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**Textual Resistance, Cultural Legitimacy
and the Politics of Representation in the
Fiction of James Kelman and
William McIlvanney**

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For the Degree of Master of Philosophy (Research)

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November 2012

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Abstract

James Kelman (b. 1946) and William McIlvanney (b. 1936) are two West of Scotland writers whose analogous themes are realised through markedly different aesthetics, form and genres. While their reception - critical and popular - varies accordingly, the mutual lodestar of the two authors' discrete literary-political projects is a commitment to giving voice to a peripheral culture. In representing these peripheries, through fiction which focuses upon the post-industrial communities of Central Belt Scotland, Kelman and McIlvanney stage a resistance to the hegemony of late twentieth century capitalism.

This thesis examines the success of such a resistance, as class struggle becomes reified as a struggle for meaning within the texts. Foregrounded by Louis Althusser's (1918-1990) Marxist analysis of culture and Pierre Bourdieu's (1930-2002) notions of cultural legitimacy, the analysis focuses upon McIlvanney's trilogy of crime fiction novels *Laidlaw* (1977), *The Papers of Tony Veitch* (1983) and *Strange Loyalties* (1991). In comparing these works of popular genre fiction with the literary fiction of James Kelman's *The Busconductor Hines* (1984), *A Disaffection* (1989) and *How late it was, how late* (1994), the thesis moves towards an assessment of how the authors' chosen form, genre and aesthetics facilitate or compromise their attempted resistance.

The respective authors' textual politics of representation are discussed in detail. With special reference to the concept of the *flâneur*, suggestions are made as to how these modes of representation influence the manner in which their characters interact with the communities and geographies of which they are a part. Of central importance to such a discussion is the representation of the city of Glasgow.

Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff and postgraduate community within the Department of Scottish Literature. I am particularly grateful to my primary supervisor Dr Matt McGuire and secondary supervisor Dr Gerry Carruthers for time, expertise and guidance freely shared. My sincere gratitude is extended to the CK Marr Educational Trust for the generous financial assistance which allowed this project to be undertaken. Finally, for a quarter-century of support and encouragement, I am indebted to my parents, John and Linda Sharkey, to whom I owe more than I can ever repay.

Introduction

Glasgow 1960

Returning to Glasgow after long exile
 Nothing seemed to me to have changed its style.
 Buses and trams all labelled 'To Ibrox'
 Swung past packed tight as they'd hold with folks.
 Football match, I concluded, but just to make sure
 I asked; and the man looked at me fell dour,
 Then said, 'Where in God's name are *you* frae, sir?
 It'll be a record gate, but the cause o' the stir
 Is a debate on "la loi de l'effort converti"
 Between Professor MacFadyen and a Spanish pairty.'
 I gasped. The newsboys game running along,
 'Special! Turkish Poet's Abstruse New Song.
 Scottish Authors' Opinions' - and, holy snakes,
 I saw the edition sell like hot cakes!¹

- Hugh MacDiarmid

We begin not in Glasgow 1960, but in the genteel confines of Charlotte Square Garden in the Edinburgh of August 2009. The newspaper copy which originates from the events that take place here, the venue of the annual Edinburgh Book Festival, gives us the opinion of one particular Scottish author on something which is ostensibly rather different from that envisaged by the speaker of Hugh MacDiarmid's (1892-1978) uncharacteristically humorous sonnet.

In what was reported as an idiomatically foul-mouthed and cantankerous polemic, James Kelman (b. 1946) launched a rhetorical broadside against the ailing cultural health of a nation. Were Scotland responsible for awarding the Nobel Prize for literature, he claimed it would be presented to,

... a writer of fucking detective fiction, or else some kind of child writer, or something that was not even new when Enid Blyton was writing *The Faraway Tree*, because she was writing about some upper middle-class magician or some fucking crap.²

¹ Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Glasgow 1960', *Selected Poetry*, ed. Alan Riach, and Michael Grieve, (Manchester: Carcanet, [1992] 2004), p.173.

² Nicholas Clee, 'Read Between the Lines', *The Times*, 5th September 2009, see also, Phil Miller, 'Kelman blasts mediocrity of boy wizards and crime best sellers', *The Herald*, 27th August 2009, and, Alan Bisset, 'Untitled Article', *The Guardian*, 5th September 2009.

In the first instance what we might deduce from this is that analysis of high cultural concepts sells no more newspapers today than it did in MacDiarmid's putative poetic Glasgow of half a century ago. What does sell is controversy. As such it should be little surprise that journalists and cultural commentators should seek to couch Kelman's averment in the terms of an *ad hominem* attack against the twin commercial giants of contemporary Scottish literature: the sub-Tolkienesque adventures of JK Rowling's (b. 1965) schoolboy wizard in the Harry Potter series of novels and Ian Rankin's (b. 1960) perennially popular detective stories focusing on the personal and professional lives of the variously shambolic and brilliant John Rebus.

To read Kelman's comments in this manner, as they were largely reported in the national (on this occasion read British) press, is to divorce them from the context of his literary-political project. It is a project which this thesis, in part, will seek to define and appraise through recognition of its manifestation both in Kelman's actions as a cultural activist and in his artifice as an author (that is to say his construction of narratives which textually represent class struggle) in the ideological terms of a struggle for control of meaning.

To be clear, what such a statement should flag to the alert reader is not the author's localised anguish over the failure of serious literature to function in the face of popular literature. Such a dualistic split is overly reductive and speaks of too great a degree of self-interest. The fundamental issue which Kelman is addressing is the way in which culture is made to wield political power. Kelman's real intention is not to target Rowling or Rankin as the pre-eminent representatives of a decadent print-capitalism. Rather it is to interrogate the prevailing notion of who, if not evidentially the book-buying public, is in a position to confer literary value upon a text. This more nuanced reading of Kelman's apparently profane diatribe raises two pressing questions.

Does the 'popularity' of popular genre fiction act as a kind of anterior limitation which forecloses on the potential of the text to carry a serious political or philosophical message? As such, is a distinct 'literary' fiction always better suited to carry such a message or does it, too, have its own set of metafictional constraints working to limit, modify and appropriate?

These are the interrelated questions which this thesis will strive to answer. It is an analysis which in every instance will insist upon the fundamental and intimate relationships that exists between meaning, cultural worth, social class and politico-economic power.

James Kelman, William McIlvanney and Contemporary Scottish Literature

While, as I have suggested, it would be a mistake to read the above pronouncement of Kelman's as a personal attack upon any one author in particular, the fact that he should choose to specify the 'writer of fucking detective fiction' as a focal point for his ire suggests we might find it compelling to make a direct comparison between his work and that of William McIlvanney (b.1936). McIlvanney is another Scottish author whose fiction and political writing demonstrates an analogous concern with the questions of class struggle, and its representation in literature, that is so characteristic of Kelman's oeuvre but occupies a realm of form and genre which is obviously discrete.

It is one of the intentions of this dissertation to argue that McIlvanney's career in letters, specifically and perhaps perversely his trilogy of detective novels featuring the Glasgow police officer Detective Inspector Jack Laidlaw - *Laidlaw* (1977), *The Papers of Tony Veitch* (1983) and *Strange Loyalties* (1991) - can be considered the result of a coherent progressive political agenda,

different in composition but equal in commitment to that of Kelman's. This thesis seeks to affirm the relationship between McIlvanney and Kelman who, despite their divergent literary styles and reception, are authors of similar cultural concerns and inheritance, a fact which is emphatically affirmed through the textualised construction of their not-quite-discrete post-industrial communities.

In insisting on the analogies between the two novelists, with particular reference to McIlvanney's Laidlaw trilogy and to Kelman's novels *The Busconductor Hines* (1984), *A Disaffection* (1989) and *How Late It Was, How Late* (1994), I will identify a mutual contradiction which handicaps their ability to create a formal mimesis of the material struggle for meaning and power. One of the weaknesses of their (far from identical) literary-political projects is the manner in which the effectiveness of their art, as a political tool of resistance, is always already compromised by the anterior limitations and definitions imposed by the ideologically constructed conditions which govern the production and consumption of culture under capitalism. However, one of the real strengths apparent in the work of the two writers' is the way in which they negotiate their terms of viable resistance within capitalism's cultural framework. What will become apparent is the fundamental influence that each author's aesthetic and formal choices of representation have upon the effectiveness of their political message.

There are inherent difficulties in undertaking a comparative study of Kelman and McIlvanney. The potted biographies of the two authors outlined below clearly show that in cultural, political and aesthetic terms there exists a discernible distance between them. As a starting point, I would posit that in order to identify the reasons for this perceived gulf between the two authors we

need to turn first to the critical contexts and the cultural landscape surrounding their work.

The prevailing wisdom in Scottish cultural criticism over the final two decades of the last century has averred that the nation was in the process of an ongoing literary golden age. In a seminal article written in 1990, Douglas Gifford invokes the spirit of the Scottish modernist movement of the 1920s and 30s- whose leading lights included such major figures as MacDiarmid, Lewis Grassie Gibbon (1901-1935) and Edwin Muir (1887-1959) - to suggest the possibility that the contemporary situation constitutes 'at last- the real Scottish Literary Renaissance'³. These sentiments are echoed three years later in the introduction to a collection of essays entitled *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies*, in which the book's co-editor, Gavin Wallace, states,

It has become commonplace to observe that the past two decades have proved the most productive and challenging period in Scottish literary culture since the Scottish Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s.⁴

For Wallace and Gifford alike, the august hue of the nation's cultural production has a catalyst in the material conditions of the civic society out of which it is spawned. Specifically, the two critics name the failure of the 1979 devolution referendum and the democratic deficit in existence under the Thatcher government as indicative of only the latest phase of a historiographical schema which, since the time that Gavin Douglas (c. 1474- 1522) wrote the *Eneados* (1513) in the immediate aftermath of the Battle of Flodden, has seen Scottish literature being forced into acting as a kind of ersatz polity. There is a

³ Douglas Gifford, 'At Last- the Real Scottish Literary Renaissance', *Books In Scotland*, no. 34, 1990, pp. 1-4, p. 1.

⁴ Gavin Wallace, 'Introduction', *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies*, ed. Wallace and Randall Stevenson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), pp. 1-7, p. 1.

sense, ‘in which Scottish fiction prospers in inverse proportion to the difficulties of the cultural and political situation which it confronts⁵.’

According to Wallace, the task of Scottish writers who belonged to the generation immediately preceding that of ‘the new renaissance’ was to challenge the epic mythology of the 1920s and 30s by means of ‘a deliberate preoccupation with cynical and determinist urban realism⁶.’ The first section of this collection comprises of a series of essays on writers who were active during this period of iconoclasm. They include Robin Jenkins (1912-2005), Iain Crichton Smith (1928-1998) and McIlvanney. The second section takes as its starting point the publication of Alasdair Gray’s *Lanark* in 1981 as a synecdoche for a group of writers broadly identifiable as sharing characteristics, both aesthetic and political, which align them with the ‘new renaissance.’

Inevitably, this resurgence in the health of Scottish Literature was to be met with a concurrent boom in the state of Scottish cultural criticism as commentators sought to classify, explain and appropriate the texts being produced in a manner which met their own respective agendas. An incomplete roll-call of the critical monographs and collections of essays which were to appear as a direct and indirect response to the ‘new renaissance’, might encompass Cairns Craig’s *Out of History* (1996) and *The Modern Scottish Novel* (1999), Robert Crawford’s *Devolving English Literature* (2000), Carla Sassi’s *Why Scottish Literature Matters* (2005) and Douglas Gifford, Allan MacGillivray and Sarah Dunnigan’s *Scottish Literature in English and Scots* (2002).⁷ While these texts vary in the analyses offered and the conclusions drawn, they are

⁵ *ibid.* p. 2.

⁶ *ibid.* p. 3.

⁷ For a comprehensive overview of Scottish literary criticism since the nineteen-seventies see, Matt McGuire, *Contemporary Scottish Literature; A readers’ guide to essential criticism*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009).

remarkably similar in the scope of literature which they examine, or more pressingly in that which they fail to examine. The scope of their critical analyses remains focused upon what we can safely consider literary- as opposed to popular- fiction. Indeed, arguably we have to wait until the publication of *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Literature* (2007), a collection of essays edited by Berthold Schoene, before we have a critical work which devotes serious attention to the popular fiction (particularly the crime fiction of Ian Rankin and the science fiction of Iain M. Banks (b. 1954)), not just as genre fiction but as an important part of a heterogeneous and hybrid culture.

Throughout this period of seismic cultural shift there remains at least one constant. The cover of the paperback edition of *The Scottish Novel* features a photograph of the chimneys and towers of Ravenscraig steel works in North Lanarkshire. In front of this industrial monolith is a figure of a man, almost in silhouette, wearing a flat-cap and walking two greyhounds. Significantly there is still steam rising from the chimneys indicating that the plant, which closed down in the year of the book's publication, is still in use. This is the landscape of a Scottish nation which no longer exists. Its inclusion as the cover photograph on this collection of criticism should alert us that it is part of the iconography of a nation which necessarily replaces old myths and monuments with new ones.

This thesis will examine the way in which new myths and monuments, resolutely working class in their cultural composition, are variously represented within McIlvanney's and Kelman's fiction as a means of offering a kind of resistance to the erosion, under the tide of post-industrial capitalism, of a discrete and distinct sense of class identification.

In interview Ian Rankin has acknowledged the debt that his crime fiction owes to that of McIlvanney. He recounts an incident prior to the publication of his first Rebus novel where he meets the older author at a book signing and

informs him that he has created an ‘Edinburgh Laidlaw.’⁸ McIlvanney’s trilogy of West of Scotland crime novels have long been considered as the foundational texts in what was to become the lucrative phenomenon of the Scottish crime novel as a distinctly marketable commodity. Later proponents of this phenomenon were to include writers as diverse as Denise Mina (b. 1966), Christopher Brookmyer (b. 1968), Val MacDermid (b. 1955) and Louise Welsh (b. 1965); authors loosely grouped together under the banner of ‘tartan noir’, a term thought to have been first coined by the great American crime writer James Ellroy (b. 1948) who branded Rankin as ‘the progenitor- and king- of tartan noir.’⁹ When we realise that this particular epithet appeared as a blurb upon the dust jacket of one of Rankin’s early bestsellers, *Let It Bleed* (1995), then it becomes apparent that the choice of the verb ‘branded’ is one made with careful consideration. If Rankin is the putative father of tartan noir then one suspects that McIlvanney may be quick to disavow his formative influence upon such a sub-genre of crime writing. Far from occupying the role of grandfather of tartan noir McIlvanney has suggested that the whole concept of that particular body of work is ‘ersatz.’¹⁰

Some critics have identified sound foundations upon which we might objectively attempt to build a tartan noir canon. For example, Peter Clandfield casts as characteristic of recent Scottish crime fiction the fact that the city regularly functions as something more than just a passive setting for events, rather it plays an active role in the narrative by becoming a location in which

⁸ Ian Rankin, ‘An Interview with Ian Rankin’, *Scottish Writers Talking 4*, ed. Isobel Murray, (Glasgow, Kennedy & Boyd, 2008), pp. 181- 235, p. 195.

⁹ James Ellroy, quoted on front cover of Rankin, Ian, *Let It Bleed*, (London: Orion, 1995).

¹⁰ Stuart Kelly, ‘A writer’s life: William McIlvanney’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 19th August 2006, p. 27.

people ‘persist in living.’¹¹ Certainly the city occupies a central position in the Laidlaw novels; the final chapter of this thesis will offer an analysis of its function in comparison to that ostensibly same city- Glasgow- in Kelman’s novels. That such an exercise should open up critically fertile ground might tend to suggest that Clandfield’s assertion is rather reductive. This persistence in living identified by the critic is a trope which is not unique to Scottish crime fiction. For Gill Plain, the abundance of detective fiction which was being produced in Scotland at the turn of the last century is a direct reflection of the material conditions within the nation. In a comment which reaffirms Gifford’s and Wallace’s ‘representative recession/ cultural boom’ paradigm, she claims that the,

...hard-boiled crime narrative is a literature of identities forged in opposition and as such represented an ideal formula for appropriation by Scottish writers of the period before devolution in 1997.¹²

With a whiff of the antisyzygy surrounding the ‘identities forged in opposition’, Plain’s is a revisionist analysis benefitting from hindsight. To suggest that the popularity of genre fiction amongst Scottish writers, prior to devolution, is a result of its innate ability to function as a political tool seems to ignore the lack of contemporary critical engagement which is outlined above.

To attempt to conclusively prove McIlvanney’s avowal that the term ‘tartan noir’ does not signify a genuine literary movement but is rather a construct of publishing houses interested in the first and last instance in the commercial viability of their product is a task somewhat outwith the remit of this thesis. For the present however, the reader should be aware of what we might extrapolate from the very fact that McIlvanney should make such a

¹¹ Peter Clandfield, ‘Denise Mina, Ian Rankin, Paul Johnson and the Architectural Crime Novel’, *Clues: A Journal of Detection*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2008, pp. 79- 91, p. 82.

¹² Gill Plain, ‘Scottish Crime Fiction’, *ibid.*, pp. 5- 11, p. 6.

pronouncement. Through the discussion of McIlvanney's detective fiction and its place in a tradition of crime writing, which will be conducted in the second chapter of this thesis, we shall begin to identify some of the formal conventions and ideological traits which characterise the genre and examine the social functions that critics have suggested crime fiction fulfils in its role as a cultural artefact. It is a process which will allow us to conclude that McIlvanney's desire to undertake a self-conscious refashioning of the constraints of genre fiction in order to create a truly popular *litterature engagé* encounters its own set of problems. In speaking to what might be considered the traditional tastes and needs of crime fiction readers, there is a tendency -however unconscious- to permit a reshaping of the political agenda behind the work.

William McIlvanney is a poet, author and journalist born in Kilmarnock just before the Second World War. After graduating from Glasgow University he worked as an English teacher in Ayrshire prior to the publication of his debut novel *Remedy Is None* in 1966. In 1975 he was to achieve widespread critical acclaim for his historical novel *Docherty* which was to win the coveted Whitbread Prize. This novel, for which he is arguably still best known, is set in the mining town of Graithnock- easily recognisable as a fictional version of the author's own home town- at the time of the outbreak of the First World War. It comprises a lament for a working class culture undergoing a seismic and irrevocable change. This location of Graithnock is used as a recurring setting throughout the author's *oeuvre*. It is to appear again in the 1985 novel *The Big Man*, a text set around an illegal boxing match and featuring many of the descendants of the characters in *Docherty*. I will suggest that 'Graithnock' comes to represent more than simply a geographical location but is rather used as a kind of textual repository, or a floating signifier, for desirable cultural

values which stand in stark contrast to those prevailing in an age of late capitalism.

As evidence of Whitbread Award-winning McIlvanney's popular as well as critical standing we might take the fact that, five years after publication, *The Big Man* was adapted for a film starring Liam Neeson and Billy Connolly. Indeed, the tension between culture which is critically well received, and that which is popularly well received, is a dialectic which will repeatedly be brought into focus throughout the course of this thesis. It is particularly germane to McIlvanney's decision to write a piece of crime fiction immediately after the success of a serious literary novel like *Docherty*. It was a bold gamble from McIlvanney, at stake was much of the cultural capital he had amassed as a serious 'literary' author. As McIlvanney recounts, the reaction from some quarters was as if

I had committed some social gaffe. One man who had read all my stuff went so far as to chastise me for doing something as 'worthless' as a detective novel.¹³

The motivation which underpins McIlvanney's decision to write crime fiction is born out of his desire to create a literature which is widely read and simultaneously poses a challenge to the reader in the process of its consumption. One of the reasons for the enduring allure of the genre is the way in which it acts as a medium for a kind of sanitised voyeurism. It renders appropriate the readers' witnessing of acts of animalistic violence and taboo depravity; it empowers them by proxy, endowing a pigeon-chested gallousness and allowing them to swagger into the crepuscular underworld of the criminal community. For McIlvanney this notion of voyeurism is about something more than mere titillation, it is a vital literary and political device. In his textual delineation of a

¹³ William McIlvanney, 'The Courage of our Doubts', *Surviving the Shipwreck*, (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1991), pp.153- 162, p. 153 (Hereafter STS).

deutero-community furth of the rule of law, the author intends to launch an invasive and occasionally uncomfortable interrogation of the reader's preconceptions:

there would... be new, unfamiliar presences: an insight which you hadn't known was yours and which you weren't sure you could devise a use for; an odd idea that you would have to find a place for; maybe a motivation made in a working class housing scheme sitting strangely in the sitting room of a suburban bungalow. You would have to work out anew, to however minimal a degree, where it is you live. (STS 160)

James Kelman was born a decade after McIlvanney; in the Glasgow of 1946. As a young man he worked in a series of semi-skilled and unskilled jobs across the length of the United Kingdom, he laboured on building sites, mixed asbestos-sheets and drove buses. It was while working in this last job during the early years of the nineteen-seventies that the Busdriver Kelman began attending the influential creative writing group run at University of Glasgow by Professor Philip Hobsbaum. Regular attendees of these classes at this time included the writers and poets Alasdair Gray (b. 1934), Tom Leonard (b. 1944) and Liz Lochhead (b. 1947), who would go on to become some of the major voices in Scottish literature over the following four decades. The appearance of Kelman's collection of short stories, *An Old Pub Near The Angel* (1973) meant that by the time he matriculated as a mature student at the University of Strathclyde in 1975 he was already a published author. His first novel *The Busconductor Hines*, published in 1984, was to be followed by *A Chancer* a year later, although this was a reversal of the order in which Kelman wrote the two novels. The publication of the 1989 text, *A Disaffection*, was to signal his arrival as a novelist of international repute as he claimed the prestigious James Tait Black memorial prize awarded by Edinburgh University. As incidental evidence of how blurred the distinctions between literary fiction and popular fiction have become

in the internecine world of Scottish literature we might note that in recent years Ian Rankin- the writer of fucking detective fiction- has become the face of the James Tait Black prize, acting as an advisor to the judging committee and regularly announcing the winner at the awards ceremony.¹⁴

A Disaffection was also to make an appearance on the shortlist for the literary prize *nonpareil*; the Booker. Kelman's relationship with the Booker will be discussed at length in the second chapter of this thesis. It is a discussion which will centre on his winning of the award in 1994 for the novel *How Late It Was, How Late* and the attendant controversy which saw one of the members of the judging committee resign in protest over the decision. The recognition by the prize committee of his most recent novel, *Kieron Smith, Boy* (2008), marked the author's third appearance on the Booker longlist.

James Kelman no longer drives buses, but in recent years the cultural capital he has accrued from his writing has allowed him to find employment teaching at several universities in the United States and (briefly) hold joint-tenure of the Chair of Creative Writing at Glasgow University. We might wish to ponder what Kelman's engagement with these university jobs (with their reliable monthly salaried remuneration) tells us about the economic returns which he receives as a result of book sales. However, if for the present we are going to accept these titular and literary baubles as legitimate arbitrators of enduring cultural worth then it appears that in his assessment of Kelman as '*the senior Scottish fiction writer of urban alienation*'¹⁵, the critic Simon Kövesi is miserly in his praise. Indeed on the basis of the evidence offered above, it would appear

¹⁴ Anna Richardson, 'Top names in running for James Tait Black prize', *The Bookseller*, 28th April 2008, <http://www.thebookseller.com/news/top-names-running-james-tait-black-prize.html>, accessed 4th October 2011, see also, 'James Tait Black Prize winners', <http://www.ed.ac.uk/about/people/tait-black/winners-2010>, accessed 4th October 2011.

¹⁵ Simon Kövesi, *James Kelman*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 3.

churlish to position Kelman as anything other than the contemporary nation's foremost author of serious literary fiction.

The express political agenda which lies behind Kelman's art is best summed up by the author's own credo,

...my culture and my language have the right to exist, and no one has the authority to dismiss that right.¹⁶

At this juncture it might be propitious to provide a note upon the general structure of this thesis and then to settle upon some definitions of how the reader is to understand certain terms which are crucial to the analysis that is offered below. The authors' biographical information and partial publishing history which is provided above is not incidental, rather it is given as a means of establishing a solid link between William McIlvanney and James Kelman; to state that they come from the same place, is to comment upon more than the close geographical proximity of their birthplaces and their decision to call the city of Glasgow home. This, combined with my brief mapping of the critical contours of the landscape of contemporary Scottish literature, should be taken firstly as an illustration of the fact that while an author may give a text materiality, meaning is imbued from a myriad of other places, and ultimately it should emphasise the direct link which exists between culture and the material conditions out of which it was produced.

The first two chapters below provide discussion on the fiction of Kelman and McIlvanney respectively. The thesis concludes with a final chapter which stages a direct comparative study of the two authors' texts through a framework suggested in the closing paragraphs of this Introduction, it is my hope that the structure of chapters one and two- which are centred around the relationship between the respective authors' texts and the concepts of (resistance to) post-

¹⁶ James Kelman, 'Elitist slurs are racism by another name', *Scotland on Sunday*, 16th October 1994.

industrial capitalism, genre, literary form, and cultural legitimacy- will allow the reader to appreciate the implicit comparison I am attempting to make throughout the entirety of the thesis.

The Post-industrial

The history of the twentieth century is a narrative which tells of the steady and terminal decline in the fortunes of the heavy manufacturing industries which had proved the primary means of producing capital since the Industrial Revolution. At two points during the century the imperatives of total global war ensured that the decline was temporarily reversed, but since the end of the Second World War industrial capitalism in this country, and as such the composition of the labour force, has become unrecognisable from that in existence a century earlier.¹⁷

The construction of the welfare state in Britain, brought about chiefly by the Labour government of Clement Atlee (1883-1967, Prime Minister 1945-1951), was to see the bringing into legislation of the Education Act (1944) which ensured compulsory schooling until the age of 15 (to be extended to 16 as soon as was practical), the National Insurance Act (1946) which allowed social security payments to be made on a universal basis and the creation of the National Health Service which came into operation in 1948. During this second half of the century access to higher education came to be viewed as a democratic right of citizenship; on the eve of the Second World War there were

¹⁷ For a comprehensive and eminently readable overview of the decline of the industrial in twentieth century Scotland see T.M Devine, *The Scottish Nation 1700- 2007*, (London: Penguin, 2006), for an explanation of the re-structuring of how class is viewed in this new paradigm see, David Cannadine, *Class in Britain*, (London: Penguin, 2000).

some fifty thousand university students in the United Kingdom, by the time of the New Labour government of Tony Blair (b. 1953, Prime Minister 1997-2007) that figure stood at more than two million.¹⁸

Such an exponential rise in the proportion of the working population holding a university degree can be regarded as part consequence and part cause of a general process of the proletarianisation of the middle classes. While the old means of producing capital by traditional manufacturing began to wither away, usurped by the emergent heavy industries of the developing world, the service industry rose to fill the vacuum which appeared. As a result, a new work force of educated white-collar workers were subjected to the same process of wage labour and alienation which their parents, working in the primary and secondary industries, had undergone a generation earlier. The consequences of this shift for the old communities which previously relied on these traditional industries was profound, not just in an economic sense but crucially in the manner in which it saw geographical areas and cultural groups dispossessed of the factor which provided them with self-definition. They were to find themselves cast into a global cultural maelstrom where they were no longer defined by what they produced, but rather by what they consumed.

This socio-historical outline and the suggestions given for further reading are provided to offer a sense of context which is vital for the analysis put forth in the following chapters, both in terms of the material conditions out of which the Kelman's and McIlvanney's texts are produced and consumed, and in terms of the material conditions which constituted the formative years of the two authors as artists and political activists. Kelman and McIlvanney, themselves members of a generation which benefitted directly from the opportunities

¹⁸ A.H. Hasley , 'Further and Higher Education', *Twentieth Century British Social Trends*, ed. A.H. Hasley & Josephine Webb, (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 2000), pp. 221- 253, p. 222.

opened to them through the nascent welfare state, would recognise the decade of what we might term 'the long 1980's' as a period of crystallisation and galvanisation of the divide between a proletarianised middle-class who were experiencing an improvement in their material conditions of living and a newly forming underclass; a never-working-class. In power during this time was the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher (b. 1925, Prime Minister 1979-1991) which presided over, and effected, a sea change in society's economic and social relations. Clearly, McIlvanney and Kelman are products of the environment in which they grew up; their textual resistance to the mores of post-industrial capitalism is a direct consequence of the material conditions in which they find themselves in the final three decades of the twentieth century. What is less evident, and what this thesis intends to illustrate, is the manner in which those material conditions directly inform not only the content of their text but the formal politics of its representation. The precise meaning of what each of the two authors has to say is directly influenced by the way that it is said and the vehicle used to say it.

Ideology

Writing in 1920- less than three years after the Bolsheviks had stormed Petrograd's Winter Palace- in an essay redolent of the revolutionary optimism of the age and the confidence in the onward teleological progress of history, the Hungarian Marxist and cultural critic Georg Lukács (1885-1971) claims that,

... when the final economic crisis of capitalism develops, *the fate of the revolution (and with it the fate of mankind) will depend on the ideological maturity of the proletariat, i.e. on its class consciousness.*¹⁹

For Lukács, then, there exists a dialectic relationship between the consciousness of the individual under the hegemony of the bourgeoisie and that which is possible when the dominant class in society is the proletariat. The immature false consciousness which exists under capitalism and which disguises the relationship of the individual to her material conditions of existence requires to be replaced by a true consciousness alert to the myriad myths which capitalism propagates in order to ensure its survival. At the instance of capitalism's inevitable implosion only such a true consciousness will guarantee the ascendancy of the proletariat.

The conditions of a post-Fordist age are beyond the scope of those predicted in traditional Marxist doctrine. Late capitalism has become characterised not by the death throes of an epoch about to spawn its own gravediggers but by its seemingly purgatorial propensity to reconstitute itself. As John Fiske states, the overriding lesson of the late twentieth century for the materialist has been,

... not the inevitable self-destruction of capitalism but its unpredicted (by Marx) ability to reproduce itself and *to incorporate into itself the forces of resistance and opposition.*²⁰

The emphasis in the above quote is my own and, as will become apparent, is central to our understanding of the role of ideology in capitalism's ostensibly non-coercive self-perpetuation.

Western cultural theory of the last half-century has sought to provide us with a context in which the decline of industrial capitalism has been mirrored by

¹⁹ Georg Lukács, 'Class Consciousness' (1920), *History and Class Consciousness*, Rodney Livingstone (trans.), (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1971), pp. 46- 82, p. 61.

²⁰ John Fiske, 'Culture, Ideology, Interpellation' (1992), *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, Second Edition, ed. Julie Rivkin, & Michael Ryan, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 1268- 1273, p. 1269.

an attendant decline in the stock of the grand narrative as a legitimate paradigm of history, most famously outlined in Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979). Under such conditions the notion of a verifiable true consciousness espoused by Lukács appears moribund. The iconoclastic influence of structuralism and post-structuralism has conspired to present such a Manichean and essentialist idea as a glaring anachronism.

It is against this background that the French philosopher Louis Althusser (1918-1990) set out his analysis of ideology, the effect it has on the consciousness of the individual and the influence of society's cultural superstructure as the pre-eminent force in capitalism's post-industrial longevity. Althusser's analysis emphasises the importance of culture and in doing so contradicts orthodox Marxist thought which had hitherto privileged the economic sphere of society as the most important theatre in which to wage class struggle.

The interpretation put forth by Althusser holds that ideology is not a phenomenon which fosters a traditional false-consciousness, it does not signify 'the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence'²¹, but rather that it has a material existence which is guaranteed in its reification through the organs implicit in the naturalisation of the social norms where the entire concept of what is normal has been dictated by the dominant class. These organs he terms Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs); they include the church, the education system, the media, the family and language. They differ from the Repressive State Apparatuses, the police force or the judiciary for example, in the manner in which coercion appears to be absent from their everyday operation. It is necessarily thus, for the defining characteristic of ideology is the way in which it presents itself in a manner that will always allow the illusion of

²¹ Althusser, Louis, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' (1968), Rivkin & Ryan (2004), pp. 693 -702, p. 693.

free choice to prosper. Ostensibly the individual- or subject- gives their consent to participate in the rituals which society generally expects of them. However crucially these rituals are constructed with the intention, in the final instance, of maintaining power on behalf of the dominant class:

The social norms, or that what is socially acceptable, are of course neither neutral nor objective; they have developed in the interests of those with social power, and they work to maintain their sites of power by naturalizing them into commonsense.²²

Ideology has a non-temporal relationship to the individual and to deny its existence or role is a fruitless task. The universal nature of ideology ensures that we are all subjects to it from the time of our birth to that of our death; two events in human life inextricably linked to expected 'normal' standards of behaviour through the distinct set of rituals which have developed around each event. For Althusser,

...ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all).²³

Althusser terms this process of irresistible recruiting carried out by ideology as 'hailing' and our recognition of it, for by definition we always recognise the hail as being directed towards us, as 'interpellation'.

An understanding of this concept of ideology and the specific emphasis on the importance of culture for capitalism's consolidation of power will allow this thesis to examine the potential problems and tensions inherent in the textual resistance staged by McIlvanney's and Kelman's fiction. We will be able to appreciate the evasions undertaken by the two authors in order to guard against their narratives being incorporated by the dominant social class and dominant central culture.

²² Fiske (1992), p. 1270.

²³ Althusser (1968), p. 699.

Tastes, Needs and Legitimate Culture

James Kelman is a major author of international importance. The evidence which I have offered in support of this fact is in no way comprehensive but is, I hope, sufficient to convince the reader. If we are to juxtapose this assessment against the context of Kelman's comments which open this dissertation, and the consternation they caused amongst commentators in both the Scottish and the metropolitan press, then we should become acutely aware of a contradiction which will lie at the heart of our attempts to analyse the author's work as politically engaged fiction; Kelman is simultaneously made to occupy the role of the *enfant terrible* and the grand old man of contemporary Scottish literature. The prestigious position that Kelman's literature holds within the cultural economy necessitates that Kelman-the-politically-engaged-writer is forced into a dualistic existence. On one hand he apparently has the agency to function as a subtle and nuanced polemicist against the dominant culture whilst concurrently the very medium he uses to conduct the interrogation of capitalism's values- his fiction- is lauded by the dominant social class in a way which must have consequences for the political agenda- the depiction and protection of *my culture*- which lies behind his art.

In Kelman's engagement, willing or otherwise, with the arbiters of literary taste there are inevitable compromises enacted upon his cultural output. In these terms there is a direct analogy to draw with the manner in which McIlvanney consciously eschewed those arbiters by setting out to write genre fiction which was at once popular and political.

The sociologist and cultural theorist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) offers a definition of 'legitimate culture' which recognises such a concept as being as important as the possession of economic wealth for the maintenance of the

status quo under capitalism. Using this notion I will outline the terms in which the forces exerted upon Kelman's stylised literary fiction by the 'legitimate culture' of the centre can be considered similar to those acting upon McIlvanney's popular genre fiction. Does fiction which sets out to challenge the dominance and preconceptions of a central culture become compromised when it is consumed and lauded by those in possession of economic capital? Is the resistance reduced to little more than a cultural relief valve, brought into play by the ruling classes in order to prevent damage to the capitalist system? Or, is truly effective resistance to be found in art which co-opts the discourses of the centre in order to forcefully highlight the plurality and value of the peripheries?

For Bourdieu, legitimate culture can be understood as that which signifies the kind of artistic production aesthetically favoured by society's cultural elite; where elitism is conferred by the formative access one has had to earlier legitimate culture, this access is often enabled by the relative economic comfort of one's upbringing. The necessity of existence of such an elite is rendered by ideology into an objective unquestionable fact, while simultaneously disguising what enables that existence. That concept is 'taste', something which is acquired in a very concrete way and governs how cultural consumers respond to certain types of art.

Characteristically art which belongs to legitimate culture asserts,

'...primacy to that of which the artist is the master, i.e. form, manner, style, rather than the 'subject', the external referent.'²⁴

It speaks to the tastes of the cultural elite who, from an early age have been schooled in the necessary tradition and precedents required to fully understand it. This stands in contrast to the aesthetics of popular culture where in many

²⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, 'From *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*', *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Leitch, Vincent B., et al, (New York: Norton, 2001), pp. 1809- 1814, p. 1811.

instances there exists a more literal relationship between art works and what they signify, and even where there is an element of knowing allusion, the cipher to this code is readily available to all. In these terms it can be seen that through a process of backwards signification, legitimacy of culture is always bound in questions of class,

Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the decisions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed... Art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously or deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimising social differences.²⁵

Using this paradigm it becomes apparent that artistic production cannot exist in any kind of glorious isolation from economic and social forces. Those in possession of economic capital are in a position to amass cultural capital and as such afford themselves the freedom to define what constitutes legitimacy. It is a relationship in which legitimate culture is used to ideologically *legitimise* the political and social power of the dominant class in society.

By focusing upon the decision of the Booker judging committee to confirm Kelman as the recipient of that prize in 1994, and the furore which surrounded it, we shall begin to suggest ways in which those in dominant social positions - those in possession of cultural capital- can work to temper any message of resistance offered through the art of legitimate culture. The corollary of such an analysis for McIlvanney's crime fiction is to raise serious doubts over the effectiveness of popular fiction for carrying a message which directly interrogates capitalism. We shall question the extent to which the author is forcibly bound into speaking to the tastes and needs of the cultural elite in order to lend gravitas to a 'serious' point being made via the supposedly ephemeral

²⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 1813- 1814.

medium of genre fiction. Where McIlvanney's detective novels escape the conventions of the crime fiction canon, are they in fact doing nothing more radical than affirming the high literary conventions of the cultural elite? Can genre fiction ever be the best means of conveying a serious cultural and political argument?

What McIlvanney attempts to effect through the Laidlaw novels is the appropriation of a genre in order to put forth a narrative which is viewed by those in positions of power as inappropriate. This is what lies at the heart of the textual contradictions which will be uncovered in Chapter One. In Chapter Two we shall ask whether, in choosing to write in an aesthetic which is most (we might venture exclusively) suited to those possessing the tastes of legitimate high culture, Kelman leaves his narratives of resistance open to appropriation by that centre.

Form and Genre

The realities of existence in and between the post-industrial communities which Kelman and McIlvanney represent in their respective texts and the means by which they make formal allusion to this reality is a central point of contrast between the works of the two authors. For reasons of clarity and in line with the definitions outlined below, we will consider the three Kelman novels upon which this thesis focuses to loosely belong to a late modernist school of literature and those of McIlvanney we shall, for the present, term 'realist fiction'. I intend to conduct a discussion on the literary form used by each of the authors separately. Hopefully in sum these two analyses will confirm the fact that the gulf between the authors' modes of formal mimesis is concerned with rather more than the

mere aesthetic sensibilities of literary style. Rather it is fundamental to our understanding of the way in which their texts are culturally consumed and has direct consequences for the potential of their literature to carry a form of resistance. As the sub-heading to this section suggests, the discussion of form will appear at times indistinguishable from a discussion on genre; the comparison of literary modernism versus realist fiction will bleed into a comparison anent critically feted high literature against popular crime fiction. Drawing on Bourdieu's conception of legitimate culture it would be perverse not to recognise the interrelation between form and genre. The way in which a text is written has a direct impact on the way it is read and on who its readership is intended to be.

Any conclusions drawn about the Laidlaw novels will explicitly recognise the way in which the genre of crime fiction drives forward the events of the narrative in a manner which demands a textual resolution. More than simply answering the question of 'whodunit?', the imperatives of the genre dictate that the narrative must also provide an ideological resolution, a restoration of certainty and order. With reference to Stephen Knight's authoritative monograph *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction* (1980) I will examine the specific ways in which McIlvanney's politically engaged crime novels variously confound and confirm the expectations and conventions associated with the genre. As an affirmation of the intimate relationship between a popular text and the material conditions in which it is produced and consumed I will recognise that the crime fiction tradition serves a social function, useful to those interested in maintaining positions of power. With reference to Ernest Mandel's *Delightful Murder; A social history of the crime story* (1984) and the social theory of Michel Foucault we shall see clear links develop between crime, capitalism and crime fiction.

The control of meaning and tightly scripted revelation which characterise even McIlvanney's supposedly unconventional detective novels are in many ways the perfect antithesis of Kelman's subjective anti-empiricism. It is a discrepancy which has far-reaching consequences for the political effectiveness of the texts and for the ways in which the authors' agendas are laid open for interpretation. Turning once more to the work of Georg Lukács, we will examine his assertions that only realist fiction can hope to address the material conditions of capitalist society effectively and as such function as a form of resistance.

For a critic like Lukács, Kelman's stylised modernism would be at best an irrelevance and at worst an anathema. In its emphasis on aesthetics as opposed to content it can never hope to effect an interrogation of the 'reality', the material conditions, it purportedly takes as its subject matter. The framework suggested by the critic Colin MacCabe in his influential monograph on the pre-eminent novelist of high modernism, *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word* (1979), offers the ideal rebuttal to Lukács' assertion. By this method, specifically with reference to MacCabe's notion of a 'metalanguage', it will become apparent that the self-conscious and highly stylised formal aesthetics of Kelman's texts are essential if one is to attempt an escape from traditional realist fiction's portrayal of a reality ordered by generic and formal conventions. As has been alluded to above, and will be expanded upon in the following chapter, such an approach contains its own unique set of ideologically tempered restraints.

Glasgows

It appears that an analysis such as the one outlined above will serve only to drive us into an impasse. Both the stylised high literary vanguardism characterised by Kelman's art and the politically engaged genre fiction of McIlvanney's Laidlaw trilogy ultimately find the potency of their resistance against post-industrial capitalism to be diminished by dint of an interaction with the centres of power. This is however only part of the story. While the *a priori* constraints of ideology work to attenuate the inappropriateness of their various texts, McIlvanney and Kelman- separately and to different extents- succeed in representing a geographical and cultural locus which critiques the hegemony of late capitalism.

The geographical locus is of course centred on the city of Glasgow and the West of Scotland, but the cultural location is more difficult to discern. For McIlvanney there exists a tendency to fashion his fiction into a kind of cultural and moral repository; a cache in which the sepia-tinted sensibilities of a bygone age can be deposited in the hope that they can be used as a means of resistance. For Kelman any comment on the death of community and the past certainties which the Laidlaw trilogy laments is notable by its absence; a whiff of the grave clothes already cling to such notions. In the case of Kelman, we shall come to understand that for this ostensibly most Glaswegian of writers, the city of Glasgow is important not for what it represents in the popular imagination, but rather for its suitability as a platform for representing the kind of universal everyday power struggles that characterise capitalist society.

In the course of the first two chapters I shall attempt to move towards identifying the composition of the culture which the two authors represent, the culture they feel belongs to them. In the final chapter I shall suggest the ways in which these cultures come to be inalienably connected to the cityscapes which

comprise the setting of their novels. Textually this is evident in the authors' differing depiction of the Glasgow housing scheme of Drumchapel and the extent to which their narratives confound or confirm the preconceived notions about the place which endure in the collective imaginations of their readership. With recourse to the concept of the *flâneur*, that high literary convention adopted so effectively over the years by the writers of crime fiction, a direct comparison will be made between the way that the characters created by McIlvanney and Kelman respectively interact with their surroundings and what effect those surroundings have in the potency of the authors' political messages.

While the manner in which McIlvanney's and Kelman's texts are used to stage a resistance to capitalism is markedly different, it will become apparent that the authors are united by the fact that they both endeavour to represent a culture which is viewed by those in the centres of power as marginal and peripheral. On occasion, the imperium of power seeks to actively embrace these discourses of the peripheries in order to neuter the threat they pose to its locations of dominance. The culture of a late capitalist society is predisposed to work tirelessly and, in a material way, to appropriate and *make appropriate* their differing forms of textual resistance.

Chapter One

You wouldn't tell Cezanne to take up fucking photography as a way of reaching the mass market.¹

- James Kelman

In the opening paragraph of his monograph on James Kelman, the critic Simon Kövesi recounts the claim of one senior academic in the English Literature Department of an ancient Scottish university that she is not an admirer of Kelman's work.

'The trouble is, one ought to admire him,' she says, hinting at the pressures of academic orthodoxy.²

For Kövesi such a statement nods towards the overwhelming sense that there exists a sort of proportional relationship between how difficult a text is for the reader to consume and the literary value or worth of that text. The challenging formal and linguistic styling, so characteristic of Kelman's *oeuvre*, is lauded by the academy and a cultural elite who choose to ignore the fact that these self-same features serve to render the text inaccessible to the vast majority of the population. To agree with the above assessment is not necessarily to criticise the authors of such texts. The relationship between the aesthetics of Kelman's texts and the stake they hold in an economy of cultural prestige are at the heart of this thesis' attempts to evaluate his success as an author bent on propagating a political agenda through art. The notorious difficulty of Kelman's stylistics is an adroit and sophisticated manifestation of a political desire to evade the

¹ David Robinson, 'Plain Talking Glaswegian', *The Scotsman*, 26th April 2008.

² Sam Phipps, 'The age of the page', *The Herald*, 11th March 2006, p. 4, quoted in Kövesi (2007), p. 1, the academic in question is Janet Todd, Professor of English at the University of Aberdeen.

controlling forces of ideology which govern conventional realist literature. In identifying the nature of the formal politics of Kelman's texts, taking into consideration their position in a metatextual dialectic linking economic and cultural capital, it will become apparent that success in evading the tyrannical conventions of realist literature brings with it its own pitfalls. The text as a site of resistance is always-already compromised by the materialist forces working to shape the way in which it is consumed as a cultural artefact and, in the process, attenuating the threat it poses to capitalism's hierarchy.

Textual evasion

Writing in 1957, the Hungarian Marxist theorist Georg Lukacs attacks the modernist school of literature for what he alleges is its institutionalised failure to function as an organ of historical and political progression. In literary modernism's privileging of form over content and in its psychopathological introspection there exists a fundamental betrayal, 'an escape into nothingness'³, made evident by the evasion of the conditions set forth in Lukacs' pronouncement that,

In any protest against particular social conditions, these conditions themselves must have central place.⁴

Using James Joyce's seminal novel *Ulysses* (1922) as the pre-eminent example of the school, Lukács bemoans the manner in which modernism's key texts display a characteristic formal construction whereby,

...the stream-of-consciousness technique is no mere stylistic device; it is itself the formative principle governing the narrative pattern and the presentation of the character.⁵

³ Georg Lukacs, 'From 'The Ideology of Modernism'' (1957), *Marxist Literary Theory*, ed. Terry Eagleton & Drew Milne, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 142- 162, p.150.

⁴ *ibid.* p. 151.

Crucially this has consequences for the way in which the text can be read and who is able to glean meaning from it. The Lukácsian argument holds that a critical reading of a text which engages primarily with the form - as is the case with the critical industry surrounding the Modernist movement - represents a dereliction of analytic duty. A preoccupation with form over the narrative portrayal of material conditions is a distraction which materialists can ill afford. What should be more germane for the politically progressive reader is, 'the view of the world, the ideology... underlying a writer's work.'⁶

The most useful way in which we can counter Lukács is in addressing his conception of reality as an objective truth, a truth which can only find manifestation in fiction by means of literary realism. For Colin MacCabe, the defining feature of 'the classic realist text'⁷ is the presence of a metalanguage. He defines this notion as a discourse present in the text which succeeds in elevating itself to a plane of the unquestionable, of infallibility. If the metalanguage says something is so, then we can assume that it is naturally so. It is recognisable by its 'refusal to admit its own materiality'⁸ as a means of evading interrogation,

Whereas other discourses within the text are considered as materials which are open to reinterpretation, the narrative discourse [the metalanguage] functions simply as a window on reality.⁹

The narrative function of the metalanguage is the provision of an objective moral and ontological authority for the reader. Lukács would identify it as representing the 'concept of the normal' - a site of incontrovertible

⁵ *ibid.* p.142.

⁶ *ibid.* p. 143.

⁷ Colin MacCabe, *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word*, (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1979), p.15.

⁸ *ibid.* p. 14.

⁹ *ibid.* p. 15.

certainty- which is essential if we are to, ‘‘place’ distortion correctly; that is to say, to see it *as* distortion.’¹⁰ For the advocate of historical realism the metalanguage thus becomes a necessity of all progressive politically engaged fiction. It provides the base from which the author is able to use the narrative, plot and characterisation of his text to illustrate the manner that capitalism distorts the natural essence of,

‘Man [as] a social animal [who] cannot be distinguished from their social and historical environment.’¹¹

The narrative metalanguage provides the vantage point which affords a god’s-eye view of existence; it presents the opportunity for the realist writer to colour the text with his own subjectivity and in doing so, attempt to influence the value judgement made by the reader. The metalanguage is essential for conveying the author’s intended meaning. Without it, so Lukács would argue, a text can only ever be static and superficial.

MacCabe counters such a thesis by maintaining that the decision of the modernist author to create a narrative which doesn’t rely upon a metalanguage is not only an aesthetic choice, but a political one too. In rejecting naturalised subjectivity in favour of the multifarious nature of each subject’s own perceived reality, the author is attesting to the right of existence of innumerable cultures beyond the ideological hegemony which forms the framework of capitalism’s hierarchical power relations.

In the opening chapter of Kelman’s *The Busconductor Hines*, the eponymous protagonist, Robert Hines, is sheltering from the rain with some of his off-duty workmates while discussing the next port of call on their pub crawl,

They were waiting for another driver by the name of Barry McBride who had gone to the gents before leaving the pub.

¹⁰ Lukacs (1957), p. 153.

¹¹ *ibid.* p. 143.

I'm suggesting the snooker-room, said McCulloch.
 Aye but nobody's allowed in now because of that last performance.
 Colin Brown had spoken and McCulloch glared at him: You trying to
 say something?
 I'm no trying to say fuck all- but some cunt pished into the corner;
 and it wasnt me.¹²

The continuity of the narrative perspective in this instance may be considered relatively conservative for an author with as formally ambitious a reputation as Kelman has. It is consistently that of the third person clearly interspersed with direct speech, which although forgoing the traditional inverted commas, is punctuated clearly by paragraph breaks and in one instance a colon. However if we are to juxtapose the language of the first line of the above extract (They were... the pub), with that of the last (I'm no... wasnt me), we are presented with an example in microcosm of Kelman's political ambition to represent his culture- the culture so often objectively portrayed as peripheral and second rate- as a legitimate culture. The Standard English of the first line makes use of the euphemism 'gone to the gents' to allude to an act which the character of the final line would no doubt express as having, 'gone for a pish'. Meanwhile we might suggest that the proper noun Barry McBride is approximated in the final line by the term 'cunt'. It is a specific use of the term where the outstanding example of profanity, for Standard English sensibilities at least, comes to be used not as a term of abuse but rather as a demotic non-specific nominative similar to 'guy' or 'bloke'. The fact that there exists no marks in the text to suggest that the voice of the Standard English third person narrator inhabits a realm separate to that of the author's rendering of working class

¹² James Kelman, *The Busconductor Hines*, (London: Phoenix, [1984] 2001), p. 11, (Hereafter *BH*).

Glaswegian, pitches both perspectives of reality into a shared but separate subjectivity and, as a result, confirms their mutual validity.

Referencing Franz Kafka, an author to whom critics are often keen to compare him, Kelman comments on the former's uncanny ability to use narrative,

...to refer to a space which he then fills with a crowd of things that either don't exist, or *maybe* don't exist. He fills the page with absences and possible absences.¹³ (SRA 6)

This creation of absence, or more precisely the explicit planting in the mind of the reader of the suggestion of possible absence, is a trait as characteristic of Kelman's fiction as it is Kafka's. Its effect on the reader is a destabilisation, a decentring of the point of narrative authority. We are left instead with a shifting narrative voice; the lack of a metalanguage ensures a levelling effect through which, all reality appears as a subjective reality. This subjectivity is made manifest in the quotidian existence of Hines. Sitting in a pub, alone with his thoughts after his wife has left him, Hines becomes agitated by the old man at the bar intent on engaging him in small talk.

You grab a hold of his lapels: Here auld yin my wife's fucked off and left me I mean what's the fucking game at all, your daft patter, eh, leave us alone you cunt for fuck sake. This isn't Hines who's talking. It's a voice. This is a voice doing the talking which he listens to. He doesn't think like this at all. (BH 167)

To attempt a close reading of this passage leaves the critic punch-drunk and disorientated from the uncertain modulation of the narrative perspective. We might fairly assume it starts in the second person with the direction 'You grab a hold of his lapels'. The sentence which begins 'Here auld yin...' ostensibly appears to be direct speech reported again from the third person

¹³James, Kelman, *Some Recent Attacks: Essay Cultural And Political*, (Stirling: AK Press, 1992), p. 6, (Hereafter SRA).

perspective even though there exists no punctuation to this effect. However, any certainty we may have in this assertion is immediately qualified by the subsequent four sentences, ‘This isn’t Hines... He doesn’t think like this at all.’ How then are we to read the passage as a whole? Is the direct speech actually vocalised by Hines in a moment of uncharacteristic aggression- *this isn’t the normal Hines who is talking*- or is it a fantasy articulated only in the mind of Rab Hines- *Hines isn’t talking*?

That the disentanglement of such a relatively brief extract from the text should prove such a headache and suggest so many ambiguities is illustrative of the politico-aesthetic project which foregrounds Kelman’s work. This is certainly the case for the critic Lee Spinks who lends credence to the view that Kelman’s challenging aesthetics need to be read and understood as

... the corollary of his insistence that our linguistic understanding of the world is always already mediated by the social and political contexts within which our language functions.¹⁴

As a formal technique Kelman’s sophisticated evasion of a naturalised and subjective metalanguage makes an emphatic cultural-political point. It leaves the reader struggling to discern which of the subjective ‘truths’ they are being offered is the one most worthy of believing.

The Busconductor Hines is a novel which veritably revels in its construction on the shifting sands of the subjects’ disparate conceptions of the material reality of their existence. Kelman’s insistence on multiple subjectivities fundamentally effects how the reader consumes the text in an aesthetic sense, that is to say that the form of a text influences and orders the meaning which the reader takes from that text. Consider for example Hines’ musing on the leaking gas fire in his house and the potential it opens to him,

¹⁴ Lee Spinks, ‘In Juxtaposition to Which: Narrative, System and Subjectivity in the Fiction of James Kelman’, *Edinburgh Review*, no. 108, 2001, pp. 85- 105, p. 96.

The occasional whiff 1st thing in the morning. It is the gas. The inhalation of such fumes doth annihilate the white corpuscles of one's bloodstream. Hence the cause of death. In you come night after night and slump into your chair- a chair you have been placing as close to the feedpipe as is surreptitiously possible- and so on until the loss of the white fills your being with total red unto black. Get yourself insured and that's you... All you need is a short note. (*BH* 73)

Again the ambiguity of the passage is carefully crafted. The anachronistic, pseudo-Biblical register, suggested by terms such as 'doth' and 'unto', militates to suggest that the idea of suicide is never seriously entertained. Instead it exists only as one of the myriad hypothetical possibilities open to nearly all individuals at any given point in their lives. Yet this shift into an idiom which ostensibly appears as pastiche is not without precedent in the novel and as such it is difficult to categorise it as pastiche to any degree of certainty. The form of Kelman's writing has robbed us of the assurance of perspective offered by traditional realist fiction and, as a result, leaves us unable to discern with any surety the extent to which Hines' thoughts have potential to become Hines' actions. If we are willing to entertain the possibility that his contemplations on suicide actually effect his interaction with material reality, that is to say he does physically sit close to the leaking feedpipe, we find the entire premise on which we approach the novel utterly altered. It becomes possible, probable even, that his reoccurring search for a gun is less idle adventure fantasy and more actual symbol of a human bent on a course of self-destruction. With this possibility acknowledged it then becomes likely that Hines' decision to return to the buses- a job he repeatedly professes to detest- to work his notice in the closing paragraphs of the novel, is not as a result of his need for extra money for Christmas but rather his need for money to buy a gun from his childhood friend Frank who he has been to meet in a pub in Drumchapel.

Admittedly the extrapolation may seem rather laboured, but it is nevertheless illustrative of this important point. All reality can only ever be a

subjective conception of such, under which all of an individual's potential means of engaging with the material conditions of their existence remain equally as abstract until the moment they are rendered concrete by articulation or deed. To recognise this as the case is by extension to inextricably and without contradiction bind the aesthetic form of Kelman's non-realist fiction to his radical politics of representation. It is to 'insist upon an irreducible connection between stylistic and ethical particularism'¹⁵ and in doing so it shapes art as a progressive force. It is a force that demonstrates that we need no point from which we can gauge Lukacsian distortion as all claims to an objective reality are always already constituted by their own ideological construction.

In this recognition of infinite possible realities a voice is provided to those whose reality and whose culture would be held as Other by the core of capitalism's power. If Kelman's self-conscious and skilful choice of form enables his work to evade ideology's controlling conventions by offering a representation of his culture, then it is a choice which can only ever be a partial success. In the nefarious relationship between political power, economic capital and cultural prestige we find the effectiveness of his texts to resist and interrogate the hegemony of late capitalism compromised to an extent by the way they are received and consumed by the reader.

¹⁵ Spinks (2001), p. 90

Glasgow Green and the Cultural Colonialism of the Year of Culture

While renowned as the pre-eminent Scottish novelist of his generation, James Kelman was a playwright before he was a novelist. Kelman's radio play, *Hardie and Baird: The Last Days* was broadcast by BBC Radio Scotland in 1978, seven years prior to the publication of his debut novel, *The Busconductor Hines*. *Hardie and Baird* tells the story of the execution, at the hands of the British state, of the eponymous John Baird and Andrew Hardie for their part in the so-called Radical War or Scottish Insurrection of 1820¹⁶.

Retrospectively, we might look on the play as being doubly representative of Kelman's wider literary-political concerns. Firstly, in general terms it constitutes an engagement with radical history thoroughly in keeping with the author's commitment to give voice to the peripheral discourses which the centres of power would rather remained silent. In a rather more specific way, it also constitutes a link with a symbolic and geographical space which is to become of acute concern to Kelman as a writer and political activist: Glasgow Green.

Gifted to the people of Glasgow in the 15th century by King James II, Glasgow Green was used as a training ground for the armed would-be revolutionaries of the 1820 Insurrection. Over the centuries, the green and pleasant space to the east of the city centre has become something of a Jerusalem in Glasgow's half-mythic, half-legendary narrative of resistance. It played a starring role as the venue for protests by the Suffragette movement between the 1870s and the early 20th century, as the backdrop for John MacLean's first anti-war rally in 1914, a gathering place for strikers during the

¹⁶ A full account of this little known episode in Scottish history can be found in Peter Berresford Ellis and Seamus Mac A' Ghobhainn, *The Scottish Insurrection of 1820*, (Edinburgh, Birlinn, 2001).

General Strike of 1926 and the starting point of Strathclyde Anti-Poll Tax Federation's fifty-thousand strong protest march through the city in 1989. To this day it remains the setting for Glasgow's Mayday celebrations, its place in the popular imagination of the city secured as a result of its historical significance as a free gathering place for Glaswegians.

During Glasgow's tenure as the European City of Culture for 1990, the city council led by the then Lord Provost Pat Lally attempted to sell-off a third of Glasgow Green to the developers of a leisure centre. Vocal and vociferous opposition to these moves were established by a number of public figures amongst whom Kelman was a leading voice. For its opponents, the proposed common land sell-off by the Labour controlled council spoke to greater concerns over the ideological agenda which lay behind the Year of Culture. As Kelman explains in his essay 'Art, Subsidy, and the Continuing Politics of Culture City' (SRA 27- 36), the fifty million pounds of public funding which supported the showpiece Year of Culture project would, in the long run, have severe consequences for Glasgow's everyday cultural institutions: the city's libraries, art galleries, museums and public halls.

Aware of their vulnerability to such criticism Glasgow City Council engaged the advertising corporation Saatchi & Saatchi, at that time perhaps best known for their work for the Conservative Party under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher¹⁷, to market the event as one designed to 'entice private investment to the city and its environs' (SRA 31). It is this decision, Kelman contends, which exposes the foundational myth - the 'intellectual poverty,

¹⁷ A 1978 poster produced for the Conservative Party carried the slogan, 'Labour isn't working... Britain's better off with the Conservatives' in front of an image of a dole queue. Many commentators have since suggested this was central to Thatcher's election success in 1979. See for example, Ivan Fallon, 'The agency that made Tory history', *The Independent*, 17th September 2007.

moral bankruptcy and political cowardice' (SRA 31) - upon which the entire project was founded,

... the assumption that a partnership already exists between the arts and big business and that such a partnership is 'healthy'. (SRA 27)

Organising under the name of 'Workers' City', Kelman was part of a group of artists which opposed the unpalatable alliance of economic capital and artistic expression that constituted the logic behind the Year of Culture. The group was variously dismissed, firstly by Lally who, demonstrating an inverse intellectual-snobbery, branded them a band of 'well-heeled... dilettanti'¹⁸. For Neil Wallace, the council's then-Depute Director of Festivals, the opposition of Workers' City proved the trigger for a betrayal of a hidden strand of cultural colonialism. What was considered 'culture' by the Worker's City group was not synonymous with the 'Culture' being officially celebrated throughout 1990.

Kelman and his ilk were,

... pathetic, factless, plank-walking... an embarrassment to this city and all of its cultural workforce.¹⁹

The author concedes that the interests of the capitalist press predictably lead to Workers' City having their direct opposition to the Year of Culture limited to picketing flagship events and writing "'Outraged of Newton Mearns' style letters to the editor' (SRA 1) of *The Glasgow Herald*. It was more productive to proactively focus on their own agenda. Through 'The Free University Network', another alternative intellectual group with which he was involved, Kelman successfully extended an invitation to the celebrated American academic Noam Chomsky to deliver the keynote address at an international conference held in Govan in 1990.

¹⁸ Cited in David Kelly, *Glasgow 1990: the true story behind the hype*, (Gartocharn: Famedram, 1990), p. 19.

¹⁹ *ibid.* p. 19.

Kelman's obstinate and visible criticism of the Year of Culture during 1990 cemented his reputation as a principled and civically-engaged artist and political activist. The ideological workings of capitalism will always work to ensure that those who seek to resist its hegemony must undergo a compromise which to one extent or another proves undermining. Kelman's opposition to the appropriation of Glasgow Green for profit represents a desire to protect a geographical site of resistance, or rather potential resistance. As is outlined at the beginning of this chapter, his texts function at a sophisticated level to offer an analogous site of cultural resistance. It is at the intersection of these two spheres, where the cultural discourses of the text are modulated and altered by the imperatives of economic and social material reality that the presence of such a compromise is most clearly visible. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the consequences of Kelman winning the Booker Prize in 1994 for his novel *How late it was, how late*.

Kelman and the Booker

Writing in the immediate aftermath of Kelman's Booker Prize victory, the journalist Simon Jenkins used a leading article in *The Times*, that great newspaper of record, to bemoan the vacuous emperor's-new-clothes intellect of an English literary establishment which saw fit to laud the savage 'genius' of *How late* with that most prestigious of literary awards. For Jenkins, the experience of engaging with the text was not at all like the experience he would expect from engaging with a work of art. Such was his estrangement from the text that he likened the act of reading it as akin to being accosted on a train by a urine drenched drunken Glaswegian. The article itself is riddled with the inconsistencies of its writer's peculiar cultural sensibilities. Jenkins' self-

identification as a ‘cultural pluralist’²⁰ fails to recognise the fact that he views the Booker as some sort of gold standard, supposed to function as an objective arbitrator- and guarantor- of ‘good literature’. The gulf which exists between what the Booker *should* represent for Jenkins and what it *does* represent by recognising a novel such as *How late*, is so great that the decision of the judges represents a descent into ‘lunacy’. Like a spoiled child in the playground Jenkins tucks his ball under his arm and takes it home because it is his game and if he cannot make the rules then he does not want to play. Jenkins’ dissent was not a lone voice. Indeed Rabbi Julia Neuberger, a member of the judging panel, resigned her position stating that the novel was ‘crap’, and ‘deeply inaccessible’ and as a result Kelman’s victory was a ‘disgrace’²¹.

Much of the media furore surrounding *How Late* centred on the fact that the word ‘fuck’- and its derivatives- supposedly appeared on four-thousand separate occasions in the course of the novel.²² While Jenkins’ makes comment on this fact in his article and feels the need to euphemistically gloss it as the ‘Anglo-Saxon expletive’²³, it is significant that for both him and Neuberger (note it is the judge’s decision not the text which is a ‘disgrace’) this profanity is not the catalyst for their angst. There is no puritanical sensibility at play; Kelman has a right to create such a text and consenting adults have the right to read it. When we understand the role that literary prizes like the Booker play in the economy of cultural prestige it becomes clear why, in the final analysis, the vexation of commentators such as Jenkins and Neuberger is concerned with questions of power and not of morality. The disagreement is a result of

²⁰ Simon Jenkins, ‘An expletive of a winner’, *The Times*, 15th October 1994.

²¹ No byline, ‘Diary- Books’, *The Sunday Times*, 23rd October 1994.

²² See for example, Stuart Wavell, ‘Scots bewail 4000-expletive blot on the national character’, *The Sunday Times*, 16th October 1994.

²³ Jenkins (1994).

Neuberger and Jenkins' collective inability to recognise what happens in the narrative of *How late* as a viable representation of culture. So far removed is the content of the novel from the culture experienced by Jenkins and Neuberger- and theirs is the culture which awards the prize- that it is incomprehensible to them that one should consider it a work of art. Indeed, for Jenkins, not only is the text a paragon of 'literary bareness', but it hardly even achieves the status of text, rather it is simply a record of Kelman 'transcrib[ing] the rambling thoughts of a blind Glaswegian drunk.'

For reasons which are discussed below, this critic's detextualisation of Kelman's text illuminates a complex relationship between the author's fiction and those who are in a position to confer cultural legitimacy. It might be suggested that the bafflement over Kelman's Booker victory expressed by Jenkins actually demonstrates a certain naivety which serves to flag the insidious level upon which ideology works to protect capitalism's interests. When we understand the role that a prestigious literary prize actually plays in the dialectic between cultural prestige and political power, it should come as no surprise that it would be in the best interests of the central culture to recognise and laud threatening discourses emanating from its own peripheries. Working at a metatextual level to add new meaning to and pass value-judgements on a text, the literary prize moulds to the framework of MacCabe's metalanguage in the way in which it supposedly provides an objective measure of worth.

In an explanation worth quoting at length, Mary McGlynn delineates the implicit and explicit functions of the Booker:

The role of the literary prize is complex here, effectively *investing* the work with the value it supposedly 'measures' as an intrinsic feature of the work; the imprimatur of the Booker Prize victory practically guarantees lasting 'literary' status. This endows the prizes themselves with great power. The activity of perceiving/ conferring elusive 'literary' qualities in a novel- distinguishing works of genuine and enduring aesthetic worth

from mediocre books which may sell more copies- this process itself reinforces the values of the people and institutions doing the classifying.²⁴

As we have already established in the Introduction, ‘Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier.’²⁵ That is to say, in the process of awarding the Booker, the judges effectively recognise the victorious text as belonging to their own culture; the legitimate culture of the centre. For Bourdieu theirs would be a culture which ‘asserts the autonomy of production’; it gives,

...primacy to that of which the artist is master, i.e., form, manner, style, rather than the ‘subject’... It also means a refusal to recognise any necessity other than that inscribed in the specific tradition of the artistic discipline in question: the shift from an art which imitates nature [the Lukácsian ‘view of the world’] to an art which imitates art, deriving from its own history the exclusive source of its experiments and even of its breaks with tradition.²⁶

Ostensibly this description of the anatomy of *avant-garde* art seems to suggest that such a corpus of work should, in the process of asserting its autonomy of production, actively resist ownership by the discourses of power. However, the compromise of the art’s autonomy occurs at the interface of artefact and material conditions: at the point of consumption.

In order to understand any given cultural artefact as we consume it, we must have some knowledge of historical, artistic and social context,

Consumption is... a stage in a process of communication, that is, an act of deciphering, decoding, which presupposes practical or explicit mastery of a cipher or code... A work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded.²⁷

In these terms, we can begin to understand the contradictions and limitations which restrict Kelman as a political writer of literary fiction. The

²⁴ Mary McGlynn, ‘How late it was, how late and Literary Value’, *The Edinburgh Companion to James Kelman*, ed. Scott Hames, (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 20- 30, p. 21.

²⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, ‘From *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*’, Leitch, *et al*, (2001), pp. 1809- 1814, p. 1813.

²⁶ *ibid.* p. 1811.

²⁷ *ibid.* p. 1810.

author's adoption of highly stylised formal techniques creates a literature loudly proclaiming the autonomy of production. In turn, this proclamation enables the creation of a textual plane able to resist the controlling tendencies of the dominant powers; the naturalised form of the metalanguage's subjectivity. However, the role of taste works to diminish the political potency of such art. Those cultural consumers most fluent in the codes and ciphers of this *avant-garde* literature, those readers for whom the text has interest and meaning, are in possession of a degree of cultural capital which is sufficient enough to emphatically mark them out as not belonging wholly to the peripheries. The very fact that Kelman's readers find Kelman's texts to their tastes is a guarantee that they themselves have the competence to negotiate with and communicate through the discourses of the central power.

Let us turn to a textual example from Kelman's fiction as a means of mapping the paths and pitfalls of such a negotiation.

The Cultural Capital of Patrick Doyle

The protagonist of Kelman's 1989 novel *A Disaffection*, Patrick Doyle, is a teacher at a Glasgow secondary school. His existence as described in the course of the narrative is a fractious one. A troubled relationship with his family, with alcohol and with his colleagues are all part cause and part corollary of a mind in serious crisis. At the centre of Doyle's disaffection is the mounting tension he feels between the two cultural spheres he inhabits; the working-class culture of his parents and brother and that of the university-educated, middle-class school teacher.

Kövesi indulges in a bit of literary number crunching to count the number of references in *A Disaffection* to famous proper-noun names²⁸. The result runs to forty-one different characters, philosophers, authors and artists. They include most frequently Goya, Dostoevsky and Camus, but stretch to encompass what might fairly be considered a canonical roll-call of Western European high culture. The valuable point that Kövesi succeeds in making is that Kelman's prominent centring of this canon within the narrative of the novel makes a crucial presumption about the extent to which his readership have knowledge of this legitimate culture, to what degree they exhibit a 'practical or explicit mastery of the code or cipher' needed to satisfactorily consume this culture. To state that the author's referencing of such a high cultural code represents a betrayal of his, working-class and peripheral, culture is to be overly reductive, simplifying it to a monolithic whole and failing to recognise the heteroglossic composition of language and culture. Referencing Barthes and Bakhtin, Kövesi maintains that often Kelman's characters draw their language

...not just from [their] own immediate points of contact and identification, but from 'innumerable centres of culture' - and some peripheries too²⁹.

The point being, that a subject's ability to recognise and interact with the discourses of the central culture does not necessarily render him or her part an inalienable part or unquestioning component of that cultural and political core or power.

While it is true that references to a canon of high culture concepts and figures proves an integral tenet of Doyle's interior monologue, we might suggest that Kelman gives it prominence not through the philosophical or artistic engagement with the ideas which they represent, but rather through the

²⁸ Kövesi (2007) p. 109.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 113.

frequency with which these forty-one names are mentioned. In setting out this argument one might have to concede the involved references to Goya as the exception which prove the rule. Nevertheless, such is the capriciousness and superficiality of Kelman's employment of these references that the reader is often left feeling that the narrative is close to being swamped under a surfeit of allusions, even perhaps a tending toward pastiche. The author's intention is not the creation of a consuming postmodern self-consciousness, a kind of high-culture name-dropping purely for its own sake, but rather it is a technique which serves to characterise Patrick Doyle as a man acutely, we might venture neurotically, aware of his uncomfortable position on the edge of a cultural elite. It is an elite whose central purpose is to define and defend cultural taste; ostensibly on the grounds of aesthetics but actually motivated by the imperative of retaining political power.

On an authorial level, Kelman's characterisation of the fraught Doyle is empowering for the class politics which lie behind the text. Making manifest the irreconcilable contradiction of Doyle's predicament is key to highlighting the link between education, taste and power.

The self-identifying Marxist Patrick Doyle offers, at several points in the narrative, a fairly comprehensive materialist analysis of his place in society. By becoming a teacher and selling his labour to the state in the form of Glasgow Corporation's education department, he has ensured he is simply another cog in the machinery of capitalism and as such shouldn't be entitled to question the very power relations he is partly responsible for maintaining. He recognises that he 'had sold his rights for a when of pennies.'³⁰ Of particular chagrin to Doyle is

³⁰ James Kelman, *A Disaffection* (London: Vintage, [1989] 1999), p. 303, (Hereafter *D*).

the manner in which his position as schoolteacher renders him complicit in the perpetuation of the capitalist state. Despite being

a guy who is all too aware of the malevolent nature of his influence. He is the tool of a dictatorship government. A fellow who receives a greater than average wage for the business of fencing in the children of the suppressed poor. (D 67)

Patrick Doyle is able to play by the rules of society's cultural elite thanks to his education which has endowed him with the cipher to the aesthetic code of a self-referencing and self-referential legitimate culture, as evident in the legitimate cultural references and allusions which dominate his interior monologue. His deliberate conflation of Althusser's Ideological State Apparatus with the Repressive State Apparatus recognises the extent of his complicity in the maintenance of the socio-political status quo. He is,

...a boy who went in for his Highers and then went to uni and became a member of the polis. (D 139)

As a result he earns enough to leave behind the material hardships of the working-class life led by his parents and brother. Yet in leaving behind those hardships Pat becomes estranged from the community to which he once belonged. Leaving school one lunchtime, Pat makes the trip to his brother Gavin's flat determined to repair this fissure by never returning to teaching. Perennially unemployed Gavin and a group of friends are spending the afternoon drinking homebrewed alcohol when Pat arrives with a conspicuously large and expensive carry-out. The polyvocal Pat has, on this occasion, failed to negotiate the tacit social codes of the working-class society which he was born into. Unable to comprehend his brother's decision to give-up teaching, 'that's the daftest thing you've ever done' (D 260), Gavin rails against Pat and what he represents,

He doesn't really hate being a teacher at all... He fucking loves the bloody job! He loves it! It's all he fucking talks about... He doesn't talk about anything else except from it... All your teachers and all your students and

fucking pupils and all your fucking headmasters and your cronies from the fucking staffroom. Fucking middle-class bunch of wankers ya cunt! (D 281)

Gavin's invective highlights the gulf between Pat's view of himself and the way in which he is viewed by others. Patrick Doyle occupies an unhappy hybrid position. The cause of his disaffection is the inbetweenness of his life; detached by means of his education and salary from his working-class roots yet visibly peripheral to the core culture and still subject to the alienating effects of wage-labour. His awareness of his unassailable difference from the intellectual elite who confer and determine cultural legitimacy (and hence political power) explains the tone of many of Doyle's pronouncements on culture and on the children he is entrusted with teaching

Their parents and/or guardians did not come into it. In comparison to his their values and opinions were absolutely worthless, absolutely worthless. (D 7)

What appears aristocratic or neo-Arnoldian is in fact pastiche; a lament for the absurdity of the powerless position which Doyle occupies in society. The explicit link he makes between material deprivation and cultural deprivation highlights the superficiality of Pat's engagement with high culture; the demotic register of the words before the colon offering an opposition to the Standard English of the learnt mantra which follows it.

Now class, the lot of ye, repeat after me: Our parents, who are poor, are suffering from an acute poverty of the mind. (D 24)

In an essay entitled 'Artists and Value' Kelman comments that economic value is privileged by society over artistic, aesthetic autonomy. The result of this is a wholesale disenfranchisement and devaluing of the artist who creates art outwith the tightly controlled but always shifting conventional framework of legitimate culture, as outwith this framework there is no economic value to be had.

The creative output of most artists has no economic value at all. Nobody buys it and the names of the artists seldom get mentioned. Their work is 'worthless' and they are 'worthless'. (SRA 12)

On finding two lengths of electrician's pipes behind the local arts centre Doyle undergoes an epiphany. By turning these abandoned object into something with which he can create art, Pat realises an escape is possible.

And now there existed a great temptation: to stop being a teacher. To stop being a teacher. To concentrate solely upon things of genuine value, things of a genuine authenticity, of a genuine physicality. Teaching by performance instead of pointing the finger. (D 10)

The appropriation of the pipes, the transformation of them into a musical instrument through his own ingenuity and artifice is an attempt to escape the controlling influence of a culture predisposed to perpetuate itself. Challenging this fact calls for Pat to open his art to public scrutiny, 'teaching by performance', yet to recognise the necessity of this performativity is to realise that such a process inevitably leaves the art open to the appropriation, the comment and the criticism of those who determine legitimate culture. Significantly, like the numerous escape fantasies which punctuate the novel, Pat's dream of artistic resistance goes unfulfilled with the dawning realisation that

If he wanted to do things like perform on the pipes then he had to do them alone. And not tell folk either. (D 224)

All artistic production which is made public is enacted upon by the ideological forces of capitalism. It is judged, given value and a place within a hierarchy in which cultural legitimacy, economic capital and political power go hand in hand. An awareness of the proprietorial nature of the centre culture's relationship with the peripheries is a vital tenet in any artist's attempt to stage a resistance to that centre's hegemony. Having established this fact let us now turn our attention to the specific ways in which the central culture uses

peripheral narratives of resistance to galvanise its own position of ascendancy and, the extent to which Kelman circumvents these.

The Noble Savage

If we are to return once more to Simon Jenkins' opinion piece in *The Times*, 'An expletive of a winner', then it is a move made not in combative spirit but rather with a desire to explore what Jenkins' assumptions tell us about the way that narratives of resistance are nullified by the core culture. The television broadcast of the Booker award ceremony cut short Kelman's attempts to give an acceptance speech. However the speech was published in full by several newspapers on the day after Jenkins' article appeared. In it he offers an emphatic pre-emptive rebuttal of Jenkins' claim that *How late* is somehow non-art by self-identifying as a postcolonial writer,

There is a literary tradition to which I hope my own work belongs... it is a tradition that assumes two things: 1) the validity of indigenous culture; and 2) the right to defend in the face of attack. It is a tradition premised on a rejection of the cultural values of imperial or colonial authority, offering a defence against cultural assimilation, in particular an imposed assimilation.

Postcolonial writers are well used to these critical attempts at detextualisation which are commonly encountered by authors who set out to represent experiences which exist outwith of those easily recognised by the dominant core culture. In a polemic which binds together concerns over language and power, Kelman asserts that it is in the interests of those in power to aver that

...any writer who engages in the use of such so-called language [the inferior linguistic forms which are not part of the core culture] is not really engaged in literature at all.

It's common to find well-meaning critics suffering the same burden, while they strive to be kind they still cannot bring themselves to operate within a literary perspective; not only do they approach the work as though it were an oral text, they somehow assume it to be a literal transcription of recorded speech.

This sort of prejudice, in one guise or another, has been around for a very long time and for the sake of clarity we are better employing the contemporary label, which is racism.³¹

The use of the term 'racism' in this context seems bold. It is a good rule of thumb to be always wary of such claims of discrimination when they come from white, straight, male intellectuals. Its use however is justified in as far as it is representative of a wider idiom in cultural rhetoric which has witnessed an increasing readiness to co-opt the language of race into the discussions of power relations between class groups. For an example of how this has been reified in the particular example of Scotland we should note the propensity of Scottish literary and cultural criticism over the last two decades to read and re-read both contemporary and historical texts through the lens of postcolonial theory. The foundational examples of this can be found in Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull's *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture* (1989) which was followed by Cairns Craig's influential monograph *Out of History* (1996). Both these texts represent an attempt to frame Scottish culture within the outlines of a process of 'inferiorisation' as set out in that seminal work of postcolonial theory, Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952).

For Fanon the narrative history of colonialism is one in which the culture of the coloniser has been insidiously and unquestionably established as superior and infinitely more sophisticated than that of the colonised. The native and indigenous history is irrevocably one of darkness and primitivism. Indeed in its

³¹ James Kelman, 'Elitist slurs are racism by another name', *Scotland on Sunday*, 16th October 1994.

lack of teleological progression, for the Enlightenment-inflected sensibilities of the coloniser, it barely functions as a history at all. In the context of the specific Scottish scenario which concerns Turnbull, Beveridge and later Craig, the year 1707 has been made to stand as a watershed in the conception of the nation's history. The Union of the Parliaments, the subjugation of Scotland the nation-state into the state apparatus of a nascent Britain, represents not only the liminal act of British imperial aggression but is also made to mark the transition from a pre-colonial temporal locus construed as being identifiable by its barbarism, religious fanaticism and savagery into a new epoch of British enlightened sophistication. Crucially, it is a shift which is present not just in the minds of those outside Scotland but is also rooted foremost in the national imagination. Hence Craig is able to claim that the post-Union Scottish national identity is one characterised by 'a profound self-hatred.'

It is not our personal self that we have hated, but that self when seen moulded to the physiognomy of the group, a group whose existence has no significance in the eyes of the world: to escape the parochial we borrow the eyes of the dominant culture and through those eyes we are allowed to see 'the world'.³²

But applying the trope of inferiorisation to a putative postcolonial Scotland, as a means by which to identify the cultural conditions which impinge upon material reality, is an undertaking fraught with difficulties. In the above text Craig asserts that the complicity of Scotland in the project of British imperialism must not negate the effects on the nation of being colonised themselves, as being never fully able to achieve Britishness to which so many aspired. Scotland in the context of British colonialism was always viewed as belonging to a realm of otherness. However, this tacit unshakeable assignment of alterity and incompleteness came as a result not of the colour of our skin, but

³² Cairns Craig, *Out of History: Narrative Paradigms in Scottish and British Culture*, (Edinburgh, Polygon, 1996), p.12.

rather thanks to ‘the colour of our vowels.’³³ In case of the Scot, so Craig maintains, the dominant British culture is unable to differentiate otherness by means of the gaze and instead has to resort to the secondary method of distinguishing by the dissonance of accent.

Let us for the minute suppose that this is a phenomenon of incomplete difference which is manifest through the actions of the protagonist of *How Late*. For Sammy Samuels- that ‘blind Glaswegian drunk’- the attraction of leaving Glasgow for London is the opportunity the metropolis offers to blend in.

He would get off at Victoria. It was aye a great feeling that when you left the bus. All the Glasgow accents disappear. As soon as you step down onto the ground; everybody merges into the scenery, no looking at one another. And then ye’re anonymous.³⁴

Sammy’s journey to the former heart of empire begins, presumably at Glasgow’s Buchanan Bus Station and ends at London Victoria. He embarks from a terminus named for Andrew Buchanan- one of the great tobacco lords who made his fortune by not paying for labour- and arrives at another named for the British monarch most closely connected to the age of empire. As I shall expand upon in the final chapter, Sammy is recognised by himself and by the core culture as belonging to the peripheries. Yet on this occasion his relative similarity to how the dominant culture views itself- white, male, middle aged- allows him to affect anonymity and negate the creation of otherness as long as he keeps his mouth closed. Yet this example in itself is illustrative of the problems inherent in Craig’s insistence on the slightly gauche analogy between the permanence of skin colour and the potential fluidity of accent and, more generally, in the whole task of reading Scottish literature as a postcolonial literature. The timbre of his comment undoubtedly resonates with the sentiments expressed by Kelman’s

³³ *ibid.*, p. 12.

³⁴ James Kelman, *How late it was, how late* (London: Vintage, [1994] 1998), p. 255, (Hereafter *HL*).

‘racism by another name’ but in clinging to dualistic paradigms of national identity, where Scotland fills the role of oppressed and England/ Britain that of oppressor, there is evidence of an essentialist trait demonstrative of a Eurocentric liberal intellectual conceit which fails to recognise the manner in which the creation of such a postcolonial Scottish identity will, in the words of the critic Michael Gardiner, ‘always be... undermined by other types of subjective structuring such as class, ethnicity [and] sexual difference.’³⁵

What Kelman actually means when he talks about ‘racism’ is the discrimination suffered by one culture- the peripheral culture- at the hands of another- the central culture. He is rightly indignant of a critical trend which devalues and disempowers his art through a reductive idiom of detextualisation. It is a phenomenon given existence in the narrative events of *How late* through Sammy’s relations with the bureaucracy of the DSS. Here the only reality that matters is that which can be invested with the textual authority of the core culture by its entry into the computer system, in a register which belongs to the discourse of power. In describing the circumstances in which the onset of his blindness arose, he is informed that the colloquialism ‘they gave me a doing’ is an unacceptable term. At the prompting of the government official, Sammy code shifts and transliterates this phrase rendering it as, ‘They were using physical restraints’ (*HL* 103), and in the process the meaning of his narrative recollection of events is greatly altered.

Just as Pat Doyle occupies a hinterland between the periphery and the centre, Sammy Samuels does similar but to a far lesser extent. In order to get by, to interact with the institutions which order their lives, Pat and Sammy must adopt a degree of mimicry. In the words of Homi Bhabha, another of the major

³⁵ Michael Gardiner, ‘Democracy and Scottish Postcoloniality’, *Scotlands* 3.2, 1996, pp. 24- 41, p. 39.

figures in postcolonial studies, they must ‘*become a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite.*’³⁶ This process of mimicry, where the subaltern is forced to communicate and even think in the register of the dominant power is for Bhabha, ‘one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge.’³⁷ Evidentially the university-educated Doyle is a far more proficient mimic than Sammy can ever be and this is reflected in Sammy’s difficulties in making his predicament understood. Equally as skilful a mimic as Pat Doyle is to be found in the character of Ally in *How late*, who appoints himself as Sammy’s ‘rep’ and attempts to assist him with his claims for benefits.

See what you have to understand about repping; I have to think the way they do... How d’ye think I got ye yer referral! Cause I knew the right words to say... It’s how they think and how they act, the authorities I’m talking about, how they breathe; how they hold their knife and fork, the kind of car they drive... And that’s afore ye reach the rules and regulations and all the different procedures... when ye bow and when ye scrape; when ye talk and when ye hold yer wheesht... when to wear a tie and when to loosen the top button. (*HL* 239)

In his sophisticated aping of the discourses of power the autodidactic Ally is motivated primarily by the economic imperative of the thirty-three percent commission which he earns from all the compensation claims he secures for his clients. Yet his difference, his lingering otherness always remains: mimicry can only be an imperfect reflection and a *partial presence*. It is an incompleteness which proves an uncomfortable inappropriate threat to the sites of authority,

...through the repetition of *partial presence*, which is the basis of mimicry [there is an articulation of] those disturbances of cultural, racial and historical difference that menace the narcissistic demand of colonial authority.³⁸

³⁶ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London, Routledge, 1994), p. 86.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 85.

³⁸ Bhabha (1994), p. 88.

For Ally the incompleteness is both insisted upon by himself as a means of asserting his heterogeneity and difference from the hegemony which rules him ('The one thing they don't know is you and me' (*HL* 239)) and is insidiously averred by the organs of that hegemonic power in order to contain the menace it presents, such as when Ally's letter to the editor of a quality newspaper is published without the correction of the spelling mistake it contains:

... what they done, just to show me who was boss, one of the qualities, DID publish my letter. But see I had made a bloomer, I spelt 'victimising' wrong, I spelt it with an 'o' for 'victom' instead of with an 'i' for 'victim'. So they just left it in. And then they done an insert, the buggars, they stuck a wee SIC beside it. (*HL* 300)

Inevitably such a line of argument leads us to the metatextual possibilities of Kelman himself as a source of mimicry. In a paper written some fourteen years after the publication of his disavowal of Scotland's postcolonial identity as quoted above, Michael Gardiner suggests that Kelman has been made to function by the cultural elite as some kind of noble savage, who like Burns before him is 'possessed of a miraculous and self-taught sensibility'. The role prescribed for him is a

... Romantic and Ossianic one of standing outside of core English to feed it with authentic vernacular. It is a familiar trope in which the literary forms of the core culture are quietly propped up by a stream of peripheral content.³⁹

On one hand, there is an attempt by the discourses of power to use Kelman's literature to galvanise their own hegemonic position. His art is a welcome complement to that of the core culture; as discussed above, its challenging aesthetics ensure that it appeals only to those conversant in the codes of that imperium.

Bhabha is clear in his delineation of mimicry that it is a phenomenon which is 'not a harmonization or repression of difference, but a form of

³⁹ Michael Gardiner, 'Kelman and World English', Hames (2010), pp. 99- 110, p. 100.

resemblance'⁴⁰, and in this reflection of near sameness- *almost the same but not quite*- Kelman the white, male, Western intellectual can be used by those who occupy the sites of power and in doing so negate the threat that the peripheries pose to the central culture. Regardless of his similarities, the contribution he makes to the discourse of power is always only that of the perpetual outsider and is always loudly proclaimed as such both by Kelman himself and by the core culture.

For a final time we return to Jenkins' article on the Booker and *How Late*, not in an effort to define the culture of the periphery against that of the metropolis, but rather as a means of establishing the essential ambivalence of the role Kelman fulfils in the space between the sophisticated, stylised articulation of his culture and the consumption of that culture by those fluent in the discourses of power, those in possession of the cultural code and ciphers who are located in and around the core of the imperium. It begins to become apparent that for the core culture, the true threat is to be found not in the peripheries of society, but from those locations inbetween. From these margins is emanated a narrative of resistance avowedly distinct from the centres of power but conducted using the same discourse as does legitimate culture.

The tone of Jenkins' assessment of the semiotics of Kelman's sartorial choices at the Booker award ceremony is slightly tongue-in-cheek, however the contents are revealing not least in how they echo the thoughts of Ally- 'when to wear a tie and when to loosen the top button'- quoted above.

He eschewed the notorious dinner jacket and made his "statement" in the form of a pinstriped suit and tie... Much care went into this. The double-breasted jacket was left carefully open, thus diminishing its capitalist content. But how could the tie not signify English cultural domination? Mr Kelman's solution was to undo the top shirt button and lower the tie just one inch. That inch was rebellion superbly controlled.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Bhabha (1994) p. 90.

⁴¹ Jenkins (1994).

Caught in the Othering gaze, the true danger of Kelman's art for the central culture begins to draw into focus. Kelman appears as the antithesis of the autodidactic noble savage. His resistance is a thing of forensic control, contemplation and agenda which seeks to menace the culture of the coloniser. By loudly proclaiming his difference, the core culture is able, to an extent, to ensure that the menace is nullified by its containment within and commoditisation by the hegemonic hierarchies of power. At this point- the point where the culture of the centre lauds that of the periphery and simultaneously assimilates it, appropriating it and making it appropriate- the resistance offered by a writer in Kelman's position is attenuated.

Once we are aware of this ambivalent, slippery hybrid of a position which Kelman is made to occupy, the corollary for much of what he polemicizes in his Booker acceptance speech is profound.

... my culture and my language have the right to exist, and no one has the authority to dismiss that right.⁴²

The ambivalence ensures that he must be robbed of a dualistic notion of his culture in opposition to the culture of the centre. 'My culture' as is textualised by Kelman is a culture laid open to distortion and appropriation when viewed through the ideologically imbued lens of a central culture intent upon reducing the threat posed by the peripheries through one of two tactics. Firstly, the centre can attempt to undermine the value of the peripheries by treating their representation as an anomaly created by a heaven-taught peripheral author; the non-text argument espoused by Jenkins. Secondly, and almost contradictorily, the imperium can attempt to manage the threat by bestowing upon the suspect discourse the full regalia of the centre culture. By

⁴² Kelman (1994).

recognising it as one of its own, the core culture can hope to negate the threat posed.

What the formal politics of Kelman's fiction so often succeeds in doing is militating for a change which the events of his texts suggest is not possible. The overwhelming sense of repetition and stasis which constitutes the daily life for the disaffected school teacher, the alienated busconductor and the blind Jakey is made extraordinary by the language and form of the text, not the events of the narrative. The Booker prize winning author, the academically feted intellectual and the publically recognised activist has the cultural capital at his disposal to offer a resistance which the characters of his novels could never hope to achieve precisely because they are part of the peripheries to which Kelman's art brings a voice.

For William McIlvanney too, the culture of the periphery is a vital aspect of his fiction. In the following chapter we shall examine the ways in which the representation of this culture in opposition to that of the centre, results in a success which is as conditional and open to compromise as that enjoyed by Kelman. Ideology works, in a very different but equally as effective way, to control the terms on which McIlvanney stages his resistance.

Chapter Two

In the previous chapter I suggested that we might regard Glasgow Green as a kind of geographical analogue for James Kelman's literary-political. If we are going to set about identifying a symbol which embodies, more than any other, the political agenda which constitutes the driving force behind William McIlvanney's *oeuvre* then we could do worse than turn our attention to a passage in the panegyric dénouement of the novel which is usually regarded as his masterwork. In one of the closing chapters of *Docherty*, McIlvanney describes a fatal accident which befalls the eponymous hero Tam Docherty. A weakness in the structure of the mine in which he is working causes the roof to cave-in. For Tam the result is catastrophic; his body is crushed under tonnes of debris. His last action in life, however, is one laden with significance. As the coal dust settled all that was left for the shocked onlookers to see was,

... a hand projecting from the rubbish, fixed in its final reflex, Tam Docherty's hand. It was pulped by the weight of the fall. The hand was clenched.¹

It appears that even in his death throes Tam's central characteristic, that which defines him as the hero rather than mere protagonist of the novel, abides in a very tangible way. 'Tam Docherty's hand' becomes a *leitmotif* figuratively present throughout all of McIlvanney's work.

It is a relatively simple task to read the clenched fist as an unbowed interrogation of, and rallying symbol against, the prevailing social conditions which were already working to destroy the traditional notions of community at the time the novel was set. For the materialist, the clenched fist- that most recognisable symbol of organised resistance to capitalism- stands as a beacon

¹ William McIlvanney, *Docherty*, (London: Sceptre, [1975] 2007), p. 333, (Hereafter *Doc*).

that signals the possibility of a regrouping and a counter-attack against the forces of capitalism. They are forces which have, in the intervening period between the setting of the novel at the outbreak of the Great War, through to its publication in the 1960s and beyond, served only to consolidate the position of ascendancy occupied by capitalism. The fist stands as a powerful visual metaphor for the potential inherent in an as yet un-lived history, it speaks of an eternal optimism always averring the potency and necessity of resistance.

In his seminal work, *Imagined Communities* (1983), the American academic Benedict Anderson outlines the cultural framework which accounts for the modern concept of the nation. For Anderson, the nation is a recent social construct, built on the myth of its own antiquity and immemorial past. This supposed immortality acts as a guarantor of a shared sense of belonging and continuity. A totemic manifestation of this phenomenon is to be found in the role that the Cenotaph or the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier plays as host for national imaginings. He highlights the monopoly that nationalism has on this kind of appropriation of death by suggesting the absurdity of the idea of

... a tomb of the Unknown Marxist or a cenotaph to fallen Liberals. The reason [for this] is that neither Marxism nor Liberalism are much concerned with death and immortality.²

It is this aside of Anderson's, slightly flippant it may be, which furnishes us with the cipher which we may use to decode the literary-political agenda at play in McIlvanney's fiction. His *oeuvre* offers a textual resistance to the hegemony of late capitalism by providing a site in which the values of a bygone age may be granted immortality and as such be imbued with a sense of legitimacy. The textual Cenotaph of McIlvanney's work presents to the reader a set of values and a way of interacting with other people which is out of kilter

² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 2006), p. 10.

with the mores of the post-industrial age. In a novel such as *Docherty* he effects this through the very literal retrospection of an historical setting. In his crime fiction, set at a time contemporary to its creation, he must attempt this by focusing on the peripheries of society. It is not just the eponymous maverick cop of his Laidlaw trilogy who carries these values, but on occasions a cast of crooks, gangsters and down-an-outs.

In decoding the symbolism of Docherty's clenched fist we might become aware of some of the complications which arise from such an undertaking by highlighting what is tragically absent from the picture. The fist projects from the earth under which Tam has sold his labour for the duration of adult life in a relentless toil which has eventually caused that life to be cut short. In these terms Docherty's final reflex is less a call to arms and more a disembodied and emasculated arm which, from our post-industrial and postmodern vantage point, draws our attention to the failure of progressive history to realise the potential which once appeared to inhere within its narrative. It highlights a collective failure in society's inability to witness capitalism pitch itself into a final terminal crisis.

As is the case with Kelman's writing, we shall examine the manner in which the form and aesthetics of McIlvanney's crime fiction, to an extent, enact a limiting effect upon the author's political message and the devices employed by the author in order to escape these limitations. Ultimately, the strength of the political message relies upon the interface between the creation and the consumption of culture- between text and reader- and the extent to which McIlvanney's craft as an author usurps the ideological conventions which predispose the reader to see things a certain way.

Canon forming and Cultural Legitimacy

In his monograph appraising the artistic merits of popular literature, the critic John J. Cawelti rhetorically searches for the clues which might solve the mystery of the enduring popularity of crime fiction. Cawelti traces the rude cultural health of this particular genre from its beginnings with the rape of Helen in *The Iliad*, continuing through Shakespearean murder and skulduggery to the heavy-drinking, wisecracking protagonists of the hardboiled era before finally manifesting itself in the depictions of a professional and tightly organised police force working to maintain order within a contemporary society which displays a fascination with real life crimes and real life criminals

From the beginning of written literature and, one suspects, long before that, human beings have been fascinated with stories of homicide, assault, thievery and roguery of all sorts. Without exaggeration one can say that crime and literature have been in it together from the beginning... man loves crime stories because he has some basic trait that, among other things, manifests itself in a fascination with tales of crime.³

For Cawelti then the narratives of crime fiction are consumed out of a voyeuristic desire to experience the sort of actions which society has deemed taboo. Crucially however, this is a vicarious voyeurism tightly controlled within the constraints of the text and as such the consumption of these narratives can be considered as part of a search for a sense of reassurance. They offer a kind of secular redemption for the reader in the manner in which the generic imperative that necessitates a plot resolution mirrors the social and moral resolution which comes as part of solving a crime, of the putting right of a transgression and

³ John G Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery and Romance; Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 52.

temporarily restoring justice. In this paradigm of Cawelti's, what is to be understood as central to the effectiveness of crime fiction is the operation it performs at a social level, the manner in which it constructs and exploits the discourses which inform the relationship that exists between what we might term 'lawful society' and those criminals who transgress the legal and moral boundaries (for these are rarely the same thing) delineated by that society.

Attempting to locate any single text within a tradition or canon to which it apparently belongs can never be an exact science. It is always useful to question the motivations of any individual critic who embarks upon such a task; the place of the canon is never solely to provide a descriptive shorthand for the 'type' of literature of which it is comprised, rather membership of it confers a degree of what Pierre Bourdieu terms 'cultural consecration'⁴. This is not to suggest the critical act of identifying literary traditions is a pointless task, but it is one which needs to be undertaken with awareness that it is always more than an exercise in neat categorisation. This is especially the case when the text in question is one which sets out to interrogate the values which underpin the society in which it is produced and consumed.

It has been suggested by other critics, and reiterated in the Introduction to this thesis, that William McIlvanney's decision to write a detective novel immediately after the success of his Whitbread Award winning historical novel *Docherty* demonstrated a brave willingness to expend the critical capital he had amassed in order to become a more popular writer; to reach an audience who would never usually pick-up a work of serious literary fiction. It was a decision made with his political agenda as the driving force; popular crime fiction was to become the means by which the author could disseminate his narrative of

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, 'From *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*', Leitch, *et al* (2001), pp. 1809- 1814, p. 1814.

resistance against the cultural and political malaise of society under post-industrial capitalism to as great a number of cultural consumers as possible.

Any attempt to place McIlvanney's Laidlaw trilogy within the tradition of crime fiction must not be one which is concerned with the simple act of categorisation. An analysis which demonstrates a sensitivity to the motives and needs which drive its cultural production is required to highlight the specific ways in which the texts conform to, or usurp, the basic ideological conventions which are characteristically found throughout the canon. Meanwhile, an investigation demonstrating an interrelated awareness of the conditions of the text's cultural consumption will make possible an assessment of the motivations at play in the construction of a literary crime novel with a progressive political agenda. It will work towards an evaluation of this project which will insist upon the importance of the social role that the texts play and the wants, tastes, fears and desires of cultural consumers to which it speaks.

In adopting such an approach we might make good note of the fact that Cawelti avers that it is not just the narratives of crime which have held the rapt attention of cultural consumers throughout history, but significantly there abides 'in the hearts of the great majority of peaceful and law-abiding citizens throughout the ages' a fascination with the criminal himself. It would follow then that in order to move towards a better understanding of the perennial popularity of crime fiction we should turn our attention to the role of the criminal within society. However, for our purposes, the diachronic scope of that critic's analysis appears too wide to function as appropriate terms of engagement in an analysis of texts which are bound in an interrogation of the hegemony of late capitalism.

Crime and capitalism

Crime and capitalism are linked by a progenitory relationship. Crime must be considered the Original Sin of capitalism. To account to some degree for the astronomical success of crime writing as a genre across the last two and a half centuries, we must be aware of one of the central ideologically disguised contradictions which allows capitalism to flourish. We are required to make an explicit recognition of the way in which capitalism has fostered a relationship of tolerance with crime- the transgression of its supposed values- in order that the sites of power occupied by the dominant social class are buttressed and maintained.

In an interview conducted in 1975, the French polymath Michel Foucault outlines the ways in which, for the capitalist state, 'criminals come in handy'⁵. He suggests that the history of capitalism is one in which criminality is always tolerated in order that when faced with a moment of crisis which threatens their position of power, the dominant social class will always find it preferable to turn to criminality and criminals in order to consolidate that power. From Napoleon III's use of 'common law criminals'⁶ to seize the apparatus of the French state, through to the implementation of cheap prison labour in order to undercut market values and the government-tolerated Mafia infiltration of organised labour in the United States during the nineteen-sixties and seventies, capitalism has learned to use the transgression of its arbitrary legal boundaries for its own ends.

⁵ Michel Foucault, 'Prison Talk', *Power/Knowledge*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Gordon *et al*, (Harlow: Longman, 1980), pp. 35- 54, p. 40.

⁶ *ibid.* p. 40.

For Foucault, modern capitalism gives birth to crime and criminals as we understand them today due to the relationship it has engendered between ownership, commodification and so-called natural law. Through the repressive and ideological apparatuses of the state there has emerged a code of morality which develops concurrently with the growth of capitalism and is codified into law in order to protect it.

...once capitalism had physically entrusted wealth, in the form of raw materials and the means of production, to popular hands, it became absolutely essential to protect this wealth. Because industrial society requires that wealth be directly in the hands, not of its owners, but of those who labour, by putting that wealth to work, enables a profit to be made from it. How was this wealth to be protected? By a rigorous morality of course.⁷

It is this rigorous morality- constructed in the interests of maintaining the locations of economic, cultural and political power- which Foucault terms the 'normalising judgement'⁸. The role that this judgement plays in the front line between legitimate society and criminality, the way in which actions are categorised into those which are tolerable to bourgeois society and those which are intolerable, is of secondary importance to the insidious effect of the normalising judgement upon society as a whole. The demands which capitalism must meet in order to successfully exercise control over its subjects are far removed from the analogous demands which were placed upon the dominant class in an earlier feudal era. There are several reasons for this, ranked not least amongst which is growth in the number of those subjects and their proximity to each other in the new urban milieu which were necessary for high-industrial capitalism.

⁷ *ibid.* p. 41.

⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan, (New York, Vintage, 1978), p. 184.

The methods of control which were once used to contain criminals have become applicable to all subjects of capitalism. There has come into existence a kind of pervasive means of disciplinary control through which the moralising normalising gaze of the centre has ensured that each individual is judged not on their own relevant merits and demerits (for objectively there is no such thing) but upon the place in which they occupy in relation to others in society. Furthermore, to attempt to escape this judgement, to actively reject bourgeois morality, is in itself seen to be an act which flags the perpetrator as existing outwith of the spectrum of socially accepted normality. This 'discipline' is not to be understood as an ideological or repressive state apparatus (although it is present in both of these organs), but rather as 'a type of power, a modality for its exercise.'⁹

The result of the disciplines is to pitch us into a realm identified as a 'carceral archipelago'¹⁰, a world of constant examination. Foucault employs the architectural metaphor of the panoptical prison in which the prisoners' cells are arranged in a circular formation around a central control tower. Clearly it is impossible for the warder in the tower to be looking in all the cells at the same time; the effectiveness of the design is not in the actuality of observation, but in the omnipresent possibility of that supposed omniscience. It,

...induces in the inmate a state of consciousness and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power.¹¹

Under capitalism we are made visible and observed by our textual existence within the 'network of writing'¹². This network comprises the documentary records that facilitate the running of the modern capitalist state

⁹ Michel Foucault, 'Panopticism' from *Discipline and Punish*, *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Robinow, (London, Penguin, 1991), pp. 206- 213, p. 206.

¹⁰ Foucault (1978), p. 298.

¹¹ *ibid.* p. 201.

¹² *ibid.* p. 189.

and the ideologically tempered mass material culture through which consumers make sense of the reality of their conditions of existence and of which popular fiction is an important constituent part. This two-fold textualisation of the individual, within the discourse of the state and within the iconography of cultural discourse, ensures their entry into a perpetual process of representation. It allows the creation of categories and lists which in turn makes easier the construction of standards by which to judge the normality of actions. In this way power can be exercised in a manner which is near-invisible by rendering those that fail to assimilate to it as *highly visible*. Disciplinary power works to

... characterize, classify, specialize; [to] distribute along a scale, around a norm, hierarchize individuals in relation to one another and if necessary, disqualify and invalidate.¹³

In McIlvanney's *oeuvre*, and in his Laidlaw trilogy in particular, this hierarchy is skewed: the system of prestige at play is not a perfect representation of that which exists in society in general. It is the hierarchy of a peripheral culture not a central culture. Classification and characterisations are made through the discourse of this periphery with the intention of highlighting the gulf which exists between the desirable attributes of the edges in comparison to those of the core.

¹³ Foucault (1991), p. 212.

The Laidlaw Trilogy and the Crime Fiction Canon

For the literary critic intent on examining the social functions inscribed in the formation of a crime fiction canon, the mapping of this Foucauldian historical relationship between capitalist society and the criminality which it created and tolerates onto the terrain of the development of crime fiction since the late 1700s is an instructive exercise. In John Scagg's critical monograph *Crime Fiction* there is a comprehensive survey of the history of crime fiction which resonates with the insistence upon the importance of the social function of the genre. Scaggs suggests *The Newgate Calendar* stories as the earliest crime fiction of the modern age and, in turn, the first to be rendered anachronistic by the ascent of capitalism. First appearing in 1773 this was a collection of,

...cautionary tales in which the perpetrator of a criminal deed is captured, tried and punished. Such collections were a response to the popular demand for bloody and shocking accounts of violent crime.¹⁴

By the early decades of the 1800's, the age of the Industrial Revolution gave rise to a new sort of commonplace criminality as hitherto unimaginable levels of unemployment ensured that property crime became the only viable means of subsistence for tens of thousands of people in urban conurbations across Europe. The British state was to respond to this by passing the Metropolitan Police Act of 1828 which created the first professional and government-administered constabulary in the world. The birth of this repressive state apparatus demonstrates a further way in which capitalism's relationship with criminality is never as Manichean as it ostensibly appears. As Foucault states,

¹⁴ John Scaggs, *Crime Fiction*, (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 13.

At the end of the Eighteenth Century, people dreamed of a society without crime. And then the dream evaporated. Crime was too useful for them to dream of anything as crazy- or ultimately as dangerous- as a society without crime. No crime means no police. What makes the presence and control of the police tolerable for the population, if not fear of the criminal? This institution of the police, which is so recent, and so oppressive, is only justified by that fear.¹⁵

The history of the detective story, as we recognise it today, is one which demonstrates a particular contempt for the professional police force through its generic propensity to focus upon the starring role of the individual detective character, whether this be Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes- whose forensic approach to detection aped a Victorian fascination with science and rationality- , Agatha Christie's Golden Age amateur sleuth Miss Marple or the hard-boiled private eyes of the nineteen-thirties and forties who worked on the edge of the law. However, by the end of the Second World War the credibility of such a paradigm appeared increasingly in jeopardy as one capable of solving crime. One of the social legacies of this conflict, as identified by the critic Stephen Knight, was the growth in the extent to which it allowed the state to make a tolerated input into the everyday life of the citizen:

Total war involved both general experience and widespread acceptance of bureaucratic organisations, and communicated the notion that security could come from organised, technically skilled collective effort.¹⁶
As is always case, we find a change in the material conditions of existence

reified within the culture that society produced and hence we witness the emergence of the police procedural in the crime fiction canon. This sub-genre recognises the needs of a better educated and better informed readership who, thanks to the increased realism available to them in the cinema and on the television and radio, sought a greater degree of verisimilitude in the narratives which they consumed for leisure.

¹⁵ Foucault (1980), p. 47.

¹⁶ Stephen Knight, *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction*, (London: MacMillan, 1980), p. 169.

For his part, McIlvanney has avowedly denied the connection between his crime fiction and the police procedural:

Laidlaw has been called a police procedural. It isn't. It makes no serious attempt to deal in any detail with the technical procedures of police work, partly because such procedures have little to do with what I'm after and partly because I find such procedures largely boring.
(*STS* 115)

Perhaps the author's desire to distance his work from the ghetto of genre fiction is what lies behind this statement, and strictly speaking there is little in the novels which suggest that the author has undertaken anything but the most perfunctory research into the workings of Strathclyde Police. However, the first two novels of the trilogy certainly demonstrate conventions of the police procedural both in terms of content and structure. In *Laidlaw*, the gruesome discovery of a murdered teenager in Kelvingrove Park shatters the peace and quotidian certainty of a sunny Sunday morning in Glasgow's West End. Yet the arrival upon the scene of the police force immediately begins to restore order to the chaos:

The hubbub rose and travelled beyond the park. The screams of panic and horror were translated into even professional voices.¹⁷

To give a further representative example, the eponymous victim, and the impetus for much of the plot, of McIlvanney's second detective novel *The Papers of Tony Veitch* is to be found murdered, not by Laidlaw, but by his rival on the Crime Squad, DI Ernie Milligan, who is working on a seemingly unrelated case. However, even with these facts in mind it appears that the most obvious point of contrast between McIlvanney's *Laidlaw* novels and the recognised sub-genres, which constitute a crime fiction canon, are with that of the hard-boiled mode of fiction whose urban setting and hyper-masculine, romantic characterisation

¹⁷ William McIlvanney, *Laidlaw*, (London: Sceptre, [1977] 1996), p. 28, (Hereafter *L*).

lends itself to the drawing of numerous analogies with McIlvanney's texts and his characters.

Throughout the trilogy, Glasgow's urban wasteland appears on occasions as much post-apocalyptic as it does post-industrial. In *Tony Veitch*, Laidlaw presses a group of vagrants for information within the burned out shell of an old church on the city's Southside, 'the ashes of a dead fire suggested an abandoned camp-site' (PTV 60). The effect of this is to distance the reader from the reality of the city within which Laidlaw works by highlighting the gulf between the core culture and those who inhabit the very extremes of the peripheries. This act of distancing, the imposition of a plane of distortion between what exists and what is perceived to exist, finds an antecedent in the Los Angeles of Raymond Chandler. The city synonymous with the movie industry, towards which those who wish to make a living from pretending to be someone else are magnetically drawn, is characterised, 'above all else, by its 'unreality'... a metropolis of lies... of facades, of stucco and fake marble'¹⁸. According to Scaggs the effect of this is to drive a wedge between 'what is seen and what is known' with the result that

... the private eye's quest to restore order becomes a quest to make sense of a fragmented, disjointed and largely unintelligible world by understanding its... lack of connections.¹⁹

Here then we encounter for the first time something which becomes a regular occurrence in our attempt to place McIlvanney's politically engaged resistance fiction within the crime writing tradition. Conventions are upheld up to a point only to be completely reversed.

¹⁸ Scaggs (2005), p. 71.

¹⁹ *ibid.* p. 72.

Convention and Compromise

Laidlaw is a character who is acutely concerned about the lack of connections, the breakdown in community, which abides in his surroundings as one of the defining symptoms of capitalism's rot:

... a coat-of-arms for the times, motto: live high on the hog and don't give a shit about other people.²⁰

This concern is writ large throughout his extended lament for the failure of the other people around him to appreciate that the inter-connectedness of the world, the existence of a community, is a necessity and not a luxury, 'It was one world or no world, no other way'.²¹

Jack Laidlaw's insistence upon connections, not just as a means of piecing together the clues which will provide us and him with a plot resolution, but in a more general recognition of the nature of humanity, brings McIlvanney's detective and his narrative into ideological and formal conflict with the epitome of the hard-boiled hero, Philip Marlowe. For Knight, the solitude and detachment of Chandler's Marlowe is one of the key factors at play in the success that that author has achieved at a popular as well as critical level:

If Chandler's work is examined in terms of its underlying ideology, reasons emerge why it generated praise from university graduates in English and people of similar tastes and needs. The pressure of form and content suggests that an isolated, intelligent person, implicitly hostile to others and basically uninterested in them, can verify his own superiority by intellectual means and create a defensive withdrawal.²²

If we allow a brief conflation of the textual and the metatextual, then it is probably fair to consider Laidlaw as a character 'of similar tastes and needs'

²⁰ William McIlvanney, *Strange Loyalties*, (London: Sceptre, [1991] 1992), p. 13, (Hereafter *SL*).

²¹ William McIlvanney, *The Papers of Tony Veitch*, (London: Sceptre, [1983] 1996), pp. 187- 188, (Hereafter *PTV*).

²² Knight (1980), p. 138.

to those who might appreciate the literary merits of Chandler's writing. He studied at university for one year before leaving disgusted with the 'polysyllabic prejudice' (PTV 103) which conspired to use 'literature as an insulation against life rather than an intensification of it' (PTV 102). Yet his opinions of high culture are far from consistent. The man who rails against the ivory tower detachment of the academy is the same one who quotes from Eliot's *The Wasteland* (L 6) and who offers opinions to Glasgow winos on George Bernard Shaw's shortcomings as a playwright (PTV 170). Significantly he also keeps the tomes of the existentialist philosophers Kierkegaard, Camus and Unamuno locked 'like caches of alcohol' (L 7) in his desk drawer. They are something to be consumed furtively, a private means of keeping the world at bay.

Certainly, such a possibility would be supported by the suggestion made above, that the normalising judgement at work in the Laidlaw novels is one detached from that normally associated with late capitalism. There is a concerted, although not altogether unproblematic, effort throughout the three texts to usurp the traditional notion of a prestige culture by the repositioning of, what we might term, a Clydeist masculinity at the centre of the cultural imperium. Conducting a re-centring such as this within the generic constraints of the crime novel has significant consequences for McIlvanney's depiction of the organised criminality which exists in his textual Glasgow.

A character like the gangster John Rhodes seems to embody an enviable paragon of working-class masculinity. He can throw punches which inspire 'awe' in other people while 'costing him nothing' (PTV 72). Significantly he chooses to hold court in a fortified pub in the Calton as he

...would allow no intrusion from the violent ways he made his money to disturb the home where his wife and two daughters might as well have had a bank-manager as a breadwinner. (PTV 51)

Rhodes has a kind of respectability attached to him. This becomes clearer when juxtaposed against the description of the mood at the wake of the murdered teenager Jennifer Lawson. Through the description given by the narrator of *Laidlaw* in the passage below, there begins to develop an explicit connection between capitalism and criminality.

Their righteousness was total. These were rough men. Several of them lived with violence as part of their way of life. One of them might like to talk about the time that he'd met a safe-blower or had a drink with a well-known criminal. But there were crimes and there were crimes. And if you committed certain of them- like interfering with a child or raping a girl - they emasculated you in their minds. They made you a thing. (L 49)

The committing of a criminal act which is motivated by the imperative of turning a profit is entirely acceptable in that it affirms a masculine archetype; that of 'the breadwinner', the bank-robber who may as well be a bank-manager. This recognises the fact that, as Ernest Mandel suggests,

Organized crime, rather than being peripheral to bourgeois society, springs increasingly from the same socio-economic motive forces that govern capital accumulation in general.²³

However, this relationship between legitimate society and those who do not subscribe to its legal and social norms is a significant component of McIlvanney's literary-political project. The author is intent upon interrogating the conditions of post-industrial capitalism through a focus upon the marginal locations within which there still exist values which are in many ways preferable to those at play in the core culture.

With this caveat in mind, let us re-establish the lines of demarcation between the textual and the metatextual- the tastes and needs of Jack Laidlaw and the tastes and needs of William McIlvanney and his readership- and suggest a way in which one is directly informed by the other.

²³ Ernest Mandel, *Delightful Murder: A Social History of the Crime Story*, (London: Penguin, 1984), p. 112.

The narrative mode utilised by McIlvanney modulates across the course of the Laidlaw trilogy, shifting from the third person perspective of *Laidlaw* and *Tony Veitch* to the first person of *Strange Loyalties*. As discussed in the previous chapter, to equate a third person narrative with objectivity is evidence of an aesthetic-political conceit brought about by a piece of ideological literary legerdemain. In *Strange Loyalties* the narrative voice belonging to Jack Laidlaw is explicitly subjective, yet what the reader witnesses in *Laidlaw* and *The Papers* is a voice which often seems unable, or perhaps unwilling, to work to maintain its facade of objectivity.

Writing in an essay which emphasises the political commitment of McIlvanney's *oeuvre* as a whole, Beth Dickson notes that there exists a tendency in *Laidlaw* and *Tony Veitch* to filter the third person narrative through the moralistic consciousness of the lead protagonist. It is a device which is worked to great effect by the author in that it allows a straightforward yet unobtrusive means of interpolating into the body of the narrative the fundamentals of his political agenda:

The great strength of the [crime] novels is the imaginative coherence contributed by the perspective of Jack Laidlaw... Laidlaw provides the further focus that the third person focus of [McIlvanney's] previous novels sometimes seemed to require. Yet the detective stories are still written in the third-person... Laidlaw is still 'presented' by the narrator... But in a way, Laidlaw still speaks for himself. The gains in immediacy are real: through Laidlaw, McIlvanney has found his ideal means of commentary, whether distanced or committed.²⁴

For Knight such a tactic might be remarkable for the progressive hue of subjective moralisation which is on display, but it is far from being an idiom unique to McIlvanney's crime writing. Rather it is to be found in a familiar guise across a sub-genre of more 'literary' crime fiction which is aware of the influence of literary modernism's and its distaste for a claimed objectivity. As a

²⁴ Beth Dickson, 'Class and Being in the Novels of William McIlvanney', Wallace & Stevenson (1993), pp. 54- 70, p. 57.

sop to this pressure, the tradition of ‘a quasi-objective mode which is actually controlled by specifically moral and humanist subjective modal patterns’ must develop as a kind of safety valve to ensure continued credibility. It becomes a means of

...recognising to a degree... the impact of alienation and reification on the modern consciousness... But having raised this mode and its innate feeling, contain it by subjective evaluations.²⁵

These subjective evaluations become the site of a central tension in the construction of McIlvanney’s crime fiction; it is a tension which operates in various ways.

That such contradictions and tensions are commonplace in the Laidlaw novels is a result of the strain to which the formal framework of the genre is exposed in being made to carry McIlvanney’s progressive political message. In the emphatic and self-conscious refashioning of the constraints of genre fiction, McIlvanney recognises that he is involved in something more than simply a matter of structure. He correctly states that ‘conventions are never merely technical. They are ways of determining how we see experience’ (*STS* 160). Through the character of Laidlaw, McIlvanney challenges his reader to re-assess their conception of a world which is coloured to such an extent by pre-conceptions.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, it is never enough for an author creating art as a site of political resistance to merely acknowledge the existence of ideological conventions. He must attempt to negotiate these conventions through evasions and ultimately via a degree of compromise. In offering a close analysis of the way the Laidlaw trilogy variously usurps and complies to the specific formal conventions which govern the construction of crime fiction we

²⁵ Knight (1980), p. 171.

can begin to appraise the effectiveness of the literary-political project.

Repeatedly we find the subjective evaluations evident in the trilogy to be recognisable as sites of tension which must, for the sake of the narrative, be resolved through compromise.

Subjectivity

In the previous chapter I drew on Colin MacCabe's notion of metalanguage, which he identifies as a vital tool in the control of meaning within realist literature, to account for Kelman's modernist aesthetics. In this context any analysis of the modulations which occur between objectivity and subjectivity in McIlvanney's narratives must recognise that even the ostensible omniscience of the third person narrator is utterly subjective. It is a truth at odds with the demands of crime fiction as a genre in which revelation and the piecing together of facts- in order to solve the mystery at hand- represents an important part of the allure. On several occasions throughout *Laidlaw* and *Tony Veitch* we can detect fissures where the generic imperative of a putative objective narrative voice clashes with the literary-political motivations of the author which lie behind his writing of the texts.

In these instances, the role of the narrative voice and where it is coming from becomes hard to discern. In one episode in *Tony Veitch* the hapless police snout Macey is summoned for coffee with the underworld hard man Dave McMaster who suspects that he is passing on information. The rendezvous takes place in an upmarket Glasgow hotel, a venue which is far removed, socially if not geographically, from Macey's usual habitat:

Its [the hotel's] weathered exterior... had been a familiar landmark to him since boyhood but had never seemed more relevant to his life than the Necropolis.

He was entering it for the first time and a couple of porters looked at him as if they knew that. Put a monkey in a toy uniform, Macey thought, and it will try to pull rank....

In the coffee-lounge looking up from an armchair like Lord Saracen receiving guests in his mansion was Dave McMaster. On the table in front of him was a silver coffee service, three cups and a plate of dainty biscuits. One of those Sunday papers that looks like a paperback library was open on his knees. (PTV 179- 180)

Within the space of these three paragraphs we see the perspective of the narrator fade in and out of putative objectivity. The phrase, 'Macey thought' creates a barrier between character and narrator in a very traditional manner, but this barrier is to be eroded by the disparaging comment uttered about the newspaper McMaster is reading. These sentiments, undoubtedly those of Macey, have been interpolated into the narrative discourse and the tokenistic terms which flag objectivity ('he thought', 'she felt') have been quietly removed.

Such a device is commonly used in realist fiction and is far from unique to McIlvanney's writing. However, what makes it worthy of comment is the way in which the shifting of the narrative perspective clearly contrasts the tastes of those in control of the metalanguage against those occupying the peripheries of the text and of society.

There is a chameleon-like quality, a heteroglossia, inherent in the artifice of McIlvanney's narrative voice. It is a fact which becomes evident when we compare the above passage with another which occurs later in the same text but which features different characters. Laidlaw and Jan, the woman with whom he is having an affair, meet each other to spend the night in a holiday home which belongs to friends of Jan. It is a comparison which renders an otherwise banal passage of scene-setting centrally important to our analysis of the success of McIlvanney's use of popular genre fiction as a kind of *litterature engagée*:

The cottage was a very self-conscious act- rough white walls with horse tackle hanging from them and a Gudgeon sketch of the inevitable fighting cock. In Gudgeon's world did they ever just peck corn? The wooden furniture was rough enough not just to have been made by hand but possibly by foot. But Jan liked it. (PTV 213)

Here the same, supposedly objective, voice which had previously disparaged broadsheet newspapers- and presumably their readers- by drawing attention to the self-important grandiosity of an essentially ephemeral publication ('a paperback library') is now in a position to offer a nuanced, aware and stylish criticism of a particularly bucolic piece of interior design. Not only is there demonstrated an appreciation of the element of staginess inherent in the decor ('a very self-conscious act') but the owner of the narrative voice is also in possession of enough cultural capital to be able to, not just name-drop a reference to the Scottish watercolourist Ralston Gudgeon, but also offer a criticism of this relatively minor artist's *oeuvre*.

If the context and the sentiments expressed in the first passage suggest that the narrative voice in that instance is temporarily influenced by Macey, then the pressing question which presents itself is over who has 'control' of the voice in the second passage. The final sentence, 'But Jan liked it', sees a return to ostensible objectivity. It is however fundamentally ambiguous. Is Jan aware of the criticism which has just been offered- is it in fact made by Jan who in spite of this is still fond of the cottage's maladroit interior? Or is she in fact oblivious to this expression of taste and the narrator has offered the explanation that 'she liked it' as almost a form of excuse for his presence in such a place? This second possibility renders it tempting to suggest that the subjectivity at play in the passage actually belongs to Laidlaw, the only other character described as being present in the cottage.

While it may ostensibly be the case that the subjective evaluations at play in the Laidlaw novels are those which seek to resist the hegemony of late

capitalism and which interrogate the role the police force has in ensuring the endurance of that hegemony, the value of a close analysis such as the one offered above is to be found in the manner in which it brings into focus, albeit in a rather esoteric way, the nature of the assumptions made by the narrative voice about the values, knowledge and sympathies of the reader in the course of its modulation into an explicit subjectivity.

As Dickson notes above, on occasion, this explicit subjectivity affords an effective means of commentary. However, it appears that it is commentary with an accent. Where the author's conscious subjective interventions seek to make the case for his resistance to capitalism, they speak unwittingly to the tastes of those conversant in the dominant centre culture.

Content and Ideology

If the explicit subjective moralising of the narrative highlights the tensions at play upon McIlvanney as he attempts to refashion the formal anatomy of the detective novel into an organ of political resistance, then this strain is manifest in the character of Laidlaw and his interaction with those around him. He is a character frequently at odds with his profession as a police officer. While the normalising gaze of the state codifies depravity into crimes- using the absolutist discourse of guilt and innocence- Laidlaw attempts to humanise the actions of the law's transgressors through a subjective morality. He rails against the received manner in which his fellow officers as agents of the state dehumanise those who they are paid to contain:

What we shouldn't do is compound the felony in our reaction to it. And that's what people keep doing. Faced with the enormity they lose their nerve, and where they should see a man they make a monster.
(L 161- 162)

While Laidlaw may feel extreme discomfort with the moral compromises which his employment as a high ranking officer in one of the state's repressive apparatuses of control demands of him, he is more than willing to invoke the latent power of that same state in order to protect himself from physical harm. In *The Papers of Tony Veitch*, Laidlaw's ambush of the knife-wielding Mickey Ballater goes badly wrong, causing the policeman to resort to his state legitimised position of power as a means of saving his own life.

'I'm polis, Mickey.' Beyond his own control, his [warrant] card was thrown on the floor. 'You're tryin' to kill polis.'

The card lay between them in a way that neither understood, seemed to build an invisible fence. (PTV 243)

The place of the police I.D. in the semiotics of the crime fiction canon is of totemic importance. Known in American cop parlance as 'the shield', it offers a level of protection beyond that of fists, nightstick or even sidearm. It shall become apparent in Chapter Three that, for Laidlaw especially, the shield represents a barrier between himself and the community which he polices. McIlvanney's focus on this disconnect as a negative aspect is atypical of a genre which frequently classifies characters along the dualistic lines of good/bad, us/them and cops/robbers. However, Laidlaw's reliance upon the symbolism of the shield in this instance is profoundly conventional. In this first analysis, the act a very human one of self-preservation and Laidlaw's lack of agency ('beyond his own control') reminds the critic that a character (or indeed artist) need not be considered compromised simply because they seek to negotiate compromises.

Recourse to the conventional is a frequent occurrence across the Laidlaw trilogy, although its manifestation is often less than immediately obvious. If we are to take the specific example of *Laidlaw*, it rapidly becomes apparent that

the plot of the text relies heavily upon incidents of superficial randomness and caprice in order to provide a resolution. The entire premise of the novel relies upon the coincidence that on the Sunday morning that Bud Lawson comes to report his daughter missing, Laidlaw is the only detective on duty in the police station. It is doubly fortunate - both for us as readers and for Laidlaw- that he decides to take a personal interest in the case, for this enables him to name the dead body of a young female, when found hours later, as that of Jennifer Lawson.

‘Look,’ he said to Milligan. ‘I think I know who this is. She lives in the Drum. Ardmore Crescent.’

The young policeman was looking at him in awe. Out of such innocent moments legends grow. (*L* 34)

Of course, none of this is innocent coincidence. It is a fiction; a product of the author’s imagination laid open to interpretation, but carefully framed at the start of a narrative which has a beginning, a middle and an end. The fact that there exists an element of self-conscious scene-setting in this incident of supposed coincidence only serves to highlight the contrasting unconsciousness of the coincidence occurring elsewhere in the novel. Indeed at several points the narrative positively groans under the effort of naturalising coincidence.

Later in the course of the Jennifer Lawson murder investigation, Laidlaw’s partner, Harkness, waits patiently in the lounge bar of a pub called The Muscular Arms. He is hoping to meet a man known only by the name ‘Alan’ who sometimes drinks in there because the detective suspects he may have vital information about the case. Harkness ruefully considers how unlikely it is that he will be able to elicit information about someone whose full name he does not even know:

For the past ten minutes or so he had been listening to the girl behind the bar talking to one of the waitresses, pathetically hoping that they would reveal all. ‘Alan?’ ‘You know. Alan that usually drinks in here. The one

who goes with Jennifer Lawson.’ ‘Oh yes. That Alan.’ ‘Well. Tonight it seems he’s going to be at 14 Bath Street all evening. (L 173)

Ironically however, within the space of a dozen paragraphs the narrative has conspired to allow Harkness the opportunity not only to find out from the waitress Alan’s surname, but it also reveals the information that the waitress knows he is attending a party that evening and, in a final piece of riotous good fortune, she is able to furnish the police officer with the address of the flat where this party is being held at. Such episodes would be identified by Knight as an example of the way crime fiction relies upon ‘a mirage of police work’²⁶ as a hegemonic ideology dictates that it will not

...accept police method as a self-protection system, but prefers to rely on the vague force of good morality and fortune to fabricate a defence against feared betrayers of the self.²⁷

In a manner analogous to that whereby Laidlaw’s subjective first person interjections into the third person narrative serve to humanise criminal motivation, the ideologically motivated role of chance and fortune in a formal sense works to mask the controlling and repressive nature of police work by instead imbuing it with a kind of divine grace. The function of the police force, as the means of asserting and perpetuating hegemonic control by the capitalist state, is benignly disguised by an insidious ideology. It is not a threat to freedom or liberty, but instead an essentially humanised phenomenon smiled on by the gods of good fortune.

McIlvanney’s understanding of the role that conventions play in his writing finds its unwitting reflection in *Laidlaw* in the encounter Laidlaw and Harkness have with the hirsute self-proclaimed anarchist who objects to their questioning of the aforementioned Alan at the party he is attending. As the detectives lead

²⁶ Knight (1980), p. 183.

²⁷ *ibid.* p. 184.

their suspect away to the station for questioning the ‘big man with the beard’ (L 185) contemptuously summarises the situation as ‘Capitalism at work’ (L 186). His assessment is correct of course, but it is revealing that it is uttered only at this moment when (in a metaphorical, if not literal sense) the handcuffs are out. To recognise capitalism only in instances of state-sanctioned coercion is to negate the fashion in which ideological apparatus work incessantly to naturalise the tensions which capitalism creates. Literary, social and cultural conventions provide the ideological framework through which capitalism can present itself to those subject to it as the only possible discourse through which one can make sense of their life and relation to the society they inhabit. That such a presentation takes place within the framework of a discourse, such as McIlvanney’s fiction, which consciously sets out to resist and question capitalism’s power, speaks only of the essential irresistibility of ideology within the cultural sphere.

Looking Out and Looking Back

In the Introduction to this thesis I suggested that McIlvanney’s motivation for writing the Laidlaw novels was born out of a desire to reach a new readership, one which would not normally pick up a work of literary fiction such as *Docherty*. It is a theme I want to return to in way of concluding and in doing so emphasise the inalienable connection his fiction has with the material conditions in which it is created and consumed. For McIlvanney, the plan was to transplant a

...motivation made in a working-class housing scheme [so that it ended up] sitting strangely in the sitting-room of a suburban bungalow.
(*STS* 160)

In doing this he would replace the normalising judgement of the centre with that which exists at the peripheries of society: he would force those comfortable with the discourses of power to interact with the powerless. His juxtaposition of the working-class housing scheme and the suburban bungalow is significant in giving us a clue to the kind of demographic which McIlvanney assumes will constitute the bulk of his readership.

Since the end of the Second World War the steady decline in the traditional industries, which comprised the sustaining and defining force behind the working-class communities whose death throes his literature laments, has been met with a concurrent and inverse growth in the white-collar service and administrative sectors. By the time McIlvanney published the above comments in 1991, a nadir had been reached under the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher which is best typified in the draconian anti-trades union laws and the 'Right to Buy' enshrined under the 1980 Housing Act brought into statute by that government. This trend, suggests Mandel, is responsible in part for the continuing success of crime fiction as a genre. As a result of this economic change there is born a new-middle-class who are literate and often university-educated but who have been 'objectively proletarianized'²⁸ by their subjection to the wage-labour of the service industry or their role in one of the tentacles of the increasingly bureaucratic state. As a result, they are victim to the same process of alienation which befell the employees of the primary and secondary industries of an earlier age; the traditional working-class miners, steel-workers and ship-builders of their parents' generation. For a population such as this,

... the crime story becomes an ideal means to escape from the monotony of daily life into vicariously enjoyed adventures. The craved security of a sheltered existence, the material ideal of the middle classes, is

²⁸ Mandel (1984), p. 70.

counterbalanced by a vicarious insecurity. Readers carry-out in fantasy what they secretly long to do but never will in real life: to upset the applecart.²⁹

In Mandel's analysis there is a marked contrast in tastes and needs of this group of readers from those of the readers of crime fiction who belonged to a previous generation. The classic Golden Age fiction of the inter-war period was unashamedly unreflective of the material conditions in which it was produced. It was

... not supposed to reflect reality at all. [But] intended to satisfy subjective needs, thus performing an objective function: to reconcile the upset, bored and anxious individual member of the middle class with the inevitability and permanence of bourgeois society. The subjective need to be filled by [the crime fiction of that age] was that of nostalgia.³⁰

Might we suggest that for the readership of the Laidlaw novels the subjective need is also that of nostalgia, but nostalgia of a different sort? The nostalgia of a post-industrial age sees the proletarianized middle-classes yearn not for the security of a society in which capitalism is in the permanent ascendancy. For the leitmotif of late capitalism is its propensity to reproduce and incorporate within itself the forces which seek to stage resistance to it. McIlvanney's nostalgia is one which harks back to a time of community and an organised resistance to a capitalist hegemony which still endures at the edges of society.

To say that nostalgia is at the heart of McIlvanney's crime fiction seems to unfairly rob that work of the materialist motivations which lie foursquare behind its creation. The presentation of a version of Tam Docherty's fist, existing as the reminder of a better future to be built out of the values which existed in the past and are now only to be found lurking in the peripheries; on the borders of society and the borders of legality. It is only in the peripheral surroundings of

²⁹ *ibid.* p. 71.

³⁰ *ibid.* p. 29.

marginal communities and individuals that these values of resistance can remain credible. Herein though lies the rub; in this act of peering from the centre to peripheries there are inherent serious concerns for the politics of representation. At every turn the author's attempt to stage a textual resistance is frustrated by ideology's manipulation of meaning within the cultural sphere to guard against the ruin of capitalism's foundations.

Just as Kelman must rely upon his artistry to negotiate a degree of freedom amongst the controlling conventions- technical and social- of the 'genre' of literary fiction, McIlvanney's detective trilogy variously usurps and conforms the conventions which govern crime fiction. In this negotiation both authors demonstrate resistance primarily through the depiction and evocation of a culture which exists outwith the centres of power. The compromise involved in the act of giving voice to the periphery is to be found in the manner in which the two authors draw upon the codes of the imperium of high and popular cultures.

In the final chapter of my thesis I wish to examine the specific ways that Kelman and McIlvanney interact on a textual level with the peripheral. It is an analysis which relies upon the city which both men call home: Glasgow.

Chapter Three

...only those for whom poverty or vice turn the city into a landscape in which they stray from dark to sunrise know it in a way denied to me.¹

-Walter Benjamin

The certitude of place and the changing constitution of community, Glasgow and the West of Scotland, labyrinthal cityscapes and the paradoxical isolation of a busy street are dominant motifs within the fictions of James Kelman and William McIlvanney. In this, the final chapter of my thesis, I wish to move towards making explicit the hitherto tacit evaluative comparison I have been making between the two authors. It is a task which will be undertaken from two separate- but closely related- perspectives with the intention of enabling the reader to achieve an evaluation of the effectiveness of the texts as a site of cultural and political resistance. This will be achieved through a comparison of the two authors' varying treatment of space and place in reference to the extent that the formal and generic constraints of their chosen mode of writing variously facilitate and foreclose upon such textual representations.

By choosing Glasgow as the specific location in which I will root this analysis it will become apparent that the city represented in Kelman and McIlvanney's fiction occupies discrete cultural locations and as such carry different meanings. The two authors are alike in that they use geography as a literary tool by which to reposition the culture and discourses of the peripheries so that they might reach those in the centre. They differ in the political message

¹ Benjamin, Walter, *One Way Street and Other Writings*, trans, Jephcott, Edmund, and Shorter, Kingsley, (London: NLB, 1979), p. 330.

which those discourses carry. At the core of such an evaluation, and our first point of contrast, is an analysis of the ways in which Kelman and McIlvanney's central characters interact and move through their textual surroundings.

The success of such an evaluation requires us to turn our attention once more to the conventions of crime fiction which were discussed at length in the preceding chapter. Throughout modern crime fiction, authors have been quick to borrow the high literary convention of the *flâneur*². Offering an analysis of the extent to which McIlvanney's and Kelman's protagonists fulfil the conventional role of the *flâneur* will prove vital in the overarching assessment of the effectiveness of the two author's work in functioning as a site of textual resistance. It becomes apparent that the manner in which the characters interact with the spaces which they inhabit, and thus how that space is represented, is ultimately shaped by the textual politics of the form and genre in which their narratives are framed.

Alienated and Appropriated Spaces: Capitalism and the City

Writing sometime in the 1860s, in an essay entitled 'The Painter of Modern Life', which was eventually published posthumously, the French proto-modernist poet and essayist Charles Baudelaire (1821- 1867) redefined the term '*flâneur*' and inscribed it within cultural discourse. The word, derived from the French verb *flâner*- to stroll- originally described a bourgeois gentleman in post-Revolutionary Paris who would fill his leisure time by wandering the arcades and

² A comprehensive outline of the development of the detective as a *flâneur* across the history of the crime fiction canon is to be found in, John Rignall, 'From City Streets to Country Houses: the Detective as Flâneur', *The Art of Murder*, ed. H. Gustav Klaus & Stephen Knight, (Tübingen: Stauffenberg, 1998), pp. 67- 76.

galleries observing the newly democratised metropolis. The defining characteristic of this figure was his innate belonging to the city streets he walked. As Baudelaire puts it,

The crowd is his element, as the air is that of the birds and water of fishes. His passion and his profession are to become one flesh with the crowd. For the perfect *flâneur*, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite.³

The figure of the *flâneur* occupies a penumbral hinterland between historical fact and urban mythology. Given prominence in the popular imagination as a result of its earlier existence in the works of authors such as Alexander Dumas (1802- 1870) and Honoré de Balzac (1799- 1850), it remains for many critics ‘essentially a literary gloss... uneasily tied to any sociological reality’⁴. As Rob Shields claims, it is an ‘ideal-type found more in discourse than in everyday life’⁵. For post-war critical theorists the cultural worth of this gloss becomes truly realised thanks to its resonance in the work of the German philosopher Walter Benjamin (1892-1940). Benjamin adapted the term *flâneur* to denote the idea of a device which could be used as an active agent in society’s attempts to understand the conditions of modern existence in the city. For Benjamin, the *flâneur* was to be understood as an analogue for the distribution of power in urban spaces. The ‘reading’ of those spaces- both textual and geographical- as articulated through literature has profound consequences for our discussion on the formal politics of narrative. As Shields explains,

Flânerie is more specific than strolling. It is a special practice of specific sites: the interior and exterior public spaces of the city. These include parks, sidewalks, squares, and shopping arcades or malls. While

³ Charles Baudelaire, ‘From The Painter of Modern Life’, trans. Jonathon Mayne, Leitch *et al* (2001) , p. 792- 802, p. p.795.

⁴ Rob Shields, ‘Fancy Footwork: Walter Benjamin’s notes on *flânerie*’, *The Flâneur*, ed. Keith Tester, (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 61- 80, p. 62.

⁵ *ibid.* p. 67.

flânerie is an individual practice, it is part of a social process of inhabiting and appropriating urban space.⁶

McIlvanney and Kelman alike enact the process of *flânerie* upon their textual urban spaces as a way of appropriating, or re-appropriating, them in a cultural sense. Their characters who occupy the peripheries of culture interact with the physical and social geographies of the fictions in a manner which has consequences for the effective resistance of the authors' work and is a direct reflection of how their texts are received and consumed as works of popular crime fiction and high literary fiction respectively.

We have already seen the commitment which James Kelman offers to Glasgow's radical history through his actions as an artist and an activist. William McIlvanney is another author acutely aware of this aspect of the city's past and, more importantly, the position this past occupies in the popular imagination. Glasgow is an ideal setting for his fiction, not just in so far as it is local to him but in that it embodies, at some innate level, a resistance to the dehumanising effects of capitalism.

What I feel in Glasgow is the accumulated weight of working-class experience. The streets of the former Second City of the British Empire are haunted by what the Industrial Revolution has meant to us, the tensions it imposed on the human spirit and the resilience that grew out of the tensions. There, more intensely than anywhere else, you can sense the force that shaped the nature of modern Scotland. It was a brute force, but, like a gallous lion-tamer with a chair, Glasgow men and women domesticated the beast and made it part of their way of life.
(*STS* 157)

The brute force which McIlvanney alludes to in his extended metaphor is of course that force of industrial capitalism which, in a very tangible way, has shaped the physicality of the nation. The appearance of the countryside over the last three hundred years has changed irreversibly as forests have been cleared, mines sunk, rivers dammed, railways laid and agrarian communities decimated.

⁶ *ibid.* p. 65.

However, it is in the cities that the brute force has had the greatest transformative effect on the physical surroundings. Smoke stacks and slum tenements were built and eventually demolished to make space for the maligned tower blocks of the *banlieue* and glittering skyscrapers of post-industrial capitalism.

Since the time of the Industrial Revolution, the city in Britain has been the site of bourgeois domination. The catalyst for its exponential growth during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was to be found in the demands for labour made by a nascent and later rampant industrial capitalism. A force which in turn drove forward a wider project of Imperialism as the capital and goods it produced were used to establish sites of political and cultural domination in other nations.

As such capitalism has not just been formative in our conception of the city but also in our conception of ourselves as urban inhabitants. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries the role of the city was to undergo a paradigm shift, no longer was it a locus of production but one whose primary purpose was to serve as an area where consumption took place. The critic Graeme Gilloch suggests that Benjamin prefigures this change in his writing by the use of the *flâneur* to affect a move

...away from the traditional Marxist emphasis on the forms of production... to explore modes of commodity display, advertising and consumption. It is not so much the experience of the alienated worker but that of the fetishizing consumer.⁷

To be clear, what Gilloch is identifying as existing in Benjamin's work is the reification of the effects of alienation in the act of consumption rather than solely in the act of selling one's labour. Benjamin anticipates a trend in twentieth-century Marxism which is spearheaded by Althusser's work on the

⁷ Graeme Gilloch, *Myth and the Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), p. 8.

importance of the cultural superstructure of society over the economic base. The German philosopher recognises that capitalism's ability to resist its supposedly inevitable moment of terminal crisis will reside in its ideological propensity to engender an insatiable desire for commodities whose exchange value exponentially outstrips their use value. Capitalism's foundational conceit, its ability to shape the tastes of the consumer in order to maximise its own profits, works to alienate not just the producer of the commodity- as conventional Marxist orthodoxy has it- but also to alienate the mass consumer of that commodity. Through this process of alienation, capitalism of the post-industrial age, just as that which was in existence during an era of high-industrialism, succeeds in rendering its subjects' experience of reality as one which is fragmented, interiorized and marginalized.

In a postmodern era in which the academy has become more open to a heterogeneous definition of what constitutes literature, commentators have been eager to apply already existing theoretical and cultural tropes to new and popular genres in what might be viewed as a laudable exercise in cultural plurality. As such, a plethora of critics have been quick to map the concepts and language surrounding the notion of *flânerie* onto the landscape of detective fiction. Far from this being laboured, it was actually a connection first suggested by Benjamin himself who explicitly noted the ready link which can be made between the concept of *flânerie* and the characteristics of crime fiction. There is, he stated,

[A] remarkable association of *flânerie* and the detective novel... The figure of the flâneur prefigures that of the detective. The flâneur should find a social legitimation for his behaviour. It suits him perfectly to see his indolence presented as a facade behind which he hides the sustained

attention of an observer, never letting his eyes off the unsuspecting criminal.⁸

While Benjamin reads the traits of the *flâneur* as being characteristic of a kind of amateur proto-detective, the critic John Rignall argues that the concept of *flânerie* is actually a central tenet of urban crime fiction which features highly-organised police forces. The professional detective and the stroller become indistinguishable in terms of the way they are made to function as a literary device.

Detective and *flâneur* are... closely related expressions of the same impulse to master and make sense of the modern metropolitan world. Frequently merging with each other, they imply the power of the individual mind to understand and render intelligible the bewildering diversity of big city life.⁹

As precedent for the claim he is making, Rignall cites Poe's Dupin, Dickens' Inspector Bucket, Conan Doyle's Holmes and Chandler's Marlowe as proponents of a type of crime-solving which involves a cerebral and physical exploration of their city surroundings. In this schema the detective is also involved in an appropriation of urban space in the manner that order and social normality is restored within the narrative by the aggregative gathering of knowledge in order to solve a crime. In the crime novel a social taboo- more often than not a murder- is committed and in unearthing the truth the detective has re-established the rule of law and the norms of appropriate behaviour. For the Marxist critic of the genre a corollary of this restoration of normality is the reassuring (for those at the centres of power) construction of meaning out of chaos. As outlined in the previous chapter, even ostensibly radical crime fiction which sets out to resist and interrogate core culture through its plot, characterisation and setting can find its potency dulled by a neat narrative

⁸ Walter Benjamin, *Paris du Capital XIXe Siècle : Le Livres des passages*, trans. R. Lacoste, ed. R. Tiedmann, (Paris: Ed du CERF, 1989), p. 444.

⁹ Rignall (1998), p. 68.

resolution. Where such a textual resolution exists it is always concurrent with an ideological resolution vested with the interests of those in power.

Laidlaw as *Flâneur*

When it comes to meeting the conventions of the crime fiction canon we have seen that McIlvanney's Laidlaw trilogy so often appears to affect subversion or evasion, only to capitulate at the last. It is a trend which is found to continue in our analysis of Laidlaw as *flâneur*. Granted, there appears to be an element of self-consciousness to McIlvanney's writing which tacitly acknowledges the fact that while in some ways the warrant card that DI Laidlaw carries in his pocket may tangibly facilitate his travel round the city it also limits his access to certain communities. While his employment as a senior officer in one of the state's repressive apparatus may physically open doors which would otherwise be locked (or give him the mandate to kick them down), it simultaneously forecloses on the possibility of unhindered access to a number of discrete cultural communities to which he may have otherwise belonged. Like Kelman's disaffected teacher, Patrick Doyle, although arguably in an even more acute sense, Laidlaw is caught between his roots in the peripheral culture and the position as a guardian of the core culture foisted upon him by his profession. We might recognise him as the very archetype of the *flâneur* of the post-industrial city in the way in which he is subject to a process of alienation which becomes all the more intense due to his inbetweenness. As Shields notes,

... the *flâneur* is the embodiment of alienation. Triply so: within himself, between himself and his world, and between himself and other people.¹⁰

¹⁰ Shields (1994), p. 77.

With this statement and the one quoted above, Shields has outlined the twin characteristics of the *flâneur* in literature. The figure is an alienated subject of capitalism and simultaneously an authorial device used to appropriate cultural and physical space within a text. As always the battle for culture and space is rooted in capitalist power relations. It will become apparent that in a comparison of the timbre and composition of Laidlaw's *flânerie* against that of Kelman's wandering characters, there are exhibited both similarities and differences. While there is much common ground between the two authors' *flâneurs*, the essence of their difference can be traced back to the position in the capitalist hierarchy that each character holds and ultimately to the generic and formal constraints of the texts in which they are given existence.

For a senior ranking detective such as Jack Laidlaw to take to the streets on foot is in itself remarkable: 'walking the beat' is a far from glamorous activity and is as such usually performed by a lowly police constable. For evidence of the resonance of such a fact in the popular imagination we need only consider the use of the term 'Plod' in British slang as a derisory nickname for a police officer. Such plodding is resented by Harkness who is doubtful over the value of the menial practice and regards the physical legwork demanded by it as being slightly beneath those cerebral qualities which are traditionally required from the detective:

Harkness had worried about Laidlaw since they set out on foot from the office. He knew Laidlaw's belief in what he sometimes called 'absorbing the streets', as if you could solve crime by osmosis. Apart from being of dubious effectiveness, it was sore on the feet. (PTV 55)

It might be considered that in undertaking the act of walking the beat, PC Plod becomes a human embodiment of the command tower which forms the central keystone of the panoptical prison which Michel Foucault maintains is writ large in the carceral archipelago of the capitalist state. The subject is controlled

by the visibility of his oppressor ensuring that observation is always a possibility even though it can never be omnipresent. In these terms the lowly beat cop is a far closer adherent than Laidlaw to the conventions which mark out the *flâneur* in the tradition of cultural discourse, '*flânerie* is public and other-directed... (and) the *flâneur* is out to see and be seen'¹¹.

Crucially however, Jack Laidlaw patrols the beat not in a proactive attempt to deter crime from happening through his visibility, but rather in an effort to gain an intimate- although never total- knowledge of the city which enables him to do his job. His plodding is primarily an epistemological exercise reliant upon some kind of unexplained and incomplete alchemy which occurs when mind meets street.

To function effectively as a detective he must disguise the visibility of his difference which marks him out from the peripheries which he polices while exclaiming his attachment to the centres of power. Laidlaw's first meeting with Harkness is punctuated almost at the outset by the senior officer's decision to chastise his junior colleague, albeit in characteristically humorous terms, for his appearance.

I was thinking it might be more discreet working with the Police Pipe Band. Where do you get your gear anyway? The Plainclothes Policeman's stores? (L 81)

Laidlaw's desire to distance himself from what it means to be a policeman, what it means to *appear* as a policeman to other people, manifests itself almost as a neurosis. After having hailed a cab, Laidlaw's immediate response, to a taxi driver's question as to where he was going, is the deliberate but nearly unconscious deployment of a smokescreen behind which he can hide,

¹¹ *ibid.* p. 65.

not from the truth of who he is, but from the consequences that the revelation of such a truth would have for his ability to 'absorb the streets'.

Laidlaw, with a sense of camouflage that was instinctive to him, gave an address near Pitt Street [the city centre headquarters of Strathclyde Police]. (PTV 61)

The role that McIlvanney has Laidlaw fulfil, as part of his literary-political project, has been rehearsed previously in this thesis. It is to provide a viable vehicle for transporting the values of the periphery- both positive and negative- to within the central culture. To carry out this task successfully Laidlaw clearly must have free access to those peripheries and it must be an access which is unfettered by his position of authority. This is a complicated conflict to resolve in the Glasgow in which he operates. It is a city in which an 'inflection of aggressiveness' in the pronunciation of the word 'polis' is taught at the same time as the word 'choo-choo' (L 230). There exists a kind of inverse prestige whereby Laidlaw must disguise his visibility in order to get by. In this world of the powerless- which is in no way fully coterminous with a criminal world- the police officer is an inappropriate presence able to interact with his surroundings only by first masking his difference.

In the opening passage of *Laidlaw* the narrative voice is temporarily assumed by Tommy Bryson, Jennifer Lawson's murderer. Bryson is running through the streets of the city in order to put distance between him and the crime he has just committed.

A voice with a cap on said, 'Where's the fire, son?'
Running was a dangerous thing... Walking was safe. You could wear
strolling like a mask. Stroll. Strollers are normal. (L 1)

In order to become an effective *flâneur* Laidlaw must figuratively affect a nonchalant stroll, he must normalise his actions as they are seen through the gaze of the communities which he polices. It appears he is well aware of the almost untenable tension created by the gulf between his role as an agent of the

state and his own personal set of values- the values of the peripheral stroller: 'Laidlaw had been wondering if it was possible to be a policeman and not be a fascist' (L 12- 13). However, on other occasions this self-awareness appears to desert him. Standing in the busy waiting room of Glasgow Royal Infirmary's casualty department, Laidlaw peruses the faces of the walking wounded and anxious relatives in the crowd, on the off chance that one of them may be familiar to him.

He recognised nobody, except perhaps the two plain-clothesmen who had just come in. He didn't know them as individuals but he knew that style of moving on tramlines of professional preoccupation. (PTV 17)

This recognition of his fellow officers not as individuals but rather for what they represent- mutual non-uniformed uniformity- is, in the first instance, illustrative of the tension which makes Jack Laidlaw such a compelling character. For all Laidlaw's concern as to the plight of humanity under the conditions of late capitalism and for all that his specific process of *flânerie* is primarily about attempting to gain some kind of essential understanding of the fragmentation of post-industrial existence, his position is always doubly compromised by a duo of irresistible imperatives. In the fictional sphere Laidlaw functions as a human being riddled with doubts over the society he is charged with maintaining, while in a metafictional sense he is used by McIlvanney as an avowedly politically progressive authorial device. On this first fictional level Laidlaw is motivated by a personal and professional need to solve the crime; to restore order by tracking down the perpetrator of a legal (and in most cases moral) transgression. He is guided by a combination- and often a conflict- of his moral compass and the expectations over the conduct of a Detective Inspector held by his superiors and by wider society. On a metatextual plane the narrative is driven forward by the uncompromising demands of the crime fiction author. The conventional ideological resolution demanded by the generic narrative

resolution conspires to ensure that Laidlaw's communion with the city and with its inhabitants is always compromised and never complete. In a similar manner we might consider McIlvanney's representation of his political agenda to be compromised by the aesthetics and the form of crime fiction as a genre.

To recognise that the attempt to stage a complete derailment from the tramlines of professional preoccupation is as fruitless a task for the strolling detective as it is for the crime writer, should not blind us to the literary and political fruits which are born out of McIlvanney's use of Laidlaw as a *flâneur*. Laidlaw's *flânerie*, his exploration of the urban milieu and his attempts to solve crime through connecting shoe leather, instinct and brain power with city street gives McIlvanney the means by which to invest his textual Glasgow with a set of values which differ from those considered normal by the late capitalist hegemony. The fact that Laidlaw can never fully disguise what his profession makes him, that he can never escape those tramlines, serves to make Laidlaw an archetypal *flâneur*. It is this failure; the estrangement from the community in which he lives and works, which is the cause of his chronic and inescapable alienation.

Faced with the crowd in the hospital waiting room, Laidlaw is only able to recognise those figures that are most visible because they most closely resemble his own predicament. Yoked to the figurative tram rails, bus routes and subway lines of the city Laidlaw becomes the perfect walking metaphor for urban alienation in the age of consumer capitalism. While ostensibly being afforded free access to Glasgow, he is in reality confined by his recognisable difference to some of those who inhabit the city.

Kelman's *Flâneurs*

While Laidlaw has wider-ranging freedom to explore the geography of Glasgow, if not the multifariousness of its culture, Rab Hines is limited in a much more literal way in his interaction with the textual space of Glasgow. *His* profession might not close down on an unfettered access to a peripheral culture, but it works to both figuratively and literally keep him contained. Examining his reflection in the mirror, in the course of his morning shave, Hines attempts to internally ameliorate the shock of his unkempt appearance with the consolatory thought of the benefits which his employment as a conductor on Glasgow Corporation buses brings him. For the purposes of our analysis the face staring back at him may as well belong to Jack Laidlaw.:

A grey face. Two slits in a grey face. Even my hair by christ!... Terrible... He started shaving... It's good to know that in a short while from now I'll be getting transported from point A to point B and charging a price for the privilege. (*BH* 43)

A straightforward Marxist reading of such a passage might claim it is indicative of the ideological effects of a capitalist hegemony which functions to engender in its subjects an enthusiasm for the process of selling one's labour in order to turn a profit for other people- 'charging a price for the privilege'. In a post-industrial Britain where consumerism reigns as one of the dominant narratives of the age, and where the Welfare State provides a safety-net against the extremes of absolute destitution, it is not only the economic imperative of receiving a wage which motivates the worker to sell his labour but also the necessary illusion of freedom and choice which the possession of money facilitates. The material conditions of post-industrial consumerism have enabled the capitalist ideology to become so skilled that it no longer need settle for

cultivating mere consent. Instead it strives to craft outright enthusiasm for the task of ensuring its perpetuation.

As has been suggested elsewhere in this thesis, the shifting narrative perspective employed by Kelman as a means of voicing Hines' thoughts should certainly lead us to question the degree to which such sentiments may be inflected with a degree of sarcasm, or are indeed even the words of Rab Hines. However, whether or not it is Hines' character who articulates these thoughts is largely an irrelevance, for synecdochically the character of Rab Hines can be made to stand as an example of the illusionary nature of the putative freedom which capitalist wage labour offers its subjects. His occupation affords him the physical means to travel across the city, yet plainly it would be wrong to conflate this element of locomotion with an idea of freedom. Hines' movement as the busconductor- never the busdriver- is something over which he has very little agency, it is rigorously controlled by the timetables and confined by the bus routes designated by his employers. His existence is defined by means of reference to his occupation which is writ large in the title of the novel. As Kövesi confirms,

...in a work-a-day factuality neither busconductor nor bus driver is in total control of where or when they go... Driver and conductor operate as part of a machine, and are continually checked by Inspectors and corralled by Deskclerks to ensure they are functioning according to the exacting instructions and directions of the timetable.¹²

This superficial and one-dimensional way in which Hines interacts with the city-space in which he lives becomes an extended metaphor for the sense of disconnection felt by the individual under consumer-driven late capitalism.

Speaking in April 1972, in a caustic polemic recognised by *The New York Times* as, 'the greatest speech since President Lincoln's Gettysburg Address'¹³

¹² Kövesi (2007), p. 46.

¹³ James Reid, 'Bang the Bell, Jack, I'm on the bus', *The New York Times*, 20th June 1972, p. 39.

the famous Scottish trade unionist Jimmy Reid (1932-2010) was to outline just what this sort of disconnection meant for him. Reid, who was being installed as Rector of Glasgow University, had already gained iconic status in Glasgow's part-mythological history of organised resistance for his role in the successful work-in staged by the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders the previous year¹⁴. In that speech, Reid identified the pervasive process of alienation as 'the major social problem in Britain today'¹⁵. Whether or not it could be rationalised or articulated, alienation, for Reid, is the effect of a disassociation of the individual from the macro-economic forces and government decisions which shape and intrude upon each of our lives. During the address Reid famously urged the students to eschew the values of an age which held individual success in far higher esteem than the corporate wellbeing of humanity.

A rat race is for rats. We're not rats. We're human beings. Reject the insidious powers in society that would blunt your critical faculties to all that is happening around you, that would caution silence in the face of injustice lest you jeopardise your chances of promotion and self-advancement.¹⁶

As a means of showing how widespread these insidious powers were, Reid cautioned against the widespread 'genuinely intended friendly advice' which counselled to,

"...look after number one". Or as they say in London, "Bang the bell, Jack, I'm on the bus."¹⁷

During one of his regular bouts of 'speculative musings' (*BH 93*), Hines offers a means of redeeming his relatively lowly social status as a mere bus conductor against the lofty expectations of his wife's more affluent family:

¹⁴ For a comprehensive introduction to the UCS work-in see Glasgow Caledonian University's online *Radical Glasgow* project, http://www.gcu.ac.uk/radicalglasgow/chapters/ucs_workin.html, accessed 21st Nov 2011.

¹⁵ James Reid, *Alienation: Rectorial Address delivered in the University of Glasgow*, (Glasgow: University Of Glasgow Publications, 1972), p. 5.

¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 7.

¹⁷ *ibid.* p. 7.

Sandra had already informed them of the plethora of books to be found in his rectangle. Having shucked off his adolescent excesses he would no doubt be buckling down to serious studies... All would indeed be well. And education was, after all, the Scottish Way. Surely this erstwhile nation had once been the forerunner of Equal Opportunity at a Spiritual Level. And did this spiritual levelling not include the possibility of Social Transport! Ding Ding. Why, throughout the length and breadth of this grey but gold country toty wee mites were being befriended by the Sons of the Laird and going on to become steely-eyed village dominies or gruff but kindly members of the medical profession, and even preachers of the gospel in far-flung imperial establishments. (BH 95)

In its punning content and pseudo-official register Hines' thoughts ostensibly comprise a vision of the urban Kailyard and the myth of the democratic intellect which tends towards pastiche. However it is more than simply a dig on Kelman's behalf at a paradigm of reductive national essentialism which has long since become passé. Kelman's deliberate and humorous conflation of the concept of the movement through the physical space of the city which Hines fulfils in the course of his work- work which is pointedly far removed from that of the dominie, the doctor or the missionary- with the concept of social advancement, 'Social Transport', functions to highlight the manner in which the ideology of consumerist capitalism serves to insidiously and perpetually disguise the alienation which its means of production engenders. By always averring that social advancement and attendant happiness is to be found in the act of consumption, the ISAs, which maintain the sites of power, ensure that late capitalism is able to self-perpetuate. The 'Ding, Ding' which Hines internalises is the spectral echo of Jimmy Reid's warning not to 'look after number one'; don't bang the bell Rab.

If the prevailing rhetoric of the age conflates 'movement' and 'mobility' with the end of class struggle, then it is little surprise that such a cultural phenomenon is to be found manifest in the material geography of the society we live in. Writing in 1983, in his monograph bemoaning the stasis of

postmodernism, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, the American Marxist critic

Marshall Berman states that

The distinctive sign of nineteenth century urbanism was the boulevard, a medium for bringing explosive material and human forces together; the hallmark of twentieth-century urbanism has been the highway, a means for putting them asunder.¹⁸

In these terms it appears that Pat Doyle's mechanised *flânerie* is very definitely a sign of the times. It is intimately related to the zeitgeist of late capitalism in a far more fundamental way than simply through Doyle's penchant for late night motorway driving. Doyle's automotive wanderings are only enabled by the relative economic prosperity he achieves as a university graduate teaching in a secondary school. His salary pays for the car and as such, 'Driving went with teaching' (*D* 206). Yet much of the driving that Doyle does is remarkable for the fact that it is undertaken not for the purpose of making a journey from point A to point B, but rather in order to attempt some kind of escape which is never realised either figuratively or geographically:

Patrick Doyle, drove right out of Glasgow, late that Friday evening. He had decided to visit his old pal Eric who teaches in a technical college somewhere in the East Neuk of Anglia, not too far from the sea, where he has a boat. And upon awakening tomorrow Patrick would knock the fucking boat and bid adieu, continuing onwards, south to Dover thence Calais, Paris, Marseille, Aragon, Barcelona, Pamplona and a quick stop off at Guernica just to see what's what. (*D* 69)

The impotence of Pat's attempt at escape feed into the hybrid position which we have early identified him as occupying. It speaks of the alienation of a proletarianised middle class who may have the material wherewithal to escape via car, boat or plane to Paris, Marseille or Barcelona but for whom that escape can only be a temporary evasion. It is enabled by complicity, conscious or unconscious, in the economic and power hierarchies which ordered late capitalist society. Perhaps it is significant that the only incident in which Pat

¹⁸ Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience Of Modernity* (London: Verso, 1983), p. 165.

achieves something tantamount to a real escape occurs in the closing paragraphs of *A Disaffection*. Having come to an end of his drinking session with Gavin and his friends, Pat decides to abandon his car and begin to walk home. It was a drinking session which Pat could only attend because he had earlier decided to abandon teaching. Strolling through the rain Doyle picks up a brick with the intention of throwing it at a window in the kind of ineffectual protest entirely in keeping with his character. He is prevented from going through with the act when he spots

... a pair of polis across the street who needless to say were observing him openly and frankly and not giving a fuck about who was noticing.
(D 336)

Instead he starts to run even though he is aware of the attention which it will draw to him,

...daft, fucking daft, but too late... That was them there, shouting; they were shouting at him from the other side of the road... They must have come running after him to be shouting. What are they shouting. They're just shouting they hate him they hate ye we fucking hate ye, that's what they are shouting... Ah fuck off, fuck off. (D 337)

Here in this instant we have Doyle staging a wholesale rejection of the position between the core and the periphery which his education and occupation has dictated that he must occupy. In railing against the police, he no longer offers the sophisticated political critiques that were present previously in the novel but instead can only articulate by way of repeated empty intensifiers, 'fuck off, fuck off'. Knowledge of the form of Kelman's narratives should warn against investing events with extra significance purely because they occur at the end of the text. The lack of a metalanguage ensures that the end of a novel is not the end of the discourse which that novel carries. The possibility, probability even, remains that this rejection is only temporary. Come the sobriety of morning the ideological construction of capitalist society will ensure that Pat

Doyle is back in front of his class and back behind the wheel of his car from where he can continue to critique, deconstruct and orate against capitalism while insidiously ensuring its ascendancy.

A far more effective *flâneur* created by Kelman is the emphatically more peripheral Sammy Samuels. Ostensibly it might seem rather difficult for the blind Sammy to be considered a *flâneur*. However, rather than foreclosing upon the possibility of the character being used in such a role, the newly-imposed blindness is utilised by Kelman as the perfect tool through which to highlight the author's acute concerns over how cultural and political power is wielded and maintained. The 'blindness' of the narrative voice is used by Kelman as an extended metaphor through which to represent the relationship which exists between the political, cultural and economic capital which one possesses (that is the place in the capitalist power structure) and the extent to which one is rendered visible or invisible by ideology. Sammy's blindness affords Kelman the narrative freedom to represent, in a very literal way, how this visibility is used to order society's power relations; how the core views the periphery.

The negation of Sammy's sense of sight forces him to find another way to interact with the streets of the city in which he has grown up. Finding his way home for the first time as a blind man he must re-learn his surroundings in a way which he describes in infantilised terms. Sammy embarks upon a game of 'patacake' (HL 34), painstakingly feeling his way along the walls of buildings. Significantly his inability to gaze upon himself also threatens to throw into jeopardy his own sense of himself,

... the sudden blast of wind for christ sake like he had got jailed in the spring and let out in the middle of winter. It was warm when they took him in! That was what he remembered anyway, warm, the warm. Maybe it was nay him they lifted! Maybe it was some other cunt! Maybe it was nay him, him here. (HL 34)

The literal defamiliarisation of his home surroundings to which Sammy has been subject mirrors the process of alienation to which capitalism subjects the individual. It has not just reduced elements of his humanity, but has led him to question the very conception of himself as the human being which he was familiar with. Crucially though, while this profound physiological and psychological change leads Sammy to feel invisible, he still remains a very visible presence as far as the core culture is concerned. In so far as Sammy is regarded as a threat to the sites of power, he will always be made visible by those in power in order to galvanise their ascendancy. We find a very literal example of such when, during a police interview, Sammy is confronted with surveillance photographs taken many years ago when he was living in London. Of course Sammy's blindness functions to create equality of knowledge (or the lack of it) between the reader and the narrator. Neither can be sure that the photos, purportedly showing Sammy meeting an old friend named Charlie Barr, really exist. Barr has already been described by police in a previous interview as 'a political' (HL 169) and by Sammy, presumably metaphorically, as someone who was 'still fucking throwing bombs' (HL 173). This, combined with the fact that the officer conducting the interview is speaking with an English accent (HL 200) suggests the involvement of Special Branch; Sammy is no longer viewed as just a common criminal but rather perceived as a clear and present threat to the *status quo*.

Through the zoom lens of the panoptical state's repressive apparatus of observation Sammy has been recorded and categorised by the normalising judgement of the carceral archipelago. The capitalist state has asserted that Sammy's behaviour is inappropriate and has, as a result, made him visible in a set of photographs, which the reader and Sammy alike can only be confident of the existence of in as far as it is asserted by the state's apparatus of control.

Sammy we've just had a photograph turn up, you with Charlie; you're looking especially well, like a say ye had long hair, pity ye canna see it. (*HL 200*)

Framed in this normalising gaze, his Otherness is assured simply because those with power have deemed it necessary in order to buttress their own positions. This is of course an extreme example of political power being exercised by the state and is suggested as such by the very literal metaphor of surveillance photographs which Kelman uses. Capitalism functions, in all but the final instances of crisis, through consent engendered by ideology and not by a repressive use of force or even invasive monitoring. A much more nuanced and representative example of capitalism's wielding of power is evident not in Sammy's direct interaction with the state's organs but rather in the way he is treated by wider society.

In order to register his blindness and thus qualify for welfare support, Sammy must take the bus to the 'DSS Central Medical' office. His journey to the office is aided by the fact that he has managed to visually signal his inability to see. His decision to purchase a pair of sunglasses and to fashion a white cane out of a broom handle means that when he boards the bus he is helped to his seat and is later given assistance when the bus reaches his stop. For Sammy the sunglasses are important in that they provide those around him with an explanation for why his behaviour might not conform to social norms. His journey to the DSS office is in contrast to the journey he makes home after waking-up blinded on the street. During this earlier trip he surmises that his staggering could easily be mistaken for drunkenness and this, along with his unkempt appearance, would stop anyone from offering him help. In the eyes of the normalising gaze his presence is an inappropriate sight,

... it was just how ye looked, if ye looked alright ye were fine- if not then you would frighten them away, if ye didnay look alright man, they would steer clear. They would be steering clear anyway. As soon as they spotted him, yer man, they would keep well out of his road. Nay danger. (HL 40)

The inappropriateness- the danger- is negated by his decision to don the glasses and carry the stick,

... he was fine and fucking great man and nay cunt could see him; nay cunt could fucking see him! know what I'm talking about, the glasses and that, the shades... (HL 83)

Resolution for Sammy occurs at the moment in which he is accepted and passed over by the normalising judgement as something not worthy of examination, 'nay cunt could see him'. This is a physical manifestation of a phenomenon which he can never hope to achieve at a cultural level. Sammy will always appear inappropriate to the core culture by dint of the very fact that he represents the peripheries. Sammy dons shades in a literal reflection of the way that Ally attempts to negotiate a way through the discourses of power, or indeed a writer such as James Kelman crafts fiction which draws on the cultural codes of the imperium. Sammy's act of disguise, of blending in and negating differences, always must be a physical one for he lacks the cultural capital to stage such a negation in any less concrete a manner.

Imagining Glasgow, 'Glasgow' and Graithnock

For Mary McGlynn, the textual Glasgow of Kelman's fiction is recognisable as the actual geographical Glasgow in a relationship not dissimilar to that which exists between Joyce's *Ulysses* and the city in which *it* is set.

While the specificities of Kelman's geography of Glasgow are not nearly so exhaustive as the Dublin rebuildable from the pages of *Ulysses*, the specific mentions of actual pubs and the negotiation of the city evoke a Joycean sense of urban space as well as continually underlining their own reference to a local identity.¹⁹

I would suggest that, in actuality, the specificities of Kelman's Glasgow are pretty sparse. In Sammy's internalised subjective narrative throughout *How late* the commercial thoroughfares of Buchanan Street and Queen Street appear regularly, but mention of anything more localised is rare. As a consequence of Sammy's blindness, through which the reader 'sees' Glasgow, physical descriptions are often exacting but rarely provide much hint of actual geographic location.

In an attempt to get his bearings Sammy asks a passerby the name of the street he is on and is informed that he is on, 'Davis Street... Just at the corner of Napier Street' (*HL* 42). While there is a Napier Street in Glasgow there is no Davis Street. Later, while marking time in a police cell, after having been arrested in a raid on his flat, Sammy wonders which police station he has been taken to,

He didnay even know where he was. He was assuming it was Hardie Street but maybe it was someplace else. (*HL* 207)

Like Davis Street, Hardie Street exists only in Kelman's texts although the fact that there is a Baird Street police station in the Springburn area of Glasgow suggests a certain self-referencing playfulness on behalf of the author. As for actual pubs, the contention that *Glancy's Bar*, Sammy's local and the workplace of his missing girlfriend Helen, appears to be a fictionalised construct of Kelman's is strengthened by its punning relation and homophonic similarity to the word 'glances'. In *Hines* the evasion of geographical certainties is even more pronounced. The proper nouns of the city's district which Hines traverses on his

¹⁹ Mary McGlynn, "'Middle Class Wankers' and Working Class Texts: The Critics and James Kelman", *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (Spring 2002), pp. 50- 84, p. 71.

bus are reduced and ambiguously abbreviated to, for example, 'Y', 'D' or 'High Amenity Zone K' (BH 119).

There exist strong political motivations which might account for such geographical obfuscations. Kelman's textual 'Glasgow' is not actually the physical city of Glasgow, or rather not limited in its representation to that specific locus. Instead, assisted by the shifting and explicitly subjective literary form, it functions as a shorthand for anywhere and everywhere in which there exists the kind of power relations with which he is concerned. 'Glasgow' in Kelman's work is the peripheral culture of late capitalism; the setting of his texts in this metonymic 'Glasgow' should serve to reinforce the mutuality of subjection to these hegemonic forces rather than provide a distraction through an insistence on an exclusive locality. Such a fact stands in contrast to the Glasgow and Clydeist West of Scotland which forms the backdrop to McIlvanney's Laidlaw novels and indeed the overwhelming majority of his entire *oeuvre*.

Having earlier co-opted the language of nations and race to shed light on Kelman's working-class literary fiction I want to attempt a similar undertaking with McIlvanney's working-class popular fiction. In this way we shall see how the structure and social role of the two genres dictate the manner in which a sense of place may be created by the author. In *Imagined Communities* Benedict Anderson suggests that material culture plays a vital part in the conception of the modern nation. National communities are, in the twentieth century and beyond, no longer reliant on geography as their primary defining characteristic. Rather they are perpetuated through the cultural discourses which comprise the quotidian, unremarkable rituals of everyday existence. As Anderson maintains,

An American will never meet, or even know the names of more than a handful of his 240,000,000-odd fellow Americans. He has no idea what they are up to at any one time. But he has complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity.²⁰

In this schema the cultural roots of nationalism are found to be analogous to those of religion in the manner in which they are interred in the mythology and iconography of death and mortality. It is no coincidence that, at the precise moment in European history when the rational values of the Enlightenment began to attack the foundations of hitherto infallible religion, the modern nation becomes an ideological and physical bulwark with which to fill the semiotic gap left when fatality has been rendered arbitrary by the negation of God. The nation represents a location of certainty and continuity:

If nation states are widely considered to be 'new' and 'historical', the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and, still more important, glide into limitless future.²¹

In McIlvanney's fiction, seemingly immemorial communities within identifiable geographical areas- and their absence- are made to occupy a central ground in the critique of a decline in social values which has occurred as a simple consequence of the decay of the industrial base of the traditional manufacturing industries. By affirming the continuing existence of these peripheral communities through his fiction, McIlvanney can hope to offer resistance to the conditions of post-industrial capitalism. These communities and outposts form what he considers 'decency's bunkers' (SL 30). Perhaps such a project is manifest most clearly in the final novel of the Laidlaw trilogy. *Strange Loyalties* differs from *Laidlaw* and *The Papers* in that the quest for a narrative resolution which Laidlaw embarks upon at the start of the novel is an explicitly personal one. Following the death of his brother Scott in an accident Jack

²⁰ Anderson, (2006), p. 26.

²¹ *ibid.* pp. 11- 12.

Laidlaw, in order to come to terms with the loss, returns to Graithnock, the town in which they grew up and in which Scott still lived. Essentially what Laidlaw is searching for are the past certainties embodied within the geo-cultural location of Graithnock; Graithnock as the textual Cenotaph or monument to Tam Docherty's clenched fist. It represents a quest for a community which can only find viable existence in peripheral culture and which is, in turn, represented to the central culture by means of popular fiction.

For a critic like Ray Ryan, this community and this culture is one constructed primarily along nationalist lines to the extent that McIlvanney's writing displays a reductive, essentialist and recidivist tendency to search for an, 'ethnically tinged foundational myth.'²² Through this paradigm Ryan reads *Strange Loyalties* as a national allegory. The search for meaning undertaken by Laidlaw may superficially be about reasserting a sense of order in a personal life rocked by the sudden death of a brother, but on closer analysis it is about the civic stock of the conception of the nation in society:

... 'Scott' is a free floating signifier hovering outside of the text who must be grounded in the daily commerce of Scottish life. The search for 'Scott' attempts to re-insert nationality as an active principle in everyday Scottish life and re-establish Scotland as a continuous and cohesive cultural space.²³

The textual evidence in support of such a reading appears to be compelling, not least in the manner in which McIlvanney attempts to define ideas of positive Scottishness through a process of negation. Familiar dual nationalist lines are demarcated; Scotland is what England is not and crisis is imminent at the locations where the geographical and cultural space separating the two nations becomes terminally attenuated.

²² Ray Ryan, 'The Contours of Republicanism: William McIlvanney and the Geography of Difference', *Ireland and Scotland: Literature and Culture, State and Nation, 1966- 2000*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) pp 37- 90, p. 86.

²³ *ibid.* p. 80.

The search for 'Scott' takes Laidlaw back to the Borders town of Selkirk, where the two brothers were born. On drawing closer to Selkirk he recalls his father's characterisation of the areas as

...the place that had defined Scottishness at its weakest edge, where it meets Englishness, had lost its sense of itself and blurred into anonymity. (SL 101)

It finds its urban reflection in the next destination for Laidlaw's quest; Edinburgh's New Town,

... the most English place in Scotland, built to be a Hanoverian clearing house of Scottish identity. The very names declare what's happening, like an announcement of government policy in stone: you have Princes Street and George Street and Queen Street... Any way you count it, the result is the defeat of Scottishness. (SL 118)

If for the present we are to continue employing the critical framework suggested by Ryan, then it becomes apparent that what McIlvanney appears to be insisting upon is a rather essentialist elision between geographical space and national culture. However a more nuanced reading would yield the suggestion that the search for 'Scott' is an enterprise inherently bound in notions of *class* culture, not national culture, and what actually takes place in *Strange Loyalties*, as in the rest of McIlvanney's work, is an elision of specific geographic spaces and a class culture which the ideology of late capitalism has attempted to render anachronistic. Ryan is mistaken in his reading of *Strange Loyalties* as a nationalist text. Rather it is a novel which draws on localised communities-geographical and imagined- and encodes them with a set of values which McIlvanney identifies as being indistinguishable from social class.

The great patriarch of twentieth century Scottish literature, Hugh MacDiarmid, was born only a matter of miles from Selkirk. His literary-political agenda, like that of McIlvanney's, is one punctuated by the intersection of, sometimes competing and sometimes complementary, nationalist and class ideologies. In his epic poem, *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (1926), the titular

thistle is used as a shifting literary device to symbolise a Scotland in flux which must seek renewal by abandoning the old myths and icons of its pseudo-historical past. In one of the text's most memorable passages the poetic voice of the eponymous protagonist captures the events of the Langholm Common Riding, a yearly ritual which is replicated in towns throughout the Borders:

Drums in the Walligate, pipes in the air,
Come and hear the cryin' o' the Fair.

A' it used to be, when I was a loon
On Common-Ridin' Day in the Muckle Toon.

...

And Scotland followin' on ahint
For threepenny bits spleet-new frae the mint.²⁴

The same ritualised memory is at the forefront of Laidlaw's mind on his return to the Borders, yet the significance is emphatically different,

I tend to think of the Borders as the place of the horse. I like horses, especially if they've got Pat Eddery or Steve Cauthen up on them. They're where it was and I don't like the way it was. It's maybe a tribal memory. I'm sure my ancestors went on foot and had to fight the ones that sat on horses. (SL 106)

He has appropriated this tribal memory of a distinctly nationalist hue and recoded it as one recognisable primarily in terms of class. This is the case firstly in the historical sense of his ancestors being too poor to ride on horseback but also crucially in the effect the glib reference to the champion jockeys Eddery and Cauthen has in appropriating the image for a specific working class masculine culture in which Laidlaw plays a part-passive, part-active role; by dint of his formative years in Graithnock and by his experience as a police officer and a *flâneur* which engenders the fundamental inbetweenness of his situation.

Only through knowledge of the specific codes of this class-based culture, the recognisable old myths and icons of a pseudo-historical past, which the

²⁴ Hugh MacDiarmid, *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, lines 455- 469, *Hugh MacDiarmid, Selected Poetry*, ed. Alan Riach & Michael Grieve, (Manchester, Carcanet, 1992), pp. 25- 113.

reader may gain either from first-hand experience or vicariously from exposure to a number of discourses which propagate it- crime fiction being a pre-eminent example- can access to this community be achieved. It is a class community, but one in which divisions are constructed and maintained not by economics but by discourse.

The veracity of the one-time historical existence of this putative community is of no consequence to McIlvanney's agenda, what is important is that its existence is affirmed in the realm of cultural discourse. In doing so it undergoes a process of legitimisation through its repositioning within the central culture. In turn, this new position allows free access to those readers who belong -or part belong- to that central culture. The 'Graithnock' which Laidlaw searches for in *Strange Loyalties*, and which is present to a differing degree across his entire *oeuvre*, becomes a repository for the values of the specific normalising judgement which is part of McIlvanney's resistance to capitalism's hegemony.

In the opening pages of *Strange Loyalties*, Laidlaw's drive to Graithnock is slowed by the conditions he encounters in his mind as much as on the road:

The nearer I came to the place, the less confidence I had in what I was doing... I felt as if I was driving into a fog bank... I tried to establish landmarks. It wasn't easy. (SL 20)

If Laidlaw struggles to locate Graithnock from out of the fog of McIlvanney's text then it is not a problem that the alert reader with a map of Ayrshire to hand should share. The evidence given of its situation 'only twenty miles' (SL 20) from Glasgow, surrounded by the towns of Fenwick- where Brian Harkness' father lives- to the West and Troon- home to Scott's university friend Dave Lyons- to the South hails Graithnock as the textual representation of the author's own home town of Kilmarnock.

This most lowland of towns, whose nineteenth century prosperity was brought upon by the exploitation of the surrounding coalfields and the establishment of heavy engineering works, occupies a unique position as unwitting birthplace of two cultural phenomena which were to come to constitute prevailing images of mythological, tartanised and ahistorical Scotland. The town not only gives its name to the first edition of Robert Burns' poetry which was published in 1786, but it is also, until the end of 2011 at least, the home of that most globally popular brand of Scottish whisky, Johnnie Walker.

It is significant that McIlvanney has chosen to deny this Kilmarnock a textual existence throughout his fiction by his glossing of the town as Graithnock. By fictionalising Kilmarnock as Graithnock he effectively removes his textual location from the narrative of historical change by erecting around it a rhetorical *cordon sanitaire* and brings it under the benevolent tyranny of his authorial control. Through the imposition of this control, the textual and cultural location of Graithnock becomes a mimesis of the centre of McIlvanney's discourse concerning class; a discourse which is the lodestar of his literary project. With this insistence on West of Scotland working class experience as the normalising gaze by which all experience may be understood and which material and social relations can be explained, McIlvanney succeeds in writing himself into something of an impasse. Whilst it is relatively simple to highlight the extent that such an endeavour can offer a basis for resistance against the civic decay of the post-industrial malaise it is an undertaking fraught with compromise and contradiction.

The essence of McIlvanney and Kelman's discrete resistance is to be found in the act of presenting a peripheral culture as a viable alternative to the core. This is manifest in a very literal way within the geographies of their texts. In an essay examining the role of Glasgow in fiction, Dorothy Porter McMillan outlines

the particular peculiarities of the city's housing distribution which serves to create a division within Glasgow - and within the collective imagination - which is not a concern in the artistic depictions of many other cities.

The invention of suburbia supported by blue trains [Greater Glasgow's commuter rail network] and motor cars worked to protect the professional and managerial-classes from too-disturbing proximity to urban degradation. But the *coup de grace* to the notion of the readable city comes with the development of outer-city schemes: it is no longer necessary to by-pass the others, their existence need scarcely be recognised at all. For why would anyone go to Drumchapel, Easterhouse, Castlemilk and so on unless they lived there or knew someone who did, knew personally that is, the powerless and the dispossessed.²⁵

The comparison between Kelman and McIlvanney's depiction of life in one of these peripheral housing schemes, Drumchapel, is an instructive one. Let us make the assumption that the Drumchapel given textual existence in *Laidlaw* is roughly contemporary to the first publication of that novel in 1977, and likewise that the Drumchapel of *Strange Loyalties* is the Drumchapel of the early nineties. Between these two representations, which bookend the long nineteen-eighties, we can trace a clear decline in the fabric of that localised community. In *Laidlaw* the eponymous detective inspector is accompanied by a young constable to Jennifer Laidlaw's Drumchapel home to inform her parents of her death. At this point Drumchapel continues to function as a community almost despite itself:

Glasgow folk have to be nice people. Otherwise, they would have burned the place to the ground years ago. (L 36)

The inhabitants of Drumchapel are 'Glasgow folk', the same people who McIlvanney identified in the passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter as having 'domesticated the beast' of industrial capitalism. On arriving at the Lawson's house Laidlaw's news is met with understandable grief from Jennifer's mother. Her father Bud Lawson, the archetype of Glasgow working-class

²⁵ Dorothy Porter McMillan, 'Imagining a City', *Chapman*, No. 63, January 1991, pp. 42- 50, p. 47.

masculinity, the man whose enormous hands ‘had driven rivets on Clydeside for thirty years’ (L 15), produces an equally predictable show of stoicism. In order to comfort his wife he is reduced to going across the landing ‘to get a neighbour in’ (L 38). It is an act which echoes the opening chapter of *Docherty* where Tam Docherty, a more heroic paradigm of the working-class man, is robbed of agency at the time of his wife giving birth. The strength of the Graithnock community is such that Tam is confined to his neighbour’s house while that neighbour tends to Jenny Docherty who has just gone into labour.

The Drumchapel of *Strange Loyalties* is a changed place into which ‘Graithnock’ no longer fits. Its inhabitants have been conspired against by a change in economic circumstances leading to profound social change,

... while their parents’ poorness had been part of a cohesive community that gave at least the support of shared values, theirs was part of a widespread rootlessness. (SL 207)

In this context it is easy to see why, in the course of the internal monologue which constitutes the narrative voice of *Strange Loyalties*, Laidlaw would refer to Drumchapel as ‘a badly conceived place’ (SL 205). The meaning of the phrase is ambiguous; ostensibly it references the abject failure of the high-rise social planning experiment which motivated by the best intentions took place after the Second World War. Laidlaw’s description of Drumchapel’s physical appearance as ‘penal architecture’ (L 36) hints at more than just a criticism of Basil Spence’s Brutalist follies. It draws attention to the negative manner in which places like Drumchapel have come to be ‘badly conceived’ in the collective imagination; an imagination which is constituted entirely out of the cultural products of discourse.

Kelman’s decision to deny Drumchapel a textual existence in *Hines* by referring to it as ‘the District of D’ bares similarities to McIlvanney’s technique of glossing Kilmarnock as ‘Graithnock’. It stems from a desire to control how

locations carry meaning. For Rab Hines Drumchapel is the opposite of a badly conceived place. His recollection of growing up as a child in the housing scheme is tinged with nostalgia:

There can be long hot summers in the District of D. Dont let anybody tell you different. And it can be good in the long hot summers.
(BH 80)

As always with Hines' internal discourse, a descent into pastiche seems a distinct possibility. The threat of this is nullified though when we realise that the material conditions of life in Drumchapel are preferable to those in the tenement building in which Hines currently lives. While filling the tin bath for his son in their living room Hines reflects that

There are bathrooms in Drumchapel; Hines was never bathed in front of the fire. This experience will remain with the boy for the rest of his days.
(BH 149)

Such a revelation skews the perspective from which the reader approaches the peripheral culture which this ambiguous and shifting Drumchapel represents. This element of defamiliarisation, combined with the deliberate opaqueness of Kelman's textual geography, creates a contrast with the tightly controlled representation of place in McIlvanney's fiction.

For the former, the crux of his project is the representation of peripheral cultures which can then be laid open to interpretation in the same way as a core culture might be. By steadfastly refusing to create a definite link between his culture and the city in which he sets his texts, Kelman facilitates a peripheral culture which is plural and shifting. While the formal politics of his texts encourage this ambiguity, their aesthetics make them readily consumable only by those who are conversant in the codes of the centre culture. For the reader to reach an understanding of the peripheral culture which Kelman creates in his texts, it must almost be presupposed that they possess a greater degree of cultural capital than those avowedly culturally and economically impoverished

(where this is a value judgement made in reference to the norms of the centre culture) characters of the texts. In this way Kelman's textual 'Glasgow' is always open to appropriation by the core culture and the opportunity for it to become a site of resistance is always open to compromise depending on the tastes of that reader.

On the other hand, McIlvanney presents a specific peripheral culture and relocates it as the centre of meaning, the normalising judgement, by which to demonstrate the deficiencies of the core culture. The mode in which he chooses to represent his geo-cultural locations is very different to that used by Kelman, but it retains a similar connection to the core. By engaging with the crime fiction canon he is entrusting his narrative of resistance to a mimesis which relies on conventions born out of the social wants, tastes and needs of its readership. The compromise which McIlvanney's Glasgow and 'Graithnock' must be exposed to is a result of the fact that these locations are ensconced within a genre which is historically and fundamentally linked to social escapism and not social engagement.

Conclusion

Identifying compromise in the politically engaged work of James Kelman and William McIlvanney should not be confused with considering that political commitment compromised. Both authors use their fiction to attempt a resistance of the hegemony of late capitalism by giving a voice to peripheral cultures.

The preceding three chapters have suggested the ways in which these forms of resistance differ from each other in their imaginative composition and attempted execution. McIlvanney turns to a popular genre as a way of allowing his peripheral cultures a voice with far-reaching resonance. In contrast, Kelman adopts a highly stylised formal aesthetic as he attempts, to escape the limitations placed on meaning by traditional realist fiction. The vulnerability of the political effectiveness of their fiction is a result of the meanings which their texts are laid open to within the culture of late capitalism.

The naturalised legitimate culture of the centres of power work to control narratives of resistance which are considered a threat to the *status quo*. As rehearsed above, the means of control are insidious and sophisticated. Through a process of legitimisation, of adhering to convention, of appropriation and cultural consecration, the centre culture attempts to profoundly compromise the criticism and resistance with which it is faced. The balanced compromises that the two authors make in order to negotiate a way of viably representing their culture by evading, if not escaping, the ideological conventions of the forms in which they write speaks to their skill as artists.

What this thesis concludes then, is that in the final analysis, the success - or otherwise- of the literary-political projects of Kelman and McIlvanney can only be assessed at the instances that their texts are consumed as cultural artefacts: at the point where materiality becomes meaning in the mind of the reader and in a wider collective imagination. The writer of this thesis has neither the space, nor the skills to investigate and draw conclusions about who constitutes McIlvanney's and Kelman's intended and actual readership. For the present, we must content ourselves with generalisations which identify the kind of people who read their work and what their wants, needs, tastes and fears might be.

In its own way, a thesis like this is part of the larger process of buttressing the hegemonic power relations of late capitalism. In the act of examining the discourses of peripheral cultures we are always-already involved in an undertaking which seeks to categorise, to contain and to appropriate. We might emphatically highlight the fundamental conceits upon which such a social hierarchy is built and aver the legitimacy of the peripheries. However, it is not cynicism which renders us unable to read these textual resistances as anything other than capitalism's safety valve. In the act of appropriating these narratives of resistance the centres of power so too render them appropriate. The imperium controls the voice in which the resistance is heard and, in doing so, serves to nullify the threat.

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