Under the Influence: Addiction and Literary Politics in Five Scottish Contemporary Novels

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ABSTRACT

As Scotland begins a new era in its history after 300 years of being governed from Westminster, many contradictory effects on the cultural, historical, literary and economic life of the country have begun to be put into perspective. The focus of this thesis is the dystopic impulses in some key texts of contemporary urban Scottish literature since Alasdair Gray's *Lanark* was published in 1981. It argues that the defining moment in recent Scottish political and literary history was the failed 1979 Devolution Referendum and the devastating effects of eighteen years of Tory leadership on Scotland. Five chapters focus on works of urban fiction, mostly set in Glasgow and the West of Scotland: Alasdair Gray's *1982 Janine*, James Kelman's *How Late It Was, How Late,* Janice Galloway's *The Trick Is To Keep Breathing,* Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* and A.L. Kennedy's *So I Am Glad.* Chapter Seven comprises a review of more recent work to illustrate the continuing vibrancy and diversity of contemporary Scottish fiction and to help put the literary and political history into a contemporary context.

The main theme of this thesis is addiction, central to much of the content of these novels: to alcohol, drugs, sex, anorexia nervosa and bulimia. The principal argument of each novel suggests the incompatibility of the ideologies of the capitalist and imperialist systems with self-determination, social justice and questions of class and language. Patriarchy and the role of institutions are observed as repressive instruments of government and the embedded attitudes of state and family display a culture that exhibits many of the symptoms of the individual addict.

The effects of the widening poverty gap as a result of the "Thatcher Revolution" in Scotland are examined through the disrupted lives of the novels' protagonists; the effects of church and state on the lack of community are also considered. Cross-generational family dysfunction or absence of family is also evident in all the narratives depicting a culture of dependency and blame and a preponderance of sexual immaturity.

Scotland as a nation is portrayed as a victimized society with a history of an absence of entitlement, with respect not only to women, but also to men. Violent behavior is commonplace and condoned; the "hard man" is not purely a sensationalist fictional character. The impact of Scotland as a stateless nation is cumulative and has resulted in a certain social paralysis (denial) and hopelessness (hangover), leading to varying responses for three of the male protagonists in the novels of Gray, Welsh and Kelman: from escape to attempted suicide.

All but one of the novels uses first-person, interior monologue as a device to draw the reader into a more sympathetic understanding of the protagonists' pain and trauma, in

what are, generally disturbing and depressing narratives. The use of experimental literary devices and different literary genres is a hallmark of all the novels, from the mixing of realism and fantasy to the pared-down existential narrative illustrating the dysfunction and fragmentation of the protagonists. The voices of all but one clearly define the protagonists as coming from a working-class background. The fictional characters are all wrestling with their own demons in an effort to make some sense out of their lives, but humor is the saving grace of most, lifting the reader out of depths of despair that these stories might have engendered. There is, however a divide in the emotional and political perspective of the last two and most recent novels, enabling the protagonists to walk away from their dependent selves and serving notice to the repressive effects of church and state.

Women, however, are portrayed as symbolic creatures of an abused nation, near parodies of sexual stereotyping or off in the margins and footnotes in the three novels written by men. The two female novelists treat their subjects differently. While the content of the novels is no less despairing the female protagonists argue compellingly that madness might well be a viable alternative to their present situation. Evident in both are intimate observations on the themes of sudden death, family dysfunction, oppression, suppression and loneliness, leading one protagonist to display violent and abusive sexual behavior and the other to be on the verge of a mental breakdown. However, these two novels by women also point more positively toward recovery, as if coming out a period of intense therapy.

While all the novels portray a demonic view of Scottish life, there is honesty to the narratives, which helps to give them a distinctive voice and place internationally. If literature as protest is allied with political action in representing the need for Scotland to come to terms with itself and its history, these novels help take the first steps toward recovery and self-determination.

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To my grandchildren Bronwen Anna Spolsky,
Lyndsay Isabella Carter and Ella Ann Carter (and those not born),
with a purpose, that they read this

To John for his love and support

To Anne Doris whose love and friendship was an
education in itself

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Introduction

We are going to have a referendum!
Shall we join the British Empire?
Tom Leonard[1]

The failed Devolution Referendum, it could be argued, was a defining moment in Scottish history, not only to political history, but literary history as well. The year 1979 also marked the beginning of the Tories' eighteen-year reign and Scotland's claim for a larger share in its off-shore oil profits, as well as the social upheaval of the striking miners in north-east England. In addition, the Thatcher government's two abortive attempts at social engineering - the introduction of the poll tax, initially in Scotland, and the plan to privatize Scottish water - probably did more to ignite nationalistic spirit than any political party platform could achieve. On the international front, the idea of nation as a social organisation was being overwhelmed by the proliferation of transnational capital and the presence of U.S. military installations in Loch Lomond and elsewhere in the world.[2] As Donald Wesling observes:

> The failure of a political solution, in the devolution vote, was met by remarkable new initiatives in the substitute public spheres of publishing, history-writing, the arts and literature.... [W]ith few exceptions cultural work since 1979 [...], has manifested the re-routing of political meanings, by grand display or wry irony or noble idealism or psycho-social repression. (86)

Alasdair Gray's *Lanark* (1981), a novel that is much more than the sum of a life in four books in its importance to Scotland's literary canon, because it dealt with contemporary Scotland as a country at a crossroads, was published three years after the Referendum vote. It is a literary landmark as Gavin Wallace notes and can be "likened to earlier enduring literary landmarks like *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (1926) and *Sunset Song* (1932)"[3] in its importance to Scottish letters. Scottish narrative since 1979, Donald Wesling has noted, contains a surprising number of novels told in the first-person - monologic in utterance and often a combination of monologue-dialogue in style. He argues that there is a possible connection between "this prominent sometimes spectacular group of writings to a Scottish national consciousness" [4] in the "congealed event" (82) of the narrowly lost referendum vote and its aftermath.

The novels examined in this thesis are Alasdair Gray's *1982 Janine,* James Kelman's *How Late It Was How Late,* Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting,* Janice Galloway's *The Trick Is To Keep Breathing and* A.L. Kennedy's *So I Am Glad.* Each of these novels could be considered as "politics-as-extreme repression". (ibid.) All are linked by the deeply disturbed condition of their protagonists. This condition is a "sickness" both individual and societal, portrayed in the Scottish novel of the 1980s and 1990s as "a sharp weapon in the battle for Scottish identity and autonomy", [5] according to Carmen Callil and Colm Toibin. This contrasts with much recent North American fiction, which has often been concerned with taking account of itself through historical fiction. Novels by Don DeLillo, Barbara Kingsolver, Russell Banks, Margaret Atwood, Andrea Barrett, Charles Frazier, Gore Vidal and others are the retelling of their nations' histories.[6] Gore Vidal, for example has for the past thirty years, says reviewer Stephen Smith, "never actually stopped channeling his own vivid dramatic readings of American history through the big names and big events in one ... big book after another". (ibid) "We keep revising our past to keep it consistent with who we think we are",[7] says Kenneth Millard. Much of Scotland's recent literary output has left the re-examination of its historical roots to the history books and popular historical and romantic fiction rather than the historical novel.

Contemporary Scottish literature has probably more cultural parallels to recent Irish literature, in its centrifugal rather than centripetal relationship as a "peripheral" culture.[8] Ireland has also seen an extraordinary explosion in fiction in the last twenty-five years and a "refusal to be content to work within any supposed tradition",[9] says Dermot Bolger in the introduction to *the New Picador Book of Contemporary Irish Literature.* One of the differences between the two literatures, however, is that with respect to Irish literature "few see themselves as social commentators". (xx) It could, however, be argued, that Irish literary political events have already been portrayed in the plays of Sean O'Casey, J.M. Synge and the novels of Bernard MacLaverty, early Brian Moore and others.

In the modern British novel, the late Malcolm Bradbury notes, in his book *The Modern British Novel,* "all the terms of my title - with the possible exception of the definite article - are contentious, or as we now say contested".[10] "Modern" he notes, referring to Stephen Spender's claim, forms only one tradition: that of the experimental and *avant-garde.* "Contemporary" is concerned with social questions and "the way we live now". (xi) Both aspects of "contemporary" are a preoccupation in the novels examined in this thesis, since the publication of *Lanark.* The thesis begins with *Lanark,* but does not examine it in detail. It is used mainly to delineate the time focus under discussion and the dystopic impulses of the other novels in focus.

The chief difference between Scottish and English contemporary literature (that is, not literature written in English, but concerned with social issues both in and out of England) is English literature's growing multicultural nature, its middle class voice, and the middle ground it chooses as its subject matter. There is, however, some of the same pre-occupation in the Eighties with the "Thatcher Revolution", which Bradbury argues was a "real revolution, which quickly transformed the social, political and cultural climate, and brought a well-established liberal consensus to an end". (396) The parallels include a discussion of deterioration of public spaces in cities, increasing crime rates, the problems of drugs and urban violence and, as Bradbury observes, "the rising problem of the "underclass", "those who did not share in the entrepreneurial opportunities the Eighties increasingly offered". (397) These topics are to be found in the novels of Martin Amis, Ian McEwan, Peter Ackroyd, Jim Crace and Salman Rushdie among the men, and Margaret Drabble and Angela Carter among the women.

However, more recently the novel south of the border has been dominated by the mores of the middle class as Showalter and Kennedy note. Elaine Showalter has observed in a review of Jeanette Winterson's novel *The.Powerbook,* that English literature

> is preoccupied by the perennial small change of romance. Writing about singles and couples, triangles and hexagons, about love instead of money, about sex instead of power, about the past instead of the future, they are measuring out in latte spoons the greatest social material offered to fiction since the 1840s. Stylish and fashionably satirical, they seem afraid to tackle big subjects and to take either the subjects or themselves seriously.[11]

This is a view, which Alison Kennedy confirms, in a 1999 interview where she discusses the English novel:

> They all seem to be bound by all sorts of very strange rules. Basically it has to be very tied to a plausible upper-middle class realism, so effectively it's going to be about people who work in publishing, people who work in television, women who don't work at all. And they all have adulterous affairs either in London or in country houses quite close to London, but they can't have passionate affairs.... The primary thing is to have as little emotion anywhere as possible.[12]

The dominant working class voice of all but one of the novels examined here sets them apart from England's fiction of the same period. It would, however, be facetious to suggest that Scotland has no middle-class voice in its contemporary literature. While Jennifer Wilson in *So I Am Glad,* Kennedy's second novel, is not rooted in working-class culture, she does live in shared accommodation in the heart of Glasgow's populous West End and works for a living. Kennedy is one of many middle-class Scottish writers. I will argue, however, that the overriding emphasis in the novels examined is their major pre-occupation with the state of the nation.

Since *Lanark* was published in 1981, the output and quality of literature in Scotland has been impressive and shows no sign of being a mere blip. Rather, it is a literature which has been ahead of its country's politics in terms of its stand on self-determination and its dissatisfaction with the economic and social disparities of the political system. A "passion for liberty", says Prof. H.J. Paton "runs right through Scottish literature and political thinking".[13] It is a passion which, it could be argued, stems from a conflict, rather than a confusion of identity, giving literature not only a role in reflecting society, but also a part in the political struggle of the country. The novel in Ireland and Scotland, say Carmen Callil and Colm Toibin "fill[s] in gaps, spaces between the public and the private" ... "and seems to strengthen a fragile identity". (x) The success of the Scottish novel in contemporary literature, as Douglas Gifford observes, "refuse[s] to accept the old polarities"[14] giving contemporary Scottish literature its distinctive voice and place internationally.

The diversity of Scottish voices and pressure by younger writers to be heard was the impetus for the emergence of influential small presses in Scotland. In both Scotland and Ireland radical small presses have played an important role in fostering the growth of indigenous work, while both countries have benefited from a pressure to allow young voices to be heard. In Scotland, Duncan McLean's Clocktower Press is an example of a publishing venture born out of writers' frustration to be published. His early efforts, along with those of James Meek, were photocopied pamphlets of short stories mailed out to individuals and small groups, giving writers like Gordon Legge and Alan Warner their

start.[15] Under Peter Kravitz's editorship at Polygon, (now an imprint of Edinburgh University Press), both James Kelman and then Janice Galloway launched their careers. Edinburgh publisher Canongate also played a pivotal role not just in reprinting Scottish classics, but in publishing *Lanark* and welcoming Kevin Williamson's Rebel Inc., which published Laura Hird and Toni Davidson. Janice Galloway and Hamish Whyte, in turn, gave Irvine Welsh his debut with an excerpt from *Trainspotting* in *New Writing Scotland* (1991). Welsh subsequently sold *Trainspotting* to English publisher Jonathan Cape, whose Scots-born editor Robin Robertson also published Alan Warner and Alison Kennedy.

In a tightly organized literary community, authors helped each other get published and in Duncan McLean's case embarked on publishing ventures with little capital, but a fierce determination that new voices should be heard. This was a far cry from the days when Hugh MacDiarmid would, says Peter Kravitz "start arguments with himself, changing his mind from month to month as if only to open up areas of debate [16] in an environment where little dissent was evident.

A genesis of much help and inspiration to Scottish writers, however, goes to poet Edwin Morgan who, as a board member of the journal *Scottish International*, ran extracts from *Lanark* in the early 1970s, a full decade before it was published. (xv) While Gray and Kelman were instrumental in helping either practically or in a literary sense all five authors examined here, Irvine Welsh especially owes a linguistic debt to Kelman's popularizing of the use of the vernacular in fiction. Janice Galloway has also benefited from both Gray's vision and the experimental structure of his novels, together with Kelman's use of stream-of-consciousness style and blending of dialogue and prose.

The five novels examined here are linked through the addictions of their protagonists. Addiction, however, is examined not only through the prism of intoxication, but psychologically as a crutch for larger societal issues in these novels. All of the protagonists are loners, outside the societal norm, all suffering from some kind of obsession/addiction. Compulsion to and obsession with alcohol, drugs and sex, as well as bulimia and anorexia nervosa, suggest the feelings of anxiety, insecurity, blame, dependence, resentment, violence and aggression experienced by the individual. They also reflect the ills of a society where social inequality prevails and physical surroundings are those of a troubled and changing world. Jock McLeish in *1982 Janine* and Sammy Samuels in *How Late It Was, How Late*, have experienced huge structural change and upheaval in Glasgow and its environs. Samuels fits the profile of poverty, substance

abuse and violence, while McLeish is psychologically dependent on alcohol and addicted to masturbation, which only worsens his damaged psyche.

In Scotland, where whisky is not only a valuable commercial commodity, but has also acquired the mythological status of "water of life", its consumption has become an established part of the culture. It has lead to an ambivalent attitude toward it and a society largely in denial as to its detrimental public health and social consequences. "[T]he condition", says Griffith Edwards in a book-length study of the subject is "downplayed or made into a joke and met with teasing forgiveness rather than condemnation".[17] He also observes that alcohol is a lightning conductor for other social tensions. (91). "Five times more Britons have serious drink-related problems now than in the Sixties, according to Eric Appleby, director of Alcohol Concern".[18] Dysfunctional behavior too is cross-generational. In *So I Am Glad,* Jennifer Wilson's abusive sexual practices can be seen as rooted in her own abuse as a child, while Joy Stone in *The Trick Is To Keep Breathing* comes from a family which can aptly be described as the walking wounded. Mark Renton's parents in *Trainspotting* are of little help and are caught up with their own problems. And Jock McLeish in *1982 Janine* sees little separation between the repressive effects of church, state and his own family. The novels reflect a country in a downward spiral of structural and emotional neglect.

Trainspotting and *How Late It Was, How Late,* reflect the stark class divisions of two cities, Edinburgh and Glasgow, where the term working-class hardly encompasses a generation which might never have had a permanent job, resulting in social and emotional consequences that this kind of poverty and insecurity spawns. While Jock McLeish and Joy Stone inhabit, through their jobs, a middle-class lifestyle, there is a discomfort felt by both in embracing a bourgeois existence. Kennedy's *So I Am Glad* displays none of these class divisions or insecurities, allowing her voice to clearly depict her own and society's dysfunction. Kelman, Welsh (and Luke Sutherland, discussed later), all have a strong interest in linguistic strategy and bring their own distinctive voice to their protagonists' speech. Douglas Gifford has argued that a recognizable genre of Scottish fiction has emerged

> suited to writers growing out of and coping with the inherited pressures of a culture full of self-questioning, which feels itself marginalised or peripheral, yet resents bitterly the forced anxieties of class, language, religion, constraining gender roles.[19]

Class divisions depict the voice of a stateless nation experiencing very difficult and unduly lengthy birth pains.

Gray's Jock McLeish and Galloway's Joy Stone are preoccupied with Protestant guilt and the destructive forces of patriarchy and capitalism. Kelman's Sammy Samuels and Welsh's Mark Renton are characters from common socio-economic backgrounds, in tales of two cities, where only a minority enjoy the benefits of sustainable employment, adequate housing and good healthcare and where the deadening effects of alcohol and drugs guarantee a life without a future. Kennedy's M. (Mercy) Jennifer Wilson is struggling to make sense out of her life (and her country) and to lay to rest the demons of a troubled childhood. It is not a coincidence that most of the novels examined here exhibit a preoccupation with the excretion of bodily liquids and fluids. In the case of Galloway's *The Trick Is To Keep Breathing* this becomes psychological as well as physical in Joy's bulimic purging. As Berthold Schoene-Harwood has observed referring to Jock McLeish (and the works might apply to Scotland itself): "[h]aving borne more than it can stomach, the body releases itself from the ego's death-bound strategies of self assertion quite simply by throwing up".[20]

It is an approach to literature that Douglas Gifford has said is

> often a kind of therapeutic autobiography, and essentially to do with the protagonist as loner and outsider, as embodiment of unfulfilled desires, sexual, social, and cultural, or as casualty of traumatic events that force their conscious and unconscious minds into bizarre and yet therapeutic strategies for survival and healing.[21]

The novels examined by Alasdair Gray, James Kelman, Janice Galloway, Irvine Welsh and A.L. Kennedy are probably among the most widely recognized and discussed modern Scottish texts, both nationally and internationally. They portray a demonic view of Scottish life, a very different Scotland from that too often considered as representative. None of the novels' protagonists has strong communal ties, either within a nuclear family or an extended family, or with religion. They are the loners and outsiders of contemporary urban culture in Scotland. Only one is in a loving relationship with anyone, which is stretching reality a little, because the lover in question is 375-year-old Cyrano de Bergerac. It is, however, a radical and provocative approach to literature and begs a like response. The literature is part political message, part stream-of-consciousness narrative that separates the country's contemporary urban fictional output, and sets it apart from the literatures of England, Ireland and even the United States. It is a literature of frustration, full of psychological hurts and protagonists retreating into sickness and madness, reflecting a victimized culture whose malaise is linked to the fact that its seat of government has for 300 years been far removed from its borders.

It is evident in the narratives under discussion that the first-person narrators, are unreliable, full of pain and suffering, victimized by their individual situations. Truth, it could be said, is the first casualty in these conflicts of the mind. This is also evident in *Trainspotting* where no single voice is allowed to dominate but, as Kasia Boddy observes the voice is at the same time "both bleaker and less despairing ... The fundamental difference may be Welsh's lack of self-consciousness and the fact that no single narrative voice is allowed to dominate".[22] The protagonists are all wrestling with their own demons, continually juxtaposing different points of view, yet the first-person narrators do encourage understanding and empathy and while the endings are ambiguous, they are not bereft of hope.

There is, however, a theatricality and a political sensibility to all of them. Two of them were successful plays on the international stage. It is the flamboyant use of language, the comedic/parodic humour, despite the serious and depressing nature of the issues, which bring the characters to life on the page. This is especially true in *Trainspotting, The Trick Is To Keep Breathing* and *So I Am Glad*, given the subject matter in each: a humorous novel about heroin addiction; the lighter side of death and dying; and a fantasy where child abuse haunts the protagonist and Cyrano de Bergerac is both urban lover and gardener. The novels' technique is to use humor as survival, as well as signalling a departure from a literary tradition steeped in the mythic mists of time. The novels are also widely experimental and inventive in their use of language and form to illustrate the trauma of the protagonists in divergent and creative ways. The reader is drawn into the protagonists' inner thoughts through the first-person narratives. In *Trainspotting* the distinctive linguistic styles of the four main characters act as a delineation of each character's identity and a device which has led to a fair amount of cloning of the novel's speech patterns.

The two most overtly political novels, *1982 Janine* and *How Late It Was, How Late* act as a political overview for the rest. But what unifies them all is that the writers see themselves simultaneously as social commentators and as storytellers.

In Gray and Kelman the political context is more finely drawn showing both writers remaining true to the old urban experiences around them which shaped their perspective (both left school at age 15), but now cry out for societal change. Gray can't keep his politics off the page, while Kelman's polemic politics are always "off the page", embedded figuratively in the existential style of Camus and Kafka. Kelman strives toward an internationalism in his arguments. Both *1982 Janine* and *How Late It Was, How Late* describe a sensibility and a connection with the urban which goes beyond politics and into

the realms of an organic relationship. Both are centred on troubled individuals who could be tracked on Margaret Atwood's Basic Victim Positions[23] continuum in *Survival,* (1972) her thematic guide to Canadian literature, where Canada as a colonized country unduly influenced by her neighbor to the south is depicted in its literature's characters as paralyzed by fear. There is a preponderance, she says, of "dramatizations of failure" and "an obsession with surviving [which] can become the will not to survive" (34.). Literature, she notes, always has a central symbol and for Canada the appropriate one is the "collective victim". (36) While *1982 Janine* is not a Glasgow novel, the sensibility is urban and Glaswegian. Jock is a highly skilled security engineer for a nuclear facility "wired for war" near the Firth of Clyde. He's the son of a miner and therefore working class by birth, and Glaswegian by sensibility because perhaps Gray couldn't write any other way. Even though Kelman does not signpost Glasgow the way Gray does in *Lanark*, Sammy Samuels' voice in *How Late It Was, How Late* is so distinctly Glaswegian that we couldn't imagine him living anywhere else. Seeing Glasgow as a city in crisis Sammy's attitudes and expectations are predisposed. Much like the often-quoted passage from *Lanark*, he is alienated from his environment allowing us to imagine living there.[24] What we see is a city of great disparities where nearly half of the population live in designated areas of deprivation and nearly half of the primary school pupils receive free meals, while more than half of the city's council tenants rely on income support. Glasgow, on the surface, seems affluent, but the city is fighting for its life in an effort to stem the flow of its absent citizenry to the suburbs, towns and villages nearby and rebalance the effects of urban despair.[25]

It is this urban blight in Glasgow and its environs and in Edinburgh which is a focus of concern in most of the novels. In *1982 Janine* Gray uses as his palette a country without say in its own destiny. Here, corporate capitalism dictates economics, but pays little financial dividends and Westminster creates national insecurity. In Kelman's *How Late It Was How Late* we watch the demise of the city's industrial base and the lot of the petty criminal who drinks too much and ekes out an existence under the repressive eye of the Department of Social Services, the police and the medical establishment. Galloway's *The Trick Is To Keep Breathing* primarily depicts a patriarchal culture with little sympathy for individual self-determination. The novel also depicts similar institutional repression, this time in the form of a healthcare system unable to cope with the mental dysfunction of the country's populace. It is, however, the other face of Edinburgh which most shocks and depresses. In the midst of conspicuous wealth a group of young men succumb to a slow death from cheap heroin or AIDS in Welsh's *Trainspotting*. It is no

wonder that Alison Kennedy, the youngest novelist of the group in *So I Am Glad* implies she has inherited not only a dysfunctional society but a country reeling from years of neglect. Dystopian impulses are evident in all five novels which are seen as articulating a strong degree of social criticism, although only one text (and one not looked at in detail here Alasdair Gray's *Lanark)* may truly be categorized as dystopian fiction.

"By definition", argues M. Keith Booker "dystopian literature is not so much a specific genre as a particular kind of oppositional and critical energy or spirit". [26] For example, *Lanark* with its futuristic theme and negative utopian narrative, situating itself in direct opposition to utopian idealism, belongs more properly to the genre. In particular, three novels, Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1924), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and George Orwell's *1984* (1949) are the defining texts of the genre illustrating the

> vividness of their engagement with real-world social and political issues, and in the scope of their critique of the societies on which they focus. The issues explored by these three texts can be grouped roughly under the six rubrics of science and technology, religion, sexuality, literature and culture, language and history.[27]

Booker observes that a number of literary works, especially modern ones, emphasize dystopian impulses which would not be considered clear examples of dystopian literature. These energies and spirit are evident in the five novels examined here and play a role in the recent widespread pessimism that there has been engendered a dystopian mood in popular culture as a whole, which has inspired popular films like Stanley Kubrick's version of *A Clockwork Orange.* (18) There are parallels in the novels examined, as I shall discuss later, with the proviso that it is not the future or the past that is depicted as nightmare in contemporary Scottish novels, but the present.

Trainspotting parallels *A Clockwork Orange* with respect to the ghettoizing of marginal groups of young men in deprived areas that breed violence. *Trainspotting* can be read as a critique on consumer capitalism, lack of adequate housing and healthcare and the effects of what the widening poverty gap does to people. It could also be read as a plea for legalization of drugs and an indictment of how the justice system treats addicts as criminals. *How Late It Was, How Late* can be interpreted as a warning against the runaway effects of capitalism and the destructive structural effects of globalization on the individual. Arguably *1982 Janine* and *The Trick Is To Keep Breathing* can be seen as a result of the abuses of patriarchy, religion and capitalism, combining under the chill of Thatcherite politics to paralyze political self-determination.

Statistical data of the extremes within Scottish and British society in a "trainspotting" of the dire social consequences of political and capitalist malaise in

contemporary society cannot be discounted. Scotland is the number one country in Western Europe for teenage pregnancies, [28] and in a corollary of family dysfunction, British divorce rates, until recently, the highest in Europe.[29] Homicides in Scotland, also until recently, were nearly double those of England and Wales combined.[30] The male death rate in the mid-1980s was the highest in Western Europe,[31] while the poverty gap in a United Nations report published in 2000 revealed that the richest 20 per cent earned ten times more than the poorest 20 per cent in Britain – the widest gap in Europe.[32] Edinburgh in the mid-1980s had the worse AIDS per capita of anywhere in Western Europe. Oxfam listed Craigmillar, a housing-scheme near Edinburgh, as a developing country in order to qualify for aid.[33] "In the 1970s", historian Christopher Harvie notes "Scotland had five times the alcoholism rate of England".[34]

Scottish fiction has often been written in the tradition of social realism. Yet it also shows strong links between realism and fantasy. Scottish fiction frequently operates on these two levels in the novels of Hogg, Mackay Brown, Stevenson, Spark and others. There are also strong ties with the supernatural in ghost stories, folk and fairy tales and the "spectres of the past impinging on the present ...[as] the natural and supernatural are as much a whole as are the past and present",[35] observes Peter Zenzinger. This mixing of genres and literary styles is a touchstone for several of the novels examined here, primarily the realism and fantasy of Alasdair Gray's *1982 Janine* and the dark surrealist, magic realism of A.L. Kennedy's *So I Am Glad* which Kennedy uses in the tradition of Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and others to weave a story which is at once dreamlike and realistic in rendering events that are in themselves absurd or impossible.

It could be argued, on one level, however, that *Trainspotting* also fits the meaning of a doubled telling as a fiction of social realism and parody. Galloway, while less satirical than Welsh in *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing,* manages through the use of interior monologue to make a story about loss both self-lacerating and poignant while losing none of her biting wit. Kelman relies on the symbolism of Sammy Samuels' blindness for his inability to see his way out of his current predicament, other than escaping to England. This situation could describe the dilemma of Scotland at the time the novel was written. Above all, the novels examined here clearly exhibit their Scottishness.

Scottish fiction has produced a fertile, if contested, terrain, for women. In drama and poetry Liz Lochead was a strong voice in the 1970s. In 1989, Janice Galloway's feminist debut novel *The Trick Is To Keep Breathing,* heralded the appearance of a voice for contemporary Scottish women, long excluded by patriarchy and Protestantism. Alison Kennedy benefited, as she has acknowledged, by following Galloway's ground-breaking work. Douglas Gifford argues there is little doubt that " Janice Galloway's *The Trick Is To Keep Breathing* (1989) and A.L. Kennedy's *Looking For the Possible Dance* (1993) represent the high points of the contemporary novels' questioning of gender roles, of personal, familial, and social obligation."[36] It is, however, Galloway who confronted the entrenched male attitudes of west of Scotland society, in her collection of short stories, *Blood* (1991) in which "Fearless" and "Scenes From the Life" (23, 29, 26 and 27, for example), satirize what is clearly an example of Glasgow gallows humor. Kennedy too examines the somewhat macabre and Gothic aspects of Scottish humor in *Now That You're Back* with "The Mouseboks Family Dictionary" and the surrealism of "Penguins Have More Sense".

In an essay entitled "Gothic Revisited", Carol Anderson has noted the strong tradition of the Gothic in Scotland on three female contemporary novelists and discusses what could be more broadly interpreted as "represent[ing] the demands of the unconscious, the imagination and desire, transgressing literary and social conventions and provoking unease." She adds that "Gothic" is difficult to separate from related modes such as 'horror' fiction and fantasy" and she goes on to suggest that

> modern Gothic fiction, including work by various Scottish writers, offers cultural self-analysis, and examination of the relationship between past and present. .... A. L. Kennedy's *So I Am Glad*, with its portrayal of psychological damage and sado-masochistic sex, can be seen in a Gothic light.[37]

The Trick Is To Keep Breathing and *So I Am Glad* reflect a markedly greater role for writing by women in the last twenty years. While Galloway's was the first feminist Scottish contemporary work to speak intimately to many women on the themes and issues of sudden death, sex, oppression and suppression these are universal themes which have been addressed by other Scottish writers. Kennedy's treatment of one woman's pain is also a universal one, although as the youngest writer in the group, she is blessed in one sense by her youth, as well as her early success, but shoulders the burden of both. *So I Am Glad* has many of the hallmarks of several of the other novels - a first person female narrator, a community from which she is estranged, a past full of emotional abuse, while she emphasizes the cross-generational aspect of abuse, the abuser is herself and in similarities to other contemporary Scottish fiction the "masculine is the abject position".[38]

However, singularly and unambiguously Jennifer's story is a love story to herself, and it could be suggested, for her country.

While a number of novels published since *So I Am Glad* deal with familiar topics like the past, questions of alcoholism and identity, the tone, if not the content, is less tortured, less obsessive. *Our Fathers*, Andrew O'Hagan's examination of the legacies of Glasgow socialism never lays blame. Laura Hird's *Born Free* and John Burnside's *The Mercy Boys,* both address alcoholism but could be set anywhere. *Scar Culture*, Toni Davidson's psychological telling of child abuse and incest has a cross-Atlantic connection signaling, it could be argued, that a similar tale could be set in a distant trailer park. However, Jackie Kay's *Trumpet* and Luke Sutherland's *Jelly Roll*, both using music as a backdrop for stories about identity, are an indication that race as well as gender and sexual identity are suitable topics for Scottishness.

Two decades is a very short time to evaluate a nation's literary output. It is indicative of the quality of the literature under discussion, however, that so much has happened in the realm of fiction and politics since Alasdair Gray's *Lanark* was published in 1981 that the first novel discussed can now be seen as the beginning of a path toward self-determination.

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[3] Gavin Wallace and R. Stevenson eds. *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies.* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1993), p.3

[4] Wesling, p.81

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Chapter One

Alasdair Gray's *1982 Janine*

"If way to the better there be,
it exacts a full look at the worse".
Thomas Hardy[1]

Jock McLeish, the protagonist in Alasdair Gray's second novel *1982 Janine*, is a parodic version of a Scotsman, both argumentative and melancholic, who drinks too much and is damaged by a sexually repressive society. By Gray's own admission *1982 Janine* is "a sado-masochistic fetishistic fantasy"[2] and, one could add, a Swiftian assault to the senses. Gray portrays Jock as an alcoholic and a troubled fantasist in a fable of exploitation, or an exploitative fable, which bestrides realism and fantasy, misogyny and self-loathing. As such he tranforms himself into the feminine that he then subjects to sexual abuse. The link between strong drink and repressed sexuality is a well-trodden field in Scottish literature from Robert Burns' "Holy Willie's Prayer" to Hugh MacDiarmid's *A Drunk Man Looks At The Thistle,* which Gray acknowledges in the Epilogue as "[t]he matter of Scotland refracted through alcoholic reverie". (343) Add a little voyeurism ("Tam O'Shanter"), some hypocrisy (*Confessions of a Justified Sinner*), and you have the ingredients of a recipe for cultural pornography. Jock, like Scotland itself, is psychologically damaged and must become worse before he (or it) gets better.

Berthold Schoene-Harwood has observed that the novel could, however, also be read as a revision of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in its spectacle of one person's "subversive potential" [3] He notes that " [i]n both novels, the masculine self is portrayed as intolerably straitjacketed by totalitarianist constraints, eventually confronting itself in a claustrophobic, sado-masochistic encounter as potentially both an abject victim and complicitous perpetrator of despotic power". (ibid.) Schoene's interpretation depicts *1982 Janine* as fundamentally political, as it reflects the realities of a patriarchial culture and the totalitarian nature of Thatcherite government policies. These aspects are both national and universal: they reflect both the rise in globalization and American Imperialism in the early Eighties and they take place specifically three years after the defeat of the 1979 Referendum. Jock feels complicit in the destruction of society with his job as a security installation expert for the military and as a Scot in a country subservient to the political determination of England. Although unhappy with his role, Jock can be seen as part of Britain's 'Big Brother' security operations.

This novel is Gray's strongest argument in fiction for Scottish nationalism. He compares elsewhere nations in Europe smaller than Scotland, where political and cultural autonomy have been achieved, but the novel's genesis and symbolism belong quite unmistakably in his belief that Scotland needs to govern itself.

1982 Janine is a rape-revenge fantasy, but it is also an escape for the protagonist to a fantasy sex life, conveyed by an interior monologue, which Gray uses to pull the reader (ready or not) into the narrative as participant rather than observer. In a cinematic screenplay prose style, the novel is full of impromptu editing and rewriting. He emphasizes a voyeuristic fluidity of focus and makes the narrative filmic and predominantly visual, rather than reflective or speculative that an interior monologue might have produced. As Schoene-Harwood observes Jock is "both perpetrator and victim of systemic oppression". (131)

Jock, like several protagonists examined here, is on the edge of a breakdown, a state of mind which is based on both an individual malaise and the societal dysfunction of a country governed from outside its borders for over 300 years. Jock's excessive drinking contributes to, but also underlines, the emptiness of his life and the impotence of his fantasised misogynous violence. When sober, he is full of self-recrimination: "I am not a bad man, I am a good man". (56) However, he lacks the will to take responsibility for his actions, with more than half of the narrative consisting of graphic descriptions of exploitative sex fantasies, featuring stereotypes of women completely at the disposal of others, enjoying bondage.

Jock's narrative is both arresting and disquieting. Gray is equating sexual deficiency with Scotland's economic deficiency. He is saying that modern day society is pornographic and that Jock is only the product of this victimized culture. This interpretation is one that Susan Sontag uses in her essay "The Pornographic Imagination" as she observes "a [pornographic] society [is one that is] so hypocritically and repressively constructed that it must inevitably produce an effusion of pornography as both its logical expression and its subversive demotic antidote".[4] Why, she asks, is sex dirty when "genocide screened nightly on TV, apparently, is not". (211)

We are introduced to Jock, immobilized and prone in a hotel room, with a bottle of whisky, "another dram of stupidity" (15) for comfort: an aging [fiftyish], divorced, alcoholic insomniac. He is a supervisor of security systems for National Securities Limited, which include military installations, suggesting that his voyeurism and emotional insecurity are both professional and personal. Jock oversees and maintains the very military installations he finds so abhorrent and a threat to Scotland's sovereignty.

Interspersed in the narrative are Jock's unhappy memories of a repressive Scottish childhood and adolescence. He feels he has been robbed of his manhood and sexual maturity. As in *Lanark*, God keeps popping up in all the wrong places "sabotaging my exotic sexdreams", (194) while corporal punishment, in the form of Mad Hislop's "Four of the Belt"[5] rounds off the twin foundations, and the undoing of, the national character: repressive religion and unimaginative education.

Jock's present predicament, at least in part, is alcoholic not sexual, though he denies it for most of the novel and maintains it is "sex not alcohol". (12) The interior monologue is at once both argumentative and melancholic. His company is trying to ease him out of his job and in the denial endemic to the functional alcoholic he argues that his drinking is not affecting his work. He is, however, on a slippery slope. "I am certainly alcoholic, but not a drunkard", (12) thus isolating himself so as to cover up his addiction and full of bombast and bluster about his abilities, to cover up his own insecurities. " ... I am the only essential man in the National team, all the others can be replaced. I am a liar. I know two young area supervisors who could do my job as well as I do". (104) This insecurity and defensiveness may be read as suggesting something about Scotland as well. It is a trait not only of the alcoholic, but one suggestive, in this novel, of the nation itself. Sexual repression, class, and the teachings of the Protestant Church in Scotland, have been the mainstays in Scottish literature. All three are the foci of the novel's concerns, and the basis of national insecurity.

Donald Wesling has argued there is a "hectoring quality or disquisitory intent"[6] to Scottish novels published since 1979, possibly leading to the reason a surprising number of which have first person narratives. This quality is connected to Scotland's political and economic discontent following the failure in that year, of the devolution referendum. In a discussion of Bakhtinian literary theory Wesling singles out *1982 Janine* and Irvine Welsh's *Marabou Stork Nightmares,* a novel with many similarities to *1982 Janine,* as examples of fiction where the monologic narrators illustrate the "*class based* conditioning" which '*merges with the judgements of the class to which we belong.*" (88) As Jock observes: "The notion that all politics is class warfare is merely correct". (62)

Jock, most certainly has feelings of guilt about how he treated his girlfriend and first love Denny. He abandoned her for the middle-class actress Helen, who subsequently left him after a long loveless marriage. Jock is a social climber, a Tory, yet is never comfortable as a member of the Scottish bourgeoisie. Gray's point is that in a class-based society one is always the product of one's roots and even though Jock holds a professionally responsible position, Scotland's economic and cultural dysfunction as

subservient to England impedes any sense of respectable status. Joy Stone in *The Trick Is To Keep Breathing* exhibits similar tendencies which are examined later.

In an effort to portray Jock as everyman, Gray is deliberately vague when he places Jock in a hotel room, which could be somewhere in "Nairn, Kirkcaldy, Dumfries or Peebles", (12) where the action in the novel takes place over a one-night stay. As Christopher Whyte says "[t]his could be any provincial town in Scotland and therefore stands for them all". [7] Gray sees Jock's problem as being a national problem, not an urban problem. We will later find him waking up in Greenock, "an ugly man-made mess", notes S.J. Boyd, " on the edge of sublime natural beauty. A place of deprivation, it is just across the Clyde from the glorious sea-lochs of the southern Highlands, scarred [...] by the presence of the secure installations of foreign powers and their ships of mega-death".[8] For Jock, Greenock is the epitome of a Scotland wired for war.

Jock and his [sub] alter-ego Janine embody much of what is wrong with Scotland. As Jock tells his life story during an evening of drinking and the performance of masturbatory bondage and rape fantasies, it becomes evident that for him the sexual and the political are never very far apart. "Scotland has been fucked", (136) England, the United States and global capitalism act as the dominating powers. Through his extended monologue, the reader may begin to see the novel itself as presenting a critique of capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy. Jock is an oppressed and damaged Scot, who brutally rapes imaginary women, who are eventually revealed as representing Scotland itself.

Cairns Craig points out:

> Jock's fantasies are not simply the occasion for self-abuse but a fundamental abuse of the self: his fantasies are enacted on himself in disguise; they are encouraged by a world economic system which requires the bondage of the self in order to deny the possibility of resistance to the world that it creates. Jock is a symbol of Scotland precisely to the extent that he has translated himself into a feminine that he then subjects to sexual abuse.[9]

Jock's self-loathing, dependency on alcohol and obsessive sexuality could be likened to the country's patriarchal relations with England. "The truth is we are a nation of arselickers", says Jock. (65)

Multinational capitalism, in the form of the North Sea oil revenues being sucked south to build the English Channel tunnel, are in Jock's eyes a rape of Scotland's natural resources. Scotland, he believes, is being bought up by "bigger non-Scottish firms and then reduced in size or closed". (136) Scottish investors, he says, prefer "putting their money into businesses that operate in coolie [sic] nations where trade unions never had a

chance". (ibid) Jock's father points out that it was the Gas Board who discovered North Sea Oil and argues that "[I]f Britain kept its own oilfields and developed them very slowly and carefully, with British skill and capital, for the public good, we would not need to buy foreign fuel for most of the coming century and we would be a lot richer". (145) Jock's imaging portrays Scotland as colonized [not colonizer], a country "wired" for war, where "[b]etween Loch Lomond and Gareloch one hill at least is honeycombed with galleries where the multi-megaton warheads are stockpiled," (134) and the Clyde awash with "American and British missile submarines" . (ibid.) "[I]t would be a luxury", he says in desperation, "to blame ourselves for the mess we are in instead of the bloody old Westminster parliament". (66) While much of what Jock says may have been true or reflect the reality of the book's events these are also the verbal rantings of an alcoholic, and at a deeper level the expressions of a victimized culture. Jock's politics are those of the oppressed, those who lack control in their own affairs, who have no road map to effect escape. Escape for him is to a fantasy sex life, which becomes more and more desperate as the story unwinds (or ties itself in knots).

Gray has chosen again to use realism and fantasy to articulate not only political oppression, but sexual repression, and to emphasize that Scotland is a deeply unsexy place. As in *Lanark,* Gray can't completely separate himself from his narrative. In *Lanark*, the narrative is divided into four books to help delineate realism from fantasy. In *1982 Janine* the two genres intermingle and sometimes confuse the reader. The novel is so full of emotional turbulence that Jock is correct when he says "I was wrong when I said I needed justice on my side, all I need is revenge". (15) Unfortunately that revenge is not directed outward but inward both against himself and the representation of women.

Alasdair Gray is a senior figure in Scottish literature, has the status and respect of other writers and an international reputation as an experimental novelist. More than any other writer he put Glasgow and Scotland on the contemporary literary map and re-wrote what he claims was the "failure of the greatest density of living Scots to produce, between [John] Galt's *Entail* and Archie Hind's *Dear Green Place,* an interesting, imaginative account of themselves". [10] Gray surmises that this dearth was caused by "a combination of poverty and unimaginative education" (ibid.) and was alleviated by postwar social programs and education grants. Writers like Kelman, Leonard, Lochhead and others he suggests, are "tough, sensitive and well-read. They know the rich resources of international literature so they use them". (ibid.)

He is, along with James Kelman, the most politically astute of the novelists examined here. Gray and Kelman, indeed most of the Scottish literary establishment, share a leftist political point-of-view, which is articulated in their writing. Both Gray and Kelman actively campaigned against what they saw as the financial hypocrisy behind Glasgow's designation as City of Culture in 1990 when so much of the city's social and industrial infrastructure was crumbling. It is one of Gray's characteristics that he can't keep politics off the page.

Gray has also been a major influence not only on all the writers examined here but writers like Iain Banks and Alan Warner. The troubled heroes in their novels all feature, as Christopher Whyte notes, "these fictional male figures incapable of adopting an upright, "erect" pose and remain horizontal. The damage that reduced them to this state is as often as not self-inflicted".[11] The hero of Banks' *The Bridge* (1982) (which he has openly stated is influenced by Gray) is in a coma in intensive care until the end of the novel, as a result of a drunk-driving accident. Irvine Welsh's Roy Strang, the central figure in *Marabou Stork Nightmares* (1995) is also comatose and resisting resuscitation. The principal male character in Alan Warner's *Morvern Caller* (1995) is dead.

Jock McLeish is the prototype for these anti-heroes. He is slowly coming to the conclusion that patriarchal masculinity is a problematic social construct. Jock sees himself as a typical man. ("I could be hundreds of men"). (11) He also realizes there is a "psychic splitting" [12] of his personality. He knows that his sex fantasies are exercises in self-abuse and humiliation, far from what could possibly be seen as a healthy sex life and more like a desperate man's fear of impotence. He seeks ex-girlfriend Sontag's counsel but never follows her advice and ritually includes her in his sexual degradation. He observes the patriarchal processing of young boys like himself as an initiation into manhood. Boys are expected not to cry ("[s]ince the age of thirteen I have not shed a single tear") (57) or shirk the corporal punishment meted out in school by sadistic teachers like Mad Hislop. He wonders why girls always liked the bullies, the hard men. In his job – another institutionalised instrument of patriarchal power – Jock is also under pressure. "I am not a man, I am an instrument". (105) He realizes that although he feels used by the patriarchial system, he is also part of it. After all, what is pornography except an obscene use of power? It is these feelings of both collusion and conflict which have led to an emerging body of work by men, like Gray, trying to re-write the masculine norm and offering a critique of patriarchal culture away from the oppressive violence of hegemonic power. Berthold Schoene-Harwood argues that because patriarchal society is

> [e]ngaged in continuous battles for authoritative predominance, patriarchally organised societies perpetrate an irrevocable split of the dominant self from its subordinate others, a split that manifests itself in institutionalised sexism, classism and racism at one end of the spectrum and rape, torture, even full-scale, worldwide war at the other. (xii)

Jock not only inflicts imaginary rape ("we enacted a very jolly little rape together") (43) and bondage ("Superb, handcuffed and nude, facedown and writhing screams") (106) on his various victims as he comes close to the edge of breakdown and a suicide attempt. Jock comes to the realization that his sex fantasies exhibit a contempt for women which distorts not only a national culture, but humanity in general.

There is little doubt that the sexually repressive history of the Presbyterian church in Scotland has had an untold effect on the country and its people (although one could just as easily also argue the case for Catholic Puritanism's effect on the Irish). It is certainly true to say that Jock McLeish thinks Scotland is a very unsexy place and no match for what he sees as America's endless sexual possibilities. In a psycho-analytical reading of the novel, David Stenhouse makes some very perceptive connections between Reichian thought and the text. In his List of Plagiarisms from *Lanark,* Gray has acknowledged that Reich inspired the dragonhide in the novel through his writing on character armour. It is Reich's writings on sexual and political repression which are more pertinent to *1982 Janine* says Stenhouse, especially Reich's work on human sexuality under capitalism.

> Capitalism ensur[ed] its survival by creating appropriately docile character structures in individuals. For Capitalism to survive workers must have characters which are fearful, respectful of authority and sexually repressed. Repression guarantees that the workers fail to realize where their class interests lie ... [and] that those hegemonic ideas become internalized in human character itself. [13]

Jock feels that capitalism is having a subversive effect on his emotional life. He can no longer live with himself and profit from a job which goes against all his political convictions. By using sexuality, coupled with political oppression, in a fictional representation of Scotland's state of mind, written three years after the 1979 devolution referendum, Alasdair Gray can not be accused of political apathy. However, Gray's use of the female body as body politic is problematic.

In an essay on the problematic "use" of women's bodies by colonizing and decolonizing narratives, using Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*, (1966) Gray's *1982 Janine* and Margaret Atwood's *Survival* (1972) and *Surfacing* (1973), Canadian academic Christopher E. Gittings states that:

> Imperial British iconography traditionally depicted Canada allegorically, as a passive woman waiting for the male British emigrant to till her soil and violate her forests. Scottish authors contributed to this system of representation in pamphlets and books published to encourage emigration to Canada as this verse from John Murray Gibbon's *Scots in Canada* (1911) illustrates:
>
> > I am the land that listens, I am the land that broods,
> > Steeped in eternal beauty, crystalline water and woods,
> > I wait for the man who will win me, and I will not be won in a day;
> > And I will not be won by weaklings, subtle, suave and mild
> > But by men with the hearts of Vikings, and the simple faith of a child.[14]

Canada is the beautiful, chaste, supine female body who "listens" but does not speak. Males are stereotypically dominant, but coupled with the innocence of a child. This passage illustrates for Scots what a contested territory they mine as both colonizer and colonized.

Scotland shares some of the same colonial literary foundations as Canada. Both countries now have a healthy homegrown literature but suffered the same prejudice and devaluing of their literary merit especially in university English courses. Alasdair Gray has acknowledged his debt to Margaret Atwood's *Survival* and Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* as sources for ideas he "could steal and use"[15] in the writing of *1982 Janine.* Atwood's text is a thematic study of Canadian literature, which examines a large number of novels with central characters that are continually defeated in their failure to achieve their desires. "What defeats them", says Gray, "is not some overwhelming tragedy; it comes from a lack of force or support on their part – artists who fail at being artists because they can't help being second rate". (312) Perhaps Gray meant to say, "feeling" second-rate, but certainly both countries have felt overshadowed and second rate by England's dominance and centrality in English literature.

In *Survival* Atwood configures a Basic Victim Positions Continuum as a kind of plotting device which can be seen as a modified twelve-step program, leading hopefully to recovery. There are four stages that comprise Atwood's continuum: Denial; Victor/Victim; Repudiating the Victim Role and Creative Non-Victim. The step out of victimization, she says is "recognizing complicity and repudiating the victim role by directing the real source of oppression and channeling energy into constructive action". [16] Jock seems to fit in at Step Two, both victim and by the end of the novel, possibly, victor, but not yet Step 3.

However, what makes Gray's imagery problematic is his choice of subject matter: first person accounts of rape and bondage by a perpetrator representing Scotland herself. This is not historical "rape" of land or inanimate objects, or representations of art and

mythical female figures, filtered through the mists of time. Janine, Superb, (Superbitch) Big Momma, Sontag and Helga are not Britannia, Cathleen ni Houlihan or Alba, (although these too are problematic). The sex fantasies in the book take up nearly half of the novel. Some of the dialogue is deliberately repeated and can be described as cliched, possibly parodic. However, pornography, says Susan Sontag "isn't a form which can parody itself"[17]. The text forces the close reader to analyze dialogue like "Good penis, Good Doggie! Are you awake? Yes master". (24) The repeated references to breasts always come with adjectives "vulnerable breasts," (20) "each heavy breast sagging sideways with its own sweet weight"; (46) or an obsession with buttons "breasts spilling out of the satin blouse ecstatically unbuttoned". (89) Gray's imagery seems adolescent and dated. Certainly the references to Jane Russell in the movie *Outlaw* are from the 1940s. Some of the incongruity of the text comes from the sexual imagery of the text not jelling with the contemporaneity of the political intent.

What is problematic about Gittings is that he reads Gray's novel as allegory. It is not, the other novels he compares it with are. *1982 Janine* is a realist work. It tells a "memoir" of a Scottish adolescence and sexual fantasy concentrating on rape and bondage to represent outside forces. The fact that an unreliable narrator refracts the sexual fantasy through the prism of intoxication only adds to the complexity and confusion of the novel. As Gittings notes, Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* contains similar passages on male lust and power as this passage illustrates:

> No wonder the forests of Quebec are mutilated and sold to America.
> Magic trees sawed with a crucifix. Murder the saplings. Bittersweet
> is the cunt sap of a thirteen-year-old. O Tongue of the Nation!
> Why don't you speak for yourself? Can't you see what is behind all
> this teenage advertising? Is it only money? What does 'wooing the teenage
> market' really mean. Eh? ... Look at all those thirteen-year-old legs on the floor
> spread in front of the TV screen. Is it only to sell them cereals and cosmetics?
> Madison Avenue is thronged with hummingbirds who want to drink from those
> barely haired crevices ... Woo them, woo them, suited writers of commercial
> poems. Dying America wants a thirteen-year-old Abishag to warm its bed. Men
> who shave want little girls to ravish but sell them high heels instead ...[18]

Cohen is in control of his muse. His book was published nearly twenty years prior to *1982 Janine*, yet the imagery, even today still seems relevant. He is linking sex, consumer capitalism, the raping of natural resources, religion, in the form of Jesuit repression/oppression and Madison Avenue commercialism in a provocative manner as obvious allegory, with an intent, which cannot be misinterpreted. Jock, in the interior monologue section of the novel, covering some of the same territory, argues:

> ... most mothers teach their sons to be ashamed of their penis. I don't blame them. The churches teach us to be ashamed of our penis. They think our whole bodies are wicked. Arts and advertising teach us to be ashamed of our penis. From Aberdeen to London the fronts of Victorian insurance offices are decorated with carved nude women representing truth, fertility and the graces beside an occasional man in robes or armour representing science or fortitude. In art galleries the proportion of cunts to pricks is fifty-to-one, and without the male homosexual magazines the proportion in pictorial publications for men and women is nearly the same. Yes, art and advertising exploit women's bodies for money, *but to do so they promote the idea that these bodies are beautiful and good* (my emphasis)
>
> (49-50)

Should we agree or indict? How are we to respond to this you might ask? Jock's narrative seems to be arguing for more male naked bodies in art, and that the body is beautiful and good, but he doesn't recognize that pleasure can serve any political purpose by exploiting women's bodies for advertising money. Which is the bigger sin, censorship or exploitation? Gray's narrative is more problematic and less coherent. The confusion begins in this passage because we are not sure whether this is Jock's opinion or Gray's. Jock/Gray's point seems to be that religious oppression results in sexual repression, or censorship. There is no larger political context here. Had he tried to use allegory as a literary device against repressive Calvinism, maybe the narrative would have been more effective. Calvinism, however, is one of the few things the country can't blame on the English.

Some of the confusion, it could be argued, stems from a "clash of genres",[19] which William Boyd argued was problematic in *Lanark.* I am arguing that this is an even bigger problem in *1982 Janine.* The lack of a truly defined role for the narrator and the reader's uncertain relationship to him is problematic. As Boyd notes:

> *Lanark* in effect, is made up of two novels: one traditional and naturalistic, the other a complex allegorical fable. And for all the numerous points of comparison and cross-references, in the end the two do not happily cohere. Gray, it seems, is fully aware of the problem and has sought to resolve it first through the dislocation of chronology and second through the addition of a self-referring modernist note which asserts itself from time to time. This is most evident in an epilogue which is inserted [...] about three-quarters of the way through the novel. Gray, not surprisingly, is too canny an artist not to realize this himself. When the young Thaw submits a story for the school magazine, it is rejected by his teacher on the grounds that 'Thaw had tried a blend of realism and fantasy which even an adult would have found difficult.' (219)

The sex fantasy sections of the narrative have always, it seems to me, been problematic. I see no humor or pathos in them and do not find them sexy. This could, of course, be an argument against their intent to titillate. While the book is not intended, like pornography, to serve as a masturbation aid, maybe it is just bad pornography. I appreciate the role women's bodies represent in the symbolic nature of the story and understand that Jock's aggression is directed toward himself. While Gray's writing style conveys an honest immediacy, it also lacks editorial distance. There is a lack of detachment or the kind of "aesthetic distance" which an author may deploy, as M.H. Abrams says, to "control a reader's distance or disinterest that is independent of one's personal interests and desires". [20] It is this question of lack of distance that creates such discomfort.

Gray's confessional narrative style in these passages is more like verbal "cruci-fiction" of himself as a person, rather than Jock as a character. However much Gray is at pains in interviews to represent Jock as a man very different from himself, a man of technology, a conservative, a Tory, there remains the uncomfortable feeling that the reader is being ushered into Gray's own bedroom and made to feel like a voyeur. Interviews and biographical material seem to elicit more private confessions from Gray. In a 2000 interview with *The Sunday Times,* he revealed that he'd made a kind of Faustian pact with God. "The bargain was that God would allow him to create a masterpiece but the price would be sexual frustration".[21] He has commented on the size of his genitalia; that he spent some fifteen years without sexual relations; that his early acumen as a lover was not to the liking of his first wife and that she took lovers. (ibid.) In answer to Christopher Whyte's rhetorical question what writer would put his (or her) own fantasies on the line, [22] one might speculate that it could be someone with an axe to grind.

Detractors of the novel have been accused of "critical and cultural illiteracy",[23] because of their reactions to the book's sexual content. As Susan Kappeler notes pornography is " ... a particular form of sexism, [and] one of the most fundamental patriarchal structures in our culture [which] is by no means simply avoided by the category of the literary"[24]. Andrea Dworkin reminds us "that the sexual colonization of women's bodies is a material reality: men control the sexual and reproductive uses of women's bodies".[25] A feminist reading of the novel could quite rationally correlate sex fantasies with sexual violence and the misuse of drugs and alcohol. Combining both in the form of pornographic fantasies with an intoxicated narrator is to hit more than just a nerve in how bruised and bloodied male/female relations have been and continue to be in Scotland.

Andrea Dworkin has said that the word *pornography* does not mean "writing about sex or depictions of the erotic or depictions of sexual acts, depictions of nude bodies or sexual representations or any other such euphemism. It means the graphic depiction of women as vile whores". (200) "The institutions of control" she continues include "law, marriage, prostitution, pornography, health care, the economy, organized religion and systematized physical aggression against women ..."(203). Gray's sexual symbolism of cultural penetration by [an]Other takes the metaphor to its most base meaning. ("drives his stiff etcetera again and again through her etcetera etcetera") (106) It furthermore not only relegates the reader to mere spectator/voyeur, but also unwilling participant in what can only be described as Gray's uncontained anger, which he pours unremittingly into this novel.

The ending does have a certain catharsis: Jock cries, forgives himself and beckons to Janine to "come to me now". (341) *1982 Janine* is not, however, a "rewrit[ing] [of] the longstanding pattern of male/female antagonism which has obsessed Scottish fiction" [26] that Christopher Whyte suggests it is. Gray's novel is certainly groundbreaking in its examination of the harm done by institutional patriarchy and indiscriminate power. Yet it commits the even greater sin of using the female body as an abused body politic in the most graphic way possible through pornographic fantasy. While the literary landscape has changed irrevocably with the importance of work by women writers, and Gray has contributed to this change, the political landscape has not. Pornography touches a nerve, even when it is literature. The literary blurs into the social reality of sexual and domestic violence even though we might intellectually understand the separation of the two.

The two most problematic aspects of this text are that it is refracted through the voice of a troubled protagonist out for revenge. Equally problematic, however, is its first person structure, meaning that not only is Janine without voice, but ultimately Scotland itself. Janine never gets to say anything about patriarchy or oppression. When she finally is allowed to step out of the text per se and confront her tormentor she says: '"Act calm" [...] "Pretend this is just an ordinary audition. Hell no! Surprise them. Shock them. Show them more than they ever expected to see"'. (341) By continuing the voyeuristic spectacle and the theme of domination of Janine and Scotland itself, Gray misses an opportunity in the novel to redress the balance and empathize with the character of Janine, and by extension all women. Pornography, like prostitution, is a labour contract where money is exchanged for services rendered. This means it is all in a day's work and on only one side of this equation is there any enjoyment. Gray's sympathetic understanding of women is not at issue; for empathy, however, we need to look to female writers.

[1] Quoted in Christopher Harvie *No Gods and Precious Few Heroes* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), x

[2] Back flyleaf.

[3] "This Stiff State Does Not Suit Man: Alasdair Gray's *1982 Janine* in *Writing Men: Literary Masculinities from Frankenstein to the New Man* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp.130-144, p.137

[4] *Partisan Review* vol.34 (1967), pp.181-212, p.183

[5] Gray, Alasdair. Credited to Tom Leonard's poem "Four of the Belt." in the Epilogue, p.344

[6] "Scottish Narrative Since 1979: Monologism and the Contradictions of a Stateless Nation" in *Scotlands* 4.2. (1997) pp.81-99, p.81

[7] Whyte, Christopher, "Masculinities in Contemporary Fiction" in *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 34: 3 (1998), pp. 274-85, p.280

[8] "Black Arts: *1982 Janine* and *Something Leather* in *The Arts of Alasdair Gray*, ed. by R.I. Crawford and T. Nairn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), pp.108-123,
115

[9] Craig, Cairns, *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p.187

[10] Anderson, Carol and Glenda Norquay 1983 "Interview with Alasdair Gray" in *Cencrastus*, (Summer 1983) no.13, p.7

[11] Whyte, p.280

[12] Schoene-Harwood, p.130

[13] "A Wholly Healthy Scotland: A Reichian Reading of *1982 Janine*" in *Edinburgh Review* vol. 95 (Spring 1996), pp.113-122, p.113

[14] "Re-Figuring Imperialism: Gray, Cohen, Atwood & The Female Body", pp.1-9, p.1. World Wide Web: http://www2.arts.gla.ac.uk/COMET/others/glasgrev/issue3/gitt.html

[15] Whiteford, Eilidh MacL. "Political Histories, Politicised Spaces: Discourses of Power in the fiction of Alasdair Gray" (unpublished doctoral thesis no. 11121, University of Glasgow; 1997). Appendix interview with Alasdair Gray, p.312

[16] Atwood, Margaret, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972), pp.36-39

[17] Sontag, p.195

[18] Cohen, Leonard, *Beautiful Losers* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1996), p.62

[19] Boyd, William, "The theocracies of Unthank" in *Times Literary Supplement* 27 February 1981, p.219

[20] Abrams, M.H., *A Glossary of Literary Terms 6th edn* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993), p.46

[21] Bowditch, Gillian, "Gray's Elegy" Ecosse Section, *Sunday Times,* May 21 2000, pp.1-2

[22] *Gendering The Nation: Studies in Modern Scottish Literature*, ed. by C. Whyte (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), xvi

[23] Stenhouse, p.114

[24] Kappeler, Susan, "The White Brothel: The Literary Exoneration of the Pornographic" in *Sexuality: A Reader,* ed. by Feminist Review (London: Virago Press, 1987), p.329

[25] Dworkin, A. *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (London: The Women's Press Ltd., 1981), p.200

[26] Whyte, Christopher, "Alasdair Gray: Not A Mirror but a Portrait" in *Books in Scotland* no. 28 (Summer 1988), p.2

Chapter Two

James Kelman's *How Late It Was, How Late*

Blessed are the meek
For they shall inherit the earth
Poor bastards!
Fucked again!

Tommy Orr, The B-Attitudes
An Old Man Dances In George Square
Maryhill Writers Group
Smeddum Press[1]

In James Kelman's *How Late It Was, How Late* Sammy Samuels embodies the effects of a country denied a past and with precious little future. He is the product of a victimized culture, isolated from his community, family and friends, fearful of the justice and medical systems that seem to work hand in glove with each other, for the benefit of no one. Sammy is an alcoholic, ex-con, prone to fighting and in trouble with the police. He has a prison record for breaking and entering and as an accessory to robbery. Stealing for him is a job. He is also a binge drinker, ("ye dont mean to get drunk), (160) whose drinking leads to blackouts, loss of time and memory and subsequently blindness. We find him at the beginning of the novel waking up, suffering from a hangover, unable to piece together the events of a lost weekend, prone to irrational mood swings, which tend to range from bloodymindedness to melancholy. ("[y]e want the mentality for how come he ladled into the sodjers then ye've got it, it's all there fucking Custer's last stand".) (16) "[F]olk take a battering but, they do; they get born and get brought up and they get fukt, that's the story; the cot to the fucking funeral pyre". (ibid.) Constant self-doubt, blame and lack of self-esteem also stalk Sammy. At thirty-eight, he's spent eleven of those years in jail, for what can only be described as stupid adolescent crimes. He is also depressed at not being able to get a job. His sense of hopelessness, his own fearful shortsightedness, and the country's, is the central theme of this novel.

Sammy Samuels is not someone, one might think, who engenders sympathy from the reader: he's another damaged Scot. Sympathy, however, is not what Sammy seeks. What he implies is his need for social justice and fair play from the institutional arms of the state. But social justice is a dream, both for him individually, as well as collectively for the nation. He senses an absence of entitlement and figures that even if he wins, he loses, especially in his dispute for compensation with the Department of Social Services for his sight loss. James Kelman's narrative methods pull us inside Sammy's head. The

reader becomes his ally, much the same as the aptly named advocate Ally tries to do, without success.

There is a sense of "suspended animation" to Sammy's life, a phrase Craig uses to define the Scottish "predicament" as

> not simply the residue of a harsh industrial world, nor the effort of a people to build a better environment than the one they have inherited: it is the total elision of the evidence of the past and its replacement by a novelty so radical that it is impossible for the individual to relate to it his or her personal memories. And impossible, therefore, for that environment to be "related" as a coherent narrative.[2]

Just as Sammy has abandoned responsibility for himself so has Scotland whose governance has been ceded to British rule for 300 years.

A unique narrative style is one of James Kelman's defining achievements. His intent is political. For Kelman standard or received pronunciation is censorship and suppression and not how people talk. There is no such thing as bad language. Language has a wider political context - that of decolonization and self-determination. He connects street to word, but owns neither. The subject-matter is "gritty, unpleasant, authentic; a transcription of reality, particularly, low-life reality", says Alan Freeman.[3] His aim is to get rid of the "God voice" of English literature, "to eliminate all but the essential experience of his characters".[4] Although nothing much happens in his novels by way of plot, Kelman has captured the oral quality of the urban west of Scotland identity. Importantly, the narrative voice is a Glaswegian one, non-standard, and to some (both in and out of the literary establishment) offensive, with its proliferation of swear words. Kelman writes with the voice and experience of growing up in Glasgow's inner-city tenement neighborhood of Govan and the housing scheme area of Drumchapel on the city's outer limits. Winning the Booker Prize in 1994 for *How Late It Was, How Late* served a wider purpose for him, both literary and political, and was a fitting tribute to Kelman's efforts to break new ground in social realism, or more properly hyper-realism. The term was coined by John Barth to depict a school of U.S. painters in the 1960s whose work was so realistic that it was hard to tell from a photograph. Transferred to literature it can be interpreted as a sense of heightened reality, which Welsh and Galloway also use to good effect where the characters don't seem like real people, but a cranked up version of reality.

What Kelman wanted to write about were people from his own socio-economic background, which he couldn't find in English literature. It could be interpreted that what he means is British literature because of what he sees as its political and historical class assumptions. He never articulates this in interviews, but is always careful to have his

narrative methods compared to Beckett rather than Grassic Gibbon[5] and his literary debt to Kafka and Joyce rather than Gunn or MacDiarmid. The reader could interpret from what he says (and doesn't say) that Scottish Renaissance literature is anathema to him. In a parody of the Scottish education system in *The Busconductor Hines,* Rab Hines says:

> Why throughout the length and breadth of this grey but gold country toty wee mites were being befriended by 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.[6]

The class assumptions are clear: learning means forsaking your working-class roots. Douglas Gifford has argued that since the end of the Second World War there has been a distrust in Scottish literature of "national socialist ambience [which] caused rejection [by many Scottish authors] of renaissance values. And Kelman alone sums up this rejection". He observes:

> His busconductors, teachers, chancers, and other unemployed, lonely, edge-of-society men and women all told us of the irrelevance of historical pageantry and the intimations of landscape or 'Scottish tradition' to the lives of thousands, if not millions, of Scots and Britons.[7]

What Kelman found in English literature was that the working-class

> were confined to the margins, kept in their place, stuck in the dialogue. You only ever saw them or heard them. You never got into their mind. You did find them in the narrative but from without, seldom from within. And when you did see them or hear them they never rang true, they were never like anybody I ever met in real life. None of the richness of character you'll find in any cultural setting, any cultural setting at all.[8]

Even working class novels, he says, "from the [F]ifties onwards, which includes people like Sillitoe and John Braine, and all that crowd, where the hero is a working-class character who finds the education system and becomes a member of the middle class".[9] Kelman has argued that the speech and thought of his environment were "as valid as any mode of expression", indeed as valid as "high literary language".[10] What he saw were the recognizable stereotypes of working-class figures in English literature, a "cut-out, [cut-up] figure who wields a razor blade, gets maroculous drunk never has a single solitary 'thought' in his entire life." [11] He rejects the image of the hard man as urban demotic stereotype reiterated so many times in the history of the classic novel. It would, however, be a mistake to label him a political nationalist even if the focus of his work is concerned with decolonization and self-determination.

Kelman's narrative style has been described variously by literary critics, including Dietmar Bohnke, in a book-long examination of his literary politics, as "third person as alienated first", "free indirect discourse", "stream-of-consciousness" and "interior monologue", (74) using a range of devices to allow us to get inside the head of Sammy's version of the Meaning Of Life. Bohnke observes that Kelman's narrative style is probably his greatest achievement and in *How Late It Was, How Late* he reaches "his most sophisticated handling of the narrative voice to date. It is no longer the interiorized third person that dominates most of the book but the self-referring second person "ye" (76) similar, in fact, to Grassic Gibbon's "you" in *A Scots Quair*. As we see in the passage below:

> Sammy could throw a punch, he was quite a solid guy, and his knuckles were still sore, so was his right foot, so who are ye gony blame? Know what I'm talking about it was him woke up down the lane. It was him fucking landed down the lane in the first place man how the fuck he got there I don't know. But naybody dragged him into the boozer and naybody filled his neck with booze, he did it himself; it was under his own control.
> (15-16)

The narrative voice and the absence of self-pity are such that the reader can hardly feel morally self-righteous indignation toward Sammy's predicament. "Kelman's narratives," as Cairns Craig notes "are not concerned with progressions along a temporal trajectory of events; they are concerned with an unchangeable context into which human beings are thrown and from which there is no escape".[12]

Caroline Macafee, in her study of the Glasgow vernacular, has suggested that while the working class has been dispossessed in many ways the "traditional dialect is part of ...[its] moral capital".[13] Sammy Samuels' story captures the essence of that moral capital in post-industrial Glasgow where he moves from one temporary job to another in a city where it takes "twenty-two buses to get back home"(4). Sammy represents the "throwback" culture of Glasgow's southside, akin to the successful BBC Scotland television series "Rab C. Nesbitt" by Ian Pattison, where the main character satirizes the lot of those left behind in Glasgow's reinvention of itself as a service economy and city of culture; a task which is still its main agenda today.

Kelman's fictions, as Cairns Craig notes:

> take place not in the traditional sites of the working-class struggle for power (the trades unions, the educational system as liberator), nor in the traditional sites of working-class escape from work and exploitation (sport, domestic solidarity), but along the margins of that traditional working-class life. And they do so because that traditional life has been decimated: founded as it was on heavy industry, on the idea of a mass society whose masses could be brought into solidarity, it has been wiped out by the destruction of the traditional Scottish industries. Kelman's central characters are symbols of the collapse of working-class life into a dispirited and isolated endurance. (101-2)

Sammy is down, but not out. He is not a moaner, but a philosopher. On Margaret Atwood's Basic Victim Continuum he is Stage One: not acknowledging the fact that he is a victim and using up a lot of energy, suppressing anger and denying the obvious. Unlike Jock McLeish, who is a classic Stage Two, an acknowledged victim, who explains away his victimization as Original Sin, Sammy does not rail against or blame authority, the church or his childhood. His only recollection of adolescence is his father's insistence on his use of non-disposable razors. Sammy does not expect much, so he is not disappointed. He is at once street smart, ("ye do yer crime ye take yer time") (15) and fatalistic he ("had aye been a bit stupit. And there's nay cunt to blame for that except yerself".) (ibid.) This effects a powerful immobilizing combination. Sammy Samuels shares with Jock McLeish the condition of *anomie* in their reaction to the structural upheaval around them and the predicament in which they find themselves. So-called society has moved on and left them behind. When the "sodjers" manhandle him it is because he is "no a fucking millionaire or else talk with the right voice", "they dont give a fuck". (4) He knows he is not "earmarked for glory"! (11) Neither, however, does he feel sorry for himself or, unfortunately, expect any better. To him, his confrontation with the police was an act of futile rebellion, which left him blind. "He was the cause of his sight loss". (248) Sammy Samuels, more than any other Kelman character, represents the common man in a fable of industrial demise without epigram or resolution. He is a flawed mythopoetic hero, an "ancient innocent fated to a hell of a life of hell"[14]. He is a victim of society at large.

Resignation, the hairshirt of the alcoholic, best explains Sammy's attitude. Blindness is almost a relief. "[H]e wouldnay see the cunts looking at him". (12) For him hope does not spring eternal, nor does he exit in a trail of glory. Sammy lacks a past and does not contemplate a future. If he was feeling fucked, he was entitled. And he continues to check his back to the last page as he shadow boxes his way out of the city with the help of his son's savings. Escape to England is his exit route, as it was for many Scots in the 20th century, paralleling the foreseeable political options open to Scotland at the time the novel was written. The novel holds out only despair with little understanding by Sammy

about why he finds himself in his current situation. He is in a state of denial, alcohol clouds his brain and his emotions. Unlikely as it may seem, blindness is an escape route for him. "[M]aybe he didnay want his sight back". (39) It frees him from the hand to mouth existence of the community work programs. "[H]e wouldnay be doing what he was doing last week". (ibid.) Blindness is his safety net as well as a symbol of societal evil. Sammy is the epitome of post-industrial Glasgow, wiped out by the destruction of its traditional heavy industries, the absence of any effective structural change and a sense of hopelessness to do anything about it. "There's none so blind that will not see" says Alan Freeman[15]. Sammy sees his sight loss as "just one new predicament".(10) Kelman seems to be asking, what more can society do to the working person when you get beaten up by the police, blinded, then denied compensation through bureaucratic doublespeak?

In *Some Recent Attacks*, a collection of political and cultural essays, Kelman explores the prison system in Scotland and asks what sort of effect prison life has on not only prisoners but the friends and families, given that "Scotland has the highest proportion of young people locked up behind bars than anywhere in Western Europe". (53) He could have added, and twice the homicides of England and Wales. He questions what this says about Scotland itself. For Kelman, society "is certainly not open and it's only with some linguistic juggling you could describe it as democratic". (54) Neither does he feel, one supposes, that the penal system rehabilitates offenders. They become, he says "the antithesis of what it is to be a healthy human being". (ibid.) Kelman distinguishes in his essay between the responsibility of the state and government. The state, he argues, comprises the institutional framework of society. He sees the state as the people in permanent control: the civil service, the legal system, the Department of Social Services and the institutional medical arm of those departments. These are the central methods of state control. How a society treats its criminals reflects on how a government treats its populace. That is what Sammy finds when he finally does get a doctor's appointment. The doctor is an extension of the justice system; he quotes his prison record, blocking and tackling him at every opportunity. He covers for the police and quotes a nine-year-old report diagnosing and prescribing medication for Sammy for a condition that was caused by an isolated incident, as documentation of his ongoing emotional instability. It is an exercise which is used to baffle the client with bureaucratic science in layers so thick they become obstacles, reinforcing Sammy's suspicions that launching a case against the authorities would not be in his best interests. "Look give us a break, if I fucking win, I lose". (233) Sammy's appointment with the doctor for his sight loss is an exercise in evasion, arrogance and scapegoating on the part of the medical system. The doctor

continues by asking Sammy if he plans to re-register for work on a City Building Project and refers to Sammy's sight loss as "alleged", "received" or "pseudo spontaneous". And in a clever counterpoint by Kelman, when Sammy loses his temper and swears it is the doctor who finds Sammy's language offensive, not vice versa. Just as Sammy is victimized by medical authorities, it is Spud who becomes the scapegoat of the justice system in Welsh's *Trainspotting* and in Galloway's *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing,* Joy Stone's experience with the mental health system follows a similar pattern.

Dietmar Bohnke has noted (referring to Sammy's medical appointment) that the person who is really seen as inarticulate is the doctor. It is he who speaks a lot without saying anything that relates to Sammy's situation, whereas Sammy says the things that matter. This could be taken as an essence of Kelman's work. It is in passages like these where Kelman's claim for the veracity of the likes of Sammy manifests itself most clearly and shows that Sammy is as articulate - or maybe even more articulate than - anybody else. (71-72)

Kelman has said, "the *reality* in the DSS is much worse than that. Thinking this is some sort of fantasy *is* a perfect example of what Noam Chomsky calls "intellectual myopia".[16] He is borne out in this assumption by Kasia Boddy's entry on Scottish literature in the *Oxford guide to Contemporary Writing,* where she says

> There is a tendency, particularly in Kelman and Galloway's work, to give indiscriminately paranoid portraits of "authority figures" - the DSS, the police, and doctors all seem to be in conspiracy.[17]

Sammy's victimization is institutionalized. His time in prison and his drinking have reduced him to a stunted adolescent. His grandmother treats him like "a wean". (63) Without any support except his friend Helen, it is hard not to have sympathy for Sammy's predicament. He is, however, in many ways, the originator of his own misfortune. He has a young son from a marriage that didn't work out. His son evidently cares for and loves him and Sammy shows no antipathy toward his former wife: a woman (a "child" bride?) whose parents seem to have had an inordinate amount of control over their daughter's married life. "The trouble with Sammy's first wife was her mammy and daddy. Her mammy says this and her mammy says that". (151) Sammy's problems, the reader surmises, are more deep-seated than he is willing to acknowledge. Not only is justice blind, but for Sammy love is too. It is evident that his binge drinking has got him into trouble with Helen. They have had rows about his drinking. On the night she disappears he has had a row with Helen. "She would be doubly annoyed. She would really fuck off this time. That would be that", he says after his latest drinking episode. Helen too has problems, her three children have been taken from her by the authorities. "Terrible

depressions, she got too, her downers could last for days"[...]. "She aye chose bingers". (23) The reader suspects that Helen hardly needed Sammy's problems to add to her own troubles and point to her own insecurities and depressions, as well as a job that pays too little. Dependency is indeed contagious and Helen seems to know this. She feels they are doomed and her problems are her own, self-inflicted. While Helen is off in the margins and footnotes of the narrative and we never hear from her directly, Sammy seems to portray her quite unambiguously. The "one thing he had going for him was her ... If she hadnay went last week it was next week". (173) Sammy can intellectualize his dysfunction, yet all he does throughout the whole narrative is burn his bridges, one by one. There seems to be a powerful amount of emotional injury to Sammy Samuels. This injury is all-encompassing, born out of frustration, breathed in through the air. If you expect little, then you are not disappointed. People are polite, they get knocked down. They apologize. Ally, the rep, who argues Sammy's case for compensation, tries to give him hope, but for Sammy "hope doesnay spring eternal". (248) Sammy does not believe in the possibility of communal political action, an absence of entitlement that dooms him (and Scotland) to more of the same. Substance abuse for Sammy is a prison sentence to the emotions.

It is not surprising that an alcoholic ex-con like Sammy has "woman trouble". There is an emotional paralysis, an attitudinal numbing in the novel which affects all the protagonists in the novels examined here and which could be extended to the country's attitudes toward diversity. Sexism, or the absence of the female voice, is evident in both *1982 Janine, How Late It Was, How Late, Trainspotting* and from a feminist perspective in *The Trick Is To Keep Breathing*. However, Welsh's novel is the only one that alludes to religious bigotry, racism and mentions homosexuality. Scotland itself could be accused of living in suspended animation with regard to its attitudes to these issues.

A number of James Kelman's novels share an absence of female voice. In *A Chancer*, Tammas has a "girlfriend" of sorts, whom he treats disdainfully, breaking dates, not showing up, and a sister and brother-in-law with whom he lives, or rather stays with, until he leaves. Kelman's handling of female dialogue and narrative is more problematic for the reader in a novel like *The Busconductor Hines*, however, which has a more traditional storyline. Rab Hines is married with a son, and here one may examine more closely how Kelman writes about women. Rab has a close relationship with his wife Sandra but she always acquiesces to him. When they go out with Rab's work buddies the group is segregated by gender, even though Sandra objects. They live in substandard Glasgow housing, which has rodents and dampness just waiting for a condemned notice

for their building. It is a "no-bedroom" flat, with little chance for privacy, with no hot running water and no telephone. Sandra's choice of a flat, she argues, would have been affordable and better. There is a veneer of reserve, both in their lovemaking, always told from the male point of view, and in Sandra's almost puritanical body language. Sandra's family feels she married beneath her. Christopher Whyte notes that she fits the profile of the "helpmate, meek and supportive". Her acquiescence fits a character type commonly seen in Scottish working class literature. Her role is to maintain the domestic realm "as a haven of peace, harmony and sexual fidelity".[18] Rab's shiftwork means weekend work. Sandra's part-time job pays poorly. The relationship, however, both sexually and economically, is overshadowed by the work schedules of the pair. Sammy too is affected by Helen's night work, which pays poorly, and her weekend work schedule, and finds it too tempting when he has money to stay home not to go to the pub. "[H]e liked going out, he liked the pub, no just for the bevy, he liked the crack as well, hearing the patter". (160) Life is not beautiful; pubs and bars and endless cigarettes break the monotony. Like Sammy's relationship with Helen "[t]he bleakness of life is made bearable for Rab, by Sandra" (97) Sammy sees his local bar Glancy's as one of the "official hoping [and waiting] rooms" where people pass the time "hoping for something". (213) It could be argued that waiting and hoping has been a collective as well as an individual activity for Scotland.

Christopher Whyte has argued that Scotland has a "crisis in masculinity" (284) and that while Kelman's fiction operates on a different level from fictions like *No Mean City* (1935) and does not exhibit the violence of characters like Frank Begbie in *Trainspotting*, nevertheless, the "political and class claims made for his fiction in the Eighties and Nineties can be seen as making a similarly authoritarian attempt to restrict his reader's possibilities of response". (277)

Whyte has noted that in the

> absence of an elected political authority, the task of representing the nation has been repeatedly devolved to its writers. While one can hope that the setting-up of a Scottish parliament will at last allow Scottish literature to be literature first and foremost, rather than the expression of a nationalist movement, there is clearly also an urgent necessity to nurture and promote competing representations of both national and gender identities. (284)

Whyte's "crisis in masculinity" could also be seen as a crisis in humanity. The protagonists in all of the novels examined exhibit an inability to love, themselves as well as others.

In an examination of Scottish literature, culture and politics, Peter Zenzinger has argued that Scots are crippled emotionally and observes that it is "seen as the primary

curse of Scottish life". "It aggravates the sense of loneliness and isolation felt by the modern urbanized Scot to the point of neurosis".[19] In order "to escape the bleakness of life in a working-class community without work many Scots resort to alcohol," he notes. (230) Zenzinger points to accounts on the subject of alcoholism depicted in novels such as Gordon Williams' *From Scenes Like These* (1968), Agnes Owens' *Gentlemen of the West* (1984) and *Like Birds in the Wilderness* (1987) as illustrations of this bleakness. In Ron Butlin's *The Sound Of My Voice* (1987) the author examines the problem through the second person narrative of an executive of a biscuit firm where his job's monotonous nature, the social obligations of business meetings and his own weakness have made him an alcoholic (230). This sense of hopelessness is certainly a central theme in Gray's *Lanark* and *1982 Janine*. On one level *1982 Janine* may be seen as a long juvenile sexual fantasy with which the narrator tries to repress his arrested emotional development. Lanark's dragonhide shell acts both as a protective covering and an isolating/insulating outer layer. Thaw looks for love in all the wrong places and as Lanark explains to the "author" in the "Epilogue," "I never tried to be a delegate. I never wanted anything but sunshine, some love, some very ordinary happiness". (484) As Zenzinger observes, Jock seems to be arguing for Scotland's political independence, without which the country's major problems will never be solved. Zenzinger argues, however, that it is not only political independence that the country needs but "true independence of mind". (232)

It can be argued that the Scots suffer from having some kind of victim gene, which these novels recognize. However, these are, after all, novels written with a larger purpose in mind. Cairns Craig has argued that Kelman's novels depict not just a picture of a working-class community, but a working-class world which has "become atomized, fragmented and in which individuals are isolated from one another, a world in which political hope has been severed and only economic deprivation remains" (101).

Crucially, there is an international dimension to the dystopic impulses in Scottish literature. There is something wrong in the world, not just in Scotland. Capitalism, globalization and social justice make strange political bedfellows. "National identity", "nationalism" and "internationalism", says Bohkne, "are very much interdependent concepts, and maybe even more so in a Scottish context" because "culture and particularly literature is at times instrumental in keeping alive the national identity of a community"(28-29). Kelman's use of vernacular language therefore has an international dimension as well. There is, Bohkne argues, "a duality in twentieth century intellectual nationalism in Scotland .... [that is] concerned with Scotland and its institutions but ... expresses a "big picture" as it transcends purely Scotland". (27)

Kelman draws on the parallels between his own work and that of Irish, West Indian or black writers in his Booker Prize acceptance speech. As he notes

> the greatest weapon of the imperial culture is to wipe out the indigenous people. Take away their language, Don't let them speak it -or else inferiorize it. Call it dialect, patois 'not fit for the page'. [...] I'm only one of many people from all over the world writing from our own languages. Language can't be separated from liberation and political struggles. [20]

Scottish literature in this context is predisposed to articulating the struggle for preserving and strengthening of the national and regional identity because of its 300-year-old history as a stateless nation."There is a sense in which Scottish fiction prospers in inverse proportion to the difficulties of the cultural and political situation",[21] says Gavin Wallace. Kelman's work underlines the universal nature of what he is saying. While the location of *How Late It Was, How Late* need not be Glasgow, the manifestation of global capitalism has been particularly dismal in Scotland and Scottish authors have used the voice of those most ill-equipped to handle this upheaval in their novels. What is perhaps unique in both Gray's and Kelman's work is that neither can "keep politics off the page". Although Gray's political stance is more nationalist and overt than Kelman's, both writers focus on universal decolonization and self-determination. Kelman has remained singularly determinist in his choice of subject matter, be it life as a game of chance for Tammas in *A Chancer* or Patrick Doyle's role in [mis]shaping young Scottish minds in *A Disaffection* or the gradual elimination of traditional jobs in *The Busconductor Hines.* He has also devoted substantial amounts of his own time to helping workers' claims with respect to asbestosis, while the state looks on, or averts its gaze. His work begs the questions: Why aren't the unions involved in social justice issues? Where are the agency advocates? Why are the Churches not in the forefront of the plight of the homeless? Why is religious bigotry still a topic for debate and racism, sexism and homophobia (if Westminister had had its way) not? Maybe Alasdair Gray is right in claiming that "Britain is OF NECESSITY organized like a bad adolescent fantasy".[22] (139) In *Lanark* Gray summarizes this nicely by observing that "[t]he world is only improved by people who do ordinary jobs and refuse to be bullied. Nobody can persuade owners to share with makers when makers won't shift for themselves".[23]

Kelman's fictions are full of people who do ordinary jobs, but unfortunately, are themselves bullied. The meek, unfortunately, do inherit the earth, and everything that is wrong with it. It is a message that both Gray and Kelman are at pains to repeat in their fictions over and over again, tackling stories that needed to be told, if only so their readers and perhaps their country may be able to imagine better and move on.

[1] *Edinburgh Review,* vol. 95 (Spring 1996), p.180

[2] Craig, Cairns, *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p.21

[3] Freeman, Alan "Realism Fucking Realism: The Word on the Street, Kelman, Kennedy and Welsh" in *Cencrastus* (Summer 1997), pp 6-7, p.6

[4]Bohnke, Dietmar, *Kelman Writes Back: Literary Politics in the Work of a Scottish Writer* (Glienicke/Berlin: Galda und Wilch, 1999), p.74

[5] McLean, Duncan, "James Kelman Interviewed" *Edinburgh Review* no. 71 (1985), pp.64-80 p.66

[6] Kelman, James, *The Busconductor Hines* (London: Orion Books Limited, 1992), p.95

[7] Gifford, Douglas, "Renaissance and Revival" in *Books in Scotland* no.50 (Summer 1994), p.3

[8] Kelman, James, *Some Recent Attacks: Essays Cultural & Political.* (Stirling: AK Press, 1992), pp. 81-82

[9] McLean, D., p.72

[10] Bohnke, D., p.67

[11] Kelman, J., 1992, p.82

[12] Craig, Cairns, "Resisting Arrest: James Kelman" in *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies*, ed. by G. Wallace and R. Stevenson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), pp.99-144, p.105

[13] Bohnke, D., p.69

[14] Kuebler, Carolyn, Book Reviews. "James Kelman. *How Late It Was, How Late*" in *Review of Contemporary Fiction* vol. 15:2 (Summer 1995), pp.199-200

[15] Freeman, Alan, p7

[16] Lockerbie, Catherine, "Lighting Up Kelman" in *The Scotsman Weekend* 18 March 1984, p. 4

[17] Boddy, Kasia", "Scotland" in *Oxford guide to Contemporary Writing*, ed by J Sturrock, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp.361-377, pp.369-370

[18] Whyte, Christopher, "Msculinities Contemporary Scottish Fiction" in *Forum for Modern Language Studies* vol. 34:3 (1998), pp.274-285, p.274

[19] Whyte, p.284

[20] Quoted in Bohnke, D., p.15

[21] Wallace, G. and R. Stevenson, p.2

[22] Gray, Alasdair, *1982 Janine.* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984), p.139

[23] Gray, Alasdair, *Lanark: A Life In Four Books* (London: Picador, 1994), p.554

Chapter Three

Janice Galloway's *The Trick Is To Keep Breathing*

In my judgment it is a pretty poor thing to write,
to talk without a purpose
Charlotte Perkins Gilman[1]

In the above quotation, the American nineteenth-century feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman refers to her short story "The Yellow Wall-paper" which examines a woman's experience of mental illness within the discourses of medicine and "proper femininity". The story has attracted contemporary feminist critics' attention because it draws on the autobiographical experiences of the author and undermines the stereotyped ideas of Victorian femininity. Gilman chose to send her completed story to the eminent physician who initiated and supervised her treatment, which left her permanently incapacitated, especially for systematic intellectual work (245-6). Although he never acknowledged her account, he later modified his treatment of nervous ailments. Essentially the story is a political protest, a mode of resistance against medical discourse within patriarchy and the capitalist system. Although written a century earlier it exhibits some parallels to this chapter's subject of male authoritarianism replicated both through the medical establishment, and within the education and religious systems which leaves Joy Stone little self-esteem.

Authority is making Joy Stone sick - literally - "I swallowed my hand up to my wrist".[2] Joy is turning on her own body, punishing it in a masochistic, obsessive-compulsive manner, considering suicide, starving and cutting herself and brushing her gums until they bleed. It is an angered response. Joy Stone doesn't menstruate anymore, but she does bleed in other ways. While she never tells us she is anorexic-bulimic the evidence is irrefutable. We find her rocking to and fro in the opening pages of the novel. She is compulsively making lists, looking to women's magazines for how she should behave, making and baking food that she will never eat, painstakingly dressing and primping and generally deceiving herself ("I tell lies all the time"). (25) Like Sammy Samuels she is losing days and drinking too much. Every door seems closed to her, making her feel "walled in like an adulterous nun ..." (36) These acts of physical rebellion are Joy's reaction to a world she can no longer tolerate, a rage in the act of mourning for her dead lover and partner Michael. The novel works on several levels. Joy has no place to grieve because Michael already has a wife. She is in danger of losing the

house she shared with him and she feels too unwell to continue teaching. The narrative can also be seen as an examination of loss of identity, lack of entitlement, the numbing sensation of feeling "nothing there at all" (146, 166) which Cairns Craig has argued makes the body of Joy Stone representative of Scotland itself. He describes her body as being the image "not only of a woman negated by a patriarchal society but of a society aware of itself only as an absence, a society living, in the 1980s, in the aftermath of its failure to be reborn".[3] While this might be true, at the same time, however, it objectifies Joy Stone and condemns her to being a symbolic representation of Scotland.

The novel's subject matter addresses contemporary woman's insistence on being seen and heard, but it also addresses something more immediate: an intolerable sexism in Scottish society and the resultant effect it has had, and continues to have, on its population. Written only ten years before the end of the twentieth century, but nearly twenty years after such seminal works as *The Female Eunuch, Sexual Politics* and *Patriarchal Attitudes*, the novel points to a society in a kind of emotional deep freeze. Social issues are not only stratified, they're ignored. Janice Galloway has been extremely vocal in her views as a feminist and on gender representation in the West of Scotland. She notes:

> There is coping with that guilt of taking time off the concerns of national politics to get concerned with the sexual sort: that creeping fear it's somehow self-indulgent to be more concerned with one's womaness instead of one's Scottishness, one's working class heritage or whatever. Guilt here comes strong from the notion that we're not backing up our menfolk and their "real" concerns. Female concerns, like meat on mother's plate, are extras after the man and the weans have been served".[4]

There is little difference, however, between Galloway's choice of subject matter and the other male authors discussed here: all have a powerful political dimension, with Scotland as their main concern. What Galloway is articulating are the realities of a hierarchical society governed from outside its borders where women's needs are overwhelmed or subsumed by other more pressing agendas. As always with Galloway, her instincts and her honesty are laudable. She, like Gilman, draws on autobiographical experiences in this novel – a double bereavement and a period of hospitalization for depression[5]. The novel too is a political protest, a mode of resistance against the medical discourse within patriarchy and the capitalist system. Equality, like independence of mind, comes first from the inside, something that Galloway instinctively knows to be true, but finds difficult to achieve.

In *The Trick Is To Keep Breathing* we meet Joy Stone as a young bereaved woman, institutionalized for "reactive depression". We share an insight into her frustration and unhappiness with the institutionalized concepts of society and the cultural constructs of gender. She is, however, no less troubled than Sammy Samuels or Jock McLeish. Both are deeply disturbed and feel marginalized by society, internalizing their rage. Sammy does this by drinking himself into a stupor and ending up blind. Jock does it by acting out his repression through sexual fantasies that cause self-inflicted guilt.

Germaine Greer has observed in the introduction to *The Whole Woman* that it was not her intention to write another book devoted to feminism. However, she states the impetus was compelling as she observed some thirty years after the publication of *The Female Eunuch* in *The Whole Woman,* that women were starving and mutilating themselves in increasing numbers. Greer argues that "[mutilation] can perhaps be explained as partly an angered response to being defined as our bodies. The woman who cuts her body asserts undeniably and emphatically that there is a self that has power over that body".[6] She has observed that "food is a feminist issue" (56) and that a disordered parental relationship and a sense of inadequacy are two contributing factors. In a world where some women feel they have little power, refusing food is a weapon as well as a source of power. As Joy Stone says, "I didn't need to eat. [...] The first four days were the worst. After that, it found its own level." (38-39) In her cornered isolation Joy Stone's refusal to eat is her only arsenal against the outside world.

Feminist literary critics Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore argue there is no innocence for the feminist reader "or neutral approach to literature: all interpretation is political. Specific ways of reading inevitably militate for or against the process of change".[7] While patriarchy and capitalism impose male privilege, Scottish history too it could be argued is complicit in "masculinisation" of its culture and nationhood. The Scots Presbyterian religion has been historically anti-female with its dominant male elect and doctrine of hell, damnation and Original Sin. The disproportionate number of witch burnings in Scotland, compared to those in England, goes some way to explaining the demonizing of the female for the sins of the flesh and those who fought back or descended into mental trauma.[8]

As Joy Hendry notes in her essay "A Double Knot In The Peeny":

> Being a woman is difficult enough. But being a Scottish woman is more difficult still because of Scotland's position as an oppressed colony of England, and a nation with severe psychological hang-ups. (36)

It would seem that in Scotland both sexes are fighting separate but similar battles in different spheres and losing. Aileen Christianson observes:

> given the patriarchal male-centred nature of Christianity and most other world religions, and the oppressive nature of their relation to women it is inevitable that the construction of the idea of the 'nation' should have been equally male-centred and patriarchal, manifesting itself in the traditions of warrior nations, warrior clan systems, with women as bearers of warriors or symbolic female figures of nationhood.[9]

It is impossible to talk about the subjugation of the sexes in Scotland without noting the repressiveness of Scottish Presbyterianism. Not only does Joy Stone have to contend with her Scottishness and patriarchy, but she is constantly hemmed in by Sunday school catechisms, or what might be called secular Calvinism, on the right way to behave "where good = value for money", (81) "where good = productive/hardworking/wouldn't say boo". (82) Ironically, however, none of these straightjacketed rules for life seem to dictate or destroy her sex life, as they do for Jock McLeish. Joy Stone is a woman without a place in society. She feels forced to play a role, but is never sure what that role comprises. In fact she plays many roles, most of them unsatisfactorily: wife, mistress, child to her friend Marianne's mother. Unfortunately, her only non-acting role as a troubled and disturbed young woman is the one for which she gets little credit or support. Scotland too could be seen as having played many roles: human capital for the Industrial Revolution; loyalists for a burgeoning empire; foot soldiers for two world wars and compliant servants to royalty and the elite.

Institutional care and justice come up wanting in the majority of novels I have examined, whether in social work or the justice system in *Trainspotting* or the medical arm of the compensation authorities and the law in *How Late It Was, How Late.* Both Renton and Samuels are made into scapegoats; Renton for not conforming to society's norms and Samuels for his prison record and his subsequent sight loss. They are not the problem, however; the institutions are. Joy Stone's immediate problem is she is suffering from clinical depression and needs medical attention. Joy's experience with the National Health Service is, in itself, an indictment of the institution and its two-tiered [three-tiered?] system.

Political economist Will Hutton argues in *The State We're In* that there is a structural inequality imbedded in the health system:

> Patients from large practices with large budgets [...] benefit from their GPs' greater purchasing ability, especially if they lived in an area with high standards of health – such as a middle-class suburb where the GPs could afford to pay more for any given service; or where the hospital would be more willing to provide it, calculating that the demands would be less than from poorer, less healthy areas.

Not only is the non-fee paying patient subjected to the disparities of socio-economic factors, but also the system is built on the vagaries of a market economy required to compete for health care business. As Hutton notes, "access to care becomes markedly unequal" [10] and "the health of the poor ... [becomes] worse". (213) Doctors themselves are disgruntled. "They know how to treat doctors in New Zealand" says Dr. Stead (233) leaving the impression of an under-funded system in Britain, with a lack of direction and yet more migration by health practitioners. Compounding this already tortured problem is a male hierarchy with the inherent power to diagnose and stigmatize. Joy's initial appointments with her general practitioner Dr. Stead are an exercise in arrogance and humiliation. He is accusatory, abrupt, dismissive and patronizing. Consultations read like spats. There is a satirical side to some of these exchanges, however, and they should be read with that in mind. Joy Stone is another unreliable narrator who, as Galloway notes, "is having a nervous breakdown so, of course, her perspective is going to be jaundiced".[11] What Galloway is trying to convey, one supposes, is the powerlessness of the exchange on the part of the patient - the drowning out of voice.

DOCTOR Try. You're not trying. You're looking for something that doesn't exist, that's why you're not happy. Look at me. I'm under no illusions. That's why I'm in control.

PATIENT How can I be more like you?

(52)

This paternalistic exchange could be read as being between England and Scotland at the time the book was written in the late 1980s when the economy was faltering and nationalistic aspirations were in doubt.

Visits to the health visitor appointed by Dr. Stead have a contrary social construct of paternalism. Here Joy instead becomes the model housewife fussing over biscuits and tea as the health visitor comes in unannounced:

HEALTH VISITOR … How are you coping?

PATIENT OK [Brave smile] I manage.

HEALTH VISITOR The house is looking fine.

PATIENT Thank-you. I do my best.

(21)

It is totally baffling why this woman is here at all, or why the doctor referred her. Joy receives little positive assessment of her depression. She never gets to communicate in any depth with health professionals. She is silenced and marginalized by them. Her experience on entry to Foresthouse mental institution only underlines the institution's dysfunction, not that of the patients. Doctors don't listen or observe, they misdiagnose and over-prescribe. Psychiatrists seem to think that she should heal herself rather than they should heal her. She languishes at state expense for weeks in a mental hospital without treatment. Doctors, not patients, are numbers in a queue, identified only in order of service provided. Sanity and intellect often seem to be on the side of the patient, the hippocratic oath left at the front door.

DOCTOR So. Why do you think you've been sent to us?

PATIENT … I'm here by invitation.

DOCTOR Yes, but why do you think you were referred?
What's the problem *as such?*

DIFFERENT DOCTOR … So. Why do you think you've been sent to us?

PATIENT … I want to shout Someone else just did that.
Just minutes ago, the same thing.
This is the third time I've been asked
this same old stuff. Doesn't anybody keep
any notes around here? Why do you all ask the same
thing? But I don't. I cough and try to look reasonable,
mustering a reasonable voice.

A doctor just left. He asked me all that.

(111-112)

In his essay "Ideology and ideological state apparatuses", Louis Althusser includes literature among the ideological apparatuses which contribute to the process of "reproducing the relations of production, the social relations which are the necessary condition for the existence and perpetuation of the capitalist mode of production".[12] These practices, he argues, "are supported and reproduced in the institutions of our society" (594) which he calls 'Ideological State Apparatuses'(ISAs), as distinguished from 'Repressive State Apparatus' (the police, the penal system, the army). ISAs represent the education system and its ancillaries - the family, the law, media and the arts. All these are necessary adjuncts to a functioning society. "The central ISA in cultural capitalism is the education system, which prepares children to act consistently with the values of society by inculcating in them the dominant versions of appropriate behavior as well as history, social studies and of course, literature". (594) What we see in the novels discussed so far, and what we shall see in the *Trainspotting* chapter, is that the ideology of the institutions examined is rarely questioned. What we find is a society where a dysfunctional healthcare system is delivered to a clientele who feel they deserve nothing better reproduces the class hierarchies in which it operates. In Toni Davidson's *Scar Culture*, discussed later, we witness the psychiatric arm of this system run amok, leaving the patient like Joy Stone more disturbed at the end of the treatment than at the outset. A lack of ownership, or accountability by the participants concerned, could be the explanation for the institutional sense of despair prevalent in Scotland at the time, or it could be argued that institutions mirror society. Joy's experience in hospital and also in her job as a drama teacher, leave her feeling that she is the problem not the institution. "I teach children", she says

I teach them :

1. routine
2. when to keep their mouths shut
3. how to put up with boredom and unfairness
4. how to sublimate anger politely
5. not to go into teaching

(12)

Joy tells her story to five different doctors in all. No one diagnoses her anorexia and bulimia, even though she is physically thin and obviously not eating. She is even examined by a gynecologist to see if she is pregnant, because of her lack of menstruation. This is one indicator, among others, which are never diagnosed. Most importantly, her family history is never probed.

Janice Galloway has said that one reason why people care less about state-run mental institutions is that "middle class people don't end up in them. Maybe that's the reason private ones are different. It's taken for granted that people who are in the NHS wards by and large live in poverty and nobody ever addresses the fact that their poverty might be one of the things that has led them to end up in a psychiatric hospital". [13]

Joy's stay in Foresthouse does not make her feel better. Vomiting and starving herself offer a form of absolute control over her life where her medical care does not. What Joy needs is positive assessment of her depression and someone to listen to her problems which will help her to find an active solution to the clinical depression she is suffering. She has closed herself off from society in order to hold herself together. She talks to no one, except Marianne - who is in America - and then often by letter. As Galloway observes "it's always easier to talk to someone who isn't there than it is to talk to someone who is ...." (340). Hospitalization is not furthering her recovery.

Galloway, like Gray and Kelman, is concerned with class. Gray and Galloway are probably closer in attitude in the two novels discussed. Both Joy Stone and Jock McLeish have middle-class professions, but both seem uncomfortable in bourgeois society, Jock in his relations with Helen and his championing of fair pay for Denny, a topic not normally espoused by middle-class Conservatism. Joy Stone never overtly talks about class, but there are indicators that class, as well as gender, are central concerns of their novels. Both Jock and Joy come from working-class backgrounds though Joy's is much more disruptive than Jock's. For Joy class is powerlessness, making her doubly marginalized. While she is a professional, even her job as a drama teacher isn't enough to give her a sense of self-worth, except the limiting observation that her job is what "tells me what I am". (12) She argues that her job defines her, yet there is the nagging doubt of whether she feels she belongs. Her weekends at the betting shop seem to pull her back into the working-class milieu where young, attractive employees are easy targets for employers' sexual appetites. In the psychiatric hospital it almost comes as a surprise when one of the other patients declares accusingly "[t]hink you're better than this place don't you?" (222)

Both sexes are subject to the fixed identity conferred by bourgeois ideology and colonized nation. The class structure produces and dictates contradictory subject positions for compliance or non-compliance. Kelman's Sammy Samuels could be seen as freely accepting his subjection: "Hope doesnay spring eternal". [14] Similarly Joy Stone also accepts subjectivity when she says "I don't menstruate, but I bleed other ways" (92), or Jock's plea for understanding ("I am not a bad man, I am a good man"). (56) Writing specifically about women and patriarchy, Catherine Belsey notes that one way of responding to this situation is "to retreat from the contradictions and from discourse itself, to become "sick" - more women than men are treated for mental illness. Another is to seek a resolution of the contradictions in the discourses of feminism". (598) It would seem Joy Stone does both, but with limited success.

However, Joy's family is also making her sick. Her mother and sister Myra dominate and abuse her. Myra has "hands like shovels. Myra left marks". (59) Both read her diary and her sister Myra burns it. We learn of Joy's mother's attempt to drown herself and her death from a fall shortly afterwards. Her female family history is littered with the corpses of female suicides and suspected suicides, condemning Joy to the notion of inherited insanity, as well as in the larger context denying the disease at the heart of the family home. The male family history is less interesting: "coronary thromboses, bronchial disorders, mining accidents. Even some natural causes. With my father it was booze ..."(199). This throws up the corollary that the female descends into madness and suicide, while the male drinks himself to death. Joy's sister Myra, who she's been afraid of "ever since I remember" (59) is old enough to be her mother. In fact, Myra and her mother were pregnant at the same time, but Myra's baby died. When Joy feels hard done by she thinks about how much worse it would be if Myra had been her mother. Joy Stone has no role models and precious little family support. Her closest friend Marianne is out of the country. But it is to her that Joy turns with a feeling that safety in the distance between them aids communication. Letters to Marianne are a lifeline. Marianne genuinely cares for Joy's health and her psychological well-being. Female friendship, it would seem, is the ultimate therapy.

Galloway's narrative encourages the reader to see Michael's death as central to the story, but it is not. The story is much more personal than that. It is about loss of identity. At the same time the narrative device of threading their final days together in a kind of cinematic panning with italics and the present tense - keeping the past alive - could also be read as marginalizing Michael's importance. The slow-motion sequence of the events surrounding his death and a conviction that loving unconditionally has its own

pitfalls proves that Michael fulfills a role, but is never really brought to life by the narrator. Joy's relationships with men and her dissatisfaction with them - and herself – are what forms the focus of her story, as they do for Cassie in *Foreign Parts*. Even Joy's work as a drama teacher isn't enough to give her a sense of self-worth. It is relevant that the institutional structures of the school system and organized religion should combine to make Joy feel invisible. It is, after all, Mr. Peach, the head teacher, who lectures on reality, and the Rev. Dogsbody at the memorial service, who completes the task by figuratively rubbing her out. "He'd run time backwards, cleansed, absolved and got rid of the ground-in stain. [...] And the stain was me". (79)

In *Feminine Fictions* Patricia Waugh theorizes that those excluded from or marginalised by culture for reasons of class, gender, race, beliefs, appearance, or whatever, never experience a sense of "full subjectivity". They already sense the extent to which subjectivity is constructed through institutional dispositions of power relations as well as "fictional convention".[15]

Gavin Wallace has observed that *The Trick Is To Keep Breathing* is in many ways "a perfect analogue to Gray's *1982 Janine* as an exploration of psychological collapse from a female perspective". [16] He concedes, however, that the female experience is focused on an "entrenched male value system" which reflects "the regressively masculine values inscribed in Scottish society and culture" and the "sinister chorus of louder, external [voices] - those of insensitive psychiatric opinion, of authoritarian employers, of exploitative women's journalism" (ibid.) Joy, however, internalizes her rage and abuses her own body, bingeing and starving herself, while Jennifer Wilson in *So I Am Glad* exhibits her rage by sexually abusing her lover.

Joy's relationships with men are a minefield of broken dreams. In her ill-fated seven-year romance with Paul her subservience to his needs reduced her to a non-person. In her liaison with Tony, the boss of the betting shop where Joy works part-time she is the clichéd mistress with few of the perks. Unfortunately Joy is hardly unaware of what going out with Tony entails; "kissing was taken for granted. He had paid good money, after all". (174) Joy's only positive male relationship is with David, ten years her junior. She's less needy with him and there is no unequal power dynamic between them. Friendship as well as sex is the relationship's foundation. It could be interpreted that David represents a change for the better in the unequal relationships she has with the other men in her life. Her relationship with David implies that younger men might be more sensitive to contemporary mores and expectations in sexual and non-sexual relations and is arguably an indication that the uneven war between the sexes is assuaging, to a degree. Joy's

relationship with David, who alone comes to visit her in hospital, is not one of dependency like all the others: "She shouldn't get dependent on any one person again". (132)

Joy's relationships with men are fraught with disappointment because she understands little about herself and her own needs, denying herself the ability to be able to successfully cope with the demands of someone else. She is constantly trying to be the perfect self that all the advice columns and women's magazine articles portray. The absence of a normal family, or, it seems, any parental love has left her looking for love and reassurance in all the wrong places. "Agony aunt" columns reassure her that things are just as bad for others. The determinism of the horoscopes helps put a shine on her future prospects; diets promise a firmer you and when in doubt about the womanly role, endless baking and food preparation point the way to a man's stomach, if not his heart. Popular culture and the pop psychology of television, magazines, books and popular music replace a sense of self for Joy Stone and give her reassurance that she's doing everything that's expected of her. In *Reading Women's Magazines* Joke Hermes [sic] observes that almost all the studies of women's magazines show concern rather than respect. Concern, she says, "belongs to what Joli Jensen has called "modernity discourse" in media criticism. Jensen shows how the media in this type of discourse is seen as a Janus-faced monster: agent of change and progress, but also devil in disguise, agent of alienation, anomy [sic] and despair in the powerfully seductive guise of provider of entertainment and excitement ".[17]

Far from providing entertainment and excitement these magazines raise unrealistic expectations for someone like Joy Stone, who not only lacks role models, but seems unable to find a comfortable balance in her relationships with men and sways between wife and mother roles, succeeding at neither. As Joy says of Paul: "I tried to talk to him" because the magazines I was reading said communication was important. He was reading different magazines: ... I thought the answer was soul-searching and he thought it was split-crotch knickers". (42)

Janice Galloway has explained that we should read Joy's emotional and mental state as an exercise in "heightened reality". "She's lost [...] several layers of skin and several layers of protection that the rest of us use when things start to get tight [...] or uncomfortable, or when things start to move in self-destructive cycles". Galloway goes on to say that she believes

> the world is not organized in a way that is healthy for women to live in. The world is very much organized in ways that are singularly unhealthy for people to live in to begin with. Women more than men, I think, have a tough time trying to make sense of what they are fed, as being a good way to live, as a moral way to live, as a sound way to live. [...] It is impossible to think and to feel and to be sane and to be female all at once.[18]

Galloway uses Joy's internal turmoil as the basis for the novel's fragmented narrative structure. It is an effective use of the techniques which Alasdair Gray utilizes, particularly in his portrayal of Jock McLeish. Galloway has acknowledged her intellectual debt also to Kelman, who spotted her in a short story competition and introduced her to then Polygon editor, Peter Kravitz, who subsequently published *The Trick Is To Keep Breathing*. Galloway's use of an episodic style in *The Trick Is To Keep Breathing* owes much to Kelman's *The Busconductor Hines*. Her writing style in this novel, however, has Gray as literary muse. In Galloway's hands the text is handled in what could be called a hyper-textualized manner with the confessional mode of the narrative beginning on the first left hand page with the words "I can't remember the last week with any clarity" (6). Light and bold-faced passages and pages are interspersed throughout the text underscoring the fragmentary nature of the text. Phrases and words bleed off into the margins signaling Joy Stone's distress and anxiety. The text makes liberal use of different media: horoscopes, advice columns and letters. Elliptical bubbles signal states of mind, or maybe just textual "coming up for air". Apart from the use of italics as a narrative device, to which I have already alluded, Galloway uses this mixed media of typography to best effect in the series of appointments she has with those in authority - doctors, head teachers, the health visitor. Key moments of despair like the funeral service where her presence is ignored and denied cleverly emphasize the feeling of disentitlement that is a recurring theme throughout the novel. As Cairns Craig notes "[t]ypography becomes the medium in which the inexpressible anguish of the character finds its representation within the text that dramatises her repression of that very anguish".[19] (195)

It is not, however, these technical devices, which shape the novel's structure, but the strength and breadth of Joy's dilemma and how she handles it. The novel's self-lacerating wit is what makes it such compelling reading. Galloway uses humor as a device to cut straight to the heart in its directness, unfortunately to the detriment of Joy's mental health. Self-deprecating humor delivered monologically could be said to be a hallmark of Scottish comedy, which Billy Connolly, for one, has turned into an artform. Even more relevant to my argument about the Scottish abused self is the revelation in a biography published in 2001 concerning his sexual abuse.[20] There is, however, a quality

of cultural survival in the wit, a gallows humor that Galloway exploits in this novel and in her short stories. "There is no such thing as a free lunch" (46) becomes more than the double entendre of the added calories defeating the purpose of starving herself. Lunch, however, not only means eating, it also means talking, explaining to someone else why you're depressed. Her short story collection *Blood* (1991) is almost overwhelmingly bleak. In "Fearless," she articulates the misogynist element in Scottish culture in a tale of a mentally disturbed local who spreads terror among the women and children of the neighborhood. The men totally ignore him. He is not a threat to them. He preys on the women who try to diffuse his anger, while at the same time, leave plates of food on his doorstep. He is both feared and used by the women as a totem against the children ("YOU'LL END UP LIKE FEARLESS") [21] and by the men as "the hard, volatile maleness of the West Coast Legend". Some even admired his drunken bravado. He was a character, and a victim. "After all, you had to remember his wife left him". (113) To the child it is unfathomable why nobody, not even the law, did anything about him until the first-person narrator in the story chooses to kick Fearless in the shin and fight back: "The outrage is still strong, and I kick like a mule". (ibid.) The message here is simple: it is up to Scottish women to speak up and fight back. This story stands out in *Blood* as singularly brave and outspoken in a collection that is full of death, violence and fear. In the title story an adolescent girl visits the dentist for an extraction and the dentist instructs his assistant to give her a sanitary napkin to staunch the flow of blood. You want to say "TELL HIM TO SHOVE IT, Martin Amis wouldn't have put up with this. Don't take it, kick him in the shins, demand surgical wadding, and enough of it so you don't frighten off the cello player and drip blood all over the piano keys!"

Alison Smith has commented on the bleakness of Galloway's writing, observing that although she is driven by the question of gender she offers few solutions on how to fight back. "[T]here's a peculiar passivity in her work that's all the more peculiar for coming from work of such passion and strength".[22] She reasons that the successful Glasgow fictions of which *The Trick Is To Keep Breathing* form part are also pretty depressing coming as they do during a period of economic decline and nationalistic uncertainty in Scotland. An alternative theory could be that there is a certain literary purging going on in these two books. Whatever the motivations might be Janice Galloway speaks to women's experience in a clear-headed unsentimental manner. In *The Trick Is To Keep Breathing*, Joy contemplates learning to swim. The reader does not expect the next line, "I read somewhere the trick is to keep breathing. They say it comes with practice". (235) This is unexpected because the reader thinks that throughout the novel that's what

Joy has been trying to do. By putting the title in the context of swimming Galloway adds to the trauma and the sense of potential recovery from the shock of Michael's drowning and her mother's attempted suicide from drowning. She also uses it as ballast for her assertion that - like Jock - she will not do nothing. The ending, however, is ambiguous. The penultimate line begins "I hear the rise and fall, the surf beating in my lungs. Reach for the bottle. Watch the lights". (236) We're left wondering whether after what seems like the telling of an episodic period of intense therapy and the first tentative steps toward recovery, instead of starving herself to death, Joy will try drowning her sorrows in alcohol. Yet the same voice intones "I forgive you", (235) surely an indication that with practice Scotland will change and Joy Stone will endure.

It is to this end that Galloway's more ambiguous ending seems acutely relevant. Like the protagonist in "The Yellow Wall-paper" Galloway refuses a resolution to the problems raised in the text. As Ruth Robbins notes of Gilman's short story: "social, economic, biological, cultural, psychic problems: none is resolved".[23] By providing a woman's voice in contemporary feminist Scottish literature, Janice Galloway addresses in fiction what Scottish women and girls experience, quite literally, from the country's social justice system, and the use of language by institutions such as the Roman Catholic Church and the mainstream media: a man-made hierarchy to articulate a man-made language.

In a June 2000 Paisley case a 13-year-old girl was brought directly to court from hospital after an attempted suicide, to be cross-examined for three hours by her alleged rapist, John Anderson, a notorious "hard man" who had a year earlier conducted his own defence in a similar case. Anderson had been cleared of raping five different women in the previous fifteen months - the majority of the verdicts were "not proven". The most recent trial, which produced no forensic evidence and instead relied, as Anderson did in his cross-examination, on corroborative evidence, produced two "not proven" verdicts and one "not guilty". The presiding judge, Lord Bonomy, argued that "women find it a harrowing experience to be examined at all", a statement supported by leading solicitor-advocate Joe Beltrami who observed that [the Scottish] "legal system is perfectly fair as it is ..." [24] While this case, it could be argued, is a travesty of due process, the media and other institutions seem to have unbridled power to use language which is demeaning and sexist in nature. Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore have observed:

> Language does not merely name male superiority: it produces it. The tendency of words to seem transparent, to appear simply to label a pre-existing reality, indicated to feminists the crucial role of language in the construction of a world picture which legitimates the existing patriarchal order. (4)

When the Scottish justice system condones the cross-examination of a 13-year-old girl by her alleged rapist and the Scottish mainstream press sees no conflict in running the headline "Rapist admits attack on virgin"[25] to describe a Glasgow court case concerning a student's brutal beating, sadness may be the only dignified response. The press, however, is not alone when it comes to unacceptable language and labeling. The late Monsignor Tom Connelly, spokesman for the leader of the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland, called health minister Susan Deacon a "nutcase" after she outlined the Scottish executive stance on contraception and abortion[26], personalizing what was Scottish Executive policy.

The Scottish Executive, led by ministers Wendy Alexander and Susan Deacon, have made an impressive start to the new parliament's first year in 1999 with human rights legislation which legitimizes freedom of choice and the teaching of information on sexual diversity in the schools. This confirms that there is room for constructive change in society when a nation has some say in its own governance, be it towards sexual equality, or racial and religious tolerance. In fictional terms, Galloway underscores Joy Stone's self-determination to articulate and personalize the contradictions within capitalist society as lived-out experiences. As Waugh notes

> Marx emphasized that contradictions within capitalist society are not simply impersonal constructs, they are lived out through experience and do not have an independent existence outside people ... For feminism the emphasis on "impersonality" in all of these theories is problematic because [it is] deeply at odds with the practices of consciousness-raising and within women's own experience of subordination and objectification as lived realities. (20)

While the subject matter of Janice Galloway's novel is depressing, the important point is that she has confidently articulated, not only the dilemma Scottish women find themselves addressing in all walks of life, but also the relevance of gender to the larger issues of nationhood and self-determination. Galloway's honesty and courage in this novel, her unerring ear for humor, come from the heart, but speak, with a purpose, to the head.

[1] Robbins, Ruth "Reading the Writing on the Wall: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-paper" *Literary Feminisms* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), pp.242-258, p.242

[2] Galloway, Janice. *The Trick Is To Keep Breathing* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1989), p.87. Further references are from the London Vintage 1999 edition

[3] Craig, Cairns, *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p.199

[4] Galloway. Janice, Introduction to *Meantime: Looking Forward To The Millennium* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991), pp.5-6

[5] Babinec, Lisa Suzanne, "Cultural Constructs: The Representation of Femininity in the Novels of Emma Tennant, Margaret Elphinstone and Janice Galloway", (unpublished doctorial thesis no. 9781, University of Glasgow, 1994). Appendix. Interview with Janice Galloway, 29 October 1993, pp.332-341

[6] Greer, Germaine, *The Whole Woman* (London: Doubleday, 1999), p. 97

[7] Belsey, Catherine, ""Constructing The Subject" *Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism,* ed. by C. Belsey and J. Moore 2nd edn (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1997), p.1

[8] Hendry, Joy, "A Double Knot In The Peeny" *In Other Words: Writing As A Feminist,* ed. by G. Chester and S. Nielsen (London: Hutchison, 1987), pp.36-45, pp.36-37

[9] Christianson, Aileen, "Imagined Corners to Debatable Land: Passable Boundaries" in *Scottish Affairs,* no. 17 (Autumn, 1996), pp.120-133, p.121

[10] Hutton, Will, *The State We're In* (London: Vintage, 1995,) p.212

[11] Babinec, L.S., p.252

[12] Belsey, Catherine, "Constructing the Subject: Deconstructing the Text" *Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism,* ed. by R. R. Warhol and D. Price Herndl (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), p.593

[13] Babinec, L.S., pp.335-6

[14] Kelman, James, *How Late It Was, How Late,* (Toronto: Minerva 1994), p.248

[15] Waugh, Patricia, *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting The Postmodern* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 2

[16] Wallace, Gavin, "Voices In Empty Houses: The Novels of Damaged Identity" in *Scottish Novel Since the Seventies* ed. by G. Wallace and R. Stevenson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), pp.217-31, pp.223-4

[17] Hermes, Joke, *Reading Women's Magazines: An Analysis of Everyday Media Us* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), p.1

[18] Babinec, L.S. p.333

[19] Craig, Cairns, *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p.195

[20] Stephenson, Pamela, *Billy* (London: Harper Collins, 2001)

[21] Galloway, Janice, *Blood* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1991), p.112

[22] Smith, Alison, "Four Success Stories" *Chapman,* no. 74-75 *(* Autumn/Winter 1993), pp.177-192, p.179

[23] Robbins, R. p.257

[24] Drought, Andy, "Cleared of five charges in 15 months", Friday June 9 2000. *The Herald*, pp.1,3

[25] *The Herald,* Friday, June 9 2000, p.9

[26] Trueland, Jennifer, "Winning's anger at easy sex for young people of Scotland: Cardinal enters abortion row with attack on minister*", The Scotsman*, Friday, 3 December 1999, p.1

Chapter Four

Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting*

Violence, the warped sibling of economics
Irvine Welsh[1]

If violence is the sibling of economics, anger and revenge have to be close relatives. These emotions are everywhere in Irvine Welsh's work, specifically in *Trainspotting*, but in his other novels and short stories as well. Davie's revenge fantasy on the dying Al Venters and Kelly's "Eating Out" tainted food episode involving the "invading" English university students, share the seething anger and self-loathing of a nation turned inward and represent a violent and abusive Scotland. It is a response also evident in Gray's *1982 Janine.* Both novels act out violence on others but show the protagonists' self-loathing, making addiction, to alcohol or drugs essentially harm against the self. Heroin becomes a social anesthetizing agent.

Since its publication, the novel has retained its immediacy as an examination of a segment of the population and its political relevance, and as a social critique. It has also, however, the underlying aim, which is addressed only in theoretical terms, of arguing for the legalization and decriminalization of drugs.

Welsh has said he wrote *Trainspotting* to express his anger at the death of people he grew up with, not about drugs.[2] He argues, in a foreword to the plays *Trainspotting* and *Headstate,* that society is no longer sustainable and government deliberately fosters political, social and economic inequities. (4) The 1980s, he argues, "heralded a major change in the drug culture"(2) with cheap heroin taking the place of tobacco and alcohol for a segment of the population who would not normally be involved in the heroin scene and who "didn't have a fucking clue what was going on".[3] The legal status of drugs, he observes, "has always been related to historical, capital and economic factors,"[4] and has had little to do with "health or scientific or criminological issues concerning the toxicity, addictive qualities and social damage caused by a particular drug". (2)

The novel's politics span the 1970s and 1980s. Welsh has said he began writing the short story "The First Day Of The Edinburgh Festival" while he was a student, enrolled in a one-year Masters of Business Administration program at Heriot-Watt University in 1988. Politically, as well as economically, the discovery in the late 1970s of North Sea Oil field "the Forties – 120 miles north-east of Aberdeen"[5] - changed the tenor of British politics. About the same time, Margaret Thatcher came to power and brought

"the whole concept of the Union into question", as Christopher Harvie notes (185). Regional development suddenly meant the north-east, not the south-west. Edinburgh and the greater Midlothian area had never been heavily industrialized. The capital itself had little manufacturing, unlike Glasgow, and relied heavily on government, tourism and the service and retail industry for its economic base. Thatcherite social engineering, like the poll tax and the privatization of the bus and electrical industry, polarized the population. Job creation policies (that never led to jobs) and regressive taxation policies, which rewarded higher income earners, were the backdrop to life in the city that Renton articulates with his opinions on choice and nationalism.

Welsh's observations on the downward spiral of those he grew up with is increasingly relevant to my thesis as the poverty gap between the rich and the poor increased with the dictates of the free market economy. The roots of addiction are manifold, but according to a recent Canadian study by Bruce K. Alexander, who uses Canadian and Scottish history as a backdrop, "as free market globalization speeds up so does the spread of dislocation and addiction".[6] Dislocation in this context can be seen in the rootlessness of the main characters. They have no community. Leith represents a cheap place to live where the law leaves them alone. No one in the group comes from secure, nurturing families and the conspicuous wealth of Edinburgh acts as a haar frost freezing any aspirations they might have of escape within the capital itself.

The book's setting in Edinburgh then plays more than a geographical underpinning to the narrative. On the first day of the Edinburgh Festival, Mark Renton, the book's primary narrator, is bent over a noxious plugged-up toilet in a bookie's lavatory in Leith, dredging through his own shit to recover opium suppositories he has inadvertently expelled. Edinburgh has always enjoyed the reputation of being one of the world's most beautiful capital cities. The city's middle-class image as a festival city with the castle as a symbolic baronial fortress, was as Welsh argues, "at worst a lie and at best perversely one-sided and had a hegemony over all the other images of this urban, largely working-class, but multi-cultural city. Other realities existed, had to be shown to exist"[7].

Welsh's argument is both an emotional and a moral one and not dissimilar to the political debate by Alasdair Gray and James Kelman which ensued during Glasgow's City of Culture year in 1990, when the city centre was beautified, while the housing schemes were left to decay. It is a debate with global implications over image and share of resources that takes place during every Olympic Games.

The narrative is a curious mixture of dark humor, satire and irony and shows "marked fondness for the grotesque",[8] a phrase Edwin Morgan uses to describe Scottish satirical verse. As he says, "there must be something about the conditions of life in Scotland which has given rise to so much satire". (xi) Public opinion is divided on the legalization and decriminalization of drugs although there is a general social condemnation of the use of hard drugs. Thus *Trainspotting* seems determinedly provocative, and differs from the other novels discussed here, given the taboo nature of drugs versus alcohol in society.

Trainspotting appeared as a series of short stories, the first of which was published in *New Writing Scotland 9* (1991), and edited by Janice Galloway and Hamish Whyte. The main narrators, Mark Renton, Sick Boy, Begbie, Spud Murphy and Tommy piece together the group's profile in an episodic literary style. The text moves from first-person narratives, some in dialect, some not, to a third-person interior narrative, often making it difficult for the reader to identify who's saying what and in general making the narrators unreliable. It is not straightforward social realism, but a mixture of comedy, satire, surrealism and the grotesque and probably deserves the nomenclature *écriture merde* coined by Neil McMillan:

> Welsh emerges not so much as a gritty or dirty realist, but rather as someone who takes the grit, the dirt, the junk, the shit, piss, spew, blood, saliva, sperm ("muck") - all these bodily fluids and wastes, and cultural detritus - human waste, wasted humans - all different kinds of abject - and recycles them, materializes their hollow worthlessness, within a distinctive linguistic and metaphoric economy. He does not give us the truth or reality of dirt, but writes it, makes it signify; not dirty realism, but *écriture merde*. As any single meaning of junk is exiled to let in other, manifold significances - the poisons of poverty, the mess of sex, the wastes disavowed by, but inherent in, clean living no one, and no place, is safe. [...][9]

There is, however, no doubt about content: *Trainspotting* is brutally frank in its examination of the physical and emotional effects of heroin addiction. Yet the novel can't be seen as a condemnation of the drug culture. Welsh portrays his characters as exiles from a repressive society.

Welsh's use of language acts as liberation - a way of rejecting the official ideology of the society while at the same time choosing one poison (heroin) over another (consumer capitalism). The accented dialogue is not confined to direct speech, but to the narrative sections as well, a hallmark of Kelman's work. As Bernard O'Keeffe notes in a discussion of language use in the novel:

> Many of its subjects are "taboo" that is, normally avoided or excluded, and much of its language is of a similar nature. Drug abuse, a variety of sexual acts, bodily functions and bodily substances are presented in language usually excluded or euphemistically expressed in more conventional works. There are no euphemisms in *Trainspotting*; the "f" word and the "c" word are frequently and casually deployed. The narrators' use of taboo words marks their contempt for, and distance from, social conventions and any sense of propriety.[10]

Trainspotting shares its political use of language with Kelman's *How Late It Was, How Late*, another novel where the "f" word, if not the "c" word are casually deployed. There is, however, humor, energy and purpose in the profanity and colloquial nature of the protagonists' language. Sick Boy's Sir Sean impersonations parody Connery's iconic status as Scotland's National God, a man who doesn't pay taxes, lives abroad and probably since the film version of *Trainspotting* finds it difficult to make dinner reservations over the phone anywhere in Scotland. Spud's catboy jive talk, mixed with cockneyfied rhyming and Edinburgh slang is his signature: a nice touch, given that Spud is the fall-guy character. Characters have dialogue to be spoken and mimicked and most importantly to entertain. The key to Welsh's success in this novel is his fine ear for street idiom. The dialogue also helps to both clarify and confuse the reader concerning the multi-voiced nature of the narrative. This at times makes it difficult to know who is speaking and what they are saying, which one presumes is also intentional. Ian Rankin has commented that Welsh made up words in *Trainspotting*which have now been incorporated into general usage[11]. There is, too, a political point to the language: Welsh has said he couldn't imagine characters who thought in received pronunciation - "A living language is there to be used, it shouldn't be hidden, shouldn't be pushed aside, shouldn't bow to pressures regarding standard English"[12]. It is an observation that owes more than a nod to James Kelman's mastery of the demotic.

M. Keith Booker has observed, in his critique of Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*, another novel with an episodic and violent plot that presents anti-social behavior as a way of self-validation, that language use is a form of "linguistic rebellion"[13]. Nadsat describes the manufactured, stylized language used in the novel. It could be argued that the use of the vernacular in *Trainspotting* is a way of rejecting the official ideology of society by rejecting the language of that society and replacing it with one the literary establishment dismisses. The language itself, Booker observes is "invested with a lust for violence and contempt for women, presumably because the Nadsats themselves harbour such attitudes".[14] The description could clearly be transposed to describe Welsh's use of a stylized Edinburgh dialect in *Trainspotting* and his characterization of women. Both novels challenge the reader, have main characters that display violent behavior and are

seen as controversial and shocking. Alex, the central protagonist in *A Clockwork Orange*, does evil by his own free will, thus emphasizing Burgess' point that "if I cannot choose to do evil neither can I choose to do good. It is better to have our streets infested with murderous young hoodlums than to deny individual freedom of choice".[15] For Burgess, the novel "sincerely presented my abhorrence of the view that some people were criminal and others not ... [I]t was in Britain, about 1960, that respectable people began to murmur about the growth of juvenile delinquency and suggest that the young criminals were a somehow inhuman breed and required inhuman treatment."[16] The re-issue of the film *A Clockwork Orange* in Britain in 2000 caused hardly a ripple of controversy. One might suppose society is inured to the violence portrayed in the twenty-five or so years since the movie first appeared. Violence turned inward in *Trainspotting* really represents the futility of open insurrection or acceptance.

While promoting drug use is socially unacceptable, the epidemic in the 1980s did not happen by chance. Edinburgh was routinely described as the AIDS capital of Europe. Critics of government policy toward drugs have observed that "if harm reduction is really to be worthy of the name, it also means taking political measures to tackle unemployment, bad housing, low wages, lack of decent sport and leisure facilities, and a general lack of opportunities for young people"[17]. These are the seeds of discontent that Burgess saw in *A Clockwork Orange* and which the late Malcolm Bradbury observed as bringing the well-established liberal consensus to an end. The closing of the coal mines in the north of England and the miners' strikes in the 1980s only emphasized the fact that the Conservative Government had few job creation strategies in place to alleviate social upheaval and address the effects of structural unemployment. Social needs were overridden by global economics and national governments' lack of response to structural change. As Will Hutton observes: "The country as a whole, and the North in particular, suffered from large-scale unemployment, and a majority of marginalized and insecure jobs"[18].

More directly, the questions of global economics, a free market economy and the Thatcherite policies of social and economic inequality, are central to events in Welsh's novel. Housing and health policies, along with economic policy shifts of taxation, from direct to indirect taxes, freed up disposable income for high earners and polarized the advantaged and disadvantaged. As Will Hutton notes:

> The boom moved to its climax in 1988, with the reduction in top tax rates to 40 per cent particularly overheating the south-east where most higher rate tax payers lived, emphasizing a regional as well as social bias to inequality which had wider malevolent economic consequences. (178)

It is in this context that Renton explains why he uses heroin:

> Choose us. Choose life. Choose mortgage payments; choose washing machines; choose cars; choose sitting oan a couch watching mind-numbing and spirit-crushing game shows, stuffing fuckin junk food intae yir mooth. Choose rotting away, pishing and shiteing yerself in a home, a total fuckin embarrassment tae the selfish, fucked-up brats ye've produced. Choose life. Well, ah choose no tae choose life. (187)

This statement is both an indication of self-hatred and an indictment of consumer capitalism and the Yuppie culture it breeds: and importantly, too, a culture of drug dependency and welfare in what Fiona Oliver describes as the "Scottish body as a weak host to a greater power – heroin".[19] For Daniel "Spud" Murphy - jobs are definitely the consolation prize, and perhaps his use of Speed is too. He and Renton are the only two in the group looking for legitimate work albeit at the insistence of the Department of Social Services. However, in a satirical, surreal job interview, Spud demonstrates why work is so far removed from the realms of possibility, even if jobs were available. Like many of the homeless with mental health problems or alcohol and respiratory related illnesses, heroin addicts need comprehensive rehabilitation and institutional care before they can begin to contemplate life, never mind hold down a job.

The failure of the community is starkly drawn in the inability of the justice and medical system to play any constructive role in the rehabilitation of both Spud and Renton, when they get caught stealing books from Waterstone's. Spud gets a ten-month sentence which he says afterwards he'll use to get off heroin and as "second prize" use hash "(H.M. Prison) Saughton's barry fir hash". (168) Renton receives a fine for cannabis possession and a suspended sentence on condition that he continue his treatment regime with social service. In an irony that has much to do with the judge's class distinction, Renton explains that he stole the Sőren Kierkegaard text for his own erudition. Prompted to give a short analysis of Kierkegaard's existentialist philosophy he gives an impressively straightforward analysis of subjectivity and truth, concerning choice, versus societal wisdom as social control. Arguably what Renton is really saying to the judge is that drugs should be decriminalized, legalized and rehabilitation should be a question of choice.

Neither sentence is social justice; instead, it is the letter of the law, within the jurisdictional confines of a judiciary appointed by the government of the day with no legal independence. No-one in the novel is institutionalized. Counselling, methadone and temazepan "treatment regimes" are meted out within a system that is generalized rather

than specialist in nature. Renton's medical referral includes "pure" psychiatry, clinical psychology and social work. In a series of sessions with his psychiatrist Dr. Forbes, whose approach is largely Freudian psychoanalysis, an exchange reminiscent of Joy Stone's psychiatric sessions in *The Trick Is To Keep Breathing*, we see two people not talking to one another but off to the side:

Dr. Forbes: You mentioned your brother, the one with the, eh, disability. The one that died. Can we talk about him?

(pause)

Me: Why?

(pause)

Dr. Forbes: You're reluctant to talk about your brother?

Me: Naw. It's just that ah dinnae see the relevance ay that tae me being oan smack.

Dr. Forbes: It seems that you started using heavily around the time of your brother's death.

Me: A loat happened aroond that time. Ah'm no really sure how relevant it is tae isolate ma brar's death. Ah went up tae Aberdeen at the time; the Uni. Ah hated it. Then ah started oan the cross-channel ferries, tae Holland. Access tae aw the collies ye could hope fir.

(181-182)

To be fair, psychoanalysis, counselling or any kind of therapy involves an element of free will and self-determination: Kierkegaard and choice again. Renton's reaction here is classic liberalism's view of non-intervention by the state. The trick is for the patient to want to keep breathing and it is difficult for someone in Renton's life situation. Renton wants to get off drugs because his addiction is affecting his love life, not for any reasons of personal responsibility, or from a wish to reform or rehabilitate himself. Perhaps his bouts of abstinence have allowed him to look critically as his friends' slide into self-destruction. These point to what can be seen as the moral ambiguity of the novel. Drug taking is portrayed as both nirvana and nadir. Drugs are fun, when you're not hooked. Life is hell. Families represent a noose around the neck.

There is no evidence that the families of these addicts are constructively involved in any way in their recovery. In fact the families of this group need therapy themselves. Begbie's father, it would seem, is beyond help and a chance encounter by Renton and

Begbie at the long defunct Leith Central Station, which purportedly gives the book its title, finds Begbie's father in a drunken stupor, not recognizing his son ("What yis up tae lads? Trainspottin, eh"?) (309) It is more than a nod to the inane and pointless activity of trainspotting and heroin addiction.

This is a community of associates, rather than friends. Heroin is their true "friend" and is watching them sicken and die ("we're all dead white meat"). (8) Renton, who is cleverer than the others, gradually realizes that he has to get away from heroin use, away from his friends, or turn into likenesses of them. He is more cynical and thoughtful than the others, whose characters sometimes read like caricature. This is a turning point in the narrative where friendship turns into betrayal. As Andrew O'Hagan notes in a review of the film *Trainspotting*:

> Renton's pals are part of himself, and therefore worthy of rejection at some point. You get the distinct impression, for all his furious repudiations of nationality, he feels that whatever is wrong with the country is also wrong with them.[20]

Renton, unlike the others, sees the cycle of desperation and hopelessness that has taken hold of the country and perhaps himself, if he doesn't escape.

Mark Renton's parents are well-meaning, but completely confused about how to help their son. Renton's father is hard-working. He's been made redundant, but instead of hanging around the local bar, he sells small goods at local markets. Renton's father never had any chances, as he frequently tells his son. He grew up in Govan, left school at fifteen and was apprenticed. Yet when Renton analyzes his lot (discounting his year at university), leaving school at sixteen, taking an apprenticeship and, unlike his father, facing an era of mass unemployment, he sees society not as getting better, but becoming worse. Renton's mother is unquestioning, indulgent and smothering. She drinks too much and mixes alcohol with Valium. "Everybody gets a bit pished quickly" (169) says Mark in a bar scene after his brother Davie's funeral. He and his brother Billy are embarrassed by their mother's behavior when she discusses her menstrual periods ("forty-seven n still goat periods") (ibid).

Mark Renton (Rentboy, Rents) described by Sick Boy as "ma semen-rectumed chum", (27) a reference and nickname which is never embellished or explained, wages a somewhat futile battle to get off heroin. Numbered "Junk Dilemmas" track Renton's efforts at kicking his habit, relapsing, blowing it. Welsh has said that he kept a diary while in London during an 18-month period on heroin and used it to write these episodes.[21] This part of the novel is really Renton's story. The family "mapping" gives some clue to how ludicrous it is to suppose that people like Renton can "just say no" or demand "gissa job", referring to Yosser Hughes, the character depicted in Alan

Bleasdale's TV drama *Boys from the Blackstuff.* He was one of the seriously long-term unemployed in Thatcher's Britain where unemployment in 1986 was 11% up from 4% when she took power in 1979.[22]

There is no patriotic bravado in Welsh's novel ("Scotland the brave, ma arse") (228). There is no mention of Empire, World Wars, the Commonwealth or Scotland's engineering achievements around the world, which earlier literature might have trotted out as a salve for the poverty and self-debasement evident all around. There is a feeling, however, that enough is enough, that somehow Scotland could not continue to gripe about inequities, but had to come to grips with what O'Hagan refers to as "a cycle of extremity and hopelessness" (6). As Welsh says, other realities existed. Renton looks forward, not back. This is an important departure from the novels examined, so far, where all the protagonists, except Sammy, who doesn't look at all, look back .

Renton harbours no sentimental feelings for Scotland. He neither feels Scottish, nor British. The novel neither blames the English for Scotland's woes, nor sees the Scots as agents of British imperialism. Instead, in what could be called inverted nationalism, Renton feels Scots are "failures in a country ay failures". ("Ah hate the Scots") (78); articulating what Kasia Boddy observes as an attitude "both bleaker and less despairing and reveal[ing] less self-pity and greater compassion" in the novel.[23] Ireland is given grudging praise for having fought "English" imperialism. War in Ireland, Renton says, is not Scotland's war. He doesn't hate the English. He blames the Scots for allowing what he sees as "effete arseholes" to colonise Scotland. Renton is arguing for nationalism without tartanism.

Racism and bigotry are a way of life in much of British society. Both Renton and Spud have strong convictions, as we find out when Spud and his much younger biracial Uncle Dode get into a brawl in a bar full of Orangemen "relaxing" after their annual march and rally on Leith Links. The group starts singing sectarian songs about Bobby Sands and taunting Dode with "Ain't no black in the union jack! "(127) "Hate, hate, hate wi some punters", says Spud. (129) It is Renton's father, who is in the bar with his brothers and son Billy, who pulls a bloodied Spud and Dode out of the fray. Renton, who is not in the bar with them, is estranged from his father's family (who come from Glasgow) and his brother Billy because of their sectarian prejudice. Welsh has said that he feels that there is

> a kind of reverence for working-class culture. There's a lot of glossing over of sectarian and domestic violence – it's all portrayed in this creepy, sentimental way. The Orange Walk for example – it's seen as a big sentimental thing with nothing sinister about it; just a symbol of the working-class community. I wanted to react against that. I wanted to show that there's a lot of ugliness and a lot of negative things in all cultures. I'm not about putting any kind of culture on a pedestal. I'm not about trying to sanitize it [24].

Welsh has said in interviews that people might think he's attacking Scottish culture, a culture he's from and grew up in. This is not, he says, his intent. What he's trying to do, he observes, is make a statement about sectarianism and domestic violence. "They're ugly and they're wrong. You can't joke about a woman with a black eye 'cos her old man's had one too many or a man wi' a beer glass in his face 'cos his skin's the wrong color" (ibid.) Yet while racism is addressed in the novel, sexism isn't. Interviewers never seem to bring it up. The stage version, more than the film, however, does go some way to try to address the inclusion of women. A first-time reading of *Trainspotting* leaves the reader feeling that the only utterance that is gender neutral is in the usage of the word "cunt" but, of course, that too is derivative. Overwhelmingly, women are treated contemptuously. The problem here is not that Welsh is unable to write women's narrative well, as we see in the "Eating Out" dialogue with Renton's girlfriend Kelly and Renton's encounter with sixteen-year-old Dianne, two women who seem believable. Other women, however, are stereotypes of themselves. More typical is the bar brawl scene where a physically abused woman sides with her attacker boyfriend against Tommy when he intervenes. Another is the toilet scene at Renton's brother's funeral. The consensual sex, with his pregnant sister-in-law Sharon, is, if credible, nevertheless salacious. It is also an abuse of power and an example of contemptuous male behavior. It matters little whether Sharon consents or not. She is in no fit state emotionally to be making decisions. While these incidents are believable, Welsh seems to be arguing that sex relations and communication between the sexes are dysfunctional. Men think all women want is a man, then a bairn. Women think men are only good for an odd shag, babysitting and a wallet.

Berthold Schoene-Harwood notes this "patriarchal" trap in his critique of *Marabou Stork Nightmares*:

> Welsh's attempt at criticizing patriarchal power relations is ultimately sabotaged by a latent horror of feminine alterity, leading the author to conclude his novel, not on a note of reconciliation but with a nightmarish vision of man and women's mutual castration[25].

While the men are sometimes caricatures of themselves, the women's dialogue is, for the most part, a representation of stereotypes from working-class fiction representing patriarchal conditioning where romance, marriage and motherhood loom large. One explanation for this could be that Welsh is attempting to satirize women's patriarchal conditioning. In other words, for Welsh women deserve to be rebuked for their subservience to men and their similarities to each other. In *Theorizing Satire*, Brian Connery and Kirk Combe note that "satire is a literature of power and attack and has been seen as radically masculinist, and in fact a form of power exerted frequently against women".[26] Felicity Nussbaum in her work on anti-feminism, devoted to Restoration and 18th century literature, concurs when she argues that often "the satirist is not always fully in control of his persona." However, she also argues that "the criticism in satire implies the hope of something better"[27]. This could explain Welsh's attitude to women in the novel. Character development is sketchy, giving the reader no context to evaluate the author's intent. One would suppose, given Welsh's MBA thesis topic on equal opportunities training for women,[28] it would be incongruous to label him misogynist. In his writing neither sex exhibits many redeeming qualities toward each other. These are a group of sick people, including the parents. Sexual relations hardly bear analysis given the effect of heroin on the mind as well as the body. Inevitably the male characters' anxieties are primarily with sexual performance. Women's characterization is the only area where Welsh's humor, satire and irony are heavy-handed. It is baffling to me why Welsh, or his publisher, wouldn't have seen the author's characterization of women as a problem, unless the female content is supposed to reflect a society which itself is dismissive of women and sexist. These are not the women of Laura Hird's Edinburgh, who in their own way are no more appealing, but at least more enabled characters in a contemporary context.

The novel is, to a large extent, a boy's own story turned bad. Women don't really "invade" the inner sanctum and camaraderie of the men, probably because male drug injectors outnumber females by at least two to one.[29] Lesley is the exception. She is a heroin user and the death of her child Dawn is only rivaled by the grotesqueness of the Venters' passage. This scene portrays the depths of despair for the characters and the harrowing view of the effects of heroin addiction and its consequences. As the mood dissolves into sentimentality with Lesley being given the first hit, the arrested development endemic of the addict is horrifyingly real.

What Welsh rarely discusses is his open hostility to the country's drug laws.[30] Central to the debate on drug decriminalization, and only alluded to in the novel, is the double standard of treating licit drugs like alcohol and tobacco differently from illicit drugs like marijuana, cocaine and heroin. Begbie's status as "hardman" and resident psycho could be construed as a reference to the use of alcohol as the bourgeoisie drug of choice. Welsh and Kevin Williamson, editor of Rebel Inc., have commented on the acceptance of alcohol as a drug of social disorder and aggression. Begbie is feared as well as revered ("he doesn't do drugs he does people")[31]. None of the other characters exhibit this kind of violence and mania, implying that heroin addicts are passive, not aggressive. In terms of attitudes to drugs, society remains stuck in the Seventies. Decriminalization would remove the onus on anyone using a specified amount of any drug for personal use as long as it didn't put others at risk.

From 1980 to 2001, the use of drugs increased to epidemic proportions. The stigma remains, however, keeping the British government and others from looking rationally at drug use and decriminalization. Portugal, Spain and Italy have decriminalized drugs such as cannabis and heroin, enabling drug addicts to seek help instead of facing prosecution as criminals.

Begbie's character is an example of what Welsh feels is the hypocrisy of society, government and the press when it comes to legal drugs like alcohol and tobacco which kill far more people than illegal ones. He is the embodiment of that double standard. Frank Begbie (Franco, Beggars) is a man in a perpetual state of alcoholic rage, he's a nod to a much older tradition of substance misuse that refuses to die. His friends alternately fear him and revel in Begbie stories which as Renton says "portray the cunt as hardman and stud extraordinaire". (308) Hardman ecosse is a figure in West of Scotland literature, which is modeled on life, but mythologized too. Robert McNeil has said that Alec McArthur's *No Mean City* (1935), the novels of William McIlvanney, Jeff Torrington's *Swing Hammer Swing* (1993), and Peter Mullan's film *Orphans* "are a fairly faithful reflection of the macho world of west of Scotland criminality".[32] In a sidebar article to a story in the same edition of *The Scotsman*, Scotland's average homicide rate between 1985 and 1994 is revealed as almost twice as high as that of England and Wales.[33]

While it could be argued that cannabis and ecstasy are drugs that have a passive, rather than aggressive effect on the human body, it could be seen as a bit of drug-induced idealism to suggest that only alcohol fuels social disorder. Anyone who has lived in Glasgow is aware, if not affected, by the high incident of property thefts in the city, not all of them fueled by alcohol. Glasgow's urban housing estates and high levels of

unemployment have the "youngest average age of heroin injectors in the world at just sixteen years old. There are heroin injectors in places like Castlemilk and Possil as young as ten."[34] The reality which Welsh acknowledges is that Edinburgh had the highest rate of AIDS-related deaths per capita in Europe, partially because the health and governmental authorities closed down needle exchange clinics.

In Ian Rankin's Inspector Rebus novels, hardmen are often inextricably connected with the drug culture. Bigotry and racism are also often factors and "in personal motivation terms, being a hardman was one way people who had not been conventionally successful could earn respect", says Rankin. "In some communities - and by communities I mean housing schemes - there are different rules. The people you look up to are the people you fear, not necessarily the people who are the most successful or have the most money"[35]. There are still a lot of Begbies in the real world, including John Anderson mentioned in the previous chapter, whose trial was worthy of Kafka.

There is, however, throughout the novel the underlying theme of adolescent rebellion, or an enactment of it gone horribly wrong. It would be easy and unfair to accuse Welsh of writing a novel about men's inability to grow up. Drug addiction is not a level playing field. The drug addict brings the unresolved problems of family background, self-esteem and insecurity of his or her past, to addiction. Addiction acts like suspended animation. Welsh was in his mid to late twenties when he wrote most of what became *Trainspotting*. There is, however, a sanitized nature to the story, not discounting all the shit and piss. There is one drug-related death: Tommy's, an outsider to the group because he is clean at the beginning – there is a little pathos there and misdirected blame. The group are themselves what they most abhor - "tourists and shoppers, the twin curses ay modern capitalism". (228) Drugs are their daily shopping list. Leith is a "safe" drug haven, but none of them really live there. The law never pays a visit. Money seems to be found to buy drugs, even cheap drugs, yet none commit really horrendous violent crimes. An American tourist is mugged and there's an unemployment insurance scam. Tapes and books are stolen. Only Tommy and Dawn die when a substantial amount of high-grade heroin falls into their laps. For the anti-hero Renton, at least, there is a "happy" ending as he slips off to psychedelic dreams in Amsterdam. The "real life" reality is somewhat different. Heroin use has been attributed by a 1997 Home Office report as accounting for one in five crimes committed with an estimated 1.3 billion pounds of goods stolen each year.[36]

Welsh has written an entertaining book about heroin addiction because he enjoys taking drugs and believes they should be legalized and decriminalized. This is not an

existential protest novel, nor a study of a bohemian section of the population. It carries none of the condemnation of drug use of a William Burroughs' novel, or a Hubert Selby novel, or the horrors of addiction of Alexander Trocchi's *Cain's Book,* where as Joe McAvoy observes "the futility of a drug habit is never allowed to be anything other than nihilistic ..." "There is no redemption ...". The characters in *Trainspotting* are not the *avant garde.* As Welsh says, they didn't have a clue what was going on.

There is more to the novel, however, than just a representation of drug use. There is a "venting spleen" quality to the narrative, which I have alluded to in the chapter on *1982 Janine.* The anger is palpable toward the class alliance that controls Edinburgh's government, a year-round Festival committee only interested in beautifying the city centre for tourists. The central government's lack of a viable health and housing policy is only short of criminal as it condemns those at the bottom end of the economy to poverty and slum dwelling.

Trainspotting brought into focus "a world of desperation - of hedonism, heartlessness and wastedness" (7) says Andrew O'Hagan, leaving that world, rather than that of *Braveheart* or *Rob Roy,* as the enduring image. Thatcherite Britain had deliberately encouraged inequality, as a matter of government policy, as Welsh and others have argued, and incentives for the middle-class and the rich polarized an already widening income gap. While these policies were felt in other regions of the country, it was Margaret Thatcher's experiment with poll-tax that caused revolt in Scotland, with one third of the population refusing to pay.[37] Arrogance is a powerful motivator, as the Conservative party was to discover. Margaret Thatcher's comment to a women's magazine, on the eve of a visit to the Scottish General Assembly in 1988 that "there is no such thing as society, only individuals and families" [38] were not forgotten in 1997 when the Conservative party was routed in Scotland. The protagonists in the novels examined so far all turn anger inward. Perhaps in a societal sense Margaret Thatcher and John Major redirected some of that destructiveness.

There is too, a resentment toward the literary establishment of Scotland for aiding and abetting. The liberal use of "cunt" and "fuck" has the same intent as Kelman's use of "fuck" in *How Late It Was, How Late* and is aimed squarely at the literary hierarchy. *Trainspotting* has not been recognized in British literary award circles, or more particularly in Scottish literary awards. Revenge, however, is sweet. At last count there were 1,807,350 hits under Irvine Welsh on the altavista search engine. Even if Welsh does not write another book with the same success as *Trainspotting* he has shaken up the literary establishment. As Welsh comments on the success of *Trainspotting*: "It's a

passport, not an albatross, to do whatever I want. When *Trainspotting* came out, there was this idea of me as a noble savage ...a thick fucker from a Scottish council estate. The idea that you could become a proper writer is more of an overt challenge".[39] *Trainspotting* has been recognized, however, and taught in university literature courses as well as being included in high school booklists. The grotesque nature of some of the narrative still engenders volatile reaction. There have, however, been several journal articles. A 1998 article in *Scotlands* compares Welsh to Hogg[40], and another dealing with the *Trainspotting* publishing phenomena.[41] Cairns Craig included an extensive critique on Welsh in his *Modern Scottish Novel* published in 1999. Welsh has done what few authors, never mind first-time authors, could even dream of doing, by putting a very different face of Edinburgh on the world map: that of the people he grew up with. He has exposed Edinburgh society as a city of rich and poor, with its full share of bigotry, racism and class prejudice. Robert Burns would have understood, and so would Fergusson and Ramsay.

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[16] Quoted in Conal Urquhart "A Bit Of the old ultra-violence ... Kubrick's infamous film *A Clockwork Orange* to return to British screens" *The Scotsman*, Friday, 3 December 1999, p.7

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[30] Welsh, Irvine, Foreward to the texts of the plays *Trainspotting* and *Headstate* (London: Minerva, 1996)

[31] Cardullo, Bert, "Fiction into Film Bringing Welsh to a Boyle"in *Film Quarterly*, 25:3 (1997) pp.158-162, p.161

[32] McNeil, Robert, "He's Still With Us Spoiling For A Fight", *The Scotsman,* 4 March 2000, p.3

[33] Gray, Alison, "Scots 'Hard Man' Culture Is Blamed For High Murder Rate", *The Scotsman,* 4 March 2000, p.3

[34] Williamson, p.99

[35] McNeil, R., p.3

[36] Williamson, K., p.100

[37] Harvie, C., p.238

[38] Harvie, C., p.235

[39] Crumey, A., ibid.

[40] Miller, Karl, "Irvine Welsh and Other Festivals", *Scotlands 5,1* , 1998 pp 1-9

[41] Squires, Claire, "*Trainspotting* and Publishing, or Converting the Smack into Hard Cash" *Edinburgh Review* 101 (1998), pp.50-56

Chapter Five

A.L. Kennedy's *So I Am Glad*

Christian:

Oh tae be able tae express things sweet and clear!

Cyrano:

Oh tae be a neat wee handsome musketeer

Edwin Morgan[1]

In Alison Kennedy's *So I Am Glad*, (1995) Cyrano de Bergerac reprises his role as duelling bon vivant, following Edwin Morgan's 1992 Glaswegian Scots translation of Edmond Rostand's play. This time, however, Cyrano is a handsome wee musketeer who gets to deliver his own lines, in a tale of redemption which redeems the central character, M. (Mercy) Jennifer Wilson from a personal despondency that is paralysing her. In a new rendering of the theme of myth and magic, Jennifer weaves her life in present-day Glasgow with the Paris of the seventeenth century through her lover Cyrano de Bergerac's eyes. As Douglas Gifford notes Kennedy "extend[s] the worlds of Gray's *Lanark* and *Poor Things* [....Liz] Lochhead's *Dreaming Frankenstein* [...], or [Edwin] Morgan's *Sonnets From Scotland* [..], until the Scottish and mainly urban present intermingles with anything and anywhere the author cares to imagine".[2] Of the five novels examined here this one conveys the most hope for the future: a defiant optimism not only to be glad but the will to have something to be glad about.

Morgan himself ponders:

> that at times when states are anxious to establish their national identity and to prove the virtues of their language, they have very often in history indulged in widespread translation from other cultures; yet in the process of doing this they subtly alter their own language, joining it in many unforeseen ways to a greater continent of almost undefined and non-specific human expression.[3]

The novel too looks outward, rather than inward and backward, inviting Cyrano de Bergerac into modern day Scotland.

There is a detachment in much of Kennedy's fiction, attributable in part to her age, her middle-class background and her university education in England, but also to a determination that her fiction should avoid the trap of the stereotypes of Scottish fiction. In both *So I Am Glad* and *Looking For The Possible Dance* the central characters leave the country, not as a method of escape, but as a way to reassess and re-evaluate their situation. Kennedy, the youngest of the writers discussed here in depth, portrays Scotland

in a less self-obsessed and introverted manner than many of the fiction writers of the 1980s. Like most of the novels examined this too has a first-person confessional narrative. The central character is deeply disturbed, with violent sexual tendencies. She is breaking down. She has had to cling to her sanity. In a quest for personal and political truth Jennifer engages the reader in an almost therapeutic dialogue, allowing us to see through the lies and obsessive bravado of the opening pages about her calmness, coldness, lack of commitment and over-control – "a fishy disposition".[4]

She is displaced from her world. It is a predicament which she confuses with the survival tactics of emotional numbness. Jennifer avoids her room-mates. In her working life she is a radio announcer reading prepared scripts alone in a soundproof booth, relating as well as limiting her exposure to the disturbing world around her. She is also actually ill, with a throat infection, and could be hallucinating.

The narrative, however, produces a way to tell the truth, which eases out sentence by sentence. We, the readers, are her confessional, and like Jock McLeish and Joy Stone there is an engagement made by the narrator with the past, her own past and her country's. The novel jumps forwards and backwards in time, much like Cyrano himself. This narrator is a stripped-down person trying to live honestly, trying to connect. While confessional in style, there is no self-pity or apology in the tone. Jennifer has had a traumatic childhood. While her parents never physically abused her, she was an unwilling voyeur to their exhibitionist lovemaking and is haunted by their untimely death and by her recollections, which return repeatedly to transgressive sexuality, violence, guilt and loss. Slowly she has to admit that she is emerging from her self-imposed exile, her uneasiness about sharing her things with someone else, her enjoyment of being constantly in the company of another person and the new emotion of loneliness when Cyrano is absent for a short period. There is a conceit too in this confessional style, a manipulation and control of the text and the reader, reminiscent of Jock McLeish in *1982 Janine.* The narrator steps out of the fiction to give cinematic, documentary-style asides to the narrative: "Now this section you needn't read or really bother with. It won't add to your understanding of the book, or the story it's trying to tell". (69) "I'm writing a book. I have to think about it from time to time.... This would be easier, at least different, if I was dealing in fiction, just making the whole thing up, but I'm not". (186)

Kennedy is involving the reader in what Dinah Birch, in a review of *So I Am Glad* and *Now That You're Back,* calls "spiritual autobiography" and "characteristic introspection".[5] It is, she argues "a Scottishness" (ibid) which is motivated by guilt – not personal guilt, but guilt bred from shouldering the blame and responsibility of social

injustice in an oppressive world. Her anger is well-placed because Kennedy, born in 1965, is of a generation that has experienced all its adult life under Conservative rule, in an age of rising unemployment and a growing number of people being tipped out of mental institutions and onto the streets. The two world wars and the immediate legacy of British Imperialism did not directly affect her, but she is now questioning Scotland's second-class citizenship within the United Kingdom. As Kennedy reflects, "it's difficult to live in Scotland and not be aware of the marginalised members of society. If you walk 400 yards down the road you will see things that simply shouldn't be happening".[6] This is a theme Kennedy examines elsewhere, giving voice to those who are lonely and poor, like the pensioner in *Night Geometry and the Garscadden Trains* (1990) who has a passion for photography and wants to make a film. She feels she deserves better things and refuses to "settle for lies and nonsense and second best".[7] Birch argues that Kennedy's fiction is driven by the precepts which "generated the novel in the first place and has never, in the hard climate of Scotland, quite lost its original impetus". (17) She goes on to argue that this confessional guilt "actually implies the opposite because the crimes Kennedy most wants to expose are not personal but political and social vices making "[a]ll Kennedy's sinners [...] justified" . (ibid.)

It is a clever conceit because it allows the narrator free reign and poetic licence to take on the political powers that be under the immunity of fiction. What better way than making her narrator a "professional enunciator" for a local radio station with no powers about what to leave in or take out?

> Someone has to do it. Radio prayers and poems, British voices for American faces, neutral voices for criminal faces – terroristically digitised – jolly encouragements to purchase who cares what and, of course, calm accounts of current chaos, who cares where. (37)

Jennifer's job mirrors her life. She never liked being seen. She resists intimacy. Her private world is full of self-abuse and one-way communication. She tells lies for a living because telling the truth is so painful, but as she slowly reconnects with herself, her emotions seep into her psyche and ultimately her employers tell her that her tone of voice has taken on an "an air of negative comment". As Jennifer interprets selected highlights from recent newscasts she allows her emotions to reflect her role as a narrator and a mouthpiece for a sick society:

> Our prime minister wishes to fine the penniless and homeless for being homeless not to mention shabby and down at heel. Unforthcoming fines will be used to build prisons in which to store those homeless persons unable to pay fines. (218)

Jennifer shares an uncanny affinity with Jock McLeish and his job as a surveillance equipment manager, with one important difference: Jock sees his job as protecting the nuclear reactors, the military depots and the banks reducing him to a mindless tool in the service of the military-industrial complex. Jennifer, on the other hand, is paid to deliver words, just as Jock is paid to deliver electronic systems, except she doesn't feel personally responsible for the unethical weapons policies of the British government and its export of explosive devices. Although the two characters could be seen as troubled and introverted, products of an alienated modern society, there is a generational distinction. Jock's is an obsessive dysfunction linked to the period of Cold War turbulence and a national preoccupation with lack of statehood. Jennifer is also dysfunctional, but her generation has a whole new set of problems, most of which are seen as inherited under a Conservative government, which has outlived its usefulness. The government, whose leader John Major saw no contradiction in declaring that it should "[u]nderstand less and condemn more"[8], was as Birch notes engendering "Public anger and private inwardness [that had ...] proved a fertile mix for an aggrieved but assertive generation of Scottish writers. To be set aside gives a compelling incentive for fiction, a desire to find language for what might otherwise be silenced." (17)

Both Gray's and Kennedy's protagonists act out their anger and anxiety in deviant sexual practices. For Jock voyeuristic sex fantasies are an antidote for a Scotland controlled from outside its own borders. For Jennifer sex is either something she does alone or as violent sex games. Psychologically she would be said to be in a dissociative state, which functions as a survival mechanism to counteract the fear and pain of recollection. In order for her to "get by" she disconnects from herself. This, of course, only delays and increases the possibility that staying out of touch with reality will make her become truly insane.[9]

As Jennifer says, as "sex with other people is now undeniably dangerous, I should welcome the thought that we might all prefer to spend entirely solitary nights in, not leaving ourselves alone". (3) To prove her point her next sexual encounter with Steven is undeniably dangerous, leaving him bloodied and beaten in a sex game gone horribly wrong. Jennifer is using violent and repressive sexual behaviour and anxiety about intimacy to act out her own anger and her own violence stemming, in part, from a troubled childhood. Marked by her parents' voyeuristic and exhibitionist sexual behaviour and death under suspicious circumstances when she is eighteen, this experience has left her introverted, damaged and isolated: "I knew that friends should be avoided ... that no one should get in and see us, find us out" . (70)

Jennifer's sexual compulsion has many of the underpinnings of addiction. It is related to family dysfunction and child abuse, shame and repressed sexuality. Jennifer leads a secret double life where sexual acting out has an analgesic effect, providing temporary relief. But she is both out of control in her sexual life and compulsively non-sexual in her emotional life, a Jekyll and Hyde phenomenon – the capacity to split-off from reality in a state of "hyperarousal alternating with numbing" ,[10] feeding a greater need resulting in more shame and dysfunction.

Jennifer Wilson, like Joy Stone, says Fiona Oliver in an essay on the self-debasement of Scotland's body politic, "turns in on herself in the most negative and destructive way possible as a means of gaining control in the context of oppression".[11] Both women feel empty inside. Jennifer feels "there truly is nothing there.... I am empty". (7) This experience has left her introverted, damaged and isolated, much like Scotland itself.

Jennifer now lives in Glasgow's west end where she shares a house, if not a life, with Arthur, and intermittently with Liz and the absent Peter, who is doing humanitarian work in Romania. They forgive her social inadequacies. Cyrano's presence is the catalyst for change and gives a political perspective to the novel. He gives Jennifer hope and allows her not to be afraid of being in the company of someone else. Arthur, or Art as everyone calls him because of his artistic aspirations, opens up about his less than interesting life. In a comic touch Kennedy has taken Ragueneau, the baker from Rostand's play - "the poet of pastry and dough. The custard tart rhymer"[12] and given his identity to Arthur who can't keep up with the demand for scones in his dull job but who dreams of constructing a "monster out of scone. The perfect man, the sweetness of treacle, the brain of a raisin and the strength of a potato". (74-75)

In a reworking of the supernatural and the psychological, Alison Kennedy uses seventeenth-century France to bring a new perspective to bear on twentieth-century Scotland and the world. As Douglas Gifford observes: "Once again a new kind of treatment of fantasy and supernatural accepts few or no limitations to its scope, and is no longer contained by traditional folk and Gothic rules .... Kennedy keeps the reader guessing for [as] long as the legitimacy of Cyrano [prevails], in the tradition of ambivalence which is a hallmark of the Scottish novel from Hogg and Stevenson to Spark and Gray". (620)

Into this tormented isolation and the spare room in Jennifer's house, Cyrano materialises in an entrance worthy of the science fiction writer he was. The seventeenth-century French writer was a duellist, a soldier, a student of philosophy and physics, a free-thinker and gay[13]. Savinien de Cyrano de Bergerac, is a shorter than average man who glows in the dark. His speech is odd but slowly we learn that Savinien possibly believes God has given him a second chance from purgatorial punishment in order to renounce his religious doubt, which might have led to his accidental death. "I do believe" he tells the bewildered Jennifer "that God still keeps me, because I was true". (59) Cyrano and Jennifer are kindred spirits. Savinien is a man who has become a fiction, was said to be a notorious liar which led to his real and imagined life becoming hopelessly entangled with his fictional one. For Jennifer his existence in the novel is also something of a lie. Is he a ghost, a hallucination or a psychological phenomenon? As Jennifer admits "nothing tangible happened between Savinien and myself. "What could happen between the professionally calm and the long-term dead"? (100)

Truth, honour and honesty are important principles in Kennedy's fiction. She has an overriding interest in the ethical, the political and the truthful. Her characters seem to be searching for truth in a world where it is almost impossible to achieve. Telling the truth "is what writers are for", says Savinien. (196) It is a preoccupation which Kennedy explores in her latest novel *Everything You Need* (1999) in some 600 pages of avoiding telling the truth about a relationship between father and daughter. Jennifer too is searching for the truth. Her job as a media liar is at odds with her world and her country. Like Jennifer, Savinien was searching for truth, he was also at odds with his age. Bergerac, in real life, was considered one of the first "moderns" and was accused of atheism for his novel *L'Autre Monde* that is, as Edward Lanius observes, as much a satire on institutions and religions as it is meant to amuse and instruct. [14].

Savinien too has had a violent past. He was reputed to have killed a hundred men. In his early life he was consumed by alcohol and loss of dignity. As he recalls from his first years in Paris "the wine was always there for me, slicing little ribbons from my soul". (179) The seventeenth-century world that Savinien has left behind was more violent than the one he finds in present day Glasgow. "Every crime on earth was being either considered or committed in the Court of Miracles (a terrible place and terribly close to my house); assassins, thieves, beggars, necromancers, treasonists, they were all there ...." (79) yet, there was, he contends, a code of honour. The seventeenth-century was an age Kennedy has noted "where science and religion and spirituality were mingling and influencing each other.... Now science has no soul at all and neither does religion".[15] The

present is not better. For himself what Cyrano did best was kill. Yet he finds modern day horrors as menacing as duelling weapons. Cars he thinks "make such fear" (177). As he observes, drivers are "boxed up" behind their wheels, not making a journey but "setting out to kill". (ibid.) Drugs too are more potent than wine. Savinien is looking at our society through the eyes of someone from a different culture and century and finding it wanting. " I cannot recognise how satisfied you all are with despair", he says. (191) Cyrano questions how and whether humanity has indeed grown.

> You still have executions and hunger and madness snapping about your streets ... He nodded at a man, oddly but well dressed, who was pacing on balanced between two carrier bags, a long stain of urine dark and new, in his jeans.
>
> His face is the drunk face. It has the shape and the shame and the colour and the eyes and the smell and the sweat of the drunk face. I know this. I have known this three hundred years ago in another country. Nothing is truly changed.
>
> (191-192)

Drugs and living rough become a reality when Savinien, without money, leaves and finds himself close to committing murder, after he gets mixed up with some drug users and is forced ultimately to fight a duel with the leader, James. This separation becomes cathartic for Jennifer. For the first time she experiences loneliness. When Savinien comes back high on drugs, his rehabilitation is an opportunity for Jennifer not only to show how far emotionally she has travelled, but in turn to cement a familial bond with her flatmates and especially Arthur who shares the responsibility of tending Savinien. Through Savinien, Jennifer is forced to begin to resolve her troubled past and that of her culture and fall in love, and for his part, Cyrano is no longer an object of ridicule because of his mythologised long nose. Like Jennifer, his vulnerability is a lack of the past. His courtship of Jennifer contains all the tactile tenderness and love that eluded him in his "fictional" life. Gone is the burlesque, the rhetorical flourish, yet he finds Glasgow a hostile environment and his experience of living rough and drug use make him realise how drugs are far more potent than wine. He'd "never had to fight for his soul, only sometimes for [his] dignity" (250) In the final duel with James he is forced to make this acknowledgement.

> He did things to me that no one has ever done. I would go on my knees for what he could give me, for the Atties, the Eggs, for the crying and the flying. I gave him my soul. A man cannot be without a soul.
>
> (249-250)

This is a damning indictment of present day culture when compared with the harsh realities of seventeenth-century France. It is into these two colliding universes that Jennifer and Cyrano bring their own separate worlds. While Cyrano has the benefit of looking forward, Jennifer is consumed not only with the present, but her contempt for her nation's preoccupation with the past. The telling and retelling of its history and its inability to deal with the present and the future makes her "want to be nothing but angry"; (131) "My entire country spent generations immersed in more and more passionate versions of its own past", (187) she says, unbalancing its preoccupation with less and less organised activity or even interest in the here and now. Scotland's 300 years of subsumed history has acted as a deterrent for change. It is a subject on which Kennedy has been very vocal:

> We have served England's crown, we have died for England's empire, we have seen our Gaels subjected to genocide in the eighteenth century, and our urban poor to needless and fatal poverty. For generations, we have been told that we are awkwardly different and expendable. We had to find this funny and fascinating, or go insane.[16]

This engagement with the past she implies, emphasizes the need for new interpretations of the present.

An analysis of the literary output of the authors examined here could be seen to conclude that they portray a nation on the edge of insanity reeling from the effects of colonisation and neglect. Welsh relies heavily on the use of satire and the grotesque in *Trainspotting* and in a number of his short stories as a way of distancing himself from the darkest stuff of life, but also it could be argued that he uses it as a form of "verbal warfare against the failings of mankind".[17] Kelman uses the metaphor of blindness as a way to portray a society that has lost its way in *How Late It Was, How Late.* Gray, politically the most "nationalist" of all the authors, has a protagonist on the edge of a breakdown who argues strongly for independence in *1982 Janine* and Galloway, the most pronounced in her indictment against authority and patriarchy, portrays Joy Stone's reaction as a double bind based on gender. As Jennifer says:

> Sometimes I feel as if my generation was galloped one morning over a huge, metaphorical employment cliff and some of us were saved immediately, scooped up by angels or helicopters or convenient safety nets and given a useful and meaningful life. Some of us bounced a little further on, had to scramble to avoid the full drop. Then right down, just before we crossed the line into unprofitability and disaster, there were people like me, lodged in funny but quite comfortable places, overlooking the enormous mess beneath.
>
> (37-8)

Jennifer understands the social inequity around her, the increasing gap between the rich and poor and instead of blaming the victims, points to the lack of viable social and industrial policy of successive governments and a complicit public. ("The public had become too tame a lay "). (166)

Kennedy's ability to write unsentimentally and dispassionately about her country is surely one of her distinctive characteristics. As we watch Jennifer's estrangement from life at the beginning of the novel change, as her suppressed emotions begin to dissipate and her interest and involvement in the political life around her become evident and immediate, we are charged with certainty that hope is a tangible reality. Through the surreal love story with Cyrano, who has also lived with violence, yet retained a code of honour, Jennifer discovers truth:

> I used to be secretly happy because my relative youth meant that I would most likely outlive all but the most lunatic regime. Now I know I will have to survive in what carelessness, plans and theories I never agreed with have done to my air, my water, my soil, my food.
>
> Sorry to go on, but I found I cared about these things. Someone I loved was living here and I cared about them. People who cared about each other were out there, beyond the studio, up to their necks in crap. (220)

Jennifer, unlike any of the characters examined so far, seems defiantly self-assured that she will do something, not just not do nothing. Kennedy's mixing of the genres of fantasy and the psychological make this resolve entirely believable. The reader understands that Savinien will have to make an exit somewhere, but Kennedy manages to suspend disbelief to just the right moment, allowing Jennifer to be defiantly glad.

As Eleanor Stewart Bell notes in a discussion of *So I Am Glad* and *Original Bliss*, Kennedy's work, although

> often ethically and politically focused [...] avoids presenting any 'knowable' or stereotypical forms of Scottish life in the process.... It is therefore in the *in between* spaces, between Scotland and the rest of Europe, that real awareness is generated for these characters. In order to avoid national self-obsession here, characters are visibly transported to a different location from where they can evaluate their own culture.[18]

Gone is the suffocating introspection and along with it the guilt which as Jennifer notes "is, of course, not an emotion in the Celtic countries, it is simply a way of life a kind of gleefully painful social anaesthetic". (36) Jennifer ultimately finds the meaning of contentment: "the difference between being with another person and being with more of myself." (100) She is glad when she accompanies Savinien back to his native France even

knowing that perhaps there is no permanence in their relationship and she will return without him. So when Savinien feels mortality slip from his grip he pushes Jennifer aside. Jennifer, for her part, knows she has a reason to live: "[she] did not wish to die with him, to go with him" (276). It is a reaffirmation of her determination to give *herself* a second chance.

"You cannot love another human being without being changed, less like yourself, more like the other", (52) David Kinloch observes in his discussion of Edwin Morgan's Scots Glaswegian version of Cyrano de Bergerac in relation specifically to language.

There is a sense of irony in Morgan's translation of the play that shouldn't be lost. "Scots Glaswegian" was, he notes, "by no means incapable of the lyrical and poetic" (x) but he chooses to leave the minor characters, aristocrat Count de Guiche and the foppish marquises in standard English. Cyrano himself would probably have been seen by Parisiens as something of an outsider. The play's hero was a poet, "a reminder of what poetry can do in the theatre" observes Morgan. (ix) What better way to articulate that *in betweenness* that Bell refers to than in a story set in Glasgow, about a seventeenth-century character to whom so many stories and legends attached themselves. "[P]eople sometimes wondered if he had ever existed, but he had and his short but extraordinary life provided wonderful material for a playwright" [19]. (xi)

[1] Morgan, Edwin, *Edmond Rostand's Cyrano de Bergerac: A New Verse Translation* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1992), pp.70-71

[2] *A History Of Scottish Women's Writing*, ed. by D. Gifford and D. McMillan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p.620

[3] Quoted in David Kinloch "Lazarus at the Feast of Love": Morgan's Cyrano de Bergerac" *Scotlands 5.2* 1998. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), p.52

[4] Kennedy, A.L. *So I Am Glad* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1995), p.4. All other references will be from the Vintage 1996 edition

[5] Birch, Dinah. "Warming My Hands and telling Lies" in *London Review of Books*, 3 August 1995, p.17

[6] Villiers, Sara, "Write on, right here", Spectrum, *Scotland on Sunday*, 3 December 1995, p.2

[7] Kennedy, A.L. *Night Geometry and the Garscadden Trains* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1990), p.84

[8] Harvie, Christopher, *Scotland & Nationalism: Scottish Society and Politics 1707 to the Present.* 3rd edn (London: Routledge, 1998), p.203

[9] Stout, Martha, *The Myth of Sanity: Divided Consciousness and the Promise of Awareness* excerpted in *The Globe and Mail*, Saturday, March 3 2001, D6-7

[10] Carnes, Patrick J., "Addiction or Compulsion: Politics or Illness? In *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity Journal Treatment & Prevention.* vol. 2:2 (1996), pp.127-150, p.139

[11] Oliver, Fiona, "Self-Debasement of Scotland's Postcolonial Bodies" in *Journal of the South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies,* ed. by R. Crane and R. Mohanram. Nos. 42/43 (April & October ,1996), pp.114 -121, p.117

[12] Morgan, E. viii

[13] Edwin Morgan notes in the Foreward that Cyrano's sexuality in the play "could offer the theme of frustrated love an added resonance, scarely but perhaps just audible in the play itself", x

[14] Lanius, Edward W, *Cyrano de Bergerac and The Universe of the Imagination* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1967), p.21

[15] In *Critical Quarterly* Vol. 37:4 (Winter, 1995) p.53

[16] "Scots To the Death", *New York Times* Saturday, 20 July 1996, p.19

[17] Nussbaum, Felicity, *The Brink Of All We Hate: English Satires on Women 1660-1750*) (Lexington, Ky: University Press of Kentucky, 1984), p.2

[18] Bell, Eleanor Stewart, "Scotland and Ethics in the Work of A.L. Kennedy in *Scotlands* 5.1 (1998) pp.105-113, p.107

[19] Morgan, xi.

Conclusion

The development of the Scottish contemporary novel has been, as Cairns Craig has observed, "profoundly linked to the development of the nation".[1] The failure of the 1979 Referendum marked a change in the country's literary and political determination that ultimately led to the establishment of a Scottish Parliament in 1999. Scotland's contemporary fiction was born out of a frustration with the political process or fears for the future of the country. All five novels examined have dystopic impulses, deal with addiction and have protagonists who are on the edge of breakdown.

As Cairns Craig notes:

> Scotland went on imagining itself as a nation and went on constituting itself as a national imagination in defiance of its attempted or apparent incorporation into a unitary British culture, a defiance which has had profound political consequences in the last decade of the 20th century. (36)

This political limbo spawned the trajectory on which the novel travelled in the intervening years in the works of Gray, Kelman, Galloway, Welsh and Kennedy. Jock McLeish in *1982 Janine*, Sammy Samuels in *How Late It Was, How Late* and Joy Stone in *The Trick Is To Keep Breathing* are the embodiment of what Craig describes as "fearful selves". This condition is a sickness, both individual and societal - a malaise which takes the place of political action and social comment for a country whose governance has been outside its borders for 300 years. The endings to these three novels are all ambiguous. There seems only a fleeting possibility that the protagonists will be able to turn themselves around given the hostile environment in which they live. There is, however, a definite divide between the first three novels and the last two. Gray, Kelman and Galloway share a loyalty to one another in their personal and professional lives and their novels share a common voice in time and place. Jock McLeish is obsessed by nationalism and thwarted by Calvinism. Joy Stone is preoccupied with gender and also thwarted by both Calvinism and patriarchy. Kelman adds dimension to the other two by making Sammy Samuels' rootedness in Glasgow both unspoken and inherent while concentrating on universal injustice, which makes his voice come from both inside and outside the country.

Welsh and Kennedy in contrast are voices of the 1990s. *Trainspotting,* for all its bleakness and despair, looks outward not inward in its perspective. Mark Renton in *Trainspotting* is a voice for change. He confronts the status quo as does Jennifer Wilson in *So I Am Glad* and while she echoes the self-abuse of the other protagonists there is a marked progression in her confidence and in the tone of the novel. There is a conclusive sense that there is something about which to be glad. There is a definite generational divide here which is not always chronological but emotional and political. This is striking

in its development over such a short time span. Mark Renton and Jennifer Wilson seem to have cast off the encumbrance of social victimization. This helps give a historical perspective of community in their novels. Community is seen as the product of a period of Labour impotence and Conservative oppression, but it is also serving notice on the repressive effects of church as well as state. However, there is no defensiveness in the tone and both books have far less zeal for history or reviewing the past. They even lack a fervor for "fixing" the matter of Scotland. The dependent selves seem to have walked away from their demons; or at the very least been forced to re-evaluate them.

The use of narrative, language and genre in the five novels examined displays a depth of understanding and a range of tongues uncommon in contemporary literature. The choice of genre – the contemporary novel as protest - rather than historical or popular romantic fiction is an important one. Modern day Scotland can no longer be accused of nostalgia and self-pity of feeling in one language and thinking in another, as Edwin Muir argued in the 1930s. The literature now speaks for itself in whatever tongue it feels comfortable using. Speaking really is the operative word. Kelman's achievement in getting rid of the conventional voice and therefore ridding the narrative of its whole value system is simplicity itself, yet profoundly difficult in practice. Welsh's ability as a great monologue writer connects his novels to the street idiom that is so much part of his work. It is also crucial that his work is not monologic in style; he gives a number of voices to his characters and perhaps less angst to their message. The confessional and monologic style of Gray, Galloway and Kennedy pull the reader into the inner workings of the protagonists and argue strongly for empathy and understanding. The monologue style is as important in Scottish literature as it is in drama and comedy. In fact, there is a strong bind among the genres, not only because of their adherence to a storytelling tradition, but also as the most effective way of making a point. Literature has not only had a role in reflecting society it also became part of a social struggle highlighting the lack of effective political leadership that the country experienced at the time. All five novels show a determination to present, as Cairns Craig observes, Scottish literature as an "embodied argument which both carries forward a tradition as an inheritance from the past and projects a path for tradition by defining and redefining the telos towards which the tradition is directed". (23-24)

Nevertheless, Scotland is a country in denial. The literature under examination exhibits a demonic view of Scottish life. Dysfunction is both societal and individual. Societal dysfunction and addiction, however, are a symptom of a country with little say in its future. All the protagonists are loners, without a sense of community. None has a long-term relationship. The literature is full of frustration and psychological hurt. Addiction and mental breakdown is based on individual malaise but represents social dysfunction, dislocation and the vagaries of a market economy that is anaesthetizing the population.

A recurrent theme is institutional malaise. Most of the novels examined portray the medical establishment, the justice system, the health service and the compensation system as roadblocks to the mental (and sometimes physical) health of a number of the protagonists. Sammy Samuels and Joy Stone probably suffer most from a medical system that sickens and discourages them. Spud hardly receives justice from a court system that metes out justice on a whim. Institutions represent adjuncts to a non-functioning society and emphasize the economic inequality so central to the subject matter of the novels examined.

In more recent fiction since the works discussed both individual and societal malaise is still evident. Yet the fiction doesn't blame and seems less obsessed by its subject matter. Four of the six discussed deal with alcoholism, the past, deviant sexual practice and abuse. Unemployment is still a preoccupation in one; the remaining two are concerned with racial and sexual identity. None is monologic in style and intent.

Andrew O'Hagan's *Our Fathers* (1999) most closely reflects the novels examined as it observes the legacies of Socialism and housing policies in post World War II Glasgow. Hugh Bawn, a legendary socialist, Jamie his grandson, a demolition expert, are watching the highrise flats that the elder man fought hard to build being demolished because of misguided and corrupt building policies which have rendered them uninhabitable and Hugh under scrutiny. Hugh's generation, as the narrator observes, "was a country of fearful men ... unable to rise, or rise again and slow to see the power in their own hands".[2] The story mixes generational conflict and political struggle encouraging Jamie to grieve before his time and allowing the father to hand down this legacy to the son. The novel also serves as a social commentary for the dashed hopes of national rejuvenation for the post-war generation. It is, also, however, an old-fashioned story of redemption and survival as Jamie comes to terms with his absent alcoholic father, now in recovery, and tries to forgive him.

In *Born Free* (1999) by Laura Hird there is little that is redeeming in the Edinburgh family where the mother Angie is a relapsed alcoholic, whose relationship is being slowly destroyed by infidelity and drink. She is unhappily married to Vic, a bus driver who is sober, impotent, dull but well-meaning. Vic can't deal with his family's dysfunction. They have two teenage children, Joni, who is obsessed by the idea of losing her virginity and Jake, the only one with any gumption, who falls foul of a vicious gang of thugs. Each chapter is narrated by a different member of the family giving the novel a well-rounded view of urban despair, or as Angie observes: "Why is wanting some kind of life for yourself after you've had kids a sin akin to granny bashing? Joni'll get pregnant. That'll be the next thing. The next generation of misery". [3] The women are rendered far less sympathetically than the men pointing possibly to a fate of predestined disappointment. The novel gives an intimate view of Angie's free-fall that vividly and convincingly depicts the results of one person's actions on every member of her immediate family.

Drinking yourself into oblivion is the subject matter of John Burnside's *The Mercy Boys* (1999), about four emotionally stunted Dundonian men who commune each day over pints and shots in the Mercy pub, not unlike Glancy's in *How Late It Was, How Late* where the regulars spend their time hoping and waiting for their lives to change. Junior is a depressive, Sconnie, a dreamer. Alan lives in a kind of dream world and then Rob commits an act of senseless violence and their whole world collapses. Alcohol is a way for these four to compensate for some of their psychological shortcomings whilst compounding external, material deprivation such as the bleakness of everyday life without a job and the thought of how little hope they have waiting for one.

The horror of incest, child abuse and institutional psychosexual healing is the topic of Toni Davidson's *Scar Culture* (1999). Two renegade psychiatrists, one living in the U.S., the other in the U.K., are perhaps more dysfunctional their patients. Each one attempts controversial untested methods of treatment on two extreme cases of child abuse that have failed to respond to orthodox treatment. The novel tracks the upbringing of three main characters Click, Fright and the psychiatrist Curtis Sad. Click recounts his disastrous upbringing in a caravan with two desperately unstable parents. Fright's father is a violent sadist who terrorizes his mother, himself and his older brother; a harrowing story of murder and paedophilia. Both find themselves under the care of Sad, the pyschiatrist whose therapy and own incestuous relations with his sister Josie foretell the psychological outcome of his treatment. Yet the novel could be set or written on either side of the Atlantic. Life in the margins and "recovery" in a mental health institution

serve a purpose as a moveable object to examine the harm and horrors experienced by the novel's protagonists, perhaps at the hands of the medical establishment.

Luke Sutherland's *Jelly Roll* (1998) and Jackie Kay's *Trumpet* (1998) use music as a theme to deal with identity, in two different ways. Sutherland's story, written in the vernacular, is an indictment of racism in Scotland told from the perspective of Liam, a black bass player in a band that travels around Scotland who finds that the farther north they go the more overt the racist attitudes. Kay's story is also one of identity, sexual identity and secrets and lies. It is the gender-bending tale of the black jazz trumpeter Joss Moody, from the perspective of his son Coleman who feels cheated, hurt and alienated by his father's secret identity. Secret identity serves as a way to discuss sexuality and society's attitudes towards it. Both novels serve the purpose of identifying diversity as a Scottish topic.

John Burnside's *The Mercy Boys* is the only novel discussed that is not a first novel. Only Andrew O'Hagan's *Our Fathers* uses Glasgow as the basis for its story. Its author, however, lives in London. Both Luke Sutherland and Jackie Kay live in England, ostensibly because it became too difficult to live in Scotland as a person of color. Perhaps there is less preoccupation with place and more interest in subject matter in these novels. Only one of the authors, Kay, grew up in Glasgow. In recent years Edinburgh writers like Ian Rankin and Laura Hird have captured a considerable amount of attention, coupled with Edinburgh-based writers like J.K. Rowling and Kate Atkinson, giving a much more diverse view to the country's literary output.

As Donald Wesling has observed "the lack of a political solution in the devolution vote" of 1979 changed the course of Scottish politics and had a consequent effect on the literary history of the country. The 1997 Referendum produced a decisive result and led directly to the re-establishment of a parliament in Scotland for the first time in 300 years, a substantial change of attitude that "will alter the politics of Britain for ever" , says Dr. David Butler in the foreword to *Scotland Decides*.[4]

In the intervening 18 years there has been a change of opinion which is reflected in the literature under examination. The impetus for this change was the need for Scotland's economic destiny to be nominally in the hands and minds of the Scottish people. The results, it might be hoped, are a more representative body, more consensual in style and proportional in representation, reinforcing both Scottish national and working class identity and regional diversity. While there are no redistributive powers in the new Parliament it has an important role in the way its policies reflect the self-determination of its people. Parties will be more accountable to their constituents. Scotland and its political

coalitions in the first year of its existence have managed to eradicate university tuition fees and introduce the teaching of sexual diversity in the school system, two important policy changes that the new parliament enacted. Throughout this thesis I have been arguing that there is a link between addiction that is both individual and societal caused by a lack of self-determination, poverty and unemployment. The key determinant for the new parliament will be whether it is able to tackle poverty, unemployment and hardship. These are crucial times for Scotland. The new parliament could be just the psychological boost the country needs in order to see itself as others see it and no longer be set in darkness. The fiction of the late 1990s represents a country in transition, less obsessed by its history and more open to possibilities. Perhaps this transition will allow the novel to take its place on the bookshelf rather than in the forefront of the political hustings.

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[2] O'Hagan, Andrew, *Our Fathers* (New York, Harcourt, Inc. 2000), p.8

[3] Hird, L. *Born Free* (Edinburgh: Rebel Inc.), 129

[4] Denver, D.J. Mitchell, C. Pattie, H. Bochel *Scotland Decides: The Devolution Issue and the Scottish Referendum* (London: Frank Cass, 2000)

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