We need to have a look at some of Lochhead's earlier poetry as a guide to her characteristic preoccupations and technique before we turn to the sequence "Grimm Sisters".

The seemingly open and accessible nature of her poetry may dull our sense of the unobtrusively clever stuff actually going on. In "**The Abortion**", for example, have you noted her use of powerful words suggesting acute pain and distress: "agony", "neck distended" and so on. There are a number of questions we might ask: her imaginative use of non-standard word order, and the effects she achieves by its use, for example? Her use of allusion, and its effect? How she manages to link her own predicament, struggling with an unborn poem to the miscarrying cow in the nearby field? Think of her "labour" at the "barbed words" on her desk top (ll.14-15). We might think, too, of the powerfully original visual imagery (the writer is, after all also a painter)…say, "pulsing locomotion of some / terrible underwater creature, /rippled down her flank" (ll.19-21). What does she gain from the unusual word "locomotion" do you suppose? Her use of deliberately ugly sounds in ll.27-8, say? How does she evoke the men in the poem? Any sense of opposition with the females in it; and if so, how is this achieved? Why the intense stress on the cow's desperate attempts to somehow lick a dead calf into life? And at the end, what exactly is the cow—and by implication the poet—actually guilty of?

"Heartbreak Hotel": Having a break, achingly lonely and disorientated after the near collapse of yet another affair. She's on tranquillisers--deadly eye as usual for interior detail—interesting stanza in which she rakes frantically amongst her beauty-kit, aware that the only change she can produce is woefully superficial. Bitter commentary on her physical beauty—"Did my eyebrows offend you? ? Well I've plucked them out—" her frequent use of blasphemous biblical echoes. Surrounded by Kleenex, aerosols, mudpacks and creams and powder—all the tatty detritus of seduction she sits, stricken, in front of the mirror in a state of near emotional collapse. Everything is empty. Powerful poem.

"Inter City". Violent imagery—"hammered like a bolt"…Frankenstein? Image of male monstrousness—train full of cursing drunks. Complete feeling of alienation from all that surrounds her—the bestial fellow passengers, the weird splashes of synthetic light that mark the train's progress through and past the small burghs of Scotland; her own blurred features reflected in the window glass (aha, we think—the mirror motif again—the blurring is probably the important bit—drained—ashen--) whole thing framed by the title of the photo in her glossy magazine, "Portrait of Absence". Anonymity of poem is intriguing. Just who, or what, is absent?

"My House": Nice sweet (and therefore early) love poem from her stay in America in thelater sixties—usual bed stuff and domesticity.

"Dreaming Frankenstein": Triumphant tying-together of renewed interest in the monstrous and her dabbling in folklore—seven apple pips—hollowed out salt-filled

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egg—etc. which unites the theme of love with the quest for visionary experience. For the artist, however, the experience does not end with the "experience"; the even more alarming and risky stage comes later, in using such experience as a vehicle for art, sitting "in the reasonable sun of the morning…[with] quill and ink ? and icy paper." Nice poem, one of the best in her later manner.

"The Grim Sisters" (pp.72-4) On the discomforts and petty degradations of youthful femininity—beautiful sense of time and place: the references are placed with brilliantly economical effect. Full of images of impressment, moulding, piercing—suggesting self-immolation. Conversational opening as if overheard *in medias res,* a standard enough technique, no doubt, in the dramatic monologue, but effective here. Fragment, as many of these poems are, of an as-yet-unfinished verse autobiography. Intense absorption in the rituals (?sacrificial) of the boudoir: "Those days womanhood was quite a sticky thing / and that was what these grim sisters came to mean." i.e. grim in the sense of the Furies visiting the pains of womanhood upon the pubescent Liz Lochhead. Grim, too, in the sense of the Brothers Grimm—chaperones into the glamorous and mysterious world of adult femininity. Cinderella reference (obviously the Grim Sisters have something in common, but what? with the Ugly Sisters). Typical Liz Lochhead, teasingly suggestive web of references. Suddenly at midnight the scene flashes back to the present from the Fifties and the participants, sans Liz Lochhead, remain frozen in increasingly passé and parodic modes. Marvelous collection of phallic objects carefully controlled, neutralised inside their prophylactic "mantrap" handbag—hedgehogs, mice, "barbed combs" (teeth), spiked heels, they themselves are contained, held, encased within protective corsetry which distorts their figures into the currently fashionable exageratedg shapes "wasp waist and cone breast".

In the course of these poems, the persona is transformed from an almost quivering innocence into something utterly lewd and gross, through successive stages in what can only be called psychological self-mutilation the Maiden is transmuted into the Hag in very earnest.

We may reflect that when she fails—which is sometimes—its not because of an embarrassing uncontrolled slide into vulgarity and kitsch, but because she takes incredible heart-stopping risks, steering an expert but precarious-seeming (this is one of the things which makes her poetry exciting) course along the knife edge which divides tragedy from bathos, deadly irony from high camp, partaking of both, but owing allegiance ultimately perhaps to neither quite.

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