

Spatial Transgression in Laura Hird's *Born Free*

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Abstract

Drawing from space theory and gender perspective, this article focuses on spatial transgression in Laura Hird's novel *Born Free*. It revises Hird's presentation of the private and the public spaces and the disruption that takes place between the two. The acknowledgement of the necessary relationship between space and gender is key for the successful development of the points made in this study. Firstly, the private arena of the home and the established notions of motherhood are the focus for the analysis of the transgressions that occur in the domestic place through the application of activities that are associated with the public space. Secondly, another spatial disruption takes place in the streets through the engagement in activities associated with domestic areas. This article concludes that Hird's work must be seen as an urban study that focuses on elements such as the city dweller or the *flâneuse*.

Keywords: *flâneuse*, motherhood, urban space, domesticity, spatial transgression.

Resumen

Este artículo se centra en la transgresión espacial en la novela de Laura Hird *Born Free*, desde la teoría espacial y la perspectiva de género. El artículo revisa la presentación de Hird de los espacios públicos y privados y la ruptura que ocurre entre ambos. El reconocimiento de la relación necesaria entre espacio y género es clave para el desarrollo de las ideas presentadas en este estudio. En primer lugar, el espacio privado del hogar y el concepto tradicional de maternidad son el punto central para el análisis de las transgresiones que se dan en el ámbito doméstico, las cuales ocurren a través de la aplicación de actividades asociadas con el espacio público. A su vez,

en segundo lugar, ocurre otra transgresión espacial en las calles a través de la realización de actividades típicas del ámbito doméstico. Se concluirá la necesidad de presentar el trabajo de Hird como un foco de estudio urbano, a través de la aplicación de elementos urbanos como la *flâneuse*.

Palabras clave: *flâneuse*, maternidad, espacio urbano, espacio privado, transgresión espacial.

1. FICTION IN EDINBURGH

For centuries, the city of Edinburgh has figured both as the setting and as the muse for a great number of renowned authors. It is the setting for the heroic adventures in Sir Walter Scott's writings and for Robert Louis Stevenson's classic gothic stories. So far, the Scottish capital has been usually associated with a unique and enchanting atmosphere. In *On Glasgow and Edinburgh*, Robert Crawford metonymically refers to the Royal Mile to highlight the city's changing nature, which affects inevitably the way in which it is presented in literature over time: "So freighted with stories, history and souvenir shops, the Royal Mile changes its name as it goes, and can seem to alter, too, according to the season and the time of the day" (2013: 74). In the twentieth century, the city of Edinburgh becomes the locus of self-identification in the work of one of its most popular authors, Muriel Spark.¹ Spark was able to portray the realness of Scottish society for decades, depicting personal life experiences in the process, as it is reflected in her representation of Edinburgh public education in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961).

The city of Edinburgh itself, being the capital of Scotland, is the heart of a nation that is known to be haunted by the so-called Caledonian Antiszygy.² There is indeed a relationship of opposites in the Edinburgh of the fictional work to be analysed in this article, which is important to take into consideration for this study on space. At the end of the twentieth century, Irvine Welsh's work becomes the most iconic example of contemporary writing from the city. His focus on Edinburgh and its subcultures granted him worldwide recognition with the publication of *Trainspotting* (1993), whose film adaptation by

Danny Boyle in 1996 contributed greatly to the popularity of the text. Welsh gave voice to working-class and marginal subjectivities in Edinburgh's underworld. Laura Hird's portrayals of the city of Edinburgh have often been paralleled with Welsh's—they even had their short stories published in the same volume of *Children of Albion Rovers* (1996)—yet what makes her work distinctive is her geopolitical representation of gender issues in Scotland's capital city. In contrast with *Trainspotting's* peripheral neighbourhood of Leith, Hird writes a parallel unpleasant Edinburgh, adding the portrayal of a community of lower class, city dwellers who also abuse drugs amongst other things. Besides, she gives a significant more striking contrast by creating circumstances in which the characters are trapped in environments that are expected to be places of comfort, but where in fact her protagonists undergo unsettling experiences. Hird is the author of the novel *Born Free* (2001) and two collections of short stories: *Nail and Other Stories* (1997) and *Hope and Other Urban Tales* (2006). Through funny, emotional, deeply honest and realistic writing, her work explores the situation of Scottish society during the last decade of the twentieth century, passed the year of the devolution into the twenty-first century. These aspects place her in an ideal position to analyse her remarkably metropolitan narrations, all of them set in various locations in the city of Edinburgh.

Born Free deals with the experiences of four members of a rather dysfunctional family: married couple Angie and Vic and their children Joni and Jake lead their lives individually yet they uncomfortably share an atypical domestic space. The alcoholic mother provides nothing to the household whilst the depressed father prefers to spend his hours working as a bus driver, repeating his route around Edinburgh again and again, rather than return to a neglected household where finding their dog dead seems unsurprising. Meanwhile, the disregarded children develop peculiar relationships with their sexualities. In my analysis, established notions of the concept of home will be presented in order to assess Hird's challenge to conventional approaches to the private and public spheres. Linda McDowell studies the ambivalence of these domestic spaces, whose "connotations of shelter and security, of pleasure, and as a storehouse of memories' (1999: 72), in fact conceal the actual hierarchies they sustain. In Hird's novel, we find violence, fear, and even death in the

depictions of the home. Similarly, the character that should incarnate the positive associations of domesticity is Angie, the mother, who is portrayed as a one of the most dysfunctional characters in the story. In fact, it could be argued that the protagonists keep looking for a true dwelling, which is certainly not found in the family house or on the streets. In this article, I want to take a step further and present the value of the home and the street as instances of disrupted spaces in each sphere: private and public. As Doreen Massey (1994) argues, the terms space and place bear a multiplicity of meanings and connotations. In this article, the public and the private will be considered two binary spaces with a representative place or sphere for each of them: the street and the home, respectively. The term transgression will be employed to illustrate the instances where the boundaries between the two spaces seem to be blurred, and as a consequence, the private and public spaces are subjected to disruption.

2. DOMESTICITY

The aim of this article is to analyse the oppositional relationship between the public and private spheres portrayed in Hird's novel. In order to do so, I will first of all examine to what extent the boundaries between them are presented in conflict. This seems to be done through the representation of a chaotic environment in which spaces coexist, for it is yet another case of duelling polarities. Massey explains the link between the definition of a specific place shaped by locality and its corresponding cultural identity, consequently, in a society in which such a strong identity is established from the first paragraphs as it is the 'Scottishness' in Hird's work, it should be expected to find the corresponding association with the place where the inhabitants would consider to be their home, thus challenging Massey's assertions. Nevertheless, we encounter a contradiction that can be interpreted as Hird's attempt at providing a suitable scenario for the difficult confrontation that another pair of polarities is undergoing: private and public.

The relationship between the private and the public spaces has changed over history and it has become a challenge to establish the

corresponding borderlines between the two. In her study of this binary of spheres, McDowell focuses on the significant differentiation between the “private arena of the home” and the public aspects in industrial societies regarding the social construction of accepted qualities of gender, as related to waged work, politics and power (1999: 96). *Born Free* presents instances of moral transgressions that are construed in terms of spatial transgression. More specifically, she narrates the actions of the four members of a dysfunctional family who are affected by the state of affairs McDowell refers to. The distinction that must be attributed to Hird’s writing lies on the fact that she demonstrates her ability to imagine impossible scenarios that actually bear undeniable truths. The following assertion rightly explains the reason behind this: “The division between the public and the private, just like the distinction between geographical scales, is a socially constructed and gendered division that feminist scholarship has challenged and attempted to overturn” (149). As McDowell recalls, let us not forget that identities are social constructions and, therefore, the identities developed in the fictional work—which will be analysed below—are direct results of the relationship between the public and the private. In Hird’s work, traditional domestic spaces are challenged through the application of practices that are typical of public areas: violence, fear, lack of comfort. Similarly, the street is presented as the scenario for practices that are associated with private spaces, primarily sexual practices. Both spheres and the boundaries between them are transgressed by Hird’s characters in their spatial performances. The home and the street are interrelated spaces in Hird’s depiction of spatial transgression. As McDowell states, “the divisions and associations are more complexed than a simple binary division between the public and the private” (168). In this vein, I will focus specifically on one representative sphere of each space: the streets and the home.

Indeed, private spaces are disrupted in *Born Free* and Hird’s discourse presents two ways in which the disruption occurs: Firstly, the already established connotations of the term ‘home’ are no longer valid in the spaces created in her texts. Secondly, the fact that such long-established rules do not apply anymore, we could infer that the resulting circumstances should be ideal, as the imposed traditions have brought such inconsistency to their dwellers; nevertheless, that is not

the case encountered in Hird. In its stead, we find other factors that produce equal undesirable effects. For instance, Carole Jones suggests that the behaviour of women characters in *Born Free* is affected by the influence of second-wave feminism in conjunction with the rise of post-feminism. Such behaviour seems to be affected in terms of the women's relationship with their sexuality and self-respect, as it is summarised in the following quotation: "Returning the women to the confines of a restabilized family structure posits the failure of liberal feminism to have effected change in the most basic of social institutions and gender power relations" (Jones 2015: 393).

In all of Hird's fictional works, the representation of the home carries negative overtones. Unhappy working-class protagonists from fragmented homes live in the city of Edinburgh, trying to carry on with their lives indicating that they want to do so without much inconvenience. Hird's city dwellers ache for leaving the house: the homes (family and living surroundings) are evidently shown to be inconsistent. On the same note, the image of the family in *Born Free* is certainly dysfunctional, and the four members (Angie, Vic, Joni and Jake) are aware of it and share their thoughts in Hird's humoristic narrations. As Massey contends, the gendered distribution of space has been particularly contradictory and pernicious for women. She explains that the concept of the home has been constructed as a "woman's place" whose meaning implies an association with stability and reliability. The views of place commonly understood as "nostalgia for something lost" are associated with the woman, and coded female: "Home is where the heart is . . . and where the woman (mother, lover-to-whom-you-will-one-day-return) is also" (1994: 180). This assertion leads to examine the presentation of the mother in the novel: Angie, the character with the strongest personality, sees her house as a prison. Even though she never takes agency in abandoning it completely, the place and the people who inhabit it make her not want to be there. The family were removed from their home forcefully due to Angie's alcoholism; their former neighbours made them feel compelled to relocate. Consequently, Angie promised to quit and it is suggested that, for a while, before the novel starts, circumstances remained calm. In *Motherhood and Space* (2005), Sarah Hardy and Caroline Wiedmer present the idea of mothering spaces and try to analyse what constitutes mothering and the

consequences of prescribed ideas of domesticity. Their study helps this article to establish factors affecting the society surrounding the mothering character in *Born Free* by approaching this idea from a private-public division as well:

The division between the domestic and the public is central to this discussion. While this division has been critiqued at length in feminist discourse, many mothering subjects have an abiding experience of ideologies that rest on just this distinction, an experience that has not necessarily dissolved in the face of increasing theoretical sophistication. Examining the division of domestic versus public spaces, while understanding that it can mean vastly different things for different people, therefore remains an important move for complicating the static conception of where women and particularly mothers “belong.” (2005: 4)

In *Born Free*, Angie starts drinking heavily again, declaring that home is the state into which she goes when she drinks: “The first sip, I swear, gives me a rush, right up my spine, that explodes inside my chest like air-waves are all reopening. It tastes so strong, it must be double. Right away, fuck, what a feeling. I am come home” (Hird 2001: 54). As a result, the house gradually falls into disarray: as she is out drinking, she forgets to do the grocery shopping and other chores, tasks that used to be her responsibility. In direct relation with her drinking, comes the cheating on the husband, Vic, with another man. It is only when she has intimate relations with her lover in her own bedroom that she accepts the house as a place of comfort: “Home – the place where Raymond fucked me the other night, that’s all it is to me now. I have more affection for the bed he buggered me in than I do for my family” (187). Thus, Angie’s own concept of home appears to be a factor that influences on her behaviour which manifests through transgressing acts —i.e. physical violence— in the private space.

Moreover, and following this idea of the influence of the mothering figure, the rest of the characters’ behaviour seems to be born out of Angie’s attitude. Therefore, I will describe the relationship of each protagonist with their conception of home.

As main sufferer of Angie's mental imbalance, Vic has become a martyr figure who is full of resignation. For him, the house is only home when he manages to be alone to sit on the sofa and drink beer: "I savour the brief 15 minutes I generally have in the flat at night before everyone comes trundling in" (9). He mostly ignores Angie in all aspects, including the sexual, for taking Prozac —the main road to his resignation— has made him sexually dysfunctional. However, Vic clings to hope in his children, with whom he tries to bond by going to the football match (Jake) and by having deep conversations (Joni) expecting them to confide in him. Even though the adolescent daughter only sees her house as a useful place with rooms where she can masturbate, her relationship with it is yet not as unusual, as she still sees it a space for privacy. Nevertheless, as for the people occupying the same space, she feels completely unloved: "They all ruffle my hair in this house. Ignore me for months then ruffle my hair and think that makes it all right" (19). Consequently, Joni's conduct is appalling in conjunction with the hatred she flares towards everyone and towards herself. When stating their opinions, Jake and his sister continuously show that their awareness of privacy and intimacy is practically non-existent. This could be so due to their inconsistent mother figure and the circumstances they are exposed to because of Angie's personality. It is Joni who receives such influence in a more direct way and fails completely at practising affection: "Dad sticks his head round the door when he gets back from the hospital . . . I've a bizarre urge to ask him to join us, but that would just be sad" (241). In relation to this, Massey asserts: "The identities of 'woman' and of the 'home-place' are intimately tied up with each other" (1994: 180). These situations in *Born Free* explain the direct relationship existing between the mother figure and the next generation's behaviour. Besides, due to her problem of alcoholism, Angie resorts to physical violence, reaching the point where we can see that she does not offer the corresponding traits of a homely mother (consideration, attention and love); instead, she only provides his family with threats, negligence and violence.

Furthermore, the family's behaviour is shaped by a society whose characteristics do not seem to fit the characters' experiences. In other words, their everyday experiences are socially affected by the structure of the physical landscape, as, for instance, people living in a house designed for a nuclear family. This is what Jessica Sewell addresses as

‘experienced landscapes’, which are the physical landscapes as experienced in daily practices (2012: 597), and their definition accurately illustrates the circumstances surrounding *Born Free*’s family. In some way or another, each human relationship existing in the novel seems to be defective, especially according to the established characteristics of the nuclear family. In this presentation of characters acting in dysfunctional ways in the social structure that has been imposed on them, Hird successfully portrays inconsistent boundaries of privacy. Indeed, there are valuable elements in her work that are in need of the corresponding recognition that only male authors have received hitherto. Through her writings, Hird is able to present conflicting dualities at different levels in order to portray the overall pair of opposites on which this analysis focuses: the private and the public. Drawing from Hird’s dual presentation of space, the idea of the home is disrupted by challenging the established conceptions specifically in relation to the woman’s place in the home. Concurrently, in the following section it will be explored how the public space is disrupted as well. This second disruption also occurs via the characters’ unconventional behaviour in certain spaces, this time within the public sphere. This other transgression illustrated in *Born Free*, which is performed mainly through sexual practices, will be examined in order to explore its effects along with its relationship with the disruption of the domestic space.

3. THE STREETS OF *BORN FREE*

The question remains as to how the public space is disrupted in Hird’s work. It is necessary to analyse the circumstances surrounding the characters’ behaviour on the street, as the two spaces are linked, McDowell declares: “A focus on the social relations within a domestic space crosses the boundary between the private and the public, between the particular and the general, and is not, as is often incorrectly asserted, a focus on the “merely” domestic or the private sphere” (1999: 72-73). Similarly to the analysis above, there are established associations with the public space that have been imposed previously in history. Accordingly, Hird demolishes the expected behaviours that are regulated by such entrenched principles. In their desperate need of belonging somewhere, which

the private space of the home has failed at providing, Hird's fictional protagonists carry out certain practices in the sphere that remains available for them: the public space. Mainly in all her fictional works, it is especially the younger characters who are associated with the unconventional use for a public space. For this particular analysis the following quotation offers a significant approach as to the explanation for the link between the public spheres and this demographic: "A range of other groups [apart from women] are also discriminated against in terms of access to particular spaces. Young people, people of colour and "countercultural" groups often find that they are harassed and moved along . . . as urban public spaces become increasingly less accessible and privatized" (McDowell 1999: 151). In Hird's work, the graveyard is a common example of the public space that city dwellers pursue to spend time with adolescent friends or engage in sexual intercourse. In relation to this, McDowell addresses the notion of "subaltern counterpublics," used by marginalised groups, where they "might articulate their needs, so constructing them in opposition to the dominant or legitimate uses of these spaces" (151).

The ways in which Hird creates a disruption in the public space are full of uncomfortable situations mainly linked to sexuality. For instance, when Angie starts her affair, she resorts to public places like the pub. In addition, the secret relationship that she starts with her work colleague, Raymond, seems to develop together with her relationship with alcoholism. Throughout the novel, we can observe that, while her attitude towards her marriage unfolds into cheating on her husband, her promise to stay sober is abandoned as well: "With each drink, we get increasingly tactile with one another and the more inevitable it seems that something is going to happen between us" (2001: 55). Furthermore, whenever Angie questions her actions, she tends to blame her weakness towards alcohol on Vic: "I'm going to get steaming so quickly, I better watch it. Or maybe Vic's just made me neurotic. I'm sure I'll be fine, I always was. I was them was the problem" (54). Therefore, Angie blames her actions on the home that she and her husband have modelled. In drinking again and in starting a sexual affair she is abandoning a private space that is supposed to provide comfort and safety, i.e. as she is not acting accordingly to what this space requires, she stops doing what she is *supposed* to.

Mainly, Angie's actions are related to sexuality, as she enjoys having sexual encounters with Raymond in public restrooms. What is more, her daughter Joni seems to have the same tendency and she aims at committing similar transgressive actions, always in relation to her sexuality. Joni's primary tendencies, such as being a bad friend or constantly longing for sex are precisely habits into which her mother has fallen. Joni's relationship with sex is mainly an obsession with the loss of her virginity with an adult before she becomes sixteen years old and, therefore, it becomes legal. Moreover, her mother's sexual convictions are similarly unusual. Watson's assertion explains the association of sexuality being present in the public as a questionable behaviour:

Underlying some of the resistances to rubbing along in public, encountering others who are different, is a distaste towards others who behave in ways that are deemed inappropriate and unacceptable, often because they are designated as "private", and that this produces and legitimates hostility in the self to others who are different. (Watson 2006: 161)

Therefore, the actions of *Born Free's* protagonists are perceived as spatial transgressions. Moreover, there are plenty of distressing scenarios in which the limits of intimacy and privacy are severely deranged. Another instance of the children's lack of boundaries is clearly seen with the following quotation, when Jake is watching a television personality: "She's wearing a really tight top that shows off her tits in a way that shouldn't be allowed on children's TV. Why couldn't Dad've married someone like her? Imagine that tucking you in at night" (2001: 81-82). Hird presents this as normal, uncomfortable only to the reader. In their ignorance, the characters do not recognise their actions as unacceptable. Such behaviour will rebound to the private space, adopting attitudes of inappropriate nature also in the house and therefore, breaking with any defined limit that might have remained. The identity resulting from this chaotic environment is one that reflects the same emotional turmoil, thus creating dwellers with contentious personalities whose hope is doomed to failure.

The characters that Hird creates keep failing in their attempts at finding ways of belonging outside the private space. Despite all these attempts in the form of sexual practices, we find that the search never reaches the end. In her essay "Femininity in Crisis," Carole Jones declares that Hird's depictions reflect mainly the failure of feminist influences: "In *Born Free* we leave the female characters trapped in a hostile world, having failed to achieve self-determination by means of a sexual revolution appropriated and cruelly manipulated by a resurgent patriarchy" (2015: 398). As mentioned before, Vic never loses hope in building closer relationships with his children. This might be a key element in the story when we reach the point where it might be Angie who now wants to come back. This is only one interpretation for the ending of *Born Free*, yet it would match with Hird's last collection's title: *Hope*, and it can be inferred that she is suggesting some motives. The novel ends with the married couple having sex in their bed, with Angie showing intentions of giving herself to him and with Vic being physically able to perform sexual intercourse despite his medication. With this act, the characters intend to return to an intimate place. Due to the fact that the sexual encounter is described in a way which suggests that Angie was adopting a passive position, Jones interprets this moment as an instance for feminist failure, by demonstrating how the sexual act was in fact a representation of the reinstatement of traditional active and passive gender roles: "Signaling no ultimate change in relations; the drop of her arms and his commanding height above her reinforce this in the particularly fraught arena of sexual intercourse. Returning the women to the confines of a restabilized family structure posits" (2015: 393). What Jones interprets as "the failure of liberal feminism to have effected change in the most basic of social institutions and gender power relations" can as well be seen as the remains of a resigned hope to eventually find a sense of belonging. As much contradictory as that might be, it would be yet another confrontation of opposite entities which in fact matches perfectly with the kind of representation of contrasting spaces that is presented in Hird's fiction. Consequently, it is clear that Hird's portrayal of spatial transgression is present in her work through the presentation of emotionally dysfunctional characters who are trapped in disrupted domestic environments. The relationship between the private and the public that is depicted exists as a direct result the socially constructed identities that inhabit such spaces. In

this case, they are conducting a desperate search for identity in relation to space with the overall intention of challenging their former failing dwelling: the home.

We can see that Hird certainly challenges these traditional definitions for regulating behaviour in the public sphere. Homi Bhabha's words successfully summarise the significance of what Hird's fiction achieves: "There is a negotiation between gender and class, where each formation encounters the dis-placed, differentiated boundaries of its group representation and enunciative sites in which the limits and limitations of social power are encountered in an agonistic relation" (2004: 41). Hird's work challenges the recent political and economic circumstances, particularly in Scotland as, inevitably, her whole fictional work is set in the city of Edinburgh. She presents a reflection on society by means of antagonistic situations and pejorative portrayals of relationships in space. Here, it is clear that the effects of her portrayal of contemporary society reveal a reactionary nature. Bhabha writes about the "transformational value of change" and its rearticulating nature, a notion that can be associated in the first place with Hird's discourse of binaries presented above, but also with another element to be analysed in this article that deals with this idea of re-articulation. A re-imagining of the presence of the urban elements in *Born Free*, and more importantly, its effects will be performed in the final section. The different activities performed by the characters strolling around the city are also relevant for this study of space and it will be explored how do the city dwellers' experiences in the map of Edinburgh provide in their particular walkings of the city.

4. THE *FLÂNEUSE*

The influence of multiculturalism makes it necessary to conceive new approaches of the urban space and its dwellers as new contexts for the figure of the *flâneur* emerge, as Isabel Carrera affirms: "Literary and theoretical readings of the urban have also been transformed by the self-conscious postmodern context, by poststructuralist theory and by a complex vision of constructed subjectivities and difference" (2015: 3). Drawing from space and gender theory, this article focuses on the

figure of the city stroller as present in Hird's novel and her subversion of *flânerie* from a gender perspective. The voyeur, the male passer-by who finds joy in strolling around the streets, has come to be identified with Walter Benjamin's texts on Charles Baudelaire.³ More recent feminist studies of the *flâneur* have argued that *flâneurs* "might have had a female counterpart" (McDowell 154), which Lauren Elkin explores in depth in *Flâneuse* (2016). In Hird's fictional works, all the characters, in a more or less specific way, present a city of Edinburgh that certainly evokes the experiences of the urban onlooker. Although the motives of a city walker seem to have changed over time, in a contemporary tale such as Hird's we find city dwellers (male and female) whose affairs in Edinburgh are as relevant as Baudelaire's *flâneur*. The differentiation male/female is highlighted in this analysis due to the several examples of contrasting dichotomies found in the study of Hird's work. Virginia Woolf already defended the importance of a woman's right to have her own private space in *A Room of One's Own* (1929), yet it is relevant to take this notion to the urban environment in general, and the city stroller in particular as well, as Elkin suggests: "It would be nice, ideal even, if we didn't have to subdivide by gender —male walkers, female walker, *flâneurs* and *flâneuses*— but these narratives of walking repeatedly leave out a woman's experience" (2016: 20). For that very reason, for the sake of woman's acknowledgement, the figure of the *flâneuse* is stressed in this particular analysis.

Yet another relevant aspect of Hird's fiction, this time in relation to the reactionary connotations that were mentioned above, underlines another reason for the home being disrupted. By simply existing, the figure of the *flâneur/flâneuse* wields its power, mainly because, with its presence, there is already a desire for being out of the private space. This affects directly the established relation of home with the woman, whose place used to be inside. Now, the *flâneuse* represents the woman's joy in being out of the house and on the streets; free not only as a woman released from the traditional orders that imprisoned her, but also as a party which is placed equal to the *flâneur*. Different experiences of city walkers in Hird's work are presented in various ways. In her essay "The Room and the Street," Elkin studies the representation of the inside and outside in the work of Gwen John and Jean Rhys, with the latter in particular being closely associated with the

art of walking the city. Both artists, city dwellers themselves, were confined to a room for long periods of time, and in their respective arts were able to express their feeling in contrasting ways:

Unlike Rhys's characters, John does not seem to have sunk into desperation. While her behaviour may have been transgressive—posing nude and carrying on affairs with sculptors more than twice her age—she cobbled together enough of a living, from selling paintings to modelling, to live a few steps above Rhys's heroines. If John felt desperation, she was able to confine it off-canvas, while in Rhys's work it becomes both the canvas and the subject itself. (2016: 244)

The same happens in Hird's *Born Free*, in which a four-member family who lives unhappily in the same space show different ways in which they manage to cope with their hatred toward their situation. In conclusion, the home that Hird portrays does not offer the expected comfort and therefore, we find constant attempts to find a sense of belonging beyond the domestic setting. The characters keep failing at establishing a relationship between a place and an identity, yet they continue their search in the space that remains available: outside. It is then when the *flâneur/flâneuse* appears. However, the ways in which they conduct their search might lead to other frustrating ends.

Focusing on the *flâneuse's* origins in Michel de Certeau's analysis of the *flâneur*, *Born Free* suggests an association of the characters' experiences with the particular 'walkings' of the city that de Certeau presents in his essay "Walking in the City."⁴ De Certeau acknowledges that not all city walkers can be as free in their wanderings as the moneyed, male *flâneur*, as Elkin also points out, yet he invites to think that "all urban dwellers have the potential to impress their own pedestrian story on certain parts of the city" (see Bridge 47-48). In Hird's work we also find instances of agency associated to the characters. Such association contributes to give her work the condition of being read as an urban text: both *Born Free's* family and the stories' protagonists are indeed city dwellers who create their own individual walking of the city. This idea of walking in the city, which de Certeau relates to the effects of the speech acts, unfolds a major effect in

reactionary terms. For de Certeau, maps, plans and urban rules and codes constitute, as Fran Tonkiss puts it, an “unsigned gesture of refusal in the face of the official city, with its logics of planning, of surveillance and spatial order” (Tonkiss 114); these many routes “overdetermine” the individuals who make room for themselves in urban spaces. The reactionary nature of *Born Free*'s characters lies on the unconventionality of their activities, not being governed by the rules but “vanishing out of sight:” “If rationalist fantasies have held that the modern city might be laid out and governed as a total environment, a kind of social machine, the artful manoeuvres of everyday users are always slipping between the lines” (Tonkiss 114).

Following this idea on the reactionary purpose of the different walkings of the city, Tonkiss illuminates the radical and reactionary potential in the act of walking in the city. This reactionary purpose is an important feature in Hird's work, and in the following analysis I will explore this feature. On the effect of de Certeau's walking, Bridge suggests that it is “presumably a sense of personal liberation, being the author of one's own urban story, precious because unshared” (2005: 47). It has already been mentioned that Hird provides this kind of precious and unique experiences thanks to the depiction of her own remembrance. De Certeau insists on the lack of rules when walking, as if we were taking a guided tour, with instructions where to turn, when to look up or what to think (see Tonkiss 128). It is in these actions that lies the reactionary nature of the *flâneuse*: “the practice of walking in the city is a matter of telling one's own spatial stories, drawing on a mobile and private language of the streets” (Tonkiss 128). Not only in *Born Free* but in her whole oeuvre, Hird acknowledges her writing of strong women, thus giving presence to the figure of the *flâneuse* throughout all her work. Female characters in Hird's fictional works certainly perform this independent liberating act that Bridge advocates, and in it we can find a sense of rebellion.

5. CONCLUSIONS

There are different conflicting dualities in *Born Free* that reflect the overall pairing of opposites on which this article focuses: the private

and the public. It can be appreciated that Hird presents situations in the private space that strongly differ from the traditional representations of the home. Focusing on the dual presentation of space in Hird's novel, it is clear how the idea of the home is disrupted by challenging established conceptions, specifically in relation to the woman's place in the home. Concurrently, the public space is disrupted as well by means of practices of sexual nature. Certau's theory on walking the city is applied to the experiences in the city of Hird's characters. In her fiction, we find examples of agency being employed by the dwellers. Such associations give her writings the status of an urban text, as the protagonists of her work fit the pattern of city strollers who create their particular 'walking of the city', a notion which unfolds strong effects in terms of reactionary purposes. This article has illustrated how the conceptions about spatial concepts such as the domestic one can today be very different from the established notions that have been present so frequently in other contexts. The relationship between the spheres of the public and the private has changed over time, leading to the challenging task to establish corresponding boundaries between them. The traditional associated meaning of the private arena of the home is challenged in Hird's fiction through the appliance of practices associated to the public space. At the same time, the private areas are substituted by the public space when we see sexual practices taking place outside home. In Hird's fiction, both spheres and the boundaries between one and the other are victims of transgression, leading to the consequent disruption of the definition of the limits between private and public domains. Hird's representation of spatial transgression can be seen through her portrayal of emotionally defective protagonists who find themselves imprisoned in dysfunctional private environments. The depiction of the relationship between the private and the public is directly related to the socially constructed identities that populate those spaces. In *Born Free*, the characters conduct a search for identity which is to be determined in relation to space. Their overall intention is to challenge the failing domestic space. Yet, failure is also the result of their trials in the public sphere. Consequently, they would resort to the domestic space once again. In addition, there are some interpretations as to what their return to the private space represents, suggesting the failure of feminist ideals in contemporary contexts, which, in relation to this analysis, contribute to the reactionary purpose found in Hird's fictional works.

NOTES

¹ See Gifford and McMillan's *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*.

² This refers to the idea of opposites within the same entity. Frequently referred in relation to Scottish psychology in terms of literature, geography, religion and nation. See George Gregory Smith's *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence*.

³ See Benjamin's *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*.

⁴ This essay is included in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980).

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