


Identity and Intertextuality in Kate Atkinson's *Emotionally Weird**

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Abstract

Many women writers employ intertextuality to question gender identity and to produce female characters who are free of the narratives that have proven to be violent, oppressive and not viable for the contemporary female experience. In this article, I propose a reading of Kate Atkinson's 2000 novel, *Emotionally Weird* in the light of Bakhtin's argument on intertextuality in novelistic discourse to understand how the novel rewrites the gendered individual. *Emotionally Weird* combines the quest for a new female character and the investigation of postmodern novel's relation to previous novelistic discourses. Kate Atkinson stages a quest of identity, crystallized in Euphemia Stuart Murray's search for her true parentage, which merges with the quest of the paternity of the novel searched through the rewritings of literary traditions. The new woman that emerges when these quests are resolved is an illegitimate woman writer; a bastard born out of wedlock who disrupts the law of inheritance while the postmodern novel is similarly shown as an illegitimate novelistic discourse born out of its dialogism with previous novelistic discourses and other literary forms.

Keywords: Postmodern novel, women's writing, parody, feminism, rewriting.

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Kate Atkinson'ın *Emotionally Weird* Romanında Kimlik ve Metinlerarasılık

Öz

Birçok kadın yazar toplumsal cinsiyeti sorgulamak ve baskıcı ve artık çağdaş dünya için geçerli olmayan anlatılardan kurtulmuş kadın karakterler yaratmak için metinlerarası ilişkileri kullanır. Bu makalede Kate Atkinson'ın *Emotionally Weird* adlı romanı Bakhtin'in roman söyleminde metinlerarası ilişkileri kuramı çerçevesinde incelenmiştir. *Emotionally Weird* Euphemia Stuart Murray adlı karakterin biyolojik kökenlerini arayışı üzerinden bir kimlik sorunsalı sunar ve bu arayışı önceki edebiyat anlatılarının yeniden yazımlarıyla gerçekleştirilen postmodern romanın kökeni üzerine bir arayışla birleştirir. Bu iki sorgulama sonucunda ortaya evlilik dışı doğmuş, miras kanunlarını alt üst eden gayri meşru bir kadın yazar ortaya çıkar. Postmodern roman da önceki roman söylemleri ile ilişkiler içinde doğmuş, orijinal değil, yeniden yazımlardan oluşan benzer bir illegal söylem olarak sunulur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Postmodern roman, kadın yazını, parodi, feminizm, yeniden yazım.

INTRODUCTION

Bakhtin writes that parodic writings test belief systems and values, turn the narratives inside out to expose their failure as valid forms of representation at moments of change in literary history. The prevalence of parodies, rewritings, and incorporation of various novel traditions in addition to references to literary theory in the highly self-conscious narratives in the postmodern novel, then, indicates the inadequacy of the inherited literary narratives and the need for new narratives to make sense of the changing world. For Bakhtin because a literary work is not an autonomous whole, it needs to be understood in its relations with other genres, speeches, styles, jargons, and dialects that constitute the linguistic background of the work (1996: 301-315). This approach is maybe most relevant to the postmodern novel that is marked by its deliberate intertextuality (1996: 301-315). The postmodern novel captures the literary scene by exposing the inadequacy of the previous novelistic discourses, the modern and realist novel, in representing contemporary experience through parody (1996: 383-384).

Here, I propose to discuss the intertextuality in Kate Atkinson's 2000 novel, *Emotionally Weird*, which combines the quest for a new female character with an investigation of postmodern novel's relation to previous novelistic discourses. *Emotionally Weird* rewrites the gendered individual in a dialogic relation with many literary works, among which Shakespeare's *The Tempest* constitutes the framework of the novel. The novel activates and organizes *heteroglossia*, employing an array of genres and novel traditions in various ways, to produce its own theory of the novel as a genre that concentrates on creating identity within the epistemology of the era. References to literary theory is frequent in *Emotionally Weird*; the novel is "a fiction-writing manual" in Helen Benedict's words (2000: 9). Revealing the sign-systems on which the postmodern relies, the novel underlines the centrality of female subjectivity and the problematization of representation in novelistic discourse, beginning from eighteenth century novel. Kate Atkinson stages a quest of identity, crystallized in Euphemia Stuart Murray's¹ search for her true parentage, alongside the quest of the paternity of the novel searched through the literary traditions. Since identity is posited as the central concern of the novelistic discourse, the investigation of the postmodern novel's relation to previous novelistic discourses becomes the investigation of the new woman, a new form of subjectivity at the same time.

The novel is composed of Effie and Nora's narration; Effie's about her university life that she offers to Nora in return of Nora's reluctant narration of the family past and Nora's narration of Effie's parentage that Nora relates on Effie's insistence. Effie grows up with Nora, who claims to be her mother, on a constant move from one seaside town to another, without having seen any other family member or having heard of a coherent family history. All that Effie knows about her identity is contradictory and obviously unreliable bits and pieces, -even her birth certificate is fake, as Nora confesses one day (Atkinson 2001: 141). At the end, Effie learns that all she knew about herself was wrong, that Nora has told her many lies whereas Nora's unbelievable claims such as her having only one grandmother and being a virgin are true as she confesses that she is virgin because she is actually Effie's mother's stepdaughter. Since Nora's parents were brother and sister, her claim that Effie has only one grandmother is true, too. At the end of the novel, Effie appears as a writer of detective

¹ Henceforth Euphemia Stuart Murray will be referred to as Effie and her mother will be referred to as Euphemia to avoid confusion.

fiction. Hence, the new woman that emerges when Effie's quest is resolved is an illegitimate woman writer; a bastard born out of wedlock who disrupts the law of inheritance, that is Effie who inherits the family name without having blood relations to the Stuart Family. On the other hand, the postmodern novel, investigated in Effie's narration of her academic life, is similarly shown as an illegitimate novelistic discourse born out of its dialogism with previous novelistic discourses and other literary forms, which is *Emotionally Weird* itself.

In Search of Identity

By emphasizing sexual difference and presenting the question of identity within family relations, especially in mother-daughter relationships, Atkinson, like many other women writers, suggests that the individual is always a gendered individual. This impulse to trace female identity in relation to familial bonds, which can be as violent and tragic as they are nurturing and loving suggests that, as Sinead McDermott also notes in relation to *Behind the Scenes at the Museum*, for Atkinson identity can only be described and understood within family relations. However, while family relations have an important role in the individual's formation, Atkinson unsettles the form and meaning of the family. Effie is disappointed in her search for the truth of her identity at the end not because she cannot learn about her true parentage but because it turns out that there is no significance she can derive from the random passing meeting of two strangers, Mabel Orchard and Chick. When her desire for the truth of her parentage is fulfilled, she is left with an insignificant and illegitimate origin in her biological parents. Nora continues to function as a mother even after Effie learns that she is not her biological mother but the meaning of motherhood has undergone a change now. The mother becomes a co-author and audience in this new configuration of the female subject. This constellation of the mother and father figures suggests that the new woman is defined in writing where one becomes a mother by collaborating in the writing of identity.

The first chapter of Effie's first person narration dated to 1972 when she is a college student of 21, subtitled "Blood and Bone," begins with questions about her paternity and identity. While many novel traditions are parodied in Effie and Nora's complementary narration, the overall narrative frame is built on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Kate Atkinson traces the origins of the modern individual in the Renaissance. In this allusion to Shakespeare, there is the implication that an ambiguous gender difference and problematic power relations were already inherent in the subject of humanism from the very beginning. In the displaced roles of men and women of *The Tempest* in Atkinson's text, gender is laid bare as a problematic, artificial construct.² The rewriting of the power-struggle in *The Tempest* emphasizes the battle between the sexes. By dismantling the patriarchal family and identity built within the play's codes on the Scottish island, which corresponds to the island where Prospero is exiled to, under the control of a female, that is Nora, *Emotionally Weird* offers a new sexual identity who is an illegitimate woman writer educated by other woman writers.

The parallel between *The Tempest* and *Emotionally Weird* is drawn first of all with the setting of what we can call the main narrative due to its being the largest section; a remote, unpopulated Scottish island. Apart from Effie, who is on leave from college because she is

² See also Foakes for an analysis of the play in terms of violence and power-struggles between the male and the female characters and figures in the plot (2003: 195-209).

sick, and Nora, who has settled on her family holiday home a couple of years before, the island has no other inhabitants and is detached from any sign of civilization in the middle of nowhere, just like the island where Prospero is exiled to with his daughter, Miranda. This fairy-tale-like setting, alongside Effie's description of Nora as a witch-like woman who is allegedly in control of the weather and the owner of a small boat called the *Sea-Adventure*, associates her with Prospero. Like Prospero, Nora is the mistress of the weather and irrational powers, and Effie has to learn who she truly is like Miranda. In contrast to Miranda, who is not much interested in her father's story of her family past, in *Emotionally Weird* Effie has to nudge reluctant Nora to tell her who she truly is. Nora imitates Prospero's storytelling where he reveals to Miranda her past and thereby her true identity in a subverted way. Atkinson, like Julie Taymor's 2010 adaptation of the play, makes Prospero a woman, who befits better the dreamlike atmosphere of the island that symbolizes the subconscious by being subject to irrational powers, that is, the place of forbidden knowledge and desires. In *The Tempest*, Prospero is identified with Caliban's mother, Sycorax, on one level, as they are both banished from society for their use of magic. The father and the daughter replace the mother and the son, Sycorax and Caliban on the island. While this indicates a power turnover from the mother to the father, this correlation also problematizes the patriarch's identity by ascribing him a maternal role. Following this implication in Prospero's problematic identity, *Emotionally Weird* rewrites this character as a woman, Nora.

The new sexual individual, the new woman that emerges in the rewriting of *The Tempest*, is of illegitimate origin and status. Nora is the fruit of an incestuous relationship between a brother, Lachlan, and sister, Euphemia. This illegitimate woman replaces the male line of the family, claims the island and property as her own and she will leave the legacy to Effie, who has no blood relations to the Stuarts at all, besides being a bastard like Nora herself. This disruption of the bloodline in the Stuarts implies a radical subversion of the regulations of inheritance and identity where blood has no defining, empowering effect. As Nora reluctantly unfolds her family history towards the end, the "un-mother" Nora, as Effie will call her, appears to have seized power over the male line and property. At the end of Shakespeare's text, Prospero gives up his magic and returns to society to become part of civilization. Julie Taymor's Prospera, too, goes back to the sphere of the conscious at the end and conforms to the social order by marrying Miranda and Ferdinand, symbolized by her wearing her tight corset. Here, however, the storytelling results in the disruption of the myths of family, motherhood, and of the narratives of identity and truth.

The illegitimacy of identity and succession on the island will be even more accentuated with the unreliability of Nora's story. According to Nora's highly complicated and dubious story, Nora is the child of a sister and brother, Euphemia and Lachlan, who keep this secret from her and treat her as a sister. Euphemia poisons her bed-ridden father and her step-mother, called Mabel, and attempts to murder Mabel's new-born illegitimate baby - fathered by a random stranger, Chick-, Effie, to prevent the baby from sharing her inheritance. Nora rescues the baby from Euphemia when she was about to drown her in the river. Overwhelmed with hatred against Euphemia for concealing the truth about her parentage, as she has so far gathered for herself that she is the fruit of an incestuous relationship, and for abusing her, Nora drowns her mother. Nora runs away with the family diamonds and the car as the scene of three dead bodies, two of them from poisoning and one drowned does not seem easy to explain. The big surprise comes when Nora's narration of the family past and Effie's narration of her college life overlap and we learn that Chick, a

police officer back then and a private investigator now in Effie's narration, is her father. Nora's absorbing narration, deserving well the name of the chapter "The Great Excitement" –in allusion to Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* where false expectations lead to misery– stops here. We will later learn that, as it happens, Nora's mother, Euphemia, with another twist of the plot, is rescued from drowning by a man who was about to commit suicide by the river that night. Euphemia, mirroring Sycorax, the absent mother, appears like a ghost towards the end with her own version of the story. She tags Effie to tell her story, which incriminates Nora. She claims that Nora murdered Mabel and Donald, attempted to murder Euphemia, her mother, and made a run with the family diamonds and car. This sounds more plausible than Nora's version, of course, yet our expectations of setting the story straight is disappointed as Effie's expectations of establishing the truth of her origins are.

Nora's adoption of, or stealing Effie is an act that turns all rules of blood relations and affection built on bloodline upside down. While it is understandable that she had to run away when there were three dead bodies to explain for, her taking Effie along with her when she does not have any relation to the baby is suggestive. Her life as a fugitive would surely have been much easier without a new-born baby to look after when even defining their relationship is very difficult (Effie is Nora's mother's stepmother's daughter from a stranger, or in other words, Nora is Effie's mother's stepdaughter). An abused child of incestuous union herself, Nora raises and educates another bastard as the new woman. Moreover, by naming the baby after her own mother, in raising this orphan, Nora creates a new bond, a new mother-daughter relationship, a sisterhood, or a bond between just two women in a new paradigm that is not defined by blood or family relations. Nora proves herself to be the magician, the mistress of arts who orchestrates her plot. It seems that when Nora abandons her husband and children to find herself in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, she ends up in the realm of arts where she is now the mistress of *the house of fiction* rather than a doll in the father's or the husband's house.

Nora's story, though it discloses Effie's parentage, has many loose ends and raises more questions than it answers. The end of Nora's story is evocative of the realist novel not because it neatly reaches a resolution and explains away every puzzle but, on the contrary, because it creates an illusion of resolution against all the odds. Despite the realist novelistic discourse's ostensible happy endings achieved by settling everyone within the patriarchal family, the novels usually become a critique of the problems created by patriarchal family and middle class culture. *Emotionally Weird* exposes this complexity and problems of family relations.

A woman without any knowledge of her family, Effie appears at the turn of the millennium to trace her legacy in the literary tradition, feminist movement, and in her family history, which yet again reveals crimes and traumas of misogyny, incest, and abuse. That this search is set in the 1970s implies that Effie, the new woman is educated in the intellectual atmosphere of the 1970s, but obviously, Atkinson is not an exponent of the ideas and movements that flourished back then, as the parodic portrayal of the movements, the major actors and actresses of those movements suggests. The disharmony, antagonism, and animosity among the members of the women's liberation group at Dundee University, and the helplessness of the members of the commune, Balniddrie farmhouse, throw a pessimistic look on the women's movement in the 1970s.

Similarly, academy becomes the target of Atkinson's criticism as Effie's dropping out of school in addition to leaving the family and father figures behind implies. Though Atkinson's criticism sounds too harsh when one considers the opening of the first women's studies departments and the inclusion of women writers in the curriculum in the 1970s, Atkinson's association of academy with father figures resonates with Adrienne Rich's comments on the study of literature in the 1950s and 1980s. Rich writes of the academic institutions as a professional institution concerned with prestige, money, and inclusion in fraternity (1983: 26). It is understandable to some extent that Effie's education as a woman writer requires her disillusionment with the academy that is governed by a certain class and sex.

The idea that Effie is the new woman, a woman who needs to figure out who she is, is signalled at the beginning of her narration with the ironic authorial tone of her first sentence, "*My mother is a virgin. (Trust me.)*" (Atkinson 2001: 23). With this statement, Effie asserts herself as the female Jesus, the god's daughter, as the only virgin mother is Virgin Mary. This gesture of changing the paradigms for religion and identity recalls Luce Irigaray's call for a female spirituality that feeds female desire and a culture and language that houses two sexes. Effie, then, ventures to create a religion that will add god's daughter alongside god's son, here, goddess' daughter as her mother Nora is represented as a goddess figure. The association of the holiday house and the island with Sumerian cities and the ruins of a Minoan palace reinforce Nora's status as a goddess from Greek mythology (Atkinson 2001: 72; 74). Both Nora's island and female cultures are subject to time and forgetfulness. This resemblance between Nora's island and the Sumerian and Minoan civilizations where female religions and female traditions flourished suggests that Nora is the repressed female voice speaking from a dreamy island on the margins of civilization. This idea is further emphasized when Effie describes Nora as "*Mnemosyne's forgotten daughter*" (Atkinson 2001: 28). The daughter of Gaia and Uranus, Mnemosyne, the personification of memory in Greek mythology is closely associated with art as well since her daughters, the nine muses, are the guardians, embodiments and inspiration of arts and knowledge. Also, Nora's claim to descent from the Stuarts, the alleged descendants of King Arthur, the heroic native of Britain who fought against the Saxon invaders, emphasizes her claim to ancient cultures and religions. Nora, the witchlike storyteller transfers power, property, and identity to an illegitimate woman as the future of Britain.

The narration of the new woman's search for her identity is a *künstlerroman*, too, since this search turns into the education of the woman writer as Effie becomes a writer of detective stories at the end. Mary Eagleton argues that the woman author has been a popular figure in women's writing since the 1970s. The impetus she identifies for this trend is first of all feminism's interest in authorship's association with authority, and alongside authority, cultural legitimacy and place. Writing about women writers helps the woman author to explore her own situation through her protagonists as well. However, it is not easy to situate Effie's writing in this pessimistic picture of the woman author struggling in the literary field and market or facing the challenge of negotiating the demands of the private sphere and their public roles as a writer as Mary Eagleton argues. While claiming that she represents the coming of the utopian age that Hélène Cixous celebrated in the "*The Laugh of the Medusa*" would be imposing an imaginary revolutionary significance on Effie's authorship, her position and engagement with writing does not project the challenges that Mary Eagleton discusses either. Effie, on her book tour, is very much confident and easy in her role in the

book market at the end of the novel. Effie's authorship undermines the authority of this position, as she exposes the writing process as a cooperative, plagiarist process governed by fear of failing and desire for success or at least, by motivation for avoiding trouble, which seems to be the motivation for many students' writing at the college. Still, as Mary Eagleton observes of the woman authors who have to choose between their intellectual career and motherhood, unable to negotiate these two demands, Effie becomes a writer after she quits her family and boyfriend.

While Sandra Meyers is right when she says that the metafictional and metanarrative devices in *Emotionally Weird* center on the quest of identity, unlike Meyer's conclusion, Atkinson does not offer a stable identity at the end. The identity Effie gains at the end of her narration is the illegitimate woman writer, who has to give up her expectations of deriving any significance from her biological roots and who is mothered by co-authors and readers.

In Search of the Paternity of the Postmodern Novel

Effie's quest for identity that she believes lies in her biological origins is placed alongside a quest for the postmodern novel's paternity. Effie and Nora's narration that is staged as a contest, as a form of collaborative story telling questions and rewrites various novelistic traditions. Eighteenth century novel, in Effie's parody of *Tristram Shandy*, Victorian novels, especially Dickensian novel, alluded to by both narrators and modernist novel discussed in the inserted genres in Effie's narration of her academic life at Dundee University are investigated in terms of their formation of identity and narrative techniques. The result of this investigation is *Emotionally Weird* itself, the postmodern novel that is the rewriting of previous novelistic discourses. In this rewriting, Atkinson suggests that identity has been the main concern of the novelistic discourse since the eighteenth century and the different narrative techniques reflect the dominant epistemology of the particular era.

Effie and Nora's narrations exemplify *parodic stylization*, one form of creating an artistic representation of a language in novelistic discourse that exposes the internal dialogism of language. In parodic stylization, the speaker speaks in the stylized language, represents another's language to cast light on the linguistic consciousness of the stylized language. The parody works to expose the boundaries, limitations of the parodied language, but still it "*re-creat[e]s the parodied language as an authentic whole, giving it its due as a language possessing its own internal logic and as one capable of revealing its own world inextricably bound up with the parodied language*" (Bakhtin 1996: 364). In Nora and Effie's narration, the realist novel's language is subjected to such an exposition, with Effie speaking in the language of *Tristram Shandy* and Nora in Victorian novelistic discourse while modernist novel is, Henry James especially, is discussed in Effie's papers for her classes at university. This parody exposes the invalidity of these previous novelistic discourses within the contemporary epistemology. By destroying the belief systems of these languages, the whole text produces its new novelistic discourse that modifies the gendered individual of the novelistic discourse.

Effie's and Nora's story-telling enacts a performance, a sort of contest to test the validity of their different approaches to identity. The double narrative performs an experiment to test two opposing views of what the self is and how one can give an account of it. Effie's narration ventures to give the self as "*a bundle of perceptions*" as Hume said against the self that will be composed out of Nora's memories. If we are constituted of our memories, here is the identity constructed out of Nora's memories that are surely unreliable

and partial. If we are constituted of sense perceptions, on the other hand, here is Effie's absurd trial at reporting every single perception after Tristram Shandy's fashion. The identity that appears in the end is derived from the total structure of the novel that includes a combination of Effie's and Nora's stories, the 2001 Booker Prize winner collage signed by Andre Garnett, one of the students from Effie's college, and excerpts from Effie's now popular detective novel *The Hand of Fate* signed as Effie Andrews, the surname that Nora adopts when they were fugitives.

Effie's desire to gain a stable identity is shaped by narratives that she has grown up with, especially by Victorian novelists for whom identity was a determined, definable category that could be understood in a rational, coherent frame under the guard of the omniscient narrator. She hopes for a narrative similar to *Oliver Twist's*, in which her true parentage is revealed and she is restored to her true place in society (Dickens, 1999). Her phantasy that she will attain her true identity as her predecessors, such as Oliver, Pip, Tom Jones, Joseph Andrews did in the history of the novel, gives her some comfort as well, as she says: "*I grew up thinking I must be a clandestine princess of the blood royal (true and blue), awaiting the day when I could come safely into my inheritance*" (Dickens 1999; 1996; Fielding 1994; 1999). For Effie identity can be pinned down, as she says:

"Some people spend their whole lives looking for themselves, yet our self is one thing we surely cannot lose [...]. From the moment we are conceived it is the pattern in our blood and our bones are printed through with it like sticks of seaside rock. Nora, on the other hand, says that she's surprised anyone knows who they are, considering that every cell and molecule in our bodies has been replaced many times over since we were born."
(Atkinson 2001: 27)

Desperate to learn about her parentage, her "blood and bone," Effie believes in the validity and truth of a subjectivity based on biology. Effie invests in the idea of fatherhood as the clue she drops as to the ending when she says that she feels safe with Chick, which was like to have a father, illustrates (Atkinson 2001: 297). Effie's hope in her father does not look very promising, though, when we look at the fathers in the novel: Donald Stuart-Murray, the grandfather, is bedridden and unbearably ill-tempered; Lachlan is in an incestuous relationship with his sister, Euphemia, which results in her giving birth to Nora; the university professor Archie is a failure with his students, and makes a pass to his female students in addition to leaving his daughter, Maisie, to her own devices most of the time; another lecturer, Roger Lake keeps breeding uncontrollably and thinks of moving his pregnant student lover, Olivia, to his family home without consulting his wife, which results in Olivia's having an abortion by herself and suicide attempt afterwards, and not to forget Chick, with his notion of fatherhood consisting in offering Effie a cigarette when he lights one. This list of the dysfunctional if not violent fathers suggests that Effie, the new woman, and by extension the postmodern novel need not invest much hope in their paternity.

Effie's belief in the accountability of the self opposes Nora's ideas. This difference in their perception of the self will reflect in their different approaches to storytelling, too, as Nora's summary of her tale indicates. She discards

"[...] commonplace tales of Hausfrau Angst, of the woman heroically making over her life with a handsome new lover, a beautiful child, a happy ending. Instead, we shall have murder and mayhem, plots and subplots, a mad woman in the attic, purloined diamonds,

lost birthrights, heroic dogs, a soupcon of sex, a suspicion of philosophy" (Atkinson 2001: 29).

Here, with the allusions to Victorian novel, Nora mocks Effie's reliance on narratives of a coherent, determined identity. The references to the suppression of female desire with the "mad woman in the attic" in *Jane Eyre*, desire and subjectivity and Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter" and the bunch of male protagonists in search of their heritage and origin in Victorian novel in such a mocking manner reveals that Nora's story will subvert these narratives. Besides revealing that biology is rather a complicated text that can be interpreted in more than one way, Nora's fragmentary narrative disclosing a long, complicated, shocking family past in a very concise way undermines Victorian narrative conventions. When Nora mentions finding Mabel's crucifix around her neck when Effie was born, for example, Effie expects her to give it back to her now "as one does in all good stories" reminding again the establishment of Oliver Twist's identity by the evidence of his mother's locket but then Nora blurts out that she lost it (Atkinson 2001: 463).

Effie's concern with what constitutes the self is further connected to the dominant epistemology of the eighteenth century with the allusion to Hume's notion of the self as "a bundle of perceptions" (Atkinson 2001: 27). The allusions to the empiricist epistemology of Locke and Hume, which constitutes the epistemological premises of formal realism, according to the dominant understanding of the novel that was first suggested by Ian Watt, strengthen the idea that Effie's quest for identity runs parallel to a quest for a viable representation in novelistic discourse. Locke's conception of the individual as an entity composed of its experience in a particular time and place constituted the basis for realist novel's narratives of identity. Effie's desire for a language that can achieve a true representation of experience is basically a parody of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, whose parody, Bakhtin argues, indicates an era of a new novelization. For many critics *Tristram Shandy* occupies a unique place in literary history. Ian Watt argues that with its awareness of the aspects of the formal realism in the exploitation of the individual experience in temporal and spatial terms and considering the fact that the novel genre has always allowed novelty and originality, it is part of the tradition as a parody of the novel (1968: 303). Viktor Shklovsky, too, finds in *Tristram Shandy* a narration of its own creation where the techniques of the new literary form, the novel, is discussed. This rewriting of *Tristram Shandy* takes a route through the fiction of Henry James, George Eliot, Charles Dickens, detective fiction and literary theory in the inserted genres and in characters' speeches, which will be subjected to tests for their adequacy in representing the gendered individual of the contemporary world.

The echoes of *Tristram Shandy's* parodical and self-conscious narrative that strives to give an account of every perception, feeling, and happening simultaneously as Tristram is writing, can be found in Effie's struggles to translate her experience into language. Effie, too, writes the story as she goes along sharing her thoughts and problems about the progress of the story with the reader and Nora. Metafiction in Effie's narration prevents the suspension of disbelief by constantly making its textuality an issue. As Tristram leaves a black page to mourn for Yorick, Effie leaves a black page when she closes her eyes not to see the yellow dog run over by Chick (Atkinson 2001: 24, 102). She decides not to go to McCue's party, although she says, "[t]here was much material for narrative there" (Atkinson 2001: 251). There are many self-references. Effie explains something she sees out of the window during

Archie's tutorial on page 58 later on in brackets on page 180 (Atkinson 2001: 58, 180). She never lets us forget that everything occurs within language: "*We all chose a different adverb to sup with. Philippa consumed her soup hungrily, Mrs Macbeth decided on messily, Mrs McCue on recklessly, whereas I myself opted for cautiously. Lucy Lake opted not at all*" (Atkinson 2001: 268).

Tristram Shandy's digressive narration is evoked here where many incidents happen and many characters enter the story without culminating in a coherent plot that has a beginning, development, and an end. Kevin, a student, visits the McCue house to see Professor McCue to demand an extension on his assignment when Effie is babysitting the McCues' daughter. Even though Archie McCue is not home, he goes in and sits with Archie's mother, Mrs. McCue, and her friend, Mrs. Macbeth, from the nursery home. Upon the elderly women's wish, Kevin reads an excerpt from his story he is writing for the creative writing class and then leaves. This is an absurd scene that does not contribute to any plot development with dialogues that do not lead anywhere. As Heather bursts out at the end of another similar chapter about the so-called women's liberation meeting at Philippa McCue's house, many dialogues in the novel are "*absolute, gratuitous nonsense*" (Atkinson 2001: 382). There is no logical motive behind characters' acts or causality in the plot. This parody of the realist novel in Effie's narration reveals that the realist novel's endeavour to transfer experience into writing within the rules of casualty is a vain effort, as Lawrence Sterne also exposed in *Tristram Shandy*. Laurence Sterne was quick to respond and show the absurdity of this claim by taking it to its logical conclusions, which is "*Reductio ad Absurdum*" as Ian Watt describes it and Atkinson alludes to in a subtitle (Watt 1968: 304; Atkinson 2001: 187).

Effie's narration defies logical connections in the plot. Yet, to say that some incidents and characters do not contribute to the development of the plot does not mean that these characters and events do not produce any meaning. Through these random and unconnected incidents, we question the relation of the novel to life and experience. If the novel is to give an impression of life, as the realists and the modernists, Henry James, for instance, believed it should, the experiences that do not cause or affect anything reflect life better than any realist novel since chance relations rather than rational cause-effect relations governs life. Effie's implication of her desire for "*a transcendently coherent view of the world*" that she expresses in Archie McCue's tutorial on structural criticism is refuted when first Professor Cousins, Martha Sewell and then Watson Grant walk into the classroom and join Archie's class without any logical reason that they or we can think of. The question is, as Archie asks, not only if this coherent worldview is possible but also if this transcendentalism is desirable (Atkinson 2001: 70).

Effie's narration tests the interiority/ exteriority distinction that, as Ian Watt notes, some critics apply to distinguish the realist and the modernist novel. While it has been suggested that defining a character by their relations and actions in their interaction in society defines Fielding, Dickens, and Defoe's fiction in opposition to mirroring the consciousness found in James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, Watt argues that both narrative conventions are part of the same project, which is, giving an account of the individual (Watt, 1968). Similarly, Effie's narration exposes the invalidity of this distinction. Sometimes, characters hear Effie's comments in her narration. After Effie says: "*I had a sudden unnerving glimpse of the polite schoolboy lurking within the hairy chrysalis –of Robin helping at parental cocktail parties, handing round salted nuts and topping up the tonic in large, middle-class gins.*"

Robin, as if he heard what Effie told herself, responds: “‘Yeah, ‘Robin admitted, shamefaced, ‘Surrey. Dad owns a firm of estate agents’” (Atkinson 2001: 241, 242). Of course, exteriority does not make much sense when we remember that what we are reading is the product of the writer’s mind, interiority. There is nothing unusual in Robin’s responding to Effie’s thought when Robin himself is Effie’s thought. Effie’s narration enacts the disruption of this duality, as *Tristram Shandy* does (Atkinson 2001: 306).

The representation of the modernist novel also appears in the “*inserted genres*” (Bakhtin 1996: 320-323). One of the two papers Effie has to write for her degree is on Henry James’s critique of George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* where she is required to discuss the following statement: “‘*Middlemarch is a treasure house of detail, but an indifferent whole.*’ *Can Middlemarch be defended against this criticism by Henry James?*” (Atkinson 2001: 40, emphasis in the original). This excerpt from Henry James’s article on *Middlemarch* published in 1873 and his theory of the novel plays an essential role in the novel because it applies to *Emotionally Weird* itself (James, 1965). James’s evaluation of *Middlemarch*, or George Eliot, though, is not completely negative as the excerpt from his article here suggests. He appreciates George Eliot’s superiority; what he criticizes is that George Eliot’s novels are devoid of dramatic movement despite the existence of many possibilities in her narration. He finds it lacking in form with many loose ends and without a purpose that the whole form is moving towards. This is the ultimate goal of Henry James’ art whereas the greatness of George Eliot’s fiction is bent on the philosophizing and moralizing commentary of the narrator.

Henry James elaborates on George Eliot’s art best in another article on *Daniel Deronda* written in a fictional conversation form with three characters discussing her fiction with opposing views of the novel (1965). In this interesting piece of criticism that shows James’s dual attitude, the weaknesses of the novel in terms of dramatic stagnancy, diffuseness, lack of concentration, and lack of liveliness in the characters are countered by an argument for its strength in its wise observations and descriptions. While it is true that Eliot’s diffused narration and lack of a neat plot are the target of James’s critique, he finds the description of the English rural life and the characters true to life, which is the purpose of high art for James. The subtitle of the chapter on Archie McCue’s tutorial on *the nouveau roman* and structuralist theories refers to Henry James’s “The Art of the Fiction.” Here James argues that the quality of a novel rests on the writer’s skill in creating an illusion of life and this he finds in George Eliot despite the digressive nature of her fiction (1965: 5). One fragment from Effie’s paper, yet another ill-fated writing that never gets to be completed safe and sound, stands in defence of *Middlemarch* against Henry James:

The schematic unity and integrity of Eliot’s vision must lead us to the conclusion that James’s comment that it is ‘a treasure house of detail’ is a flawed and, ultimately, prejudiced view of the novel and in fact reveals his aversion to the very concept of Middlemarch. (1965: 349, emphasis in the original)

It is true that there are too many characters and subplots that do not seem to be integrated into the most obvious main plot that can be summarized as Dorothea’s choice of the wrong husband among her suitors, her disappointment and suffering as a result, and finding happiness in the end with the marriage to the right man thanks to the convenient death of the wrong husband. If we take this plot as the purpose of the novel, it is natural that

many characters and events look redundant. As Effie says above, his criticism reflects a certain conception of the novel. This digressive narration, for example, can be one of portraying life rather than a coherent drama based on recognizable, rational cause-effect relations moving towards a purpose that Henry James wanted to create in his fiction.

There are parallels between *Middlemarch* and *Emotionally Weird* in terms of the profusion of sub-plots and insignificant characters that do not contribute to the main plot, and in terms of the digressive nature of narration. Thus, the whole text of *Emotionally Weird* is played out against what Henry James insisted on as a must quality of the novel: a plot of a purposeful, logical progression towards an end. Construction of this parallel between George Eliot's fiction and *Emotionally Weird* demonstrates the employment of another form of artistic representation of a language that can be called stylization to some extent. The speaker, Effie does not exactly speak in the stylized language, i.e. in George Eliot's novelistic discourse but still the novel creates resonances with its digressive narration (Bakhtin 1996: 362- 363).

This resonance with George Eliot's fiction transpires in the meta-narration as well. For Henry James, another deficiency in the novel is the sacrifice of suspension of disbelief. In "The Art of Fiction," he finds Anthony Trollope's giving away the fact that he is writing fiction an unforgivable mistake, the writer's showing himself as a writer is "a betrayal of a sacred office," "a terrible crime" (1965: 51). Effie discusses this point in her dissertation, which is also on Henry James. For Henry James, the writer has to maintain the illusion in the novel. The fictionality of the work cannot be revealed, which is what Atkinson's text does.

Archie McCue's lectures on the new fiction further emphasize the continuity of the postmodern novel in the novel tradition. Archie McCue being a dedicated structuralist, his lectures on literary theories on Robbe-Grillet, Derrida, Barth, Proust, Valéry desperately struggles to ingrain poststructuralist linguistics theories of the novel, authorship, and textuality in the students but he meets with their lack of enthusiasm and interest. In one of his tutorials, the question Professor Cousins, who just walks into Archie's tutorials, asks, raises an interest in the students who have been daydreaming until then. Professor Cousins' question, if "all literature is about search for *identity*," not only intrigues two students, to Archie's annoyance, but makes us connect it to the novel we are reading as well (emphasis in the original, Atkinson 2001: 62). We but share the students' interest in Professor Cousins' comment as we realize that the postmodern novel we are reading is as much about the search for identity as *Tristram Shandy*, *Great Expectations* and *The Tempest* are. The protagonist in search of his identity and of his place in society, as is the case of Pip, and the protagonist struggling to write a true biography based on an immediate relation between experience and writing, as is the case of Tristram, has been a dominant theme that we also observe in *Emotionally Weird*, in Effie's search for her identity. Revealing the continuities between the realist, modernist and the postmodern novel, Effie's narration in total suggests that the experiment with subjectivity and investigation of language's relation to life is a legacy of the whole novel tradition. The playful and humorous use of a wide range of works and literary theory reveals that despite the seeming differences between previous novelistic discourses and the postmodern novel, the novel genre has always been about the individual's experimental search for their place in society and language.

For many critics, the postmodern novel marks a break from the previous novel traditions. This echoes the modernist writers' refutation of the Victorian values and novel.

To some extent, the Bloomsbury group defined itself against the Victorians. Leonard Woolf says that “*Thackeray and Dickens ... meant nothing to us or rather they stood for an era, a way of life, a system of morals against which we were in revolt*” (quoted. in Keating 1989: 94-95). Many critics, on the other hand, noted the continuity in terms of the genre’s concern for constructing the individual. Jale Parla notes that, when Robbe-Grillet objects to the novel in the “*Le ‘Nouveau Roman’*” he takes into account only nineteenth century novel without noticing the similar techniques and occupations between the eighteenth century novel and the new novel (1965: 276). Watt also argues that the seeming disjunction between the modernists and the realists is due to the different responses that derive from the different epistemologies of the eras that nevertheless serve the same purpose of depicting the individual.³ In this light, the postmodern novel’s difference from the realist and modernist novel appears to be an exaggerated difference; to adopt the phrase from Bakhtin, “a tempest in a teapot” (1996: 325).⁴ The tempest is related to the changing epistemologies and life styles but the central issue, the question of identity, always sexual, remains to mark the genre.

CONCLUSION

Emotionally Weird combines the woman's search for identity with the postmodern novel's search for its origins. Effie's narration of her search for her true paternity is also a search for a viable form of narration for her identity. Hence Atkinson reveals the narration of identity as the central problem of the novelistic discourse. Atkinson emphasizes the continuity in the novelistic discourse in terms of the formation and representation of the individual and suggests that the postmodern novel shares with the realist and modernist novel this main question.

The quest for identity that we see in the postmodern novel has a strong emphasis on gender, as it is exposed in the representation of female protagonists in search of their place in society and language. The new woman constructed in this parodic narrative is an illegitimate woman writer who produces her tale of identity in collaboration with other co-authors. The desire for coherence and stability is exposed as invalid, violent and undesirable, when the family past becomes a story that can be interpreted in different ways, biology cannot add any meaning to identity, and the structures that rely on the illusion of a stable identity such as the family and academy are discarded for a career in detective fiction. Offering a woman writer of detective fiction at the end signifies the eternal continuity of quests for both the female subject and the novelistic discourse.

³ Many critics see a radical difference in the employment of parody, rewritings and metafiction in postmodern novel. See, for example, Patricia Waugh *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious* (1984) and Linda Hutcheon's two works on the postmodern novel, *The Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) and *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989).

⁴ Bakhtin uses to describe the pseudo multi-voicedness in a unitary language system against the true intertextuality in the novelistic discourse. I argue that whether a language of a past time is unitary or not is difficult to establish when we have limited knowledge on those languages and their background

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