CHAPTER III

HISTORICAL NOVELS OF HELEN DUNMORE

3.1 INTRODUCTION:

“The idea of nationality is in itself a conservative idea – the demarcation of one’s rights, the opposition of self to another; it includes both the Judaic conception of superiority of race, and the aristocratic claim to purity of blood and to the right of primogeniture. Nationalism as a standard, as a war-cry, is only surrounded with the halo of revolution when people are fighting for its independence, when it is trying to throw off a foreign yoke” (Herzen 288).

Questions of nation and national identity have become significant in terms of their representation in twentieth-century literature in English. Dunmore had been reading the history and literature of the World War I and World War II since her teens—poetry, diaries, novels and letters. Lady Cynthia Asquith’s diaries gave an illuminating insight about war. The biographical materials about Lawrence, Katherine Mansfield, John Middleton Murry, Lady Ottoline Morrell provide her information about history. The novels of Lawrence, Irene Rathbone, and Tolstoy shape her thoughts. She read a lot of Russian fiction and poetry including Osip Mandelstam, Tolstoy, Pushkin, Anna Akhmatova and Marina Tsvetayeva and Turgenev. Dunmore wrote historical novels out of a broader preoccupation with the country, culture and literature that come from her school—from years of personal interest. Then she realized that she should write about Russia’s Empire (The Siege) and its impact on the neighbouring country—Finland. (House of Orphans).

The historical novels, Dunmore wrote are House of Orphans, A Spell of Winter and Counting the Stars. Helen Dunmore's The House of Orphans (2006), follows the previous literary practices relating to the representation of Russia. All communities are imaginary, or, in Dunmore's protagonist’s words, “everyone came from somewhere else at some time” (House of Orphans 13). The nation is constructed through imagination and “subjectivization” and the imaginary is presented as “real”. In this representation the positions between
strong and weak vary: questions of power are never absolute, and Russia, represented as subordinate, can also be imagined as a master. For example, in Dunmore's *The House of Orphans*, there is the representation of a Russia that rules Finland, and although people live “like slaves tied to the land” (28), they are represented as superior to the Finnish nation. Russia is a despotic, demonized community from which, “like all extremes”, comes “restless, rebellious anger against the order of things” (58). Dunmore uses power in a highly symbolic way to emphasize the exclusion of the nation and to construct imaginary relations between superior and subordinate.

The inaugural winner of England’s prestigious Orange Prize (1996), *A Spell of Winter* is a compelling turn-of-the-century tale of innocence corrupted by secrecy, and the grace of second chances. This dark, gothic novel takes place in pre-war England and focuses on Catherine and her brother Rob. Their mother left them and their father went insane. They are rich enough to have help but poor enough to live in a crumbling estate. *A Spell of Winter* is considered as a literary Gothic novel. When it began in the late-eighteenth century, Gothicism emphasized experiences connected with subterranean dungeons, secret passageways, bloody hands, ghosts, graveyards, etc. The novel takes place at the turn-of-the-century, when modernization is beginning to sweep across Europe. Confronted with new comforts like indoor heating at Ash Court, Cathy thinks:

“\[I wondered if I would miss our alternations of roasting and shivering, which were as natural to us as the squeeze and swell of our hearts\] (A Spell of Winter 80).”

Though the setting is classic gothic, the novel is peculiarly modern with its precise, unforgiving depictions of childhood and madness, its dark sensuality and artful use of metaphor. The intensity and darkness of the world Dunmore creates teeters between gripping and overwrought. Catherine and Rob Allen, siblings two years apart, grow up in a world of shameful secrets. Their mother creates a public outcry, abandoning her family for a bohemian life on the Continent. Their father, whose mental state always has been slightly
precarious, is committed to an asylum in the country. The children are sealed off with their grandfather in a crumbling country estate accompanied by their sturdy and well-loved servant, Kate, and the predatory tutor, Miss Gallagher. In true gothic fashion, terror, violence and eroticism collect beneath every dark surface. *A Spell of Winter* is praised by the *Publishers Weekly* as "Unsettling love and stifled horror create and then destroy the claustrophobic world of this lush, literary Gothic set in turn-of-the-century England. . . . In true Gothic fashion, terror, violence and eroticism collect beneath every dark surface. A finely crafted, if disturbing, literary page-turner " (03).

Her later book, *Counting the Stars* marks a complete contrast by jumping back to the late Roman Republic. The hero of *Counting the Stars* is the Roman poet Gaius Valerius Catullus. He lived between about 84 and 54 BC, the age of Cicero, Suetonius and Caesar; (c84-54 BC) lived in the fading days of the Roman Republic. The novel is about his love affair with the woman believed to have featured in two dozen of his poems, whom he called 'Lesbia'. Catullus was believed to have an older, married lover called Clodia Metelli. He wrote famously smutty poetry about her, beloved of young Latin scholars everywhere. Dunmore has been getting to know Catullus since she studied Latin at school, and has loved him ever since.

In an interview, Dunmore says that “in this case, it was when I realized that there might be a story behind the death of the pet sparrow that Clodia/ Lesbia loved so much ... and another story behind that, of another death. There were secrets there, and the beginnings of a plot... I see other things; a young man's vulnerability as well as his brilliance, a love shaded by obsession as well as by passion, and a great poet who has influenced the way succeeding generations read and write about love” (31).

“I just find him absolutely intriguing,” Dunmore says. “He's got terrific control technically when he writes. And yet the content is so transgressive, so bold, and so fearless really. He lays bare his emotions. And yet at the same time he's also being very artful. And I think he brought into literature for the first time a lot of things that we take for granted: the relationship described in
detail; the uncontrollable passion; the woman who is not idealized but is shown warts and all. That would be Clodia – the Lesbia of Catullus's poems – whose presence and tantalizing absence gusts through the novel like an insatiable Italian wind. He was quite a word-maker,” she believes (32).

The poems to Lesbia are particularly tempestuous. Scholars believe Lesbia was Clodia Metelli, a married aristocratic woman ten years older than Catullus with a terrible reputation: she was said to drink too much and was accused of being willing to sleep with virtually anyone, including her brother, a powerful and probably corrupt senator. Her equally powerful husband died under mysterious circumstances, and Clodia was suspected of poisoning him. She then had an affair with one of Catullus’ friends, and accused him of trying to poison her. The setting for all of this was Rome under Julius Caesar, a hotbed of infighting, corruption, and decadence. This richly evocative novel conjures up the corruption and rampant consumerism of ancient Rome.

The present chapter analyzes major themes in Dunmore's historical novels. Her historical novels deal with the culture, language, and literature of concerned historical setting. There are the themes of orphanhood and parenthood, fight for survival, love and sexuality, war and betrayal, food and starvation. The silenced histories of ex-centric groups are foregrounded, their stories are retold and alternative histories are composed. Dunmore’s historical novels regard literary history as a part of a larger cultural history.

3.2 ORPHANHOOD AND PARENTHOOD:

The theme of orphanhood and parenthood as not in oppose but in concern with each other is present primarily in the framing of Dunmore’s historical narrative. It delves into questions that occur to orphaned children and Russifying Finland. House of Orphans takes place in Finland in the first years of the twentieth century, as the Russian empire begins to exert greater control over the country. Russian Empire enforces a brutal policy to destroy Finland’s freedom and force its people into submission. It creates a
groundswell of fierce nationalist feeling that becomes bound up in the greater unrest of the workers as it gains momentum across the Baltic States. Finland had been under the nominal control of Russia for hundred years, but is now in the hands of a Russian-appointed governor-general and the Okhrana, his secret police. Russia is intensifying its grip, as hatred for the tsar's Governor-General in Helsinki grows. It is a historical drama about a country's struggle for independence. In *The Siege* Dunmore wrote vividly about the effects of wartime starvation, cold and terror on the Russian soul. In *House of Orphans* there is again a Russian theme, but this time the Russian presence is that of an oppressor, rather than a victim. The novel describes the brutal contrast between duty and desire, love and politics, youth and age.

Parenthood is linked in *House of Orphans* to comradeship and caring. Parent-like protectiveness appears as a natural reaction to have men under one's command or patients under one's watch. Especially in wartime situations—in which control over many aspects of one's existence is so limited—a desire to protect others serves as an outlet for the need for some measure of control. Some examples in the novel are Lauri's fatherly feelings for his comrades, and the way many of the patients hold Dr Eklund to be a surrogate father figure. The idea of parenthood is complicated by unorthodox gendering of protective roles.

*House of Orphans* focuses on Finland. It shows how the Romanovs contributed to their own downfall. The Czar didn't realize how close to the edge he was in terms of history and how the Romanovs were about to fall over the cliff's edge. Czar Nicholas II failed to realize that his role as "father of the people" was not only anachronistic, but hated. Though in his eyes, a Finnish petition demanding autonomy was a minor issue, it contributed to his downfall. *House of Orphans* deals with subversion and the reaction of state and society to those it regards as threats to the status quo. It concerns with the uprising of the Finns against Russian domination in 1901.

The country's autonomy is threatened by a policy of 'Russification' that has been instigated by Tsar Nicholas II. The main character, Eeva is an orphan
who finds herself destitute when her father dies. Of course she is not an
ordinary orphan. She is a ‘diamond in the rough’ and her uniqueness draws
the attention of Dr Eklund, who takes Eeva on as a servant in his home. In
1902, Finland was teetering on civil war. While tension was mounting in the
capital city Helsinki, the remote forested rural areas were somewhat
cushioned from civil unrest.

There is a stigma attached to an orphan as unloved and rejected.
Orphans are at the bottom of the social ladder. Orphans have a desire to be
belonged, to be loved. And what are the political consequences of living in a
world where it is not always possible to do so- a world in which the people
may have to be someone's servant or, be ruled by their mistakes or by
unrequited love. Eeva, the main female character, is an orphan. When her
revolutionary father dies, she is sent to an orphanage in the remote forest
areas of the North, miles away from her home in Helsinki. Dunmore writes:

“Eeva was like the bird in the tale that blew from one end of the
hall to another, from dark night into dark night. She had no
connection here. She was an orphan and a girl from nowhere,
from generations of people who had owned nothing and left no
mark on the earth” (House of Orphans 87).

Good parenthood involves care for the individual. Although war rejects such
attention to the individual, as a doctor, Thomas makes his best effort to
provide it. The orphanage's aim is to produce girls for a life of service. When
the girls are put out into service, they are raped, beaten, and worked like
dogs. But Eeva’s early years have given her strength of purpose, a belief in her
own worth. Her father educated her and instilled in her a sense of being equal
to anyone. She stands out from the others in the orphanage. She has a mind of
her own.

“She looked just like the rest of them, but he'd known
immediately that he hadn't seen her before. It was the way she
moved, which was quick and free, as if she hadn't learned how
to walk like an orphan yet...... And she's dirty. Can you change
the flannel and wash her?” “They're all dirty” commented the
girl. “All of them. They all need changing.”...He felt a power in her, as if he had to answer her” (05).

The kind, generous doctor doesn’t know at this point how Eeva will impact on his life. Thomas is also a kind of orphan, his wife has died recently and he is estranged from his daughter Minna. He is hardworking yet lonely. He has never experienced the happiness of true intimacy with a woman. He gives to others, but has no-one to enrich his life personally. He is very endearing. His house in the countryside outside Helsinki is empty and so is his heart. Minna's anger with her father is a reflection of the unhappiness of her parents' marriage. Both Minna and the doctor's old friend, Lotta Eriksson, are aghast at the arrival of 16-year-old Eeva. Both conspire to remove her to prevent a scandal, they say. Thomas' unhappily married friend Lotta is mainly being protective of him. She is undoubtedly in love with him but, being very conventional; she will never leave her husband Karl. She is the mirror opposite of Eeva.

“Long ago, rebellion might have found its echo in her. But not now. She'd learned the hard way that things are as they are. People had their natures, which couldn’t be changed. Lotta the gardener had learnt to bow to the sun, the wind, the rain, the late, piercing frost. She’d learned to yield. If she hadn't had love, she'd had something else. We must adapt, thought Lotta. We must shape ourselves to reality, not expect reality to shape itself to us” (58).

Lotta has not had the advantage of good looks. She is married to a man who does not love her. She has made the most of what life has to offer her. Helen Dunmore says that she has great affection for Lotta, as she wrote more about her; she grew to like her more and more. Lotta is a kind of orphan too, living without love, without children to care for. Beneath her tough exterior, there is a tender heart lurking.

People cut off from their parents, are also orphans. The old Finnish tradition of being 'born in the sauna' (very wise, because it is sterile due to the great heat used there) led directly to the scene of Thomas’ birth, and then
indirectly to the scene where Eeva bathes in the sauna and Thomas becomes hopelessly in love with her. Ways of birth were quite significant in House of Orphans both literally, as in childbirth, and metaphorically, as in how a nation can come to birth. There are examples of coercive, even cruel birth, when a husband wants nothing but a wife who works, produces children and is available for sex. There is the rather idyllic birth of Thomas, where his mother abandons upper class convention and returns to the safety and independence of the sauna. And of course there is national independence struggling to be born, and individuals struggling to possess the lives into which they have been born.

Dr Eklund acts in a fatherly and motherly way to his patients. The relationship between the doctor and the orphan is doomed from the outset. It is a potent blend of tragedy, pathos, and farce. The two talk, but without warmth: in a splendidly graphic image, They were like a couple of burglars swapping essential facts in undertones, while they passed each other tools to jemmy open a window. Eeva is simply biding her time to return to underground politics in the capital, casually abandoning her lovelorn patron to a miserable future. Eklund has been bypassed by history, left with nothing but a censorious daughter and memories of a hideously violent wife.

Eeva’s fight against injustice and corruption mirrors the one fought by many in Finland. Her relationship both to the kindly old country doctor for whom she keeps house and a group of socialist revolutionaries from Helsinki, Eeva is oppressed at the hands of the odious Finnish aristocracy. Eeva experience class tension, conflict and passion. Repeatedly discriminated against because of her class, Eeva recognizes the insidious logic of her oppressors: ‘They won’t teach you anything that lets you escape.’ She develops into an idealistic and passionate young woman. Through her, Dunmore most clearly communicates anti-oppression thread that runs throughout the novel. Eeva’s situation seems to be a microcosm of the whole of Finland at the time. It is this oppression that ignites her contemporaries’ voracious desire for change. Russia’s imperial leadership tightens its
oppressive grip on Finland and perpetuates the abuse of working people such as Eeva. This oppression leads Eeva to leave her job as a servant and move to Helsinki, a place which, in contrast to the stagnation of Eva’s orphanage and bucolic life.

Fatherhood and motherhood tie into a larger issue of gender roles in society. The scene shifts from the Finnish countryside to the noisy, industrial boom town of Helsinki where Eeva finds her childhood comrade Lauri and a romance develops between them. Eeva finds she is living the life she has always longed for – a life with a purpose – as all her friends are revolutionaries. She is keen to resist the imposition of Russian oppression. But one of the friends isn’t just a revolutionary – Sasha, a disaffected Russian, is a terrorist. He plans to assassinate the top ranking Russian official, the Governor General of Finland, Bobrikov. Lauri is arrested and Eeva writes to Thomas for help. At this point it is discovered that Sasha is a double agent. Sasha is a character who is in fact capable of any act of violence. He is persuasive, manipulative and magnetic. He is engaged in revolutionary act and thus orphaned from his altruism. The use of double agents and indeed double double agents was practiced by the Tsarist secret police. Lauri and Eeva are reunited and join the host of Finns immigrating to America.

The relationship between Thomas and Eeva is marked by great restraint. Thomas is overwhelmed by a passion for this young woman and he does not completely understand this passion, where it comes from or what it means in his life. As a servant living under his roof Eeva is very vulnerable and could so easily have been persuaded or coerced into a sexual relationship. However, not only is Eeva much stronger than she at first appears, but the doctor is not a predator. If the relationship is difficult it is perhaps because the love is so one-sided, and also because these two people are at quite different stages in their lives. Their lives intersect but cannot truly meet. For this reason their journey across the Finnish countryside is the most profound part of their relationship, because it is bound to end. There is no shared destination. And again Thomas becomes orphan.
In the power games played out between Sasha, Lauri, Eeva, and a woman called Magda who befriends houses and employs Eeva, Helen Dunmore seeks to examine Finland's early-20th-century resistance to Russian power and to examine the terrorist mindset. The personal and the political are interwoven. Just as Finland is oppressed by Swedish and Russian influences, free-spirited Eeva becomes territory for the conflicting desires of those around her. But the novel's greatest achievement is the depiction of Thomas Eklund, his instincts constantly checked by his agonising self-knowledge.

Eeva, loses her home in Helsinki, her friends and her freedom when her political activist father dies and she is sent away to a country orphanage. Eeva appears to have nothing left and to be subject to the will of the orphanage matron just as Finland is subject to the will of the Tsar. It looks as if she will have to accept the only future offered to her: training for domestic service. She goes as a servant to the house of a country doctor, and her life appears to be mapped out; but it isn't so. Eeva's future is going to be remarkable. Meanwhile, in Helsinki, other young people are joining the revolutionary movements which Eeva knew in her childhood.

The theme of orphanhood goes even further. The nation, Finland as a child of Russia is also an orphan. Russia orphaned Finland. Its people feel it should once again belong to itself, to break free from the oppression of the Russian Empire. The relationship between Finland and Russia, and the way in which Finns first won and later maintained their independence, against enormous odds is fascinating. Helen Dunmore has a longstanding interest in the place, people and period of Finland. Russia is the overwhelming force that has taken control of its neighbours.

Finland is orphaned from her own heritage and even from her own language. The Russian Empire enforces a brutal policy to destroy Finland's freedom and force its people into submission. A city landscape at a time of very rapid change, as people flooded to the city is orphaned from its originality. Old wooden buildings were torn down and replaced by stone
buildings, industry grew, and new public buildings sprang up. Someone who had been away from Helsinki for ten years might have found parts of the city almost unrecognizable.

The theme of orphanhood and parenthood is also reflected in A Spell Of Winter. She begins A Spell Of Winter with a flashback of Kate delivering a scary story by the fire to Rob and Cathy (1-5). Cathy and her brother, Rob, have forged a passionate refuge against the terror of loneliness and family secrets, but their sibling love becomes fraught with danger. As Catherine fights free of her dark present and haunting past, the spell of winter that has held her in its grasp begins to break. Dunmore touches everything: skin, bone, frozen earth.

Comparing herself to the beautiful Livvy, a dowdier Cathy thinks: “I was too like my mother. My face made people thinks of the things men and women did together in the dark” (A Spell Of Winter 66). Having abandoned her family, the mother remains a topic mostly avoided by the men at the estate. The shame of Cathy’s mother is stirred up in people by Miss Gallagher. But Cathy has difficulty of forgetting (and forgiving). After Cathy’s abortion, she recalls a poem about a women's stillbirth: “A mother, a mother was born” (196). The poem was about a woman whose baby died after birth. The baby died, but the mother who has also been born that night could not die. The abortion affects Cathy's bond with her mother. Cathy's motherhood is now on the highest peak. “She would never hurt her own daughter, but the darkness squirmed... Kate, where did you bury her?” (190).

There are a number of mothers and mother figures in A Spell of Winter. Cathy has three “mothers”—Kate, who is affectionate, dependable, but in the end more centered on her own life than on the lives of the children; Miss Gallagher, who is a fairytale “bad mother,” possessive, dangerous and yet pathetic; and finally Cathy’s real mother, Cynthia, who is absent and mysterious and does no mothering at all and yet is both idealized and mourned by her daughter. The notions of mothering and motherhood seem to be necessary in order to launch a successful mother and child relationship.
Left alone, Cathy and her grandfather grow close. One evening he talks about raising his daughter — Cathy's mother — almost from the moment of her birth:

“Even when I was holding her she was wanting to crib herself round into something soft that wasn't there. The way a man's body is made, it's like a rack of ribs. It doesn't fit to a child” (301).

Cathy receives letters from her mother but she kept them unread. At last, she decides to see her mother. George tells her that her mother has no money now. She earns her livelihood from writing stories for children.

“... This is my mother. For a moment my beautiful mother with her long white fingers, her hair like ink, her perfect, averted face stands between us, filling the space across which we must touch. Then I blink and the slide of my tears across my eyeballs washes her away. Here is my mother... her face which is not beautiful at all but is like my own. My mother stands facing me, waiting to see what to I'll do, or say” (313).

Cathy's mother is now near to her. Her eyes are only inches from her. The bond between daughter and mother tightened fast. As war started, the feeling of patriotism increased in the people. For their mother Nation, women are scarifying their sons. Grandfather shows Cathy her correspondence in The Times. A woman has written in to say that she has sent every one of her six sons to the war.

“In these time a mother’s heart, wrung as it with sorrow, beats high with pride and the knowledge that among all those fine young men her own flesh and blood is marching. Mothers of England who have given and given and given again, our sacrifice will never be forgotten” (262).

The theme of parenthood and orphanhood are woven closely even in Dunmore's Counting the Stars. It is also reflected through the master-slave relationships. Catullus' mother died young and his father was a remote figure, leaving Catullus to be largely brought up by a trusted family slave. That is why
he cleaves so deeply to his unsuitable older mistress. His father has freed him from paternal authority.

“You have the right to do as you please, and I must trust to your own judgment” (Counting the Stars 75).

His father is in Sirmio and he is in Rome. Catullus receives letters from his father. But he is not the son his father wanted. That ideal son, his infuriating twin, has followed him all his life. His father’s son is high-spirited but pious, writes clean Latin in a decent old-fashioned style, sows his wild oats, but once these are satisfactorily scattered he is ready to settle down with a girl of their type. ‘A girl like your mother’, that is his father’s ideal. His mother dead, embodies all the virtues, but she no longer laughs. Catullus, however, is all too alive, a flesh-and-blood contradiction of his father’s desires. Catullus is modestly eager to learn everything his father has to teach him about the management of the family’s estates and of their trading interests in Bithynia. He understands that his chief purpose in life is to advance the family, protect its interests and defend its name. Even his brother, Marcus, who does almost everything else that their father wants, does not like Caesar.

Catullus himself is quite fleshed out. The novel moves beyond his love affair with Clodia to dwell on his past, his family life, and his relationship with the city of Rome and with the countryside where he grew up. There is also quite a bit about life in ancient Rome, about the Republic’s politics, and about power games and conspiracies. Dunmore writes:

“That’s Manlius world. Slaves are treated well, and in return they offer loyal service. Wives are discreet, faithful and fertile. He’s only broken the rules once in his life, when he married a girl who ‘wasn’t really one of us” (01).

There is a fire- a very convenient fire- when the slave janitor happened to be absent on his master’s business. So, they have no more villas, just a tasty, smouldering piece of land that is immediately snapped up by a property developer. Manlius probably took a rock-bottom price from him, not realizing
the value of the plot, and never suspecting that his steadfast old slave might be pocketing a backhander.

The theme of parenthood is, further, developed through the master-slave relationship. Lucius has been with Catullus' family since long before Catullus' birth. He was given his freedom on the death of Catullus' grandfather, but he is so much part of the family that it is hard to imagine how they would live without him. Lucius is trusted and faithful slave. He is content to be their steward, rather than to scrabble for riches in the way so many freed slaves did. Lucius never seems to care about money. Lucius belongs to the family once, and now they belong to him. They owe him more than they could ever repay. When Catullus' mother died, it was Lucius who made life bearable for the boys. They see him grieve rather than become silent and angry like their father. They remember how often their mother has laughed with Lucius, and how rarely with her husband.

There is a feeling of orphanage. Their mother has become a shade. She has gone to join their ancestors, those terrifying ancestors whose wax death masks are stored in the atrium. Their mother could not come back, ever. Lucius recalls little rhymes that their mother has remembered from her own childhood. He has her knack of telling stories. Their mother has stood between her boys and all the dark shadows that scared them, but then she turns into a shadow herself. Catullus remembers pressing into her skirts, against the swell of her thigh, snuffing her smell through the cloth. He is shy with strangers, and his father hates it.

Lucius knows everything about them. He showers the motherly affections to the boys. He even knows that their skin smells different when they have a fever, and he would heat up the brazier, grand herbs in the pestle and prepare medicines just as their mother used to do. Lucius never criticizes their father, but sometimes he would be silent in a particular way, if their father has lashed out at them. Lucius always has to check that drinking water is cold, the bed linen changes after another night of fever and sweats and that the bunch of rosemary that hung over the door is freshly cut and not shedding
its narrow silvery needles. And it is soothing to watch Lucius. If Catullus’
mother were still alive, she would look at him just as Lucius has done. She
would want him to understand his father too, and even love him. His mother
has loved his father, in her own way. She has known something in his father
that his son never experienced.

Catullus receives a letter informing the death of his brother Marcus.
Lucius himself brings this letter. Lucius doesn’t open his arms to embrace his
boy, to offer the comfort and support he has always given. It is happened
when he is drinking, or when he is writing, or when he is in the Forum, or
when he is with Clodia. He never sees his brother again. He loves his brother.
“It is terrible, when you love someone and they die”. “Ave atque vale... ave
atque vale...” (242). He says the words aloud, kneeling on the earth by his
brother's grave. The words move through the air, shadowing it. “You
understand, Marcus,” he says , “that words are all I can give you” (243).
Catullus says to Lucius to look after his father and leaves to Rome. Lucius also
accompanies Catullus to Rome as he is not staying there for a long time. To
Catullus, Lucius is his father. “My true father, who has given me everything
that a father can give to his son” (246).

The slaves, inevitably, lead dislocated emotional lives — their
children are sold away from them, they are removed from their homelands.
The slaves are thus made orphans. A slave baby who had taken a breath of
human air, sneezed, thought of better of the fate it had been born to, and died
(08). But their emotions are all the more vivid for being suppressed, revealed
only in small actions, never in words. Jealousy, loyalty, passion, affection,
spite — the slaves’ feelings are like an underground river running beneath
the activities of their masters and mistresses. The emotional lives of the
upper classes, played out, as they are, in public, are little more than an act.
The only real tears Clodia sheds are for the death of her tame sparrow. The
minor characters like Catullus' steward, Lucius, and Clodia’s slave, Aemilia
are mostly flashes. Unfortunately they, like Catullus and Clodia, remain
resolutely undeveloped. There are also very brief twists of focus on one or more of the many slaves.

Many of the episodes recounted in *Counting the Stars* are recognizable from Catullus’ poems – there is the famous death of his mistress’ sparrow. Catullus is obsessed with Clodia, the ‘Lesbia’ of his poems. Clodia is ten years older, married and a mother. She is cruel, voracious and spoiled and she has plenty of lovers besides Catullus, including her own brother, the sadistic and ambitious ‘Pretty Boy Clodius’. None of this deters Catullus, who chooses to believe that a core of innocence and true feeling lies within Clodia to which only he, with his poet’s sensibility, has access. Catullus can make words behave in the way he wants them to behave. He thinks he can create ‘a blank wax tablet on which we would write our own story’ (08) But nothing is ‘blank’ in Rome. There is no privacy, no innocence. The lovers are never truly alone. There is always a slave in the next room, covering her ears against the sounds of their love-making. Nothing can take place without the connivance of the slaves. The delicate balance of power between master and slave is maintained by subtle, unwritten rules.

### 3.3 FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL:

“Fight for Survival” is the most recurrent theme in Dunmore’s fiction. The primacy of survival is the definitive theme in the heart of her historical novels. In the *House of Orphans*, the characters are struggling against the worst circumstances. Dunmore has managed to bring realistic characters to life as well as bring out Finnish Archetypes without them overshadowing the story. The clashes of Swedish Fins and Fins through the references to nature versus civilization are portrayed vividly. This clash is also shown through the references of the struggle between political and social world. The novel perches historically on the edge of the abyss of civil war and even later the struggle for survival of the winter war.

A chill Finnish orphanage is far away in the great forests, where rural society keeps to its antique ways. The kids have no one to look for them. They
are inheritors of TB and syphilis. It is a harsh life for the children, who are imported from great distances and look forward to a life of near-slavery if they survive long enough to go out to work as farm labourers. The orphanage is blessed by a compassionate widowed doctor who lives in a rambling house in a forest clearing, looking out over a sea of trees. Eeva, an orphan of sixteen, steps in the house of orphan. She has chosen to be Thomas’ housekeeper. She has green eyes and a high intelligence and speaks Finnish, Swedish and Russian, taught by her father who, like Illych in *The Siege*, was a dissident. (He had taken part in the murder of a Russian spy.) Eeva is well fed and happy in the doctor’s kitchen - and soon becomes beautiful. The watching neighbours confront her as a temptress who threatens their doctor’s virtue. Immediately, she leaves with her bundle on her back. The elderly doctor accompanies her through forests and over lakes for two days and nights until he can see her on to the great steam train to Helsinki. He watches as it pulls away, standing in sadness.

This theme of survival is highlighted even more vividly because Eeva and Thomas parallel their survival instincts in both parts of the story. The first part of the novel which deals with traditional, idyllic life in the Finnish backwoods is in sharp contrast to the second half of the story taking place in the hustle and bustle of the modern city of Helsinki. People living in the countryside seem so far away from the social upheavals in the capital city. Thomas loves birch trees, cherry trees, and vegetable gardens around his house. He often treats sick children in the orphanage free of charge and is compassionate toward pregnant women giving a home birth. Eeva is working energetically as a housekeeper with her strong sense of dignity and integrity. Although she is just a servant of the doctor, she considers herself an independent individual belonging to her own self.

Destitute when her father dies, she is sent away to a country orphanage, and then employed as servant to a widowed doctor, Thomas Eklund. Slowly, Thomas falls in love with Eeva ... but she has committed herself long ago to a boy from her childhood, Lauri, who is now caught up in
Helsinki’s turmoil of resistance to Russian rule. ‘Terrorism’, Thomas warns Eeva, ‘ignores the fact that the healing of the wound, whether personal or political, is a slow, stealthy process. Nobody cure it by driving a knife into it’. Here, medicine becomes a political metaphor, drawing both parts of the work deftly together. A doctor’s patient, persistent practice is an image of reform rather than revolution. The story reveals how terrorism lies hidden within ordinary life, as rulers struggle to hold on to power. Lotta knows that houses like hers are built up by generations of self-control, self-denial, and public service.

“Her men had taken up their responsibilities. As soldiers they had defended and enlarged what was theirs. As men in public life they had fought longer battles, which called for guile as well as resolution. Where would Finland be without such men? Who else could handle the Russians with such consummate skill? Lotta’s men knew that they had to play a long game. There were extremes on both sides. Fennomania, Russification: both of them entirely wrong for our beloved country” (House of Orphans 102).

She has fought long battles praying for acceptance to replace the terrible anger that threatened to swallow up her life. In the end she has won her battle. She has come to believe in her deepest, inner fibre that it is God’s plan that she should be childless, and married to a man who not only doesn’t love her but seems sometimes to ...

Eklund’s poverty-stricken patients divide themselves from their brutal survival instinct. They are touchingly credulous. The mother of a child whose boil needs lancing is told to brew him a concoction of raspberry and pepper vodka, which Eklund then breezily throws away. It is just a device to distract her while he attended to her son. Thomas is cold hearted, over bred daughter is scandalized by some of his home-spun remedies: bottles of nettle tonic, cranberry juice for a chill on the kidneys, mare’s milk, and poultices of mould bread. Eklund is a relic of the old rural Finland, in an age when a new urban, revolutionary nation is being brought tumultuously to birth.
Thomas is in deep sympathy with his environment. He makes medicinal remedies out of woodland plants, loves foraging for berries and mushrooms, and is stirred by the sound of rushing water, the slopes of lilac and birch and cherry trees, the spruce and larch pushing out sparks of brilliant green. Thomas is an able and caring doctor who treats his patients as individuals. But he has had to suppress his sensual and emotional needs during the long souring of his marriage. When the book opens, the winter snows are beginning to melt. For Thomas, this is "the long thaw that's half feared and half desired" (02). When he chooses 16-year-old Eeva as his live-in servant, it is inevitable that he will fall in love with her.

Survival almost always triumphs morality, even for a character like Eeva, who is deeply principled. Thomas finds Eeva at the house of Orphans, where children from "tainted" urban backgrounds are steeped in the "purity" of the countryside and trained to become "a biddable domestic servant or a farm worker, rather than a prostitute or a criminal" (02). But Eeva is not trainable, or at least not tamable. She is good at cooking and cleaning, quick to learn. But she is fierce and proud. Her father was a political activist and she spent her childhood in Helsinki, in a cell of would-be revolutionaries, Finns who opposed the "Russification" of Finland, in constant fear of a knock at the door from the Okhrana, the Russian secret police. Eeva is highly intelligent and extremely well read. Her incarceration in the House of Orphans has forced her to conceal her true nature and abilities, but once she is released, Thomas becomes all too acutely aware of them. Sensitive to her every movement, he longs for her to grow and flourish in the heart of the forest with him, but he knows his hopes are vain.

This theme of survival is clear throughout ordeal of the characters. Eeva sees herself as an ant crossing the great squares of St Petersburg. Her father used to say that first make people feel like ants and then stamp on them. And this is the way of the Tsars. The rudiments of the situation are concisely communicated: Russia’s imperial leadership is tightening its oppressive grip on Finland and perpetuating the abuse of working people.
such as Eeva. Jumping between streams of consciousness and dialogue, Dunmore exhibits highly developed characters - the impassioned and often distraught thoughts of Eeva, the idealist heroine, while also viewing those of her oppressors. At the end of the novel Dunmore shows us Bobrikov, the high-ranking Tsarist official whom Lauri was commissioned to kill. Now a decrepit and pitiful old man he is distraught at his poor blood circulation, and Lauri’s decision not to assassinate him seems vindicated. The doctor is last seen back in the forest getting on with his job, delivering a poor man’s child into a country that is about to be destroyed by Russia before the long, bloody fightback begins. Eeva, orphaned daughter of a failed revolutionary, also battles to find her independence and identity.

In the orphanage, Eeva brings with her a distinct whiff of urban revolutionary politics. Dozy old Thomas ends up with a little agitator in his kitchen. The daughter of Helsinki firebrand has suffered torture in the struggle against Russian imperial power. The lonely doctor falls in love with his fiercely self-dependent sixteen year old, but the only real affinity between the two is one of blood. Just as the revolutionaries hold that bloodletting is the only solution to the Russian yoke, so Thomas understands in his own way that drastic surgery can be essential for life. Eeva and Lauri disappear in the long and bloody fight against Russian domination. *House of Orphans* is a tale of endurance and fear in a gathering storm.

*A Spell of Winter* is described as a thriller as the opening sentence is really the most thrilling part of the book: “I saw an arm fall off a man once” (01). When Rob was aged ten, and his sister eight, their mother abandoned them and ran off to live a gypsy life on the continent. Shortly after, their father was committed to a mental asylum where he died under suspicious circumstances. Catherine narrates the story, her naiveté and decipher reveal some of the secrets and lies of the family. Sometimes she is remarkably astute and wise: "Grandfather and Mr Bullivant smiled at one another, but their smile was about me; it did not include me" (*A Spell of Winter* 60). She is a dynamic character who grows and comes into her own as the novel
progresses. It is a natural, real coming of age within a context of horrors. Catherine and Rob Allen, siblings two years apart, grow up in a world of shameful secrets. Their mother abandons them when they are young, and their father dies after being institutionalized. The children live with their grandfather, "the man from nowhere," in a crumbling country estate accompanied by their dependable maid, Kate, and a malicious tutor, Miss Gallagher. Together they forge a passionate refuge for them, while the world outside moves to the brink of war. They forge a passionate refuge for themselves against the terror of family secrets, and while the world outside moves to the brink of war; their sibling love becomes fraught with dangers. But as Catherine fights free of the past, the spell of winter that has held her in its grasp begins to break.

The novel’s rich imagery moves between the stark, harsh winter worlds that Catherine loves and the warm summer she loathes, when the air is thick with the scent of roses and painful memories. Through decades of changing seasons, the two siblings mature within an enclosed world in which they are virtually imprisoned by servants who guard the mysteries of their heritage. In different ways, first Rob and later Catherine will dare to break through the wall that encircles their perversely stifled lives to move toward heartbreaking but final release. Against this backdrop, cruelty and eroticism lurk beneath every surface. Kate and Rob finally leave for Canada and then the war comes, taking most of the neighboring men with it, so that Cathy is left with her ailing grandfather on the farm. It's only when the war ends, and she is alone that she is ready to break away and be redeemed by love.

In chapter eighteen, there is the description of Kate’s packing to leave, simply saying: “It’s never been my home” (223). Cathy feels secure in the home. Mr. Bullivant offers Cathy glimpses of a larger world, and Kate urges her to leave the estate, but she cannot bring herself to act in response. She even states that she's “not sure about anything except staying at the house” (253). Cathy is so attached to a house even if she had with her bad memories. This suggests her psychological complexities related to that house.
A few relatively normal characters keep the novel grounded: There is the eccentric grandfather with whom the children live, their mother having long ago fled to the Continent and their father having eventually died in the sanatorium. There is Kate, the Irish maid of all work, Miss Gallagher, the good servant as opposed to the bad and their wealthy neighbour, Mr. Bullivant, who woos Cathy in a discreet fashion, sends her lemons from his Italian villa, teaches her about painting --- and, most importantly, knows and likes her errant mother. Believing Miss Gallagher to be the cause of her unborn child's death, Cathy decides to rid herself of the bitter and petty affections of the old woman. She walks with her deep into the forest under the pretense of digging up plants. She threatens the older woman but never lands the shovel on its intended mark. Miss Gallagher's heart gives out and she collapses in the snow. Rob runs off along with Kate, first to Ireland then Canada. Cathy must carry on during wartime with little means to support the small household. She learnt ploughing the land. “The blade jagged at the soil and the mare dragged heavily, baffled. I looked back and saw the ugly line of the furrow” (A Spell of Winter 259) Rob returns home but will be heading for France to fight in the war. Her grandfather's health eventually fails.

Against this strange and secretive backdrop, Cathy and Rob develop closeness so fierce that it eventually threatens to smother them both. Kate makes the first crack in their hermetically sealed world, which World War I eventually bursts wide open. With Kate's departure for Canada and Rob's for the front, destitute times at home force Cathy into self-reliance. It is only after she has redeemed by hardship that she has given a second chance to be redeemed by love. At last, Cathy's grandfather dies. A man known as "the wizard" --- a friend of the cook, the marvelously named Mrs. Blazer, who sells herbal remedies in the market square --- comes to the house and burns attar of roses to see the old man out... an unsparing and curiously gorgeous scene.

The theme of 'fight for survival' is also reflected in Counting the Stars. In this historical novel, Helen Dunmore moves to the Rome of Julius Caesar.
She reveals the class discrimination and the survival of the society. It is a city where greed is good. Property developers pack tenants into jerry-built apartment blocks while the rich live in palatial villas.

“You are such an innocent Manlius. They’ve already thrown up a five-storey building on the site of your villa, to match the apartment blocks on either side...It’ll fall down in a decade or two but then it’ll hold dozens and dozens of juicy tenants. They’ll be squeezed until the profit gushes like blood. They’ll be crushed flat like bedbugs when the floors collapse, or burned alive when fire traps them on the top storey. That’s how we built in Rome these days” (Counting the Stars 02).

Politicians, orators, arse-lickers, idiots, plotters, poisoners, back-stabbers and buggers from Caesars downwards- all these bastards make Rome the incomparable fountain of entertainment. Surely, Rome is enough to fill a life. Armed gangs roam the streets. And the young poet Catullus is living dangerously by publishing passionate love poetry to an older married woman. He made Latin come alive in a way that still feels immediate and contemporary. As one of the Novi Poetae, or “New Poets,” of Rome in the first century B.C., Catullus broke from tradition and wrote lyric poetry, sometimes translating Sappho from the Greek, often writing “nugae” (small personal poems) in the tradition of the poets of the Greek Anthology. His most famous poems alternately celebrate and defame Lesbia, his passion, jealousy, and frustration. Of course, these were his poetic persona’s feelings, not necessarily Catullus’ own, the biographical interpretation is a bit old-fashioned. His poems are rude, very rude. They include satires of public figures and friends, and they deal with sex - of any all descriptions. Many of the poems are dedicated to “Lesbia” - a code name for a lover of Catullus, Clodia Metelli. She was embroiled in one of Ancient Rome’s many poisoning scandals. The poems are wonderful; polished and controlled technically, but wild and passionate in theme. Dunmore, herself a poet, has taken Catullus’s original poems as the inspiration for this highly charged story of an illicit passion. Dunmore identifies Catullus’s love for Clodia, wife of a powerful Roman, Metellus Celer. Clodia is also a poet but admits herself, she is not
much good, that she is better suited for an ornament. For all his complaints about her alleged infidelities, the poet Catullus claims to have loved Lesbia as a friend appreciated her wit. Clodia occasionally finds time for the lovesick poet between her busy schedule of friends to meet, spas to visit, massages and hair treatments, travels to plan, visits to her dressmaker, new dishes to consider. Catullus is obsessively jealous of Clodia’s other loves, including her husband, her maid and her pet sparrow. The death of the sparrow sparks off a macabre trail of violence when Clodia’s husband, whom she suspects of having killed the bird, dies from eating poisoned mushrooms. Metellus Celer is on deathbed, such a death which is easy neither to suffer nor to watch. Dunmore writes,

“Whatever happens, they won’t panic. They are Metelli, and the determination to survive is cut into their faces as strongly as their sufferings. They’ll retreat, regroup, and ready themselves to advance again” (122).

Clodia probably had some part in her husband’s death, for an unbelievably stupid reason. There are rumours that the Metelli have vowed revenge against ‘those responsible for our sorrow’. In public they say nothing. Everybody sticks to the story of sudden, tragic, unavoidable death, a great man cut down in his prime, an irreparable loss to the city, and so on and so forth. They seemed to bury the man for a second time with so many words.

The slaves are struggling to survive by offering their duty to their masters and mistresses. The slaves do the gardening and pool-cleaning in the morning. Aemilia, a slave of Clodia, has to heat water to bathe her mistress. She has set up the little room next door like a boudoir. She is always ready to stand behind Clodia, dressing her hair as she sits in the basketwork chair or for the make-up. It’s Aemilia’s job to return Clodia’s bruised, swollen lips to even carmine, to smooth on foundation paste and massage it into her face, to wipe away the smudged cosmetics and replace them with subtle grey eyeshadow and kohl to create Clodia’s famous ‘Hera’ eyes. Dunmore writes:
“With her strong fingers Aemilia massages Clodia’s scalp, parting the hair and dividing it into sections so that every lock can be dealt with in order, in time. She massages first with her fingers, and then more strongly, with the heel of her palms. Finally, with butterfly fingertips, she strokes Clodia’s temples. Who would have thought Aemilia’s touch could be so delicate? The room fills with the smell of Clodia’s hair, warm and damp after sex. Clodia’s eyes are shut” (15).

Lucius, the slave has been with Catullus’ family since long before Catullus’ birth. Now he becomes the part of that family. They couldn’t manage without Lucius. He knows everything and everyone. He oils the machinery of the year so deftly that they don’t even notice him doing it. When Catullus was ill, Lucius looks after his households - regarding his diet, room temperature and ventilation. Counting the Stars, a character-driven historical fiction evokes Catullus’s wine-sodden, slave-dependent, hedonistic lifestyle and the decadence of the late Roman Republic. Catullus rebelled against classical epic poetry – like Homer’s – that concerned the feats of ancient heroes and Gods. Instead he created pithy, intimate verse about his own life. As well as offering up messy emotions concerning Lesbia, he wrote of his other beloveds, rebuked friends who betrayed him and lamented his beloved brother’s death.

The theme of survival is reflected through the depth of character, vibrancy of character, depth of emotion and a fascination with the way each individual’s story plays itself out. The language has got to be fully alive. Dunmore’s prose gives acute psychological insights into her characters, haunting description of the landscape, and an examination of the nature of justice and political rage.

3.4 LOVE AND SEXUALITY:

Love and intimate friendship between men and women is a rumbling theme in Dunmore’s historical novels. House of Orphans is a love story. The relationship between Thomas and Eeva is difficult. Thomas is overwhelmed by a passion for this young woman. As a servant living under his roof Eeva could so easily have been coerced into a sexual relationship. The love is one-
sided, and these two people are at quite different stages in their lives. Their lives intersect but cannot truly meet. For this reason their journey across the Finnish countryside is the most profound part of their relationship, because it is bound to end. He yearns to envelop Eeva in this quilt, but knows he cannot; he constantly teeters between his impulses and his sense of himself as a doctor, an employer, a responsible middle-aged man. Meanwhile, Thomas develops a (fascinatingly) sexualized, emotional dependency on his new sixteen-year old servant, confusing his conflicted emotions for his own estranged daughter, Minna, and the fall-out from an affair with a young girl years before, for love. His feelings for Eeva are compulsive, verging on psychosis, but tender too and, since he never acts upon them, sympathetic, somehow acceptable.

But his life in solitude is shaken by the presence of Eeva when he finds himself in love with her. Minna notices her father’s secret love and warns Eeva to keep away from him. Eeva, who has no interest in Thomas, is only too glad to return to Helsinki to be reunited with her childhood friend, Lauri. Thomas has fallen in love, with all the passion of a deeply feeling man who has never been loved in return. It takes all the power of his deeply moral nature to relinquish Eeva, but that is what he does, leaving clear her path to return to Helsinki and the unfinished revolutionary business of her childhood. Eeva’s blossoming love affair with Lauri is executed with the graceful verve and precision. Eeva and Lauri are childhood friends separated by death and politics. Eeva grows up in an orphanage and is sent to work for a doctor, Thomas, who becomes obsessed with her. Lauri, influenced by the ideologue, Sasha, becomes involved in resistance to Russian rule and ultimately in a plot to assassinate the governor. It is a novel of obsessions, both personal and ideological showing how freedom fighters – or terrorists, depending on your viewpoint – become politicized by their personal experience rather than by nebulous theories.

Lotta is crazy, a tomboy, admired by the boys and happily unaware of the girls. She swims in the lake in summer and skates on it in winter. She
likes racing, climbing, jumping and scrambling. Until she was thirteen, she was free. Then it had all changed. This clumsy, eager, self-critical girl hadn’t had a chance of surviving. Karl has married her. It is a dumb, embarrassed struggle to court him. She has remembered the acid gurgling and growling that has accompanied Karl’s courtship. Still Dunmore portrays the sexuality in Lotta. It is the warm, milky night air lightening with July’s early dawn.

“Karl, she whispered. ‘Karl’. Her breast swung against the tucks of her nightdress bodice, and her nipples tingled. But he lay still, his face like wood... she slid on top of him, holding her weight off with her elbows... She was still too modest to look at ‘that part’ of Karl, but she felt it stir. She had for the first time a huge, greedy curiosity for it, for him, for Karl... She moved her body; letting her breasts brush his bare skin...He frowned a little, like a judge. Suddenly she knew that she was a fool, lying on top of him with her bare bum in the air (they used to say that when they were children, your bare bum, and laugh)...But that part— that part without a name— was stirring. Side-ways- and now rising... the part of him which was hidden by her damp female flesh... Out he went... ‘Lotta, you donkey’, she murmured, and flushed with anger and shame” (House of Orphans 54-55).

Sometimes Lotta wonders if there is something wrong with Karl; really wrong, not just unpleasant. Lotta had helped as much as she could during Johanna’s illness. Johanna is her friend, in the way that women can sometimes be friends without any great affection. Johanna has always been so rational, but she whispers fiercely to Minna not to let her leave alone with her. Now Johanna remains no more. But Lotta’s love and caress for Johanna is noteworthy. The sexual feelings of Thomas towards Eeva are arousing day by day. The orphans are taken to the public sauna, once a week. Yes, Eeva bathe in the steam as long as she wants. And there, through the slender birch boles, he sees the sauna door open. He pictures her.

“No cry of shock at the cold, no cry of pleasure...Crouched on her haunches in the shallow pool, scooping up water in her cupped hands and throwing it over herself” (71).
The narrative of Thomas Eklund's wrenching, one-sided and painfully innocent love affair with Eeva is extraordinary. The narrative combines a luminous delicacy of observation with raw emotional power to haunting effect. *House of Orphans* is a story of love and change. The first part of the novel is very powerful, the delicate and haunting unrequited love that Thomas has for Eeva, is very moving. The second part is fragmented and missed the intensity of the first part. But city life is faster and more fragmented than country life, and it can be argued that Dunmore has cleverly crafted the novel to reflect these differences.

The theme of sexual desire is a recurring feature of Dunmore's writing. Love and sexuality are of paramount importance in Dunmore's historical fictions. In *Spell of Winter*, she depicts the outrageous sexuality and thwarted love of Cathy and Rob. Their love is built on failures, betrayals and frustrations in life caused by the abandonment of their parents. Hence their love is associated with pain and suffering. Disturbing love and underlying horror govern the hermetic world of this Gothic novel set in early twentieth-century England. The Allen house is old and decaying along with the tragic legacy of their families' tormented past. The local spinster Miss Gallagher who was Cathy's tutor shows an unnatural attraction towards Cathy as well. Rob is halfheartedly courting Livvy, a pretty but frigid young woman. Cathy, young and beautiful at seventeen, is regularly having sexual relations with her brother Rob even while being courted by a wealthy middle aged neighbour named George Bullivant at his manor home- Ash Court. Dunmore writes about sexual relationship in them:

“...his mouth straining on mine, his teeth biting my lip as I cried out. As for what had happened between our bodies, I hadn’t got the words for it. My legs ached where he had forced them up and apart. But something else had happened too. In the middle of it I’d felt myself give way, warm and liquid, opening my legs wider and wider so that he could plunge into me again and again, each stroke making me shiver. That was after the first panic when he was forcing himself against me and I was small and tight and dry and he couldn’t get inside me, and I panicked
more, hearing his desperate breath in my ear” *(Spell of Winter 105).*

Then it is all over. They are not Rob and Cathy any more. They are two cold, aching lumps of flesh, crushed together and wanting to be separate. But when she realizes her mistake, a pang of fear goes through her. All this has happened because of Mr. Bullivant, and the way Rob has watched them standing together at the fountain. Rob knows everything about her. He knows more of her than anyone, and she also knows more of him, more than Livvy, more than Kate. It leaves them alone together, a shipwreck with their secret that dragged at them like treasure. There is always that unspoken ‘yet’ to terrify her. What is happening between them might be growing towards its own discovery.

The physical passion reigns supreme after their first love. The mysteries of their love and life lie beyond the scope of reason. Their sexuality explores again and again. Cathy reflects:

“Last night he had curled sideways to suck my nipple. His first suck had sent sensation in a thin bright line down through my breast to my stomach and between my legs. I jerked, then lay still... so we got the best of it... If we’d been other people, not Cathy and Rob, brother and sister, it would have been so easy to say ‘I love you’. But of course we did. We were brother and sister, weren’t we?” (121).

Cathy becomes pregnant but only the long time family maid Kate knows. Catherine is the narrator of the tale, and possibly because of their feeling of abandonment the two siblings draw close to each other, so close in fact that the events that unfold will really horrifying as Catherine and Rob turn to each other for the love and affection that they think they can’t get from others. Cathy is reduced to elemental sexuality - abolishing the need for reciprocity in human relationships and prompting to deadening sexual drive. Both are victims of forbidden love. Dunmore uses subtle images to suggest the arousal of sexual desire.
Cathy and Rob are brother and sister who have been abandoned by their parents and are being raised by servants in their grandfathers’ home. Cathy’s father attacks her during the visit.

“He was holding me too tight, he was hurting me ...He was burning hot, even through his cloths. He kissed my head with quick, hot, clumsy kisses. But it wasn’t me he was kissing. His voice came thick and hot by my ear as he crouched down and clutched me to him. ‘Cincie’, he said. ‘Cincie’, ‘Cincie’, ‘Cincie’. I wriggled and twisted but I couldn’t get away from his voice” (40).

So the sister and brother later embark on an incestuous relationship --- all which is shocking. When Miss Gallagher hints that she is aware of the siblings’ carryings on and threatens blackmail. Cathy leads her into the woods and speaks to her. When Rob returns from Canada, Cathy no longer lusts after him—“I no longer wanted what he wanted” (276) -and in France, before meeting her mother, she experiences genuine happiness—“It makes me want to laugh. And as if he senses it, he gives me a smile... (300). Catherine, a grown woman, living in one room of a decrepit estate trying to stay warm wrapped in her brother’s army coat:

“Now I move my body inside Rob’s coat so all my skin will touch the lining which has touched him. My breasts tip forward, catching on the hairy wool of the coat’s opening. My fire dances and grows strong, stronger than the worn brown oilcloth, bought for hard wear, stronger than the iron frames of our two beds, stronger than the chain of the gas lamp over the table” (09).

Dunmore masterfully weaves suspense and horror as her tale twists. The siblings’ relationship is complex — they have really only had each other for most of their lives. They throw in a potential suitor or love interest and jealousies arise on both sides. As the novel progresses, the mood darkens considerably. The children’s only spark of warmth and human guidance is provided by their trusty servant, who, at the novel’s opening, is retailing them with totally unsuitable and frighteningly rustic tales, and in herself, is highly
reminiscent of the narrator. As war approaches, the loving relationship between Catherine and Rob become incestuous, creating a passionate refuge against the harshness of the world without.

Love between father and daughter is seen through the following situation. Grandfather recalls the memories with Cythia when she was a baby.

“...She was my flesh and blood. I gave her goat’s milk. You’ve no idea what it is to sit up all night with a child, dipping your hand in goat’s milk so she’ll suck it off your fingers. Then I found she liked sweet things and if I let her taste a little honey first she’d swallow the milk...Later, when she learned to smile, that was the first thing I saw: her face beside me looking like half the world because it was so close, and her smile” (248).

The title Counting the Stars refers to the following lines in Catullus’ famous poem (Poem 05):

“You ask how many of your kisses, Lesbia, are enough and more than enough.
As great as the number of Libyan sands...
or as many as there are stars, when the night is silent, watching the furtive loves of men....” (32).

It says that the number of kisses he wants to give his lover is akin to the multitude of stars in the sky. As in the poet’s verse, Catullus is obsessive in his love for beautiful, haughty and morally dubious Clodia. It frequently degenerates into its polar opposite. Counting the Stars recounts the mesmerising love story between real-life poet Catullus and his older, married mistress, Clodia. Catullus says.

“Imagine, Clodia, I thought your past didn’t matter. The heat of our passion had burned it off like mist. A good simile, but not, of course, the truth. You were thoroughly married, and you had your daughter, safely removed from Rome for a ‘good old-fashioned country upbringing’. You’d had the same ‘good old-fashioned country upbringing’, but with some unusual elements. Brothers and sisters growing up together, all so close. Too close in some cases, if rumours was right. And now the adult siblings were showing their claws in the big arena of Rome” (08).
Catullus’s life remains a mystery. So Helen Dunmore has set out to bring Gaius Valerius Catullus to imaginative life. Probably living around 84-54BC, Catullus seems to have packed a lot of living into his scant thirty years or so, leaving behind one hundred and sixteen poems that suggest a hedonistic, impassioned life of wine, women (or men) and song. But it is the twenty-odd love poems he wrote to "Lesbia" that have proved most familiar, and most enduring. "Odi et amo," begins one famous lyric: I hate and I love.

Volatility is his most salient characteristic. Catullus was a brilliantly controlled poet, but he was also a randy Latin hothead. Part of the reason he remains so admired is his emotional range: not just love and hate, but suave urbanity and wit, followed by carnality, lasciviousness, delight, exaltation, fury, bitterness, brutality and satire. Many of his poems are outrageously obscene. In "Pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo", for example, he informs two men who have accused him of being ‘soft’ because he writes delicate poetry that if they doubt his virility he will give them a personal demonstration by violating every orifice they have. Dunmore’s hero is a hackneyed anachronism: the modern image of the poet as languishing and lovesick. In this mannered, artificial world where political ambition is the driving force, the love Catullus professes for Clodia cannot be more than an elaborate conceit. ‘I was the one with delusions;’ he recognizes, in hindsight. ‘Imagine, Clodia, I thought your past didn’t matter. The heat of our passion had burned it off like mist. A good simile, but not, of course, the truth ‘(08). Many of Catullus’s poems concern his tempestuous relationship with an older married woman. He called her Lesbia – a reference to Lesbos, island home of the poet Sappho, whom he much admired, rather than an intimation of homosexuality. Most historians identify her as the real-life aristocrat Clodia Metelli. There remains scant biographical detail about Catullus, so Dunmore’s novel takes this proposition and runs with it. Passionate and loving Catullus is a bawdy delight of a poet and a master of Latin concision in verse. In the thick of the politics, gossip and affairs of Rome, he is merely Lesbia’s besotted lover. The real Lesbia was thought to be Clodia Metelli, wife of a Roman power-broker who was possibly
poisoned, a writer of second-rate verses and, according to Roman tittle-tattle, her brother's lover. Nobody knows what she was really like at eight. Catullus reveals,

“You were a child, and they say your brother came to your bed, for comfort at first. He was two years younger than you, but always big and strong for his age. They say Pretty Boy Clodius was a grown man at eleven. There you sat, wrapped in one cloak with your brother, feeling your cheeks grow hotter and hotter. Pretty Boy and Pretty Girl” (06).

Clodia’s eyes are dark, although they seem bright. Her enemies call them cow eyes, or pretend to praise her by saying that her eyes are as lustrous as Hera’s. Clodia is almost as fortunate as Hera; she may not have Zeus for a brother but she has got Pretty Boy Clodius, the handsomest sibling any girl could ask for. The gossipmongers love Clodia. They are like dogs snuffling under her skirts. They say her brother stayed in the habit of visiting her bed, even when they were too old for it to be decent. He took her virginity, or else she took his. Clodia is public property- not anyone’s Clodia, but ‘our’ Clodia. Clodia nostra… Lesbia nostra. Catullus wants to ask Clodia: Are those rumours true, about her and her brother? Pretty Boy Clodius and beautiful Clodia…But he will never be able to reach or touch that Clodia who really might have been shy, frightened and at a loss. At a loss, because everything in the ceremony celebrated her virginity, and they say she was not a virgin. She had been used by her brother, who was ‘fully a man at eleven’.

Clodia is married now. She is to be handed from the Clodii to the Metelli: it is an alliance between cousins, of the kind that keeps Rome strong. Patrician families must marry with care, to advance the power and honour of the clan. They get more than they bargained for with Clodia. The marriage is not a love match, but an arrangement between cousins. They have no shared married life. Their marriage is an arrangement and their life together a formality. They do not love each other. No fire burns between Metellus Celer and his wife, as it burns between Catullus and Clodia. The same fire consumes them both. Dunmore writes:
“He’s (Catullus) a fool, wasting love on someone who thinks she wants it but doesn’t even know what it is. She wants the feeling of being loved, and that’s why one lover is never enough. Clodia doesn’t kill for food, she kills because it’s her nature. He hates her and he loves her. He doesn’t know what is happening to him or why it’s happening” (60).

The biographies of Catullus and Clodia suggest that their torrid love affair is only part of their fascination, but it is Dunmore’s main concern. Catullus called Clodia a lot of things- Bright-shining goddess, tart and whore, ball-breaker, heavenly visitor. But on the happiest days she is just his ‘my girl’. He says,

“You came to me, and of course you left me longing for you. One more touch, one more glance. A whole abacus of kisses, with the beads flying from side to side as we tried to count them. The smell of you after sex: salty and gamey. The hiss of silk as you dressed. Even as you walked to the door with Aemilia lugging that everlasting basket behind you, I was already begging for you again” (07).

There is sex, desire and jealousy enough in the Lesbia poems, but Counting the Stars coyly shuts the bedroom door and instead tells about Clodia’s make-up routine and her tiresome affection for her pet sparrow. Clodia’s life is like her jewel box, opening to reveal a dozen separate ivory-lined compartments. Catullus loves to watch Clodia with her sparrow. But sometimes there is something disconcerting about Clodia and the sparrow—his naked, eager girl, and the little bird— the way she moves the sparrow’s beak over her lips.

One of the most surprising characters is Aemilia, the slave Clodia has had since childhood. She has a very strange relationship with Clodia. She trails after Clodia to her various rendezvous with Catullus, bringing a basket of unguents and powders so she can repair Clodia’s hair and makeup after the sex. Catullus seems to imagine she is also having an affair with Clodia. Catullus would like to lose all those years. Lose them all in drumbeat of kisses, hypnotic, repetitive, cancelling out everything but their own rhythm.

“Da mi basia mille, deinde centum,
Dein mille altera, dein secunda centum,
Deinde usque altera mille, deinde centum.”

Da mi basia- give me kisses- give me a mille, give me a thousand-then give me a hundred- and then another thousand, a second hundred, and then another thousand with them, and then hundred (31).

They are melted into each other, dissolved into basia. Thunder beats in their ears and their eyes are full of darkness. He is still counting, counting, until all the figures fly apart.

"Odi et amo" shows Catullus tormented between love and hate. There is something in Clodia that Catullus has never found in any other woman, no matter how lovable or fuckable. “Clodia is not as lovable as Cynthia. She’s not as fuckable, strictly speaking, as Ipsitilla. She’s like a taste that’s never been known in the world before…He’s tasted her and he can never give up her.” (189). He isn’t looking for the truth about Clodia, because he doesn’t want it. If she has done wrong, let her hide it. It is Clodia herself he wants. They are dying together. The poem he wrote about Clodia’ sparrow, hopping into the blackness; it was about the two of them, him and Clodia, already on the dark path and always knowing where it ends for them. But they are not caring, because they have got what they wanted from time and death. Clodia and Catullus go into the pool room together. She spreads blankets on the floor, covers them with silk and pulls him down to her. ‘No one comes here, no one can see us’, she whispers as if it’s a magic spell.

“He is back with her, inside the climate of her skin, her hair, her eyes, her lips, her soft warm waist under the wool of the tunic and her silk underclothes, her eyes that seem to slant as she rolls on top of him and her sudden way of grasping his face between her hands, pulling him to her and softly biting his lips, all over, not hurting but tasting him as if he were a fruit she could never taste enough. Afterwards he has it again, that feeling that rare feeling that he doesn’t know where he ends and she begins, barely even knows if they’re male or female any more, she is so close. Perhaps he’s given birth to her, or she has given birth to him. He’s never felt so new. They lie together,
wrapped in each other, just breathing. His lips touch the pale curve of her jaw. He opens his eyes and sees hers, half closed, shining. He reaches down and pulls a blanket up over her, to keep her warm” (220).

Catullus wants to marry Clodia. He wants her to marry him. But now things have changed for him. It feels like a betrayal of them and of himself. Clodia has destroyed many things except his poems. But she is also in his poems. He won’t get away from her, any more than he can escape from the self that is in love and in hate with her. But in Sirmio, may be he will find a little peace. Catullus says:

“I don’t ask for the stars  
For a return of her love  
For what cannot exist  
For truth or faithfulness-  
All I want is to be free from this sickness  
This soul-sucking corruption” (248).

Clodia pushes Catullus away and stares at him. There is enough light for him to see the shining darkness of her eyes- wide eyes, Hera eyes. The eyes of goddess who loved her brother so much that she shared his bed. Catullus is her dear poet again. He reminds her of her dead sparrow.

“My girl’s sweet sparrow, her darling  
For whom she’d have torn out her own eyes  
And left herself blinded ;”(272).

Is there some present that doesn’t end, where Clodia’s sparrow always hops and cheeps, and where he kisses her, a thousand kisses and then a hundred more, and then another thousand. Catullus recites:

Nulla potest mulier tantum se dicere amatam  
Vere, quantum a me Lesbia amata mea est.  
My Lesbia, loved by me  
Beyond any woman  
Who calls herself beloved (275).

Counting the Stars is a love story that needs to make either hate or love the central characters. Catullus visits a prostitute whose living situation has
deteriorated. He thinks that "to downgrade her like this was harsh". Here Dunmore transforms one of history's greatest poets into an inarticulate surfer dude. Dunmore draws people with a few strokes: Aemilia, the unsavoury serving-woman, is "sweaty and out of breath... like a clod of earth" (04) when compared with her beautiful mistress, Clodia. Dr Philocetes rolled up with his shirt-sleeves, striding about as he "dominated the sickroom with the stripped-down urgency of a wrestler who had just perfected a new throw".

_Counting the Stars_ is a captivating tale of forbidden love with a bitter-sweet finale. One of my favourites of Catullus' poems perfectly reveals his love for 'his girl', 'Lesbia':

> “Let us live, my Lesbia, and let us love,  
> and let us judge all the rumours of the old men  
> to be worth just one penny!  
> The suns are able to fall and rise:  
> When that brief light has fallen for us,  
> we must sleep a never ending night.  
> Give me a thousand kisses, then another hundred,  
> then another thousand, then a second hundred,  
> then yet another thousand more, then another hundred.  
> Then, when we have made many thousands,  
> we will mix them all up so that we don't know,  
> and so that no one can be jealous of us when he finds out  
> how many kisses we have shared” (05).

### 3.5 WAR AND BETRAYAL:

The theme of war and betrayal appear with many dimensions in all Dunmore's historical novels. _House of Orphans_ deals with the forces that propelled young people to commit what variously described either as terrorist acts or as heroic acts of martyrdom and patriotism. It also concerns the activity of revolutionary groups in both Finland and Russia, and the efforts of the Tsarist secret police, the Okhrana, to penetrate these groups using double agents. Okhrana struggles to infiltrate revolutionary groups, and to imprison or execute their leaders. The small, idealistic groups of young people in revolutionary cells came to justify terror, political assassination and
bombing campaigns. And the Tsar failed to understand what was going on in the countries he ruled.

Everything is in ferment, at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as Finland and Russia move towards violent revolution and civil war. Finland had been part of the Russian Empire since 1809, but had enjoyed a relatively significant level of autonomy. Finland kept its own currency, police force and border controls. However, a policy called ‘Russification’ had been instigated, with the aim of forcing Finland into closure integration with Russia. The ‘February Manifesto’ of 1899 was a key statement of Tsar Nicholas II intent to extend Russian autocracy into Finland, and to violate the Finnish Constitution. It aroused fierce anger and resistance. The Governor-General of Finland was General Nikolai Bobrikov, a former soldier and politician, and a much-hated figure in Finland.

Eeva is all too aware that Finland is in political ferment while she sweeps floors and cleans display china; that its Russian rulers, its Swedish aristocracy (of whom Dr. Eklund is one) and its Finnish workers are headed for conflict, even revolutionary disaster. Eeva, orphaned daughter of a failed revolutionary, also battles to find her independence and identity. Finland has emerged as a free and democratic country. It can’t have been easy for such a small population to have liberated itself. The social and political situation in Finland in the year’s pre-Russian revolution is chaotic. In 1902 Finland was teetering on civil war, whilst tension was mounting in the capital city Helsinki, the remote forested rural areas were somewhat cushioned from civil unrest. Dunmore writes:

“Even in Mika’s house it was the same familiar atmosphere. Pamphlets, meetings, reading, bashing out arguments like steak on a wooden plank, friends from Petersberg appearing and then disappearing again, bringing ideas and leaving them behind to grow or just shrivel away into nothing. Eeva hadn’t come across an idea since she left Helsinki. They didn’t have ideas in the House of Orphans: there’d have been trouble if they had” (House of Orphans 66).
The Governor-General Bobrikov is trying to turn Finland into Russia-a Greater Russia. On the other side, there are hotheads who think that they could win the battle by taking help of their Greater Neighbour. However the reality is that Russian power has to be managed, not defied. The unrest is spreading. There are agitators. Pamphlets smuggle in from Helsingfors, denouncing the ‘Swedish Elite’ for its ‘traitorous collaboration with the Tsarist Oppressor N. I. Bobrikov’, and calling for all true Finns to ‘rise up and throw off the Russian yoke…’the solution by blood’.

“We conclude that revolutionary violence is no more or no less than a necessary defence by which the oppressed classes defend themselves against the violent force of those institutions of state power which keep them in a state of subjection… Revolutionary violence, properly considered, represents a duty rather than a choice” (125).

They believe that the problems of the world could be solved by blood. But Lotta knows they could not. Sasha, a revolutionary activist and his comrades hates ‘the Tsar and men like the Governor-General, who make themselves tool of their Empire. He reads the agreement. The policy of Russification means exactly what it said:

“Yes, they wanted to crush Finland, just as they wanted to crush the workers and peasants of Russia itself. They wanted to destroy the policies which for decades had allowed Finland to be part of the Russian Empire and yet separate from it”? (133).

Everything is now to be shaped to the mould of our Great Neighbour, the moribund pattern of Church and Tsar. If something is moribund, then it is as good as dead already. How could it be a crime to kill what was already dying? Sasha argued. The novel is set just before a bloodbath - an assassination and the loss of many lives.

*House of Orphans* is a story of betrayal on many levels. The Historical betrayal is in Finland’s Russification by the Russian Government. The Governor-General of Finland, Nikollai Bobrikov drives the policy of Russification; Tsar Nikolas II intends to extend Russian autocracy. Both of
them betray the Finns and violate the Finnish Constitution. Finns are to the mercy of Okhrana (secret police). In the background there is always a central betrayal that of entire Finns and revolutionary groups by General Nikolai Bobrikov and Tsarist secret police, Okharana using them as double agents.

The novel is laden with personal betrayal. Eeva is removed from the House of Orphans, by the local doctor, Thomas Eklund. He is in need of a housekeeper. His house in the countryside outside Helsinki is empty and so is his heart, for his wife is recently dead. His daughter, Minna, is married and estranged from him - her anger with her father a reflection of the unhappiness of her parents' marriage. Thomas, whose only satisfaction seems to come from self-sacrifice. Johanna, his late wife, married him on the rebound – he was never loved by her, and thus betrayed by her. This might be the reason for his having an affair with a friend of Minna’s, an affair Minna never forgives her father for. Minna accused Thomas for betraying her trust. She reacts even more vehemently against his response to nature; it reminds her of the affair he had with her school friend Sophie, for which she cannot forgive him. The depiction of Thomas enhances the novel with conflict and tension. Thomas has lied to Johanna, and the lie has acted upon the whole of his life, like a drug that the bloodstream carried to every part of the body. He felt that he is betrayed by his own morality. He lied to Johanna and betrayed Minna. He has never thought of himself as a man who would need to know what lies do to a life. It spread like poison into three lives- Eeva, Thomas and Lotta.

Also, Sasha, a Russian revolutionary intrigues by his sinister attempts to betray his “comrades.” He uttered, “No, I’m a double agent... A double double agent”(327). He has many faces but no identity of his own. Sasha betrays Lauri and his group of Russian and Finnish comrades forcing them for revolutionary activities. This enigmatic character, Sasha is abruptly shut out of his life when he commits suicide. His fate betrays him.

Eeva returns to Helsinki where she takes up with a group of young socialist revolutionaries – among them Lauri her childhood friend. Lauri is
inveigled into an assassination plot on General Nikolai Bobrikov, the Governor-General of Finland. When the plot is leaked he is captured and tortured by the Okhrana (secret police). Eeva turns to Doctor Eklund for help. Dunmore shows them as fringe, led by the egotistical “Sasha” and on fire with rhetoric, right in thought and wrong in action (killing is no solution etc.):

“It was easier when they went to meetings. Sasha always knew where to go, when to set out, which courtyards to slip through and how to wait... At meetings, Lauri began to burn with the same fire as the others. He drank in speeches and applauded until his watchful thoughts were swept away and he rose and fell on the wave that was lifting them all, ready to hurl them into the future. He wanted to topple, to overthrow, yes, to change everything utterly. He was sure with the same sameness” (131).

Sasha talks of sacrificing “crocodiles of schoolchildren” to save a hundred more from Russification, of women activists carrying their babies swaddled with bombs up to officials and exploding both in glorious retribution, of explosives thrown into crowds or planted in vehicles. The rhetoric is as recognizable as the situation and the thrust of Dunmore’s position is only yet another reworking of familiar liberal justifications for extremism: desperation, naivety, poverty, alienation and personal psychosis.

War and betrayal overshadows Dunmore’s *Spell of Winter*. When the hunger of the war began to close in on the village, everything is changed. All the things that have been difficult become easy. Men who have never been five miles from the village have their travel warrants issued and they are gone. Men who have always worked alone, ploughing with a cloud of starlings for company, now marched and drilled and slept in a flock, like starlings themselves. And the things that have been easy are difficult. “...It is hard to get up and put on your working boots and go on to the job you’d been doing all your life” (Spell of Winter 256). George Seple was dead almost before people have begun to believe this war would lead to dying.
Rumours are coming back of what they do to conchies, how they make them run all night naked on freezing beaches near Scarborough, how they put them up for shooting practice or send them over the top without guns. This is war. People are there, half-starved for company. It is the fourth winter of war. People in town are not getting the ingredients because of war. “They are queuing for margarine there, nasty stuff that it is... and jam with wood chips in it for strawberries” (269).

The theme of betrayal reveals mostly on personal level. It is 1914. As World War I leeches boys from the surrounding villages, Cathy learns to plough, mend fences, live off the land: "I could skin a rabbit now as easily as I could undress myself." Robert (Rob) and Catherine (Cathy) Allen have grown up in their grandfather's house in rural England in the early 1900's. Though they are ‘rich enough’ to have servants and enough food to eat, their property is in a continual state of needing repairs. A once-proud family in a grand but ravaged old house --- leaky roof, a gaggle of servants --- somewhere in England. Their father has been committed to an asylum and his fate betrayed him. It has been years since anyone heard from their mother Cynthia who ran off to live in France along the coast of Brittany. Thus their mother betrayed to the trust of her husband and the kids. The dysfunctional lives of the two young Allen's never heal from the scars of abandonment inflicted by their mother. Cathy comments on grandfather's opinion about her betrayal:

“I was too like my mother, and so he couldn't love me. He'd given my mother everything, even the fine slender upright Englishness of Father. But my mother had shown her true colours and she'd given everybody the slip, even her own children” (42).

Isolated on their grandfather's estate after their mother abandoned them, their father is sent to a sanatorium. Catherine and Rob rely on each other to navigate the secrets and loneliness of their world until their need for each other crosses boundaries and destroys all they know. The turning point of the story arrives when Rob, unforgivably, runs off to Canada with, even more unforgivably, Kate. This is a double betrayal. It is also when A Spell Of Winter
starts to find its center. Rob returns from Canada, but there is uneasiness between them, and soon he, too, joins up Cathy. At last, Cathy's grandfather dies.

The children are accompanied by their sturdy and well-loved servant, Kate, and the predatory tutor, Miss Gallagher. Both servants fiercely guard the mysteries of the family heritage from Rob and Cathy. And they betrayed their masters. This inverts common behaviour, resulting in outsiders who are better informed about the family than the family itself. It affects adversely on Cathy and Rob. And they are isolated. Their loneliness results into their attraction not only of emotional but sexual too. Their forbidden passion makes Cathy pregnant and then abortion. Cathy is betrayed by her own fate and sexual desires. Kate forced Cathy for abortion. To Cathy, “Kate was a liar like the mother peewit trailing her wing as she piped the predator away from her nest.”

In *Counting the Stars*, Dunmore brings to life the people, the smells and the streets of a city where greed is good and lust for sex as well as power is what drives men and women on. Though there is no war the theme of betrayal is recurring element in *Counting the Stars*. Catullus is self-absorbed and lovelorn poet. He does nothing but pine. Dunmore renders none of his raunchy directness or his dark satirical comedy. In his twenties, Catullus had an affair with one of Rome's most scandalous aristocrats, Clodia Metelli. She is a dangerous choice of lover. Ten years his senior, she is notorious for heavy drinking, gambling and having sex with anyone to hand, including her slaves and, it is said, her brother. Clodia argues violently with her powerful husband. His mysterious death is suspected of poisoning. After a brief liaison, she leaves Catullus for one of his friends, Rufus whom she soon accused of trying to poison her in turn. The affair is dragged to the courts, where Cicero leads the attack against Clodia.

The heroine of *Counting the Stars* is a busy woman. She has "friends to meet, books to read, poetry to write, bets to lay, massages and hair treatments to be fitted in". In fact, Clodia is a loose-lipped, loose-hipped
Roman seductress, living in the unsettled times of Pompey and Julius Caesar. Both she and the narrator of this novel, the poet Catullus, tend to speak as if they are talking to camera in a soap opera. "When women haven't got their make-up on, they'll look sideways, or down, as if to hide them," he muses.

For Catullus, Clodia is always there. She is in his blood. But he is not even sure if this is still love. Love and hate that is what he feels for her. He needs new words for her. No one wants to listen to a moaner. Hence Catullus decides:

"Let's set the words on fire, Clodia, until even you can't shut out what you don't want to hear. Let's make your ears burn.

"Odi et amo, quare id faciam, fortasse requires? Nescio, sed fiery sentio et excrucior. I hate and I love. Maybe you want to know How that trick's done? I know nothing. I feel crucifixiaion" (Counting the Stars 73).

Catullus is portrayed as a melancholy poet. He tries to stay immune to Clodia's disrespect for not only him but every man, woman or child in the world (her only true friend is, a sparrow). Catullus says,

"Afterwards! That's my girl. Always so practical. You would never go back to your husband smelling of another man, with the carmine smudged on your cheeks and your hair in a rope down your back. No, you played your part in the game which had nothing to do with concealment and everything to do with appearing to have made the proper effort to conceal" (02).

Counting the Stars is Dunmore's fictionalization of the love between a brilliant but brittle older woman and an intellectual, romantic young man. It is full of the joys and sorrows of an illicit relationship and of the seething ambition and treachery that filled Rome's patrician houses at this time. Clodia is a selfish, self-obsessed woman and it is clear from the very first page that the relationship is doomed, whatever Catullus might think. However, she is also mesmerising, hypnotic, alluring, and quixotic. Catullus is addicted, jealous of Clodia's maid, of her pet sparrow, even. Clodia has a crazily obsessional. She
has possibly unnatural relationship with her pet sparrow. After the death of her sparrow, her face contorts with anguish. She brings the sparrow close to her lips, as if to kiss, then lets her hands drop to her lap again. The sparrow's body bounces a little. Clodia looks desperate and awful. The sparrow is buried somewhere in a beautiful place where her husband won't disturbed it. Catullus buried Clodia's sparrow. She needs him, but he doesn't help her. It is a moment that wouldn't come again. Clodia is grieving. Clodia is alone and looking for consolation. Yes, he has buried the sparrow, but his offer to do so has been a pretext. Really, he wants to escape from her red, swollen eyes and the black cloud of grief that has swallowed her. Thus he betrays her faith. She suspects her husband as he hated her sparrow:

“May be he killed my sparrow’.
‘Why would he do such a thing?’
‘Because I loved him. That would be enough reason. You don’t know my husband. No one does” (96).

Charging for her sparrow’s death, Clodia betrays her husband. It is not surprising to learn at the end that Clodia has, as Catullus suspected, bumped off her husband with poisoned food.

Metellus Celer is power-mad. Dunmore writes:

“He was in the Senate only two days ago, radiant with health, in the flower of manhood, fulfilling his duty to the city he loved so well, and so on and so forth. And now he’s been struck down in his prime and he’s lying on what may be his deathbed, but still he thinks of nothing but Rome … God knows which delusion he’s chasing now: Cicero, defender of the ancient virtues of the Republic; Cicero, the great wit; Cicero, guide and mentor to Crassus, if not Caesar himself; or Cicero, ally and confidant of Pompey- what a joke. … Cicero has no idea how much a truly vicious man can enjoy the wait for his revenge” (111).

How terrible that the dying of a man brings such a glow to the faces of those who knew him. They have dined at his house, enjoying his ample and rather impersonal hospitality. They have curried favour with him, pretending to remember every word of his Senate speeches. His front-runner toadies will be
up at the Clivus Victoriae already, and soon the whole pack will follow. Now, Metellus Celer is so entirely alone. All those clients and dependants might be in Egypt for all their noisy presence means to him. Even his family and the gathered shades of his ancestors can’t help him. Here everything has stopped. Soon the breathing will stop too. His fate betrays him. Catullus expresses his guilt,

“Sorry for being alive when you’re dying, for putting thoughts into your head and words into your mouth. For triumphing over you, not by sleeping with your wife but by having the power to walk out of this room into the sunlight, and live another day” (125).

Metellus Celer is forgetting Clodia. He, the swift and strong, is now dead. She will have to be there, weeping, tearing her cloths and pulling down her hair. But no one see her washing her husband’s body for burial. She doesn’t love him. Catullus thinks that he should be strong to cope with Clodia’s bewitching, disturbing, betraying presence. At the point of death, an old nurse might be better. Catullus doesn’t trust himself:

“His girl, who broke her heart over a sparrow, she couldn’t plan a death like that. She wasn’t capable of watching calmly as her husband was dragged to the grave. And such a death. Such a degradation hour after hour until he must have longed to die, as a man broken by tortures doesn’t even notice the reek of shit when he is thrown into Cloaca Maxima. No woman could act her way through such horrors” (182).

The theme of betrayal moves further exposing the very nature of Clodia and Catullus. She has had men, and he has had women- and men too; Cynthia, Ipsitilla, Ameana, his honey-sweet Juventius, Fufa, a dozen and then a dozen more with whom he has slept, teased, got drunk, gossiped and whiled away long stifling afternoons. All those afternoons seem to melt into one endless afternoon with the shutters keeping the sun at bay, a pitcher of wine, a plateful of cakes, the bed a mess of sweat-soaked linen and a naked body sprawled beside him, or straddling him, as intent on its pleasure as he is intent on his own. Clodia’s afternoons have been just the same. It would take a
lot of time to reckon up her lovers. That is why he and she understand each other because they are equally compromised by all the promises they haven't meant a word of. They have got so much in common. They share a stock of shifts and stratagems. They know about lies, their own and other people’s. They know about scenes and storms of tears. They have both sworn by love on the understanding that love is whatever anyone chooses to believe in at the time. What is real is the hot body and the cold observing heart. Dunmore writes:

“They’re both saturated with experience, like ground that can’t take one more drop of rain without flooding. He wants to go straight to Clodia and swear to her that he’s never for a second doubted her innocence. A rose grows in shit but it is still a rose. She'll believe in his belief in her. They’ll create their own kind of innocence between them” (192).

When Catullus first came to Rome from Verona, he loved Rome at first sight, and his one aim was to belong. But now he learned how to breathe in Rome’s soup of hatred, mistrust, temporary allegiances and considered betrayals. Pretty Boy enjoyshis dish of revenge against Cicero at last, no matter that it is served cold. With a certain amount of bribery, corruption and general leaning on the body politic, he finally succeeds in getting old Chickpea banished on the grounds that Roman citizens has been put to death illegally under his consulship.

Clodia has settled down to being a widow. Perhaps ‘settled down’ is not the correct expression. Catullus is never going to stop her sleeping with other men. The best he can hope for is that she will be discreet enough not to shove it in his face. And if he is lucky, she will stop that trick of staring at him wide-eyed and saying, “But, darling, why do you take it so seriously? It’s got nothing to do with how I feel about you” (232). Catullus writes:

“You mean, my life, that this love of ours
This bliss between us can live unchanging?
Great gods, let her mean what she says,
Let this be the truth her soul speaks,
And let us go through our whole lives
Never breaking the blessing” (234).

Catullus is not an insider in Clodia’s life any more. Rufus is alleged to have plotted to poison Clodia. She has gone far away from him, into a highly coloured world of plot and counter-plot, poison and antidote, threat and counter-threat. It is her brother’s world, the element where Pretty Boy swims like a fish. And now it seems that Clodia swims there too. She claims that Rufus tried to have her poisoned after she refused his request for money to get hold of poison to kill someone else— a conspiracy with as many layers as Hell itself. Clodia has made a deposition about the plot to poison her. Now the things have changed very much. Dunmore writes:

“It feels like a betrayal of them and of himself. He has made a life here in Rome, and it’s the life he dreamed of all the years of his adolescence. He has become Roman, and what his life will be back in Sirmio, he can’t really imagine. Only his poems are left. Clodia has destroyed many things, but not his poems… No. Be truthful. She’s in them, part of them, indestructible. He won’t get away from her, any more than he can escape from the self that is in love and in hate with her. But in Sirmio, may be he’ll find a little peace” (248).

Rumours say that there are a lot of strange faces in Clodia’s house these days. Pretty Boy, Rufus, even that bastard Egnatius. “After all, our Lesbia’s an experience everyone should have at least once in his life” (268).

Thus, *Counting the Stars* is a story of a strange and obsessive love for an older woman by the Roman poet, Catullus. Catullus, the younger son of a noble family, comes to live in Rome to develop his poetic ability and to make a name for himself as a premier poet. He meets and falls instantly in love with the notorious Clodia Metelli, wife of a prominent Roman Senator. Clodia is notorious for her less than discreet taking of numerous lovers and, although his friends warn him about her doubtful reputation, Catullus is too besotted to care. Clodia borrowed a villa in Rome which is a secret, illicit meeting-place for them. When they are apart, Catullus burns with a desire for ‘his girl’,

161
while Clodia goes her own way among his rivals. Other passions simmer in the heat: the streets threaten to erupt in political violence, hearts sour and contemplate murder, and love and hate are dangerously entwined in this novel. Catullus’ jealousy grows as toxic as hellebore or hemlock. Poisoning is a Roman art, and there is poison everywhere. When Clodia's husband dies a sudden and violently painful death by poison, Catullus is forced to question his nagging suspicion that Clodia or her evil brother are involved.

3.6 FOOD AND STARVATION:

Dunmore creates a beautiful sense of stillness in her historical novels. Her careful descriptions of domestic detail imply meticulous research as food, landscape, plants and clothes. There are beautiful and poignant scenes in which the characters unfold an ancestral quilt from an oak chest, a glorious patchwork of colour “as violent as a cry of pleasure in the middle of a church service”. House of Orphans is exquisite, full of wonderfully sensuous descriptions of food and gardens, children's chubby calves encased in stout boots, a woman giving birth in a sauna, a silk patchwork quilt and enough different ways of describing snow to compete with the Inuit.

Food, or the lack of it, is very important. The food in the orphanage is not enough to nourish the children. The food is scant, and the weakest don't get their share. Part of the children's food is kept back to sell for profit. But Anna is honest. The children have what belonged to them. They have porridge and black bread, skimmed milk and a bit of cheese soup... In summer, they forage for berries and mushrooms, like everyone else. In the Finland of 1901, Dr Thomas Eklund works for the half-starved waifs of the local orphanage. Thomas treats chilblains and whitlows, warts and impetigo.

There is a lot of cooking and eating in the House of Orphans: moist buttery almond cake, gingerbread, parsley dumplings lowered gently into a beef soup. Porridge is a luxury for the children in the orphanage, black bread, skimmed milk, a bit of cheese, soup makes up their meagre diet. Thomas Eklund tells Eeva that he likes plain food. Dunmore quotes:
“Plain food. A supper of soup and pickled herring with preserved red cabbage, and she’d stewed some of the dried apple rings from the storeroom. The soup seemed to be asleep in its pot. She stirred it and a bubble broke the surface. Ham and barley soup rich and glistening. There had been plenty of meat on the ham bone. People who lived in houses like this might consider it plain food” (*House of Orphans* 32).

He has the choice; he could afford more exotic food. And a bar of chocolate takes on special meaning, when he is walking with Eeva for days and they have limited supplies. He generously gives her his chocolate and some wild strawberries. Magda, Eeva’s friend and flatmate in Helsinki, is “hard up” and on a tight budget. But she can still afford to go to concerts and coffee houses. Eeva teaches her the art of preserving food for winter, realizing that Magda doesn’t know how it is to be so poor that you do not have enough to eat.

Throughout *A Spell Of Winter*, the reader encounters graphic descriptions of smells—numerous flowers, perspiring bodies, dry rot, lemons, the fresh sweat of a horse, and so on. All these olfactory references serve some literary purpose. When telling Cathy a story about their father, Rob says: "I remember...because when I came in you were sitting by the fire and room smelled of rosemary" (111). Clearly, smells assist (and can trigger) memory. Dunmore is wonderful at establishing a sense of place and smell. There is also a dreamy description of winter:

“My winter excitement quickened each year with the approach of darkness. I wanted the thermometer to drop lower and lower until not even a trace of mercury showed against the figures. I wanted us to wake to a kingdom of ice where our breath would turn to icicles as it left our lips, and we would walk through tunnels of snow to the outhouses and find birds fallen dead from the air. I willed the snow to lie forever, and I turned over and buried my head under the pillow so as not to hear the chuckle and drip of thaw” (*A Spell Of Winter* 14-15).

The Gothic undertones are clear even though the details take time to build up: The paintings disturbed the air. It was more than a vibration: the colours were as exulted as angels (87).
There is a beautiful description of juiciness and naughtiness. Its salaciousness is shown through gorgeous language that presents an intriguing contradiction. “Did other people have this insane drive to destroy what was best for them, and cherish what was worst?” (103). Dunmore describes the food with her keen interest. “No one we knew had food like Mr. Bullivant’s. He had a cook from Italy who made pasta like kid-gloves, slippery with neat juice” (P.62). Cathy, once belonged to a proud family, realizes the reality.

“We ate white bread while the world ate brown if it was lucky. How could it matter what the neighbours thought of my grandfather, compared to the facts of eating or not eating? (79).

“We opened our bags of food and ate greedily. The pickled walnuts puckered my mouth but I ate them one after another, staining my fingers. Rob brought a white paper bag out of his pocket. Sugared almonds” (123).

War made the people to starve. Food is marginalized. Cathy and her grandfather pare their life down to manage without money. She could skin a rabbit now as easy as she could undress herself. Cathy says,

“We ate pigeon-pie baked with apples stored in the loft until they wrinkled into intense, nutty sweetness. We ate rabbit and rabbit and rabbit. Roast rabbit, potted rabbit, rabbit stew. We didn’t buy and sell any more: we bartered, exchanging a load of firewood for honey on the comb, and a bushel of apples for a length of calico. We were lucky ” (255).

The references of food are also seen in Counting the Stars. Clodia invites Catullus for dinner. The table is loaded with lobster, mullet, a whole sucking pig. But Catullus eats almost nothing. Her husband has eaten some plain dish of roast meat. The elaborate feast is for his guests. A man of the old school, with hard, trained appetites, that is Metellus Celer. He thinks it is quite a coup, getting Catullus to recite after dinner. There is the finest description of boating party:

“The entire villa party will sail along the shore until they reach a private beach with artfully rustic couches set up for them under
canopies of vine leaves and myrtle branches. The unpretentious table will be covered a snow-white cloth. Lobster with asparagus, roasted capons, pickled quails’ eggs in a salad of mint and lettuce, gamy slices of roast boar with spiced apple relish, strips of tender kid seethed in the milk of its own mother, pomegranates, preserved quince paste, dates and apples of Hesperus- Good, plain food, everything of the first quality. Metellus Celer will permit no tasteless nouveaux exaggerations at his table. There’ll be no gimmicks and no surprises” (Counting the Stars 25).

Aemilia unpacks the baskets and lays out dishes which contain olives, lettuce, a clod roast chicken that smells intoxicatingly of truffles, a jar of pickled capers and another of preserved pears. There is oil, wine, and a white linen napkin folded around a loaf of barley bread. ‘I love simple country food,’ says Clodia.

Catullus knows exactly what is on Metellus Celer’s plate at his last dinner. Two whole partridges, stuffed with mushrooms coated with oyster sauce. He always takes oyster sauce with roast meat. His tastes are simple, and he doesn’t like new dishes. Naturally he provides all the expected hors d’oeuvres, savouries and sweet-meat for his guests, but he relies on to eat only the one main course himself—the partridges.

In the waiting room, once, a smell of sour wine hits him. His slaves are reclining on the floor, surrounded by cups, dishes and left-over food. The two lads loll on their elbows, their faces glaze with drink. One of the cups is overturned and a dark stain of unmixed wine spreads over the tiles. Niko seems not to notice his master at all. He grasps half a roast chicken and he tears off chunks of breast and crams them into his mouth. His lips shine with grease. A flap of chicken skin is caught, ridiculously, over his nose. Niko is busy with the chicken. The slaves are dead drunk.

Thus Dunmore’s historical novels concerned with past events and historical personages. Counting the Stars is an assured, addictive and captivating tale of forbidden love. It is a highly charged, richly evocative story
of illicit passion that conjures up the corruption and rampant consumerism of ancient Rome. Dunmore keeps in style with Catullus's written colloquialisms too: her Roman-talk in modern speech, rather than cringe-worthy mock-Latin. They speak of “property developers” in booming Rome, “pool-rooms” in their villas and authority figure as “bigwigs”. The portrayal of Clodia is seen as the arch femme fatale. She is portrayed as a sexual deviant. No doubt, this is a transfixing novel. No glimpse is given of the inner world of this woman trapped in an unstintingly patriarchal and violent society. It's consequently hard not to side with Catullus's drinking buddies and loyal slave Lucius, who repeatedly tell him she is trouble – contrary to his protestations that he can see her inner, childlike true self. But, then again, blind love remains one of literature's greatest themes.

Dunmore extrapolates her vision of the poet’s character from only a fraction of the poems Catullus wrote, excising all the other personality traits he displayed, his virtuosity and his versatility. He wrote with verve about travel, nature, religion, mythology, even castration, all in metrically sophisticated forms. But having reduced him to a handful of poems, Dunmore takes those poems literally, as documentary evidence of the man's actual feelings.

There are similarities with Dunmore's two more books: she uses the World War I period again in *A Spell of Winter*. Clare's Cornish childhood is very similar to that of the heroine in *Talking to the Dead*. The power of childhood memories and close familial connections are the powerful themes in all three books. But as opposed to the rather melodramatic plot construction in those novels, *House of Orphans* deals with a period that needs no additional drama. Its story unfolds naturally, almost inevitably and its combination of fact and fiction seems effortless.

*The House Of Orphans* is a moving story of the isolation and oppression of a country and its people. Although some of the same themes surface --- particularly the absent mother --- and there is a continuing taste for the macabre, Dunmore doesn’t overdo her effects or use more words than
she has to. Her people, instead of having to fight their way out of encumbering
gothic stereotypes, are fully themselves --- sympathetic despite addiction,
brutality, dishonesty, pain. This is a marvelous novel about forbidden
passions and the terrible consequences of thwarted love. It is about the
almost mystical bond between mothers and daughters. The silenced histories
of marginalized groups (of orphans and of women) are foregrounded in The
House Of Orphans. Their stories are retold and alternative histories are
composed. Dunmore’s feministic attitude shows the possibility of the
existence of a female culture within the general culture shared by men and
women. The novel includes an account of the female experience. The voice of
the repressed “Other” is heard.

A Spell of Winter is about siblings Catherine and Rob. As
abandoned by their parents, they grow up in the house of their sinister
grandfather just before the First World War. The atmosphere in the novel is
intense, evoked through Dunmore’s descriptions of winter on a decaying
country estate. The darker elements of family relationships are explored in
the context of social isolation. Kirkus reviews Spell of Winter as "British
Orange Prize winning Dunmore mixes the spirits of T. Hardy, E. Brontë, and D.
H. Lawrence to offer up a country tale of loss, madness, and deep secrecy—all
with a vividness that’s luscious and unflagging. . . .Dunmore is skilled at
keeping her telling always restrained and thus real. . . . Romantic turmoil, but
every square inch done with a sharp exactness of eye, word, and detail that
give it the pleasures of a Merchant and Ivory on the page"(02).