether Katherine thinks about me now. And if she does whether she feels remorse – or whether she feels betrayed. Or whether she thinks that I'm getting what I deserve for carrying on with her husband behind her back. But probably she doesn't think about me at all. I probably never even cross her mind.

Charles thinks of me still perhaps. But by now he probably has another girl in my place. Lifting her skirts and slipping his hands where they shouldn't go. It sickens me that I feel a little jealous at the thought. How can I care what that man does now, after all that he has done to me? And yet how could I not think about them all at Glen Nairne. And the young Charles still skulking around I am sure. Just to think of him makes my lip curl, and now I am left with a bad taste in my mouth. The whole time in this colony has been a bad taste in my mouth that I long to be rid of. They might be doing me a favour after all with their grim view and even if the decision is not so swift I'm sure they'll come to it all the same in the end. These kind of men in these kinds of places always do.

I wonder sometimes if William's face will come into my mind as I am about to go, but I think not. The only faces that will be there will be my memory of my own, reflected in the glass all that time ago and maybe that of my Da who thought better of me than I think of myself and whose faith might have kept me on the right path had he lived to guide me further in life's journey. Oh Da, you always were the only one who thought there was as much good as bad in me.

In Saltcoats I would often walk out alone of a gloaming, enjoying that time when the day was not yet finished, the night not yet begun. It seemed a time when things that normally weren't possible became possible. When things were transformed and when even I could become something more than a young girl with hopes of a big future.

One evening when I was out I caught sight of a strange man I had never seen before. Startled by the unfamiliar in this world where everything else was as always my heart started to beat faster in my chest and I didn't know whether it was from fear

or excitement. I looked at the man and I wasn't really sure whether I found his appearance pleasing or not. I was most uncertain of it, but I couldn't just stand gawking at him in the streets so I had to keep on walking passed him and it was only once I'd passed that my heart started to beat normally in my chest again, and I started to feel like my normal self.

I didn't mention seeing anyone new in town when I arrived home. It wasn't that I was keeping a secret, it just didn't seem that important and I wouldn't have been able to answer any questions about him because I didn't know anything, especially when I couldn't even decide if I'd liked the look of him or not. Anyway, no one asked anything about my walk when I returned so I guess I wasn't acting strangely, or if I was, none of them were interested. We sat down to dinner which was tatties and neeps. I wasn't as hungry as usual, but what I didn't eat the others split between them, food never went to waste in our home.

I fell asleep that night wondering whether I would see the stranger again, and I began to feel that indeed I would like to, and that perhaps I had liked the way he had looked. What could have brought him to our town? How long did he plan on staying? Questions of this nature ran circles through my mind until I fell into slumber.

31.

I hear the church-bells in here. I count the chimes and think their melody pretty. I long to believe that it is God's way of reminding me that I am still a sheep in his flock but I know that they would chime whether I existed or not. That they will keep on chiming once I'm gone. When they're finished chiming though, the silence seems to eat away at itself endlessly consuming and renewing itself. If only there was another sound to hear other than my own thoughts, then they might not be getting so wild. I might be able to keep a bit more on track, to think clearly about what happened, and not get lost in turnings that my fancy takes. Memories flood back from happier times. I find myself on the seaside at Saltcoats holding my Da's hand. I find myself seeing my William in the street for the first time. At the fair from my childhood I feel the pulse of the crowd and I smell the sweet air. These memories become so clear it's like I am really back there. I am grateful for these momentary escapes.

Da used to tell me stories and there would always be a part where it seemed like the hero was doomed. In the end though, it would always take a dramatic turning and the hero would be safe. I wish that this was one of those stories but it isn't. I will die.

32.

The bells are chiming as I face the crowd. The hood slides over my eyes. I am in blackness. In my mind's eye I see what my lovely Margaret and Ailie will look like when they are grown. They are every bit as beautiful as I always imagined them. I want to stop time when they look up. As they recognise me their expressions turn to wonder and it is the most beautiful and perfect moment of my life.

‘I’m coming girls.’ I whisper, and walk towards them. They hold out their hands. Aloud I say, ‘Oh. My God.’

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APPENDIX A

Brief summary of reviewed novels featuring Australian convict women/women in convict era Australia in relation to characterisation and historical accuracy. This is a list of novels I reviewed for the purposes of this thesis for their depictions of convict woman. It is not intended to be a comprehensive list of Australian convict fiction (see convict fiction websites such as <http://www.femaleconvicts.org.au/index.php/resources/fictional-works>) Some major novels were not included (such as *The Commandant*, *The Potato Factory*, *Gould's Book of Fish*, *The Secret River* and *Out of Ireland*) because their depiction of women was not deemed sufficiently central.

Author	Date	Title	Plot Summary	Characterisation of women:	Historical Accuracy
Carol Birch	2007	<i>Scapegallows</i>	Based on the life of historical convict Margaret Catchpole. Retrospective of her life from childhood in Suffolk, conviction, transportation and settlement in Australia.	Innocent and naïve victim of circumstance.	Close factual accuracy
Kathleen J Pullen	1975	<i>Mary Reibey: From Convict To</i>	Based closely on the life of Mary Reibey who appears on the \$20 note and her life from convict to successful business woman.	Sensible character with a good head for business.	Close factual accuracy

		<i>First Lady Of Trade</i>			
Catherine Gaskin	1954	<i>Sara Dane</i>	Hugely successful romantic saga based very loosely on the life of convict and businesswoman, Mary Reibey (see book of same name by Kathleen J. Pullen).	Innocent and naïve victim of circumstance.	Highly fictionalised account
*Deborah Challinor	Convict Girls series			Complex women who are basically good, but only for the four main characters. Other characters who behave in very similar ways are condemned for the same actions.	Fictional characters but depiction of Sydney reasonably accurate.
	2012	<i>Behind the Sun</i>	Four main characters meet in London. This first book details their journey to Australia and subsequent time at the Parramatta Female Factory. One of the girls dies after giving birth. The pregnancy was the result		

			of a rape. The three remaining girls murder the man who raped their friend.		
	2013	<i>Girl of Shadows</i>	The second volume deals with the guilt the girls feel after their actions. We also learn that someone knows what they've done and is blackmailing them.		
	2014	<i>The Silk Thief</i>	In the third volume, while two of the girls are coping with their guilt, the third girl is tormented by her remorse. Her wish to adopt her friend's baby is put into jeopardy by her mental instability. The blackmail plot continues.		
	2015	<i>A Tattooed Heart.</i>	The story is concluded with the death of the blackmailer and the happy adoption of the friend's child. At the end of the book all four girls are settled and in happy relationships.		

Kristin Williamson	2003	<i>Women on the Rocks: A tale of Two Convicts</i>	A melodrama following the lives of two women transported to Australia. Little focus on time spent as convicts.	The two main characters conform to stereotypes. Main character transported for a crime she didn't commit.	Highly fictionalised account
Eliza Winstanley	1876	<i>For Her Natural Life: A tale of the 1830s</i>	Female companion to the Clarke novel. Not widely available.	Women shown as put-upon and weak innocents, loyal to a fault and unable to retaliate when mistreated.	Highly fictionalised account
Hal Porter	1961	<i>The Tilted Cross</i>	An artist and convicted forger is going to make a portrait of a lady. The artist has a stroke. A young man accompanies him and accepts the advances of the lady's friend. She gifts him with a trinket that he is then found guilty of stealing and so he is imprisoned. He attempts to escape and is wounded. He eventually dies of gangrene.	The lady who has the affair with the man is portrayed as being lustful and lies when questioned about the trinket.	Partly based on a real person. Fictionalised account.

			The ladies enjoy their Christmas party at the end.		
Sarah Stovell	2013	<i>The Night Flower</i>	Two women meet while being transported to Australia – one a former Governess, Rose, and the other a Gypsy girl. They are sent as servants to the same household in Van Diemen’s Land where they find themselves in service to an immoral clergyman and his son.	Two female characters embody binary – former governess who is ‘good’ but may be mad/ Gypsy girl who behaves immorally	Highly fictionalised account
Thomas Keneally	1987	<i>The Playmaker</i>	Tells of the production of a play utilising convicts as cast members.	Main character’s wife in England is saintly and good.	Based on fact

				Convict women full of vice, save the woman he chooses to consort with.	
Babette Smith	1991	<i>A Cargo of Women: The Novel</i>	The story of a group of women from the same convict ship. Focuses on the author's ancestor and details her various love affairs and children.	Convict women seen as victims of times, not held to account for their actions.	Fiction based on fact. Smith also wrote a non-fiction book on the same subject.
*Caroline Leakey	1859	<i>The Broad Arrow</i>	Follows the life of a woman transported for a crime she didn't commit. Initially unrepentant for her life of sin she learns a lesson in the end.	Binary depictions of women as good or bad. Not much nuance to be found.	Fictionalised account but Leakey did spend time in Hobart.

Catherine Jinks	2002	<i>The Gentleman's Garden</i>	A historical romance where a woman ends up marrying her convict servant, who despite his convict past is a better man than her first husband.	Wholesome and good.	Three main characters fictional. Many other people and details historically accurate.
*Henry Savery	1831	<i>Quintus Servinton</i>	Quintus is transported to Van Diemen's Land. He gets himself into trouble again while there. His wife is a sobering influence and after she comforts him at his sickbed he vows to be redeemed.	The gentle sex- there for the edification of men.	Fictionalised account.
*Marcus Clarke	1874	<i>For the Term of His Natural Life</i>	Highly melodramatic novel with a convoluted plot.	Binary embodied by the good Sylvia/ bad Sarah Purfoy.	Highly fictionalised account. Dwells on the

					brutality of the system.
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* These books are discussed in more detail in the thesis

APPENDIX B

Examiner 1 commented on the tense in *Precious Little*. Highlighting the problem with the past continuous tense as focussing on habitual action and lacking drama.

There were a few reasons for this tense. The fractured nature of the narrative itself means that the reader is not always meant to know when a particular scene is occurring in the chronology of the story. This is to demonstrate the unpredictability and darting nature of Mary's reflections on the experiences of her life while she recounts her story while waiting to die. She has an unquiet mind and is lost in different times in her life trying to discover if there was a specific action that led her to where she is, and if she is solely to blame. For Mary, Faulkner's 'never dead' past is of the utmost importance. The tense also helps Mary circle around the things that she doesn't want to address which includes what happened at the factory in the privy – the birth and death of the infant.

The lack of specific action is sometimes deliberate in order to show that Mary's life was one of drudgery with little excitement, especially as a servant at the isolated Glen Nairne.

At times the tense might suggest a passivity, but such would not be out of keeping with a character who is waiting on death row, and reliving the events that put her there but unable to change them.

While I take the comments on board for a future version of the novel, I was experimenting with these very ideas during the writing of my PhD novel. Perhaps the experiment wasn't as successful as it could have been, but a PhD in creative writing seems a good place to strive for the experimental.

The long sentences are meant as a stylistic indicator that Mary's thought patterns are convoluted. Their dual functions is also to give a Scottish flair to Mary's voice without using the slang and Scots that would be difficult to mimic and even more difficult for a modern reader to understand.

The suggestions to trim the sentences completely alters the voice and the rhythm of the text. Mary would sound modern and there would be nothing to indicate her addled mind or Scottish background if these suggestions were acted on.

The detailing of the sexual relationship between Charles and Mary should be disturbing. The Examiner worries about ‘the discourse of fatalism and the sense of inevitability that necessarily attaches to it’ when the first rape is recounted. Mary is telling the story from the cell where she waits to die, however, the initial rape shocks her completely and she vomits afterwards. I don’t see inevitability in this particular rape, but in the other cases yes, a sense of inevitability does come in, as seemed natural to me.

Mary can be seen as passive in the initial rape, although we are privy to her shock and her thoughts as to how she should react, so we know that her mind is reeling while the events occur.

As to Mary’s complicity in the rapes, this is quite a minefield to navigate. There were many ideas in my mind when I wrote these sections – I didn’t want it to be awful for her every single time and rape victims may feel betrayed by their own bodies that may respond to sexual attentions even when they are unwanted. Then I thought about Mary as a woman who had been married and how without her husband what would happen to the desire to be touched and wanted and loved. I considered Charles as a character – how would their interaction be coloured?

Then I considered the idea of Stockholm Syndrome and the likelihood that something similar may have taken place between Mary and Charles. And I also considered how Mary might want to selectively remember these events when she thought about them from the cell.

Overall, I think that all of these issues are anything but simple. I am glad that it comes across as disturbing. It should. Any relationship like this one, even one where a servant believes herself willing (even only sometimes) is problematic due to the disparity of power between a servant and a master.

