

Trauma, Memory, Gender and Genre-Bending in Kate Atkinson's Transcription

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Abstract

Long after the battle is over, the memories of war continue, silencing voices, and disrupting daily life. Its effects do not arrive as clear recollections of those experiences, but rather as disjointed and intrusive memories which resurface unexpectedly. War literature often contends with this fragmentation. Kate Atkinson's *Transcription* is a good example to explore how the afterlife of war affects both narrative and memory. The novel's plot does not aim to glorify heroism but instead represent secrecy, betrayal, and dislocation by placing a female protagonist. Memory becomes unreliable, time is unsettled, and trauma persists time and again. The gendered vulnerabilities compound this trauma; especially as a young woman involved in the world of espionage, her labor is essential, but also invisibly enacted, and the suffering is almost marginal.

The structure of the novel, which is non-linear, reflects fragmented recollection, but prioritizes the ongoing effects of war on the self and on perception. Atkinson bends genre to offer trauma as an enduring presence, a cultural phenomenon instead of an event of the past detached from history.

This paper is an attempt to explore how *Transcription* brings memory, trauma, and gender together; how Atkinson uses a non-linear narrative structure to mirror the fragmented memory; and how experimentation with historical, spy thriller, and psychological realism amplify the portrayal of trauma as an enduring psychological and cultural effect of war.

Keywords: Trauma, Memory, Gendered Vulnerability, Non-linear Narrative, Spy Fiction, Genre-Bending

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Introduction

For a long time, spy fiction has reflected anxieties and political turmoil and conflicts in the society, establishing itself as a genre in Britain by the late 19th century based on heroism, loyalty and moral ambiguity. Early novels glorified espionage in which protagonists uphold honor, trust and loyalty to the state, while Cold War classics emphasised betrayal and compromised identities. However, beneath this intrigue of espionage, there is often an overlooked element, the psychological trauma attached to the practice of espionage, and the storytelling in the genre.

Traditionally, women in spy fiction were limited to romantic interest, seductresses, or as informants. Recently, however, the representation of women has evolved into active agent relations, secrecy, and betrayal. This is significant because it marks a departure from the predominantly male tradition in spy fiction and a possible expansion of moral, emotional, and psychological complexities within the genre.

Studies on spy fiction have largely focused on cultural, historical, and even institutional contexts within the genre. John le Carré, for example, exhibits a deep disillusionment with authority and moral decay (Hoag 4) in his works, so these particular contexts often appear in the plot itself. When it comes to the female spy protagonist and psychic trauma of espionage, this has gone largely unexplored, and is often revealed indirectly through thematic considerations of secrecy, of meaning, erasure, and the burden of unexpressed experiences.

Review of Literature

Contemporary spy fiction has drawn considerable literary and cultural criticism. This criticism focuses on themes like moral ambiguity, secrecy, and political change. In the research article, *John le Carré is Mr. Angry now that Smiley's Day Has Gone : Spy Fiction and the Age of Anger* (2023), Brian E. Crim examines le Carré's novels after 9/11, pointing to a moral critique of surveillance, betrayal, and state violence.

Matthew A. Bellamy's dissertation, *Spy Fiction and the Making of the Modern Intelligence Agency* (2020), places spy fiction in wider cultural and institutional settings. He claims that narratives, from early adventure stories to modern drone warfare, shape how the public views intelligence. Key themes include secrecy, technology, and moral duty. Anxiety, alienation, fear, and betrayal appear frequently.

Morrison and Burton (2023), in *Secrets, Leaks and the Novel: Writers, British Intelligence*

and the Public Sphere after World War Two, analyse postwar British spy fiction as a space between secrecy and public interest. They look at how authors balanced state control with narrative freedom, reflecting moral, ethical, and cultural concerns about intelligence work.

Dylan and Burton (2023), in *An Anarchy of Treason : public history, insider knowledge and the early novels of John le Carré*, examine le Carré's early novels. They show how he mixed public intelligence history with insider knowledge to create authenticity.

Contemporary spy literature focuses on morality and ethics, concerning itself with secrecy, betrayal, and power. Culture and institutions may reflect the tensions associated with these questions, and recently, scholars have begun to engage in questions of gender in the genre. For example, Pinja Tarvainen's thesis, *Kate Atkinson's Transcription: Rewriting Women in War and Spy Stories* (2020), analyses how the female characters subvert the genre of spy fiction and provide a new version of history. There is mention of Juliet Armstrong's unresolved past but it does not investigate trauma and memory very thoroughly.

These studies analyse the moral, ethical, institutional and gendered contexts of spy fiction, but they neglect trauma representation. Specifically, how experiences of espionage, often riddled with secrecy, deception, and moral complexity, are represented through memory, flashbacks, silences, and narrative. This gap emphasises the importance of exploring the task of how spy fiction encodes trauma not just as an experience of pain, but as a condition of culture arising from the influence of secrecy and political strife. We can perceive espionage texts as containers for psychological trauma that remains unresolved. Addressing this gap in representation would broaden the scholarship around contemporary spy fiction, particularly from a psychological perspective to explore how *Transcription* adds to the understanding of the complexities of espionage through memory and narrative style.

In *Transcription* (2018), Kate Atkinson reimagines espionage both during and after WWII through Juliet Armstrong, whose identity and existence are dictated by secrecy, transcription of the actions in secret, and fractured loyalty, in contrast to Ian Fleming's archetypes of romanticised male spies. The book rethinks spy fiction by centering a woman, and examines how memory and identity fracture under secrecy and loss.

The deliberate disjointed structure of *Transcription*, which moves between 1940 to 1950 and then to 1981, illustrates how Juliet's memory and self are fractured under secrecy, loss, and trauma, as well as being written by the people around her. Transcribing, in this case, becomes a metaphor for how histories and lives are rewritten in service of power. Importantly, this world of espionage is not one of action, but of performative acts. Juliet's transcriber, lover, and spy roles are scripted by others

within a world where the truth is unstable.

This paper will analyse the intersection between fragmented memory and trauma, gender, and genre in *Transcription* through the theoretical lenses of Elaine Showalter, Cathy Caruth and Astrid Erll.

Trauma and Memory

Cathy Caruth in her *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* argues that trauma is marked by its “belatedness” (187), that is, it is not fully experienced at the moment of its occurrence but returns later in intrusive forms such as flashbacks, nightmares, or compulsive repetition. She says that trauma is an unclaimed experience, an event that resists being integrated into coherent memory and instead re-emerges belatedly, often disrupting linear temporality. This understanding of trauma is reflected in *Transcription*, where we see Juliet’s inability to assimilate her past into a stable identity. The novel’s fragmented chronology, Juliet’s paranoia in her later life, and the repeated resurfacing of wartime scenes become an evidence to the Caruthian model of trauma as that which “returns” rather than remains confined to the past.

From the very beginning of the novel, Juliet is marked as a subject of loss. She enters adulthood with an absent father (killed in the navy) and a dead mother, already living with an unprocessed wound. Juliet processes her mother’s grief later in the 1950’s, she recounts how she felt - “Her mother’s death.... the martyrs who were pressed to death by stones piled on top of them. That is me, she thought, I am crushed by loss” (Atkinson 20). Trauma here is subtle, more about quiet dislocation, loneliness, and a search for stability that never quite comes. The fact that she continues to replay the memory of her mother’s burial long after the event reveals trauma’s repetitive quality. “I’ll take it home with me, miss,” he volunteered ... *You take the head, and I’ll take the feet*” (Atkinson 242). Juliet does not integrate the losses of her life; rather, she carries it as an unassimilated fragment, returning as though it were still present. This sort of also hints at the suffocating paranoia that marks her older years. The war may be over, but Juliet’s psychic world is still shaped by suffocation, secrecy, and fear.

Juliet’s understanding of joy is further altered by her experiences. It indicates, we may say, that there is some psychological scar derived from trauma. When she observes a man, “He grinned widely, showing a set of frighteningly mismatched teeth. Joy, Juliet thought this was what it looked like” (Atkinson 210), it is indicative of her not recognising happiness instinctively anymore. We see that trauma

often displaces normal emotional states, so much so that individuals cannot recognise even base emotions at the moment. Juliet's momentary recognition of joy, as something almost otherworldly, depicts the moments of trauma when the mind can store up experience of fear, loss, or betrayal so intensely that what is normal is hard to conjure up. In this way, Caruth's (181) account of trauma being experienced, not registered, allows us to see Juliet's alienation from even simple, presumably human feelings such as joy.

Juliet develops a crush on Perry and finds him charming, observant, and longs for a closer relationship than just their exchanges. Her curiosity about her own emotional and sexual desires awakens. Eventually, they are both engaged, rather confusingly, where Juliet hopes for a reciprocal of love and affection. Yet, even within this formal bond, Juliet receives little genuine emotional, romantic or sexual fulfillments.

"Juliet was in no mood to forgive him... unsympathetic to him, although really, it should have made her sympathetic" (Atkinson 348). The later revelation, that Perry only used her and is in fact gay, makes her unsympathetic to Perry. Her trauma overlaps with the shock of Dolly's murder, occurring around the same period, doubling Juliet's sense of vulnerability, fear, and disorientation. The betrayal, unreciprocated desire, and sudden confrontation with violence intersect and lead to a psychic rupture. Juliet is an orphan and this looms large over her life. It provides her with an enduring sense of emptiness and dislocation. With no stabilizing experience of family or a caretaker of some kind, she approaches the world with an always heightened sensitivity to her isolation, and that absence pervades all her relationships. She never genuinely experiences companionship with an emotional or existential assurance; even in her most intimate bonds (like with Perry), feelings of temporality, dependence, or even ineffable yearning prevail. This emptiness intersects powerfully with her sexual life, which moves between curiosity, desire, and searching for connection that she never fully achieves. Her intimacies rarely demonstrate an understanding, or reciprocity; often they hint at her unassimilated trauma, the remains of her earlier losses, and her unceasing attempts to fill her void. The birth of a child from a secret affair further complicates the situation, highlighting the way her sexuality is bound with secrecy and emotional turmoil. Juliet's encounter with sexuality is always in some sense twofold, containing possibility for connection and absence, a reminder that attachment and desire for Juliet is always entwined with loss. The fact that the man whose death she remembers as a former possible husband who died by suicide, conveys her precariousness with attachment; pleasure, desire, and grief are all folded together with painful memories for Juliet and sexuality for her is never disentangled from trauma. In this regard, her erotic and emotional attachment is always shadowed by experience of loss, betrayal, and belonging, which leaves her in continual negotiation between desire, grief, and the various unassimilated gaps of orphaned beings.

Trauma can also interrupt the natural timing of grief, delaying the expression of emotion until sometime later. When Juliet recalls Moretti's death, she notes that "She hadn't cried then, but now she fell, tears breaking hotly in her eyes" (Atkinson 301). Juliet's grieving after a substantial time shows how trauma impacts memory and the experience of affect, the mind tries to keep the person safe from the overwhelming pain, but the emotion comes back without volition. The eruption of tears is a clear signal that the shock of the emotional weight of the situation is out of integrity from when the event took place to when the emotional response is happening. Juliet's grieving process illustrates how trauma disrupts even her role as a spy, a role that expects you to be based on detachment and control. After Beatrice has died, she tells herself, "But it wasn't an adventure, was it? Someone had died (Atkinson 187)". The sob locked in her chest is an involuntary eruption of grief. She tries to suppress it but cannot completely contain it. In this moment, the story humanises the faceless machinery of the spy craft; Beatrice is not a collateral damage, she is a life taken away, a human being fundamentally changing. Grieving here is messy; there isn't an organised space of mourning in this underworld she inhabits. Grieving emerges with an interruption, a crack, causing her even to feel the value of life in a context that is organised to treat human life as disposable.

Astrid Erll's work "Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory" in *Media and Cultural Memory* (389), on trauma and cultural memory explores how literature, historical figures etc mediate experiences of loss, displacement, and unassimilated trauma, particularly in narratives where personal and historical events intersect. Erll emphasises that trauma is not simply a psychological event internal to an individual, but is also culturally and socially mediated. In this light, Juliet's experiences, as well as broader narrative elements, can be examined through Erll's notion of the "cultural repetition of trauma," where literature, media, museum, everyday objects etc becomes a site for re-turning, witnessing, and negotiating events that resist immediate comprehension.

Cafés, such as Moretti's Café, play a crucial role in Erll's framework, as they become microcosms of social and cultural memory, spaces where narratives of trauma are enacted, observed, and circulated. Juliet reflects, "She used to come to this café before the war.... It had been rather a relief to find it was still here when she returned to London" (Atkinson 17-18). This passage shows how Erll's focus on the performative and spatial aspects of trauma allows ordinary places to carry emotional and historical memory. Amidst the chaos of war, Juliet can find her sense of self in Moretti's café. The café is small and unkempt; it is imperfect yet familiar. It represents the tension between innocence and experience, as well as memory and the present. According to Erll, this scene illustrates how trauma spreads across cultures. Juliet uses the café to cope with her personal grief, the aftermath of violence, and the ongoing act of remembering.

Trauma and Non-Linear Narrative

Transcription does not proceed in chronological order but rather juxtaposes Juliet's wartime experiences with her postwar life at the BBC. The novel's nonlinear narrative shows that trauma resists assimilation. These shifts serve to underscore how traumatic memories return with force, making themselves so powerful in the present. The narrative is made up of flashbacks and shifts in chronology, not steady linear development. Juliet's recollections of her wartime life are not reflective or conscious; they are precipitated uncontrollably by events - for example, seeing Godfrey Toby or receiving a threatening letter.

The novel's non-linear structure demonstrates Juliet's fragmented memory and wounded aftereffects. Examples of her paranoia and quick panic, as in the case at the BBC when she sees the note, "Entering another stable... We must finish her off. I'm afraid" (Atkinson 281) shows how her past fears can invade the present. These episodic shifts place unassimilated memories into the incident, making the narrative a reflection of Juliet's psychological condition.

Finally, the revelation of Juliet being a double agent doesn't come easy. Juliet cannot easily reconcile the fact that she was a double agent. She cannot piece her life neatly together; therefore, she remains fractured, foregrounded by the non-linear narrative format of the novel. Trauma is not an event but rather the rupture of identity. Juliet embodies this very rupture. She is never fully loyal or treacherous, never innocent or guilty, she occupies the ambivalence of traumatic subjectivity. Her experience, much like trauma, does not lend itself to any linear story of time. The reader has to say goodbye to a protagonist whose past continues to overdetermine her present, whose identity is disjointed, and whose memories return in muted shapes and fragments rather than well-ordered representations.

This structure also changes the reader's experience of the novel. We do not receive war as a completed past. Instead, the war persists as an afterlife inside Juliet's present. Atkinson's use of structure allows the reader to see trauma as an event that continues to occur, rather than one that has been concluded. The novel's movement through the years 1940, 1950, and 1981 is more than a timeline; it is also an indication of the experience of someone who has suffered under stress. Because Juliet's present is filled with the emotional impact of her past, she is unable to establish any permanence in her current life. This creates a feeling of instability for the reader. The author is not attempting to confuse the reader for its own sake; rather, it is creating a character who is unable to fully reconcile the events in her life.

The revelation that Juliet is a double agent is important because of what it represents in terms of moral ambiguity. In typical spy fiction, a character who is revealed to be a double agent would feel an element of surprise, accomplishment, or resolution. In this case, however, the revelation of Juliet's status creates more questions than answers for the reader. Juliet cannot definitively know her whole

self due to her multiple identities that are ever-changing. Trauma has fractured both the self and memory of the character. Therefore, the story can never be entirely connected or completed, only shattered and broken. The reader will be able to see this through the character's handling of issues related to identity, as well as through the style of narrative itself.

Women as Reader and Memory

Elaine Showalter's notion of "women as reader" is particularly useful for reading *Transcription*. In her novel, Atkinson invites us into the character of Juliet Armstrong through the medium of memory, feeling and subjective recall rather than the neat record of historical events. As a result, the author does not portray Juliet as a clear-cut character whose life can be easily understood through chronology alone but provides her consciousness as the principal source from which meaning can be derived. In other words, the reader is invited to examine and trace the memory of the woman's life and experiences, allowing for continual re-interpretation (or less-than-accurate representations) because the past exists only in the context of how we feel through Juliet. In this sense, the novel creates a distinctly feminist reading space: one in which private memory matters as much as public history.

The reader is repeatedly brought into Juliet's mental world through places, objects, and encounters that work as triggers. The locations of Moretti's, BBC, Dolphin Square and the reintroduction of Godfrey Toby become more than plot devices; they are emotional attachments to memories. Moretti's becomes Juliet's borderland, representing the threshold between her life before the war and her post-war self. In addition, the movement throughout these various locations implies that memory is an act of reliving rather than one of retrieving. Juliet's past and present cannot be separated in any meaningful way but have been integrated. In this manner, the reader feels as though they are traveling through the maze of Juliet's memories, rather than merely observing them objectively.

Showalter's feminist poetics provides insight into why this is important. She asserts that women write and read differently due to the different social situations they face, which parallels Atkinson's focus on Juliet's inner experience. Juliet's memories may not be based on objective observation; however, they exist as knowledge nonetheless. They indicate that Juliet's identity is shaped by grief, secrecy, work, and emotional survival. For example, her recollections of her mother, for instance, are not simply sentimental background. They structure the way she feels about loss, duty, and selfhood. As such, the novel values what is personal, incomplete, and subjective as a valid historical record of human action. This is what makes Juliet such a persuasive character to feminist readers: she illustrates a historical sense of how women have lived, which official versions of history tend to neglect.

The reader's relationship to the text also affects one's position. The reader does not have the

distance of external authority; instead, they must read from within the frame of the memory process, whereby meaning arises from fragments, associations, and repetitions. Therefore, *Transcription* can be understood as a narrative about how women remember and thus, in turn, how this remembering serves as an interpretative vehicle. Showalter's "women as reader" is not only a critical concept here; it describes the reading position the novel creates. Juliet's memory becomes a way of reading history differently, and the reader is drawn into that alternative way of knowing.

Gender and Genre and Sexuality

In detective and spy fiction, issues of genre and gender are inseparable. The early detective stories, influenced by Agatha Christie, enabled presence for women but did not grant them institutional power. While a woman's intelligence was understood through domestic or peripheral positions, the normative rational mastery of investigation and control remained male. One hundred years later, Kate Atkinson subverts these conventions in *Transcription*, putting the woman in the machine of espionage. But this is not a power position without restrictions, access to power is full of constraints, instability, and expulsion. This questions the genre's reliance on masculine-centered authority and opens the door to reading espionage through partial power, unstable memory, and vulnerability. In this way, Atkinson's novel implicitly undermines the longstanding male tradition of writing that has framed the field of crime and spy fiction.

However, an important question while reading *Transcription* is: are we allowed into the space of Juliet's trauma simply because she is female? Would we see such psychic breaks if the protagonist were male? Atkinson frames the question by claiming that gender creates a particular literary space for vulnerability and fractures, recollections narrated through unknown, muted, or undetected labor. Surely men in espionage do not find it easy to escape trauma, but Juliets' gender allows a novel to emphasise a quieter, more recurrent or nagging kind of suffering that spy fiction tends to ignore. Elaine Showalter in her *Towards a Feminist Poetics* (Showalter) points out that women's writing often develops its own themes and ways of telling stories because it grows out of different experiences. Using 'women as a reader,' and gynocritics who see 'women as writers.' This helps in reading Kate Atkinson's *Transcription*, where the story is shaped not only by events and official records of transcription but by how Juliet remembers them. The novel lets the reader into her memories, and this makes us see that history is not only in official documents but also in the private recollections of those who lived through it. Showalter's idea of a feminist poetics is useful here, because it reminds us that giving space to memory and subjectivity is itself a way of valuing women's voices and establishing an alternative record keeping. Atkinson does this by showing that Juliet's inner record matters as

much as the public one. Memory, in this sense, becomes a form of resistance, a way of keeping hold of meaning that the larger, masculine structures of power might ignore.

The sexual dimension of this genre revision is equally important. Juliet is not sexualised in the way women often are in spy fiction, where femininity is frequently turned into spectacle or seduction. Atkinson resists that model. Juliet is not made into a glamorous object for male viewing, and that refusal matters. But the novel also withholds full sexual freedom from her. She has desire, yet that desire is repeatedly blocked, muted, or frustrated. Her interactions with men often feel emotionally limited rather than erotically expansive. The kiss with the architect is “from politeness rather than desire,” which suggests that intimacy is frequently social rather than passionate. Perry Gibbons similarly does not offer a liberating sexual relationship. Juliet may long for connection, but the novel places her in situations where that longing is not answered.

This is why the novel's treatment of sexuality feels both important and incomplete. It disrupts one stereotype by refusing to eroticize Juliet, yet it does not fully imagine her sexual autonomy either. She is visible enough to be watched, desired, and spoken to, but not given the space to explore desire intelligently or freely. That makes sexuality another form of containment. Juliet is not simply denied pleasure; she is denied a meaningful erotic narrative. Her body is present in the novel, but her desire remains obstructed. In this sense, the novel's genre-bending also becomes a critique of how spy fiction has historically positioned women. Atkinson opens space for female subjectivity, but she also shows how constrained that subjectivity remains within patriarchal narrative forms.

Gendered Vulnerability and Erasure

The narrative of Juliet Armstrong in *Transcription* is closely tied to the question of gendered vulnerability. As a young woman, orphaned and without family protection, she moves to MI5 from a precarious place. Her recruitment demonstrates how women were typically recruited into espionage not by entering valorized roles in the field, but rather performing feminised labor: typing, transcribing, and administrative work. However, this work goes beyond the margins, placing Juliet in a position of spying, knowing something disturbing and troubling within the moral ambiguity between working for MI5 and Soviets. Her gendered vulnerability makes her necessary and invisible at the same time, placing her at the heart of secrecy while rendering her mute to its psychological costs.

One thing that is notable about Juliet's trauma is the silence and erasure which is tied to it. By transcribing conversations, she is hearing and recording, while failing to intervene; she is condemned to witness betrayal and collusion, and duplicity, without acknowledgment of her own transgressions.

After the war, her work is not commemorated either, her voice is insignificant, and her existence in the world of intelligence is nearly erased from history. Juliet's gender also guarantees a late-stage erasure of her labor and suffering, a cultural erasure of women's war experiences.

This erasure is not just social but psychological. Juliet is made into someone who carries knowledge without being granted authority. She witnesses, records, and survives, but she does not become part of the official narrative. That condition is deeply gendered. The novel suggests that women's wartime labour is often essential to institutions of power while remaining hidden from the histories those institutions preserve. Juliet's position at MI5 and later at the BBC reflects this pattern. She is indispensable, but her indispensability does not translate into recognition. Instead, it produces silence.

Her vulnerability is also emotional. Orphaned and detached from strong family support, Juliet moves through a world where she has to manage on her own. This leaves her exposed, not only to institutional power but also to loneliness and uncertainty. She seems to lack anyone who fully anchors her life. That sense of being without protection matters because it shapes how she experiences memory, work, and desire. She is not a protected female subject within the state or within private life. She is someone who must continually adapt to structures that do not fully see her. That is why her erasure feels so powerful in the novel: it is built into the very conditions of her survival.

Atkinson therefore presents gendered trauma as a combination of labour, silence, and forgetting. Juliet's suffering is not spectacular, but it is persistent. It is tied to the fact that she is asked to bear witness without being acknowledged as a witness. The result is a woman whose presence is central to events and absent from history. That contradiction is one of the novel's sharpest critiques of wartime and postwar gender relations.

Genre-Bending and the Afterlives of Trauma

In *Transcription*, Kate Atkinson repurposes and bends the conventions of the spy genre to focus attention on the afterlives of trauma. The heart of the novel illustrates memory's capacity to intrude long after the war, subjecting Juliet's life to refracted attachment, delayed grieving, and return to war in the fractured self of memory, as memories rupture into her own narrative. In this world, trauma is neither stable nor linear; it returns imperfectly and with discontinuities, mimicking the novel's own non-linear narrative structure. Gender amplifies this reality, since Juliet's position as a woman places her more intensely in a matrix of vulnerability, silence, and desire. Juliet's state of orphanhood and sexuality illustrate how the wounds of women in spy narratives remain layered by absence and betrayal.

Although Atkinson departs from several traditions of spy fiction in favor of prioritising mem-

ory and psychological dislocation over action and intrigue, the novel still indicates certain familiar tropes, like the double agent. However, rather than the slow build of suspense, or glamorous betrayals, as found in canonical spy fiction, Juliet's position as a double agent is revealed anticlimactically. The narrative resists either supplying readers with any excitement related to acts of espionage; indeed, the revelation serves as just another disjunction within Juliet's identity and memory that questions the stability of truth. The double agent motif performs less the thrill of betrayal than the essential suspicion attached to women in some kind of power.

Formally, Atkinson's novel conveys trauma, as it breaks free of linearity to replicate the way memories disrupt chronological time. This withholding of closure throws readers into Juliet's own state of confusion, blurring the boundary between personal memory and the social history. With these formal decisions, Atkinson is able to include alternate genres to merge the boundaries of the genre of spy fiction and aspects of historical fiction and psychological fiction. Rather than the conventional mastery of codes, secrets and intelligence often associated with the genre, *Transcription* undermines the heroic myth of espionage to suggest that after war it is not victories that remain, but rather wounds- psychological, social and historical.

In this way, *Transcription* bends the spy genre into space for negotiating trauma, memory, and gendered experience. It shows that spying is not only about state secrets, but also about grief, hidden desires, and scars by tying espionage with the fragility of human memory. Atkinson marks her novel at the intersection of the spy genre and trauma narrative, in the end, changing the genre to that of registering the dissonance of history just as much as that of the intrigue of spying.

Conclusion

This study began with locating *Transcription* within the larger category of spy fiction, a literary history primarily associated with masculine authority and rational mastery. Atkinson shifts the expectation by foregrounding gender, allowing for the states of undoing within espionage to expose the impermanence of any female prerogative within such a context. The narrative delivers insight into how intimacy, uncertainty, and vulnerability complicate the conventional heroic dispositions of espionage narrative, transforming a genre that has obscured experiences such as these.

From this perspective, memory and trauma are presented as the significant forces in shaping the self and the narrative. Juliet is caught between mourning and memory, stumbling through moments of recollection, memory, and desire that signal the dislocated individual subject which has no

end. The non-linear, disrupted form Atkinson gives to *Transcription* holds these psychological ruptures and embeds them simultaneously within ordinary landscapes and historical traces of collective affect. In combining genre, memory, and form, *Transcription* recasts spy fiction as a site in which trauma can not only be made visible, but which is also a recognition that trauma is a constitutive aspect of both individual and cultural memory.

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