Janice Galloway

'The Trick is to Keep Breathing'

Notes and Essay Questions
The Trick is to Keep Breathing
Janice Galloway

Alienation is a prominent theme in the novel.

Definition: state of being isolated or withdrawn, or of not belonging to or sharing in something.

Read to p17

Discuss the way(s) in which Joy is alienated. Think about setting, her relationships with others (work and personal e.g. Marianne, women in the car, men at the bookies, especially Tony) and society in general.

Read to page 22

Comment on the lead up to the health visitor's visit and the visit itself. Use quotes to back up your points.
What do we learn about Joy?
Why is their conversation set out this way?
How effective is this as a way of expressing her feelings of alienation?

P23-43

Identify the ways she is marginalized in her part-time job.
Think about her relationship with Paul. Why does the relationship break down?
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Consider why 'You Always Expect Too Much' (p23) is written like this. Find more examples.
What do they tell us about Joy?
What purpose(s) do the lists that Joy makes serve? (P37-39)

P46-48
Comment on how the language used in "The Bathing Ritual" defines Joy's view of this experience.
Analyse how the language emphasizes the theme of isolation.

What does the "sometimes" at the edge of P49 tell us about Joy?

P50-53
Consider why Joy can't communicate with the doctor.

P55-57 ("You can never be too careful")
What does the phone symbolise in the novel?
Examine how the paragraph at the bottom of P57 onto P58 makes clear Joy's feelings about the phone.
What does this reveal about Joy?

P58-72
Comment on Joy's relationship with her sister.
Analyse how the language conveys how she feels about Myra.

P72-79
What is the attitude of the headmaster towards Joy?
How does the memorial service affect her?
Analyse how what happens at the memorial service reinforces the theme of superficiality within the novel.
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Read page 84-87
What is the purpose of the 'Health Update; Ultimate Diet' on page 85?

Read p92-100
Discuss Joy’s relationship with Tony.
Why does Joy leave a note for the doctor?

Read p103-108
Why does Joy call the doctor 'Doctor 1'?
Why does Joy tell him about her mother?
What further insight does this give us into Joy’s background?

“You have to try” (p103)
What does Joy mean by this?
To what extent does she try?

What is the effect of 'the mouth said' on p103?
How does the paragraph at the top of p104 continue the effect?
Find other quotes which have the same effect on p105.
What is Joy’s attitude to the phone on p109? How does the language convey her attitude?
What does this attitude tell us about her?
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Page 110 - 'Sometimes, that feeling, déja vu'
Why is that here beside this particular paragraph?

What is the effect of giving Joy pyjamas for an 11 year old girl? (p113)
Examine the conversation Joy has with the male nurse about her pyjamas on page 137. Why is this exchange ironic?
How is ward 1D different from the rest of the hospital? (p120 & 125)
Use quotes to support your answer.

Read p127-142
Write questions/observations you would like to discuss in class.
Think about Joy's feelings about the hospital, how she interacts with David & Ellen etc.
How does Joy feel when she is with David?
"He takes the screaming and holds me. I never scream any other time." P133

Look at 135-142
Comment on David's relationship with Joy. Use quotes to back up your answer.

What is Joy trying to communicate here?
"where there's no danger of people getting too"
"I wanted to keep my distance. People can be so unpredictable." (143)
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How does Joy act when the man comes to collect Michaels' things on behalf of Norma?

"I think you'll last" P149
Find other examples of this sentiment.
Why is this a recurring theme in the book?

Find three quotes on p156 which highlight Joy's feelings of alienation.

Examine the language used to describe the interaction between Joy and Tony on p173-176. How does this reinforce our idea of Joy's relationships with men?

In what way is the writing on the edge of the page linked to what is happening in the story?

What does "People know who I am." (p181) suggest about Joy?

"I want to be held, I want to be found" (p184)
How is this sentiment different to what Joy has expressed before?

How does Joy convey how disconnected she feels from herself? (P191)
P192 "mouth to mouth" How does this show that her past is constantly present?
P198 What change is there in Joy's attitude to her situation? How does this affect her?
What changes do we see in Joy towards the end of the novel?
‘The Trick is to Keep Breathing’

Essay Question

How effectively does Galloway explore the theme of alienation in ‘The Trick is to Keep Breathing’?

Note:

*You will be asked to discuss both novels in the exam.*

The above essay is to ensure you fully understand this novel and can write about its themes, narrative style and techniques at length.
Janice Galloway

‘Foreign Parts’

Notes and Essay Questions
Chapter None

This is a childhood memory. Comment on this with reference to:
- Her mother
- Her father
- What the above tell us about her home life
- The themes addressed in this introductory chapter
- Use of tense
- Narrative voice

Chapter One

1. What similarities are immediately apparent between this novel and 'The Trick is to Keep Breathing'?

2. What are your first impressions of Cassie and Rona? Use quotes to support your answer.

3. How does Cassie feel about Rona? What does Rona think of Cassie?

4. Why is 'Cassie and Rona/Rona and Cassie' written like this? Does the order change? When and why?

5. Comment on Cassie's flashback of her holiday with Chris.

Chapter Two

6. Why is some of the text boxed and what does it represent?

7. Why is Cassie desperate to get Rona to respond when they are in the car?

8. What does this highlight about Cassie's personality?

9. Why would anyone go on holiday with Cassie?!
‘Foreign Parts’ – General Overview

Wickedly, hilariously accurate analysis of consumer society – pressures of commercial tourism.

Cassie and Rona have totally different ways of perceiving the holiday and its aims – tips of the iceberg of far deeper and older tensions between them. Novel moves towards genuine, mutual understanding.

Cassie and Rona, welfare workers on holiday.
Cassie – impulsive and anxious
Rona – practical and calm (handbag)
Cassie yearns and theorises, dreams and agonises
Rona drives
Cassie clutches to her superior sensitivity & Madame Bovary as proof of her superiority to unimaginative Rona
Cassie hates everything
Galloway mixes her thoughts with conversation
Cassie remembers things she does not want to – Chris selfish – her needs were secondary

Cathedral town of Chartres becomes a place of modest epiphany with its sheer size, its quality of life and even its gargoyles – it yields peace in a way which allows Cassie and Rona slowly to harmonise.

Cassie’s anger seems out of tune with the slow pace movement through France and through Cassie’s exploration of herself, but Galloway places them in the context of Cassie’s realization of the waste of human life in the Normandy graveyard, a perception which makes her look at her own life and frustrations.

Ending – typical, but hopeful

Cassie has mellowed and understands that Rona may have understood Madame Bovary more than she imagined.
'Foreign Parts'
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Themes

Friendship – relationship without sex

Life/Death – why are we here/killing time (p235) Cassie’s big questions

Men – Cassie’s disastrous relationships
History – museums – artists/sculptors
War – irrational – destructive
Sex objects – Cassie does not like men but loves sex ‘You have to love something’

Women – Cassie
- ignored by history
- war
- art
- Religion – whore/angel/mother of God
- Films – Doris Day
- Representation in Art (although always objects.
- Cassie and Rona defy social norm.

Journey
Chapter None – girl running from-to (analogy of Cassie – from sex to mutual understanding)
France – quiet countryside – juxtaposes with Cassie’s mood swings and inability to relax.
Routine – everything done before – repetition- harmony in cottage
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Narrative Techniques

Chapter None – page numbering

Repetition
Rona & Cassie
Cassie and Rona

Very careful delineating between speakers – later blurred.

P78 – comic effect
   - main para – not Cassie’s words
   - Boo! – set in middle of page

Typography – free direct speech

Maps & Guidebook
   - Structure/control/knowing rather than learning & unpredictability.


Closure – change in attitude – things resolved/changed.
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Chapter 1
Child-unsatisfactory, single-parent background-Now looking back to age 17 – Chris – next relationship – Cassie is a doormat.

Photograph – not justified – inserted in page

London – loses money/ Cassie’s inferiority.

Chapter 2
Present holiday – ‘It wasn’t my idea to come’
Rona wants to visit grandfather’s grave – war memorial
  - Cassie sees war as irrational – for men

P10/47-8 Cassie angry at war
  - countryside flattened/decrepit with/by war


Cemetery
P50 Rona taking pictures of memorial
  - rows of dead people – dead men – dead boys
  - nothing about women’s misery

P66 Routine of travel – everything implies being done before – P70
Chris – selfish/ego-centric/vain

Chris - treats Cassie like dirt
P155 – she loved doing things for him – ‘You have to love something.’

Naxos – P80 – ‘He told me not to stare out strange men or drink too much.’
Chris is to run away

P136 – ‘Put on something nice’
P141/2
P188/9 – 13 years – Cassie realizes she doesn’t want Chris

P248 – all unsatisfactory sexual relations
  - Barry – gay or straight?
  - Richard – no sex
  - Tom – slob – only great sex
Life without sex? Or, not centred on it?

Holiday with Rona

P165

P184/5 – not preoccupied with war, but life
  - ‘what are we doing?’

Holiday begins to get enjoyable, BUT Cassie stays passionate.
  - Big questions – non response from Rona

P98/99 – Idyllic house – shopping/eating/drinking

P172-3 Rona becomes indulged child – ‘I want my dinner outside tonight.’

Rona nurses Cassie over illness

P250 – what Cassie wants

P251 – Cassie goes too far – suggestive
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Moving house- divorce-holiday (most stressful times)

Cassie & Rona P149/150 ‘are neither real nor proper ...getting by on the cheap.’

View – Cassie – nearest thing to narrator, but mostly story told in 3rd person.

Violent mood swings/irritable/irrational

Rona – driver; Cassie supposed to be navigator.

P45-6 Incompatibility

Chapter 1 – beginning
Cassie – foul mood – determined to have a bad time
Rona – cannot do anything right

P3 Unable to restrain moods – expects Rona to empathise

P5-6 – tea – Rona gets it. Cassie has to throw it away after man’s cough.

Why would anyone go on holiday with Cassie?
-during book we see niceties: making house/chapel/rambling countryside
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Cassie and Rona – single women with sexual experiences

Cassie enjoys sex – but cannot live with men (handout P1 third down)

Much of novel focalized through Cassie
-past
-self-reverential view (second person)
-mood swings (without warning)

Past
Cassie describes and meditates holiday pictures – memory or real in car

Avoidance of sanitizing effect – not ideal in a neat narrative.

Chapter None

Cassie – memory of being a girl – pursuit by mother
War memorial – bayonet – death
Cemetery – death

Humour at cousin George – male parts funny
Domineering mother – not tender
Father – beyond comprehension- ‘is that the man...’
Description of mother – not attractive
Transform – acceptance/closeness to Rona P261
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Male representation of women
P93/95/106-7 commentary by Cassie on stereotypical rep

P133-4/239-40 comical commentary – reassessment – witty

Women by men – P8/10/21

Men represented – P31 as weapons/war/aggressive ones

Chapter None – men are threatening
Sign on ferry – blue man
Body – P3 – urine
- P6 – mucous
- Men’s portrayal of women as sex objects – history/art
- P22 power relationship - Chris
- Cassie sees behind visage.
- P32/5 – wife beating – shock at icon being battered – movies glossing over
- P36 – move from autobiography – 3rd person – distancing herself
- P37 – shifts – female form/male form – narrative
- P74 – juxtaposing – Freud digging at theory – penis as big?

Galloway lays bare conventions whilst Boland/Duffy give women a voice.
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P193/203 – do not trust perspective
As novel progresses – coherence over relationships

P235 – marking time until the end


Characters
  - preoccupied with defying death – children
  - hide the fact of death – routine P254
  - P185 – Killing time – cheat mortality

Narratives
  - present journey
  - past – reminiscences P91
  - guide book – clashes with Cassie’s narrative – heightens her lack of access to high flown languages

P111 – altering course of history

Photographs P144-5
Jesus Rona this animal – referring to narrative on boyfriend

P114-15
Letter – Rona’s

Different perspectives – P112 – each limited

Characters constantly trying to interpret things P2
  - oranges P2/4 – muzak
  - P7 – travel kettle (sport)

P29 – foreign travel – take note of all signs

P155 – interpreting time it takes to register different things (she does not elsewhere!)

P31/64/124-5
  - animals- assumptions
  - P60-1 Rona – assumption
Chapter None
3rd person – 2nd person (You) – 3rd person
Past tense-present tense-past
Non-coherence – not sentences
Journey – girl running from somewhere to something – pursuit by mother
P003 – mother P261 description of domineering mother, not tender compared to closeness of Rona
P0 – water – chill/cold noise you cannot escape from
Solid iron into atoms (Breaking Down)
Shift of P262 – water that is just water – surprise of Rona’s mastery – separated but together ‘could be going home.’

Death – war memorial/cemetery
Men – humour at sexuality (cousin)
  - father incomprehensible
  - threatening – shop men/soldier

Maps – guidebook/Rona’s trust of authority/pamphlets
  - trouble when taking other unpredictable way
  - Rona finds this unconventional.

Cassie – her perspective – limited but personal/self reflective
Interrupted by narrative/guidebook
Huge questions – wonders about life
Restrictive non-tender mother/no male figure/bad relationships – inferiority complex
Defies convention – single/unmarried/no children
Routine – hides the fact of death
The text reads:

"Foreign Parts"
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Competing discourses untie each other through juxtaposition – deconstructing (breaks them down)
Home/holiday
Past/present
Heterosexuality/homosexuality
Cassie/Rona

'Undoing' the text EXPOSES the power structures inherent in the order of things.

Reconstruction
Rona ponders on restoration of ancient buildings (p254)
Hopeful ending – glimpse of new possibilities – a way of living which may not be determined by the old discourses.

Galloway creates and embraces chaos – syntax/form/layout – attacks order and moves beyond it.

Fragmentations offer a critique of power structures and also represent an attempt to move beyond existing discursive practices.

Textual experimentation moves beyond 'linguistic idealism' or aesthetic subversion into a real political engagement with the materiality of our lives.

Form of writing which does not alienate or exclude readers, but activates them.

Bricolage thus leads to an interrogation of those oppositions between politicization and experimentation which have been used to 'place' women's writing and indicates the possibility for new ways of mapping that terrain.
Galloway Essay Questions

1. ‘Each of Galloway’s novel boasts an impressive range of comic elements, in style and language, in action, in characterisation.’

Discuss the contribution made by a range of comic elements to the effectiveness of each of the specified texts. (2005)

2. Analyse and evaluate the means by which Galloway engages the reader with the inner lives of her main protagonists in The Trick is to Keep Breathing and Foreign Parts. (2006)

3. Discuss how relationships in The Trick is to Keep Breathing and Foreign Parts are used to convey the themes within the novel.
How effectively does Galloway explore brokenness and fragmentation in *The trick is to Keep Breathing* and *Foreign Parts*?

Examine some of the ways by which Galloway conveys the inner experiences, the thoughts, the feelings of her characters in *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*. 
Galloway questions:

The word ‘novel’ is derived from the Latin adjective novus, meaning ‘new and original’.
Discuss the means by which Galloway, in The Trick is to keep Breathing and Foreign Parts, has created something new and original.

Analyse and evaluate the means by which Galloway explores society’s treatment of women in Foreign Parts and The Trick is to Keep Breathing.

Choose a novel/two novels in which the author has employed unusual narrative techniques - for example, playing with time-schemes, using a variety of narrators, mixing different genres of writing. Examine the novel(s) to evaluate the effectiveness of these narrative techniques.

'Yes - oh dear yes - the novel tells a story.' (E M Forster)
Does Galloway’s fiction challenge this view of the novel?
'Each of Galloway’s novels boasts an impressive range of comic elements, in style and language, in action, in characterisation.'
Discuss the contribution made by a range of comic elements to the effectiveness of each of the specified texts.