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Political Histories, Politicised Spaces:
Discourses of Power in the Fiction of Alasdair
Gray.

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Abstract.

Critical assessments of Alasdair Gray's work make frequent mention of his postmodern literary strategies and his active engagement with political issues. However, Gray himself is quick to refute claims that he is a postmodern writer, and, although his books are often described as 'political', detailed attention has yet to be paid to the *kind* of politics Gray espouses. By examining key ideological strands in a range of Alasdair Gray's prose writings (including texts that have attracted little critical interest) and by exploring their central, sometimes unresolved, tensions, this thesis investigates the relationship between literary and political discourses in Gray's work. Attempting to chart the range and extent of Gray's engagement with contemporary issues of political and cultural debate, the five chapters of the thesis demonstrate that Gray's literary techniques are intimately connected to his thematic and political concerns.

The thesis draws on a range of critical approaches to address Gray's work, using aspects of post-structuralist, feminist, and postcolonial theories. The first chapter examines autobiographical and semi-autobiographical texts by Gray, opening discussion about his approaches to narrative construction and historiography. It argues that Gray's texts draw attention to their own narrative paradigms and underlying ideological assumptions, and suggests that Gray's destabilization of conventional Western epistemological frameworks unsettles empirical conceptions of human subjectivity and identity, challenging the terms in which personal and national identities can be secured. The discussion of Gray's self-conscious destabilization of categories of identity underlies the questions raised in subsequent chapters. The second chapter highlights Gray's treatment of the hegemonic discourses of imperialism and capitalism. Focusing on his polemical essays and short fiction, the chapter examines the role of literature in imperial processes, the complexities of Scotland's position within imperial discourses, and explores questions of cultural agency and resistance.

The third chapter attempts to unite the political critique of the previous chapter with the epistemological troubling of the first, by discussing Gray's three novels set in the specific locale of Glasgow. It argues that Gray's presentations of his native city rely not only on historiographical reconstruction, but also on spatial perspectives; the emphasis he places on multiple perspectives and peripheral views is linked to his political critique of consumer capitalism. The politics of representation remain central to the fourth chapter's discussions of three key ideological 'battlegrounds' in the post-war era: gender, warfare, and electronic media. The chapter tackles Gray's ambivalence towards issues of gendered power relations with reference to two novels.

Chapter Five attempts to draw together the ideological strands discussed in earlier chapters in relation to two of Gray's novellas. This final chapter identifies power--in a myriad of forms--as the central concern of Gray's work, and returns to discussion of Gray's engagement with literary discourses. It argues that by locating power in disparate sites, subverting prevailing cultural value systems, and presenting critiques of capitalism, imperialism and patriarchy, Gray's work reframes debates about relations between art and politics; by positing alternative, provisional sources of cultural authority, it offers a radical political vision.

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John Keats once said that a long poem is a test of invention. Had he written a thesis he might have had cause to relativise and revise that judgement. However, invention is never as lonely a task as it is sometimes made out to be. One way or another, I have had a lot of help and assistance from various people in the last four years and this is an appropriate moment to acknowledge them.

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Declaration

Part of Chapter Four has been adapted from a revised version of an article by me, "Engendered Subjects: Subjectivity and National Identity in Alasdair Gray's *1982, Janine*," researched at the University of St. Andrews and published in Scotlands 2/1994, pp. 66-82, © Edinburgh University Press, 1995.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations have been used:

SSP. Saltire Self-Portrait
 SL. Something Leather
 TLS. Times Literary Supplement
 NLS. National Library of Scotland
 SNP. Scottish National Party

Introduction: Shades of Gray.

In the second act of Alasdair Gray's unpublished play The Loss of the Golden Silence, written in 1973, the following exchange takes place between the two nameless protagonists:

SHE: When my thesis is complete it will be read by a committee of academics. Half of them will like it because they don't really understand it. The other half will understand it and hate me for it.

HE: (FASCINATED) You must tell me more. (25)

To begin a thesis on Gray's work at this particular juncture might seem audacious, if not unwise, but these lines have haunted me as I have researched and written this thesis. However, my fear that the words of 'She' would be realized in my own endeavours has bolstered my resolve rather than discouraged my critical enquiries; my fear has been counterbalanced with intrigue prompted by Gray's work, intrigue echoed in the insistent voice of 'He' urging, 'tell me more'.

As I attempt to situate myself and my thesis within a critical framework and a socio-historical context, the words above are not comforting. They beg the question 'why am I doing this?' That is a fairly fundamental question for a would-be literary critic, but one rarely posed so bluntly in black and white. The most pressing answer I can offer finds expression in terms equally aloof from academic discourses: I am a fan; I love Alasdair Gray's books. Frankly, had I been indifferent or antipathetic towards Gray's work, I would have been crazy to spend four years thinking about little else. My admiration for Gray's work should not, however, be interpreted as indiscriminate adulation; rather, I confront the problem that the language of contemporary literary criticism, where judgements tend to be provisional and emotions untrustworthy, seems unequal to the task of explaining my all-too-unsophisticated gut reactions to Gray's work. Possibly the concept of 'jouissance'¹ comes closer than other critical terms to describing how I have enjoyed, learned from, contemplated, laughed at, cried

¹The term is used by Barthes (1976) and Kristeva (1980) to address the experience of reading--'the pleasure of the text'.

at, wrestled with, and been exasperated by Gray's work, but even that seems an over-analytical term for an experience which defies analytical reflection.

Although Lanark was the first book I read by Gray, it was 1982, Janine that really made me sit up and take notice. That was the first time any writer--anyone--had made me see *connections* between the seemingly diverse social and political issues that occupied my earnest political conscience in the nineteen-eighties. This, the decade of my teens, was marked by the rise of neo-liberalism, Thatcher's (and Reagan's) 'New Right', which I experienced directly and indirectly as increasingly grim social and economic conditions began to affect many parts of Scottish--indeed, British--society; the eighties saw a back-lash against the women's movement with little remission of the endemic sexism and structural discrimination against women in the Western world;² the Cold War arms race, most immediately manifest to me in the nuclear installations and Polaris submarines situated in Scotland, continued unabated, despite the political and economic changes ushered in by Gorbachev in the USSR; and, of course, the eighties was a decade in which Scotland seemed to remain trapped within a constitutional impasse after the failure in 1979 to secure a big enough majority in favour of a Scottish parliament.

Janine (the personal and familiar title which comes to mind when I think of the novel) was a revelation. Not only did the novel make me aware of the ideologies I lived under (although I didn't use words like 'ideology' back then) but it also suggested alternative ways to *interpret* and *respond* to my personal and political contexts. Gray's novel compelled me to examine the taken-for-granted minutiae of everyday life and to question the power relations underlying seemingly straightforward everyday interactions; 1982, Janine encouraged me to see the small-scale, personal, and particular aspects of my own experience as part of much larger, more visible, and more 'obviously' powerful structures and systems. If not quite a political awakening, reading 1982, Janine was an enlightening and liberating experience.

²Susan Faludi's Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women. London: Chatto & Windus, 1992 dispels any illusion that gender equality has now been achieved in Western society.

Yet, however sincere my sentiments may be regarding 1982, Janine, my comments remain subjective, contextual, and highly personal. I present them here because they help me locate my own position within social and political contexts and help me to explain *why* Alasdair Gray's books interested me in the first place. The paragraphs above are also, perhaps, a small, indulgent concession to a certain kind of evaluative critical approach. Although no critic is ever 'value neutral', it has not been my priority in this thesis to assess the relative merits and qualities of Gray's various works; instead I concentrate on their engagement with discourses of power. The interpretations I offer of Gray's writings are secondary to my exploration of their discursive fields. I consider key ideological strands in Gray's prose writings and explore their central, sometimes unresolved, tensions. Indeed, my discussion of 1982, Janine in the fourth chapter of this thesis, rather than paying homage to one of my favourite novels, highlights its ambivalences in a critical way. In the course of the thesis, I highlight how discourses of nation, empire, gender, subjectivity, and class intersect in Gray's writings.

Mapping Critical Territory.

Any critical consideration of Gray's relation to political, or more generally, ideological discourses must first attempt to address its own methodological assumptions and its complicity with whatever it seeks to critique. Judith Butler, addressing her own critical approach in Gender Trouble, argues:

The juridical structures of language and politics constitute the contemporary field of power; hence, there is no position outside this field, but only a critical genealogy of its own legitimating practices. (5)

Butler's approach, which draws heavily (although not uncritically) on the discourse theories of Michel Foucault, is one I have found particularly suggestive for my own methodology. Discourse theory has been defined in various ways, but I take Diane Macdonell's inclusive definition that "whatever signifies or has meaning is part of discourse"³ as a starting point, stressing that discourse is a

³Macdonell, 1986; p.4.

relational concept. It is important to note that Foucault's work strongly resists any sytematization; as Sara Mills suggests, it is most helpfully used "as a 'tool-box' and not as totalising theory" (1991; 8). While Foucault's influence can be felt throughout my thesis, in fact, I draw on a wide range of critical theories, and use various aspects of post-structuralist theory, feminist theory, and postcolonial theory in the course of my arguments.

Foucault's theories have been widely appropriated within feminist, gender, and postcolonial theories, not because Foucault displays much interest in issues of feminism and postcolonialism as such, but because he highlights the role of discourse in producing, supporting, and resisting hegemonic power; he points not only to state-institutionalised power, but also to localised, personal operations of power; his 'genealogies' suggest ways to construct counter-discourses, that is, systems of knowledge which resist the determinations of universalist and universalising assumptions. Herein lies the main attraction of Foucauldian methods for those wishing to construct critiques of Western humanism from feminist and non-European perspectives.

However, Foucauldian analyses of the ways power operates at intimate, private levels, as well as in the public, political sphere, are no less suggestive for Gray's work. Gray's work, I argue, explores sustaining ideological discourses of Western humanism--capitalism, imperialism, patriarchy, individualism--and highlights their internal contradictions and tensions. At times Gray's writings destabilize and subvert these discourses, suggesting counter-discourses constructed from alternative perspectives; yet Gray's writings also confirm their complicity with the structures of power and systems of representation with which they engage. While Gray's writings, I argue, often offer critiques of prevailing Western ideologies, in my own critical account I do not attempt to resolve their internal tensions; rather, I try to use these tensions to make visible Gray's own ideological frameworks and their discursive limits. I see this strategy as a precondition for socially-concerned critical praxis which wishes to avoid essentializing its object of interest, and a prerequisite for the provisional readings I offer of selected texts.

I have already used terms such as capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy which are hard to define and have contested definitions. Social scientists, historians and economists have argued over the nature of capitalism since the eighteenth century; the term imperialism can be seen to have a much wider frame of reference than the moment of 'high imperialism' in Europe from the mid-nineteenth to early-twentieth centuries;⁴ patriarchy has been interpreted in numerous ways, although it can be thought of in broad terms as a relational system of power whereby social meaning is attached to sex difference within institutional structures and representational practices. Alasdair Gray's work enters the discursive fields of these terms, but does not theorize them with academic rigor; instead, Gray explores the intertexts of their discursive arenas. To some extent I follow a similar strategy to Gray except that I want to resist more explicitly any notion that capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy are internally consistent phenomena. This is not to suggest that I consider their power to be anything other than hegemonic; rather, by defrosting the essentialisms ascribed to these concepts I give an account of their hegemonic power, but also highlight their flaw-lines and points of fracture. Alasdair Gray's work explores key social and political, aesthetic and philosophical fields which inform contemporary debates about modernity and identity; a central contention of my thesis is that Gray's writings dramatise these debates, keeping their tensions alive.

It might be thought rather odd to use post-structuralist and feminist critical strategies to study the work of an individual, male, author. The Author, literary critics are often told, was pronounced dead some time ago.⁵ Perhaps, however, the author's demise has been somewhat exaggerated. In spite of the fact that in Gray's work (especially in his more autobiographical texts) images of death and sickness abound, it would seem clear to most political and natural scientists that the particular author in question is very much alive. One of the problems that faces literary critics who want to talk about intersections between

⁴See Mills, 1991; p.1.

⁵See Roland Barthes' widely influential essay, "The death of the author," in Image-Music-Text, 1977.

political and literary discourses is that the language and methodologies of the two disciplines can seem far removed from each other. In my first chapter, which addresses issues of authorial subjectivity, I argue that the author is, as much as the literary text, a discursive formation, interpellated into discourse. However, the status of the author's subjectivity is not the only question arising from a study of an individual author. Why, for instance, do I not contextualise Gray's work by giving more extensive consideration to that of his literary contemporaries?

Of course, it would be helpful to consider Gray's work in relation to that of his peers, but establishing who those peers might be is problematic. In my attempts to contextualise Gray's endeavours in literary and social contexts I have often found myself thinking of Tom Leonard and James Kelman--writers whose names do appear quite frequently in my discussions of Gray. Yet at other times I have thought of Italo Calvino, Muriel Spark, Milan Kundera, and Timothy Findley; the list could go on. While Gray shares some cultural background and political convictions with his fellow Glaswegian writers, his narrative approaches and political concerns are equally comparable with work by other contemporary writers from diverse cultural backgrounds. The grounds on which to base any comparative study seem slippery, especially as Gray himself destabilizes categories of subjectivity, nationality, and literary genre which provide the conventional bases of such comparisons. The urge to make connections between writers can also too easily over-ride the need for thorough, in-depth criticism of their particular achievements. However, as I embark on a study of Alasdair Gray's work which excludes extensive discussion of his contemporaries, I am conscious that these are gaps to be filled or contested by others.

A great deal of the critical material on Gray published to date is in shorter critical forms: essays, reviews, or portions of broader-based theses. Such critiques are focused on limited portions of Gray's work. This full-length study, although by no means comprehensive, enables discussion of a broader range of Gray's fictions than has proved possible within the confines of critical discussions pertaining to only one or two texts. One

disadvantage of writing a thesis on a writer who is both physically and metaphorically alive is that Alasdair Gray is still producing books at a fairly prolific rate, often reworking earlier material. That in itself is a good thing; however, it has not made it easy to draw perimeters around my own thesis. I concentrate mainly on Gray's published prose writings, although I refer quite extensively to early unpublished play scripts which have been transformed into prose. Selection of material for close discussion has proved difficult. Even in a full-length study such as this it has not been possible to include extended discussion of many of Gray's stories. Although Gray's novels and novellas are pre-eminent in my discussions, I quite deliberately devote considerable attention to those writings that have received less critical attention and which fit less easily into generic and canonical frameworks. I do so not only to broaden critical discussion, but also to highlight the frequently unquestioned privilege enjoyed by novels in literary critical discourses.

While personal taste prompted my initial interest in Gray's work, that interest has been fuelled by concerns about the relationship between art and politics, and academic debates about cultural production, in the late-twentieth century. This is an excellent moment to reflect on Gray's engagement with political discourses; as Joy Hendry notes, "connections between art and politics" became a matter of renewed public debate in the aftermath of the failed 1979 Devolution Referendum.⁶ Cairns Craig accounts for a perceptible up-turn in Scottish cultural life since then by suggesting, "the energy that had failed to be harnessed by the politicians flowed into other channels."⁷ Now that Scotland is on the brink of long-awaited constitutional change following the Devolution Referendum of 1997, there may be no time like the present to take stock of Gray's work.

In this thesis I explore the connections between politics and art in Gray's work and, also, the politics *of* art. 'Political' is a tricky word; I use it to refer not only to social issues and governmental processes, but also to convey the more general sense in which

⁶Editorial, Chapman 35-36: "The State of Scotland: A Predicament for the Scottish Writer?" (1983) Reprint, 1990; p.ii.

⁷General Preface, Polygon's 'Determinations' series.

ideological discourses carry powerful and pervasive assumptions with social and cultural implications. These dual definitions draw inspiration from the feminist movements of the seventies which argued that 'the personal is political'. Alasdair Gray's work addresses specific issues of political concern, but also addresses the 'politics'--the power relations--which accompany the ideologies and epistemologies of Western humanism.

In a 1983 interview, Gray was asked if he viewed himself "as a political writer," given that his novels, "contain critiques of society and direct political comment".⁸ He was also asked if he thought novels "have any direct effect in highlighting political issues or bringing about change in society".⁹ In his answer, Gray says:

I believe that every book soothes or upsets some idea the reader lives by. This has political consequences, which is why bullyboy governments enforce censorship. . . . But books don't cause political change, some have speeded it up by giving a brisker circulation to some current hopes and fears or by linking into one picture of events which folk hitherto looked at separately. (9)

More recently, Gray has said, "The politics of any story I tell are the politics of the country where I live."¹⁰

Gray's explicit engagement with specific issues of socio-political concern has been charted by various commentators. Charlton notes Gray's involvement with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament;¹¹ Morgan notes that Gray's books, "have much to say about the government of these islands, about capitalist society, about imperialism and small nations, about politics in general" (97); Axelrod's interview with Gray, and my own, offer reflections that bring up-to-date some of the political questions

⁸Interview with Anderson and Norquay, Cencrastus, Summer 1983, No.13; pp.6-10; p.9.

⁹ibid.

¹⁰Interview with Axelrod, p.115. See also my interview with Gray, Appendix, pp.313-314.

¹¹Charlton notes Gray's participation in demonstrations against Polaris at the Holy Loch in 1959-60 (Crawford and Nairn, p.19). In his interview with Kathy Acker, Gray reveals that ideas for early plays were gleaned from sketches he prepared for CND benefit concerts. (This interview, published in the Edinburgh Review, No.74, 1986, also exists in typescript form in Acc. 9247/52 in the National Library of Scotland. See especially p.4.)

posed in Anderson and Norquay's 1983 interview. However, while Gray's political stances--his democratic socialism, his Scottish nationalism, his anti-militarism--have been widely recognised, little detailed attention has been paid to how Gray not only accommodates these concerns in literary discourses, but carves out new critical perspectives on the prevailing hegemonic ideologies of capitalism, patriarchy, individualism and imperialism by disrupting their epistemological frameworks.

I am conscious that my thesis enters a field of critical discourse on Gray's work which has expanded fairly rapidly in the last few years. Gray's 'Index of Plagiarisms' in Lanark has attracted lots of attention because novelists rarely acknowledge their sources so openly; critics, however, have to be more upfront. In presenting a brief overview of critical work on Gray (see my bibliography for a more complete picture) I also want to present my own 'index of plagiarisms'--to acknowledge those critics whose work on Gray has proved most influential to my own. Two substantial volumes of critical essays have been published on Gray's work to date. The first, The Arts of Alasdair Gray, edited by Robert Crawford and Thom Nairn, is a useful volume in that its contributors adopt a range of critical perspectives and discuss varied aspects of Gray's work, many of them addressing Gray's engagement with Scottish literary and political discourses. Essays by Cairns Craig and Edwin Morgan, in particular, open critical avenues and suggest possible directions for more detailed critical overviews of Gray's work.

The second, the Review of Contemporary Fiction, Volume 15, No. 2, is, again, a collection of essays, half of which are devoted to Gray's work. The outstanding essay in this collection, that by George Donaldson and Alison Lee, has proved suggestive for my own arguments, as has Lee's consideration of Lanark in her study of British postmodernist fiction, Realism and Power. A slim, but significant edition of The Glasgow Review: "Alasdair Gray and Other Stories," Issue Three, Summer 1995, contains four essays of a very high quality on Gray's more recent work. Bruce Charlton's MA Thesis presented at the University of Durham (1988) is a particularly valuable resource which catalogues, and attempts to date, Gray's writings from adolescence onwards. Charlton's work is

indispensable because he has had access to holdings in the National Library of Scotland which are not, as yet, available for examination; he also offers fine insights on Lanark and Gray's early plays.

Beat Witschi's Glasgow Urban Writing and Postmodernism (1991) was one of the first volumes to give sustained attention to Gray as a postmodern writer; while some of Witschi's arguments may appear under-developed, they do serve as a critical starting point for consideration of Gray's engagement with discourses of postmodernity. An excellent essay by Ian McCormick, "Alasdair Gray: The Making of a Scottish Grotesque," addresses questions of imperialism and colonialism in relation to Poor Things in ways that I have found suggestive for discussions of other texts. In the early nineteen-eighties Cencrastus magazine pioneered Gray's work, publishing extracts from it, an interview, and initiating critical debates. While I allude to these and other critical sources in the course of the thesis, I take issue with very few directly. Alison Lumsden's essay, "Innovation and Reaction in the Fiction of Alasdair Gray," is an exception, and I discuss issues she raises later in this introduction.

Firing the canon?

Gray has been publishing prose fiction since the nineteen-fifties, but it was only after the publication of his first novel, Lanark, in 1981 that he came to public prominence. Lanark not only established Gray's reputation, but has since been widely seen as a landmark in Scottish cultural life. It hardly needs to be mentioned that Gray's writings are saturated by Scottish cultural politics and are almost exclusively set in Scottish domains. His overt and acknowledged influence on younger writers from Scotland as diverse as Janice Galloway and Iain Banks--writers whose popular appeal probably now exceeds Gray's own--illustrates the impression his work has made on a subsequent generation of writers.¹²

¹²See Janice Galloway, "Different Oracles: Me and Alasdair Gray" (Review of Contemporary Fiction Summer 1995. Vol. 15, No. 2, pp. 193-196.) and see Roderick J. Lyall's "Postmodernist otherworld, postcalvinist purgatory: An approach to Lanark and The Bridge" for discussion of Banks' debt to Gray.

Influential literary critics in Scotland, such as Cairns Craig and Douglas Gifford have seen Gray's work, particularly his first two novels, Lanark and 1982, Janine, as markers of a new renaissance in Scottish literature, or have used Gray's works as critical touchstones;¹³ academics from social science disciplines, such as Christopher Harvie, James Mitchell, and Ian Spring have used Gray's work as a cultural 'sounding-board' in social and political discussions.¹⁴ Gavin Wallace sums-up Gray's pervasive influence in the introduction to his volume (edited with Randall Stevenson) The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies, when he writes:

The considerable impact of this bold enlargement of Scottish creative potential remains symbolised by the publication in 1981 of Alasdair Gray's novel Lanark, whose still reverberating effects on Scottish literature can be likened to earlier enduring literary landmarks like *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (1926) and *Sunset Song* (1932). (3)

However, while Gray and Lanark may well remain *symbolic* markers of a moment in Scottish cultural history, it is high time those symbols were subject to closer scrutiny. By comparing Gray's work with that of Hugh MacDiarmid and Lewis Grassie Gibbon, Wallace draws a comparison, albeit indirectly, between the 'renaissance' of the inter-war years and the 'renaissance' of the eighties. MacDiarmid and Gibbon are both writers who pursued overtly political agendas, and their influence, like Gray's, has not been confined exclusively to literary or artistic arenas. However, perhaps the most interesting thing to note about Wallace's comments above is that they aid the construction of a literary tradition; not only is Gray's novel inserted into a Scottish literary lineage, the prestige commonly attached to MacDiarmid and Gibbon's works in assessments of twentieth-century Scottish cultural life is extended to Gray's novel. The insertion of Gray's work into a Scottish literary tradition is interesting because Gray himself appears acutely aware of literary traditions. His work

¹³See Craig, "Going Down to Hell is Easy," in Crawford and Nairn, eds, 1991; pp. 90-107, and Gifford, 1985.

¹⁴See Harvie 1984, 1991, 1994 (a & b); Mitchell, 1996; Spring, 1990.

frequently explores the grounds on which traditions are constructed, often in parodic and playful ways. Indeed, Gray's self-conscious engagement with literary tradition is a main feature of his work through which he reveals ideological investments.

However, the very notion of a Scottish literary tradition is far from unproblematic; it needs to be carefully explored before Gray can be placed within it, because controversies over differing concepts of literary tradition have intensified during the twentieth century, and not only in Scotland. MacDiarmid, a key figure in Scottish literary and political history, is often seen as the central figure of the cultural revival of the inter-war years; he has certainly been central to *critical* accounts of Scottish literature in the twentieth century. It is also helpful, however, to relate developments in Scottish cultural life to those evident in other parts of Europe and America during the same period; MacDiarmid might well, as Nancy Gish suggests,¹⁵ be viewed most helpfully as a modernist writer and thinker whose self-conscious attempts to reassess and redefine Scottish cultural life find parallels in broader aesthetic and cultural movements of the early-twentieth century. MacDiarmid might be seen to have some affinity with other writers who sought to redefine cultural reference points, reassess cultural authorities, and challenge prevailing social and political assumptions during the inter-war years.

MacDiarmid's efforts to redirect Scottish poetry and politics were highly controversial in his own day; in retrospect, his claim to be at the helm of a Scottish cultural renaissance might appear egocentric or exaggerated. Although MacDiarmid himself coined the phrase "Scottish Renaissance" in 1923, it gained greater currency when it was taken up by the French critic Denis Saurat in an influential essay of 1924.¹⁶ Edwin Muir, another significant figure in Scottish poetry, disputed the term, however, arguing in 1934, "There was no sign of a renaissance at the time except in the work of 'Hugh MacDiarmid' the writer who talked and wrote

¹⁵In Bonnie Kime Scott, ed., 1990; pp.275-279.

¹⁶See Scottish Chapbook, February 1923 (in Hugh MacDiarmid: Selected Prose, ed. Alan Riach; p.19). See also Roderick Watson, p.325.

most indefatigably about it."¹⁷ The conflict that arose between Muir and MacDiarmid over their respective views of 'the Scottish literary tradition' epitomises polarities in a more nuanced debate about 'tradition' that occupied artists and intellectuals in Europe and North America during the early-twentieth century; it is a debate which still reverberates in contemporary Scottish cultural life, and one which has some implications for Gray's work.

In 1919, in the aftermath of World War One, the Anglo-American poet and critic T.S. Eliot advanced an enormously influential concept of literary tradition in his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent". Cairns Craig, who, in his essay "Peripheries" offers a cogent critique of Eliot's view of tradition, outlines Eliot's view that

the value of a work of literature is dependent on its having a place within a comprehensive tradition, a tradition both local and European. No writer can achieve real significance, 'maturity', unless he has the weight of a developed tradition on which to draw. (1996; 14)

Craig quotes another review by Eliot written the same year which specifically addresses the question, "Was there a Scottish Literature?". Eliot outlines the presuppositions he considers necessary to the existence of 'a literature':

we suppose that there is one of the five or six (at most) great organic formations of history. We do not suppose merely 'a history', for there might be a history of Tamil literature; but a part of History, which for us is the history of Europe. We suppose not only a corpus of writings in one language, but writers and writings between whom there is a tradition . . . We suppose a mind . . . which is a greater, finer, more positive, more comprehensive mind than the mind of any period. And we suppose to each writer an importance which is not only individual, but due to his place as a constituent of this mind.¹⁸

As Craig points out, Eliot's view, "damns all peripheral cultures and all writers within peripheral cultures with the rigour of a

¹⁷"Literature in Scotland," The Spectator. No. 5526, 25th May 1934 (in Noble ed., 1992; p.146).

¹⁸T.S. Eliot, "Was there a Scottish Literature" in The Athenaeum, 4657; 1st August 1919; p.680; quoted by Craig, 1996, p.14.

Calvinist predestination" (14). Terry Eagleton is even more scathing about Eliot's traditionalism, arguing that Eliot's project, a reaction against middle-class liberalism, is characterised by "extreme right-wing authoritarianism" (1983; 39).

However, as Selden and Widdowson point out, 'tradition' is the "key term" (11) not only of Eliot's literary criticism, but also that of influential cultural and literary commentators who inherited his influential position in critical discourses, most notably F.R. Leavis. According to these commentators, Eliot's essay "has been perhaps the singly most influential work in Anglo-American criticism" (11).¹⁹ Even though Eliot's view would deny the possibility of a distinctively Scottish literary tradition, there were those in Scotland who shared his opinion, most notably Edwin Muir. In Scott and Scotland (1936), Muir argued that a writer who,

wishes to add to an indigenous Scottish culture and roots himself deliberately in Scotland will find there, no matter how long he may search, neither an organic community to round off his conceptions nor a literary tradition to support him. (4)

The notion of an 'organic community' might now seem clumsy, and dated in its assumptions of cultural homogeneity; moreover, the notion of 'literary tradition' itself, with its attendant concept of the literary canon, has also come under intense and severe criticism since the nineteen-sixties. As Selden and Widdowson argue:

By its nature, the canon is exclusive and hierarchical, and would clearly be seen to be artificially constructed by choices and selections made by human agency (critics) were it not for its endemic tendency to naturalise itself as, precisely, *natural*. . . . of course, it disenfranchises huge tracts of literary writing from serious study and status. It is why, in the post-1960s critical revolution, it had to be demystified and dismantled, so that all the writing which had been 'hidden from criticism'--'gothic' and 'popular' fiction, working-class and women's writing, for example--could be put back on the agenda in an environment relatively free of pre-emptive evaluation. (11)

¹⁹Selden and Widdowson, 1993.

Scottish writings, along with the literatures of other so-called 'peripheral' cultures could easily be added to the list of excluded literatures. Gray's engagement with literary tradition involves a 'denaturalisation' process which makes evident the operation of literary value systems.

While criticism of canonical processes has intensified in recent decades, the exclusionary and narrow concept of tradition advanced by Eliot was also contested from diverse angles by some of his contemporaries. Indeed, MacDiarmid's critical and poetic projects can be seen to challenge Eliot's notion of tradition in that MacDiarmid makes overt attempts to *dislocate* his work from an English tradition. MacDiarmid's early poems eschew standard written english and tend to favour cosmic or international cultural reference points. His political writings attack the ideology of North Britishness, valorizing a *Scottish* national identity. Rebecca West, an enormously successful journalist of staunch socialist and feminist convictions, whose fictional writings have, until quite recently, been under-rated (and whose Scottish background is often over-looked) was another writer who explicitly questioned Eliot's idea of tradition. In 1932, writing in the Daily Telegraph, West asked "What is Mr. T.S. Eliot's Authority as a Critic?"²⁰ West, writing from a perspective very different to MacDiarmid's, argued:

He has made his sense of the need for authority and tradition an excuse for refraining from any work likely to establish where authority truly lies, or to hand on tradition by continuing it in vital creation. (588/9)

West's intervention shows that debates about tradition in the early decades of this century were not as binary as is sometimes suggested by critical accounts; modernism cannot be seen as an ideologically monolithic movement, but rather as a complex intellectual and artistic arena. West also reminds us that a rejection of Eliot's concept of tradition is not necessarily a disavowal of tradition *per se*. This is worth remembering in relation to Gray, who upsets fixed notions of literary tradition, but offers instead a more transparent and inclusive concept of

²⁰Daily Telegraph, 30th September 1932; in Bonnie Kime Scott, ed., 1990; pp. 587-92.

tradition which pays tribute to writers he admires. Critical assessments of some of modernism's leading proponents (Eliot, Pound, Lawrence and Yeats) have frequently highlighted the co-existence of their experimental aesthetic practices with right-wing politics, and even fascist tendencies. Georg Lukács is, arguably, pre-eminent amongst the leftist critics who have attacked literary modernism for its formalistic preoccupations and its dislocation of individuals from 'objective reality'. Yet the Marxist feminist critic Jane Marcus, who examines the political and literary praxis of Virginia Woolf and Rebecca West as starting points for discussions of modernism, has, like other feminist critics, demonstrated that the formal experimentation evident in some modernist writing is firmly in the service of far-reaching and radical critiques of patriarchy, capitalism, and imperialism.²¹ Charges against epistemologically challenging writing have continued into the contemporary literary arena, however, and have relevance to discussions of Gray's literary strategies which will be addressed in due course.

Other recent reassessments of modernism--defined as the radical and experimental artistic and intellectual movements of the early-twentieth century--have challenged critical reconstructions of the period which over-emphasise the role of a few 'giant', predominantly male, figures.²² In Bonnie Kime Scott's critical anthology, The Gender of Modernism, for example, a picture emerges of a cultural environment where women writers and those from geographical and cultural peripheries, who are often seen as marginal figures in mainstream accounts of the period, can, from other viewpoints, be seen to address issues now considered highly significant to cultural debates of the twentieth century. These debates are more fluid, contested, and complex than some accounts of modernism allow. The writings of politically engaged and self-consciously experimental writers like West and MacDiarmid fire early-warning shots in a battle for 'the tradition'

²¹See "Storming the Toolshed," (on Woolf) in Signs 7:3, University of Chicago Press, 1982; pp.622-640, published in Warhol and Herndl, eds., 1991; pp.138-153; and see The Young Rebecca: Writings of Rebecca West, 1911-17, ed. Jane Marcus. New York: The Viking Press, 1982.

²²See Bonnie Kime Scott, ed. 1990 and 1995; also see Shari Benstock's Women of the Left Bank.

that still rages within critical discourses today, and which has crucial relevance for more recent conceptions of the Scottish literary tradition and Alasdair Gray's place within it.

The creation of a Scottish literary tradition in the twentieth century has often trod a fine line between recovering texts excluded from the English canon because of their 'peripheral' status, and simply instituting an alternative 'Scottish' canon and literary history which replicates the values and hierarchies of the English canon it seeks to replace. The difficulties facing historians of Scottish literature are paralleled in challenges faced by feminist critics. Sometimes strategies which 'reclaim' neglected women writers in order to secure their places in literary history and on educational syllabuses have been criticised by those who question the very terms and cultural values on which such reassessments are predicated. The benefits of inserting women writers into literary canons must be weighed against the benefits of contesting canonical concepts as such. Like many other literary traditions, Scottish literature has been defined by critics in terms which privilege masculine authorial and textual subjects; an awareness of the historical construction and conceptual limitations of the 'Scottish literary tradition' is necessary if that tradition is to be redefined and Alasdair Gray's work periodized and contextualized within it.

Gray's relation to literary traditions is complex and self-consciously ludic; his ambivalent interactions with critical discourses, academic and journalistic, are a matter of prime importance for anyone embarking upon a full-length study of his work, and in the body of my thesis I discuss specific ways in which Gray engages with writers and critics alike. Gray engages with critical discourses in playful and creative ways, even while he seems at times to call into question their purpose and methodologies. In The Loss of the Golden Silence Gray's engagement with academic literary and cultural criticism is at its most explicit.²³ Bruce Charlton (1988), noting the intertextual

²³The truncated and much revised prose version, "Loss of the Golden Silence," in Ten Tales Tall and True (1993; pp.50-59) dispenses with the scene already quoted and also with much of the play's rich, specific cultural detail and playful engagement with discourses of literary criticism. Gray maintains that some of the plays "took a

relationship between Lanark²⁴ and The Loss of the Golden Silence, draws attention to the influence of E.M.W. Tillyard's The English Epic And Its Background (1954) on Gray's play and his novel (8).²⁵ Paradoxically, while Gray's female protagonist in the play, who is writing a doctoral thesis on the British epic, expresses radical doubts about the worth and purpose of her own critical enterprise, in fact, the work of another literary critic, Tillyard, provides a crucial springboard for Gray's creative imagination. 'She' explains to her partner that, "An Epic is a work which gives a complete map of the universe as far as a civilization is able to understand it" (25); she worries that "without an Epic map of the universe people can't feel at home in it", but fears that "a modern Epic is unwritable" (25). In Lanark, Gray's own modern version of an epic novel, Nastler, the author, acknowledges an international array of epics which have shaped Lanark's story, from "the Greek book about Troy", to "the Russian book about war and peace" (485-489). Gray inserts his novel into a literary tradition constructed through critical discourses. It is little wonder, then, and no small consolation, that 'She' tells her male partner, "creative writers find scholars more useful than you think" (26).

Scholars' work is not only useful to Gray; in a personal interview he told me, "criticism is the light reading I most enjoy. I really *enjoy* Leavis".²⁶ While Gray's literary allusiveness spans centuries, the critics who seem to have influenced him most are highly influential twentieth-century figures, such as Leavis and Tillyard, for whom questions of the literary canon, in Leavis' case

different track of development" when he wrote the prose versions (Personal interview, January, 1994.).

²⁴Charlton (1988) charts Lanark's origins to two novels begun in the early 1950s when Gray was still in his teens and a student at Glasgow School of Art. Charlton argues that the Lanark narrative was intended to be a sequel to the Thaw narrative. Book One was completed by 1964 when it was rejected for publication (11). Charlton notes that, according to Gray, by 1971 or 1972 Lanark was "half finished" (11). The novel in its published form was completed by 1976. Charlton, quoting a letter from Gray dated 12th May 1988 which, retrospectively, acknowledges Tillyard's influence, argues: "it is clear that Gray had already thought of ways of joining his two types of book together. . . Tillyard's book also enabled Gray to integrate this construction with a vision of epic possibilities" (10).

²⁵Nastler, in Lanark, tells Lanark that he "found Tillyard's study of the epic in Dennistoun public library, and he said an epic was only written when a new society was giving men a greater chance of liberty" (492).

²⁶See Appendix, p.

'The Great Tradition', are paramount. Leavis and Tillyard, who might now be seen as fairly conservative in some of their critical approaches and assumptions, were at the height of their influence in the nineteen-fifties and early sixties, when Gray was a student and when a great deal of his subsequently published fiction was conceived.²⁷ Gray's concern with the construction of critical discourses is amply evidenced in his self-penned cover blurbs and mock reviews, in his eclectic range of literary allusions, in his ludic subversions and reinscriptions of literary tropes. It might appear as if Gray's approach to literary traditions is something of a response to, or even a reaction against, the critical approaches adopted by Leavis and Tillyard.

Leavis's influence on critical practices, at least in Britain, has been immense. Terry Eagleton, writing in 1983, argues, "the fact remains that English students in England today are 'Leavisites' whether they know it or not, irremediably altered by that historical intervention" (31). Alasdair Gray's work departs from, and subverts, conventional narrative strategies, typography, and distinctions between 'high' and 'low' culture. However, such departures require as a cultural reference point an established set of literary expectations and values. Gray uses conventional, *naturalised* literary values as his starting-block. As he tells Axelrod:

It seems I cannot *start out* to be visually playful. I have to start any work I do--painting or writing--in a conservative way which uses an already well-known form. Only when safe with it does the possibility of fracturing it somewhere and grafting in something unexpected (to give new height or depth) occur. (112)

However, when Gray departs from the various notions of tradition advanced by Eliot and Leavis and their like, subverts narrative conventions, and tries to pre-empt criticism by out-manoeuvring commentators, the challenge might be made that Gray ascribes a level of cultural authority to established literary conventions and critical approaches which they no longer widely enjoy in academic environments. As Selden and Widdowson point out, Leavisite

²⁷See Charlton, in Crawford and Nairn, 1991 pp. 12-14.

criticism became "the major single target for the New Critical theory of the 1970s and beyond in the British context" (21).²⁴

Yet, even though a 'theoretical revolution' has certainly taken place, Leavisite critical practices and concepts of tradition still provide an established norm from which more rigorously theorised critical practices depart. Literary criticism, as much as literary texts themselves, provides sites for processes of cultural redefinition. It is usual for critics to provide commentary on 'works of art' and aesthetic discourses; Gray frequently reverses this convention, using art--his prose fictions--to comment on critical discourses.

Of course, writers other than Gray have self-consciously attempted to redefine their contexts and alter what they perceive to be the course of literary history. Writers have engaged with literary traditions and critical discourses alike, consciously or unconsciously, for centuries, and critics have interpreted their efforts within cultural and literary frameworks. However, the epistemological experimentation of Gray's writings, the challenges he poses to systems of representation,²⁸ to the very terms in which literary traditions are constructed, aligns his work closely with that of some of his modernist forebears and late-twentieth century contemporaries.²⁹

Many of Gray's playful allusions to his literary predecessors, his assimilations and transformations of their techniques and ideas, and his affirmations and denials of their ideologies and values, depend on a shared awareness of literary tradition, and perhaps, even, a shared sense of literary propriety between author and reader; for instance, Lanark's "Index of Plagiarisms" only seems funny or subversive if readers already have some culturally mediated preconceptions about literary values, traditions, and the 'originality' of art. Such issues are frequently addressed in debates about that vexed subject, postmodernism. The relevance of postmodernism to discussions of Gray's work is marked, and will be addressed in the next section.

²⁸See Alison Lee, Realism and Power, p. 100.

²⁹See Rüdiger Imhof, 1990, Christopher Gittings, 1995, and Penny Smith, 1995 for comparative studies between Gray's work and that of other contemporary and modernist writers from diverse cultural contexts.

Power and Postmodernity.

The Leavisite 'literary establishment' against which Gray can be seen to react has, arguably, been superseded in the academy by heavily theoretical forms of criticism. The orthodoxies of Leavisite criticism have, to no small extent, been challenged and replaced by alternative theories and practices. Paradoxically, although Gray's early work shows an engagement with pre-structuralist notions of tradition, those critics from outwith Scotland who have given attention to his work have tended to be more influenced by post-structuralist thought. Critics from outwith Scotland (as well as a few within Scotland) have been attracted by what they see as Gray's alignment with postmodernist literature.³⁰

Lanark has attracted a disproportionate amount of critical attention relative to Gray's other works, not only because of its impact on the Scottish literary scene, but also because its philosophical and political concerns, and the literary strategies Gray employs, invite comparisons with other texts frequently dubbed 'postmodern'. Indeed, several critics have used Lanark to exemplify postmodern fiction; Gray gets many passing-mentions in general accounts of literary postmodernism.³¹ Alison Lee, Beat Witschi, R.J. Lyall, and Randall Stevenson have all addressed Gray's engagement with postmodernism more extensively. It is crucial to address postmodernity in relation to Gray because whether or not Gray's fiction can be seen as postmodern depends largely on how that term is defined. Postmodernism is far from easy to define; as Frederic Jameson points out, "the concept is not merely contested, it is also internally conflicted and contradictory" (1991, xxii). However, while Jameson thinks that "for good or ill, we cannot *not* use it" (ibid.), 'postmodern' is a label which Alasdair Gray strongly resists.

According to Randall Stevenson, Gray has denied knowing what postmodernism means.³² In "Edison's Tractatus," a piece

³⁰In Scotland, Gray has received attention from a wider variety of critical perspectives.

³¹See for example Bradbury (1993), Stevenson (1986), McHale (1987), Hutcheon (1985).

³²See Crawford and Nairn, eds., 1991; p. 48 and endnote, p.62.

from his most recent volume of stories, Mavis Belfrage, Gray²⁶ writes:

For several years I have been perplexed by the adjective *post-modern*, especially when applied to my own writing, but have now decided it is an academic substitute for *contemporary* or *fashionable*. Its prefix honestly announces it as a specimen of intellectual afterbirth, a fact I only noticed when I reread my brainy character saying so. (152-153)

Gray's view seems rather polemical and simplistic compared to the views of theorists of postmodernism. Andreas Huyssen, for example, argues:

what appears on one level as the latest fad, advertising pitch and hollow spectacle is part of a slowly emerging cultural transformation of Western societies, a change in sensibility for which the term 'post-modern' is, at least for now, wholly adequate. The nature and depth of that transformation are debatable.³³

While Huyssen does not see postmodernism as a "wholesale paradigm shift," (181) he does see the term as more than trendy jargon. Huyssen, very helpfully, attempts to dissolve the binary oppositions between those who champion postmodernism and those with strong aversions towards it. In a similar vein, Frederic Jameson argues that it is, "not possible intellectually or politically simply to celebrate postmodernism or to 'disavow' it (1991; 297).

Nevertheless, postmodernism remains fiendishly hard to define and periodize; sometimes it is thought of as an economic, sometimes as a temporal signpost, as Linda Hutcheon points out (1988; 3). David Harvey outlines the perimeters and some key issues at stake in the debate when he asks whether postmodernism,

represents a radical break with modernism, or is it simply a revolt within modernism against a certain form of 'high modernism' . . . ? Is postmodernism a style. . . or should we view it strictly as a periodizing concept. . . ? Does it have a revolutionary potential by virtue of its opposition to all forms of meta-narratives (including Marxism, Freudianism,

³³"Mapping the Post-modern," in After the Great Divide, pp.178-221; p.181.

and all forms of Enlightenment reason) and its close attention to 'other worlds' and other voices that have too long been silenced. . . ? Or is it simply the commercialization and domestication of modernism. . .? Does it therefore undermine or integrate with neo-conservative politics? (42)

Harvey's questions indicate that widely divergent interpretations of postmodernism have been advanced in recent decades. For Jameson, postmodernism is "the cultural logic of late capitalism". His view contrasts with that of J.-F. Lyotard who defines postmodernism, at its simplest, as "incredulity towards meta-narratives".³⁴ For Adorno and Horkheimer, mass produced postmodern culture represents 'mass deception'.³⁵ Numerous commentators, following Derridean deconstruction and Foucauldian models of post-structuralism, see an absent centre of meaning and decentred human subject as principal issues at stake in postmodernism. As Selden and Widdowson point out, clarity has not been aided by the fact that postmodernism has been used "both as an evaluative and descriptive term" (176).

The relevance of postmodernism to Alasdair Gray's writing is suggested by Huyssen when he writes:

my main point about contemporary postmodernism is that it operates in a field of tension between tradition and innovation, conservation and renewal, mass culture and high art, in which the second terms are not necessarily privileged over the first; a field of tension which can no longer be grasped in categories such as progress vs. reaction, left vs. right, present vs. past, modernism vs. realism. (216-217)

The arena and concerns of postmodernism are similar to the fields of tension that Gray's writings explore. Depending on one's perspective, Gray's texts can appear innovative *and* traditional, progressive *and* nostalgic, high art *and* popular fiction.

Although Gray's work might be seen to explore 'postmodern' concerns and use 'postmodern' techniques, the author's reservations about use of the term seem to stem from a rejection of what he sees as postmodernism's political agenda. To a large

³⁴Lyotard, 1984; p. xxiv.

³⁵See M. Horkheimer and T. Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception".

extent, within academic debates the question of what postmodernism *is* has become secondary to the question of its ideological character. However, the politics of postmodernism are highly controversial and complex. Huyssen points out that although postmodernism has often been disowned by leftists and neo-conservatives alike (199; 204), it has also found proponents from across the political spectrum. Gray seems to take sides in political debate about postmodernism in A History Maker, where it takes on sinister ideological overtones. Kate Dryhope, annotating the story of her son, Wat, writes:

POSTMODERNISM happened when landlords, businessmen, brokers and banker who owned the rest of the world had used new technologies to destroy the power of labour unions. Like owners of earlier empires they felt that history had ended because they and their sort could dominate the world for ever. This indifference to most people's well-being and taste appeared in the fashionable art of the wealthy. . . postmodernists had no interest in the future, which they expected to be an amusing rearrangement of things they already knew. (202-203)

Here Gray uses a futuristic narrative perspective as a device with which to historicize postmodernism; interestingly, he figures *postmodernism* as part of an imperial economic project, in contrast to Huyssen, who stresses "postmodernism's critical potential" (182) to challenge imperialist discourses. Gray makes plain his concerns about the material welfare of human beings throughout his work by returning repeatedly to the physical realities of human suffering, disease, and death, and makes many pronouncements in support of socialism--by definition a materialist ideology. Such ideological commitments are in conflict with the view of postmodernism his narrator advances in A History Maker.

However, Gray's reluctance to have his work labelled postmodernist may be based on a rather one-dimensional view of postmodernism. Huyssen stresses that postmodernism is deeply contested; it is not one thing *or* another, but rather, "represents a new type of crisis of [that] modernist culture" (217). Equally, the binary divisions of conventional Western political thought do not

really help to explain the political conflicts within postmodernist discourses. It is worth exploring some of the diverse political stances adopted towards postmodernism in order to illustrate the ideological positions encompassed by the term. I want to suggest that Gray's work *can*, despite his own protests, be aligned with certain postmodernist theories and practices; to do so, I plan to outline some of the key areas of conflict in debates about postmodernism.

According to Jameson, for instance, "every position on postmodernism in culture--whether apologia or stigmatization--is also at one and the same time, and *necessarily*, an implicitly or explicitly political stance on the nature of multinational capitalism today" (3). Linda Hutcheon, who sees "subversive potential" (19) in literary practices associated with postmodernism, argues, "what I want to call postmodernism is fundamentally contradictory, resolutely historical, and inescapably political" (4). Jurgen Habermas, one of postmodernism's most severe critics, sees it as a "radical critique of reason [which] exacts a high price for taking leave of modernity" (Hall *et al*, eds., 1992; 362).

In "Modernity: an incomplete project," Habermas argues that the aims of the Enlightenment, "the extravagant expectation that the arts and sciences would promote not only the control of natural forces but also understanding of the world and of the self, moral progress, the justice of institutions and even the happiness of human beings" (361), remain valid goals in the late-twentieth century; elsewhere he critiques postmodernism on the grounds that negative dialectics, genealogy, and deconstruction "can and want to give no account of their own position" (362). He argues:

What is thrown out is precisely what a modernity reassuring itself once meant by the concepts of self-consciousness, self-determination, and self-realization. (362)

However, Habermas is open to accusations that he takes too little account of the role of Western humanism in perpetrating Western cultural hegemony and patriarchy. It may be that the defence of Enlightenment reason reinforces the cultural and economic dominance of already privileged elites. Foucault, responding to Habermas, poses objections to the defence of reason succinctly:

What is this Reason that we use? What are its historical effects? What are its limits, and what are its dangers? . . . if it is extremely dangerous to say that Reason is the enemy that should be eliminated, it is just as dangerous to say that any critical questioning of this rationality risks sending us into irrationality. (Daring, ed. 165)

Foucault appears keen to examine ways in which reason operates as a discourse. Although the positions of Foucault and Habermas are often contrasted with each other, the above quotations indicate that in fact they are quite engaged with each other's thought and not necessarily 'taking sides' against each other, even though they reach divergent conclusions.

However, the destabilization of naturalised ideological discourses by post-structuralists has, like the defence of reason, been seen as a methodology closely aligned to reactionary political ideologies. For instance, Madan Sarup (following Habermas), trying to offer an overview of post-structuralism and postmodernism--terms which he uses synonymously--asserts: "Politically it is clear that thinkers like Lyotard and Foucault are neo-conservatives" (140).³⁶

It is far from clear to me that the work of these two thinkers can be so easily lumped together, and even less clear that Foucault's work can be termed 'conservative'. Foucauldian notions of discourse and genealogy inform my own critical approach, so I am keen to offer some defence of their ideological character and stress some of the distinctions within post-structuralism. Christopher Norris, an astute leftist commentator highly sceptical of postmodernism, makes a firm distinction between Derridean deconstruction and the postmodernisms of Lyotard and Baudrillard.³⁷ Norris sees great value in Derrida's work and also

³⁶ Sarup's use of these terms interchangeably, although it does highlight the close affinity between post-structuralism and postmodernism, is perplexing in the context of literary criticism because while literary texts are often described as 'postmodern', the term 'post-structuralist' is usually reserved for critical discourses.

³⁷ See *Uncritical Theory* (1992), Chapter 2, 'Deconstruction *versus* Postmodernism' (pp.32-51). Norris makes a scathing critique of "the anti-realist bias among present day literary theorists" (40); although he in no sense urges a return to naive or classical realism, he does posit a philosophical approach which accommodates material positions.

acknowledges the importance of the far-reaching questions posed³¹ by Foucault.

It is worth noting again that Foucault's work has provided a base for radical critiques of Western imperialism, perhaps most notably in Edward Said's ground-breaking study of Orientalism; Foucault's ideas have also been widely used by feminist theorists to rethink radically the categories and the politics of gender in Western society.³⁸ Selden and Widdowson, in a chapter entitled "Postmodernist and postcolonial theories" suggest an affinity between the two, arguing that postcolonial criticism explores "a set of concerns marked by the indeterminacies and decentredness otherwise associated, philosophically, with poststructuralism and particularly deconstruction" (188). What Said terms 'worldly' post-structuralism has provided important strategies for critics keen to assess and disrupt the power relations that accompany forms of imperialism and patriarchy. It may well be that the critiques of Western liberal humanism evident in many post-structuralist, feminist, and postcolonial theories, rather than heralding a descent into neo-conservatism or ultra-relativism, in fact, announce the emergence of alternative political and cultural discourses. Such a process may well be seen as long overdue by all but some of the most privileged subjects of the *ancien régime*.

Context is, however, all-important to the interpretation of postmodernist discourses. Huyssen, for example, attempts to place Habermas in cultural and political contexts, arguing that the "defense of enlightenment in Germany is and remains an attempt to fend off the reaction from the right" (201). Jameson makes a somewhat similar point, arguing that, for Habermas, "the vice of postmodernism consists very centrally in its reactionary political *function*, as the attempt everywhere to discredit a modernist impulse Habermas himself associates with the Bourgeois Enlightenment and its still universalizing and Utopian spirit" (58; my emphasis). Jameson, who like Huyssen stresses Habermas's cultural context, concedes that within that particular context "Habermas may well be right" (59). Huyssen stresses the

³⁸For example, in the work of Judith Butler, Elspeth Probyn, Jana Sawicki, Gayle Rubin, Diane Macdonell, and Sara Mills.

importance of reading critical, as well as literary, texts in culturally specific contexts, but also notes:

Despite all its noble aspirations and achievements, we have come to recognize that the culture of enlightened modernity has also always (though by no means exclusively) been a culture of inner and outer imperialism" (219).

For Huyssen, one of the positive political consequences of a shift towards what he terms the postmodern is that:

Such imperialism, which works inside or outside, on the micro and macro levels, no longer goes unchallenged either politically, economically or culturally. Whether these challenges will usher in a more habitable, less violent and more democratic world remains to be seen. (219)

Huyssen detects in cultural shifts towards postmodernism *challenges* to earlier forms of imperialism, which seems at odds with the imperialism Gray attributes to postmodernism (via Kate Dryhope) in A History Maker in the passage quoted a few pages earlier. Huyssen is perhaps wise not to make exaggerated claims for the political efficacy of postmodernism; however, numerous politically aware writers, committed to progressive, humanitarian causes, have used the self-conscious, meta-fictional styles and practices associated with postmodernism with as much alacrity as less overtly committed writers. The ideological tenor of postmodernism seems to be discernible only within particular social, cultural, and other interpretative frameworks.

Of course, this raises the question of what Alasdair Gray sees as *his* context(s)? The contexts of Alasdair Gray's more scathing comments about postmodernism are important and perhaps, in this respect, have some parallel with Habermas's critique of postmodernism. Gray's texts, I argue, display an impressive attempt to hold in tension the particular, the local, the personal with politically *functional* 'grand narratives' of the late-twentieth century: capitalism, imperialism, individualism, and patriarchy. While Gray, I argue, destabilizes these 'master discourses,' he rarely underestimates (he may even occasionally overestimate) their role in the contemporary world. However, he rejects those forms of postmodernism which would deny political efficacy and human agency.

Gray's comments on postmodernism in A History Maker were written in the early nineties, after a decade of Thatcherism and Reaganism, and after the end of communism in Eastern Europe; it is fair to say that certain forms of postmodernism (especially in North America) have co-existed rather comfortably with neo-liberalism in the West. In 1989 Francis Fukuyama published a controversial but widely influential essay which argued:

What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government. This is not to say that there will no longer be events, . . . for the victory of liberalism has occurred primarily in the realm of ideas or consciousness and is as yet incomplete in the real or material world.³⁹

David Held notes that Fukuyama's essay, "which reinforced the message of the neo-liberal New Right" (Hall *et al* eds., 1992; 23), was hailed in 1990 as one of the "key texts of our time".⁴⁰ In A History Maker Gray seems to reject any suggestion that history is at an end--either in the intellectual realm or the material.⁴¹ As David Held demonstrates, "A broad spectrum of political opinion found the general political message of Fukuyama's article hard to brush aside, even if there was intense disagreement about most of its details" (Hall *et al*, eds., 1992; 23). Alasdair Gray deftly disposes with the idea that history is at an end in his novel, and makes the whole notion seem very silly indeed.⁴²

Gray's critique of certain varieties and aspects of the postmodern reveals the author's own political commitments and ideological convictions. While he distances himself from certain

³⁹In Hall, *et al* eds., 1992; pp.48-49. Source: Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" in The National Interest, No.16, pp.3-4, 8-15, 18.

⁴⁰The Guardian, 7th September, 1990; in Hall *et al* eds., 1992; p.22.

⁴¹I do not know whether or not Gray has read Fukuyama; however, the notion of 'the end of history' was so widely disseminated in the early nineties that it would be hard to avoid at least indirect contact with Fukuyama's main contentions.

⁴²Fukuyama suggests that in the post-historical age conflict will still emerge in nationalist squirmishes and terrorism--this may also be parodied in the tribal warfare and terrorist conspiracies of A History Maker.

kinds of postmodernism, Gray's work can be aligned fairly comfortably with that of politically committed and experimental writers in other late-capitalist societies. Indeed, the slogan which adorns the covers and fly-leaves of several of Gray's books, "Work as if you live in the early days of a better nation," although now widely attributed to Gray, is actually borrowed (with acknowledgement) from the Canadian poet and postcolonial critic, Dennis Lee.⁴³ Gray's central political concerns, his philosophical preoccupations, and his literary techniques all align him with those postmodern writers and thinkers who *are* concerned about material issues. Gray is implicated in discourses of modernity, even while he resists and critiques aspects of those discourses.

Writing in the Margins.

So far I have situated Gray within a postmodern context on the basis of the *ideological* concerns at the heart of his work. However, the problem of defining and periodizing postmodernism remains particularly acute in relation to Alasdair Gray's writing precisely because his work does seem to exhibit many features and concerns considered characteristic of postmodern literature, even though Gray displays a fairly strong antipathy towards the term. Huyssen points out that the term 'postmodern' was first used by literary critics in the late nineteen-fifties, before spreading to architecture and other disciplines.⁴⁴ However, the use of the term to describe or periodize certain kinds of literary technique and narrative strategy widely practised in the literary fiction of the late-twentieth century is problematic. Gray himself draws attention to the fact that most of the 'innovative' or 'experimental' literary techniques he uses--techniques sometimes thought characteristic of postmodern fiction--have been used by writers of earlier centuries. Moreover, when I suggested to Gray that he was in some way 'deconstructing' Scottish history in his fiction, he became quite defensive and immediately compared his own

⁴³Lee came to Scotland on a Scottish-Canadian Exchange Fellowship in 1980-81. *Cencrastus* No. 4, Winter 1980-81, carried an extract from Lee's widely anthologised lecture to the third annual 'Recontre québécoise internationale des écrivains' in 1972, "Cadence, Country, Silence: Writing in Colonial Space".

⁴⁴ See Huyssen, p.184.

approach to that of John Galt and James Hogg.⁴⁵ Certainly, the self-conscious formal experimentation of writers as diverse as Lawrence Sterne and Lewis Carroll predates conventional periodizations of modernism or postmodernism.

However, although self-conscious engagement with the literary texts of earlier generations is evident in work which far predates the late-twentieth century, and even what we have come to think of as 'modernity', the projects of literary modernism and postmodernism are particularly hard to separate at times, and might often seem inextricably linked. Gray sounds a note of caution which highlights how difficult it is to periodize his work as postmodern *only* in terms of its historical moment and literary techniques.

Yet the *proliferation* of parodic, ironic, self-reflexive, anti-realist, and playful narrative approaches in the late-twentieth century helps to explain the nature of the cultural shift called postmodernism. Leaving aside the changes (economic and technological) in the production, commodification and distribution of literary fiction in the twentieth century--changes which have some far-reaching implications for writers and critics⁴⁶--a great deal of fiction dubbed postmodern questions the ontological certainties of Western humanism, and disrupts its epistemologies. Such challenges are also eminently visible in literature of earlier eras, most notably in much modernist writing, but their intensification in the literature of the late-twentieth century may be symptomatic of a deepening crisis in the sustaining discourses of Western humanism. Critics of postmodernism often find the allusive and playful strategies adopted by numerous contemporary writers--including Gray--irritating and self-indulgent; for detractors of 'postmodern' fiction, such literary reflexivity is evidence of a lack of artistic seriousness, original vision, and even a lack of political consciousness on the part of postmodernist authors.⁴⁷ It is worth noting at this stage a few of

⁴⁵See Appendix, p. 310.

⁴⁶Richard Todd addresses some of the issues relating to the production and marketing of literary fiction in Consuming Fictions. He makes particular mention of Gray in his argument.

⁴⁷Some of Gray's own reviewers have seen his work as pretentious, indulgent, or lacking in originality. See, for example, Mangan, 1990; Glendinning, 1990.

the most significant attributes of 'postmodern' fiction in order to illustrate Gray's direct engagement with the ideological controversies of literary (post)modernity.

Self-conscious approaches to historiography have been seen by numerous critics, most notably Linda Hutcheon, as a key feature of postmodern fiction; certainly, historiographical reconstruction is an essential component of much of Gray's work and its discussion pervades my own thesis. However, until fairly recently, less attention has been paid to spatial considerations in postmodern theory. Spatial power relations, now a prominent concern in postcolonial critical discourses, are also highly relevant to Gray's work. Edward Soja argues that since the nineteenth century "an essentially historical epistemology" in social theories has "preserved a privileged place for the 'historical imagination' in defining the very nature of critical insight and interpretation" (136). He argues:

So unbudgeably hegemonic has been this historicism of theoretical consciousness that it has tended to occlude a comparable critical sensibility to the spatiality of social life. (136)

Soja's essay draws on and elucidates the work of Foucault which attempts to bring geographical considerations to bear on historical discourses. In an interview with Paul Rabinow, Foucault argues, "Space is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power".⁴⁸ Edward Said has used Foucault's consideration of space to develop ideas about the relationship between 'narrative and geography' as part of his critique of Western imperialism--imperial conquest is, of course, a territorial, hence, a spatial conquest as well as a political one.⁴⁹ Imperialism is, I argue, a recurrent theme in Gray's writing, which emerges not only through his historiographical reconstructions, but also through a re conceptualisation of spatial perspectives. Gray's radical 'cultural cartography' is most evident in his writings about Glasgow (discussed in Chapter Three) where the ideological

⁴⁸Michel Foucault, "Space, Power and Knowledge," in Daring, ed. p.168.

⁴⁹See Edward Said, "Narrative and Geography," New Left Review No. 180, March/April 1990, pp.81-100.

underlay of conventional spatial and temporal epistemologies is critically scrutinized.

In "The Eye of Power" Foucault argues, "A whole history remains to be written of *spaces*--which would at the same time be the history of *powers* (both of these terms in the plural)--from the great strategies of geopolitics to the little tactics of the habitat" (1980;149). While Gray's spatialised figurations of power relations can be related thematically to Foucault's focus on the spatial exercise of power, Gray's typographical experimentation can also be seen as a spatial concern. Gray's tendency to alter narrative perspectives, often playfully, involves another spatial dislocation in the 'mind's eye' and might well be partly attributable to his background in fine art. In contrast to a painting, the process of reading narrative fiction usually necessitates greater movement through physical time than space. For the most part, Gray's fictions follow the norms of linear narrative, yet at regular intervals he arrests their progress and expectations: for example, in Lanark, where Nastler's meeting with Lanark (plus footnotes) and the Index of Plagiarisms appear together on the same pages (485-499); or, in 1982, Janine when Jock's breakdown is represented typographically, and *spatially* on the page (177-187).⁵⁰

Some of the traditional literary modes which Gray adapts to his own purposes have served to represent and interpret European conceptualizations of space. The 'social geographies' of, for instance, epic, the mode Gray uses in Lanark, or the picaresque, which he uses in "A Report to the Trustees" (both narrative modes in which the protagonist moves through space as well as time) have rarely been emphasised in critical accounts. Often, it has been left to postcolonial critics to highlight the imperialistic assumptions inscribed in these textual forms. However, Gray seems to display no small degree of political consciousness when he appropriates literary modes. For example, in The Fall of Kelvin Walker and McGrotty and Ludmilla (discussed in my final chapter) Gray models his narratives on

⁵⁰In his interview with Axelrod, Gray explains, "the speaker has a nervous breakdown conveyed by three columns of different typefaces on the same pages, each a stream of thoughts or feelings at war with the rest. I do not know how else I could have done it" (111).

adventure stories and spy thrillers, popular contemporary successors of the epic and picaresque traditions, which also inscribe geographical space, often reproducing the axioms of imperial discourse. Gray's revisionary practices, however, unsettle imperialistic ideology, even though they display some complicity with its discourses.

Spatial metaphors are also central to Gray's critique of institutional power. Gray's fiction often highlights the oppressive power of social institutions, recalling Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an investigation),"⁵¹ where the French philosopher emphasises the role of political, religious, familial, and educational structures in reproducing the exploitative relations of capitalism. Althusser, discussing Marx's 'spatial metaphor' argues:

It is easy to see that this representation of the structure of every society as an edifice containing a base (infrastructure) on which are erected the two 'floors' of the superstructure is . . . a spatial metaphor. (8)

While for Marx, according to Althusser, the object of the metaphor is to represent "'determination in the last instance' by the economic base" (9), Gray sees institutional power in slightly less reductive or deterministic terms. Of institutions, he tells Axelrod:

my approach to institutions--reflects their approach to me. Nations, cities, schools, marketing companies, hospitals, police forces have been made by people for the good of people. I cannot live without them, don't want to or expect to. But when we see them working to increase dirt, poverty, pain, and death then they have obviously gone wrong. (108)

Interestingly, in the same interview Gray uses literary evidence to refute the determinations of officialdom. He says: "The city where the bank official Joseph K struggles for acquittal from a nameless crime could easily have been Glasgow. . . . even Kafka could write a good ending out of a world like mine" (108). This is, for Gray, proof "that human government is redeemable" (108). While Gray retains an critical awareness of capitalism's hegemony, he tends to figure power in dynamic and relational ways. He seems to suggest, to paraphrase Foucault, that 'the exercise of power produces

⁵¹Louis Althusser, Essays on Ideology, pp.1-60.

resistances,' and that power is not *solely* economic. Gray, like Marx, is fond of using edifices in metaphorical ways, perhaps most notably in Mavis Belfrage⁵² where Colin, a shy lecturer, builds a meticulous edifice from match sticks--truly a 'castle in the air'--while Mavis, his former student, encroaches further not only on his consciousness, but also on his domestic 'territory'. The power relations between these two characters are subtle and dynamic, and involve a complex interplay between their respective financial, emotional, intellectual and institutional powers and dependencies.

The utopian impulses and dystopian visions evident in Mavis Belfrage and much of Gray's fiction are spatial as well as imaginative concepts; as Krishan Kumar explains, the word Utopia stems from *outopia*--nowhere--and *eutopia*--somewhere good.⁵³ He also points out, "There is no tradition of utopia or utopian thought outside the Western world" (33).⁵⁴ Images of construction abound in Gray's fiction--from the tunnel in "The Cause Of Some Recent Changes" and the 'Axletree', to the various 'making' processes of Poor Things. Gray accentuates in his writings the folly of utopian schemes which divorce themselves from the spatial power relations of the material world.

Gray's refiguration of spatial relations highlights the proximity of his concerns with certain postmodern preoccupations. Gray's extreme scepticism towards other conventional epistemologies of Western humanism also aligns him with postmodernism. Arguably, the destabilization of the Cartesian subject is the aspect of postmodernism that most fundamentally shakes the epistemological foundations of Western humanism. If modernism can be seen to react against the authoritative cultural mythologies of an earlier era--symbolized (as Foucault suggests) by Marx's critique of capitalism, Nietzsche's 'death of God' and

⁵²The novella is developed from the plays Agnes Belfrage (1969) and Triangles, a renamed version of the former, networked by Granada TV in 1972.

⁵³Krishan Kumar, 1991; p1.

⁵⁴Foucault's somewhat related concept of *heterotopia*--"singular spaces to be found in some social spaces whose functions are different or even the opposite of others"--has been adapted by Brian McHale in relation to postmodern literary discourses and indeed, McHale uses Lanark's Intercalendrical Zone to exemplify heterotopia. See Michel Foucault, "Space, Power, and Knowledge" (Daring, ed., p.168).

Freud's 'death of the father'⁵⁵--then postmodernity might be seen to continue to trouble cultural authorities, including the *new* 'master narratives' ushered in by modernism. For instance, Freud's 'discovery' of the unconscious radically challenged concepts of subjectivity in the early years of the twentieth century, but his theories in their turn have come under increased critical scrutiny as the century has progressed, not least from feminist commentators.⁵⁶ While post-structuralist thinkers have tended to revise or refine the intellectual projects of modernism, many late-twentieth century writers have attempted to reappraise and rewrite their literary inheritance.⁵⁷

Subjectivity, a central intellectual concern of numerous modernist writers, is a crucial concept in Alasdair Gray's fiction, one discussed at some length in the first and the fourth chapters of this thesis. Subjectivity has become a controversial topic of cultural debate because its break-down *can* be seen as a politically disabling strategy. If the individual human subject is 'decentred', in what ground can the identities necessary for human agency be rooted? Patricia Waugh addresses this question, pointing out that "patriarchal metanarratives function just as effectively within our so-called 'postmodern age' as in any other" (199). For Waugh, the challenge is to create "narratives which allow us to think of subjectivity in ways which neither simply repeat the Enlightenment concept of modernity nor repudiate it in an embrace of anarchic dispersal" (199). Judith Butler makes a somewhat similar move: "The deconstruction of identity is not the deconstruction of politics; rather, it establishes as political the

⁵⁵"What is an author?" in Harari, ed., pp.141-160.

⁵⁶Most notably, perhaps, Luce Irigaray's Speculum of the Other Woman, also in the work of Jacques Lacan.

⁵⁷Examples are too numerous to cite, and are by no means exclusive to the post-war years, but some well-known examples of plays and novels which rewrite a familiar story from a different perspective, or extend its narrative beyond the formal point of closure (often suggesting alternative ways in which to construct its meaning) are Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea (1966) which retells the story of Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre from the point of view of Bertha Mason, Rochester's first wife; Tom Stoppard's Rozencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead (1966) which centres its dramatic action around two minor Shakespearean characters, the assassins hired to dispose of Hamlet; Angela Carter's various reinterpretations of traditional fairy tales from feminist perspectives; and Timothy Findley's Not Wanted on the Voyage (1984) a retelling of the story of Noah and the Ark focusing on contemporary moral questions.

very terms through which identity is articulated" (148). By deconstructing personal and collective identities, Gray's fiction reveals the ideological structures of identity formations, and makes possible the construction of alternative, provisional, non-essentialist identities.

Notions of agency, liberation, and resistance are important to Gray's writing (and have been central to political movements in the late-twentieth century); in this respect, Foucault's concepts of power and resistance are enormously suggestive for critical interpretation of Gray's work. Gray's work has, however, been criticised as foreclosing the possibility of resistance, most notably by Alison Lumsden.⁵⁸ Lumsden, responding to critics (she names Cairns Craig) who see Gray's writings as innovative and radical, argues that, thematically, Gray's work "may hardly be described as innovative in any real sense" (118) and, also, that in terms of stylistic experimentation, "a reactionary position seems to be implicit in Gray's handling of postmodern techniques and strategies" (118). Lumsden's intervention is significant, not only because she challenges what she sees as a cosy "almost masonic dialogue" (125) between Gray and academic critics,⁵⁹ and is one of the few academic commentators to express strong reservations about his work, but also because she addresses questions of resistance and containment. These and related questions are important to my own thesis and are explored more fully in the second chapter with regard to the 'Axletree' stories and "Five Letters from an Eastern Empire". Lumsden recognises that Lanark, in common with other texts by Gray, is concerned with the way in which human beings relate to systems of power. However, following Lyotard, she describes postmodernism as "an attitude and response to precisely the awareness of *linguistic reflexive entrapment* which we have seen explored in Gray's work" (119;

⁵⁸In Wallace and Stevenson eds.; pp.115-126.

⁵⁹In my own experience Gray has never been other than genial and generous in sharing his work and opinions. This may leave critics open to the charge that they do not place enough distance between themselves and the author; it is hard, however, to see how such distance can bring any advantage to critics, readers or the author himself.

my emphasis).⁶⁰ This overly textualist interpretation of postmodernism leads Lumsden to conclude: 42

Thematically, then, Gray's work seems to suggest that, while the vast economic and political structures which form systems of entrapment--Lyotard's overarching grand-narratives of our age and society--may be difficult, if not impossible to challenge, the individual may nevertheless find some kind of freedom *within* these frameworks. (118)

According to Lumsden, Gray's treatment of this theme in his fiction "implies that it may provide some antidote to the larger societal forces which serve to restrict freedom," conclusions she deems "fairly traditional classical bourgeois ones" (118).

However, it seems to me that Gray's treatment of power does not correspond to Lumsden's description. Where Lumsden polarises the interpretative possibilities of Lanark, suggesting the novel can be read either as a "critique of entrapment" or as a "form of containment" (121), Gray makes apparent the writer's complicity with the system he seeks to critique. He brings to light, as Butler puts it, "the very terms in which agency is articulated and becomes culturally intelligible" (147). Gray seems aware that the 'power' of texts lies in the way they are interpellated into social and cultural discourses.

Foucault offers helpful reflections on resistance in his interview with Rabinow. He says:

I do not think that it is possible to say that one thing is of the order of 'liberation' and another is of the order of 'oppression'. . . . aside from torture and execution, which preclude any resistance, no matter how terrifying a given system may be, there always remain the possibilities of resistance, disobedience, and oppositional groupings. (162)

Like Foucault, Gray explores the possibilities of resistance, and the role of literary discourse in maintaining the 'systems of entrapment'. While Lumsden appeals for "*real* radicalism, *real* innovation" (124), she gives no indication of what these might be or how they might be constituted; Gray, by contrast, questions the epistemology of empirical realities, destabilizing rather than

⁶⁰Robert Crawford (in Crawford and Nairn, eds.) and Philip Hobsbaum (in O'Brien, ed.) also note entrapment as a central theme of Gray's work.

reinforcing the apparently hegemonic discourses of Western humanism.

Lumsden also highlights what she sees as Gray's "particularly Scottish and depressingly parochial field of reference" (121), viewing the cultural specificity of his work as "limiting" (121). Lumsden reveals universalist assumptions at the heart of her own critical approach. Yet it is precisely in the local, the particular, and the specific sites of power identified by Gray that 'slippage' in the 'grand narratives' becomes apparent; it is in intimate personal relationships, on the margins of society (among Gray's countless outcasts, recluses, and prostitutes), in the margins of the city (Something Leather's peripheral city-scapes), the margins of empires, on the body itself, that power is enacted and subverted. In Gray's fiction the power relations of late-capitalism and patriarchy, hegemonic structural discourses of Western society, are played-out and yet *also* challenged in the micro-details of day-to-day life. In contrast to Lumsden's view, it seems to me that Gray, all too aware of these overarching power structures, is more concerned to break-down the 'grand-narratives' of the age by exposing and challenging their epistemological and ontological coherence, by challenging their underlying ideologies, and by finding chinks in their hegemonic armoury. Given that there can be no position *outside* discourse, Gray's attempt to construct subtle genealogies of power (to borrow Foucault's term) seems a creative and radical step.

Lumsden also takes Gray to task for his use of pastiche, another important feature of postmodernism which is identified by Jameson. While Lumsden argues that there is a "fine line between pastiche and bad writing" (119), Jameson sees pastiche as a mimetic practice "without parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter" (17). However, for Hutcheon, it is parody, rather than pastiche, which marks contextually aware postmodern writing. Parody, rather than pastiche, is in abundant evidence in Gray's writings, as in other literary manifestations of postmodernism. Paraphrasing the Italian novelist and philosopher Umberto Eco, Hutcheon argues:

We cannot ignore the discourses that precede and contextualize everything we say and do, and it is through

ironic parody that we signal our awareness of this inescapable fact. (39)

Hutcheon suggests that "irony may be the only way we *can* be serious today" (39); she echoes a comment made by the expatriate Scottish novelist Muriel Spark in 1971.⁶¹ Spark, reflecting on repression and violence in human societies, suggests that the "marvelous [sic] tradition of socially-conscious art . . . isn't achieving its end or illuminating our lives anymore" (14). She argues: "In its place I advocate the arts of satire and of ridicule. And I see no other living art form for the future. Ridicule is the only honourable weapon we have left" (15). Judith Butler sounds a note of caution, but makes a helpful contribution to the debate when she argues:

Parody by itself is not subversive, and there must be a way to understand what makes certain kinds of parodic repetitions effectively disruptive, truly troubling, and which repetitions become domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony. . . . parodic displacement, indeed, parodic laughter, depends on a context and reception in which subversive confusions can be fostered. (139)

In Gray's work, it is tensions between aesthetic concerns and political concerns, tensions between local concerns and global concerns that create a sense of parodic displacement which enables Gray to upset systems of cultural value and expectation--for example, when world leaders congregate in Provan for a World Summit in Lanark; when the 'power plants' of A History Maker turn out to be environmentally-friendly botanical organisms; when Harry's received pronunciation english is presented phonetically in Something Leather.

Perhaps Gray's parody of empirical epistemologies and conventional historical discourses is at its most striking, and most postmodern, in "The Crank That Made The Revolution," where Vague McMenamy, an amateur inventor from a Cessnock slum, creates a device which initiates the industrial revolution. This 'Unlikely Story' is an ironic assault on the precepts of the

⁶¹Muriel Spark, "The Desegregation of Art," Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Second Series, No. 21, 21-27 (1971), in Critical Essays on Muriel Spark. Ed. Joseph Hynes. New York: G.K.Hall and Co., 1992; pp.33-37.

industrial revolution. It reassesses the effects of 'progress', noting the negative effects of mechanised labour on the work force, highlighting environmental destruction, and questioning the gospel of profit and efficiency. It is also extremely funny. Gray achieves his ironic effect by juxtaposing the relatively 'naturalised' figure of a Scottish eighteenth-century inventor with his preposterous inventions. Gray distances his readers from McMenemy's mind-set when the narrator reflects: "considered mechanically, a duck is not an efficient machine" (38). Who *would* be inclined to consider the 'mechanics of a duck', except a crank, an eccentric, a marginal figure?

After McMenemy succeeds in drowning all his Granny's ducks while trying to "improve" them, he turns his attention to the old woman herself. He observes that his Granny, who rocks in her chair as she knits, is "two sources of energy, one above the waist and one below, and only the upper source brought in money" (41). Driven by profit motives, McMenemy invents a knitting machine which increases his Granny's productivity, but puts Cessnock's other knitters out of business. Gray uses McMenemy's ultra-pragmatic approach to satirise the economic efficiency-driven logic of the industrial pioneers of the eighteenth century, highlighting the mercenary and inhumanitarian aspects of such mechanisation. Granny is an emotive figure; even if Scotland *did* spawn the industrial revolution, it is now, as every child knows, a land where 'ye cannae shove yer granny aff a bus', much less put her to work on an *ad hoc* see-saw.

The bizarre anti-realism of Gray's story reminds readers that its historiographical narrative is an exercise in cultural interpretation and critique. Gray's 'serious playfulness' emerges through his use of literary strategies which obscure the 'facts' of McMenemy's life. The protagonist's origins are obscure--"there are no records to suggest that Vague McMenemy had parents" (37)--and the part of Paisley High Kirk cemetery in which he was interred, "was flattened to make way for a new road in 1911" (43). His physical existence is unsubstantiated, but the material *effects* of his existence are manifest, suggests Gray. Among the story's illustrations, the portrait which is perhaps of the Provost, perhaps of Granny, highlights the story's ambiguities, expressing

radical doubt in the epistemologies of historical discourse and graphic representation alike. Of course, Vague McMenamys are indeed 'vague' figures in history; Gray is attempting to reconstruct a little piece of Scottish historiography, satirising the social, ethical, intellectual, and political values which inform popular perceptions of the industrial revolution in the late-*twentieth* century.

However, the contrast Gray is at pains to draw between humans and machines, a contrast his hero is unable to discern, is heightened in the puns of the title. The 'crank' is both the eccentric McMenemy *and* his crankshaft device; the revolution is the industrial revolution *and* the turn made by any crankshaft. But there's more to Gray's joke; this becomes clear when the narrator points out, "Vague is the Gaelic for Alexander" (37)--in fact, the Gaelic for Alexander is usually translated as Alasdair. Gray makes a suggestion that *he* is the crank; if so, his revolution might be seen as an ideological one, firmly placed in the late-twentieth century. Gray's metafictional story addresses the role of literary discourses in shaping perceptions both of the past and of the contemporary world.

I will conclude this introduction with a brief outline of what lies ahead. The five chapters that follow examine different ideological strands in Gray's writing, relating his work to political, literary, and cultural discourses. The first chapter discusses Gray's autobiographical and semi-autobiographical writings, his Saltire Self-portrait, Lanark, and "A Report to the Trustees," initiating discussion of his approaches to narrative construction and historiography. I argue that Gray's texts draw attention to their own narrative paradigms, unsettling empirical concepts of subjectivity and identity, and challenging the terms in which national and personal identities can be secured. The discussion of Gray's self-conscious destabilization of categories of identity underlies the questions raised in subsequent chapters.

Chapter Two addresses itself to the intersection of discourses of nation and empire in Gray's work, and introduces discussion of Gray's critique of capitalism. Focusing on his polemical essays, Why Scots Should Rule Scotland (1992 and

1997) and selected Unlikely Stories, Mostly ("Five Letters from an Eastern Empire" and the 'Axletree' stories), this chapter explores questions of cultural agency and the role of literature in producing and sustaining hegemonic discourses. The third chapter attempts to unite the political critique of the previous chapter and the epistemological troubling of the first by discussing Gray's three novels set in the specific locale of Glasgow, Lanark, Something Leather, and Poor Things. I argue that Gray's presentations of his native city rely not only on historical, but also spatial perspectives; the emphasis he places on peripheral viewpoints and multiple perspectives is intrinsically linked to his political critique of consumer capitalism. The politics of representation remains an important consideration in the fourth chapter, where I discuss A History Maker and 1982, Janine, novels in which Gray interrogates the contemporary ideological 'battlefields' of modern warfare, gender representation, and the electronic media. I address tensions and ambivalences in Gray's work with regard to gendered power relations and show how his alignments of masculinity and militarism destabilize both these discourses.

In the final chapter I attempt to draw together the ideological strands discussed in earlier chapters and the introduction. Chapter Five identifies power--in its myriad of forms--as the central concern of Gray's work, and with reference to Gray's novellas, The Fall of Kelvin Walker and McGrotty and Ludmilla, returns to discussion of Gray's engagement with literary discourses initiated in the introduction and first chapter. It seems that, like 'the crank that made the revolution', I too have come full circle.

Chapter One: Personal Stories, Political Histories

Alasdair Gray's fictions frequently offer interpretations of post-war Scottish history which focus on aspects of life often overlooked by more traditional historical approaches. History is one of Gray's preoccupations; his historiographical narratives often integrate national history, literary history, and personal history, highlighting the interconnections between discourses of politics and art. In this first chapter I want to concentrate on autobiographical writings by Gray, focusing on his Saltire Self-Portrait, his first novel, Lanark, and "A Report to the Trustees" from Lean Tales. This selection itself raises questions about genre distinctions and the boundaries between 'art' and 'life', between fact and fiction; while the essay and the short story present themselves as autobiographical texts, Lanark is a work of fiction which contains autobiographical elements. I address Lanark's problematic status as an autobiographical text in the course of my argument; however, the quasi-autobiographical status of Gray's first novel *also* helps to highlight the problematic status of the other texts under discussion. The Saltire Self-Portrait and the "Report" are perhaps more fictional than they at first appear.

Autobiographical features are prominent in numerous texts by Gray; those discussed here are by no means an exhaustive list of those in which Gray transforms personal experience into fictional narrative. These three pieces, however, highlight particularly well two key concerns which recur throughout Gray's fictional enterprises: firstly, his interest in the construction of historical narrative; secondly, his interest in the construction of human subjectivity. Gray's autobiographical texts provide a useful springboard into discussion of a wider range of his writings. Significantly, Lanark and "A Report to the Trustees" are among the earliest written of Gray's published prose writings.¹

¹Bruce Charlton's chronology of Gray's work notes that Gray was working "on his 'epic' novel, at that time called Thaw," while at Art School between 1952-57; "A Report to the Trustees" dates from 1959 (Crawford and Nairn, eds., 1991; p.19).

Autobiographical writings are sometimes indicative of an exploration of identity on the part of the author. Gray might be trying to answer the question, 'Who is Alasdair Gray?' in his more autobiographical texts. However, he frequently complicates the status of his 'self' in searching and ludic ways. Gray problematises the process by which the self can be known and understood by questioning the processes by which history can be known and understood. Gray's approach towards autobiography in his Saltire Self-Portrait casts doubt on subjective accounts of the past, and on empirical notions of individual subjectivity.

Gray's disruptions of widely accepted empirical categories of selfhood and historical objectivity have political significance. In order to explore the ideological agendas evident in Gray's work, I relate his autobiographical texts to Sidonie Smith's concept of the "autobiographical manifesto".² In the first section of this chapter I argue that Gray attempts to shift the locus of cultural authority by reconstructing the past from alternative perspectives. I suggest that Gray prompts his readers to question some underlying assumptions of more conventional historical methodologies. By displaying scepticism towards discourses presented as incontestable fact, Gray exhibits a strong awareness of the partiality and provisionality of even his own perspectives; in short, he encourages an inclusive and pluralistic vision of Scottish society.

In the second part of this chapter I consider the intertextual relationship between Lanark and the Saltire Self-Portrait. I argue that the central concern of Gray's autobiographical writings is the struggle for personal agency within the frameworks of history. My discussion of Lanark focuses mostly on links between Thaw, Lanark, and Nastler, all of whom are autobiographical figures to some extent.³ I use Brian McHale's notion of 'heterotopian zones' to explore the

²Sidonie Smith, 1991.

³In Chapter Three I discuss Lanark further, in a context where geographical and spatial, as well as historical and temporal concerns are to the fore.

relationships between Lanark's semi-autobiographical subjects. In the third section of this chapter, I discuss the extent to which Gray displaces the twin notions of individual heroism and artistic genius, with reference to "A Report to the Trustees". The issue of heroism re-emerges in Chapter Four in relation to 1982, Janine and A History Maker, and in Chapter Five in relation to The Fall of Kelvin Walker and McGrotty and Ludmilla. My discussion of "A Report to the Trustees" also explores issues of literary genre and cultural authority which are developed in Chapter Five. This final section also introduces Gray's textual engagement with issues of imperialism--an aspect of his work discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Two, but which connects closely to questions of subjectivity, human agency, and the construction of historical narratives raised earlier in Chapter One. Questions about the dynamics of power--political power, personal power, and cultural authority--underlie all these discussions. The philosophical and political challenges to cultural authority raised in Gray's work are closely related to the contested enterprise of postmodernism; Chapter One begins to explore the ways in which Alasdair Gray's writings engage with the political and intellectual climates of the late-twentieth century.

Personal Experience as National History

Alasdair Gray offers an unconventional view of history. Across a range of texts, Gray uses individual experience as the basis of historical re-interpretation, and in several fictional and non-fictional contexts he relies heavily on the events of his own life. Experience is, of course, a slippery category: it is grounded in discourses of subjectivity and historicity that may not now be accepted as unquestioningly as they once were. Post-structuralist theories have, to no small extent, upset empirical assumptions about the nature of the world and how it is perceived and understood. Individual human consciousness, privileged within post-enlightenment thought and often considered an incontestable 'reality', can, alternatively, be seen as a socially

formulated subject-position within discourse; similarly, historical narratives are always written from a particular ideological point of view. According to theories of deconstruction, there can be no absolute truth, no universal perspective, no 'essential' human subjectivity, nor any ultimate source of meaning; rather, there are relations within discourse through which meaning is constructed.

Jeremy Hawthorn notes that the term 'deconstruction' originates in the work of Jacques Derrida, and that it implies:

that the hierarchical oppositions of Western metaphysics are themselves constructions or ideological impositions. Deconstruction thus aims to undermine Western metaphysics by undoing or deconstructing these hierarchical oppositions and by showing their logocentric reliance upon a centre or presence. (Hawthorn, 32)⁴

As I suggested in my introduction, the challenges to Western metaphysics posed by Derrida, Foucault and others has held appeal for those disadvantaged within its hierarchies; it is not too surprising that post-structuralist methods have been widely adopted by feminist and postcolonial critics, and others who find themselves outwith the 'symbolic order' of Western Europe.⁵ The critical tools provided by post-structuralism also prove invaluable in relation to Alasdair Gray's work.

Post-structuralist theories, as I have already suggested, are closely connected to the creative endeavours of those engaged in what Linda Hutcheon calls "the cultural enterprise we seem determined to call postmodernism" (1988, ix). Hutcheon observes in much recent fiction and criticism a "questioning stance towards their common use of conventions of narrative, of reference, of the inscribing of subjectivity, of their identity as

⁴See also Derrida, 1978 and 1981.

⁵Toril Moi offers a useful overview of Lacan's notion: "To enter into the Symbolic Order means to accept the phallus as the representation of the Law of the Father. All human culture and all life in society is dominated by the Symbolic Order and thus by the phallus as the sign of lack"(100). Moi also discusses the critical responses to Lacan of Kristeva, Irigaray, and Cixous.

textuality, and even of their implication in ideology" (106); however, she argues:

In both fiction and history writing today, our confidence in empiricist and positivist epistemologies has been shaken--shaken, but perhaps not yet destroyed. And this is what accounts for the skepticism rather than any real denunciation. . . . postmodernism is a contradictory cultural enterprise, one that is heavily implicated in what it seeks to contest. It uses and abuses the very structures and values it takes to task. (106)

Hutcheon's comments are particularly relevant to Gray, because in his historical and personal narratives he too might be seen to 'shake', rather than fully displace, empiricist epistemologies. While Gray questions prevailing systems of value and representation, he does not seem to dispense with them altogether.

Such systems are inscribed in cultural mythologies, by which I mean the stories used within societies to validate, reinforce, and perpetuate the idea and values of the society itself. Cultural mythologies play an important role in the construction of identity; they help to determine what 'we' mean when 'we' talk about 'ourselves', both as individual selves and as communities. Some of these stories remain relevant over centuries and are among the most powerful cultural myths of the twentieth century (the Oedipus myth is an obvious example); others fail to retain cultural resonance and become lost or obscured. Literary sources have proved a particularly rich seam for numerous novelists and dramatists of the late-twentieth century who have mined classical and other culturally influential literatures as a creative resource.⁶ While some contemporary writers have considered their work to be overtly political, it has become very difficult to maintain an argument that there exists an apolitical position in which literary texts can be produced, and read; texts

⁶See Hutcheon, 1988; pp.105-123 for further discussion of Historiographic Metafiction.

are produced by and within discourse, and discourse is inherently ideological. Historian and critical theorist Hayden White sums-up the point well when he writes:

there is no value neutral mode of employment, explanation, or even description of any field of events, whether imaginary or real . . . the very use of language itself implies or entails a specific posture before the world which is ethical, ideological or more generally political. (1978; 129)

Alasdair Gray seems particularly aware of the ideological assumptions which underlie his understanding of his own cultural experiences. He seems also to be aware of the provisionality of the strategies he uses to describe those experiences.

Part of David Harvey's assessment of modernism bears some relation to Gray's approach to historiography. Harvey argues that the multiple perspectives and relativistic epistemologies of modernism expose, "what it still took to be the true nature of a unified, though complex, underlying reality" (30). Christopher Norris draws a distinction between the "ontological question (what happened?)" and "an epistemological issue (what difficulties do we face in getting to know what happened?)" (1992; 122). Gray's work challenges the way the world is *represented* within Western empirical epistemologies in order to highlight the political weight of such systems of representation. Rather than undermine the (ontological) 'reality' of the past, Gray's challenges to empirical epistemologies suggest alternative ways to make sense of both the past and the present.

The observations of both Hutcheon and Harvey, quoted above, are particularly apt in relation to Gray's playful and sceptical autobiographical writings. The internal complexities and contradictions imbedded in the pieces under discussion encourage his readers to scrutinize even Gray's versions of events sceptically. Gray's regular use of autobiographical modes is significant; autobiographical writings are often both literary and historical, yet seldom can they be unproblematically defined as either literature or history. The life stories of the rich, famous,

or successful are immensely popular, yet the popular appeal of autobiographical forms is at odds with the distinctly uneasy critical responses they tend to generate. Autobiographies do not always acknowledge the limits of their perspectives, that is, their fictionality; furthermore, their reliability as socio-historical documents is often dubious, and their artistic merit sometimes questionable.

However, more recently, autobiography has attracted greater academic attention as critics attempt to revise the (human and textual) subjects of critical discourse and re-evaluate what constitutes 'good literature'. Feminist academics, in particular, keen to recover forgotten realms of female experience, and keen to place texts within historical contexts, have used autobiographical texts in profitable ways.⁷ Also, some autobiographers *have* acknowledged the narrative frameworks in which they have reconstructed their lives. Audre Lorde's term "biomythography"⁸ is a helpful one in this respect, in that it draws attention to the myth-making, or myth-sustaining, aspects of autobiographical practices. When I describe Gray's Saltire Self-Portrait, Lanark, and "A Report to the Trustees" as autobiographical texts, I do so with Lorde's awareness of the fictionality of all biographical writing. Although Alasdair Gray does not use the term 'biomythography', it is one particularly applicable to his Saltire Self-Portrait, where family recollections are blended with documentary evidence, and constructed retrospectively in light of subsequent experiences.

Autobiographical narratives have been rendered especially problematic by the shift of critical interest from author to text and the post-structuralist assault on authorial privilege.⁹ Yet the author is not perhaps as 'dead' as is sometimes supposed. The

⁷See, for instance, the work of Shari Benstock, Shirley Neuman, and Françoise Lyonette.

⁸Lorde, 1982.

⁹See Roland Barthes' "The death of the author," in Image-Music-Text, 1977.

complex relationship between art and artist is negotiated by Foucault in his essay, "What is an Author?"¹⁰ where he argues:

it is not enough to declare that we should do without the writer (the author) and study the work in itself. The word "work" and the unity that it designates are probably as problematic as the status of the author's individuality. (Harari, 144)

If, as most critics influenced by post-structuralist ideas would accept, conditions of production and reception are relevant to the process of literary interpretation, it makes sense to take account too of authorial intent and circumstance, given that these are no less social formations than other criteria used by critics. Within a contextualized critique, fiction can help to interpret a life, and a life help to interpret a fiction. The author, no less than the text or the reader, is constructed within discourse. Autobiographical writings are interesting precisely because they are retrospectively constructed interpretations of a series of historical moments which place an individual at the centre of the narrative. Written and read from the perspective of hindsight, they shed at least as much light on the moment of their production as on the past.

However, the problematic nature of autobiographical writings at a theoretical level are compounded by the difficulties presented by the use of such texts in practice. Critics have little to gain by making simple connections between the events of an author's life and events in a novel, diary, or autobiography. Apart from the fact that personal accounts can be hard to verify, it would be simplistic and naive to make straightforward correlations between art and artist. Such a strategy could very easily overlook an author's creative agency or omit consideration of other contextual factors, thereby reinforcing notions of both history and self as universal categories. Autobiography which, like Gray's, draws attention to its own devices destabilizes universal conceptions of history and self, and offers an

¹⁰In Harari, ed. pp.141-160.

exceptionally potent site in which to interrogate the twin paradigms of human consciousness and historical continuity. Alasdair Gray's autobiographical writings interrogate the ideologies of self and state.

Although autobiographies can be egotistical, nostalgic and conservative, some writers and critics have demonstrated that the genre can also resist received ideas, offer alternative narratives, and be radically politically charged.¹¹ Although the concept of postmodern autobiography might seem at first like a contradiction in terms, Gray portrays himself in a range of decidedly unheroic and inconsistent personae which undermine the notion of the unified subject, while the national narrative he constructs is one which inscribes a stateless nation, Scotland.

Personal experience in Gray's work is closely linked to collective (particularly national) experience. The relationship between historical and literary discourses has, perhaps, an exaggerated relevance in Scottish contexts because of Sir Walter Scott's immeasurable influence on Scottish popular historiography. Indeed, the role of the novel in the construction of national identity across modern Europe has been highlighted by Bhabha and Said, and will be discussed more fully in later chapters. Scott's immense impact on literature and historiography has been felt within and outwith Scotland, and has some relevance to the present discussion. Cairns Craig emphasises the magnitude of Scott's influence when he argues:

as George Lukács demonstrated in *The Historical Novel*, the construction of historical narrative in Europe in the nineteenth century took its methods from Scottish writing-in novelistic terms from Scott.¹²

Historian Marinell Ash affirms that, "The Romantic revolution in historical writing was born of Walter Scott and Scotland" (13).

¹¹Audre Lorde has already been mentioned. Feminist critics of recent decades have drawn attention to women who, in this and earlier centuries, used diaries, letters, and novels to inscribe their identities in the face of the severe constraints of patriarchal society. See Benstock 1987 and 1988 for examples.

¹²"The Body in the Kit Bag," in Craig, 1996; p.37.

Scott's first novel, Waverley, dramatises the turbulent political history of Scotland during the Jacobite uprisings through the experiences of a young male protagonist. As Patricia Harkins argues: "Waverley is generally regarded as the first 'historical fiction'. Generations of readers have accepted this commonplace of literary history" (157). Quoting Scott's opinion that, "Romance and real history have the same common origin,"¹³ Harkins argues:

the distinction between romance and real history is not in the tale but in the teller's awareness of his motives. And Waverley is a story of the growth of the historian/poet's mind, a narrative description of the process of storytelling. (164)

Harkins concludes that Scott's most significant innovation,

was changing the nature of the protagonist in British prose fiction. . . . Scott's innovation is best described as a mixture of generic conventions which we now associate not only with the historical novel but also with the *Bildungsroman*. (167)

Harkins' association of the development of the *Bildungsroman* with Scott's historical novels makes an important connection between personal history and national history; the proximity of 'romance and real history' in Scott's figuration is also relevant to Gray's self-consciously retrospective autobiographical and historiographical writings.

Where Scott uses narratives of nation and individual to support each other, in Gray's work, by contrast, they are used to destabilize each other. Linda Hutcheon devotes a chapter of A Poetics of Postmodernism to the consideration of the "Subject in/of/to History and his Story" and uses an epigraph from Foucault which emphasises the close interconnection between the construction of individual identity and the construction of linear historical narrative:

¹³Harkins quotes Scott's 1824 "Essay on Romance," written for Encyclopaedia Britannica (in Alexander and Hewitt eds., p.164).

Making historical analysis the discourse of the continuous and making human consciousness the original subject of all historical development are two sides of the same system of thought. (158)

Gray's autobiographical texts are marked by their discontinuities and their complication of categories of subjectivity.

In "The Autobiographical Manifesto: Identities, Temporalities, Politics," Sidonie Smith argues that in the "global environment. . . . the old imperial 'I' is revealed for what it has been: a locus of normative and exclusionary stabilizations of subjectivity" (Neuman, 186). Smith examines autobiographical practices which can be used to resist "totalizing definitional politics" (186), exploring strategies used by autobiographers with emancipatory aims. She coins the term 'autobiographical manifesto' to describe texts which are "self-consciously political autobiographical acts" (189), and outlines what she sees as some of their characteristic features. Although she writes about texts by women in postcolonial contexts, all the features Smith highlights as marks of 'autobiographical manifestos' are evident in Alasdair Gray's autobiographical texts to some extent. While the application of postcolonial theories within Scottish contexts (addressed more fully in Chapter Two) may raise some problematic issues, Smith nevertheless offers a suggestive approach to Gray's self-consciously political autobiographical texts.

First, according to Smith, the writer of the autobiographical manifesto destabilizes "the transcendental rational subject outside of time and space" (189/90), resisting the "fixed 'subject-position' of discursive and cultural practices, representing culturally legitimated and authorized performances of identity" (190). In the course of this chapter I will demonstrate Gray's use of such destabilizing strategies in the Saltire Self-Portrait and Lanark. Second, autobiographical manifestos "bring to light" (190) alternative perspectives on identity and experience, rooted in the "specificities and locales of time and space, the discursive surround, the material ground, the provenance of history" (191).

This has particular relevance for Lanark, where Gray contrasts the environments of two semi-autobiographical protagonists. He contrasts a naturalistically portrayed, historicized environment with that of an anti-realist 'Intercalendrical Zone', seriously disrupting conventional temporal and spatial epistemologies, and in the process, highlighting social and economic relations in the material world. Discussion of these aspects of Lanark is continued in Chapter Three.

Next, according to Smith, autobiographical manifestos are public announcements. Smith argues: "The autobiographical manifesto asserts . . . both the politicization of the private and the personalization of the public" (192). Critics (notably Gifford, 1988) have already addressed the relationship between public and private spheres in relation to Gray's work; this relationship has special relevance with regard to Gray's autobiographical texts.¹⁴ Smith also argues that autobiographical manifestos are public performances: "The manifesto engages directly the cultural construction of identities . . . 'troubling' culturally authorized fictions . . . intervening in previous oppressive performances of identity" (193). In the Saltire Self-Portrait Gray indeed 'troubles' the terms in which his identity is 'authorised', and in all the autobiographical texts discussed here, he challenges fixed cultural identities.

Another key feature of the autobiographical manifesto is that "group identification. . . is the rhetorical ground of appeal. . . . In the manifesto, communitarian ethnography functions as a kind of 'nationalism'" (193). Gray's Scottish nationalism is central to his work, but in his autobiographical writings Gray appeals to a range of group identities--Glaswegian, working-class, European, even familial identity--in addition to Scottish identity. Gray's appeal to such a plurality of identities helps him to avoid homogeneous or exclusionary social visions. Finally, according to Smith, the autobiographical manifesto looks forward: "the

¹⁴See also Chapter Four for further discussion of the public/private dichotomy.

manifesto attempts to actively position the subject in a potentially liberated future" (194). The utopian impulses of Gray's fiction, considered more fully in Chapters Three and Four, are evident in his autobiographical narratives, especially Lanark. Gray's explicit engagement with contemporary political issues and debates acts as an appeal for material changes in society.

Gray's Saltire Self-Portrait is a short autobiographical essay of less than twenty pages, but its conciseness should not mask the extent to which it destabilizes the epistemologies of public history as surely as it undermines the concept of the unified human subject. It is helpful to consider the pamphlet as an 'autobiographical manifesto' as it accords with Smith's description in significant respects. Its publication in 1988, after Gray had enjoyed considerable acclaim within Scotland and beyond, suggests that the Saltire Self-Portrait is, like a portrait, a mark of recognition for past achievement and a public record. In the Saltire Self-Portrait, however, Gray subverts any attempt to eulogise his work and any attempt to inscribe him into any authoritative narrative of history. He also uses the Saltire Self-Portrait to offer a retrospective interpretation of Lanark.

Gray begins his autobiographical essay by locating his existence in quantifiable public discourses; having noted the precise date and time at which he is composing the essay, he uses his birth certificate, passport, and matters of medical record to describe himself physically. Yet such public data, collected through the 'objective' (yet arbitrary) measurements of calendars, clocks, and bathroom scales, can provide only an incomplete account of the famous writer Alasdair Gray. Gray presents himself as an exceptionally ordinary, if none too healthy, Glaswegian male, and suggests that such public discourses are inadequate vehicles for information about Alasdair Gray's other qualities and characteristics, those which make him the subject of a 'Saltire Self-Portrait' in the first place. The language he uses also calls into question the objectivity of public discourse. By introducing the measurements of his

birthday, height and weight with the prefix "According to . . ." (1), Gray reminds his readers that the pieces of paper attesting to his birth and height record selective information about him and may not be indisputable records.

Nevertheless, birth certificate and passport may well provide the most reliable documentary evidence of Alasdair Gray's existence, given that the passage of time will affect human memories and alter Gray's physical state.¹⁵ Paradoxically, although autobiographical writings supposedly portray the 'private lives' of their subjects, it is the reproduction of 'public' information in Gray's essay that yields the most telling information about him. The image he presents of his 'private self'--of a man at home in his underwear and dressing-gown--has no distinguishing features and, indeed, undermines any suggestion that he is an extraordinary man. Douglas Gifford, discussing Gray's uses of autobiographical material in his fiction, does not raise questions about the epistemological status of autobiographical narratives, but does argue that in Gray's fiction:

his main problem [is] the reconciliation of the autobiographical and personally therapeutic with the socially and politically satirical, or of his private world with his public. (103)

This central tension of Gray's work may, in fact, be irreconcilable. Althusser, following Gramsci, notes, "The distinction between the public and the private is a distinction internal to bourgeois law, and valid in the (subordinate) domains in which bourgeois law exercises its authority."¹⁶ The dualistic division of the private and

¹⁵The limitations of human memory are addressed in *Lanark* when Duncan Thaw finds a letter his late mother wrote to a magazine before her death recounting a funny family incident. Duncan remembers the occasion in question but in his recollection, contrary to his mother's, it was his sister, not him, who was the focus of attention. Duncan concludes that "Mrs Thaw had always preferred him to Ruth and had unconsciously transferred the incident" (203). However, readers have only the authority of Duncan's memory (as a six or seven year old) to verify 'facts' which *he* accepts unquestioningly.

¹⁶"Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," p.18.

public spheres has also been addressed in some recent gender theories. Victor Seidler, for example, suggests, "modernity has been shaped by a prevailing distinction between private and public life" (1994; xii); it is widely acknowledged amongst feminist thinkers that this distinction has had very detrimental consequences for women and for Western society as a whole.

Sidonie Smith's approach to the private/public dichotomy seems particularly relevant to Gray's autobiographical essay; she argues that making the private political and the personal public troubles "the binary complacencies of the *ancien régime* of selfhood" (192). Gray addresses the public/private dichotomy throughout his work; in the Saltire Self-Portrait he successfully blurs the lines between the public and the private but cannot fully resolve the resultant crisis of 'selfhood'. In other words, he still finds it hard to answer the question, 'Who is Alasdair Gray?'

In the Saltire Self-Portrait Gray avoids having to reconcile the apparent conflict between his private and public identities by displacing this question of who he *is*; instead he poses an alternative question, "So, what are you *for*, Gray?" (3) [my emphasis]. Gray's attempt to construct his identity through his purpose or function may seem excessively utilitarian, but it has the important advantage of providing him with social and historical contexts. For Linda Hutcheon such contextualization has far-reaching consequences:

To reinsert the subject into the framework of its *parole* and its signifying activities (both conscious and unconscious) within an historical and social context is to begin a [sic] force a redefinition not only of the subject but of history as well. (159)

Historical reconstruction is central to Gray's so-called Self-Portrait. Gray devotes a substantial part (roughly half) of his 'autobiographical' essay to a section entitled, "NOTES ON EARLY LIFE IN GLASGOW, BY ALEXANDER GRAY," which he claims was written by his father a few years before his death in 1973. Alasdair Gray gives account of his own minor editorial changes, but insists, "Nothing else is changed" (5). To offer family history

as a guide to personal identity is a common autobiographical device which goes some way towards giving the subject a social context. However, it is less usual to plant an alternative narrative perspective--another authorial 'I'--within such narratives.

The status of the Alexander Gray narrative seems to be purposefully ambiguous, especially since Gray has already, very conveniently, claimed to have mislaid the original pages ("I laid them down. . . then the pages could not be found, though we rummaged for them in all the places I could think of" [2]).¹⁷ The text which appears under his father's authorship draws attention to its ambiguous status as an authentic historical memoir, but nevertheless reads as a form of social history. The narrative, regardless of whether it was written by Alasdair Gray or his father, offers a detailed description of daily working-class life in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. By creating a narrative of the past which focuses on people largely omitted from historical accounts, Gray reinscribes their history, re-evaluating his ancestor's lives in a positive way as he writes them into contemporary discourses. Gray's historiographical approach has parallels in this respect with the work of social historians in Glasgow who have attempted to chart the previously unrecorded experiences of the city's ordinary working women and men. In fact, Gray was Artist Recorder at the People's Palace, the social history museum on Glasgow Green, in 1977 while Elspeth King was curator.¹⁸

Gray's father's narrative of his family's lifestyle describes conditions which would now be considered unacceptable in an unsensational, matter-of-fact way. It paints a picture of extreme overcrowding in the family home (four children and two adults

¹⁷Note the similarities between the account Gray gives here of having lost a manuscript, and that he gives to Michael Donnelly in Poor Things for having 'lost' the manuscript of Archie's memoirs.

¹⁸ See Bruce Charlton (in Crawford & Nairn eds., pp.15-16 & 20). Elspeth King has written extensively about Glaswegian social history. She has been particularly influential in reclaiming the histories of women's lives and documenting radical social moments in the city. Gray's friendship with King and her partner Michael Donnelly is discussed further in Chapter Three in relation to Poor Things.

in a room-and-kitchen tenement), describes harsh working conditions, and highlights the poor level of household amenities in the family home by contrasting the 'luxuries' of running water and gas lighting with contemporary standards. However, the narrative stresses that the family was not too badly off, compared to others. By describing the domestic circumstances, diet, and leisure pursuits of adults and children, Gray's father's narrative portrays an historical image of Glasgow at odds with portrayals of the city as a commercial centre, the 'second city of the empire,' *and* at odds with images of unremitting urban squalor and poverty. These extreme Glasgows are made to seem far removed from the experience of the majority of people living there.

Gray's historical selection process also has contemporary political significance. The narrative of the past he presents acts as an interpretative context for his present social and political situation, a present which, in 1988 when the Saltire Self-Portrait was published, was Britain under a third term of Thatcherism. It is within the context of the political neo-liberalism which held sway in British government from 1979 to 1997 that readers are reminded of the relative deprivations and injustices of life in industrial Glasgow *before* the introduction of the Welfare State. For example, the narrative describes how Alasdair Gray's grandfather had to take an unskilled, physically strenuous job in his old age, having become too infirm to continue in the job he had held for forty years. The narrative explicitly attributes this injustice to the fact that, "These days in the first years of this century had no social security or health insurance" (9). Contemporary readers are encouraged not to underestimate or take for granted the benefits brought about by the introduction of the Welfare State; indeed, the Saltire Self-Portrait offered a staunch defence of the Welfare State's principles at a time in the nineteen-eighties when these principles were under political assault and when social services were widely perceived to be under severe erosion.

By shifting the focus of his Saltire Self-Portrait from 'the artist' Alasdair Gray, to the more commonplace lives of his relatives, Gray shifts the focus of historical attention away from "monstrous folk with one ability," most likely to become cultural "heroes and gods" (3), directing it instead to "the most necessary and typical people [who] are seldom commemorated in art and history" (3). Gray locates himself in familial and social contexts, tempering a widely held notion that 'art' is the product of individual genius. Neither are there sweeping generalisations about 'the Scottish psyche', or the 'march of history' in Gray's account of his cultural inheritance. Gray identifies his historical context not in the discourses of art history or literary tradition, but in the particular, yet commonplace, everyday experiences of his family and community.

It is significant, however, that Gray ends his essay by situating his own artistic endeavours alongside those of some contemporaries. He advertises a short brochure he has written about the work of four visual artists, including himself, available from the National Library of Scotland. There is perhaps an intertextual reference here to the ironic damning 'advertisements' Gray includes in 1982, Janine, and the spoof reviews of Unlikely Stories, Mostly; not for the first time, Gray reminds readers that he has to make a living through his art. In attempting to answer the question, "What are you for, Gray?" (3) he inscribes himself within discourses of nation, family, class, and literature, but side-steps the more troubled question of defining his own identity.

Lean Tales, the volume of short stories by Gray, James Kelman and Agnes Owens, shows a similar commitment to collective artistic enterprise. Lean Tales is an unusual anthology; on the dust jacket (designed by Gray) an attempt is made to explain the unifying principle of the volume: "The three writers of this book live in a British region containing the highest number of unemployed Scots in the world, the biggest store of nuclear weapons in Europe, and very large lovely tracts of depopulated wilderness." Raising contentious issues on the cover

places the individual writers in political *and* geographical contexts, and alerts readers to the political content of the stories themselves. The cover continues: "They all write as if poverty is normal, but poverty is no more the theme of their writing than a fixed income is the theme of Jane Austen". Gray offers pragmatic explanations for the publication of Lean Tales in his "Post-script," where he outlines the circumstances of the three writers and their various degrees of literary success; he highlights the fact that they met in a writer's group in Glasgow, emphasising that, "Nobody writes naturally. It is an art that is learned" (284).¹⁹ In doing so, Gray locates his own creativity and his identity within dynamic social contexts and dispels further the mystique that can surround cultural production.

Alasdair Gray uses his 'self-portrait' to deflect attention away from himself and onto the people and circumstances which have shaped his personality and creativity. He shows a high degree of self-consciousness about the fictionality of any kind of 'portraiture' and draws attention to the devices and techniques he uses. It is fitting that the cover of the Saltire Self-Portrait carries an actual sketch of Gray drawn by himself; Lean Tales contains a similar self-portrait (182). These graphic self-portraits are a fitting place to conclude this part of my discussion, as the sketches have parallels in Gray's textual self-portraits. In both drawings, Gray looks critically, or sceptically, out from the page--in each picture, one eye is slightly closed, and the glasses are unduly emphasised. The drawing in Lean Tales is particularly interesting because the arm drawing the picture is visible. Cordelia Oliver argues:

The face looks down and out at the reader while the pen continues to make the image. The hand that holds the pen may more easily be imagined at the end of the reader's arm than at the end of Gray's. (43)

¹⁹See also my interview with Gray in the Appendix, pp.307-309, and Gray's essay, "Writers' Groups," 1992.

Such a 'reading' of the drawing is very plausible; it would suggest that Gray implicates his audience in the construction of his autobiographical personae. However, it is equally possible to view either drawing in another way: Gray positions himself as the omnipotent artist who directs his gaze on the reader, thus reversing the more conventional subject/object relationship between reader and text, whereby reading subjects are able to objectify the text. It is a measure of Gray's ambiguity and playfulness (not to mention sketching ability) that both readings can co-exist. In wrestling some personal agency from the potentially objectifying gaze of his audience, Gray does not enforce a subject position on his readers; rather, readers can engage with his text and make up their own minds. This is a particularly important point for the discussion of Lanark which follows.

Personal and Historical Agency in Lanark

Many of the literary techniques and social concerns evident in the Saltire Self-Portrait are reminiscent of those found in Alasdair Gray's first novel, Lanark. Like the self-portrait, the novel displays characteristics of Smith's 'autobiographical manifestos', most notably in its dramatic shifts of perspective (from the surreal world of Books Three and Four to the more naturalistic Books One and Two), and in its historiographical reconstruction of Glaswegian working-class life. In Lanark the protagonists struggle to exercise personal agency within the confines of their historical contexts. Although Lanark presents itself as fiction, it has strong autobiographical elements; simple connections can be made between Lanark's central protagonists, Thaw, Lanark, and Nastler and their author, Alasdair Gray.²⁰ The similarity of Thaw's circumstances to Gray's own early experience of growing up in Riddrie and attending Glasgow

²⁰See Bruce Charlton's essay in Crawford & Nairn eds., 1991; pp. 10-21, for a useful biographical account of Gray's life.

School of Art undoubtedly strengthens comparisons, as does the portrayal of Nastler as an ageing writer and artist to whose description Gray bears a close physical resemblance. When Lanark is asked his name shortly after he arrives in Unthank, he struggles for recollection, but says:

My tongue felt for a word or syllable. . . I thought I remembered a short word beginning with *Th* or *Gr* but it escaped me. . . I told him my name was Lanark"(20).²¹

Although Lanark is not, strictly speaking, an autobiography, it is a text with strong autobiographical elements. The playful, self-conscious way in which Alasdair Gray, as autobiographical subject, is diffused between these three fictional characters makes the novel's autobiographical status complex and ambiguous.

There are, however, some other good reasons for discussing Lanark within the context of Gray's autobiographical writing. As Charlton notes, the earliest incarnations of Lanark, entitled *Obby Pobbly*,²² written while Gray was still at school, are autobiographical. The intertextual relationship between Lanark, the Saltire Self-Portrait, and "A Report to the Trustees" gives added critical incentive to discuss these texts together. Most importantly, perhaps, the autobiographical elements of Lanark can help to draw attention to the fictionality of the more overtly autobiographical pieces; the texts become each other's site of formation and can be used as critical levers to prise each other open.

Lanark has attracted substantially more critical attention than Alasdair Gray's subsequent novels (even where later works have been favourably received) and, perhaps inevitably, some attention in reviews and interviews has been devoted to the connections between Gray and his protagonists.²³ When Gray

²¹See, for example, Gifford, 1987; p.115.

²²Now in the National Library of Scotland (Acc. 9417, Box 3). (Crawford and Nairn eds., 1991; pp.12-13 and 186-187).

²³Gray is sufficiently conscious of Lanark's autobiographical elements to distance himself quite explicitly from the protagonist of his second novel,

addresses the “connections and divergences between art and life” (15) in the Saltire Self-Portrait, he is, to some extent, responding to interest in his personal circumstances expressed by critics and interviewers.²⁴ The Saltire Self-Portrait offers an interpretation of Lanark as much as it presents a picture of the author.

The destabilizing techniques Gray uses in the pamphlet, outlined earlier, bear distinct resemblance to the techniques he uses in Lanark. For example, in the Prologue to Book One, the Oracle explains to Lanark:

if we were content to describe each other numerically, giving height, weight, date of birth, size of family, home address, business address, and (most informative of all) annual income, we would see that below the jangling opinions was no disagreement on the main realities. (108)

Despite the Oracle's claim that social consensus exists around these 'objective' statistics, the young doctor who examines Lanark in the Institute has, earlier in the novel, told him: "Diseases identify people more accurately than variable factors like height, weight, and hair colour" (21). The seemingly quantifiable discourses in which Lanark finds his identity constructed only serve to emphasise how ordinary he is :

I was 5 feet 7 3/4 inches high and weighed 9 stone 12 pounds 3 1/2 ounces. My eyes were brown, hair black, blood group B (111). (21)

In the opening paragraph of the Saltire Self-Portrait Gray describes himself in similar statistical terms, establishing at the outset of his essay its strong relationship with Lanark. Even though Lanark's physical details do not match Gray's exactly, the differences highlight Gray's creative agency in placing some distance between himself and his semi-autobiographical protagonists. It is more significant that Gray reproduces similar *structures* of identification, or grounds of comparison, in both

1982, Janine, both in the novel itself (p.345) and prior to its publication in his interview with Anderson and Norquay (p.9).

²⁴See for example, Gray's August 1982 interview with Swan and Delaney (NLS, Acc. 9247/52) published as an Addendum to the Saltire Self-Portrait.

texts. In this respect, the Saltire Self-Portrait reproduces the "crisis of representation" which Alison Lee argues is embodied in Lanark.²⁵

It is noteworthy that the disease from which Lanark suffers is 'Dragonhide', a hard outer crust which grows on the sufferer's skin, which is a physical and metaphoric manifestation of the psychological and emotional armour sufferers build around themselves; it parallels Duncan Thaw's severe psychosomatic asthma and eczema--a doctor tells Thaw, "I suppose you know that your kind of asthma is partly a psychological illness" (186). In the more overtly autobiographical "Report to the Trustees," Gray places a similar psychological interpretation on his own physical condition: "I was afraid of losing the habits by which I knew myself and so withdrew into asthma" (212). The identification marks of disease act as one of the strongest points of connection between Lanark, Thaw, and Gray's authorial personae.

Another important link Gray establishes between his own persona and that of Lanark's protagonists becomes evident in the part of the Saltire Self-Portrait narrated by Gray's father. Gray has previously presented much of the material contained in his 'father's manuscript' in Chapter 26 of Lanark, where it becomes part of the fictional story of Duncan Thaw.²⁶ In the Saltire Self-Portrait, Gray quotes both his father's account and the relevant passage from Chapter 26 of Lanark; he says of the latter:

I swear that the above quotation contains no invention of mine, just two bits of condensing and one exaggeration.
(14)

By reproducing his father's and Thaw's narratives in tandem, Gray complicates his own authorial status; additionally, he disclaims *and* reinforces autobiographical readings of the novel.

²⁵Lee, 1990; p.100.

²⁶See Lanark, pp.296-297.

However, other comments he makes about Lanark in the Saltire Self-Portrait stress the novel's autobiographical basis:

Apart from the encounter with the Highland minister, the encounter with the prostitute, the fit of insanity and the suicide, nearly every thought and incident is copied from something real in context where it happened. (14)

Although in the Saltire Self-Portrait Gray describes Lanark as his "most densely and deliberately autobiographical writing" (14), in another text he resists the description of Lanark as an autobiographical novel. In "Mr. Meikle--An Epilogue"²⁷ Gray says that his novel, "described the adventures of someone a bit like me in a world like that, and though not an autobiography (my hero goes mad and commits suicide at the age of twenty-two) it contained portraits of people I had known" (161/62).²⁸ Gray complicates the *concept* of autobiography, even though he uses the term relatively unproblematically. Gray seems to place the debate about the complex relationship between art and life generated by Lanark on his own terms by raising it again in the Saltire Self-Portrait, using his father's 'autobiography' as the context in which to discuss Lanark's autobiographical dimensions.

While Gray may attempt to create a historical landscape in which his father's experience will acquire significance, that historical landscape itself is hardly attractive. Lanark's landscapes are characterised by decay and degeneration, and its characters are diseased and depressed. Thaw and Lanark are portrayed against a backdrop of industrial decline, and their personal narratives are intimately connected to the narrative of a disintegrating culture--or a "civilization dying" (484), as Nastler puts it. The dark portrayals of Glasgow and Unthank in Lanark contrast sharply with the creative and utopian urges of the novel.

²⁷In Ten Tales Tall and True, pp.154-167.

²⁸Interestingly, "Mr. Meikle--An Epilogue" is another biographical narrative but one which places little distance between the authorial and the narrative voice. Mr Meikle taught Gray English at Whitehill Secondary School and also appears in Lanark as Duncan Thaw's English teacher (p.153).

Through Duncan Thaw, Gray reproduces a cultural mythology of defeat; it is a mythology which has been, and remains, powerful in artistic and historic depictions of Glasgow. Thaw tells McAlpin that the magnificence of Glasgow is missed because "nobody imagines living here" (243), unconsciously reinforcing the myths of Red Clydeside and the Hard Man as he suggests reasons why "Glasgow never got into the history books" (244).²⁹ Thaw is stifled not only by the feeling that his history is absent, but also by these defeatist myths of failure and destruction; eventually he becomes unable to paint, maintaining, "It's ludicrous to think anyone in Glasgow will ever paint a good picture" (293).

Yet in spite of Thaw's negative mythologies of Glasgow (mythologies from which Gray moves away in later books based in the city) he and Lanark put up a fight against such bleak prognoses for their city. The key dynamic of Gray's autobiographical writing lies in the protagonists' struggle for personal agency within the frameworks of history. Thaw, Lanark, and Nastler all doubt their capacity to change their societies by the exercise of their creative imaginations, and all fail to control satisfactorily the situations in which they find themselves; each is subject to powerful external influences. The central figures of Lanark are political subjects.

Lanark's fragmented autobiographical subjects challenge the (literary and social) paradigm of the unified subject, rendering his perspectives provisional and non-universal. However, Gray pursues a cultural and political agenda which prevents his subjects from fragmenting infinitely. As Sidonie Smith argues:

Any autobiographical practice that promotes endless fragmentation and a reified multiplicity might be

²⁹Thaw asserts that John MacLean "organised the housewives' rent strike"(244)--something many historians would dispute (for example, see Smout, 1986; pp. 268/9)--before he died in prison; Thaw also raises the spectre of sectarian gang fights in Glasgow: "it was easier to fight your neighbours than fight a bad government" (244).

counterproductive since the autobiographical subject would have to split itself beyond usefulness to be truly non-exclusionary. It is hard to coalesce a call to political action around a constantly deferred point of departure. (188)

Smith's emphasis of 'usefulness' in the quotation above recalls Gray's concern with the purpose served by art and artist ("what are you for, Gray" [SSP, 3]) alluded to earlier. The creative and political impulses that drive Thaw, Lanark and Nastler in Lanark are, ultimately, measured in terms of their social effects and the historical traces they leave.

Cairns Craig has argued that in Thaw, Gray "turn[s] on its head the myth of the artist which lurks behind many of the great works of twentieth century modernism" (Crawford and Nairn, 101), yet his observation can be extended to the other autobiographical personae in Lanark. The hero, as artist, as politician, and as omniscient author, is scrutinised in the novel and is debunked, partly by the wry, deprecating humour Gray directs against his characters for taking themselves too seriously. A perceptive school friend of Duncan Thaw's tells him in no uncertain terms that his social difficulties are caused by "wanting to be superior to ordinary life" (166). In a similar vein, Nastler assumes the role of king and creator but clearly manifests inadequacies and fallibilities. Lanark's political career takes on farce-like qualities at the World Summit but, in contrast to Thaw and Nastler, at the novel's end Lanark finds some peace with himself and is content to be "an ordinary old man," who is "glad to see the light in the sky" (560). Gray's challenge to the romantic hero in many of his guises is by no means confined to Lanark and is a theme which re-emerges throughout this thesis in relation to a number of other texts.

Gray dismantles the myth of the hero most thoroughly through Thaw, whose downfall is personal and political. Thaw is an early beneficiary of the post-war expansion of higher education when, as a talented working-class youth, he receives a "grant from the Corporation" (212) to attend art school. Gray plays with the popular Scottish myth of meritocratic access to

higher education--the 'lad o' pairts' in an urban incarnation--and with Thaw's family's hopes of social advancement. Thaw dreams ecstatically of "doing what I want" (218) but, before he completes his studies, his ambitions and happiness are thwarted by unforeseen factors. The mural Thaw paints at Cowlares Parish Church (and which is never fully completed) offends the sensibilities of the Glasgow Presbytery who decide to close the entire church.³⁰ Having been expelled from art school, Thaw is left financially destitute and artistically unfulfilled.

Part of the problem the church authorities have with his mural are sensationalist reports in the press which misrepresent Thaw and his work. He admits to a journalist that he does not attend church and is soon confronted with the headline, "ATHEIST PAINTS FACE OF GOD" (326). The newspaper report also compounds his problems with his 'almost-girlfriend' Marjory: the journalist twists Thaw's 'glum' comment that, "Most girls will pose naked for an artist if he only wants to draw them," (326) to something infinitely more quotable:

'I have no trouble finding nude models,' he remarks, with something suspiciously like a wink. (327)

Marjory has refused to model for Thaw precisely because she distrusts his motives, and Thaw is aware that her doubts will be exacerbated by the misleading insinuations of the *Evening News*. Sure enough, shortly afterwards Marjory visits Thaw at the church with a new boyfriend. The public image of Duncan Thaw created for posterity and widely disseminated by the media, not only damages his career prospects and personal relationships, but destroys his capacity to present a convincing alternative.

Thaw's inability to forge successful relationships with women is conditioned by factors which are social as much as personal, and this is a source of ongoing consternation to him. If anything, Thaw's artistic abilities distance him from his fellow human beings and blight his relationships. Thaw is the antithesis

³⁰Cordelia Oliver notes that Alasdair Gray's mural at Greenhead Parish Church [begun in 1958] was completed in 1962. The church, however, was demolished shortly afterwards (Crawford and Nairn, eds., 1991; p. 28).

of the Byronic artist or romantic hero and the final straw for him is a rebuttal from a prostitute--a 'public' woman--who refuses to sleep with him. Thaw does, however, become 'mad, bad and dangerous to know': he loses his sanity, becomes destructive, and kills himself, probably having murdered a woman (it is unclear if he actually murders her because we have only his confused testimony to confirm this). Thaw, despite his great creative vision, comes to view himself an unlovable and inadequate human being. He also feels manipulated and pressured by powerful social and institutional forces. The press, the Kirk Session, the Art School authorities, his father, and his peers all place expectations on Duncan he feels unable to fulfil and push him in contrary directions. The personal and political are inextricably bound together in Thaw's destruction.

Lanark, in contrast to Thaw, tries at first to find social and political solutions to his personal problems. Where the representation of Glasgow in Books One and Two of Lanark is naturalistic, Thaw's narrative is enclosed by Lanark's narrative set in Unthank (Books Three and Four) in which the unity of time and place are severely disrupted. By upsetting and manipulating such fundamental cultural reference points as these, Gray adopts a literary strategy that has been used by other contemporary writers.

In Postmodernist Fiction Brian McHale notes the phenomenon of literary 'counter worlds'--worlds which coexist with, or run counter to more naturalistic fictional worlds--and their increased appearance in contemporary fiction. McHale attempts to theorize the phenomenon using Foucault's concept of *heterotopia*. McHale argues that several postmodern writers (of whom Gray is one example³¹) rename the heterotopian space as 'the zone' (44). McHale quotes Foucault to describe this space or 'zone' as a place where:

³¹Others are Cortazar, Burroughs, Apollinaire, and paradigmatically for McHale, Pynchon (McHale, 1987; p. 44).

things are "laid", "placed", "arranged" in sites so very different from one another that it is impossible to find a place of residence for them, to define a *common locus* beneath them all. . . . *Heterotopias* are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that. . . (44)

McHale argues that the 'zone' "is located nowhere but in the written text itself," and is used by writers to explore historical realities through the "collapse of ontological boundaries" (45); in the zone, space is "constructed and deconstructed at the same time" (45). This concept of the zone is helpful in relation to my present discussion of Lanark and the further discussion of the novel in Chapter Three. When Lanark arrives in Unthank he chooses his name from a train destination notice in an act of self-definition. "Lanark" is an arbitrary choice, but one which links the protagonist's identity to a particular location. By naming himself, Lanark chooses the ground in which he roots his identity, only to find that the ground takes on the (metaphoric) consistency of sinking sand. He finds himself in a world which cannot be mapped in a conventional way, even though parts of it (place names like Provan, Unthank, and Lanark, and individuals like Rima and Sludden) bear some resemblance to Thaw's Glasgow. McHale argues that a juxtaposition such as that between the fictional worlds of Unthank and Glasgow is characteristic of heterotopian zones (45/46).

While it is possible to view the whole world of Books Three and Four as a zone, Gray intensifies Lanark and Rima's temporal and spatial dislocation when they enter an "INTERCALENDRIC ZONE" (376) after escaping from the institute. As its name suggests, the Intercalendrical Zone is cut-off from time and history. Books Three and Four render literal Thaw's earlier metaphoric dislocation from the march of history. McHale's suggestion that in the heterotopian zone, "metaphors become

literal" (45) is particularly relevant to Lanark.³² In Book One Thaw tells his sister that, "Men are pies that bake and eat themselves, and the recipe is hate" (188). Metaphors of consumption abound in Gray's writing and are very often related to his critique of consumer capitalism. When Thaw makes the statement above, he demonstrates that even as a child he has a naive awareness of the forces that operate in his society and of their destructive consequences.

The illustration that announces Book Two depicts a horrific dissection presided over by a triumphant skeletal figure under the Glasgow Coat of Arms. The caption under the drawing reads: "Homo a se coctum esumque crustum est hoc fecit separatio" (221) [man is the pie that bakes and eats itself and the recipe is separation]. In the institute of Books Three and Four, Gray's metaphor of human consumption takes on a stark literalism: human remains are used to heat and maintain the institute and provide food for its inhabitants. Gray suggests that human beings are feeding on each other in the terrestrial world also. Lanark and Rima's departure from the institute is prompted by Lanark's revulsion towards the cannibalism expected of him and his successful attempt to rescue Rima.³³ He is determined to escape in order to find real food and sunlight; his moral search becomes a literal journey into a Zone where all his expectations are confounded, where he is unable to find his bearings, and where he has the greatest difficulty exercising any agency whatsoever.

However, once inside the Intercalendrical Zone, Lanark and Rima find that they can make some progress if they depend on each other. At Rima's suggestion, they support one another on a

³²George Donaldson pointed out the literal metaphors of Lanark in 1993 in a seminar paper presented at the University of Guelph. A version of that paper, co-written with Alison Lee, "Is Eating People Really Wrong? Dining with Alasdair Gray," has since been published in The Review of Contemporary Fiction, Volume 15, No.2, 1995.

³³Manfred Malzhan draws attention to the metaphors of cannibalism in Lanark (1984; p.85); Donaldson and Lee (1995) offer more developed reflections on this aspect of the novel. Also see my discussion of cannibalism in my third chapter.

road which slopes uphill and downhill on either side of a yellow line. Rima says, "when one of us went downhill we'd be steadied by the one going up" (378). United by the common purpose of escaping the institute, Rima and Lanark form a mutually supportive relationship; in this sense Lanark has more success with women than Thaw, at least in the short term. Lanark and Rima discover that the Intercalendrical Zone also contains their 'previous selves'. Gray emphasises that their unified identities can only exist within time, but that in their memories, their human consciousnesses, many selves can be accommodated. At one point Rima tells Lanark to "Stop living in the past" (378) when Lanark comforts a different Rima on the roadside, making literal that common cliché of nostalgic romance. Yet in spite of their apparent progress, Lanark and Rima find themselves wandering in circles, returning to a blocked "EMERGENCY EXIT" (378 and 381), the same numbered exit through which they tried to escape from the Institute in the first place (376). They are prisoners of the Institute and, in a literal sense, prisoners of the text: the literary signposts they encounter point to "Unthank (Ch 37)" (385 and 391). Their agency is limited by authorial forces which frustrate their every move and over which they seem to have no control.

Nevertheless, Lanark still strives to save Unthank. When he and Rima eventually do find their way back to Unthank (where Rima gives birth to their son, Alexander, and leaves Lanark for Sludden), Lanark fails spectacularly in his heroic attempt to become a successful politician and save Unthank from impending catastrophe. He is only a pawn in the political schemes of others and proves easily manipulated. His individual agency is overwhelmed by the magnitude of the established interests around him. His political gestures in the conference hall are as futile as the temper tantrum he throws in Nastler's room.

Lanark actually meets Nastler, his creator, face to face in Book Four. That Lanark is a subject of and is subject to literary discourse has already become apparent; for instance, before meeting Nastler, he enters a door, a "white panel without hinges

or handle" (478), marked "EPILOGUE" (479). The single word is printed in large typescript on an otherwise blank page--the page both represents and *is* the door through which Lanark, the literary character passes. Indeed, Nastler tells Lanark that his "world is made of print" (485) and makes clear the extent of his creative power over Lanark. At first Lanark seems impotent in the face of Nastler's determining influence. Even when Lanark takes issue with Nastler over what has befallen him and the city of Unthank and overturns bookcases, easels, and shelf contents, Nastler immediately restores order: "the paintings and easels were back in their old places. . ." (484). When Nastler explains that he is Lanark's author, Lanark makes the complaint that he has been, "thwarted by organizations and things pushing in a different direction. . . . you have *planned* it" (484). Nastler, far from being a benevolent creator, is presented in a decidedly unflattering light (he strikes Lanark as "too vain and garrulous to be impressive"[484] and cowers under his bed clothes when he thinks Lanark might hit him [499]). Nastler claims to be "prostituting my most sacred memories," (485) and admits that in the process of writing the novel, he "worked poor Thaw to death, quite cold-bloodedly, because though based on me . . . I hated him" (493). He tells Lanark that his story will also end "Catastrophically" (484).

However, Nastler, though vindictive towards his characters, also has limits to his creative power; he too is bound by external influences, and as Lanark looks on him he sees the "foolishly nodding face" of a "horrible ventriloquist's doll" (484).³⁴ Nastler's influence is limited by the confines imposed by the text and by its readers. Readers are implicated in the failures of Thaw, Lanark, and Nastler because Gray makes explicit the active participation of readers in the construction of literary--and, by implied extension, social--texts. Nastler says:

³⁴Note the parallel with the short story, "Five Letters from an Eastern Empire," (Unlikely Stories, Mostly) which also has a 'puppet emperor' and also interrogates literary and political power structures. The story is discussed in Chapter Two.

It doesn't matter how much you detest this book I am writing, you can't escape it before I let you go. But if the readers detest it they can shut it and forget it; you'll simply vanish and I'll turn into an ordinary man. We mustn't let that happen. (495)

The self-referential strategy Gray uses here, and for which Nastler fears he will be accused of "self-indulgence" (481), far from being an irritating literary game, assumes considerable significance by attaching social importance to the act of reading. While Gray acknowledges the freedom of readers to cast the book aside, he anticipates the verisimilitude generated by his portrayal of the protagonists ("readers identify with you" [495], Nastler tells Lanark) and implicates readers in the creative process of the novel. Gray's readers are encouraged to be 'active' readers who render the text intelligible by taking account of their own participation in the construction of meaning as they read the novel.

Brian McHale stresses that 'the zones' evident in Lanark and some other works of contemporary fiction, "all belong to the projected space of the fictional universe, the space concretized by readers in the process of reading the text" (56).³⁵ McHale's remarks make the point well that readers interact with texts; his remarks concur with Nastler's concern about readers' participation. The narrative structure of Lanark, whereby the naturalism and social realism of Thaw's story is contained within the 'heterotopia' of Lanark's story, draws attention not only to the textual devices employed by Gray, but also to the ideological frameworks which support these respective narrative approaches. The dual narrative structure of Lanark also reminds readers that *both* the naturalistic and anti-realist visions of

³⁵Towards the end of his chapter "In the Zone," McHale suggests that heterotopian zones are in fact homotopian zones because they are 'concretized' by the reader. I prefer Foucault's term, as McHale's modification might imply that readers' subject positions can be unproblematically defined. It is questionable whether readers can be considered as 'unified subjects' *able* to 'concretize' texts, and even more questionable whether they will do this in consistent or even similar ways.

Glasgow Gray represents are aesthetic constructions which do not present the material city in a neutral or unmediated way. Gray encourages readers to connect his Glasgow and Unthank with the city as it exists in the material world, but suggests that diverse perspectives of the city can create a plurality of artistic representations.

Although the agency of readers is acknowledged in Lanark, it is not the preserve of them alone. Neither Nastler, Ozenfant, Sludden or any of the other powerful and manipulative figures exercises absolute control; rather, agency has no single source, but is shared amongst characters and institutions in a continually changing dynamic. This point cannot be overstated. Discussions of cultural, political and individual agency in relation to literary texts too often tend to take on a rather crude binary dynamic whereby agency is something characters either have or are denied. Lanark, for example, has been criticised for reinscribing through its narrative strategies the oppressive and containing systems its themes resist.³⁶ This is an issue I raised in the introduction and should be reiterated here within the context of discussion of the novel itself. It is crucial to Lanark and to Gray's work as a whole to understand that he portrays the operation of power as provisional, mediated, and partial. Gray certainly does not underestimate the weight oppressive structures and ideologies can bring to bear on people, and he shows in particular the ability of consumer capitalism (more explicitly imperialism in other texts, although the two are not always considered independently in Gray's work) to appropriate and contain resistance. Lanark and Rima's futile struggles to escape illustrate the difficulty of getting 'outside the system', but should not, however, lead critics to conclude that Gray believes resistance to be impossible; rather, by reproducing the power dynamics of what he sees as the oppressive system of 'the institute', Gray demarcates the extent and the limits of the system's power, there and in the material world of which it is a counterpart. The zone

³⁶See Alison Lumsden in Wallace and Stevenson eds. pp.115-126.

Gray presents in Books Three and Four challenges the sustaining epistemologies of Western thought--unity of time, place, and subjectivity--and hence throws open to question its attendant prevailing social and economic ideologies.

Gray shows that there exists some small possibility for change in Lanark but suggests that it requires a breakdown of epistemological certainty. Lanark discovers this as he flies to Provan. He relates to Nastler his experience of seeing a lake which he realises is an eye, and hearing, "a sound like remote thunder or the breathings of wind in the ear. '*Is...is...is...*' it said. '*Is...if...is....*'" (468).³⁷ Nastler is overcome with tears and laughter when Lanark tells him this:

He gulped and said, 'One *if* to five *ises*! That's an incredible amount of freedom. But can I believe you? I've created you honest, but can I trust your senses? At a great altitude *is* and *if* must sound very much alike.' (482)

Typographically, they look similar too. However, it is the provisional, questioning 'if' which allows Lanark to resist the determining influences of his place in history and announce, "I am not a victim," (515) at the novel's climax. Lanark and Rima find that they too can resist Nastler's determining influence. When Lanark asks Nastler about Sandy's future, the author fumbles and tells him, "You have no son. . . .there's no time for Rima to have a baby" (498). Within the zone, time has, of course, ceased to have 'normal' significance and so the baby's maturation is accelerated; Nastler's vindictive attempt to thwart Lanark is foiled. Unlike Nastler's 'festering creation' (481) and Thaw's unfinished masterpiece, Lanark's life bears fruit, despite his mostly disastrous career. He does not die until he has passed life on to a child who is himself independent of his parents. Lanark and Rima together prove capable of resisting Nastler's historical

³⁷Perspective is discussed in relation to Lanark in Chapter Three. It is worth noting that Gray's concern with perspective recurs in other texts. For example, Gray remarks, "Religion is a perspective device so I use it," in the interview which follows the Saltire Self-Portrait (19). In A History Maker, the hero, Wat Dryhope, is followed by a Public Eye which hovers above his head, recording and transmitting his actions.

determinations. Their child is a living human testimony to their existence and agency, perhaps their only quantifiable historical trace.

In Lanark, it is within the zone where conventional conceptions of time and space are rendered inconsistent and unreliable that creativity can flourish and there can be hope for the future. It is only when Lanark is content to be an "ordinary old man" (560) and lay his lofty personal ambitions aside that he is able, unlike Nastler and Thaw, to accept the human limits of his perspectives and come to terms with his mortality. Human limitation and mortality are themes which re-emerge in Gray's "Report to the Trustees". Like Lanark, this story, written in 1959, is preoccupied with death, the purposes of art, and the urge to leave the world a significant legacy. These are themes which will be discussed in the next section.

Unauthorised Reports

The "Report to the Trustees" published in Lean Tales is another of Gray's early autobiographical texts. There is little in the text to discourage identification of the first person narrator with its author, Alasdair Gray; the report ends with the date (April 1959) and Gray's Riddrie address. Bruce Charlton has pointed out that Alasdair Gray actually did submit the report to the aforesaid trustees in a longer version which was edited for inclusion in Lean Tales.³⁸ "A Report to the Trustees" is another of Gray's self-portraits, this time, one in which Gray transforms the normally functional and informative mode of documentary reportage into an entertaining piece of creative writing; he has made an artefact of the official document required to record his travels--he has made an artistic virtue of bureaucratic necessity.

This in itself is interesting as it illustrates Gray's refusal to be inhibited by the conventional restraints of genre whereby

³⁸Charlton also notes, wryly, that the scholarship was stopped shortly afterwards (Crawford & Nairn eds., 1991; p.13).

public records are usually solely functional and devoid of creativity. Gray's "Report" implies that there is no convincing reason why. Instead, Gray presents his report in a fictional form through which he is able to offer the Bellahouston Trustees a fuller appreciation of the scholarship's beneficial effects. The benefits, which Gray summarises as having taught him, "Not much about the world, but a lot about myself" (212), would almost certainly be rendered invisible within a more conventional report. Notably, Gray has ignored the conventional boundaries of art *form* as well as genre; although he has produced something of artistic merit in literary form, he has no graphic art to show for his scholarship.

Gray's "Report to the Trustees" debunks the notion of the heroic artist just as decisively as Lanark. If Lanark's narratives, as Nastler explains, show "a man dying because he is bad at loving. . . [and] civilization collapsing for the same reason" (484), then "A Report to the Trustees" shows a man failing in his personal and artistic endeavours to an equally comprehensive extent. Gray's autobiographical persona has even less to show for himself than Duncan Thaw, the autobiographical anti-hero of Lanark's Books One and Two; however, this may not be so much a cause of unrelenting misery for the "Report's" protagonist as it is for Lanark's. The Alasdair Gray of the "Report" is closely related to Duncan Thaw; indeed, Gray's persona claims to have completed "five chapters" of his "tragicomical novel" ("Report," 209) whilst in Spain.³⁹

Yet where Lanark is epic in its design and scope, the "Report to the Trustees" more closely resembles a picaresque romance in its structure and content. Gray is fond of adopting fictional modes and writing within their paradigms, often making political points in the process. In this respect, my discussion of "A Report to the Trustees" introduces issues which will be addressed more fully in Chapter Five. Picaresque narrative is defined concisely by M.H. Abrams, who traces its origins to sixteenth-

³⁹Charlton confirms this--see Crawford and Nairn, eds., 1991; p.13.

century Spain and describes it as "realistic in manner, episodic in structure. . . and often satiric in aim."⁴⁰ He argues that many picaresque narratives were "written to deflate romantic or idealized fictional forms" (118). "A Report to the Trustees" meets all these structural criteria; ingredients of the picaresque are clearly evident in Gray's episodic narrative which follows the adventures of a youthful male artist setting out for Spain.⁴¹ Gray plans a whistle-stop tour from London to Spain, viewing *en route* influential architecture and the works of lauded artists (185/6). Gray deflates the spirit of adventure generated by his ambitious itinerary, however, by admitting:

The excellence of this plan, approved by Mr. Bliss, is not lessened by the fact that I eventually spent two days in Spain and saw nothing of interest. (186)

Although Gray uses the framework of a picaresque narrative in a conventional way to satirise the romantic hero, he also subverts the devil-may-care attitude of picaresque heroes by disputing any suggestion that fortune favours the brave, the foolish, or the chancer. Gray's adventures are scuppered by ill-health and misfortune, and inject a healthy dose of realism into the myth of heroic adventure. Instead of being able to walk away from the adverse consequences of his adventures in Spain, Gray is still repaying debts to his father and Jock Brown a year after his return. Certainly, the picaresque form undermines the moral universe which sustains the notion of the Classical hero (who triumphs, or dies tragically--and honourably--in the attempt), but in Gray's hands, the picaresque form is also used to subvert itself. Unlike those picaresque heroes who get away with their reckless behaviour, Gray pays the price for every minor misdemeanour.

⁴⁰M.H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms p.118.

⁴¹The adventurous youth of the "Report" has some parallel to Kelvin Walker, who also sets out on an adventure to London. Both texts share a 'deadpan' style which communicates the naiveté of the protagonists. I do not, however, want to suggest that Kelvin is an autobiographical figure.

Abrams characterises the typical picaresque subject as, "an insouciant rascal who lives by his wits and shows little if any alteration of character through the long succession of his adventures" (118). Unlike the picaresque hero, Gray, when forced to live by his wits, is unable to cope. For example, after his money is stolen in Gibraltar, he has to contact his father for financial support; he displays a similar dependency on others when a maid, by shaking feather pillows in his vicinity, inadvertently prompts attacks of panic and asthma which result in his hospitalisation (again). Gray remains dependent on paternal support and medical aid for most of his trip's duration, in sharp contrast to the self-reliant heroic ideal. If not quite a rogue, Gray displays a certain propensity to over-indulge in whisky; the loss of his cash, stolen whilst he is very drunk, emphasises that his own irresponsible behaviour contributes to his misfortune (and imposes a swift dose of Scottish Calvinist retributive justice!). Equally, he has no success seducing women, the other skill for which picaresque heroes are notoriously renowned. His only social encounter with a woman occurs in a bar in Gibraltar and involves a woman paid by the management to provide company for lone drinkers in order to maximise profits. Yet, in one important respect, Gray fulfils the conventional role: like a true picaresque hero, Gray does not change much as a result of his experiences; indeed, the lesson he draws is "that I fear to change" (212). He concedes: "Such events should have made me grow into a different man. . . . My tour was spent in an effort to avoid the maturity gained from new experiences" (212). The playful way in which Gray allows his picaresque persona to replicate *and* to fail to fit the mould of the literary typecast, affords him a space in which to depict himself within, and against, a literary-historical context.

Discussion of the satiric elements of "A Report to the Trustees" cannot be limited merely to the portrayal of the central protagonist. While Gray appears in the role of anti-hero, similarly, his journey is an anti-adventure which questions social and cultural values as surely as it questions heroic ideals. By

exposing the less attractive side of the protagonist's journey, Gray's picaresque narrative seriously undermines the ethical values underlying such 'quest' fiction. The "Report" implicitly questions why anyone would want to go wandering and painting abroad anyway; in some respects, "A Report to the Trustees" echoes the old proverb 'East, West, hame's best'. Gray becomes homesick very shortly after leaving the familiar surroundings of Glasgow and soon begins to suffer bad asthma attacks. He compares the places he visits unfavourably with his native city: he feels "trapped in London" (186) and, although he sees very little of Spain because he is confined to bed, he recounts the opinion of his travelling companion, Ian McCulloch, that the lack of hygiene, sanitation, and the large number of beggars leave much to be desired.

Gray's attachment to Glasgow is neither idealistic nor chauvinistic, however. He states near the outset of his travels, "I do not love Glasgow much, I sometimes actively hate it, but I am at home here" (186); on his return finds the city, "as I expected" (212). He admits that his dislike of London stems from the fact that the publishers he approaches there are uninterested in his poems and drawings ("I turned my disappointment against the city" [187]). The personal rejection of his works gives Gray an excuse to reject the whole city, but his deeper reservations about his entire expedition have a different source altogether; he anticipates the potential contradictions of his trip before he leaves:

The prospect of vivid sunshine, new lands and people should have been very exciting, but . . . [I] doubted the value of a tourist's shallow experience of anywhere. (186)

Here he places a quite fundamental question mark over the value of the whole venture. Originally, he did not want to go abroad, but was obliged to do so in order to comply with the conditions of the scholarship. His own wish was to travel within Scotland, "sketching landscapes and cityscapes" (185). He claims that Ian's

premature return home is prompted by the similar realization, "that what I want to paint is in Scotland" (198).⁴²

At first sight such attitudes might appear parochial or insular, even when (as in Ian McCulloch's case in the story) the artist has had the chance to see and experience different locales, but the preference for a familiar local environment stems instead from Gray's awareness of the limits of a foreigner's perspective. In the same way that Gray's purpose in "A Report to the Trustees" is to "*understand* what happened to me and the money between October 1957 and March 1958" (185) [my emphasis], rather than attempt to objectively recount the events of that period, so too, his desire to explore Scotland can be seen as a preference to deepen his knowledge of his immediate locality rather than expand the range of his observation. He complains that his "head could form no clear map" (187) of London, acknowledging that, "Only a stranger feels challenged to judge the place as a whole" (187). Gray has little inclination to position himself as an alien, but finds himself in an outsider's role in London, where he "walked about refusing to be awed" (187) and also in Gibraltar, where his incapacity affords him a very marginal perspective of his surroundings.

The question mark Gray places over the value of his personal voyage has political implications which can be extended to the value of the 'voyage of discovery' in general and the literary tradition surrounding it. Many cultural commentators interested in issues of colonialism have come to view the Western European tradition of travel narratives as validating, even valorising, an imperialistic world view. James Clifford, for example, claims that he struggles "never quite successfully, to free the related term 'travel' from a history of European, literary, male, bourgeois, scientific, heroic, recreational, meanings and practices" (106). Clifford suggests that "[t]he traveler, by definition, is someone who has the security and privilege to move

⁴²Ian McCulloch has since become one of Scotland's more critically acclaimed and successful resident artists.

about in relatively unconstrained ways" (107), contrasting the status of "the individualistic, bourgeois voyager" (106) with the status of those who facilitate, or accompany him on, his journey, and also with that of migrant workers, forced by economic necessity to travel. He argues convincingly, for instance, that "a non-white person cannot figure as a heroic explorer, aesthetic interpreter, or scientific authority" (106) and points out that even the travel narratives of white European women have been marginalised and devalued in relation to those by their male counter-parts.⁴³ Issues of race, gender, and class present themselves forcefully in contemporary discussions about travel narratives. Gray's narrative, although it does not address issues of race and gender directly, does address class, and it does challenge the authority of the white, bourgeois male subject.

The power of artistic discourses to create or bolster a place in imaginative terms is something of which Duncan Thaw is acutely aware in Lanark. It could be argued that travel narratives, of which picaresque narratives are one example, can create objectifying images of places and peoples. However, "A report to the Trustees" attempts to resist the objectifying tendencies of travel narratives, not only by undermining the authority of the hero, but also by directing the satiric conventions of picaresque narrative against the form itself.

In terms of what I argue is an explicitly political and anti-imperialist agenda in Gray's work, it is worth noting that although Lean Tales does not appear until 1985, the events of "A Report to the Trustees" are situated in the late fifties, and the text is internally dated to 1959. The late forties and fifties saw the British Empire undergo its most intensive period of dismantling as former British colonies declared independence. The changing attitudes within British society towards its former empire (due to the economic experiences of the immediate post-war period and waves of immigration to the British mainland

⁴³See also Sara Mill's Discourses of Difference which considers the role of women travel writers in the construction of travel-writing discourses.

from former colonies) are complex and not of primary concern here, but it is significant to note that the social and political issues surrounding the break-up of the British Empire are prominent concerns in British (including Scottish) political debates around the time Gray wrote the "Report to the Trustees". Reporting to the Trustees, Gray attempts to give an anti-imperial account of what he seems to recognise as a venture tainted with imperial assumptions. He acknowledges his own complicity with, and resistance to imperial processes.

Gray's ambivalence towards cultural institutions and authorities is evident throughout the text. As a talented art student in receipt of a substantial scholarship he might be expected to display an appreciation of the 'great' art and architecture offered by Spain and London. He has, in a sense, been 'bought by the establishment' and should be enjoying the benefits. Instead, Gray rounds off his list of the sights and works of art he proposes to visit in Spain in such a way as to cast doubt over their merit. He describes them as, "grand gaudy things that are supposed to compensate for the crimes of our civilization" (186). The "Report" here echoes the sentiment expressed in Lanark that Western civilization is badly diseased. Gray deliberately distances himself from the process by which great art is ascribed its value and makes it clear that aesthetic values, for him, do not over-ride social values. Note too that he accepts a stake in ("our") civilization, even as he questions its priorities and values. Gray uses the collective pronoun 'our' even though he is discussing Spanish artistic traditions which shows some degree of European or Western identity. This is more evidence that his apparent parochialism in fact expresses a reluctance to identify with Europe's imperial traditions, even while he recognises his place within that cultural framework.

Gray's negativity towards the monuments of London illustrates that he wants to reject what they stand for:

The least awesome place I saw was the government church, Westminster Abbey. . . filled with effigies of landlords,

company directors and administrators who got rich by doing exactly what was expected of them. (187)

He describes the Tower of London in politically loaded terms which are similarly contemporary, emphasising its historic use as a jail and place of torture for political prisoners and noting, "these are supposed to be part of a *splendid* past" (188). Gray further shows himself at odds with what he views as conventional British values by making jibes about the institution of the monarchy. He asserts: "the less the monarchs were working politicians the more money was spent ornamenting them" (188), bringing aesthetic value into conflict with practical worth once again. "Edward the Fat", as Gray calls him, and the Crown Imperial come in for particular denigration when Gray describes the coronation of 1901 as the placing of "the world's most expensively useless hat on the world's most expensively useless head" (189).

The unease and antipathy Gray feels towards the British Empire is made yet more explicit when Gray and Ian McCulloch board their ship (the *Kenya Castle*) for Spain:

The menus in the dining room embarrassed us. They were . . . decorated at every meal with a different photograph of some nook of Britain's African empire--*The Governor's Summer Residence, Baliwoo Protectorate... The District Vice-Commissioner's Bungalow, Janziboda etc.* (189)

Gray and McCulloch, according to the "Report", feel alienated in these surroundings because of their social class and precarious economic states; they do not know what standards of behaviour are expected of them, and in particular, how much food they can eat without incurring surcharges. Gray appears in the guise of the bourgeois traveller, but it is a role in which he is ill at ease, and so he comes more to resemble a displaced person with limits placed on his agency. He is seriously incapacitated by recurring attacks of asthma, attacks which he is aware are induced by psychological as well as environmental factors. Reflecting on his experiences, Gray concludes that he "withdrew into asthma" (212) because he cannot reconcile the conflict between his need

to mature within his new surroundings and his desire to abdicate responsibility for himself and those surroundings.⁴⁴ As a result his journey ends amidst a "protective clutter of doctors" (212). Gray's invalid's perspective, however, (as the word 'invalid' might suggest) is one which he uses to emphasise the marginality of his outlook and distance himself from the values he suggests are imposed by his cultural situation. It is his ill-health that derails his grand scheme to travel round Spain, providing him with an alternative educational experience and encounters with unusual individuals he would have been unlikely to meet on the trip he planned originally.

It is within the context of the anti-imperial narrative that the debate about the artist as hero in "A Report to the Trustees" assumes its full significance. Throughout the narrative the value of the material and physical is asserted over the aesthetic and transcendental. Having had his plans destroyed by ill-health (he "lost all memory of normal breathing" (191) during a particularly bad asthma bout), Gray might reasonably be expected to show an unusual level of awareness of his physical state in his report. However, he concentrates an inordinate degree of attention on his bodily functions, attention which is not just confined to aspects of his health. The "Report" is not for the squeamish or prudish. Gray describes in frank detail not only his breathing difficulties, but also his sea-sickness and drink-induced stomach upsets. He describes "an obstruction of the throat which coughing and spitting could not remove" (192); describes the toilet facilities in some detail (189); and admits to the doctor later that he has no problems with his bowels (192). He attaches no shame to the matter-of-fact accounts he gives of his drinking binges and erotic fantasies, aspects of experience usually glossed over in portraits of artist and hero alike. That Gray is a mortal, flesh and blood 'hero' is continually emphasised:

⁴⁴The transtextual relationship of "The Report" and Lanark is particularly apparent here.

my hand trembled and the needle broke short in my flesh. The maid and I both panicked. . . I passed shat and grew unconscious. (211)⁴⁵

Gray also stresses that painters are working artisans, rather than merely cerebral artists; the Anglican priest Gray meets on the boat tells him that the Pope has "the fingers of an artist, a painter" to suggest sensitivity and refinement, whereas Gray notes that his own fingers "had flecks of paint on the nails that I hadn't managed to clean off for the previous fortnight" (190). Not only is the figure of the heroic artist a portrait which Gray successfully defaces, it is a myth with pernicious consequences when it is used to dehumanise the artist, even to the extent of deifying the artist hero and privileging the values he espouses. Gray encourages a similar re-evaluation of the artist as omnipotent hero in his presentation of Nastler in Lanark.

Gray seems to find his values at odds with those of the heroic artist, but he still wishes to exercise creative agency; that is, he still wants to paint. If there is a crucial difference in tone between "A Report to the Trustees" and Lanark, it is that the report lacks the optimistic hope of change *and* continuity that characterise the novel. Gray learns from his experiences in Spain, but it is a rather grim process, whereby he is taught a 'life lesson' despite his best efforts to avoid it: "eventually some form of maturity is imposed" (212). The "Postscript" Gray adds to his report injects a positive note into the story, only to negate it again a few lines later. While resident in the barracks at Gibraltar, Gray painted a mural, *Triumph of Neptune*,---surely a suitably magisterial and heroic subject--on the commonroom wall. It is the only painting he completes on his travels. However, the wife of the governor is offended by the nudity in the mural and demands that it be painted over. Gray remarks: "It is

⁴⁵Duncan Thaw's precarious health is dwelt on throughout Books One and Two of Lanark and is mirrored in the grotesque hospital of the institute. Note also that Duncan begs to be allowed to study 'morbid anatomy' while at Art School. Poor Things develops Gray's exploration of medical discourses and is discussed in Chapter Three.

pleasant to think of a more liberal age restoring them to light" (214), but before readers have a chance to relish that happy possibility, Gray concludes his report with a note of finality: "in a year or two the south bastion will be demolished" (214). His picture will be destroyed and the historical trace of the *Triumph of Neptune* will exist only in memory.

Like the Postscripts in Gray's other texts, this one draws attention to the arbitrariness of the point at which the narrative 'proper' ends, again undermining the unity of the quest narrative; but in this case, it also recalls the techniques used in Lanark and the Saltire Self-Portrait to render seemingly objective history suspect; the trustees can only take Gray's word for the fact that he did actually paint the mural and they have no means of assessing its quality. Ironically, far from being an intellectual and artistic odyssey, Gray's venture has been defined by his physical limitations and material deficiencies. Nevertheless, these physical constraints have given rise to a creative vision of a sort; instead of graphic art, Gray has used his experience to produce a work of literary imagination. In "A Report to the Trustees" , the material conditions of the artist lead him to challenge the classical ideals of hero and artist alike; Gray's text presents a political and intellectual challenge to some of the central planks of Western civilization.

Gray's autobiographical texts undermine the unified subject of Western humanism by questioning not only his autonomy, but also the very terms in which his subjectivity is framed. Gray's destabilization of familiar epistemological frameworks casts doubt on the ability of one system of representation to give an authoritative, exclusive account of human history and experience. By presenting alternative perspectives, Gray offers a critique of the ideological assumptions and political processes at work in contemporary Scottish society and offers some scope for imaginative alternatives. Gray attempts to reconstruct personal history to make sense of the political present. The key political theme of imperialism, touched on in this chapter in relation to "A

Report to the Trustees," re-emerges frequently in Gray's work. So far, my discussion of Gray's critique of imperialism has focused on individual heroism, travel, and artistic production; however, it is a far more pervasive concern in his work. In the next chapter I will address issues of imperialism as they emerge in Gray's work in relation to issues of national identity and political economy. While Gray unravels and reformulates historical categories of personal identity, he is equally willing to unravel national history and national identity.

Chapter Two: Re(in)stating the Nation

One of the most consistent, overarching strains evident throughout Alasdair Gray's work is the author's concern about Scotland's constitutional status, a concern which emerges in his artistic output and is reinforced by the regular public statements he has made in favour of Scottish home rule.¹ Yet, while Gray makes unambiguous political statements, his engagement with the altogether more problematic concepts of nationhood and nationality is subtle and complex. His work can be, and has been, read as a literary reinscription of Scottish national identity and has lent itself to discussions about the relationship between the political sphere and the arts in Scotland.

Some political commentators who have used Alasdair Gray as a reference point have highlighted Gray's inclusive civic nationalism in order to enhance the cultural and intellectual credibility of political movements for Scottish home-rule, and have used his work to exemplify a thriving Scottish identity in cultural life. James Mitchell, for example, in his discussion of 'The Meaning of Self-government,' quotes Gray to illustrate the importance of literary culture to campaigns for a Scottish parliament. Mitchell argues: "The cultural vitality of Scotland has been crucial. Without any sense of identity, the notion of self-government is not possible" (30).²

Interestingly, much recent literary criticism of Gray's work attaches more than usual significance to the historical and political contexts in which it appears.³ Gray is by no means the only contemporary Scottish writer to voice personal support for

¹Arguably, Gray's most explicit call for Scottish self-government was the publication of Why Scots Should Rule Scotland just prior to the 1992 General Election; it was updated for reissue before the 1997 General Election. During the Scottish referendum campaign of August 1997 Gray was to be found distributing 'Yes Yes' campaign materials (along with Douglas Dunn and others) at the Edinburgh International Book Festival.

²See also Christopher Harvie, "Drunk Men Looking at Thistles: Two Political Novels," in Cenchrastus No.19, Winter 1984, and "Alasdair Gray and the Condition of Scotland Question," in Crawford and Nairn, eds., 1991; pp.76-89.

³For examples, see Stephen Baker and Willy Maley's essays in Lyons and Coyle, eds., 1995. Mark Axelrod, in his introduction to a collection of pieces on Gray in The Review of Contemporary Fiction Vol.15, No.2., mentions Margaret Thatcher in his very first paragraph.

Scottish independence, but he is one of the most insistent, and one whose work expresses his political concerns explicitly. Yet it is hard to establish direct correlations between political and literary arenas because the narrative conventions most commonly employed within each are markedly different. This is not to imply that divisions between historical and literary discourses are absolute, or even helpful. However, in order to reach a more thorough understanding of Gray's nationalism, it is necessary to negotiate the complex relations between literary and political discourses in Gray's work .

One issue explored in my previous chapter, namely the relationship between national discourses and personal subjectivity, has some relevance for the present discussion in that it foregrounds debates about cultural agency and personal agency which also arise in this chapter. This chapter attempts to analyse the *kind* of nationalism--maybe even nationalisms--evident in Gray's writing and attempts to relate such literary nationalism(s) not only to broader Scottish contexts, but also to broader literary and cultural contexts. The first part of this chapter devotes substantial space to 'unpacking' the concept of 'the nation' and attempting to locate Gray's place within the deeply contested discourses of 'nation and narration'.⁴

Gray's frequent allusions to imperial power raise questions which have been addressed most thoroughly in the work of postcolonial theorists and critics. Although the application of postcolonial theories to Scottish contexts is fraught with difficulties, the *methodologies* developed within postcolonial theory are suggestive and helpful in relation to Gray because they often address the interconnections between strands of national, personal, and political identity expressed in literary texts; even more importantly, they often offer critiques of structural power. After setting out some key critical debates, I use the rest of the chapter to discuss specific texts by Gray in which his concerns with nation and empire are particularly prominent: firstly, the two versions of Gray's polemical essay Why Scots Should Rule Scotland, and secondly, two stories from Unlikely Stories, Mostly.

⁴This is the title of a seminal collection of essays edited by Homi Bhabha.

This relatively limited selection allows me to discuss the texts and the issues they raise in some depth.

Reconstituting Scottish History

Nationalism is a notoriously slippery concept for academics, although it is one used with alacrity by politicians. Benedict Anderson's notion of "Imagined Communities" has been helpful and influential in explaining the phenomenon of nationalisms and in establishing the absence of *essential* definitive characteristics in the construction of national identities. Numerous critics have drawn attention to the role of literature in making and sustaining discourses of nation. Homi Bhabha is perhaps pre-eminent in highlighting the fundamental connections between 'nation and narration', but it is a theme that has been explored by critics from diverse contexts. Timothy Brennan expresses succinctly a widely accepted account of relations between nation and narration, and the prominent role of one literary genre in the construction of national discourses:

Nations then are imaginary constructs that depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions in which imaginative fiction plays a decisive role. And the rise of European nationalism coincides especially with one form of literature--the novel.⁵

In my first chapter I mentioned Sir Walter Scott's significant influence on the development of the novel. However, Scott's lasting influence on other aspects of Scottish cultural life should not be underestimated either; in Scotland--The Brand: The Making of Scottish Heritage, McCrone *et al* trace the origins of the heritage industry, a key feature of twentieth-century Scotland and its tourist industry, back to Scott's historiography.⁶ For Marinell Ash, the significance of Scott's legacy rests on the fact that his life and times compound "the tensions and contradictions of a traditional Scotland merging into a changing British nation, part of a great world empire" (13).

⁵ Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, eds., 1995; p.173.

⁶In Chapter Three, the extent to which Gray's work offers a more contemporary historiographical reinscription of place will be discussed more fully.

Like Scott, Alasdair Gray's reputation rests largely on his novels, although novels are by no means the only genre in which Gray works. In this chapter the texts examined are *not* novels, partly because Gray himself pays little heed to conventional genre distinctions, but also because the texts in question illustrate particularly clearly how questions of nation and empire intersect in Gray's work.

The work of critics like Said, Bhabha, Anderson, and Brennan has been invaluable in establishing the crucial role of literary discourses in the construction of nationhood; however, the concept of 'imagined communities' has some serious limitations. It is important to remember that, as Stuart Hall puts it, "a nation is. . . something which produces meanings--*a system of cultural representation*" (1992; 292); but it is equally important to remember that nations--including nations which are not states--are also *political* entities. However much they are constructed within mythologies, over a period of time, nations come to have *material* histories and geographies which have material effects on their peoples. If nations are thought of only as 'imagined communities', the material aspects of their existence can be too easily neglected. Indeed, the nation-state is still a crucial ideological building block for world politics, law, and commerce which should serve as an important reminder that the *power* of nations--some nations more than others, it must be said--is far from imaginary. This aspect of debate is, on the whole, recognised by the more rhetorically supple exponents of 'the nation as discourse'; as Brennan points out, "the 'nation' is precisely what Foucault has called a 'discursive formation'--not simply an allegory or imaginative vision, but a gestative political structure" (170).

For some commentators, the power of nation states is waning because of factors like, "Globalization of the economy, supra-national political agreements (such as the European Union) and the impact of multi-national media on 'national' cultures" (McCrone *et al*; 25). For others, the paradigm of nationalism itself is winding down and national identity is giving way to different identities (Hall, 1992; Robins, 1991). Nationalism is a contentious topic in academic discussions and has been fervently debated; it

goes without saying that in twentieth-century Europe, nationalisms have regularly taken racist, xenophobic, and sectarian forms. For leftist intellectuals, class-based allegiances may be more attractive than, and may conflict with, appeals to national solidarity. The respected journalist Neal Ascherson confronts the deep suspicion towards nationalism in Europe in an article which addresses itself to the political changes that followed the end of the Cold War.⁷ He argues:

If it is true, as I believe, that nationalism in its variety of forms remains the main political dynamic of the human race, then it is disconcerting that we hear little but wholesale condemnation of it. (26)

Citing Tom Nairn, Ascherson acknowledges the 'Janus-face' of nationalism, "looking at once forward to liberation and progress and backward to reactionary and often mythical nations of the past" (27), and accuses the West of having "an interest in the maintenance of nationalism, but only in its most backward form: the sovereign nation state" (27). Ascherson asks Europeans not to confuse nations with nation-states; rather, his essay suggests a different political function for nations:

In the new world order, it may well be that nationalism functions as the opposition to that order, the main source of resistance and challenge to large and more or less integrated blocks of power. (27)

Ascherson appears to argue that the processes of globalization, far from heralding the demise of nations or fuelling a retreat into traditional culture, might actually foster different kinds of nationalism--strategic nationalisms which negotiate hegemonic political power. Ascherson's vision of nationalism and his analysis of the international political context resonates strongly with Gray's formulations of nationalism and approach towards imperialism.

In his contribution to a slim volume on Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature, Terry Eagleton, quoting Raymond Williams, outlines perimeters which demarcate the field in which theoretical discussions of literary nationalism have tended to be conducted within British contexts:

⁷Neal Ascherson, "New World Order: Nations in the Thaw," in Marxism Today, March 1991; pp.26-27.

Nationalism is in this sense like class. To have it, and to feel it, is the only way to end it. If you fail to claim it, or give it up too soon, you will merely be cheated, by other classes and other nations. (23)

Nationalism can be understood here as a 'necessary evil' which needs to be acknowledged in order to be eradicated, but which can serve as a defence against the negative effects of other nationalisms or against economic exploitation. Alignments between nationalism and socialism are not new, either in Scottish political or literary history: when Keir Hardie stood as an independent Labour candidate at the Mid-Lanark by-election in 1888, Scottish home rule was part of his electoral platform (Mitchell, 303); in literary life, Hugh MacDiarmid, as Alasdair Gray himself explains,

helped to found the Scottish National Party; it expelled him five years later because he thought small independent nations needed international communism to stop them growing parochial. He also thought international communism needed independent nations. . . so the communists expelled him for nationalism.⁸

That MacDiarmid's nationalism and communism were deemed eccentric by his political peers (see also Mitchell, 53) illustrates the perceived incompatibility of nationalism and socialism. However, nationalism and socialism are not homogeneous concepts; although Scottish home rule would be incompatible with the kind of multinational state socialism of the Soviet Union, nevertheless, there have been consistent, if at times marginal, voices from the left of the political spectrum arguing in favour of self-government throughout the twentieth century.⁹

⁸Alasdair Gray's review of Hugh MacDiarmid's Scottish Eccentrics (ed. Alan Riach. Carcanet, 1995) in The Guardian 27th November 1993, p.29. Scottish Eccentrics represents one of MacDiarmid's attempts to create an 'alternative' historiography by publishing a 'Scottish' response to Edith Sitwell's English Eccentrics. Gray's review of the republished edition of MacDiarmid's volume is lengthy, erudite, and not altogether uncritical of MacDiarmid.

⁹ Keating and Bleiman (1979) chart the fluctuations in the relationship between the Labour movement in Scotland and the movements for home-rule. It is worth noting too that it has been Labour governments who have offered referenda on Devolution in 1979 and 1997.

Seamus Heaney, in an essay on MacDiarmid and his influence, highlights the seeming contradictions of the man, but concludes:

All in all, his practice and example have had an inestimable influence on the history of Scottish writing in particular, and Scottish culture in general over the last fifty years. There is a demonstrable link between MacDiarmid's act of cultural resistance in the Scotland of the 1920s and the literary self-possession of writers such as Alasdair Gray, Tom Leonard, Liz Lochhead and James Kelman in the 1980s and 1990s.¹⁰

Of course, here we return to the undue emphasis given to MacDiarmid as the 'be-all and end-all' of Scottish cultural life this century--a myth I made some effort to dispel when discussing literary tradition in my introduction. However, the sheer tenacity of the mythology around MacDiarmid is harder to ignore--his influence on *contemporary* interpretations of Scottish cultural life is still immense, as Heaney's comments demonstrate. Alasdair Gray also seems happy to assume the mantles of Scottish nationalism and socialism; the apparent ideological tensions between their respective outlooks shed interesting light not only on Gray's fiction but on the social and political contexts in which he writes.

Tom Nairn is possibly the most influential of British academics to have attempted a rapprochement between socialism and nationalism. As Beveridge and Turnbull point out, during the nineteen-seventies, Nairn,

helped make the Scottish question appear more important--and nationalism more palatable--to many radical Scots who might otherwise have tended to dismiss Scottish nationalism as a parochial diversion, or, to recall that weary phrase, as 'tartan toryism.' (51)

According to Beveridge and Turnbull, the strength of Nairn's argument lay in his challenge to the "leftist shibboleth of internationalism" (51):

Drawing an important distinction between *internationality*, the fact of economic interdependence, and *internationalism*

¹⁰Seamus Heaney, "Lyrical in his Genius" in Scotland on Sunday, 8th October 1995. Extracted from Heaney's The Redress of Poetry. London: Faber and Faber, 1995.

as political sentiment or ideology, Nairn stresses that 'the overwhelmingly dominant political by-product of modern internationality is nationalism'--and not, as the internationalist is forever fantasising, internationalism. (52)

Nairn also, Beveridge and Turnbull note, exposes the universalist assumptions at the heart of internationalist ideology which can mask "chauvinistic and xenophobic attitudes" (52).

However, while The Break-up of Britain and Nairn's journalistic writings on nationalism were highly influential in Scottish intellectual and political circles (and are roughly contemporaneous with a prolific period of composition for Alasdair Gray), Gray's fiction formulates its nationalism in slightly different terms. I have quite deliberately presented Nairn's ideas through the filter of Beveridge and Turnbull's The Eclipse of Scottish Culture (1989) because the latter's reading of Scottish culture, influenced by Frantz Fanon's theories of national liberation, seems--at least at this preliminary stage--more helpful in relation to Gray's figuring of nationalism in his fiction than does Nairn's. Beveridge and Turnbull make a succinct distinction between their own stance and Nairn's which can help to locate and illuminate the 'imaginary Scotlands' Gray posits and seems to wish to realise:

A fundamental distinction--which cannot be drawn in terms of 'sentimental' as opposed to 'unsentimental' nationalism--must be made between those who see themselves fighting for a socialist future, and view nationalism as a tactical possibility within this struggle, and those who see the fight for a culture, a history, a people as an integral part of a socialist *politique*. (60)

It is no coincidence that theories of nationalism which are, like Fanon's, grounded in anti-colonial struggles, prove the most helpful and suggestive in relation to Alasdair Gray's work. Arguably, the most interesting and rigorous reflections on nationalism, national identity and literature have been produced in former European colonies, or in the context of colonial experience, by critics motivated to 'write back' to the imperial

centre, the perceived source of cultural authority.¹¹ It is also fair to say that the most sustained literary critiques of European imperialism have been written by writers who occupy a marginal position in relation to imperial power centres.¹² In Chapter One of this thesis, Gray's "Report to the Trustees" initiated discussion of imperial narratives. I argued there that Gray's destabilization of the Cartesian subject, his subversive treatment of traditional Picaresque narrative, and his troubling of 'factual' historical discourse, drew attention to the ideological frameworks within which Western European discourses of human subjectivity, art, and linear history were constructed, and highlighted flaw-lines in the underlying ideological frameworks of these discourses.

The fact that "A Report to the Trustees" was written during the late fifties, at a time when many of the former colonies of the British Empire were securing political independence, is salient. Gray's anti-imperial narratives, of which "A Report to the Trustees" is only one early example, are written from *within* the heart of the former British Empire and occupy a highly ambivalent position in relation to it. As might be expected, diverse postcolonial nationalisms have become evident in the literary and political discourses of many former British colonies during the post-war period. In some cases writers concerned with issues of colonialism have employed comparable literary strategies to Gray's, and their works display tensions and ambivalences in relation to the perceived imperial centre.¹³

One problem encountered in early postcolonial criticism, however, was a tendency to lump together literatures from diverse former British colonies under one critical roof. Selden and

¹¹In their influential volume The Empire Writes Back, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin acknowledge the source of their title as an essay by Salman Rushdie, "The Empire Writes Back to the Centre," which subversively appropriates the title of the successful Hollywood science-fiction feature film The Empire Strikes Back, part of the Star Wars Trilogy (Ashcroft *et al*, 1989; p.33).

¹²Edward Said's Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient (1978) remains one of the most influential challenges to Eurocentric discourses. More recently, the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, which draws on deconstructionist, feminist, and Marxist theories, is some of the most well-known critical material which tackles questions of imperialism from perspectives marginal to imperial power.

¹³Interestingly, Alison Lee discusses Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children, a novel which addresses India's colonial history, alongside Gray's Lanark. Midnight's Children is a good example of a text that can be thought of both as postmodern and postcolonial.

Widdowson note that "'postcolonial criticism' overtook the troublesome category of 'Commonwealth literature' to emerge in the 1980s as a set of concerns marked by the indeterminacies and decentredness otherwise associated, philosophically, with poststructuralism and particularly deconstruction" (188). There is occasionally some overlap between literary texts dubbed postmodern and those dubbed postcolonial, with authors from diverse contexts adopting comparable literary strategies.¹⁴ Selden and Widdowson discuss the connections between 'Postmodernist and postcolonialist theories,' noting that postcolonial criticism "draws on the more radical implications of poststructuralism" (188). Gray, often thought of as a postmodern writer, is also deeply engaged with discourses of colonialism in his fiction.

English has become an international language in the contemporary world, a development which stems from the heyday of British colonial expansion. Ashcroft *et al* point out that, "Britain without its Empire can still maintain cultural authority in post-colonial societies," arguing, "Eurocentric assumptions about race, nationality and literature return time and again to haunt the production of post-colonial writing" (1995; 7). The political importance of cultural authority should not be overlooked, but it is useful to balance the role of cultural production with economic and social factors which may be equally powerful. A focus on former sources of political authority is a recurring critical concern in postcolonial criticism, but one which re-emphasises the role of the colonisers, not the colonised. There is a danger that a critical preoccupation with the erstwhile imperial power-centre may reinscribe the power of British imperialism rather than dismantle it. Gray's writings offer an interesting perspective on such debates because, as will be demonstrated, in a sense they unwrite and rewrite categories of nation and empire from a position which is marginal but also privileged. Gray is able to show that imperialism is no more a consistent discourse than are the more sweeping accounts of colonialism. Rather than underestimating the totalising effects of imperial power, Gray suggests ways in which its discourses can be contested and unhinged.

¹⁴Linda Hutcheon draws attention to the prevalence of postmodern fictional strategies in the contemporary literature of former European colonies.

Scotland's relation to the British Empire is complex and ambiguous. As historical methodologies search beyond 'grand narratives' of nation and empire, it becomes evident that imperialism is not *only* about territorial expansion or economic exploitation; its ideologies are more pervasive, far-reaching and multi-faceted. As Stephen Slemon argues:

Colonialism, obviously, is an enormously problematic category: it is by definition transhistorical and unspecific, and it is used in relation to very different kinds of cultural oppression and economic control. But like the term 'patriarchy,' which shares similar problems in definition, the concept of colonialism. . . remains crucial to a critique of past and present power relations in world affairs. (106)

In my textual discussions in this chapter I want to show not only how the recurring theme of anti-imperialism becomes evident in Gray's work, but also that it is a vital element in the construction of Gray's Scottish nationalism. Nationalism has been an important component of liberation movements in many former British colonies; it is notable, however, that Fanon, a key exponent of national liberation, writes also of "the pitfalls of national consciousness," warning that a national bourgeoisie committed to individualistic capitalism will quickly become economically dependent upon the colonisers after political independence.¹⁵ Fanon's ideas of national liberation are strategic; they are intrinsically linked to issues of economic and social justice and entertain no diametric opposition between socialism and nationalism. It would seem that some postcolonial nationalisms do not necessarily have much in common with some of the xenophobic and chauvinistic varieties on offer. Aijaz Ahmed clarifies a complex field of discussion when he writes:

nationalism itself is not some unitary thing with some predetermined essence or value. There are hundreds of nationalisms. . . some are progressive, others are not. Whether or not a nationalism will produce a progressive cultural practice depends, to put it in Gramscian terms, upon the political character of the power bloc which takes hold of

¹⁵Frantz Fanon, "National Culture," in Ashcroft *et al* eds., 1995; p.156.

it and utilizes it, as a material force, in the process of constituting its own hegemony.¹⁶

Gray's nationalism, I want to suggest, is substantially influenced by postcolonial nationalisms and is, to a considerable extent, a provisional, strategic, and conditional nationalism. Ahmed's comments quoted above, if related to a Scottish context, not only stress that nationalisms take on diverse political characteristics, but also allow the possibility that conflicting nationalist discourses can co-exist within one national 'discursive formation'. It might be wiser to talk of Scottish nationalisms, acknowledging the multifarious forms of Scottish national identity in evidence in contemporary Scotland, and the contrasting formations of nationalism evident in literary and political discourses.¹⁷ Although I characterise Gray's as an anti-imperial nationalism, it is also important to note that different 'flavours' of Scottish nationalism may not be mutually exclusive--they may share strategic aims and even some degree of rhetorical similarity.¹⁸

However, the appropriation of postcolonial nationalism by proponents of Scottish independence raises some thorny issues. In political and economic terms, the British Empire was, arguably, at its height from the mid-nineteenth to early-twentieth centuries; indeed, imperialism is a concept crucial to an understanding of European territorial conquest and economic expansion in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, while these very rough chronological markers might be helpful in some analytical contexts, they are not so helpful when thinking about forms of *cultural* imperialism. In political, economic, and territorial terms, Scotland is not, and never has been, a British colony. Indeed, far from being colonised, the pivotal role of many Scots in the British

¹⁶Aijaz Ahmed "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness" in Ashcroft *et al* eds., 1995; p.79.

¹⁷See Alice Brown *et al*, 1996; pp.189-213 for a discussion of diverse identities in Scotland.

¹⁸A good example in recent times can be witnessed in the 1997 Devolution Referendum campaign in which Gray participated. Advocates of constitutional change from the three Scottish political parties with parliamentary representation joined forces to campaign for a 'Yes, Yes' vote, despite the fact that the Labour Party, the SNP, and the Liberal Democrats favour different degrees of self-government. Gray's preferred option of an independent Scottish socialist republic was neither on offer nor endorsed by any mainstream political party. However, the 'working consensus' of the campaign illustrates the possibility of coalitions between proponents of diverse Scottish nationalisms and may even demonstrate a continuum of nationalisms and unionisms in Scotland.

imperial projects of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is notable.¹⁹ Scotland's largest city, Glasgow, even earned the dubious accolade 'Second City of the Empire' because of its strong trading links with British colonies. Historically, Scotland, along with most of Western Europe, shared in the spoils of imperialism and to this day continues to enjoy privileges attached to that historical legacy. As a partner within the United Kingdom since the Act of Union of 1707, Scotland participated fully in establishing and maintaining the British Empire; in this sense Scotland is deeply implicated in the processes of imperialism.²⁰

Yet in spite of the role of many Scots in building and maintaining the British Empire, Scotland's marginal geographical position in relation to the imperial centre of London has been reflected in economic, political, and cultural marginalisation. It should be stressed, though, that marginalisation is not the same thing as colonisation.

However, although Scotland is not a colony within the terms of conventional political and historical discourses, the patterns of cultural domination and economic exploitation associated with colonialism may find some parallels in recent Scottish experience. As Christopher Harvie argues:

The impact of super-modern technologies--oil extraction and electronics--created a challenging reality. . . . aimed at realising that we were no longer, however guiltily, the exploiters. We had become the exploited. The American sociologist Michael Hechter's "internal colonisation" theory, pointless for the Scottish past, seemed germane to the Scottish present.²¹

The *perception* of colonial status in Scotland has developed in the 1980s and 1990s, possibly fuelled by the fact that successive Conservative governments between 1979 and 1997 enjoyed only relatively small minority support in Scotland. Comments attributed to the then Secretary of State for Scotland, Malcolm Rifkind, MP, that his powers "were not unlike those of a Colonial

¹⁹See Gordon Donaldson, 1966.

²⁰Donaldson (ibid.) notes that in *Rob Roy*, Walter Scott writes that the Union of 1707, "opened us a road West awa' yonder," (81) referring to the new trading and emigration possibilities opened by closer alliance with England.

²¹Christopher Harvie, "Still a Nation in a State," in The Scotsman 13th April 1994.

Governor," were widely publicised and exploited by SNP politicians during the 1987 General Election campaign.²² Radical Conservative policies also provoked angry responses in Scotland. James Mitchell argues:

The nadir came with the poll tax, which was widely seen as a measure imposed on the Scots against their will by a distant, uncaring government. . . .The question of whether the Conservatives had a mandate to rule Scotland was raised, and not only by the SNP" (48).

More recently, John Hodge's screenplay for the box-office hit film Trainspotting, based on Irvine Welsh's best-selling novel, included an infamous scene in which the central protagonist, a young heroin addict, announces in an outburst of cultural self-loathing: "I hate being Scottish. We're the lowest of the fucking low. . . . Some people hate the English, but I don't. They're just wankers. We, on the other hand, are colonized by wankers."²³ The scene became a centre of public controversy when it was appropriated by nationalist students in a recruitment drive.²⁴ Although comments such as those above do not establish colonial status for Scotland, they do show how some parallels could be drawn between classical imperial processes and recent Scottish political history. While the days of the British Empire may be all but over at the level of state politics, it may take longer to displace imperial and colonial mentalities at the level of cultural politics. In spite of the demise of the British Empire, English cultural paradigms retain considerable influence throughout the english-speaking world, including Scotland.

It is at least partly true that English cultural hegemony has provided some of the primary conditions of formation for Scottish national identities in literary contexts. MacDiarmid's self-confessed and characteristically extreme 'anglophobia' can be seen to have fuelled his attempts to find non-English cultural reference points. In more recent decades, Tom Leonard's poetry has drawn

²²Interview with Malcolm Rifkind in Scottish Field, March 1986. Rifkind, not surprisingly, subsequently denied making the comment, but Scottish Field stood by its interview. In any case, the damage had already been done.

²³John Hodge, p.46.

²⁴See Alan Forbes' report, "SNP's leaflet 'may breach Act'," in The Scotsman 25th September 1996.

attention to (and subverted) the cultural imperialism exercised in the use of Received Pronunciation English.²⁵ While Gray has occasionally challenged assumptions about the use of standard written English to represent direct speech (for example, he renders Harry's RP speech phonetically in Something Leather) questions of nationality seem to enter his work only when they have some bearing on underlying social power relations. As far as relations of *power* are concerned, issues of class would seem a more central reference point in Gray's fiction than Englishness as such. Gray's critique of imperialism is informed by, but is not limited by, British imperial experiences. For example, in the 'Axletree' stories which will be discussed in due course, he evokes models of imperialism which predate the British Empire by many centuries.

Scottish national identity, like other identities, is often defined in terms of what it is *not*. Derrida's key deconstructionist concept of *différance* is rarely applied to questions of national identity, but may be helpful nevertheless.²⁶ To own a nationality(/ies), by definition excludes the ownership of some other identities; there is an Other (or others) which defines the 'Self'. Many postcolonial commentators contend that the 'significant others' of Western culture emerge via the axioms of imperialism. As Ashcroft *et al* argue:

the more extreme forms of the self-critical and anarchic models of twentieth century culture which modernism ushered in can be seen to depend on the existence of a post-colonial Other which provides its condition of formation. (1989; 160)

But what is the Other of Scottish identity? It would be naive to deny that English identity has occupied this role to a considerable extent; however, there are multifarious sources of cultural authority in contemporary Scotland which may also have significance. For example, many Western feminist critics have found the notion of the Other suggestive, following de Beauvoir's contention that "'woman' has been constructed as man's Other,

²⁵See, for example, "Unrelated Incidents, (3)" in Intimate Voices, p.88.

²⁶See Derrida, 1992; pp.1-27.

denied the right to her own subjectivity and to responsibility for her own actions."²⁷ Ashcroft *et al* point out:

women in many societies have been relegated to the position of 'Other', marginalized and, in a metaphorical sense, colonized. . . They share with colonized races and peoples an intimate experience of the politics of oppression and repression, and like them, they have been forced to articulate their experiences in the language of their oppressors. (1989; 174)

There has been some cross-over between women's and post-colonial studies--most notably, perhaps, in Spivak's work, which tends to address issues of race, class, and gender in tandem--but the two fields often have different political goals and priorities.²⁸ Perhaps what distinguishes Spivak's approach is that, as Selden and Widdowson put it, she does not try to 'fuse together' feminist, Marxist, and anti-racist discourses, but instead tries to "preserve their discontinuities--the ways they bring each other to crisis" (193). Within a Scottish context, Anderson and Norquay adopt a comparable approach in their essay "Superiorism" in that they present there a critical analysis of Scottish constructions of masculinity and nationality. They expose the mutual sustainability of these discourses and challenge the exclusion of women from cultural life. They argue:

An obvious analogy can be drawn between Scottish nationalism and the women's movement in this context but the similarities do not seem to have been built upon. Given that nationalists seem capable of drawing parallels between the colonial situation and Scotland, it might be expected that a greater understanding and analysis would be extended to the oppression of women within their own society. (10)

Gray's work does address some of the challenges posed by feminist discourses (this is discussed in my fourth chapter); however, questions more immediate to the present discussion

²⁷Toril Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics, pp.92-98. Moi discusses Beauvoir's thesis and its influence, including its impact on the work of Luce Irigaray.

²⁸Outlining some "Problems of a Feminist Approach to African Literature" (in Ashcroft *et al* eds., 1995; pp.251-254) Kirsten Holst Petersen notes that "whereas Western feminists discuss the relative importance of feminist versus class emancipation, the African discussion is between feminist emancipation versus the fight against neo-colonialism" (251/52).

raised by Anderson and Norquay's article concern the construction of the Other(s) of Scottish identity: how do the binaries of Self and Other, be it male/female, Scots/English, or Western/Eastern, function politically in cultural and social texts?²⁹ And what sources of cultural authority does Gray affirm and reject as he attempts in his writing to formulate a critical response to imperial discourses? It may well be that we are missing Gray's point if we see his work *only* as a critical engagement with British imperialism; rather, his work explores the power dynamics of imperial forces in ways that have at least as much relevance to globalization, or neo-colonialism, as to the British Empire. In the next section I explore Gray's attempts to analyse relations between Scotland and England, and his attempts to move cultural debate beyond these borders.

Over the Border

Gray's most overt attempts to influence *electoral* politics appear in the polemical essays Why Scots Should Rule Scotland (1992) and a wholly rewritten version, Why Scots Should Rule Scotland, 1997. These short historical, political tracts appeared during the British General Election campaigns of 1992 and 1997. It almost goes without saying that politics is about far more than elections, but the timing and content of these pamphlets seem designed to influence the political process in Scotland. The impact of these texts is, needless to say, impossible to assess, but some significance lies in the fact that Gray (and presumably his publisher) saw fit to repeat the exercise, and to make substantial revisions to the original text in 1997.

It is hard to determine the extent to which publication is prompted by commercial viability or political motivation. The 1997 revisions take account of the political events and developments of the intervening years, but also modify and rearrange the arguments contained in the earlier publication. Gray describes his 1992 essay as "propaganda" (9) offering a dictionary

²⁹As Abdul R. JanMohammed (in Ashcroft *et al* eds., 1995; pp. 18-23) points out, overly simplistic binarisms can often accompany nationalisms which are defined solely against Something Else.

definition of propaganda as "any activity for the spread of opinions and principles, especially to effect change or reform" (9). Authorial intentionality is a vexed question, especially when dealing with a writer like Gray who is so subtle in his use of irony. Even so, there seems to be little irony in Gray's expressed desire for social and political change. Nevertheless, there is no unmediated, 'objective' way to read these texts, even if their most *plausible* interpretations seem relatively unambiguous. However, although Gray bills his tract as 'polemic', he complicates and upsets his own argument in places, giving it an unstable, provisional quality.

The style and content of Gray's essays have some relevance to the present discussion. Willy Maley, who has written perceptively of Why Scots Should Rule Scotland, describes it as "an astonishing piece of historiographical shorthand" (52). Where some of Gray's fiction rewrites parts of Scottish history using postmodern literary strategies in order to reconstruct historical perspectives and discourses in new ways, in Why Scots Should Rule Scotland, Gray uses a more conventional linear narrative framework and a direct, factual style to construct a historical narrative. Yet Gray's style and tone are deceptively straightforward; Philip Hobsbaum discusses the 'voice' of Gray's prose in an essay which focuses on "A Report to the Trustees";³⁰ however, his comments are equally relevant to Why Scots Should Rule Scotland. Hobsbaum argues, "The prose seems plain, but it is not simple. It tends to set up an expectation which it then betrays" (147). He characterises Gray as "a master of *ostranenie*" (150).³¹ Gray's historical account is not straightforward either. Of course, the fictionality of historical 'objectivity' has been examined by Hayden White and others,³² but Gray, despite his directness, makes no pretence to such an objective perspective. Indeed, he self-consciously compromises his own 'neutrality' ironically when, at the end of a chapter subtitled "A Dry Approach," (11) his publisher has to tell him, "Please stop bellowing, you are resorting to rhetoric" (16). Although the author asks to be allowed to

³⁰See O'Brien, ed., 1995; pp. 147-154.

³¹This is a term used by Russian Formalists and is translated as 'defamiliarization'. See Hawthorn, pp.33-34.

³²See White's volumes Metahistory and Tropics of Discourse.

"develop the argument in the dry, historical way I had planned" (16), his readers are made explicitly aware that the author is not an emotionally detached figure relating facts from an omniscient perspective.

Why Scots Should Rule Scotland condenses a millennium of Scottish history into a few pages in a quite remarkable way. Gray's cross-fertilisation of historiographical and literary approaches to narrative enables him to stress recurring themes and draw transhistorical parallels in ways that would carry little credibility in an academic context. For example, when Gray draws parallels between the mediaeval Wars of Independence and Scotland's contemporary constitutional battleground, his argument is based on a tenuous premise, given the completely different social, political, economic and historical contexts in which these conflicts emerge. Still, as the Hollywood feature film Braveheart demonstrated, the mythologies of Scottish history retain a wide popular appeal and, regardless of their historical accuracy, prompt emotional responses as well as political reflection on contemporary cultural contexts. All historical narratives are 'fictional' in that they are selective reconstructions; the political questions they raise, however, address how history is presented, which aspects of its narrative are privileged, and which myths or ideologies 'history' debunks, reassesses, or valorizes.

The passage of dialogue that follows shows the author making an unsustainable parallel between modern MPs and Scottish feudal overlords which is challenged by his publisher and which the author then side-steps. Although methodologically untenable for a historian, the author's comparison may resonate with readers, partly because it shifts the focus of history from heroic battlefields to the more personal field of conflicting loyalties:

Publisher: . . . Why should modern Scots think their medieval victory matters today?

Author: Because our Scottish MPs are in the same state as the Scottish barons when they had sworn allegiance to the English king. . . . Today many Scots MPs (chiefly Labour ones) have enjoyed good salaries for years by their

attachment to Westminster Palace (sometimes called 'the best club in London'). . . .

Publisher: But Scottish MPs like Donald Dewar and Tam Dalyell are nothing like Bruce and Douglas and the Scottish feudal overlords.

Author: (growing excited) Thank goodness! Modern fighters for independence use votes, not swords, and if Britain is a democracy the Scots will get independence through the ballot box. (15/16)

Gray's author neatly manoeuvres away from the charge of ahistoricity by mounting a stirring defence of modern democracy.

Willy Maley draws attention to the constitutionalism implicit in Gray's definition of 'the Scots' and exposes the limits which Gray's parliamentarianism places on his prescriptions for political change. Maley argues:

Gray's intervention into the debate on Scotland's future is in keeping with a recent tradition of writing on the national question by writers who are chiefly male. The ruling discourse, the one that defines the territory, is 'his story' rather than 'herstory'. (57)

He goes on to suggest that Parliament is a space which lends itself "to the exercise of male power" (57).

However, Gray's text also displays a degree of self-consciousness in relation to its own discursive limits. For instance, in his discussion of the American Civil War, Gray undermines his own expressed confidence in democracy as an antidote to colonialism. According to Gray, the leaders of the United States, "created a democratic system to ensure that every American could vote for their government--except women, children, slaves, and the country's original inhabitants" (46). As the vast majority of the population is included in the exceptions, and the emancipation of slaves and women have been political landmarks in US history, Gray would seem to be making an ironic contrast between the rhetoric of democracy and its practical limitations.

Gray makes his readers aware of potential objections to *his* construction of Scottish history too. Discussing the Union of the Crowns in 1603, Gray draws a parallel between the position of James VI in the early seventeenth century and politicians in

contemporary Scotland which is, again, challenged by his publisher:

he was delighted to get away. It was much easier to rule Scotland from London.

Publisher: Are you going to tell me he was like the modern Scottish MP?

Author: Yes. In London he ruled England, Wales and Ireland too so felt much more important. (29)

Traditional historiography rarely places such emphasis on the emotional motivations behind the actions of key political figures. The 'delight' and 'ease' and 'being made to feel important' alluded to in the quotation above are not the conventional currency of historical discourses, but would not be out of place in literary fiction. Similarly, the dialectical exchanges between Author and Publisher, scripted in dramatic form, utilise a literary model.

Gray's use of imagery makes no more attempt to ape the styles of academic historical narrative than do his tone or narrative strategies. His uses of imagery bear closer resemblance to fictional genres than to historical writing (and are probably more entertaining as a result). For example, when Gray describes John Knox as "a great public speaker of the Hitler sort," (25) the apparently 'throw-away' comparison carries enormous negative associations. He fosters prejudices against other historical figures too; for instance, "William the Bastard" is more commonly known as William the Conqueror of England. He *was* an 'illegitimate' child, but in an era where such civil status is of little social importance, the nickname has acquired a derogatory colloquial association quite unrelated to questions of paternity. William later becomes "William the Waster" (13) in Gray's text, this new nickname reinforcing the insult implied by the first.

More subtly, Gray cultivates an impression that English society has been fostered by a bloody tyrannical monarchy, asserting, for instance, that, "Henry was a moderate, middle-of-the-road English king who impartially tortured and killed the extremists of every party that disagreed with him" (23). Of course, here Gray is satirising historical discourses which play-down or overlook the atrocities of the 'noble histories of great nations'. But by reinforcing the horrors of *English* history, Gray also

undermines any lingering Scottish 'inferiorism' that might harbour the notion that England and its people are somehow more civilized or cultured than their northern neighbours. Gray points out, "By mere omission I may have suggested the Scots were a nation of defiant peasants protected by popular kings" (22), but he does not chart the ignoble aspects of Scottish history with the wilful irony and graphic detail he reserves for his account of English history.

The voice of the publisher allows Gray to 'second guess' his readers to some extent by anticipating and pre-empting objections. It is notable that Canongate published another slim volume of pro-independence propaganda in the run-up to the 1992 General Election by a prominent Scottish Nationalist, Paul H. Scott, entitled Scotland in Europe: A Dialogue With A Sceptical Friend. The searching questions posed there and in Gray's volume give an impression of a dialogue, of critical engagement with problematic issues; in each book, the way in which questions are posed actually helps to structure and strengthen the author's argument.

It is interesting that Gray's most marked irony, exemplified in the portrayals of English and North American history quoted above, is reserved for moments when he implicates the acceptable face of imperial culture in imperialism's least palatable processes; he draws attention to the exclusionary and exploitative practices at the foundation of American democracy, just as he exposes the bloody side of England's rise to imperial dominance. In fact, it is notable that in both versions of Why Scots Should Rule Scotland Gray frames his discussion in language of imperial conquest. The first few pages of Gray's (1992) discussion of "The Scots and Where They Come From" is framed in terms of invasions and conquests--first Irish invaders, then Danish. Gray writes:

When the Danish empire (like all military empires) suddenly collapsed, Scotland and England were left within something like their present boundaries. (6)

Apart from placing Scotland in a larger historical and geographical context than that of the British Isles, Gray also reminds his

readers that European imperialism far predates the rise of the British Empire.³³

The collapse of military empires is a recurring motif in Gray's fiction--as will be discussed later; here, his general statement draws attention to historical developments of the eleventh century in order to draw comparisons with the historical processes operating in contemporary Scotland. Gray condenses the history of immigration in Scotland so that only a page later he is discussing Victorian Britain, again utilising language that suggests Scottish colonial status: "several rich Englishmen bought estates in the Highlands where land and native servants could be got almost as cheaply as in India" (7). Gray implies in Why Scots Should Rule Scotland that Scots do not recognise their colonization because they are under the illusion that they are equal partners in the imperial enterprise; the metaphoric comparison he makes between 'native servants' in India and Scots working on Highland estates stresses economic imbalance and power differential between Scotland and England, and positions Scots as colonial subjects. However, more problematically, he makes no mention of the role played by Scots in the colonisation of India.³⁴

The 1997 version of Why Scots Should Rule Scotland, even more than its earlier incarnation, focuses on issues of colonialism in relation to national identity. The 1997 edition is quite a bit longer than the original, is substantially rewritten, and seems less playful, due to fewer narrative disruptions and digressions. Many of the unqualified assertions Gray makes in his 1992 argument are substantiated and explained so that his case seems more rigorously argued. Although Gray's narrative is ostensibly historical, it is at least as concerned with questions of geography. The title of his first chapter, "The Ground of Argument," suggests not only the intellectual underpinning of Gray's thesis, but the very territorial claim upon which it is staked. Gray writes:

³³Gordon Donaldson (1966) begins his discussion of 'The Scots Overseas' with a similar focus on immigration and colonization over many centuries (p.11 ff.).

³⁴Donaldson notes that Henry Dundas, on the Board of Control for India from 1784-1801, "had the reputation of placing many of his countrymen in lucrative positions. Sir Walter Scott referred to the India Board as 'the corn chest for Scotland'" (202). However, Scottish military service in India predates trading links. Donaldson goes as far to say that, "As long as there was conquest or re-conquest to be done in India, Scots had a hand in it" (203).

My argument is not based on differences of race, religion or language, but geology. Landscape is what defines most lasting nations. (1)

This point is here made more explicitly than in the early version where Gray places greater emphasis on the broader social, cultural and political effects of geography (and farming methods) on the formation of the Scottish nation. Interestingly, geography, rather than history, is attracting increasing attention in postmodern approaches to identity.³⁵ A focus on physical geography poses some challenge to those who argue that nations are constructed largely within narrative, that is, temporal, discourses. It is useful to note Benita Parry's reminder that "discourses of representation should not be confused with material realities" (37); while the nation as a political, ideological, imaginary entity may indeed be grounded in narrative discourses, the physical landscape undoubtedly informs those discourses and may provide the most plausible (I hesitate to use the word 'natural') explanation for national boundaries.

By basing his argument in disputed territory, geographical and ideological, Gray positions himself to address issues of imperialism in relation to Scotland. His history of Scotland begins within the context of the Roman invasion of Britain, where he argues:

It sometimes seems that every nation in Europe has had a spell of bossing others in defiance of natural boundaries, yet every empire is at last undone by the appetite for home rule and inability to rule ourselves well while bossing neighbours or foreigners. (4)

This is a strong assertion; as well as identifying imperial paradigms at the heart of European civilization, Gray suggests that there is some degree of inevitability in the downfall of empires. Gray's use of words and phrases like "bossing", "in defiance of natural boundaries", and "at last undone", reveal his distaste for

³⁵See my earlier comments in the introduction (pp.35-39). Stuart Hall, in presenting an overview of cultural identity in relation to modernity, highlights the "new space-time combinations" arising from processes of globalization; he also stresses the significance of Edward Said's concept of 'imaginary geographies' to contemporary debates about identity. See Hall *et al*, eds., 1992; pp.299-301 and also Said, 1990 and Soja, 1993.

imperialism. Gray's anti-imperialism is, if anything, even more strident in the 1997 text than in the 1992 version, and he articulates Scotland's ambivalent position in relation to the British Empire (at its height in the nineteenth century) with greater flexibility. He argues:

Many Scots used imperial connections as ladders to careers elsewhere, others found profitable work at home. . . . This vitality hid the fact that, except at local level, Scotland had no government. (72)

Gray makes explicit connections between the economic exploitation and lack of participative government in the colonies with the situation *within* Scotland. Crucially, he links the demands for Scottish home-rule of the late nineteenth century--the origins of the modern movement for self-government--with the demands coming from Ireland (Britain's "most debated colony" [72]) for home-rule.

Discussing the failure of British MPs to address Scottish concerns, Gray argues that they could ignore Scotland:

They could do so because only the labouring classes who did not vote felt deprived of their rights. Scotland's middle-class thought themselves junior partners in a world-wide everlasting English Empire.

PUBLISHER: Please! BRITISH Empire!

AUTHOR: Yes, Wales and Ireland and Scotland were in it but England's governing class led the way. (73)

Gray *attempts* to establish a case for Scottish independence with an anti-imperial character, even though at times, he overlooks (or underestimates) Scottish contributions to British imperialism, and occasionally reverts to unsubstantiated generalisations or assertions. However, in spite of these weaknesses, it is clear that Gray's economic concerns about relations of production within and outwith Scotland are a fundamental and integral part of his anti-imperial critique, not merely an accommodation of socialism within a nationalist outlook.

Anti-imperial nationalisms have found more currency in Scottish cultural debates than in the political arena. During the nineteen-eighties periodicals such as Cencrastus and Radical Scotland published many articles which 'bridged the gap' between

cultural and political debate in Scotland. A cursory glance through pages of Cencrastus shows how the magazine attempted to stimulate and sustain debate on issues such as 'Inferiorism' and Scottish self-government while also cultivating an international literary and artistic awareness.³⁶ It is interesting to note how the theme of colonization has caught the imagination of writers who have come to prominence in the nineties. The film version of Trainspotting, Irvine Welsh's phenomenally successful novel alluded to earlier, has, arguably, given greater *popular* currency to the idea that Scotland assumes something akin to a colonial position within the UK.

Gray actually quotes from a story by Welsh in the introduction to Why Scots Should Rule Scotland, 1997. Faced with anti-colonial resentment against Britain, the narrator of Welsh's story "Eurotrash" wishes to disclaim the British side of his identity, asserting instead that, "the Scots were the last oppressed colony of the British Empire." He admits, however: "I don't really believe it, though; the Scots oppress themselves by their obsession with the English which breeds the negatives of hatred, fear, servility, contempt and dependency" (x). Gray's comments on Welsh's cultural assessment are telling. Gray writes:

That unhealthy state of mind will always occur while most Scottish opinion has no influence on how Scots are ruled. But it is not my state of mind. (x)

Although anti-imperialism has been a consistent theme in Gray's work since the nineteen-fifties, he distances himself quite explicitly from the position attributed to 'the Scots' by Welsh's narrator. Gray's pamphlets, then, can be read as attempts to analyse and negotiate the ambiguous position of Scotland in relation to its imperial heritage as colonizer and colonized, and to understand Scotland's vexed political relationship with England in terms of larger patterns of political and economic power, rather than solely as a reaction against English cultural dominance. It is indicative of Gray's awareness of a nationalist paradox--namely, that nationalism is by definition exclusive, however provisional such exclusions may be--that he makes such efforts to define 'the

³⁶Editions from the early eighties, particularly 1983-84, indicate that these issues were lively contested.

Scots' in terms of waves of immigration. He is at pains to include those often 'Othered' within colonial processes.

Why Scots Should Rule Scotland, as Maley notes, is an "optimistic demand for independence, planted firmly in the past" (57). He contrasts Gray's approach with James Kelman's "pessimistic handing of the future, rooted in the contemporary" (57). However, in the stories to be discussed in the next section, Gray's approach is more akin to that attributed to Kelman. Temporal perspective is very important to "The Start of the Axletree" and "Five Letters from an Eastern Empire"; in contrast to Gray's polemical essays, both stories are temporally unspecific and cannot easily be related to a particular national situation. They are "Unlikely Stories" indeed, but this should not detract from their political significance.

The Emperor's New Clothes

The stories in Unlikely Stories, Mostly, Gray's first published collection of short fiction, were written between 1951 and 1984; several were published individually before appearing in this collection. Perhaps because of the relatively large time-span of composition, the individual stories show a considerable amount of stylistic diversity. What connects the stories, however, is that most of them eschew naturalism and all of them share a preoccupation with relations of power. The individual tales have tended to receive less critical attention than Gray's novels (reflecting, perhaps, the privileged position of the novel in literary discourses), although the quality of Gray's stories, in my view, at least matches that of his longer fictions. The stories I plan to discuss in this section, "The Start of the Axletree" and "Five Letters from an Eastern Empire," were both published for the first time in 1979.³⁷ As Peter G. Christensen has pointed out, these stories seem to form part of a five-story unit within Unlikely Stories, along with "Logopandocy", "Prometheus", and "The End of the Axletree". However, these other stories were published for the

³⁷Charlton notes that in fact Gray began writing the "Start of the Axletree," then entitled "The Great Tower," on his return from Gibraltar in 1959 (Crawford and Nairn, eds., 1991; p.181).

first time in Unlikely Stories, Mostly. Arguably, the most overt intertextual relationship between them is the one between the two 'Axletree' stories which frame the group; however, as Christensen demonstrates, the power of language to shape human societies is a concern common to all five stories. The two stories I have opted to discuss in detail are amongst the most subtle and impressive in the whole volume, and they interact vividly with discourses of imperialism. The critiques of imperialism they offer may have some general application, but more significantly, chart what Gray seems to see as a paradigm shift away from the dominance of European imperialism, towards the dominance of consumer capitalism (with its attendant military escalation during the Cold War years) as a global neo-imperial force.

While Gray has set the vast majority of his fictions in landscapes that are discernibly, however unnaturalistically or problematically, related to physical geographical locales (mostly, but not exclusively, Glasgow) these two stories are notable for their geographical and historical vagueness; "The Start of the Axletree" and "Five Letters from an Eastern Empire" are highly abstract imaginative fictions. Those texts in which Gray *does* create a particular sense of time and place are often extremely successful in disrupting historical and spatial perspectives precisely because Gray plays with, and subverts, his readers' senses of recognition, verisimilitude and literary expectation. I discuss the ideological engagement of some of these texts in other chapters. I want to argue, however, that these more abstract stories wear their ideological colours 'on their sleeves' too, illustrating Gray's wide stylistic range. Although Gray can use specific places and specific historical moments to enter political debates from keenly declared, if sometimes complex, ideological standpoints, these, his most 'unlikely stories', utilise the *absence* of specific cultural markers to chart a similar ideological terrain, one which is, none the less, primarily concerned with the processes of history and territorial advancement.

One effect of Gray's dislocation of "The Start of the Axletree" from any particular time and space is that he can conjure a range of associations and allusions from across a wide spectrum of cultures and civilisations. The fictional civilization which begins to

build the Axletree bears resemblances to modern Western society, but Gray's imagery and language evoke other civilizations, ancient, modern, and metaphysical; knowledge of these other civilizations contributes to contemporary discourses of civilization and, in many cases, still exerts considerable influence on contemporary society. The allusive range of cultural references in the story can, then, be seen as a intertextual conglomeration of diverse discourses shaping Western civilization.

Gray's story can be read as a universal myth of imperial advancement and decline. His story charts the origins of imperial processes, shows its temporary success, and sounds a prophetic warning about the damaging consequences, and inevitable decline of empires. It is precisely the universalising tendency of Gray's story (which might tend to support a master-narrative of imperialism) that is its most troublesome and intriguing aspect. Gray does seem to resist such tendencies, but not entirely to displace the idea that the empire in the story is an inhuman machine which humans are unable to control.

Gray is rather more successful, however, in creating a parable which narrates the development and transformation of imperialism in the twentieth century, from the demise of the British Empire (and the period of European imperial dominance) to the rise of (North American-dominated) global capitalism, or neo-colonialism, as it has been dubbed by numerous commentators from the so-called Third World. Crucially, "The Start of the Axletree" and "Five Letters from an Eastern Empire" explore the role of literature in neo-imperialism, not only its well-documented historical role in European imperial projects. "The Start of the Axletree" illustrates clearly the connections between the violence of political imperialism and what Gayatri Spivak terms the "epistemic violence" of imperial discourses.³⁸ Here, as in other stories, Gray bridges the gulf imperialism imposes between art and politics and exposes its processes.

In some respects "The Start of the Axletree" is a deconstructionist's dream text, emphasising as it does the role of

³⁸Spivak uses this phrase extensively in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (in Grossberg and Nelson, eds., 1988; pp.271-313) and also uses it in "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," (in Warhol and Herndl, eds., p.804).

signification, of *langue* and parole, in the ideological systems of its fictional milieu. Gray's narrator begins with the utterance, "I write for those who speak my language" (67)--after all, who else would be able to make sense of the text? But this enigmatic opening induces a certain unease by highlighting the conditionality of any 'straightforward' interpretation; it implies there are other languages, other ways of framing understanding, and displaces at the outset any latent complacency which would afford readers a premature sense of security in relation to the text. When Gray reminds his readers that the story's description of the "bowl of empire under the dome of heaven," is a "rhetorical model of the universe" (69), he emphasises the role of language, of rhetoric, in the construction of ideological frameworks, and he begs the question whether equally rhetorical, and empty, models may operate and carry political weight in the contemporary material world.

The ambiguity of perspective in "The Start of the Axletree" stems from its hint that maybe, as in Lanark, Gray is presenting a barely discernible portrait of contemporary society. However imaginary or generalised the comments of Gray's narrator, they leave open the possibility that he is viewing twentieth-century Western civilization with hindsight from an unspecified point in the future. It is just conceivable that the "republic of small farmers in a land between two lakes" (68) which was the narrator's home, could be Scotland--though plenty other parts of the planet could fit this tenuous description, including the USA.

The narrator claims to having been "born and educated at the hub of the last and greatest world empire" (68). In Poor Things (1992), Duncan Wedderburn, a character in the novel, writes (under the heading of "MODERN FACTS") that, "The British Empire is the largest Empire the world has ever known" (95). Of course, this is voiced by a nineteenth-century character, speaking at a time when the British Empire extended over much of the world. However, as the twentieth century draws to a close, British imperial power has waned considerably (although the British State continues to play a role in international politics incommensurate with its size and economic might), while the

power and influence of the USA has flourished.³⁹ However, perhaps the comparison with Wedderburn's comments have a more telling insight; perhaps many of those living within an empire believe it to be the last and greatest. In Poor Things, Wedderburn becomes insane and makes apocalyptic utterances at every opportunity. "The Start of the Axletree" suggests that civilizations do come to an end and that empires will fall, eventually. Although the period of high British imperialism is over, it is possible to see all of Western Europe and North America at the hub of a new empire of global consumer capitalism as the end of the century draws near. As Robins argues, "For all that it has projected itself as transhistorical and transnational. . . global capitalism has in reality been about westernization--the export of western commodities, values, priorities, ways of life" (25).

The impact of globalization is a complex and contentious field in its own right, but influential commentators from humanities backgrounds and disciplines have not hesitated to designate US foreign policy in the post-war years as imperialistic. Noam Chomsky's American Power and the New Mandarins (1969) makes explicit in its title the metaphoric parallel Chomsky draws between the ancient imperial Chinese ruling class and those who have wielded political power in the United States in the post-war period. Edward Said, writing after the end of the Cold War between the USA and USSR (and their respective allies) is fiercely critical of the imperialism of the New World Order in Culture and Imperialism. When Gray's narrator in "The Start of the Axletree" talks of the history of his own civilisation as "a tangle of superstition and rumours" (67), he could be offering a description of a postmodern world where historical discourses, rather than being authoritative, have succumbed to discursive frameworks in which historical 'truth' is much harder to determine.

The graphic that accompanies the story's title page offers a particularly rich and open range of significations. The angular head is slightly reminiscent of the Sphinx--a hallmark of Egyptian civilization's highest imperial moments--but the head lies below

³⁹Gittings (1995) makes a similar point about a shift from English to US domination in international commerce and politics in his discussion of 1982. Janine (in Lyons and Coyle, eds., 1995; p.24).

the plinth on which stand two legs, broken off below the knee. It also recalls Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem "Ozymandias" (1818). However, its strongest and most sustained allusions are to two Hebrew narratives, the first, that of the Babylonian Emperor Nebuchadnezzar (c.605-562 BC) contained in the Book of Daniel, and the second, the Tower of Babel story from the Book of Genesis (Chapter 11).⁴⁰

Like Gray's story, the Book of Daniel (written around 167-164 BC, at a time when the Jews were being persecuted by the Syrian king) is a story about [Jewish] resistance to [Babylonian] cultural imperialism. The editors of the New Jerusalem Bible note that the narrative contains allegorical visions, "which guarantee the collapse of the persecution".⁴¹ In contrast to Gray's story, however, which warns of imminent destruction, the Book of Daniel predicts a "glorious future" for the people of God.⁴² Gray's use of Hebrew narrative is significant not only because the latter provides one of the most powerful founding narratives of Western civilization, but also because the Hebrew Bible is quite unique in documenting the history of a people--a nation--over approximately a thousand year period. Indeed, the linear constructions of historical narrative so pervasive in contemporary Western discourse are a cultural inheritance from Judaism. The editors note that within the Hebrew canon, the Book of Daniel is usually generically categorised as a type of "edifying fiction",⁴³ notwithstanding the fact that the fictional paradigms of sacred Hebrew literature have often been ignored in Christian readings of the texts. Gray draws attention to the generic diversity of the Old Testament in his interview with Anderson and Norquay.⁴⁴ Gray's highly moral parable of the Axletree might also be thought of as 'edifying fiction', but Gray is also disrupting, subverting, and re-

⁴⁰Anne Varty (1991), Beat Witschi (1991), and Peter G. Christensen (1995) all note Gray's allusions to the Genesis myth.

⁴¹New Jerusalem Bible (Pocket Edition) p.1065.

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴In his interview with Anderson and Norquay (in Cenchrastus No.13, 1983) Gray argues: "you can soothe yourself with stoical fatalism in Ecclesiastes, stimulate yourself erotically with the Song of Solomon, get revolutionary fervour from Isaiah" (9). See also my own interview with Gray, Appendix, pp.315-316.

directing a founding narrative of his culture in order to 'rewrite' the interpretive frameworks of the contemporary world.

In the Book of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar demands: "Peoples, nations, languages! . . . you will prostrate yourselves and worship the golden statue set up by King Nebuchadnezzar" (3:5), but he faces Jewish resistance. Earlier, Daniel, the Jewish sage, has interpreted the Emperor's vision of a statue with a gold head and feet of clay (2:31-36) as a vision of the gradual decline of his kingdom. However, in predicting the demise of Nebuchadnezzar's empire, Daniel predicts that, "the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed . . . it will shatter and absorb all the previous kingdoms and itself last for ever" (2:44). While the central elements of this story--the inexplicable dream, perplexed emperor, wise sage, and future vision--are all present in Gray's story, he counters the narrative's suggestion that the new empire will be everlasting. There is an indirect link between Gray's treatment of empire in "The Start of the Axletree" and the more recent description he makes of postmodernism in A History Maker, referred to already in my introduction. There Gray writes: "like owners of earlier empires they [landlords, businessmen, brokers and bankers] felt that history had ended because they and their sort could now dominate the world for ever" (202); the relevance of this passage to "The Start of the Axletree" is marked, given the shared concern of both of these texts with the end of empires.

The enduring messages of the Book of Daniel can be summarized as follows: although temporal rulers think their empires will perpetuate themselves indefinitely, human empires rise and fall; there will be a better future ahead for the people of Israel, free from oppression, when the kingdom of God is established. Gray's story would seem to concur with the part of this postulation regarding the end of empires, but does not support the assumption that a subsequent kingdom will be better than its predecessor. In "The Start of the Axletree," the emperor advises his successors to dedicate the newly built temple "to god and his true prophet, but don't name them. Keep the official religion a kind of *cavity* which other religions can fill" (82). This religious vacuum helps the empire to flourish, but also helps Gray

to break the narrative of imperial renewal whereby one empire simply gives way to another without challenging imperialism's binary them/us, dominant/dominated dynamics.

Although Gray uses features of Hebrew narrative in his story, he changes both the narrative perspective and thematic focus in his own text. Crucially, where the Hebrew story of imperial rise and fall is told from the perspective of a marginalized and oppressed party which can only profit from the demise of the empire, and so draws comfort from the inevitability of its decline, Gray's narrative makes subtle associations between the abstract, fictional empire building, the Axletree, and twentieth century imperial projects. For instance, he captures the enduring appeal of the American dream and may even envision the skyline of New York when the fictional empire builders insist:

the outer walls must be faced with shining marble! . . . If it looks beautiful from a distance I am sure foreign provinces will gladly let us continue taking their food, materials and men at the old cheap rate. Everyone want to admire something wonderful. (81)

Gray positions his readers so that they have an ambiguous relationship with the empire in the story, on one hand identifying it with Western civilisation, on the other, maintaining a critical distance from it. He also stresses how aesthetic qualities can be used to justify or sustain a morally indefensible economic order. The back-plate of Unlikely Stories, Mostly sheds light on this point. The text reads, "By arts is formed that great mechanical man called a state," and it captions a graphic panorama of Scotland overseen by a monarchical figure made-up of tiny human figures, who wields power through his sword of "force" and sceptre of "persuasion". The role of aesthetic discourses, of which fiction is one, in persuading people to conform to the rules of the 'mechanical man'--an inhuman system--is brought to the fore.⁴⁵

Having alluded to the inevitable demise of all empires, Gray reveals how the empire in his own story finds, instead, "a new way to grow" (81). Like the emperor Nebuchadnezzar, the

⁴⁵Anne Varty argues that Gray's concern with mechanisation in the modern world recalls the concerns of Thomas Carlyle in the nineteenth century (Crawford and Nairn, eds., p.133).

emperor in Gray's story consults 'outsiders' to interpret his dreams. Gray's emperor has a terrible dream in which he envisions his empire

like a loose chariot wheel across a stony plain. Millions of tiny people clung to the hub and to the spokes and he was among them. The wheel turned faster and faster and the tiny people fell to the rim and were whirled up again or flung to the plain where the rim rolled over them. (76)

This vision of civilization shows the empire of the Great Wheel as a machine that is out of control, crushing human beings in its course. As Gray also suggests in Lanark, the system seems to have taken priority over the needs of the people who created it. In "The Start of the Axletree," the saint tells the emperor that he is, "dreaming the disease. Now you must dream the cure" (76). He beats the emperor until receiving a satisfactory response from him. Dreamt out of such extreme violence, the 'cure' the emperor dreams is the Axletree. The Axletree modifies a more familiar human structure with strong symbolic associations, the tower. The emperor tells his functionaries:

Do not call it a tower! Towers are notorious for falling down. Tell the fools you are building a connection between two absolutely dependable things. Call it an Axletree. (82)

This is another clear allusion to, and departure from, Hebrew mythology--in this case the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11). However, the myth of humans trying to build their way to heaven has been widely disseminated and appears in many cultural contexts. The Hebrew myth appears in Genesis just after the story of the great flood; it contends that prior to the construction of the Tower of Babel, the "whole world spoke the same language" (11:1); thus there are strong suggestions in the opening line of "The Start of the Axletree" that its narrator speaks from a post-apocalyptic position.

However, in Gray's story, the tower's construction process has distinct economic associations absent in the Hebrew narrative. The 'bowl of empire' that precedes the construction of the Axletree is an economic system: "The garrisons on foreign soil were built with stores and markets where local merchants could ply their trade in safety, so they became centres of prosperous

new cities" (69). The Axletree, by contrast, has a slightly different economic foundation: gold kept in the vault of the Axletree itself. The emperor tells his political advisors:

The fact that it exists and you own it will give the company more power over men than mere spending could give. Lend on the security of this gold, borrow on the security of this gold, if creditors press you hard *cheat* on the security of this gold. But never, never touch it. (82)

Here Gray illustrates the transition into a new kind of economic imperialism and a global empire. Gray inserts economic relations into his social equations so that his histories of nations and empires are *also* histories of economic systems.

The rather apocalyptic ending of the story is ambiguous. Gray states abruptly:

For two thousand years this construction gave employment to mankind and a purpose to history. But there was a sky. We reached it. Everyone knows what happened after that. (83)

Here an appeal to a material reality emerges. There *is* a sky. Although those at the hub of the empire live in a sort of hyper-reality (their "feet never touch the ground"[82]), the ground exists nevertheless. The appeal to 'common knowledge' here works in several ways. It suggests that such knowledge is so self-evident as to be not worth stating. But of course, Gray does not tell us what happened 'after that'--at least in this story-- preferring to leave it to his readers' imaginations. The short sentences and centred typography which narrows to a conclusion have a reductive effect, suggesting that the constructive employment and purpose come to a sudden and sticky end. Also, if we accept Gray's assessment of imperial history, deductive reasoning might lead us to conclude that, like other empires, this one will end, but perhaps more catastrophically.⁴⁶ In fact, Gray does elaborate on "The End of the Axletree" in the story of that name, where he describes the end of the civilization, detailing appalling environmental destruction and loss of life. The second story takes up the Tower of Babel allusion

⁴⁶ Horkheimer and Adorno's post-war analyses of 20th century consumer culture (which also display Biblical influence in their prophetic tone and religiously charged language) might seem equally apocalyptic.

again, arguing in its final paragraphs that economic and social forces will once again give rise to an empire: "the accumulation of capital which created the first great tower will lead to another, or to something very similar" (271). Yet in that story, Gray leaves open the possibility that such patterns can be broken, and he leaves his readers with a powerful challenge:

But men are not completely sheeplike. Their vanity ensures that they never exactly repeat the past, if they know what it is. So if you have understood this story you had better tell it to others. (271)

"The Start of the Axletree" challenges readers too. Like Gray's emperor, who is forced to dream his future, the text leaves open to its readers imaginative opportunities as well as apocalyptic warnings; readers are challenged to dream beyond the deterministic confines of the imperialistic cycle. There is certainly a tension here, if not a contradiction, between Gray's investment in the liberatory potential of the imagination and his commitment to praxis in the material realm. However, the strength of such a position, despite its tensions, is that it allows Gray to realign the relationship between the material and the imaginative, and even helps to distinguish between the material and the imaginary. Indirectly, Gray challenges theoretical conceptions of modernity which lose sight of 'reality' or lose the ability to articulate reality in any politically cogent formulation.

"Five Letters from an Eastern Empire" is another story from Gray's first collection which examines imperial processes in an abstract way. For me, it is his finest story, although some aspects of its ideological critique and cultural prescriptions might lead readers to bleak conclusions. But its greatest strength lies in its salutary warning of the ability of imperial power to corrupt and destroy human society, and to contain and appropriate resistance. Most importantly, it is an incisive exposé of the collusion of literary endeavour in the exercise of systematic political power.

Like "The Start of the Axletree", this story's concern with the damaging social effects of imperialism tends at times to overlook the inherent contradictions of imperial discourses. Resistance is a crucial concept for "Five Letters from an Eastern Empire" and one

which presents critical problems. Political resistance constructed through literary discourses is a topic which has occupied critics as well as writers. Slemon outlines key issues arising from the work of Cudjoe and Harlow, leading theorists of literary resistance. Slemon argues:

For Cudjoe and Harlow, resistance is an act, or a set of acts, that is designed to rid a people of its oppressors. . . . *Literary* resistance, under these conditions, can be seen as a form of contractual understanding between text and reader, one which is embedded in a experiential dimension and buttressed by a political and cultural aesthetic at work in the culture. And 'resistance literature', in this definition, can thus be seen as that category of literary writing which emerges as an integral part of an organized struggle or resistance for national liberation. (107)

Several aspects of this definition might hold an initial appeal for any Gray critic--Gray's work often appears to depend on a prior knowledge of Scottish social and cultural contexts and to engage directly with Scottish nationalist discourses. At face value, Gray's repeated allusions to Scotland's current political context, its national history, and his overt appeals for Scottish self-government may suggest a direct engagement with a struggle for national liberation. However, Slemon highlights some problems with such formations of resistance which are also relevant to Gray. First, Slemon points out that "centre/periphery notions of resistance can actually work to *re inscribe* centre/periphery relations and can 'serve an institutional function of securing the dominant narratives'" (107). In "Five Letters From an Eastern Empire," Bohu's attempt at literary rebellion is appropriated by the imperial power and used to secure the empire.

A somewhat related problem arising from Gray's narrative is that the abstract milieu of the story actually helps to *create* a literary Other. Although, as in the 'Axletree' stories, Gray gives every indication that he is writing about Western civilization, he projects his cultural critique onto an *Eastern* empire. In Orientalism Edward Said argues that the Orient has served as the Other of Western civilization for centuries and analyses the negative political consequences of this process of 'orientalism'.

Gray, although he does make a substantial assault on some aspects of imperial discourse, does not challenge orientalism in this particular story where the allusions to oriental culture are overt. This is not to overlook the history of imperialism in the Far East; however, if, as numerous postcolonial commentators have argued, Others--be they 'oriental' or female--are necessary for the binary dynamic of domination to operate, Gray's failure to undermine more effectively the binary distinction between East and West, subject and object, is a fairly serious limitation. It creates tensions in the story that are never adequately addressed.

However, other aspects of the story do make a more sustained attack on imperial ideology, most notably in documenting the role of writers and critics in imperial processes. The story, as its title suggests, is written in epistletory form and follows the lives of state poets Bohu and Tohu. As in the 'Axletree' stories, Hebrew influence is evident: the poets' names are Hebrew and although the story does not reveal their meanings, they translate into english as 'Null' and 'Void'.⁴⁷ In the very act of naming the central figures of his story, Gray diminishes their status. At the outset this can be read as a stark assertion of their worthlessness, the futility of their artistic endeavours, and the emptiness of their poetry. Initially, this appears to contrast sharply with the pivotal role ascribed to art and literature in the 'Axletree' stories.

Gray uses the similarity of the poets' names, as well as their shared circumstances, to create a communality between them. They are each other's closest friend and ally. A clear, classical distinction is made between their respective literary endeavours. Bohu is the emperor's tragic poet, Tohu, his comic poet. Although the role of Bohu, the tragic poet, is privileged over that of Tohu, reflecting the conventional Aristotelian ranking of tragedy and comedy, in the course of the story the poets themselves become aware of their dependence upon each other. Gray subverts the traditional literary hierarchy by developing a mutuality between the two characters, and exposes the problematic aspects of sustaining a polarity between tragedy and comedy.

⁴⁷I am indebted to Sarah Nicholson and Alec Ryrie for pointing this out to me.

While preparing to write their great literary works, the poets work in the service of the empire. Bohu is set to "improve the wording of rumours authorized by the emperor, while Tohu improves the 'unauthorized' ones broadcast by the beggars' association" (105). Both poets are manipulating discourses for the ends of the empire, but even the 'unauthorized' discourses that run counter to the officially sanctioned edicts are seen to be part of one larger, imperial discourse over which the emperor exerts considerable influence. The idea that Tohu, a state poet, is employed improving the strength of oppositional voices within the empire raises questions about the very possibility of resisting imperial power, suggesting, as it does, that such resistance will find accommodation at the heart of the empire and will be used to maintain it.

One of the most interesting features of the story is that it is the fictional *critic*, not the poet, who defines Bohu's poetic message and uses it to justify genocide. Gray's apparently flippant engagement with critics on his dust-jackets and in self-penned blurbs takes on a very serious aspect when seen in relation to the role of the Headmaster of Literature in "Five Letters from an Eastern Empire," where Gray makes a more sustained critique of how critical practices can affect the way in which literary discourses can be put to political effect in the material world. In interview, Gray has acknowledged "a certain anti-academic impulse, although I'm the sort of person who rather enjoys academicism."⁴⁸ The story, then, can possibly be read as a plea for responsible, politically engaged criticism, rather than as a warning that 'resistance is futile'. Perhaps more serious questions about resistance are raised by the fact that resistance emerges or is quashed within interpretative frameworks, within social contexts. Slemon challenges the idea that "literary resistance is somehow *there* in the text as a structure of intentionality" (108). As he puts it:

Post-Lacanian and post-Althusserian theories of the constructedness of subjectivity, however, would contest such easy access to representational purity, and would argue instead that resistance is grounded in the *multiple* and

⁴⁸Interview with Anderson and Norquay, p.8.

contradictory structures of ideological interpellation or subject formation--which would call down the notion that resistance can *ever* be purely intended or 'purely' expressed in representational or communicative models. (108)

There is plenty of salutary warning here to anyone who would want to read Gray's stories as political tracts. Nevertheless, it is in the very complexity of Gray's constructions of subjectivity and his destabilization of representational systems that his work challenges most forcefully the ideological foundations of imperialism. As Spivak reminds us in "Can the Subaltern Speak?", destabilizing meaning will not necessarily promote political progress, but in terms of Gray's work, such destabilizations highlight the fractures and tensions of Western imperial culture's epistemological norms.

Perspective is as important to "Five Letters from an Eastern Empire" as it is to "The Start of the Axletree". The naive narrator, the poet Bohu, beginning his first letter to his parents, states: "I like the new palace. It is all squares like a chessboard" (87). His comparison of the landscape to a chessboard suggests an overview of the terrain, but also connotes the strategic manoeuvres associated with the game (which does in fact seem to have originated in the East). However, the beauty of the new palace soon wanes for Bohu when he reflects on what he will be asked to write:

I knew I would be commanded to celebrate a great act and the greatest act of our age is the building of the new palace. How many millions lost their homes to clear the ground? How many orphans were prostituted to keep the surveyors happy? How many captives died miserably quarrying the stone? How many small sons and daughters were trampled to death in the act of wiping sweat from the eyes of desperate, bricklaying parents who had fallen behind schedule? (93)

The grandeur of the imperial project, made concrete in the construction of its edifice, is seriously undermined by the stream of rhetorical questions posed by Bohu. Like the Axletree, the new palace is a construction built by exploited labourers. Bohu's

questions imply it is a murderous endeavour, an "act of intricately planned cruelty" (93).

Gray describes the emperor's two greatest helpers as:

the two tallest men in the empire. One of them is:

*Fieldmarshal Ko who commands all imperial armies
and police and defeats all imperial enemies. . . .*

The other is:

*Bohu, the great poet. His mind is the largest in the
land. (107)*

A phonetic rendition of the Fieldmarshal's name suggests the role of capital in imperial processes. Fieldmarshal Ko --or is it Co?--has no concept of inherent human worth, judging humans instead by their usefulness to the system; the extremity of such a view is moderated by Ko's rationalisation that the most dispensable people are outwith his own borders: "*He hates unnecessary people but says 'Most of them are outside the great wall.'*" (107). At this point Bohu, distanced from Ko's outlook, and afraid of the emperor's power, has made no connection between their dehumanising authority and his own pivotal role in creating and maintaining it. He is "pleased to learn there were only two tallest men in the empire" (108) and enjoys both the prestige granted to him and his status over his rival Tohu. Bohu has been lulled into complacent service of the empire.

At this point tension becomes evident regarding the question of 'null and void' poets mentioned earlier; in fact Bohu is immensely powerful, although he is not yet fully aware of it. Bohu becomes aware of his own human agency when he actually meets the emperor. Gray literalizes the metaphor of a 'puppet emperor' by presenting an emperor who is described as a ventriloquist's dummy--the mouthpiece of another. Bohu says, "I had known the emperor was not human, but was so surprised to see he was not alive" (112). Earlier Bohu has started to become aware of the emperor's primary role in the empire's rotten processes of consumption; his imagination leads him to consider "the peculiar withered-apple-face of the immortal emperor. . . . I feel his blind eyes could eat me up and a few days later the sweet sly mouth would spit me out in a new, perhaps improved form" (107). The

discovery that the emperor is not alive makes Bohu realise that, "The wisdom of an emperor has nothing to do with his character. It is the combined intelligence of everyone who obeys him" (112). This is crucially important, so much so that Gray has Bohu repeat it to himself with a small modification of its context that makes the point even more forcefully relevant to a contemporary audience:

The sublime truth of this entered me with such force that I gasped for breath. Yes. The wisdom of a government is the combined intelligence of those who obey it. (112)

The power and authority of the emperor stems from those who do not challenge his authority. In this respect Gray attributes agency to his tragic poet, Bohu, and by extension the other people of the empire; it is agency which is accompanied by a degree of responsibility for the maintenance and perpetuation of the empire. Bohu's immediate response is one of keen compliance; he is happy to enjoy his position, but having recognised the emperor as a "simpering dummy"(113), it is now *Bohu* who adopts the characteristics of a ventriloquist's doll:

'Sir!' I said, 'I hear and respect your order, I hear and respect your order!' I went on saying this unable to stop. (113)

The full brutality of the construction of the new palace is brought home to Bohu when he learns that the emperor, with the help of Ko, has destroyed the old capital and with it all the "unnecessary people" (113), including Bohu's family. Bohu's poetic task is to write a poem that justifies the re-establishment of peace and tranquillity. Bohu has lost his innocence and can no longer acquiesce to the rule of the empire knowing his own stake in its perpetuation.

The headmaster of literature tries to console Bohu by telling him that he can bring literary immortality to his family. Bohu is urged to bring his

father, mother and city to life and death again in a tragedy, a tragedy the whole nation will read. Remember that the world is one vast graveyard of defunct cities, all destroyed by the shifting of markets they could not control, and all compressed by literature into a handful of poems. (117)

There is a grim historical determinism attributed to the imperial process here; the headmaster has already admitted to Bohu that "the emperor would have destroyed the old capital even without a rebellion" (116), so certain are the imperial powers of the course of events. The role of the poet, of literature, in this process is central. Bohu's great poem is not to be "an ordinary piece of political excuse-making" (118); the headmaster, trying to justify the murder of Bohu's parents, tells him, "a poet must feel the cracks in the nation splitting his individual heart. How else can he mend them?" (118). Bohu refuses to comply, stating, "I refuse to mend this cracked nation" (118).

Instead Bohu gives up. He decides to die, but before his death writes a poem which he believes will expose the evils at the heart of the empire and help to destroy it. However, the headmaster of literature alters his work so that it is suitable for the purposes of the empire. The role of the poet and of the critic are central to Gray's analysis of the mythologies which 'authorize' the empire. The narratives which shape the perceptions of the populace as to 'how things are' are founded in literary discourses. The Headmaster of Literature believes that Bohu's poem, written to expose and counter the 'Emperor's Injustice' in destroying the city, in fact reinforces the Emperor's power and justifies his actions. He says that Bohu,

presents the destruction as a simple stunning inevitable fact. The child, mother and common people in the poem exist passively. . . .The active agents of hoof, sabre and (by extension) crow, belong to the emperor. . . Consider the *weight* this poem gives to our immortal emperor! He is not described or analysed, he is presented as a final, competent, all embracing force, as unarguable as the weather, as inevitable as death. This is how all governments should appear to people who are not in them. (132)

Bohu's resistance is neutralised and appropriated. Such contextual critical analysis *within* the literary text, is immensely interesting because it shows Gray turning the tables on critical practices, exposing the inherent political bias of any analytical strategy, as well as interpreting Bohu's poem. Gray's commentary on his own work has, arguably, wider relevance for those among his fictions

which 'unwrite' the myths and narratives on which imperialism is founded. Gray's self-critique is comparable to deconstructive critical practices. While the strength of Gray's approach lies in its exposé of how imperial power operates, its major limitation is that it suggests no possible strategies of resistance. Indeed, the empire in Gray's story may even universalise the concept of imperialism, making its power appear total. The story ends with Bohu's death and the destruction of the city. He is totally defeated by the empire, although he refuses to comply with it any longer. He can only exercise agency by choosing to die; that does not seem to me a liberative strategy! Perhaps the most shocking aspect of "Five Letters From an Eastern Empire" is that Bohu's poem, intended as a devastating critique of the emperor's actions, actually makes possible and facilitates the destruction of the old capital.

Although the temporally and spatially unspecific realm of the story may help to reinforce notions of imperial power as universal and totalising, it does allow Gray to illustrate how temporal perspectives shape the way in which literary discourses take on social salience. Bohu writes his poem believing that the city and his family have already been destroyed by the emperor, but after Bohu's death, the Headmaster reveals that this has not yet happened. Bohu believes he is writing an epitaph for his culture, but in fact he is assisting its destruction. Because Bohu's fictional context is ambiguously located in time and space, his 'backward look' at his own culture can destabilize conventional empirical ways of structuring and relating to time and space. "Five Letters from an Eastern Empire" helps to show how interpretative frameworks can shut down or leave open opportunities for resistance. As in "The Start of the Axletree," it is imaginary possibilities that offer the brightest glimmer of hope to those resisting imperial power. Despite their bleak conclusions both stories offer an imaginative agency, that is, the power to construct and interpret the past and the present. It could be argued that this is no compensation for genuine political power in the material world; however, if literature has had the powerful role in the construction of modern Europe and European imperialism attributed to it, it seems feasible that the power of literary discourses to unsettle imperial discourses will be considerable too.

In "Five Letters from an Eastern Empire," it is in Bohu's reconstruction of childhood memories that "The rebellion begins" (115). Bohu's rebellion is personal and is based on a moral, ideological rejection of the social order, in contrast to the physical rebellion his memories recall. Bohu's rebellion occurs long after the social unrest of his childhood. It is a rebellion founded in a reconstituted historical narrative and it is one which upsets linear narrative approaches. Bohu's coming to awareness of his situation, his mental liberation, results from his break with linear narrative constructions; in fact, Bohu's linear reading of the empire's history is shown to sustain the power of the emperor. This is seen in the fact that the destruction of the city *follows* Bohu's attempt to record it as a *fait accompli*:

This state of things was described by Bohu yesterday in the belief that it had happened a fortnight ago! A poet's intuitive grasp of reality was never more clearly demonstrated. (131)

This, it need hardly be said, is a bleak conclusion. Bohu has become an agent of destruction in the service of the empire in the very moment at which he tries to rebel against the empire. Like Tohu, who writes the empire's 'unauthorized' rumours, Bohu's voice of opposition is futile; his efforts are absorbed and assimilated by those who serve the empire.

Bohu's interpretation of events plays into the hands of the authorities. Yet if the Headmaster of literature can subvert Bohu's poem to convey a different message, the possibility of subverting the *empire's* sustaining discourses must surely remain open too. Bohu gives up, preferring acquiescence to involuntary participation in the empire, but perhaps he overestimates Fieldmarshal Ko, the Headmaster, and their puppet emperor. Bohu's perspectives condition his response to his reality; by suggesting that Bohu's conception of history, of time, has been manipulated by the empire, Gray might just leave open the suggestion that an alternative perspective, a different epistemological framework, could lead to an alternative response on Bohu's part. Where Bohu gives up and chooses to die, Gray himself continues to write, drawing attention to the ideological

apparatuses that sustain imperial discourses in the material world.

Temporal and spatial perspectives are important to all the texts discussed in this chapter. Gray's historical reconstructions of British history from the geographically and politically marginal perspective of Scotland call the terms of imperial historiography into question while asserting a 'claim of right' for Scottish self-government. His abstract fictions detach discourses of political imperialism from empirical conceptions of time and space so as to interrogate their ideological investments. In the following chapter I examine in more depth Gray's treatment of spatial perspectives, discussing three novels set in Glasgow in which Gray's ideological critique becomes more culturally and politically specific.

Chapter Three: Cultural Cartography

I suggested in my introduction that Lanark has been seen as something of a landmark in Scottish cultural life. I also pointed out that Gray's first novel has enjoyed some international attention and has been seen by some influential critics as a key text of the post-war years.¹ Lanark, still in print, has retained its initial popularity since its publication in 1981; if anything the novel's status has increased in the intervening years. The TAG Theatre Company, renowned for its stage adaptations of 'classic' Scottish novels, presented a major production of Lanark at the prestigious Edinburgh International Festival in 1995, bringing Gray's work to an even wider audience.²

Although Lanark is often considered to have given a boost to the revival of interest in Scottish identity as a cultural force, it seems appropriate that it was TAG (the name is an acronym for 'Theatre About Glasgow') that put the novel on an international stage. Lanark certainly addresses questions relating to Scottish national identity, but it is a novel firmly rooted in Glasgow, Gray's native city. In my first chapter, I focused on how Gray refashions concepts of identity and subjectivity in relation to history; in the first part of this chapter I extend that discussion of identity, considering not only how Gray refashions images of Scotland in Lanark, but more particularly, how he refashions the 'cultural geography' of the city of Glasgow. I argue that Gray offers original and politically revealing perspectives on the material city through which he examines critically the ideological frameworks that underpin the material city *and* imaginary Glasgows. In the second and third parts of this chapter I extend my discussion to Gray's later Glasgow novels, Something Leather (1990) and Poor Things (1992), respectively, considering the extent to which they transform Glasgow's cultural mythologies while advancing a radical political agenda.

¹ For example, Boyd Tonkin includes Lanark in an international list of fifty novels which chart "half a century of European cultural and social change" since World War II (New Statesman, 6th January 1995, p.40.) Anthony Burgess includes Lanark in 100 Best Books in English. These inclusions might seem ironic, given Lanark's playful ridicule of canonical processes.

²Lanark, adapted by Alasdair Cording, directed by Tony Graham; TAG Theatre Company, 1995.

Consuming the City

Glasgow was certainly not an 'invisible city' (to borrow Calvino's phrase)³ in any literary sense prior to Lanark's publication; it has a long history of representation in fiction, though its histories are often contradictory and contested.⁴ Glasgow has appeared in numerous fictional guises: it is both 'No Mean City' and the 'Dear Green Place'; this century it has been the setting of George Friel's urban industrial nightmares and the setting of Catherine Carswell's discerning portrayals of middle-class society. There are many fictional Glasgows, despite Duncan Thaw's complaint in Lanark that "nobody imagines living there" (243). However, even if writers *have* imagined living in the city, their Glasgows have not always remained resonant or accessible, and there is no doubt that some Glasgows have carried more influence than others.

Although Glasgow certainly does, historically, have an existence in the aesthetic imagination, there is an element of truth in Thaw's assertion. However, Thaw has inherited a mythology of the city that cannot accommodate his own creative vision, so he concludes it does not exist imaginatively--as for him it does not. As I mentioned in my first chapter, Thaw is absorbed by popular myths of Red Clydeside, myths which offer a very partial image of the city and a very limited historical perspective.⁵ Thaw comes of age in the post-war era amid industrial decline. The heavy industries of Glasgow are disappearing just as the people in Lanark 'disappear'; the visionary socialism of the immediate post-war years is giving way to a less civic-minded consumer society. Glasgow is presented in severe decline.

Despite Lanark's documentation of Glasgow's post-war disintegration, the novel is itself a landmark in the history of

³Italo Calvino, Invisible Cities, 1972. Calvino's book presents dozens of short descriptions of cities ostensibly visited by the explorer Marco Polo and recounted to Kublai Khan. Yet Calvino's philosophical meditations on perception, language and communication present multiple images of one city, discernibly Venice, which contains these infinite invisible cities. The work bears interesting comparison to Gray's treatments of Glasgow.

⁴Moir Burgess in The Glasgow Novel and Reading Glasgow gives bibliographic overviews of fictional writing in and about Glasgow. See also Douglas Gifford's The Dear Green Place, and Christopher Whyte's "Imagining the City: The Glasgow Novel".

⁵See Iain McLean, 1983, for discussion of the mythology surrounding Red Clydeside.

Glasgow's representation. I argued in Chapter One that a key aspect of Lanark is the construction of a post-war history of Glasgow from the perspectives of people eclipsed in traditional histories of the era; in other words, it is a politically engaged novel which poses far-reaching questions about cultural authority; moreover, its publication has influenced subsequently the ways in which Glasgow is represented and understood. In the General Preface to the Polygon "Determinations" Series, a series of academic volumes published by Edinburgh University Press on contemporary issues of Scottish interest, by authors from a variety of disciplines, Cairns Craig writes:

the 1980s proved to be one of the most productive and creative decades in Scotland this century. . . .In literature, in thought, in history, creative and scholarly work went hand in hand *to redraw the map of Scotland's past and realign the perspectives of its future*. (General Preface), [my emphasis].

Craig has written specifically about Lanark elsewhere,⁶ but my emphasis in the passage quoted above shows him translating key concerns of Gray's first novel into a more general cultural context. This is not to deny that other writers, thinkers, and historians shared similar concerns (indeed, as Lean Tales demonstrates, Gray has worked with other writers engaged in comparable enterprises) but, Craig's language--his attention to cartography and perspective--echoes the language and concerns of Lanark in a particularly close way. Lanark is a novel as intimately concerned with geographical landscape as it is with historical perspective.

As a small child, Duncan Thaw (in common with several of Gray's subsequent literary figures) draws maps of imaginary worlds he invents for himself; the novel's final two paragraphs contain the words, "I STARTED MAKING MAPS WHEN I WAS SMALL. . . .I HAVE GROWN UP. MY MAPS ARE OUT OF DATE" (560). Gray's focus on charting terrain, and creating a new cultural cartography, evident here in Lanark, returns again in subsequent books where he attempts to transform Glasgow's political

⁶ Notably in "Going Down to Hell is Easy" (Crawford and Nairn, eds.) and in the revised version of "The Body in the Kitbag." (in Craig, 1996).

landscape by transforming its cultural geographies and mythologies.⁷

In Lanark, as in the other two novels discussed in this chapter, Glasgow acts as a kind of triangulation point for the cultural cartographer. However, the city is not a fixed reference point in any cultural or literal sense, although it is a place where perspectives converge. In this respect it contrasts with the actual triangulation point Thaw reaches on the top of Ben Rua, which, as he is told by a minister he meets there, is "used by government map-makers" (143). Finding a point, or points, from which he can make sense of his environment is important to Thaw; sitting in a maths class at school, he considers his studies to be 'pointless' (154). As a younger child, Duncan finds himself in "a foreign kind of street" (126) only a short distance from his home when on an illicit excursion with older boys. On the same trip he discovers "the canal, a dangerous forbidden place" (126), one to which he will return again and again in adult life and which will acquire changing significance for him. But as Thaw matures, the city changes: "Once Glasgow had been a tenement block, a school and a stretch of canal; now it was a gloomy huge labyrinth he would take years to find a way through" (146).

In an urban landscape characterised by darkness--"There was daylight in the sky but none in the streets" (169)--and depressed inhabitants, Thaw walks endlessly around Glasgow trying to make sense of his life and environment. He is something of a Glaswegian flâneur, that cultural figure usually associated with nineteenth century Paris, who observes the city from a detached perspective.⁸ Such figures appear repeatedly in Gray's fictional landscapes. To escape the "dingy streets" (170) and his own sense of claustrophobia, Duncan seeks out high places from where the panoramic views allow him new perspectives. Time and again Thaw walks to high places, "a hill among tenements" (170), the Cathkin Braes, those places where the spaciousness allows him a vision of the city he cannot grasp while he lives in it. Instead of

⁷Cartography is often associated with imperial processes--a suggestive metaphor given Gray's concerns about imperialism and neo-colonialism explored in my previous chapter.

⁸According to Elizabeth Wilson, the flâneur "caught the fleeting, fragmentary quality of modern urban life, and, as a rootless outsider, he also identified with all the marginals that urban society produced" (1991;54).

one fixed point of reference, Thaw uses all the hills of Glasgow to take his bearings. It is significant that Thaw and McAlpin's discussion of Glasgow's absence in the aesthetic imagination (where Thaw makes his assertion that "nobody imagines living there" [243]) takes place on "the top of a threadbare green hill" (243) near Cowcaddens. That their urban Glasgow is a desolate spiritual wasteland is suggested by the allusion to the famous hymn "There is a green hill far away, *Outside* a city wall" [my emphasis].⁹

Thaw's insistence that, "if a city hasn't been used by an artist not even the inhabitants live there imaginatively" (243), has some relevance to current debate about Glasgow's self-image. Thaw's statement may even be borne out by the subsequent use to which Gray's first map of the city has been put by others. For instance, Ian Spring's study of Glasgow's cultural mythologies, Phantom Village: The Myth of the New Glasgow (published in 1990 as part of Polygon's "Determinations" Series) makes extensive reference to Lanark, Spring utilising one of the most significant of Thaw's view points, Glasgow's Necropolis, or 'city of the dead' not only to inform his title, but also as his own place of vision. Like Gray, Spring grew up in Dennistoun and, like Gray, describes the places he knew as a child which may account to some extent for the similarities between their perspectives, but his use of one of Lanark's central motifs as a metaphor within his own interrogation and critique of Glasgow's cultural mythologies is a significant appropriation of a literary representation into a more sociological one. His commentary also helps unpack and contextualise Gray's symbolism. Spring writes of this prominent Glasgow landmark:

The Necropolis is a quintessentially Victorian creation. It is a monument to monuments--a massive realisation of the peculiarly Victorian obsession with death . . . the Necropolis has served a symbolic importance as a viewpoint on the city (9).¹⁰

⁹Cecil Francis Alexander (1818-95) in The Church Hymnary: Third Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973, p.214. In the Hebrew Bible, God tends to appear to human beings on mountain tops and in deserts.

¹⁰Note also the silhouette of the Necropolis, dominated by John Knox's column, used on the cover of Gifford's The Dear Green Place.

In Lanark the Necropolis is one of two key locations (the other being the canal) where the novel's two worlds, Glasgow and Unthank, meet. The 'city of the dead' affords an appropriate vantage point from which to survey the city of the dying. Duncan Thaw and his father look out over the Necropolis from Mrs. Thaw's hospital ward shortly before her death. Mrs. Thaw remarks, "I saw a funeral go in there this morning," to which her husband replies, "No. It's not a very cheery outlook" (191); the implication is that the outlook for the city is as bleak as her own fate. Later, Thaw's impressions of the Necropolis hill, "cut into by the porches of elaborate mausoleums, the summit prickly with monuments and obelisks" (191), correspond to Lanark's. Sent to Unthank as a delegate (and notably in a chapter entitled "Intersections"), Lanark realises "he was on a hilltop among the obelisks of a familiar cemetery" (397). The evening Thaw murders (or thinks he murders) Marjory--when he actively contributes to the processes of death at work in the city--he retraces his childhood journeys around Glasgow, noting that the view on the horizon is that of "the tomb rotten pile of the Necropolis"(348).

Thaw gives the Necropolis grotesque human characteristics in Lanark. He notices its "tomb-glittering spine" (243) and his descent to the institute from Glasgow is through a giant mouth which appears at the Necropolis: "The cavity below the mouth narrowed to a gullet down which he slithered and bumped" (48). Lanark too ascribes human morphology to his landscape on his return to Unthank as Provost:

The round lake and its beaches were enclosed by two curving shores which made the shape of an eye. And Lanark saw that it was an eye, and the feeling that came to him was too new to have a name. (468)

Indeed, in Lanark, not only the city, but the entire landscape is characterised as a grotesque cannibalistic organism. In Chapter Two I drew attention to a back-plate of Unlikely Stories, Mostly which paraphrases the opening words of Hobbes' Leviathan. It is an almost identical reproduction of the cover-plate of Book Four of Lanark. Under Gray's inscription ("By Arts is formed that Great Mechanical Man called a State") Scotland lies in panorama,

supported by pillars whose illustrations represent on one side, the police and army, and on the other, the law, the classroom, and the factory floor. Hobbes has an entry in the 'Index of Plagiarisms,' part of which reads:

Describing a state or tribe as a single man is as old as society--Plutarch does it in his life of Coriolanus--but Hobbes deliberately makes the metaphor a monstrous one. His state is the sort of creature Frankenstein made: mechanical yet lively; lacking ideas, yet directed by cunning brains; morally and physically clumsy, but full of strength got from people forced to supply its belly, the market. (489)

Donaldson and Lee have already highlighted Gray's use of "literalized metaphors" (160) in Lanark, stressing some of the political implications of Gray's Leviathan allusion:

Within the living political body, it is the private, individual body whose consumption by the state becomes both literal and terrifying. In Unthank the powerful few literally live off the weaker majority through a technologically polite cannibalism. (160)

Consumption, embodied in the 'organism' of the institute, becomes a 'literalized metaphor' for capitalist consumer society, a prime target of Gray's ideological critique in other novels too; in "Alasdair Gray: The Making of a Scottish Grotesque," Ian McCormick gives detailed consideration to Gray's use of the grotesque in Poor Things, where he argues, "The city, like the body . . . is largely figured as a kind of grotesque" (88) which, "like the grotesque body billows forth its own mixtures of filthy green froth and scum" (89). The passage from Lanark quoted just above helps to establish one of several important links between it and Poor Things (not least the allusions both make to Mary Shelley's Frankenstein); McCormick's discussion of Poor Things also helps to focus attention on aspects of Lanark that have received limited critical notice. Although McCormick's primary concern is with Gray's treatment of national boundaries, with a *Scottish* grotesque where "nations are represented as monstrous bodies" (91), the grotesque embodiment evident in both novels is not confined to city, state, or nation; in Lanark, "The creature" (90) that is 'the

institute' embodies the entire social system and those who live within it.

I will return to Poor Things, its political implications, and the links between it and Lanark later. Here I will discuss Gray's depiction of the 'body politic' as a physical embodiment in his first novel. Thaw attempts to create for himself a wider view of the city from the standpoint of multiple hill-tops, but his panoramas fail to give him a perspective on the underlying structures of the landscape. Unthank may seem at first to be a hellish parody of Glasgow, but rather, it is Glasgow seen from a perspective converse to Thaw's and which reveals the 'ideological infrastructure' upholding its social systems. The dilemma Thaw faces in constructing his 'bigger picture' is neatly illustrated when he reads from an 1875 text documenting the design and construction of the Forth and Clyde Canal, so central to the successful development of Glasgow's heavy industries.¹¹

The canal, like the Necropolis, is a crucial landmark for Thaw, its dereliction coming to symbolise the decline and imminent death of the city and its folk. As Thaw contemplates its design he notices, "the weight of the architecture was seen best from the base, the spaciousness from on top" (279).¹² The design of the canal, in this respect, is mirrored in the structural design of the novel itself: the weight of the social architecture, the workings of the system, are most clearly seen from below, in the underworld of the institute, whereas, panoramic visions are available on the surface of the city. Thaw tries to combine his perspectives into one all-encompassing vision:

He invented a perspective. . . he painted them as they would appear to a giant lying on his side, with eyes more than a hundred feet apart. (279)

The perspective Thaw creates is that of one huge, monstrous body which looks upon another.

The grotesque city of Glasgow/Unthank is inhabited by monstrous beings. In Book Three, the novel's opening section, the characters are physically disfigured by horrific emotional diseases which distort their humanity. Lanark suffers from Dragonhide, a

¹¹See Jean Lindsay, 1968; pp.1-51.

¹²Compare Thaw's reflections with Althusser's consideration of Marx's 'spatial metaphor', quoted in my introduction (p.38).

disease which encases its sufferers in a hard outer shell. It is a common ailment, as Lanark discovers when he views other dragons in the institute: "Most had quills, spines or spikes and some were hugely horned or antlered, but all were made monstrous by a detail, a human foot or ear or breast" (66). Although such images abound in Books Three and Four, similarly monstrous and dehumanising images are apparent in Thaw's sections. For instance, Thaw, with his classmates in the refectory notices:

their faces did not fit. The skin on the skulls crawled and twitched like half solid paste. . . . with crawling surfaces punctured by holes which opened and shut, holes blocked with coloured jelly or fringed with bone stumps. . . holes secreting salt, wax, spittle and snot. (232)

Having been prefigured by the surreal, anti-human landscape of Unthank, the disease and dehumanisation of post-war Glasgow evident in the Thaw sections seems even more intense.

Lanark's most appalling discovery about the institute, about the machinery driving his familiar world, is that it is a giant organism that feeds off the people it fails to cure. He consumes the strange pink jelly-like substance presented at mealtimes unquestioningly until he realises its origins. Monsignor Noakes, surprised by Lanark's naiveté asks him, "'Has nobody shown you the drains under the sponge wards?' Lanark. . . wanted to be sick but the pink stuff had nourished him well" (89). Again, because this revelation is made near the beginning of the novel it affects the way in which Thaw's experiences in post-war Glasgow are interpreted. Thaw's refusal to eat his mother's shepherd's pie seems much more meaningful in light of the notion that "Man is the pie that bakes and eats himself" (101). Book Three presents a critique of consumer society, revealing a world where half the continents are "feeding on the other half" (101) in a literal sense. It also foregrounds the more naturalistic scenes of Book One; for example, the mundane domestic scene of Duncan's tea-time tantrum takes on overtones of political defiance, rather than mere childish disobedience, as it recalls Book Three's highlighting of global inequalities. Mrs. Thaw tells her son, "Children in China are starving for food like that," to which Thaw replies, "Send it to

them" (123). Even the way in which Gray describes the food prepared by Mrs. Thaw connects it to the monstrous food of the institute: "spongy white tripe, soft penis-like sausages, stuffed sheep's hearts with their valves and little arteries" (122). The people who are part of the institute--it feeds off them and they off it--are, like young uneducated children, unaware of their situation. Noakes maintains that the institute, "like all machines, it profits those who own it, and nowadays many sections are owned by gentle, powerless people who don't know they are cannibals and wouldn't believe you if you told them" (102).

Cannibalism is a controversial concept. Its popular associations are with the apparent threat posed to European explorers by indigenous peoples in Africa. Anthropologist Dean MacCannell refutes popular myths about cannibalism in Empty Meeting Grounds, identifying it, rather, with contemporary Western culture. He argues:

late capitalism has aligned itself against humanity with the worst human impulse; . . . it is an only partly sublimated form of cannibalism. That capitalism has transformed itself into a metaphoric cannibalism should not be greeted as a positive development. (20)

MacCannell's assessment bears some comparison to Gray's metaphoric use of cannibalism in Lanark. Both creature and machine, the institute has no conscience and has lost its consciousness.

Given that the portrayal of Glasgow in Lanark is undeniably dismal, it is paradoxical that it has been interpreted as a sign of literary revitalisation in Scotland and part of a cultural renaissance in Glasgow by some commentators. Some even interpret the novel itself in a positive light. Isobel Murray and Bob Tait¹³ address this paradox arguing that Lanark, "affirm[s] something rather less than hope but something much more interesting, indeed more *entertaining* than gloom" (223), [their emphasis]. Although they try to account for the sense of tentative optimism generated by the novel with textual evidence, they acknowledge that readers' interpretations will be the final arbiter. I want to suggest that Lanark succeeds in creating a gap between

¹³ Isobel Murray and Bob Tait in Ten Modern Scottish Novels (1984).

its own surreal and unstable presentations of Glasgow and other more established or traditional images and experiences of the city. It is in this imaginary space, the space between readers' existing impressions or experiences of Glasgow and the unpredictable and hellish realms of Thaw's Glasgow and Lanark's Unthank, that the more hopeful readings of Lanark have their genesis.

The idea of 'the city' as an urban hell is not new. It is a recurring image in literature across Western cultures, and one proliferated during the nineteenth century. Glasgow, like other major industrial cities, has been presented as an urban hell in twentieth century writing too;¹⁴ fiction and drama centred on the negative aspects and gritty realities of urban life retain resonance and popularity. Thaw's narratives of human disintegration, set against a social background of industrial decline, might seem to fit this paradigm, even if Lanark's narratives could not be described as 'urban realism'. However, cities have not always had such a bad press.¹⁵ Indeed, Thaw alludes to the famous city-republics of the Italian Renaissance in a conversation about artistic achievement while he is painting his mural at Cowlairs Parish Church. He asserts:

The local governments and bankers of four towns, towns the size of Paisley, put so much wealth and thought into decorating public buildings that half Europe's greatest painters were bred there in a single century. . . . Strong, lovely, harmonious art has only appeared in small republics. (306-307)

However, if the image of the urban hell is due at least in part to the material history of poverty and disease associated with cities since the industrial revolution, it is equally the case that idealised, more immaterial, notions of the city have also enjoyed currency. Against the city's potential for disease and disorder stands its utopian potential for harmony and efficiency; the urban space can be figured as hell or as the celestial city.

¹⁴ Edwin Muir describes the horrors of his own Glasgow experience in An Autobiography (1954); George Friel's Mr. Alfred MA. (1972) describes the city in a state of post-war disintegration which takes on infernal tones.

¹⁵ See Sennett, 1994 for an erudite, fascinating, and celebratory discussion of relations between 'The Body and the City in Western Civilization.'

As I stressed in my introduction, utopia is primarily a spatial concept rather than a temporal one. It is perhaps not too surprising, then, that, according to Krishnan Kumar (1991) architecture has been the “main carrier of the ideal city tradition” (14), even though “The ideal city is the philosopher’s contribution to utopia” (12). He argues that utopia is “a creation of Renaissance humanism” (35), and is evident only in the Western world where it has provided powerful impetus to social reform. The vision of the city presented by Lanark is dystopian (or anti-utopian) rather than utopian, its dystopian portrayal of Glasgow urging alternative, more utopian visions of the city. Thaw’s search in Lanark for light and space amidst the dark, colourless, and morbid industrial city, like Lanark’s search for sunlight, is a search for utopia. Looking out from the institute, Lanark tells Munro, “a minute ago I saw a habitable city out there!” (60) and it is this vision which gives him courage to leave the institute and travel to Unthank.

Kumar argues that although utopian fiction has been around for several centuries, the dystopia or anti-utopia was stimulated by the renewed popularity of utopian fiction in the late-nineteenth century (47) and concurred with the emergence of utopian social theory and experiments. Both forms have enjoyed continued popularity in the twentieth century when the dystopia has been favoured by numerous politically engaged writers.¹⁶ Lanark’s dystopianism rings warning bells for a society bent on self-destruction; the horror and desolation of Lanark’s landscapes encourages a raised consciousness about their relation to the material world, and might even act as an incentive to strive for social change. In the institute, Munro tries to reconcile Lanark to his fate:

‘History is full of men who saw cities, and went to them, and found them shrunk to villages or destroyed centuries before or not built yet. And the last sort were the luckiest.’ . . .

¹⁶ George Orwell’s dystopian novels Nineteen Eighty-Four, and Animal Farm are obvious examples. In the late 20th century Margaret Atwood’s The Handmaid’s Tale provides an example of a feminist dystopia. In my interview with Gray, he draws comparisons between his own work and Atwood’s (Appendix, p.312); more recently, Christopher Gittings (1995) has drawn critical comparisons between the two writers.

Lanark looked miserably at the floor. The view had given him dreams of a gracious, sun-lit life. (60)

Yet, in the face of tremendous odds, Lanark leaves the institute with Rima, and though he fails to change Unthank, eventually he finds a little "light in the sky" (560).

By sharp contrast, when Lanark first returns to Unthank as Provost, he thinks he is going to "change the world" (476). He now thinks he understands the way the system operates and that it will be a fairly simple matter to throw a 'spanner in the works.' Gray uses the Conference in Provan to mark the futility of political gestures and satirise the political processes in which Lanark is caught-up. The Conference parodies the superficial public relations exercises that surround world summits and suggests that they are intended to divert energy and attention from global problems. In Provan debates are held on World Education, Food, Energy, Health and Public Order, all with jargon-filled and nonsensical topics for discussion.¹⁷

Gray stretches readers' credulity ironically by portraying Provan, ^{named after} a fairly deprived district of Glasgow, as the site of an international conference. Just as it would take a great reversal of values for Provan to become a site of international significance, Lanark discovers that Unthank does not feature on any other delegate's list of priorities. Lanark is desperate to discuss the sanitation problem in Unthank, but no other delegates are interested. Deluded yet again, Lanark realises too late that he is merely the unwitting puppet of Sludden. He is told, "The future of a *crippled* region. . . is usually hammered out by one of the subcommittees" (478). My emphasis above stresses once more that Unthank is part of the vast organism, and a part edging ever closer to the institute's sinks. Where Thaw's Glasgow is draining away in a metaphoric sense, Lanark's Unthank is literally 'going down the drain'.

Gray's dystopian presentations of Glasgow in Lanark might be thought to reveal a deep resistance to social change, or even a nostalgic longing for a previous era on the part of the author. Rather, they present a sustained critique on the politics of

¹⁷Gray's parodying of international agencies is also evident in A History Maker and is discussed in my fourth chapter.

consumer capitalism by destabilizing the systems of cultural representation at work in the 'text' of the city. In the next section, I examine how Gray continues to develop his 'cultural and political cartography' of Glasgow in relation to Something Leather.

A City in a State

Gray's socialist convictions and his visions of a more equitable society are evident throughout his work, but arguably these are most overtly developed in Something Leather and Poor Things, novels which, like Lanark, map the city of Glasgow. Lanark's hellish visions, in common with other dystopian fictions, create "a map of quite different possibilities for speculating on the human condition" (Kumar 19), and its panoramic scope suggests new ways to imagine the city.

Although Lanark makes some steps towards constructing a new historiography of Glasgow by undermining conventional historical approaches, part of its originality lies in shifting emphasis from temporal to spatial perspectives. Whatever its merits, Lanark does not create a new mythology to challenge or replace the narrative of a dying city which so frustrates Thaw. However, as I argued in Chapter One, Gray's concern is the power of historical narrative to shape *contemporary* society; Lanark is a novel credited with transforming the cultural landscape. If Lanark's cartography put Glasgow on a contemporary literary map, Gray's subsequent novels set in the city, Something Leather, and Poor Things have developed and modified his vision of the city. In this section and the next I will address to what extent Something Leather and Poor Things integrate Gray's renewed visions of Glasgow with a re-written *history* of the city.

However, before discussing these novels, it is worth exploring some of the cultural and political developments which took place in Glasgow during the nineteen-eighties. Quite a battle has ensued over the representation of Glasgow in cultural and political discourses since 1981 when Lanark appeared. In the years following, several writers from the city began to find a wider audience for their work, including Gray's friends Jim Kelman, Liz Lochhead, and Tom Leonard. Yet Lanark's dire warning about the

dangers and evils of consumerism were certainly not heeded in a decade characterised in the media by the triumph of market forces and materialism. The acronym 'YUPPIE' entered popular discourse and the upwardly mobile executive became the Everyman of Thatcher's Britain. Glasgow was neither immune nor oblivious to such developments. In electoral terms Glaswegians gave every impression of maintaining resolute resistance to the prophets (and profits) of the free market, but the eighties saw attempts to bring the image of Glasgow more into line with that of consumer-oriented society. Glasgow started to sell itself to the outside world in a more forceful way than ever before, enhancing its potential as a tourist destination by clever marketing and refurbishment of the city centre.

Cleaning-up the image of Glasgow predates the eighties, however. In fact, the clearing of large inner-city areas during the nineteen-sixties is recounted in Lanark when Cowlairs Church faces demolition.¹⁸ While the notorious peripheral housing schemes to which folk were decanted appear to have been a well-intentioned, if unsuccessful, attempt to combat social deprivation, the programme of urban regeneration in the eighties was altogether a more purposefully cosmetic exercise. The extensive stone cleaning of tenements and public buildings undertaken then was, as Ian Spring points out, a particularly visual, image conscious, and superficial process, rather than an attempt to combat social problems.¹⁹

It appears, however, to have had the desired effect; the icing on the city's corporate cake was its designation as European City of Culture for 1990. Opinion within Glasgow was divided over whether this was a desirable development. The civic authorities were delighted at the prospect, hoping it would reap economic benefits, improve Glasgow's image at home and outwith the city, and herald an era of co-operation between the private and public sectors.²⁰ Other Glaswegians, however, expressed reservations

¹⁸ Lanark, pp.333-334.

¹⁹ See Spring, 1990; p.41.

²⁰ In "Fashioning the Future," Ruth Wishart outlines some of the background to Glasgow's City of Culture bid, and gives a positive account of the events of 1990. It is, however, worth noting that the volume in which her essay appears was written and published in conjunction with the Labour Party, with the assistance of the Paul

about the event, seeing it as an expensive publicity stunt which would do little to benefit the people of Glasgow, alleviate the city's social problems, or display resistance to the hugely unpopular Thatcher government. Alasdair Gray was only one prominent writer from Glasgow associated with the *Workers' City Group*, an assortment of writers, intellectuals, and activists who expressed deep alienation from the politics of Culture City. These municipal affairs may seem rather tangential to a discussion of Gray's novels, but are actually of the utmost relevance. Gray's concern for local and global political affairs, evident in the spatially and temporally abstracted realm of Books Three and Four of Lanark, re-emerges in Something Leather and Poor Things in more specific historical contexts. In these later novels, Gray hangs his critique of consumer society on the peg of Culture City; in creating his new mythologies of Glasgow, he writes histories of the year of culture celebrations which lie at odds with that offered by the organisers (the elected keepers of the civic records) and which expose the systems of cultural value that informed the ethos of the year's events.

In fact, Lanark's criticism of collusion between consumer capitalism and elected government almost comes to seem prophetic in anticipating the co-operation which took place in Glasgow between private industry and public bodies in 1990. Gray's reservations about Glasgow's Labour councillors' collusion with what he calls "Culture Capitalism" emerge in Something Leather's satirical treatment of Culture City, but are evident in Lanark too where Gray's objections are more abstract. When Monsignor Noakes is explaining in Lanark how the digestive processes of the institute allow people to feed off each other, he complains that the problem has arisen "Since the institute joined with the council" (101). Gray's biggest single problem with the Culture City enterprise seems to be that it makes it harder for Glasgow's cultural producers to resist a market ideology to which they may not wish to subscribe; art is appropriated into the service of Thatcher's Britain even when its producers strive for the opposite effect. In Something Leather and Poor Things Gray is

engaged in an on-going struggle for the soul of his native city, a struggle that has been intensified by "culture capitalism"; his tactic in this struggle is to create counter-discourses of Glasgow which use the city's history *and* terrain to expose concrete examples of cultural cannibalism.

Gray's fellow novelist, James Kelman was one of the foremost and vociferous critics of the official Year of Culture celebrations. Kelman, who became an unofficial spokesman for the *Workers' City* group, involved himself in staging demonstrations and provoking debate about the merits and demerits of the programme of events during 1990. In 1992 he published a volume of essays, Some Recent Attacks: Essays Cultural and Political, as a post-script to the legacy of Culture City. In his foreword, Kelman offers some insight into the thinking that lay behind the establishment of the *Workers' City* group:

The name 'Workers' City' carries obvious connotations but it was chosen to directly challenge 'Merchant City,' highlighting the grossness of the fallacy that Glasgow somehow exists because of the tireless efforts of a tiny patriotic coalition of fearless 18th century entrepreneurs and far-sighted politicians. (1-2)

Kelman makes it clear that he and others in the group are responding to a political agenda which they perceive to have been set already, and with which they take issue:

The 1990 agenda, set by the municipal authorities, was fixed on a straightforward premise, that the European City of Culture was an affirmation of Art and an affirmation of Glasgow: thus if you were opposed to the first you were opposed to the other two. (1)

He claims that he and his fellows spent much of 1990 denying they were "an unpatriotic bunch of philistines," and defending their position: "we didn't hate Glasgow and we didn't hate art" (1).

Kelman articulates succinctly some of the political objections against the marketing of Glasgow as Europe's Culture Capital in his essay, "Art and Subsidy, and the Continuing Politics of Culture City". Initiating a broad discussion on private profit and public subsidy for the arts, Kelman strongly condemns the organisers: "The architects of the concept . . . were politicians and

entrepreneurs. The politicians represent themselves as the public and the entrepreneurs represent themselves period" (31). He accuses the politicians of "intellectual poverty, moral bankruptcy and political cowardice" (31). These are strong words, but Kelman insists that:

holders of municipal and regional office are elected by the people to offer some sort of local challenge to the present government. Instead of offering such a challenge our politicians have capitulated in a quite shameful manner. (32)

His argument continues:

Over the coming years the cost of this one P.R. exercise will have repercussions for the ordinary cultural life of the city. . . . Major cuts have already taken place in these areas precisely concerned with art and culture. The public funding of libraries, art galleries and museums; swimming baths, public parks and public halls; all are being cut drastically, and the people fighting the poll-tax are taking the blame. (32)

Alasdair Gray, although involved in the campaigns of *Workers' City*, made his most substantial contributions to the debate through his novels of the early nineties; he directed his creative energies to the debates raised by the confrontation between the *Worker's City* group and the promoters of Glasgow, City of Culture. Something Leather and Poor Things recast cultural debate in Glasgow on a 'home-grown' agenda which attempted to challenge the terms of debate determined by market forces. Thematic similarities between Something Leather and Lanark include a shared critique of consumer culture; a focus on the complicity of individuals in maintaining social systems that limit their agency; attention to social class as a force in private, personal relationships as well as in public life; and an exposition of the ideologies underpinning historical discourses. But Something Leather is also an attack on the proponents of "culture capitalism" and destabilizes the sanitised, yuppified, homogeneous image of Glasgow projected during 1990.

Something Leather was published in 1990 at the height of the City of Culture celebrations, and its narrative begins and

concludes in Glasgow during that year. It is a novel profoundly concerned with the historic and territorial dimensions of Glasgow; however, in contrast to Lanark, instead of one protagonist who tries to make an all-encompassing survey of the city, Something Leather imagines the city through four female protagonists. The novel weaves together their life stories over the course of nearly three decades, bringing the four women together for the first time in Culture City. The lives of the four main protagonists are far more closely connected than they themselves are aware--readers see connections between June, Harry, Senga and Donalda of which the characters are unaware.²¹ Readers encounter the women at different stages of their lives, sometimes in relative comfort, more usually the victims of others' power games. Something Leather takes readers to the margins of the city and the margins of experience. All the stories are about power relations and cross-class encounters; they are all also stories about unsuccessful couplings, about unacknowledged, unexpressed, or unconsummated desires. These are stories about characters who are crossing social, sexual, and territorial boundaries.

Something Leather opens in an ahistorical and geographically unspecific moment. Its first chapter is entitled "One For The Album," referring primarily to a photograph discovered by June, one of the four women, but also to the 'snapshot' perspective offered on the incident described. Most of the other chapters of Something Leather are also self-contained snapshots of life in Glasgow which could be read as 'unrelated incidents' (to allude once again to Tom Leonard's sequence of poems). All are written in the present tense regardless of the date at which they are set, and they do not appear in chronological sequence.²² All show new

²¹ For example, a boyfriend of the teenage Senga, Tom, has an affair with June years later, long before June and Senga meet. Neither June nor Senga indicates any awareness of the connection, but readers can recognise Tom's bullying nature and gauge the different responses of June and Senga to it.

²² Several chapters of Something Leather are adapted from stage and radio plays Gray wrote before Lanark brought him success as a novelist. In "Critic Fuel: An Epilogue," Gray lists these chapters as "The Proposal", "The Man Who Knew About Electricity", "In the Boiler Room," "A Free Man With A Pipe", "Quiet People" and "Mr. Lang and Ms. Tain" (249). In other words, all the chapters set in a historical Glasgow are gleaned from previous work: the new material is limited to the contemporary world of Glasgow and the fantasy of Harry Shetland's school. He has

dimensions of the city through the diverse experiences of the four women.

June's journey to the Hideout (Senga and Donalda's workshop) marks her as a kind of leisured flâneuse figure, and takes her further than she expects: "Beyond a cross-roads June finds she has left the fashionable district. A poorer lot of folk crowd along the cracked pavement" (11).²³ Harry too travels to the margins of the 'public Glasgow' on a shopping spree. She and her companion, Linda, take a trip to the Barras, something of a tourist attraction, but find themselves for a moment in Paddy's Market, a market very different from those they are used to, and altogether less attractive. There they catch a glimpse of a Glasgow that coexists within the Cultural Capital, but is only fleetingly visible to them. Donalda is part of a Glasgow underworld, living in dreadful squalor before she becomes a prostitute. Senga inhabits a slightly less marginal social domain, but makes excursions to a world of fantasy. Donalda may see Senga as a fairy godmother who "makes dreams come true," but Senga's passport to prosperity never quite materialises. Her 'hideout' is demolished and Harry cancels the cheque. Although part of a black-economy, living on the margins of social respectability, Donalda and Senga are *public* women who are able to cross into June and Harry's worlds easily, if only in transitory ways. Together, the four women inhabit and represent a Glasgow far more socially and economically divided, but also far more diverse, than that encapsulated within the images of the regenerated Culture City. Gray's vision of Glasgow in Something Leather makes visible a dark underside of poverty and exploitation beneath the veneer of artistic endeavour and civic celebration; it also accommodates co-existent Glasgows, portraying a city of many layers and textures.

However, there is nothing in the opening chapter of Something Leather to indicate that it is set in Glasgow, except possibly the names of Senga and Donalda. Chapter Twelve, "Class

used further material originally from dramatic scripts subsequently in Ten Tales Tall and True, A History Maker, and Mavis Belfrage.

²³Janet Wolff, Elizabeth Wilson and Rachel Bowlby have all written perceptively on the figure of the flâneur and the emergence of his female counterpart, the flâneuse, in the urban landscape. Bowlby says, "the flâneur epitomizes a distinctive nineteenth-century conception of the writer as walker, a sort of man about town with ample leisure and money to roam the city and look about him" (29).

Party,” which continues the narrative of the first chapter is equally dehistoricised and locationless--perhaps even more so, in that its characters play stereotypical roles from mass-produced male-oriented erotica. However, read as a whole, Something Leather's assorted snap-shots of Glasgow contextualise each other. Gray's characters link the stories together, creating a collage of the city which resists attempts to view individual chapters as isolated incidents. In the intervening chapters, Gray provides his characters with histories and identities. He gives them each a cultural background and personality denied by the depersonalised void of Chapter Twelve, and locates each character in an exploitative class system which mirrors the universalising and exploitative system of representation reproduced in its disturbing scenes of torture. Gray brings the private lives of the four women into a public focus, replicating the worst excesses of consumer capitalism when he brings them bang up to date in a city bereft of cultural significance. Gray takes to extremes a dehistoricised and universalised vision of Glasgow (which he associates with Glasgow City of Culture) contrasting it with a richly complex, and ambiguous historical city.

The four protagonists of Something Leather are as easily identified by their class positions as by their names. Gray describes June as “the professional person,” Harry as “the inherited wealth person,” and Senga and Donalda as “poorer folk” at the end of the book (251). Their interactions draw attention to the social forces affecting their lives and to the changing power relations between them. Harry, for instance, although she is rich and successful, is helpless in practical things and open to sexual manipulation. Despite her privileged background, her childhood is a catalogue of abusive behaviour from adults and other children alike. Equally, when we first encounter Senga as a young girl we find that the thing she most likes about her boyfriend, Tom, “is her power over him” (47). In contrast to Senga, June, more economically privileged, is in fact in economic thrall to Tom, her boss, when she has a relationship with him. He bullies her and she plays a subordinate role in their relationship. Senga, although astute in her relations with men, falls in love with June and is prepared to let her call all the shots in their new relationship.

Donalda has always been at the bottom of the social heap, and is very much 'least among equals' in Gray's quartet, but even she is "bossy" (201) towards the man she calls 'Dad'. Through the reversals in the fortunes of Gray's four protagonists it is possible to view a class-based social system, rather than simply four intertwined individual destinies; but, significantly, Gray's protagonists also show that class is not the sole determinant of social power relations. In this respect, Gray's novel resists deterministic views of society.

In a helpful essay, Stephen Baker characterises Something Leather as "a sex-and-shopping novel" (11).²⁴ The superficiality of the supposed 'Glasgow renaissance' is epitomised in June's shopping trip. June seeks visual and cultural satisfaction through shopping; when June shops for clothes, "she feels that life, after all, might become an exciting adventure" (10); Culture City is repeatedly figured as an 'exciting' place. The novel, like the leather garment June hunts for, presents itself as a consumable product of a culture industry intent on sensual stimulation and instant gratification.

Leather is not the only commodity available in Something Leather. In Lanark Gray uses cannibalism as a shocking metaphor for consumer capitalism; in Something Leather Gray uses prostitution, a trade in human beings in which all four protagonists are implicated, to highlight social relations within consumer society.²⁵ The graphic and detailed portrayals of violent exploitation contained in Something Leather render it a disturbing and controversial novel. As prostitutes, Donalda and Senga are literally 'selling their bodies' to June and Harry, but the novel implies that the affluent characters 'prostitute' themselves in different ways, June selling herself short at work, and Harry prostituting her artistic talents. Yet prostitutes have a broad cultural significance; according to Elizabeth Wilson they are a fixture of the urban landscape, part of a public, visible city often

²⁴ Stephen Baker, "The Fetish of the New: Culture and Class in Alasdair Gray's Something Leather".

²⁵ Gray's title not only has connotations of fetishism; leather also suggests flesh, the commodity made available within prostitution. This came to my attention after reading Anne McClintock's Imperial Leather which draws attention to the interplay of discourses of gender, race, sexuality, beauty and cleanliness in the Imperial projects of the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

manifest in literary representations.²⁶ Wilson argues that modern cities have afforded women greater independence and public prominence, but have also made more visible discourses of sexuality which “threaten ambiguity and disorder” (6). She suggests that many of the anxieties and fears traditionally generated within, and by, urban spaces are the result of new alignments between private and public life--a crisis of social and personal identity.²⁷ Prostitutes recur elsewhere on Gray's Glaswegian landscapes too, appearing in Lanark and Poor Things. They embody the tension between the private sphere of sexual discourse and the public sphere of commerce, accentuating what Wilson terms the “out and out spectral aspect” (86) of the urban space. Gray's treatment of gender, and tensions surrounding his engagement with discourses of sexuality, will be explored more fully in my next chapter; suffice to suggest here that Gray uses a discourse of prostitution to destabilize boundaries between private Glasgows and public Glasgows, and to give stark visual dimensions to the invisible processes of “Culture Capitalism”.

June's consumer trip leads her to more 'excitement' than she bargained for; she endures rape, torture, and degradation at the hands of her would-be sexual liberators, Senga, Donalda, and Harry. The most disturbing aspect of Gray's presentation of these events in Chapter Twelve is that June emerges from her ordeal as a “New June” (223) who resumes her previous life positively transformed. As Donaldson and Lee argue,

Unless the novel seriously intend to suggest that sadomasochistic lesbian rape leads to liberty, the role of ideology in making victims complicitous with their oppressors needs to be more apparent, since it may be argued that June's final victimization is that she believes her rape helps her. (156)

Baker, in a similar vein, questions the extent to which novels like Something Leather which offer social critique through

²⁶ Elizabeth Wilson (1991), discussing Baudelaire, argues that he, “believed that poets resembled prostitutes. . . if prostitutes were women of the street, the poet in his guise as flâneur or dandy also walked the streets. Indeed, Baudelaire saw the essential condition of Parisian city life as a kind of universal prostitution created by consumerism, ‘circulating securely in the city's clogged heart.’” (55)

²⁷ Interestingly, Wilson argues, “The introspective, autobiographical novel was an ideal vehicle for the examination of this fractured modern identity” (86)

representation are complicit "with the social exploitation and domination they take as their subject" (16).

Although the novel might attempt to critique the culture industry by relating the protagonists' histories of personal and social subjugation, and their bondage to market forces, to the sleazy sadomasochistic orgies set in 1990, these scenes retain a strong investment in an ideology of consumption, in that Gray fails to undermine, or challenge, the popular iconography of prostitution which sustains notions of 'woman as commodity'. Gray lessens the impact of his class-based critique of power relations by failing to take account of their intimate connection with discourses of gender and sexuality. His stereotypical reproductions of lesbian prostitutes perpetuate objectifying and, frankly, offensive images of female sexuality without challenging their systems of representation. In fact, Gray exploits a commodifiable image of lesbianism in much the same way he accuses the civic leaders of exploiting a commodified Glasgow, the difference being that lesbian sexuality, unlike the city, has recourse to far fewer positive historical representations with which to redress the balance. It is not sufficient for one of the characters in the novel (Dad, a thinly-veiled version of Gray) to offer the caveat that, "the lesbians I know are rational folk who never seem to humiliate each other" (197).

To his credit, Gray is sheepish when challenged on the subject. He has said that instead of publishing the lesbian orgy of Chapter Twelve, he wishes he had, "replaced every letter with an asterisk."²⁸ According to Craig McLean, Something Leather, Gray "cheerfully admits, was written out of financial necessity,"²⁹ which, given the novel's concern with "culture capitalism," may sound like a slightly tongue-in-cheek excuse. In the novel itself, Gray claims that he was prompted to write the book after a conversation with the American writer Kathy Acker (232). This association with Acker, whose own (feminist) work presents graphic and disturbing images of women, might be seen as an attempt to pre-empt feminist outrage against Something Leather.

²⁸Appendix, p.321.

²⁹Craig McLean, "Glad to be Gray: Interview with Alasdair Gray" in The List, 4-17 November 1994, p.13.

Gray stands by his book, but seems to acknowledge that the depictions of Chapter Twelve detract from the important things he has to say in the rest of the novel.

However, Baker concludes, and I agree with him, that Something Leather “cannot wholly be identified” (16) with the consumer capitalism it reproduces. Even though the depiction of June’s rape and her response to it remain highly problematic, the chapter which portrays the “New June” contains elements which contradict the image of renewal and transformation. Most significantly, the line drawing which accompanies the title page of Chapter Thirteen presents a strong visual image of a woman who is anything but happy: her expression is pained, her eyes are down-cast, and she is disfigured by the scars of Harry’s tattoos. She “wakes in dark feeling she has lost something essential to life and dignity” (223). She is once again a sensitive, intelligent human being, not a stereotype from a dirty-mag and, as such, she demands an emotional and a political response from readers.

Baker also argues, “If Something Leather is itself to escape outright complicity with the social forces it depicts, then it can only do so through a form of self-critique” (15). Such a critique emerges not only from the novel’s inherent contradictions, but also from the “Critic Fuel” it supplies and the bridges it builds from its historic and fantasy realms into the material world.

Although Something Leather focuses on four female protagonists, there is one chapter narrated in the first person, “Dad’s Story,” which describes Donalda’s relationship with a Glasgow comedian whose picture on the first page of the chapter bears a remarkable likeness to Alasdair Gray himself. It is one of the contemporary stories and one of the most directly politically engaged. Significantly (given Thaw’s predilection for hill-tops in Lanark) Dad lives “at the top of a building on a hill” (187) from where he describes his native city:

Since the industries closed the richest districts have been extensively cleaned, partly with public money and partly through tax concessions to property owners. We now advertise our city as a splendid one. . . . Like all poor parts of Britain the east end has got poorer in the last twenty years

and will be poorer still when the poll-tax is in full working order. (188)

By identifying himself with his Glasgow comedian, Gray questions his own authority to depict Glasgow. He positions himself as a clown who writes books, noting, "Unluckily I have only one basic joke" (191). The 'joke' is about sex and, Gray suggests, is repeated again and again in Something Leather, despite Dad's attempts to "set each story in a different time and place" (192).

The Glasgow comedian also derides his own failure to change his society:

I do nothing about how my city and nation is governed, except occasionally vote for a party too small to change them. . . . I am an *idiot*. The old Athenians invented that word for people who take no effective hand in making the laws which control them. (190)

This comedian also drinks regularly in "a pub near Glasgow Cross," recognisably the *Scotia*, home of the *Workers' City* group, where he discusses, "books, human freedom, the uselessness of Scotland's fifty Labour MPs, the culture capital of Europe in 1990 and its coincidence with the three-hundredth anniversary of the battle of Boyne Water" (199), with people identified as, "O and P and the famous Q" (199). Gray positions a thinly-veiled autobiographical persona as a character in the narrative, linking the private, fictional world of Something Leather to the public, material world of Glasgow. He encourages his readers to make explicit links between Glasgow City of Culture and the exploitative Glasgow contained in the pages of his novel. However, Gray's autobiographical persona does not claim authorial omniscience; he offers his opinions, but questions if anyone should take a Glasgow comedian too seriously. If all discourse carries implicit political assumptions, "Dad's Story" highlights some of Gray's ideological assumptions and takes a firm political stance. It is self-critique which commands attention of the utmost seriousness.

Gray further parodies the City of Culture celebrations through the 'bum art' of Harry Shetland, and the hype surrounding it. The chapter entitled "Culture Capitalism" satirises the City of Culture celebrations by describing them from the perspective of London, a rather more established cultural capital. Linda, another character

who shares Dad's analysis of the 1990 venture, is an old school-chum of Harry's who now works as an arts administrator in Glasgow. She attempts to explain how Glasgow, a "notoriously filthy hole [has] become a shining light" (171). Linda is a classic 'naive narrator' who betrays both the narrowness of her cultural perspective, and her sparse historical knowledge by subscribing to popular media myths about the regeneration of Glasgow.

Asked to explain the 1990 arts bonanza, Linda tells Harry and the art dealer, "It all began when John Betjeman discovad Glasgow in the sixties"(171). Linda's Glasgow is a modern invention, without history and uninhabited by natives, whom she shuns. She describes Glasgow by comparing its geography and its class divisions to those of London, demonstrating that she can only make sense of the city in terms of the one in which she grew up herself. Linda has never quite fitted in--at school she was always an outsider because of her working class origins; although she identifies herself with Glasgow ("we have something to advatise" (171), [my emphasis], she also retains her English identity ("which is where *we* come in--I mean the English"[172]). Linda may have conveniently abandoned her own history and culture but she is an unabashed cultural imperialist who is ready to appropriate the history and culture of Glaswegians. She goes as far as to say, "from oua point of view Scotland is slightly like Rhodesia in the early yias of the century" (172). Linda's dialogue with the art dealer is highly ironic. He asks obvious, but penetrating questions; her answers expose the links between culture and capitalism in Glasgow.

The humorous aspect of Gray's attempt to represent Linda and Harry's Received Pronunciation speech phonetically in Something Leather should not detract from its serious significance. The technique upsets the assumption that written english is a direct representation of RP speech; it subverts the authority of officialdom's accent and as such can be read as an anti-colonial gesture.³⁰ It also shifts the linguistic power-centre to Glasgow--standard written english becomes associated with an educated Glasgow accent in Something Leather (June and the other middle-class Scots are the only characters whose direct speech is written

³⁰I mention this in Chapter Two in a slightly different context.

in standard english). Gray makes it clear that class is the truest marker of cultural capital; by affording a middle-class Glaswegian dialect the status normally attached to english RP in an arresting way, Gray exposes the gap between Glasgow's titular designation and its *lack* of cultural status. He implies that real cultural power remains firmly rooted in London.

Gray makes more specific attacks on the cultural agenda of 1990 through Linda. Harry's dealer expresses incredulity when Linda describes the planned events without mentioning any Glaswegian art:

'But shooali the natives have some local cultcha of their own? . . . What about these young paintas who've emerged? Campbell and Currie etcetera?'

'The ones who did well in New Yawk? Yes, we'll put them on a show.' (174)

These artists are more fortunate in the pages of the novel than they were Culture City; despite the acclaim they had enjoyed abroad, their work was not exhibited in Glasgow during 1990, the perceived snub fuelling public controversy. Linda shows as little concern for local literature as for local fine art:

Some novels by Glasgow writas have had rave reviews in the *Times Lit. Sup.*, but I'm afraid they leave me cold. Half seem to be written in phonetic Scotch about people with names like *Auld Shug*. Every second word seems to be fuck, though hardly any fucking happens. The otha half have complicated plots like SM obstacle races. (174)

Here Gray parodies responses to his own work (1982. Janine attracted plenty criticism for its 'pornographic' content) and Kelman's. Kelman often faces charges within and outwith Scotland that he employs excessive expletives in his fiction. Linda's words might be thought prophetic in light of Rabbi Julia Neuberger's outburst after Kelman won the Booker Prize in 1994. Gray seems to make the fair assumption that readers familiar with his earlier work will hold a more positive view of it than Linda, given that they are reading more of it. Gray mocks Linda's limited outlook but he also mocks his own position as a writer implicated in consumer culture.

Linda may be a snob and a cultural imperialist, but she has very definite economic sense. When the dealer asks her where the “*cultcha*” in Glasgow comes from, she has a ready answer: “‘From the Thatcha govament,’ says Linda promptly, ‘and from Glasgow District Council’” (172). Linda relates uncritically the demise of local government, from the sell-off of local amenities to the sell-out of the elected representatives, concluding that since they “usually draw salaries until they die and get all sorts of perks *they* don’t complain. Maybe they don’t notice!” (173). By making Linda, whose knowledge and experience of Glasgow are superficial, the official mouthpiece of Culture City, Gray makes explicit the connections between economic capitalism and the ahistorical, sanitised, distorted images of the city which abounded during 1990.

Yet, were the criticisms levelled at local councillors and their efforts justified? Or were Gray, Kelman, and the other people involved in the *Workers’ City* group merely “professional whingers,” as Council leader Pat Lally claimed?³¹ There is little argument that one of Culture City’s main attractions, the *Glasgow’s Glasgow* exhibition cost and lost a great deal of public money. Large administrative costs and prohibitive entry fees are among the many reasons cited for this particular financial disaster. However, controversy surrounding the exhibition was fuelled by the fact that its execution was linked to the Elspeth King Affair. King, for many years curator of the People’s Palace on Glasgow Green, voiced open criticism of Culture City and opposition to the *Glasgow’s Glasgow* scheme. Regarding the latter, Kelman claims that it “was at that time public knowledge that Ms. Elspeth King and Mr. Michael Donnelly had predicted the outcome more than a year before the event opened” (33). King also came into conflict with her employers Glasgow District Council over plans to sell-off part of Glasgow Green to developers. King attracted widespread public support for her efforts against such a move, but, according to Kelman, was subjected to “a brutal and secretive campaign of victimisation” (2) by her employers. At the height of the

³¹Kelman cites a “10,000 word document. . . which bore the signature of Patrick Lally, leader of the Labour Council” (3).

controversy Michael Donnelly, King's partner and colleague, wrote a newspaper article articulating his perspective on events and lost his own job as a result. The questions at the heart of the King debate seem to have been about *how* Glasgow is represented, *whose* Glasgow is represented, and the political *effects* of such representations, questions I have suggested Alasdair Gray addresses in Lanark and Something Leather.

In an essay published in The New York Review of Books³² Gordon A. Craig looks back on Glasgow's year as City of Culture using the old Will Fyffe song, "Glesga Belongs to Me!" to frame his argument. Craig is not alone in pointing out that with a concessionary entry fee of nearly £4, the *Glasgow's Glasgow* exhibition was well beyond the pockets of many Glaswegians; moreover, numerous exhibits were borrowed from Glasgow's other museums, all of which were, and are, open to the general public free of charge. Critics of the policies pursued by the Year of Culture organisers argued that Glaswegians were being asked to pay to access their own cultural heritage, as most of the exhibits already belonged to the people of Glasgow and had previously been freely accessible. There were also accusations that the exhibition presented a very limited, partial image of Glasgow, more in-keeping with the new regenerated image of the city than with harsher economic and social realities. Gordon Craig argues:

As a historical survey of Glasgow life, the show was sadly lacking, saying nothing about the Scottish Reformation or the workers' movement during World War I and concentrating largely upon the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and the years of industrial dominance. (13)

It might have been expected that Elspeth King, a curator committed to recording the popular life of the city and multifarious facets of its history, would express reservations about the project, and neither is it surprising that the *Glasgow's Glasgow* controversy was fuelled by the local press. What is perhaps more surprising is the widespread support King and Donnelly received from the Glasgow public when their conflict with their employer became public knowledge; surprising too is the manner in which

³²Gordon A. Craig, "Glesca Belongs to Me," in New York Review of Books, April 25th, 1991. Vol. 38, no. 8, pp.12-18.

The New York Review of Books and some other commentators from outside Scotland accepted 'wholesale' the account of Culture City and the 'Elspeth King Affair' propagated by writers like Gray and Kelman.

Although for those from outwith Glasgow the whole affair might seem with hindsight to have been something of 'a storm in a municipal tea-cup', it was a significant episode in the city's cultural history. Only a few years earlier an article about the machinations of Glasgow District Council appearing in the New York Review of Books would have seemed about as likely as a world energy summit in Provan. The City of Culture celebrations *did* turn the attention of the international media on Glasgow for a time that, if short-lived, certainly exceeded Warhol's fifteen minutes. If the local authorities' efforts were designed to bring Glasgow to greater prominence outwith the city and improve the city's image at home and abroad, then they undoubtedly had some success.³³ However, Glasgow's year as City of Culture was, and continues to be, characterised by its key ideological conflicts more than its arts profile; put simply, there are contradictions in the city's image that no amount of public relations has been able to conceal.

While much of Alasdair Gray's fiction is concerned with ideological structures, often upsetting or reversing conventional values, his earlier prose fiction tends to explore more abstract political institutions and ideological frameworks;³⁴ in Poor Things (as in Something Leather) his interrogation of abstract power systems becomes more firmly rooted in recognisable landscapes and a material world. It is consistent with Gray's characteristic reversal of values that he magnifies the importance of a political skirmish in Glasgow--a matter of passing localised interest--to expose the values which determine the way in which the city's image itself is constructed. Appearing in the early Summer of 1990, Something Leather must have been completed too late to

³³See Myerscough (1991; 1995) for assessments of the impact of 1990 on the city's trade and tourism.

³⁴ Gray's Unlikely Stories, Mostly and his portrayal of Unthank are good examples. Gray says himself in Something Leather that in his first novel he "patched over. . . with abbreviations and metaphors" (248) his ignorance of "those who make our Britain. . . leaders of finance, government, law and fashion. . . the jailers and the jailed" (248).

report specifically on the details of the Elspeth King Affair, even though it anticipates and addresses many of the central issues at stake. However, Poor Things, despite being set mostly in the nineteenth century, is directly concerned with the events and politics of 1990.

Most notably, Michael Donnelly appears as a fictional character, a friend of the 'editor' Alasdair Gray. Mention is made of the debacle surrounding King and Donnelly's departure from the People's Palace, but Gray recounts the events in his own terms within a fictional context which makes the Elspeth King Affair the stuff of popular mythology. Gray uses his fiction to construct a small piece of Glasgow's history and, in doing so, has exerted considerable influence on the way in which the events of 1990 will be remembered. It is on the basis of Gray and Kelman's arguments that Gordon Craig concludes:

It can be fairly said that Glasgow's year as Cultural Capital of Europe was neither a financial nor a cultural success, and sterner critics have been heard to use the word fiasco. (13)

However, in spite of all the mistakes, oversights, and controversies surrounding the year's programme of events, the question persists: was Glasgow's year as European City of Culture really such an unmitigated disaster? Councillors argued that the accolade would help the city attract tourists and investors, thus creating jobs and helping to alleviate social ills. Research commissioned by Strathclyde Regional (now Glasgow City) Council, published in 1995, indicates that "the culture market in Glasgow has, indeed, expanded by some 13 per cent during a seven year period from 1985/86 to 1992/93, and that the economic value of the sector has grown by over 40 per cent in real terms."³⁵ Levels of international tourism seem also to have been sustained. However, Myerscough's figures may not be as rosy as the hue cast on them by the authorities.

Michael Kelly, a former Lord Provost of Glasgow and no stranger to controversy, argued in 1995, "though Glasgow is Miles Better than it was, the tragedy for Scotland is that Glasgow, relative to other cities has really made no further significant

³⁵See Bowen, 1995; Myerscough 1995.

economic progress."³⁶ As far as the increase in tourism is concerned, Kelly says, "Fine. But you'll not build a generation of prosperity on that."³⁷ He argues that events like the City of Culture "have an essentially short-term effect."³⁸ Even by the City's own figures, the cultural sector contributes less than three per cent to the city's overall economy.³⁹

Kelly's attempt to place the cultural regeneration in a broader economic and social perspective is pertinent. 1990, far from celebrating the regeneration of Glasgow and heralding a bright new future for the city, announced, instead, one of the worst economic recessions experienced in Scotland this century; the Year of Culture could be seen as a brief distraction from the economic hardships which remained, and even intensified, once the party was over.

McInroy and Boyle, writing from more academic perspectives, are critical of what they term 'civic boosterism' in "cities rendered redundant by the forces of global capital" (72). They argue:

Glasgow Development Agency, a centrally controlled quango, has joined with the council in an effort to revive the local economy. To date, no coherent blue-print has been produced in the city which provides a vision of the potential role Glasgow may have in the global economy, and how it might get there. Instead, Glasgow has opted for a poorly articulated notion of establishing a post-industrial economic base in which various forms of service employment dominate. . . . it would be fair to suggest that place marketing activities have formed *the* central component of the overall strategy. (72)

Far from dismissing the *Workers' City* Group, McInroy and Boyle argue that its work stands, "as one of the most sophisticated and advanced critiques of civic boosterism in the politics of local economic regeneration" (77).

In spite of the supposed improvements in Glasgow's cultural industries, Glasgow's beleaguered Art Galleries and Museums have made redundancies in the last year and most of the city's galleries

³⁶Michael Kelly, "Miles better, yes, but still a quantum leap to go," The Scotsman, 26th October 1995.

³⁷ibid.

³⁸ibid.

³⁹Bowen, 1995.

now close on Tuesdays.⁴⁰ The predictions of the *Workers' City* group have been realised to some extent; Glasgow's libraries, theatres, museums and art galleries have seen their budgets slashed. Kelman and other members of the *Worker's City* group might have cause to feel vindicated; the authorities failed to confront the assault on their finances by a hostile Conservative government, and instead languished in a superficial PR exercise with short-term benefits. The idea that 'Nero fiddled while Rome burned' seems an apt summation of the Culture City experience.

Even so, it would be misguided to assess the impact and importance of Glasgow's year as Culture City in crude economic terms. Some commentators think that desirable social benefits accrued from the activities of 1990. Ruth Wishart, a respected pro-Labour journalist, not known for journalistic compromise with Thatcherite policies, was at the time a defender of the City of Culture. She has since written that Glasgow was "a city that badly wanted to reinvent itself" (44). The notion of 'reinvention' seems reminiscent of Duncan Thaw's desire to re-imagine Glasgow, and the title of Wishart's article, "Fashioning the Future," might seem pertinent to the hollow shopping-sprees of Something Leather. However, although Gray and Wishart may share some common frames of reference, their opinions diverge markedly. James Kelman singles-out Wishart for criticism as a defender of Patrick Lally, controversial leader of the Glasgow District Council. Wishart offers justification for his administration's approach to public funding for the arts, arguing, expediently according to Kelman, that the end result of the new Royal Concert Hall justifies the "game of economic chess" (Kelman, 3) played by the council. Kelman responds by reminding his readers that "the fact that so much of the money for this new concert hall came from the insurance company who paid up when the old concert hall burnt down some 25 years earlier was conveniently forgotten" (3).

⁴⁰The problems facing local authorities in making arts subsidies have been exacerbated by the reorganisation of local government in 1995 and the substantial net cut in the amount of money received from central government. Councils all across Scotland have been forced to make sweeping budget cuts; when crucial services like education and welfare are under threat, it is perhaps understandable that arts will become a lower priority. The cuts were widely reported in the media; for examples, see Dani Garavelli, "Arts companies face devastating grant cut," The Scotsman, 27th March 1997, and Jim McBeth, "Will Glasgow ever get it right?" The Scotsman, 2nd April 1997.

Selective public memory is thus seen as a cause and symptom of Glasgow's social malaise; it is precisely this kind of selective public memory that Alasdair Gray addresses in Poor Things, the novel to which I will turn in the next section.

The Anatomy of a City

For seasoned Alasdair Gray readers, the publication of Poor Things offered rich pickings; the familiar fruits of Gray's labours--playful narrative techniques, satiric social and political commentary, and a self-conscious engagement with literary and academic establishments are evident in abundance. Poor Things was a commercial success and met with critical acclaim, winning Gray the Whitbread Novel of the Year Award and The Guardian Fiction Prize in 1992. Like Something Leather, Poor Things is, to a large extent, concerned with the representation of the city of Glasgow during its year as European City of Culture. His representations of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Glasgow offer alternative visions of the city and alternative cultural values to those perpetrated by the civic authorities and businesses involved in the ventures of 1990. Poor Things depicts earlier Glasgows, other Glasgows, diverse Glasgows, redefining the contemporary political landscape and breaking the constraints of partial or totalising historical discourses; significantly, the larger part of the novel is set in 1881, exactly a hundred years before the publication of Lanark refashioned Glasgow's cultural and historical landscape.

Poor Things comprises three main narratives, each written from a distinct perspective and at different points in history. The link between Victorian Glasgow and contemporary Glasgow is clearly established; the novel opens and ends in the contemporary city, introduced, appendiced and annotated by 'Alasdair Gray' in an ambiguous fictional role of editor. The most substantial part of the novel is a memoir purportedly written by Archibald McCandless, a Scottish Public Health Officer, at the end of the nineteenth century. It is followed by an open letter (dated 1914) from his wife, Victoria McCandless, MD, refuting most of her husband's account.

Historiographic reconstruction is a central feature of Poor Things, for the novel mingles historical circumstances with imaginary events, destabilizing conventional divisions between fictional and historical narratives. Other interesting features of the narrative include its literary referentiality, and the mutual incompatibility of its narrative voices.⁴¹ Victoria makes this explicit in her 'Letter to Posterity' when she says: "You, dear reader, have now two accounts to choose between and there can be no doubt which is most probable" (272). It is significant that Archie and Victoria's stories do not corroborate each other as it suggests that the co-existence of contested historical discourses is a positive thing; their conflict is mirrored in the late-twentieth century sections of the book in the disagreement between the editor, Alasdair Gray, and his friend, the historian Michael Donnelly.

Poor Things is, as much as Something Leather, an attempt to prise control of Glasgow's image away from the 1990 'spin-doctors', whereby Gray's use of multiple temporal perspectives allows him to re-historicise debate about contemporary Glasgow. Poor Things is, in my view, a more accessible and entertaining novel than Something Leather; it poses a more formidable intellectual and moral challenge to the defenders of Glasgow's year as City of Culture, precisely because it uses the history and the landscape of Glasgow to chart a new anatomy of the city. It recovers images from Glasgow's invisible past and reclaims lost ideals of previous eras. Gray fashions these images and ideals into a new 'mythography' of Glasgow against which the contemporary city can be measured. The intellectual breadth and political vision of Gray's Glasgows contrast favourably with the narrow, dehistoricised political agendas adopted (or accepted) by mainstream political parties and the media in the age of the 'sound-bite.' The ground in which Gray sets his agenda manages to encompass greater social diversity and progressive ideals without sweeping-over the less attractive aspects of the city's heritage.

In Poor Things, Gray's attempt to create a new cultural mythology for his native city is more ambitious than in Lanark

⁴¹ Philip Hobsbaum discusses this in some detail in "Unreliable Narrators," in The Glasgow Review, Summer, 1995.

and Something Leather. Multiple narrative ~~perspectives~~ and historical frames of reference allow him to recontextualise contemporary political and ideological concerns within historical discourses. Gray uses images of Victorian Glasgow as a counterpoint to the Thatcherite appeal to 'Victorian Values' during the nineteen-eighties.⁴² In the spoof book reviews of Poor Things on the dust jacket of the novel's first edition, Gray, satirising the style of well-known English publications and conservative authors, makes this link explicit:

he satirizes those wealthy Victorian eccentrics who, not knowing how lucky they were, invented the Emancipated Woman and, through her, The British Labour Party--a gang of weirdos who kept hugging and dropping the woolly socialism of their founders until Margaret Thatcher made them drop it forever.

The late-nineteenth century perspective Gray adopts in Archie McCandless's narrative allows him to depict Victorian Britain as a complex and heterogeneous society: he presents the deprivation, injustice, and violence of Victorian Britain, as well as the visionary socialism, egalitarian attitudes, and libertine behaviour of some of its inhabitants; he also presents, briefly, at Archie and Bella's ill-fated wedding ceremony, figures of arch-imperialists, who uphold the patriarchal family and the British Empire as twin facades. Most of these wildly diverse faces of Victorian Britain are at odds with, and were omitted from, the Thatcherite reconstruction of Victorian values in more recent times. Just as Poor Things shows that there is more to the Victorian era than is evoked by the right-wing propaganda of recent years, the novel also shows that

⁴²Thatcher's appeal to 'Victorian values' was more than a return to 19th century economic liberalism; it was also a valorization of a particular code of individualistic sexual and moral values. As Hall points out, Thatcherism involved "looking back to past 'imperial glories' and 'Victorian values' while simultaneously undertaking a kind of modernization"(1992; p.295). However, as Michael Mason has shown, the 'Victorian values' inherited by the twentieth century were established at the end of Victoria's reign, and were a consequence of a polarization of attitudes between anti-sensualists and libertarians. Mason argues that "the victories of anti-sensualism in sexual codes, at this date, were also illusory"(213). Indeed, 'Victorian' was "a stigmatizing label" at the beginning of this century (213). Elaine Showalter also challenges the notion that the late-nineteenth century was a model of sober thrift and industrious living; in fact, she characterizes it as a period of "Sexual Anarchy" in her book of the same name.

there is more to Glaswegian culture than that which was marketed during 1990.

Gray succeeds in portraying diverse Glasgows by using architectural landmarks as cultural reference points; these are spatial, physical structures which complement his historiographical approach. The novel's 'Notes Critical and Historical' (277-317) throw up all kinds of little known historical details about the present-day landscape which might otherwise remain confined to the city's archives. For example, Gray draws attention to the fact that Landsdowne Church on Great Western Road was greatly admired by Ruskin and has the most slender spire relative to its height in Europe (289; illustration, 296). The church in question is an 'A' listed building but few passers-by are likely to be aware of its architectural significance or its historical associations. The effect of such well-informed detail in Gray's editorial notes adds authenticity to the (fictional) description of Bella and Archie's wedding; in turn, Landsdowne Church acquires a new historical attachment and a small line in literary history.

Another important landmark in the novel is the Stewart Fountain in Kelvingrove Park, for which Gray provides a potted history (283; illustration, 295). The dry, factual tone of his statements emphasises the jibe he aims at the local council. He writes: "Around 1970 the authorities turned the water off and made the stonework a children's climbing frame"(283). Gray's words may seem non-judgmental, but they contain a sharp political subtext which comes into focus in the following few sentences; Gray encourages his readers to interpret the repair of the fountain prior to 1990 and its subsequent rapid fall back into disrepair as symbolic of an abandonment of civic principles in contemporary Glasgow. He suggests that the restoration of the fountain was a superficial and temporary gesture towards the preservation of historical monuments which was quickly abandoned after the celebrations: "as Glasgow prepared to become European Cultural Capital, it was fully repaired and set flowing again. In July 1992 it is waterless once more"(284).⁴³

⁴³ Incidentally, Gray remarks with some dissatisfaction that at the time of writing the fountain is boarded-up due to a combination of vandalism and neglect; this is no longer the case, although whether or not Gray's intervention embarrassed the authorities into action will no doubt remain a mystery.

However, the more general principle of recovering the history of the city's monuments to historicise political debate can open other interesting issues. For instance, although Gray does not mention the fact that the Provost Stewart in question was a Tory (a politically expedient omission, perhaps), the fountain was dedicated to Stewart because he championed the connection of the city's public water supply. Stewart's far-sighted, practical, and public-spirited project might be seen to stand in sharp ideological contrast to the efforts of the former Conservative government to privatise water services in recent years. Gray urges a renewed awareness of the physical landscape and encourages his readers to search for current cultural significance in the historical monuments that are most immediate, commonplace, or taken-for-granted.

All three novels discussed in this chapter draw attention to their own status as literary artefacts. Poor Things is rich in literary allusions and contemporary relevance. In this discussion, I intend to concentrate less on the structural and stylistic features of Gray's novel, and more on the cultural and political discourses with which it engages. However, any strict dichotomy made between the form and content of Gray's work would be misleading--one of my central contentions is that Gray's postmodern stylistics are inseparable from his social concerns. However, two of the many literary ancestors of Poor Things, James Hogg's The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner (1824), and James Bridie's play The Anatomist (1930) have particular relevance to this discussion, insofar as they help to illustrate the ways in which Gray manipulates historical discourses to explore contemporary contexts. Victoria complains of Archie's Memoir that, in addition to relying heavily on the writings of Mary Shelley and Edgar Allan Poe, "He has made a sufficiently strange story stranger still by stirring into it episodes and phrases to be found in Hogg's Suicide's Grave" (272). She continues:

What morbid Victorian fantasy has he NOT filched from? I find traces of The Coming Race, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Dracula, Trilby, Rider Haggard's She, The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes and, alas, Alice Through the Looking Glass. (273)

Victoria's list recalls Lanark's 'Index of Plagiarisms' too, illustrating again Gray's eclecticism and intertextuality. However, Bridie's play is a very notable omission from Victoria's list; The Anatomist informs the metaphors and themes of Poor Things to a considerable extent and even provides Gray with his novel's title: "Poor things. Poor hearts," (24) says Bridie's central character, Knox, to the sisters Amelia and Mary Belle Dishart near the end of Act One. Ironically, Gray's one direct mention of Bridie's play in Poor Things (300) suggests that *Bridie* has been influenced by a play about the West Port murders written by Archie McCandless! Of course, Bridie's play was not performed until 1930, so Victoria, writing in 1914, could not possibly allude to it. Gray's intertextual allusions to The Anatomist (the influence of which will be discussed more fully later in this chapter) remind readers that Poor Things is a product of the late-twentieth century which constructs the past in interpretative and retrospective ways.

James Hogg's influence is more keenly felt in Poor Things in the structure of Gray's novel, rather than, as Victoria suggests, in its macabre elements. Poor Things presents, like Hogg's novel, two mutually exclusive accounts of the same events written at different times.⁴⁴ Neither narrator in Gray's novel is reliable--Victoria McCandless tries to discredit her late husband's memoir by presenting an alternative, more rationally plausible course of events, and a discrediting psychological profile of her husband when he wrote the document: "As locomotive engines are driven by pressurized steam, so the mind of Archibald McCandless was driven by carefully hidden envy" (273). She maintains that Archie remained "at heart just 'a poor bastard bairn'" (273). As in Hogg's Confessions, conflict is evident in Poor Things between the fantastic and the rational, and both novels share a concern with the social and ideological climate of their respective times. The Enlightenment conflicts evident in Hogg's work seem no less pertinent to Gray's society; this is an important point as it situates Gray's historiographical fiction within a (rarely acknowledged)

⁴⁴In his 1995 interview with Axelrod, Gray claims that the novel "contained no original devices at all. The editor's introduction of long lost narrative was in *The Master of Ballantrae*" (114). Hobsbaum, in "Unreliable Narrators," also discusses Gray's reliance on Stevenson's model (pp.39-40). Nevertheless, I still maintain that Hogg's novel, which predates Stevenson's by sixty-five years, has heavier bearing on Poor Things.

tradition of self-conscious, politically engaged and experimental narrative fiction that predates Poor Things' Victorian setting and its 'postmodern' context. The tensions between Archie's account and Victoria's account are less about playful literary labyrinths than they are about the seeming incompatibility of Victoria's rational idealism and Archie's imaginative idealism. Neither is objective. In decrying her husband's literary plagiarisms, Victoria is oblivious to the way in which her letter, by offering a parallel to Hogg's editor's narrative will actually *strengthen* comparisons between Archie's memoir and Hogg's sinner's memoir. Her failure to see this 'bigger picture' makes her seem naive and undermines the authority of her view of events.

In the course of debunking her husband's fantastical tale of life in Park Circus, Victoria also reveals herself to be woefully naive and out of touch with the world in which she lives. Her narrative seems less fanciful than Archie's, more probable, rational, and grounded in practical 'common sense', but the limits of her 'reality' are made manifest in her idealistic optimism about the future; readers will be aware of the grim irony that Victoria's idealistic hopes for the future will be dashed by World Wars I and II, conflicts which she stubbornly refuses to contemplate because she cannot rationalise them or understand the mentality that gives rise to them. She declares:

I almost hope our military and capitalistic leaders DO declare war! If the working classes immediately halt it by peaceful means then the moral and practical control of the great industrial nations will have passed from the owners to the makers of what we need, and the world YOU live in, dear child of the future, will be a saner and happier place. (276)

The logic of Victoria's argument is sound, and her utopian vision admirable, but it shows her (albeit retrospectively) to be out of touch with the *real politick* of twentieth-century Europe.

Yet in spite of its historical settings, Poor Things is a novel about contemporary Glasgow (just as Hogg's novel with its historical settings addressed itself to its author's contemporary setting). Gray distances himself from authorial responsibility for the 'historical' texts by presenting Archie's memoir and Victoria's letter as authentic curiosities which his friend Michael Donnelly

has found. Hogg used a similar tactic of feigning authenticity in relation to the Confessions by writing to Blackwood's Magazine, announcing the forthcoming publication of two antique manuscripts in August 1823.⁴⁵ Gray's recourse to this old literary game of placing fictional matter in a context more conventionally reserved for factual information suggests that his engagement with public historical discourses is aimed at upsetting *contemporary* cultural discourses.

In Poor Things Gray blurs the distinction between historical 'fact' and 'fiction' by using his 'historical' documents to address issues which have political and philosophical significance in his *own* time. The conflict between Archie and Victoria's accounts of events in 1881 is mirrored in the novel by the differences of historical approach which lead to conflict between the editor, Alasdair Gray, and his friend, the historian Michael Donnelly. Donnelly is portrayed as being rational, thorough in his methodology, and committed to the common good; Gray, by contrast, is more inclined to bend the truth, to be, like Archie, another devious and unreliable commentator. The debate about 18 Park Circus, home of Godwin Baxter (and another architectural landmark) illustrates the point: Donnelly refutes Archie's story on the grounds that the site of the garden described by Archie (22) is, in fact, the site of a coach house. Gray responds that this, "only proves that the coach house was built at a later date" (280). Interestingly, both use the building to support their preferred version; but Gray's witty, self-deprecating account of their debates emphasises that their historical nit-picking overlooks the larger cultural, political, and philosophical issues at stake.

In Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the *Fin-de-Siècle*, Elaine Showalter's study of relationships between literary production and cultural politics (especially gender issues) in the late-nineteenth century, parallels are drawn between the literary and political preoccupations and tensions within Victorian society and

⁴⁵Gifford (1976) notes that Blackwood's magazine played host to "frequent hoaxes" (140) of a similar sort. Wain, in his introduction to Confessions, suggests that Hogg's letter was "presumably intended as an advertising device" (7) and highlights Hogg's role as a literary character, the Ettrick Shepherd in the *Noctes Ambrosianae*, "a series of fictional conversations" (7) between Hogg's contemporaries, Wilson, Gibson, Lockhart, and Maginn.

a similar sense of cultural unease evident in late-twentieth century Britain. Showalter argues that although the fin-de-siècle is an imaginary cultural watershed--the dividing line between one century and the next is arbitrary depending on whose calendar is used--it acted as a powerful cultural landmark, giving rise to widespread cultural assessment, and expression to deep-seated anxieties about social changes in Victorian Britain. Using literary texts as a kind of cultural barometer, she argues:

fin-de-siècle narratives questioned beliefs in endings and closures. . . . As endings opened up, the genre of the fantastic also introduced the theme of split personality at the same time that psychoanalysis was beginning to question the stable and linear Victorian ego. (18)

Interestingly, she names Robert Louis Stevenson "the fin-de-siècle laureate of the double life" (106), and quotes Conan Doyle (another Scottish novelist alluded to by Gray) in his assessment of Stevenson as, "the father of the modern masculine novel" (79).⁴⁶ Gray's recurring concerns with fragmented subjectivity and narrative structure could be read as symptomatic of a pre-millennial identity crisis, a contemporary fin-de-siècle. It would be misguided, however, to assume that this crisis leads Gray to take refuge in the historical safety-net of Victorian pastiche in Poor Things; rather, his work offers a historiographical survey of the anatomy of the city--a temporally and spatially specific reflection on the 'body politic'.

Developments such as open endings and split personalities are neither new nor unique to Victorian fiction (as my earlier references to Hogg's Confessions amply demonstrate) but according to Showalter, their proliferation, and the emphasis placed upon them at particular points in history, is of the greatest significance. The similarities she observes between cultural texts (films and novels, mostly) of the late-twentieth century and those of the late-nineteenth century are made for strategic reasons, and not to make essentialist comparisons. Showalter's main concern is with contemporary gender discourses and she uses nineteenth century texts to recover evidence of gender discourses in

⁴⁶ I have already noted Poor Thing's debt to Stevenson. In Lean Tales, Gray completes one of Stevenson's unfinished pieces, "The Story of a Recluse".

Victorian society. Having reconstructed a 'gendered' history, she can then interpret contemporary gender politics within that historical context. In Poor Things, Alasdair Gray appears to make a somewhat similar manoeuvre with regard to the city of Glasgow and the history of its inhabitants. He uses acquisitive postmodern literary strategies to recreate nineteenth century society, then dissects its discourses, at the same time drawing attention to their transmuted presence in contemporary Glasgow.

Although Gray frequently inserts his fiction into literary discourses--something which in itself has some political and social significance--it is also revealing to examine the cultural tropes which inform literary discourses. Poor Things presents another 'mythography' of Glasgow, but one which is envisioned through historical type-castings. The Glasgow presented in Poor Things is constructed from a store of historical images of the city that make no pretence to be anything other than constructed cultural representations. In contrast to the physical landscape of the city (which although shown to be constructed within historical discourses, remains relatively stable in the novel) the central figures move through various transformative states. Gray creates a cultural collage that does not attempt to represent Glasgow or Scotland *itself*, but rather, eschews essentialist notions of country, city, or individual. Instead he recreates the city and nation from the perspectives of central figures who are themselves constructs of assorted, contested, and often contradictory images. These figures, Archie, Bella, and Godwin are unstable (in a representational, not psychological sense) and act as destabilizing agents for representations of contemporary Glasgow.

Archie McCandless's narrative fits some of the paradigms of fin-de-siècle narrative identified by Showalter and is the centre-piece of Poor Things. Although quite fantastic and indebted to the tradition of Gothic literature (especially Mary Shelly's Frankenstein), it is an *emotionally* truthful account of Archie's relationship with the woman he calls Bella Baxter. The events and circumstances it recounts would be implausible in a rational, material world, but in a fictional realm become a touching and beautiful tale.

Archie describes himself as a Scottish Public Health Officer. Like the anti-hero of Gray's earlier novel 1982, Janine who is a Security Installations Manager, Archie's self-description is indicative of more than his professional occupation; Archie, as one of the narrators of the novel, is guardian of the public health of Glasgow in more than a physical sense. Victoria McCandless claims that it is a very misleading description--"he was a Glasgow municipal health officer for exactly eleven months" (251)--as she is blind to her husband's concern for the moral and spiritual health of the city's people. Victoria, the highly pragmatic rationalist and utopian socialist, thinks that Archie's memoir is a distraction from the practical business of helping people and setting the world to rights. She denigrates her husband's memoir as hopeless and embarrassing, adding that, "He also paid a small fortune for it--enough to feed, clothe and educate twelve orphans for a year" (251).

Bella's narrative expresses certainties about the past, but anticipates a hopelessly utopian future; Gray's notes mostly chart historical details--with dubious reliability--for polemical ends; Archie's narrative, the least plausible of the three, moves little beyond a fantastic account of the protagonists' experiences in Victorian Glasgow. Nevertheless, it is Archie's narrative which remains the most persuasive and engaging, mainly because of its evocative portrayal of the city's landscape, its depiction of the splendid figures of Godwin and Bella Baxter, and the touching love story it recounts. Most significantly, however, Archie's memoir is an urban myth of creation and regeneration.

Ian McCormick draws attention to Poor Things' focus on creative processes. He argues:

a major preoccupation of the text is with the very notion of making. The chapter headings (Making Me, Making Godwin Baxter, Making Bella Baxter, Making a Maniac) emphasise this point, showing. . . what we assume is real or natural is everywhere a constructed product. (91)

Indeed, the novel is a 'well-made' physical artefact, decorated and designed with Gray's usual attention to detail. Although it might not appear at first to be immediately relevant to the way in which the city of Glasgow is figured, the creation narratives of Poor

Things are of central importance to connections the novel makes between the city and its inhabitants. In my discussion of Lanark I have already drawn attention to Gray's attempt to establish links between 'the body politic' and 'the politicised body'; an important similarity between Lanark and Poor Things lies in their shared interest in the relationship between the structures of human physicality and those of human society. In this respect, Gray might have used another Victorian scientific classic, Darwin's Origin of the Species, instead of Gray's Anatomy, as a metaphorical and structural springboard. Gray attempts to delve into the origins of Glasgow in Poor Things by exploring the origins of its (fictional) inhabitants, and the foundations of its institutions. Bella is the most obvious and central figure whose origins are distorted, absent, and confused, but all the main figures in Archie *and* Victoria's sections of the novel are implicated in narratives of lost origins and disputed paternity.

Godwin Baxter and Archie, despite their class differences, share the stigma of having been born outside wedlock. Archie's father has done nothing to assist Archie's upbringing or support his mother; Godwin's has at least provided amply for his material needs, although Godwin's mother (if the testimony of the narrators is to be believed) retains her lowly public status as a paid servant in the household. Gray displaces the myth of the noble Caledonian savage in his portrayal of Scraffles (Archie's father) and of the honourable Victorian gentleman in his portrayal of Sir Colin Baxter. Clearly unworthy fathers, it's never entirely evident that these men even *are* the biological fathers of the masculine protagonists; Scraffles seems to bear little relation to his son, and there is a strong suggestion in Archie's tale that Godwin is an early experiment of the type that produces Bella Baxter. It is in these lost, and contested sources that the origins of Gray's figures lie.

The choice of the name of Sir Colin Baxter for Godwin's father stresses again that image and representation are key issues at stake in Poor Things. During the nineteen-eighties, Colin Baxter became known throughout Scotland as an entrepreneurial photographer whose romantic depictions of both Highland and urban scenes transformed the Scottish postcard industry. His images of Glasgow, which often focus on interesting buildings and

architectural landmarks, helped to popularise the Macintosh revival, and continue to adorn calendars and books promoting the city as a tourist-worthy location. As might be expected, his shots portray very partial, attractive, and sanitised views of the city; the public life of his literary namesake might be thought to give an equally 'air-brushed' impression of bourgeois domestic life in Poor Things, and put a respectable face on the medical profession in Victorian Glasgow. By using a familiar contemporary name in a 'Victorian' context, Gray disrupts expectations of linear progression. In doing so, he engenders complex responses to the larger question implied by the murky origins of his central figures--'Just who *are* the City Fathers?'

As my earlier comments on the genesis of *Workers' City* make clear, the so-called 'city fathers' became something of a political football in 1990. Were they the Merchants who built Glasgow from the proceeds of the Empire, or were the Red Clydesiders more worthy figures? Conflicting (and distorted) mythologies of merchants and socialists alike were used to vindicate or repudiate various political stances and activities in the city. Poor Things displaces and complicates such debates by asking not only *who*, but also *where* the City Fathers are to be found. Sir Colin Baxter, a Victorian surgeon, is presented as a worthy city father, but one whose hidden private life is less admirable than his public image suggests. Apart from some ethically questionable experiments, and an illegitimate son, Sir Colin's legacy to Godwin, according to Victoria, has been, "a syphilitic illness which would eventually cause insanity and general paralysis" (266). Gray implies that the images of contemporary Glasgow left to posterity will be the romanticised images of tourist postcards unless other discourses, other Glasgows, are presented. And he suggests that not all the inheritance of the city fathers might be desirable or healthy. Most significantly, however, by making all the main figures in his novel 'illegitimate'⁴⁷ Gray suggests that the debate itself is illegitimate and instead he redirects his attention to the neglected mother-

⁴⁷ The term 'illegitimate' has fallen out of legal terminology only this decade. Although no longer used technically, it retains some of its long-established associations of social stigma. My use of the term reflects Gray's use of the concept of illegitimacy (in its old politically-incorrect sense) as a social and historical marker in his fiction, and, I would argue, a political lever.

figures in the city's heritage--who were notable by their absence in the political arguments of 1990.

I will return to the figures of Godwin and Bella/Victoria in due course. Before that, however, I want to consider further Poor Things' intertextual relationship with The Anatomist. Bridie's comedy lends Gray some of his novel's central metaphors; parallels between Gray's novel and Bridie's play are striking. Both texts centre on the development of medical sciences in the nineteenth century, and the play, like Poor Things, is an exercise in historical reconstruction; it is loosely based on the notorious West Port murders committed in Edinburgh by Burke and Hare in 1828. However, the play focuses less on the infamous Irishmen than on Dr. Robert Knox, a pioneering Lecturer in Anatomy, and leading member of the Edinburgh medical establishment. Popular opinion implicated Knox in the murders, as it was his dissection room that received and paid for the bodies supplied by Burke and Hare; Bridie notes in the play's introduction that Knox was an anti-vivisectionist but turned his "blind eye" (literally) to the source of his bodies for dissection (xii).

Bridie's play also engages with controversies surrounding gender and medical discourses; the Dishart sisters hear Dr. Knox lecture in the 'private space' of their living room, rather than the 'public' lecture theatre. The human body, particularly the human heart (note the pun in the sisters' family name) is the prime source of the play's central tensions. The play ends with Knox delivering a lecture on the physical properties of the human heart, although the play as a whole offers a more metaphysical reflection on the properties of that organ. Knox's decision to concentrate on the "right auricle" (73) (sounds like 'oracle'?) at the end of the play might point towards the moral verdict of history on his life and work. A conflict emerges between Knox's uncompromising scientific rationalism and his eschewal of emotional and moral concerns in the ethical dilemmas posed by his use of dead bodies for medical research without the subjects' consent. Yet the play is a lively comedy and the high moral seriousness of its themes bubbles beneath a veneer of witty exchange.

Conflicts between reason and emotion are equally evident in the would-be love-affairs of Mary Belle and Walter, and Amelia

and Knox. Much of the humour arises from the confrontation between Amelia's repressed propriety and the social ineptitude of a rather stupid medical student from England called Raby. Amelia asks Raby to describe Dr. Knox's lectures; Raby tells her:

RABY: They're wonderful. About bones and joints and so forth. . . and bowels.

AMELIA: And *what*?

RABY: Oh, it doesn't matter really. (16)

Amelia swiftly changes the subject, demanding her picture album. She asks:

AMELIA: Are you fond of Naples, Mr. Raby?

RABY: Yes, ma'am. I like them very much. (16)

This body--and bawdy--comedy has a serious aspect; Amelia's refusal to face the tense gender relations in her society, and her intense unspoken relationship with Knox, emerge in her exchanges with Raby. The body is the site of the play's key ideological conflicts. In Poor Things also, the body--Bella/Victoria's body--is figured as the site of cultural conflict by Gray in a highly self-conscious way.

Dissection is a crucial metaphor in Poor Things: the novel's corny pun on the Victorian medical textbook, Gray's Anatomy, whereby Gray decorates his novel with anatomical drawings, is less flippant than might at first be supposed. Anatomy, dissection, and vivisection are key motifs in Poor Things;⁴⁸ Archie implies that Baxter has not only created a pair of 'pied-hermaphrodite rabbits,' but has transplanted the brain of a child into the body of an adult woman. Archie has difficulty coming to terms with Baxter's experiments and the ethical dilemmas they pose, even though Baxter assures him, "*I have never killed or hurt a living creature in my life*" (20).

Poor Things is also about the dissection of a society, in that it investigates the 'body politic' of Glasgow. Discourses of medicine and medical experimentation in nineteenth-century Britain are complex; recent commentators have highlighted the virtual exclusion of women from medical training, in contrast to their pre-

⁴⁸In Lanark, Thaw is permitted to study morbid anatomy in the Glasgow University dissection rooms, however, this only fuels his 'morbid' obsessions with death and grotesque human bodies. (251/252).

eminence as clinical and psychiatric subjects.⁴⁹ Glasgow University was (and is) a renowned centre of medical research, but the less palatable aspects of medical advances in Europe and North America have often been brushed under the carpet.⁵⁰ Although women were prevented from being doctors, many new and dangerous medical procedures were tested on women, or on people unable to pay for better treatment. When Godwin tells Archie, "The public hospitals are places where doctors learn how to get money off the rich by practising on the poor" (17), Gray highlights retrospectively an ignoble, conveniently forgotten aspect of some medical advances. Gray looks 'under the skin' of Glasgow's history through the figure of Bella, who embodies the female subject of medical science.

However, Bella also embodies the New Woman; her struggle to become a doctor documents another often-overlooked aspect of Glasgow's history. According to Gray's introduction, Michael Donnelly discovers Archie's Memoir only because he notices in it "the name of the first woman doctor to graduate from Glasgow University, a name known only to historians of the suffragette movement nowadays" (VIII). Gray offers an account of women's entry into the medical profession--a long and arduously fought process--charting another neglected aspect of medical history. However, Gray's is a slightly anachronistic, *fictional* account. For example, when Gray has Victoria awarded a medical degree by Glasgow University in 1890 (302), he predates by four years the first women's graduations, those of Lily Cumming and Marion Gilchrist in 1894.⁵¹ However, his account of Victoria's struggle for her medical career does indicate how fiercely women's entry to higher education was contested.⁵²

Bella carries a tremendous range of cultural significations in addition to those already mentioned. Her name, like those of the

⁴⁹See Showalter, 1987; Daly, 1979 ; Chesler, 1974; Jordanova, 1989; Moscucci, 1996 for fuller discussion of the role of women as subjects of medical discourses.

⁵⁰ Some of the commentators mentioned above have highlighted race, in addition to class and gender, as a key factor in identifying subjects for experimental medical procedures in Europe and North America. See also, in particular, Gilman, 1995.

⁵¹Geyer-Kordesch and Ferguson, p.46.

⁵²See Wendy Alexander, 1990; Geyer-Kordesch and Ferguson, 1994; and Marshall, 1983 for accounts of women's demands to study medicine at Scottish universities.

other characters, has a number of cultural associations.⁵³ In Archie's memoir she appears in a line drawing as "Bella Caledonia --although the caption could equally apply to the backdrop of 'Bonnie Scotland'. Her dress and the depth of the backdrop parody those of the Mona Lisa. Gittings notes:

Cultural history is replete with the bodies of women who have been imported into the visual iconography of patriarchal political systems to personify the state. (1995; 25).

The feminine personification of Scotland in literature has been a long-standing tradition, and a bug-bear for some twentieth century writers and critics;⁵⁴ but the panoramic backdrop to Bella's portrait can be taken as a humorous rebuke to proponents of the 'eternal feminine'; Bella's lineage is too ambiguous, her existence too manifestly constructed through Godwin's scientific experiments, Archie's romantic imagination and, of course, Gray's self-conscious literary creativity, to do anything other than parody essentialist notions of gender or nation. More will be said about gender and nation in my next chapter. Of greater significance to the present discussion are Bella's social transitions and metamorphic transformations: she is Caledonia, roaming the globe; she moves across social classes, progressing from a Manchester slum to bourgeois respectability, eventually marrying an aristocrat (at least according to her own version of events); she is mother, muse, and prostitute at different stages of the narrative; she is both a doctor and a medical guinea-pig.

Victoria's account of how she came to arrive at 18 Park Circus relies rather heavily on historical typecasting, but charts, in an accelerated process, the social ascendancy of industrialists in the nineteenth century. Victoria's early childhood is spent as the daughter of a Manchester foundry manager who becomes a merchant. Her father is violent and miserly and she grows up in

⁵³ Robert Crawford pointed out to me that Bella Baxter was the name of Anthony Burgess's mother; Burgess's sympathetic reviews of *Lanark* were particularly influential and, it seems, appreciated. Bella-Victoria, (beautiful victory in Latin) suggests a resplendent man-made creation.

⁵⁴ Willa Muir takes exception to Walter Scott's feminine personification of Caledonia in *Mrs. Grundy in Scotland* (1936) and more recently Elspeth Barker has refuted the notion of 'Caledonia! Stern and wild/ Meet nurse for a poetic child' in her novel *O Caledonia* (1991).

an environment of fear and deprivation. However, Victoria's material status changes dramatically when her father makes his fortune and she is sent to school in Lausanne. Victoria's change of social class brings her little advantage: instead of being "a working man's domestic slave," she is taught, "to be a rich man's domestic toy" (258-259). Victoria marries into the minor aristocracy, her social advancement rendering visible the marginalisation of women in Victorian Britain across class divides.

Victoria's account of how she meets Godwin Baxter emphasises her cultural marginalisation. She and her husband consult Godwin after her "third hysterical pregnancy" (259). Elaine Showalter and others have argued that hysteria was a cultural phenomenon that mostly affected women in Victorian society.⁵⁵ Victoria is thought to suffer from a psychological disorder; her physical relationship with her husband is so unsatisfactory that she and her husband have approached Baxter for a clitoridectomy--the clinical term for a procedure now outlawed under international law, more commonly referred to as genital mutilation. Such operations were a fashionable, but controversial, cure for so-called "erotomania" in women in Britain and were performed from the 1860s onwards until being discredited between the 1880s and 90s.⁵⁶ Victoria is "begging for a clitoridectomy" (259) when she meets Godwin Baxter. Godwin tells her, "Have nothing to do with it" (260), and two months later she arrives by cab at his home in Glasgow. It is this Victoria, the absconded wife of General Blessington, who becomes an emancipated woman, proclaiming free-love and birth control, who trains as a doctor, following in Godwin's footsteps as a medical pioneer.

In the process of becoming a doctor, Bella comes to resemble the New Woman of late-nineteenth century fiction in other respects. Like the protagonists of the New Woman novels, Bella is

⁵⁵Elaine Showalter, The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980. London: Virago Press, 1987.

⁵⁶See Moscucci, 1996 and Showalter, 1987; pp.130-131. Moscucci refutes Showalter's claim that the clitoris was expendable, "because its sole function was female sexual pleasure" (130), instead viewing clitoridectomy "as a chapter in the history of the social construction of racial and sexual differences" (62). She argues that the controversy was "not only about the nature of female sexuality, but also about the normalization of sexual practices and ethical codes" (62-63).

intelligent, educated, well-travelled, sexually liberated, financially secure, politically motivated and determined to embark upon a worthwhile, fulfilling, and socially productive career. As Peter Keating points out, the New Woman was a popular literary phenomenon a number of years before young British women actually started to enter professions in significant numbers, or gain some measure of personal and financial independence.⁵⁷ The New Woman novelists inspired young women to press their demands for education, for voting rights, and for personal freedoms. Bella's profession is significant; Gray's fictional record of her neglected achievements, as well as the hostility she faces from the respectable Glasgow establishment, is an attempt to encapsulate in one figure the powerful social forces at work in the nineteenth century, and to review Glasgow's social and medical history from forgotten and marginal perspectives.

Gray prevents Glasgow's history being seen through rose-tinted glasses; by placing Bella/Victoria in ambivalent relations to medical discourses, he also implies some criticism of the assumptions that motivate Godwin's own scientific research. According to Archie's narrative, Bella Baxter is 'made' by Godwin ('God' to his friends) in his laboratory, in much the same way Frankenstein makes his creature in Shelley's novel;⁵⁸ Frankenstein is, like Poor Things, concerned with themes of 'creation'. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues, "In Shelley's view, man's hubris as soul maker both usurps the place of God and attempts--vainly--to sublate 'woman's physiological prerogative'" (Warhol and Herndl, 808). Godwin Baxter also attempts to 'play God' with Bella's life; while Bella thinks God "infinitely good" (268) Archie's account encourages readers to exercise some scepticism.

In Archie's narrative there is some marked unease about the procedures supposedly used by Godwin Baxter to revive the body of Victoria Hattersley, and disquiet about the power he assumes whilst doing so. Godwin has no qualms about having used the

⁵⁷ Peter Keating The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel. 1875-1914. London: Secker and Warburg, 1989; pp.187-196.

⁵⁸The philosopher William Godwin, Mary Shelley's father, lends his name to Gray's character. Baxter's middle name, Bysshe, is taken from Shelley's husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley. Shelley's Frankenstein has also been an immensely suggestive figure for Liz Lochhead, another of Gray's Glaswegian associates; see especially her volume of poems, Dreaming Frankenstein, 1984.

'unclaimed' body of a drowned woman pulled from the Clyde--Gray's novel critiques the 'ownership' of Victoria by her father, and then, her husband; in contrast, Godwin is well-intentioned and benevolent, but his right to claim her body rests on patriarchal authority.

In Archie's account of Bella's genesis, Bella is a typical pregnant suicide victim. Godwin tells Archie, "Every year hundreds of young women drown themselves because of the poverty and prejudices of our damnably unfair society" (33). As Elaine Showalter notes, a "popular theme in fin-de-siècle painting, as in medical literature, was the doctor performing an autopsy of a drowned prostitute" (131). The image of young women jumping into the Thames because of scandal or disgrace is a recurring one in nineteenth-century art and literature; in Poor Things this familiar scenario is transplanted to the Clyde where, by implication, the same social pressures on women apply. But by specifying the time and date when Victoria's body is recovered by a non-fictional figure, Geordie Geddes (who has, perhaps, become part of Glasgow's popular mythology),⁵⁹ Gray moves Bella into a role somewhere *between* that of cultural icon and historical figure. Bella puts a human face on the nameless women occupying late-nineteenth century mortuary slabs in both the abstract imagination and the material world.

When Godwin's autopsy reveals that Victoria has committed suicide, he decides to use her body as a laboratory specimen, but does not revive her because he decides that to do so would infringe her liberties: she has "chosen *not to be*" (33). Instead, he transplants the brain of her unborn child into her adult body to create Bella Baxter. Baxter seems to locate his subject's 'being' in her mind, rather than coexistent with her body, which he has no trouble recycling. Regardless of ethical considerations, his reasoning seems to reinforce a classical hierarchical dichotomy between mind and body. The first words Bella utters in the novel--"hell low God win" (29)--are transcribed by Archie in a way that suggests a diabolic aspect to Godwin's attempt to usurp control of life and death and assume the role of benevolent Creator. Bella's

⁵⁹ Parsonage, 1990 and Hutt, 1996 both discuss the Geddes family's role in the Glasgow Humane Society.

words frame God's 'win' over Victoria's physical body in the language of a 'war in heaven'. Godwin's hierarchy of values is mirrored in his own morphology; he is a man of supreme intellect and grotesque physical proportions. However, Archie's narrative, however eccentric, counters Godwin's powerful Enlightenment discourse of progress and patriarchal authority by arresting its epistemological system of representation. Archie's transcriptions of Bella's speech illustrate this point well, but he also relinquishes his own authorial position to some extent. Unlike Baxter, Archie refuses to 'play God'.

Duncan Wedderburn, in the madman's letter contained within Archie's narrative, echoes Archie's ambivalence towards Godwin by referring to him as "King of Hell" (77), "Mephisto" (79), and "Satan Himself!" (78). Despite the fact that Wedderburn's accusations are the ravings of a lunatic, they do open readers' minds to the possibility that God is not so "infinitely good" (266) as Bella seems to think. As Foucault's ground-breaking work has shown, madness in Western society is defined by its exclusion from the rational domain.⁶⁰ In Poor Things, the insanity of Wedderburn, the fantasies of Archie, and the discontinuities of Bella's early writings offer a transgressive counterpoint to the voices and values of reason, those of Godwin and the editors, Victoria and Gray. Gray's ability to hold in tension the fantastic and the rational in Poor Things emphasises again his search for alternative perspectives and his refusal to privilege a point of view without scrutinizing its sustaining discourses.

Much still remains to be written about Poor Things; it is a rich and absorbing novel which uses an almost forgotten history of Glasgow and its people to rechart the political histories of the present-day city. In Lanark, Something Leather, and Poor Things Gray presents visions--or revisions--of Glasgow which create a new 'political geography' of his home city. In all three novels, tensions emerge around the human body and its relation to capitalism and imperialism. As the human body becomes a politically contested terrain in Gray's work, questions of gender relations--so central to Western social and political changes this century--come to the fore. In the next chapter, Gray's treatment of

⁶⁰See in particular Foucault's Madness and Civilization.

discourses of gender, a recurring preoccupation in his work, are discussed in more depth alongside his anti-militarism. In A History Maker and 1982, Janine, the texts discussed in Chapter Four, Gray's specific political critique extends beyond the city of Glasgow.

Chapter Four: Gender Wars

Although national and nationalist discourses are conspicuous in Gray's writing and have provided a focal point for critical interest, it is of great significance that when Gray's fiction raises questions of Scottish identity, questions of gender relations are often raised simultaneously. Gender-related issues have been very contentious in Scottish society throughout the twentieth century, from the suffrage campaigns of the early decades, to the women's movements of the nineteen-seventies, and the current on-going debates and struggles regarding women's social roles and expectations. Undoubtedly, changes in the roles and status of women have brought about far-reaching social change in Scotland this century; however, the realisation of such changes has brought to the surface deeply rooted cultural assumptions about gender relations and exposed acute tensions within patriarchal ideology.

Gray's attempts to rewrite national and personal history from new perspectives (see Chapters One and Two) resembles revisionary strategies employed by some of those active in women's movements since the seventies--notably in academic humanities' disciplines. In this chapter I show how Gray interrogates discourses of masculinity in a critical way which displays a broad sympathy for feminist ideas, whilst retaining an ambivalent investment in masculine privilege. The first part of the chapter assesses Gray's critique of militarism and shows how this aspect of his work highlights a crisis in masculine subjectivity. In the second part of the chapter I argue that Gray's destabilization of subjectivity displaces categories of gender.

Where the texts discussed in Chapter Three are rooted in and are, to a large extent, *about* the city of Glasgow, the material discussed in this chapter, the novels 1982, Janine (1984) and A History Maker (1994) (including the latter's earlier incarnation as a draft screenplay, The History Maker, dating from 1965) are more national and international in their immediate concerns. At first glance these novels would seem to bear little comparison to each other as they share few stylistic or narrative similarities: 1982, Janine is set in contemporary Scotland, whereas A History Maker is set in the 23rd century; 1982, Janine is set inside the

mind of an individual protagonist, whereas A History Maker is narrated from multiple perspectives and relies more heavily than 1982, Janine on the playful, annotated, and reflexive strategies that have become a hallmark of Gray's work. Yet in spite of these rather substantial differences, the central issues at stake in these two novels are strikingly similar. Crucially, both novels explore discourses of gender and nation in relation to each other. In 1982, Janine and A History Maker Gray highlights and explores critically cultural dichotomies drawn between the public and the private, between the political and the personal. Both novels explore the connections between masculine sexuality and militarism, and attempt to relate these to systems of domination and exploitation prevalent in Western culture. In each novel the main protagonist faces a crisis of masculine identity which surfaces in relation to military conflict and sexual insecurity.

Although 1982, Janine predates A History Maker, I intend to discuss the more recent novel first. One reason for this inversion is that Gray draws much of the material for his novel from a play, The History Maker written much earlier.¹ (A History Maker is one of a number of Gray's short stories and novellas based on scripted material from his early days as a professional writer.) In fact, the draft screenplays, radio plays, and outlines of The History Maker, written in 1965 (and revised and developed between 1967 and 1993) are second only to The Fall of Kelvin Walker in Gray's 'professional' canon.² The genesis of A History Maker is found in earlier work; most importantly, the crucial tensions around questions of gender and militarism evident in the novel are central to the early scripted texts. Even though the greater part of my discussion focuses on those parts of the novel written more recently, an advantage of discussing A History Maker before 1982, Janine is that such an order makes the development of Gray's engagement with gender issues more easily discernible. I would argue that, notwithstanding its later date of publication, the politics of gender pursued in A History Maker owe more to feminist debates that predate the rise of the Women's Movement

¹See National Library of Scotland, Acc 9247/1 A-D for material from 1965 relating to The History Maker, and Acc 11203/1 for material from 1967-1993.

²Bruce Charlton notes that The Fall of Kelvin Walker was written in 1964 although it was not performed until 1968 (Crawford & Nairn eds. p.156).

of the nineteen-seventies, whereas those pursued in 1982, Janine address issues central to feminism in the eighties. In 1982, Janine Gray's approach towards femininity, masculinity, and gender politics is altogether more complex and informed by a more developed cultural debate. Where The/A History Maker is characterised by rather crude dualisms drawn along gender lines (for example, in Gray's futuristic scenario, patriarchy is replaced by matriarchy; women and men inhabit separate and exclusive spheres) in 1982, Janine Gray moves towards a less essentialist understanding of human subjectivity and gender.

However, if The/A History Maker can be read as a precursor to 1982, Janine with regard to gender issues, equally, it can be read as an afterword to the later novel with regard to its treatment of warfare and militarism. Where 1982, Janine can be read as a critique of the Cold War era seen from a Scottish perspective, A History Maker can be read as a critique of the 'New World Order' of the nineties. The stylistic and thematic innovations of the 1994 prose version of A History Maker make wide-ranging allusions to contemporary events, political processes, and ideological conflicts, even while the novel remains true to the political spirit of the early scripted versions.

It is of some significance that other issues and concerns raised in the screenplay version of The History Maker span a broad range of those addressed in Gray's subsequent writings--most notably, Gray's concern with 'making history' and his critique of imperialism. However, in this chapter I intend to limit discussion to three areas of concern which The/A History Maker shares with 1982, Janine: warfare, gender relations, and the politics of visual representation and surveillance. The play would seem, however, to have presented Gray with some problems; although there are a number of reworked drafts of alternative opening scenarios of The History Maker, the script is unfinished, its conclusion existing only in a prose outline which, incidentally, bears little resemblance to the conclusion of the novel. There are points at which it is worth comparing these incomplete scripts with the novel based on them, as they offer insights into the way in which Gray adapts his material to give the novel a greater degree of political resonance for the nineteen-nineties.

Man Out of Time³

In some respects A History Maker is a problematic novel. Despite being quite entertaining, it never really resolves adequately certain key issues it raises. This is most notable with regard to Gray's portrayal of gender relations. Although it has a futuristic setting, like much science fiction, The/A History Maker is a fable for the late-twentieth century, but this is by no means immediately evident. Gray creates his 23rd century milieu by combining images of Scotland's historical past and an imagined future. His projection of a future society is mostly dystopian, but contains some utopian elements. Patriarchy and capitalism have disappeared, and with them, poverty and social injustices; however, bloody battles are still fought while sinister global corporations and institutions control the media and, hence, the society's systems of representation.

Interestingly, most of the novel's references to Scottish identity *per se* are found in the novel's annotations: the prologue, epilogue, and editorial commentary--in other words, the bits written most recently. Gray *claims* on the novel's dust-jacket that his motivation for writing A History Maker was "Alan Bold's criticism that his books are insufficiently Scottish," but in fact, the greater part of the text predates most of Gray's other work. Gray's claim should be treated ironically; indeed there is evidence that Gray had more pressing motives to turn his early play into a novel. In a letter to Stephanie Wolfe Murray of Canongate dated 17th September 1993 Gray proposes to write "a short science fiction novel called The History Maker," in order to, "persuade a shrewd businessman that a new contract for the Anthology will be in the financial interests of Canongate."⁴ While this might seem to suggest that A History Maker was written as something of a 'pot-boiler', such a conclusion would, I think, be premature if the novel were to be dismissed on that basis. Gray affirms throughout much of his writing the value of work and the need for artists to earn an

³ Elvis Costello, IbMePdErRoIoAmL. Plangent Visions Music Ltd, 1982.

⁴This letter is contained in the National Library of Scotland, Acc 11203/1G.

honest living.⁵ In a 1992 interview with Christopher Swan and Frank Delaney, Gray says:

till a few years ago I was embarrassed when I had to tell people my profession. But that feeling of shame stopped last year when I earned enough to pay taxes.⁶

In a letter to Robert Crawford of 13th June 1991, Gray reveals that Poor Things (one of his most critically acclaimed novels, and the most commercially successful) and Ten Tales Tall and True were also written, "mainly to get money to pay for my work on the anthology of prefaces." (Crawford and Nairn, eds. *Endpaper*.) Gray's self-portrayal has some political relevance as it locates artistic endeavour in the realm of work rather than of leisure, and belies any myth that creative, artistic processes are the preserve of solvent bourgeois elites. Gray makes writing for money appear just as honourable as writing for any other reason. Although A History Maker was less positively and less thoroughly reviewed on publication than some of Gray's other novels,⁷ there is still much of interest within it.

Why then does Gray claim to have written his novel to placate a nationalist critic? One plausible answer is that Gray is attempting to engage with Scottish nationalist cultural and political agendas more prominent in the decades after the sixties than during them. In the 1965 texts, allusions to *Scottish* identity are almost entirely absent, although the warriors' loyalties are to the "Keltic" tribe. Within the main body of the novel, the warriors fight for Ettrick rather than Scotland. The use of 'Border country' as a locus for the novel is suggestive as it evokes not only the historical national boundary between Scotland and England, but also the more metaphysical boundaries Gray's work explores. It also makes an overt inter-textual reference to the work of James Hogg whose The Three Perils of Man: War, Women and Witchcraft shares a geographical location (Mount Benger, where Hogg farmed) and no small measure of thematic overlap with A History Maker, as might particularly be suggested by the subtitle of Hogg's work.

⁵See William Harrison, "The Power of Work in the Novels of Alasdair Gray."

⁶Published in Gray's Saltire Self-Portrait, (p.18ff). See also the early pages of my own interview with Gray in the Appendix (pp.306-307).

⁷For example, see David Buckley's review in The Observer 27th November 1994, p.21.

While the significance of 'war' and 'women' to Gray's novel is easily apparent, Hogg's concern with the supernatural may seem less obviously relevant to Gray. However, the anonymous, and transformative power of the public eye might be seen as a kind of futuristic 'witchcraft'; the way in which Delilah Puddock changes her shape and enchants Wat, (not to mention the association of frogs/puddocks with spells) suggests that Gray adopts Hogg's subtitle in his own novel.

In the novel Gray draws images from moments in Scottish history often considered decisive in formulating national identity. His text and graphics allude to and evoke the tribal warfare of Roman Briton, the Scottish Wars of Independence, the Jacobite uprisings, World Wars I and II, and more recent conflicts like the Gulf War. While these chronologically disparate images might be thought indicative of a postmodern disruption of temporal perspectives, their more immediate effect is to draw attention to the prominent role of military conquest and resistance in Scottish historiography. Readers are encouraged to assess the extent to which historical and national discourses are in fact discourses centred around territorial dispute and military conflict. This issue is by no means unique to Scottish historiography. Read within the context of Gray's other writings--for example, his concern to write the experiences of 'ordinary people' into historical discourse (see Chapter One) or his critical stance towards imperialism (see Chapter Two)--Gray's portrayal of a Scottish history centred around militarism might be seen to imply criticism of such historical discourses. Gray relates the recurrence of an imperial paradigm in European history to a Scottish context explicitly in the screenplay of The History Maker where he describes the soldiers of the opening battle scene as follows:

each has a short Roman sword. . . , a spiked Prussian-looking helmet. . . the effect is one of strict Byzantine pattern. (1)

Each of these images evokes a different European empire in a different moment of European history. By yoking them together, Gray highlights the recurring theme of imperialism and might also hint at the common imperial fate of decline and fall, discussed in Chapter Two.

Notions of 'making history' in the Western cultural imagination tend to be closely connected to discourses of national advancement (including colonial expansion) and individual success. Indeed, the title of Gray's novel has strong connotations of individual heroism, in turn, closely aligned to a dominant public role; often in Western cultural discourse the men (almost invariably men) who are thought to have 'made' history have mostly been statesmen or military leaders whose achievements have been to forge nations and empires. But Wat Dryhope, the protagonist of A History Maker, is another of Gray's anti-heroes--a man who questions the values of his society, refuses to conform to its expectations, and fails to live up to any heroic ideal.

Through Wat, Gray resists and complicates the imperialistic and militaristic ideologies often found at work in popular Scottish historical discourses. For instance, past military heroes like Bruce and Wallace remain powerful popular symbols of Scottish nationhood in the present day, yet only rarely within that popular realm are the attendant underlying assumptions about the necessity and worth of military conflict challenged. Nationhood and Scottish independence are consistent and predominant preoccupations of Gray's fiction, and in A History Maker Gray treads a fine line between making some blatant appeals to nationalist sentiment and ironically undermining popular nationalism. For example, the allusion to the myth of 'Bruce and the Spider' on the hard cover, captioned "Try Again Scotland," is an overt use of one of the most significant historical reference points for emotive appeals to Scottish nationhood in contemporary times.⁸ Yet although it utilises nationalist imagery, the actual narrative of A History Maker is set in a post-national era where nation states have given way to tribal ("Clan") loyalties with trans-

⁸If the point requires substantiation, the overwhelming popularity of Roy Williamson's song "Flower of Scotland," the refrain of which includes the lines "And stood against them, proud Edward's army/ And sent them homeward to think again" illustrates the significance of the political symbolism attached to Bannockburn. The political furore and populist nationalist sentiment generated in Scotland by the release of Mel Gibson's film Braveheart in 1995, loosely based on events in 12th century Scotland, also emphasises how current cultural discourses make use of historical narratives. (Anachronistic as it is, the life size poster of an heroic Wat Dryhope on the bedroom wall of Annie Craig Douglas (p.48) cannot fail to bring to mind the promotional shots of Mel Gibson as Wallace, which in turn evoke those of Christopher Lambert in Highlander.)

national political and corporate structures. The nation state is presented not as a universal, permanent entity but as a temporal, historical one. Gray's valuable insight not only historicizes the concept of the nation state, but also challenges individualist formations of masculine identity. However, such shifts in perspective come with a price-tag; given the very negative view of life in the twenty-third century presented by Gray, it is hard not to share, to some extent, Wat Dryhope's nostalgic longing for the twentieth century. The ambivalence Gray generates towards the values of both societies is one of the most interesting, if ultimately unsatisfying, aspects of the novel.

The tensions around questions of masculinity raised by the novel are especially painful. These surface mostly in relation to warfare. As the Ettrick Clan takes its last stand against the Northumbrian forces of General Shafto, Wat, who is the son of the commander, Jardine Craig Douglas, advises his father to surrender:

"Give him the pole. Let's go home for a wash and a breakfast"(8). Wat may be challenging the 'law of the father' but his is a voice of ethical reason pitted against his father's desire to die like a hero.²⁰⁶ Jardine rejects Wat's advice; to justify his decision, he tells the company: "There speaks the voice of reason. . . . but war isnae a reasonable trade"(8). He explains:

"That old pole means a lot to me. I started fighting for it a week before the eldest of you was conceived. We've done well since then. In battle after battle we've conquered and won allies until Ettrick has seized standards from Wick to Barrow. . . .That flag flew over us when we were many and strong. Will we abandon it now just because we are few and weak?. . . A heroic defeat makes brave men as glorious as a victory I think!"(8/9)

The conflict between father and son is a conflict between the values of reason and the values of historical allegiance. Perhaps it is even a refiguration of 'the head versus the heart' divide that so obsessed Walter Scott and Edwin Muir. By focusing the argument on "a pole with a tin chicken on top"(32) rather than on the community and culture of which they are the symbolic markers, Gray might be seen to encourage sympathy for Wat's rationalism

^{9a} Douglas Gifford has pointed out to me that the names of the Ettrick warriors are drawn from the names of Scottish rugby heroes.

at the expense of his father's passionate loyalty to 'his people' (Gray certainly shows Wat to be out of step with the prevailing values of his own society). However, Gray's use of the Ettrick Standard also broadens his discussion into a more general debate about society's 'standards' and their defence. It is worth noting that such debates about standards in contemporary society are most often conducted through, and often directly relate to, the media. Given the media-related focus of the battle for the Ettrick Standard, it seems no great leap of the imagination to connect the fictional battle with the metaphoric, political battle for standards. (As Janice Galloway notes, Gray is a writer who places high expectations on readers, treating each one as "a partner in the enterprise".)⁹ In this way readers are encouraged to measure the standards of *contemporary* Scotland against Wat's anti-militaristic stance. Gray sets up a dialectic between Wat's position and his father's, but in showing the strengths and limits of both perspectives, he neither rejects nor endorses either unequivocally.

The relationship between reason and masculinity in Western culture is explored by Victor Seidler in a way that is pertinent to the conflict between Wat and his father. Attempting to situate the development of contemporary conceptions of masculinity within a political and historical framework, Seidler argues that it is the continuing identification of masculinity with reason that has "tended to blind men to their masculinity as something that has been socially and historically sustained"(1989; 17). He argues:

Ever since the Enlightenment men have sought to silence the voices of others in the name of reason. Men have taken control of the public world and sought to define the very meaning of humanity in terms of the possession of reason. (ibid;14)

This may help to explain why Wat, a man out of line with his own society because he values and embodies a certain kind of Enlightenment reason, is a man whose public and private selves contradict each other; his 'public' rationalism is undermined by irrational and reactionary attitudes in his personal life.

Wat may enjoy a privileged position in the text, but he is painted as a failure: in public he is revered as a military genius

⁹See "Different Oracles: Me and Alasdair Gray" (in O'Brien ed., p.193).

despite his avowed anti-militarism, and he completely fails to persuade his fellow citizens of the folly of military conflict; moreover, in private he has disastrous relationships with women. Wat lives in a non-patriarchal society but he wants to return to the old lifestyle of patriarchal nuclear families. He embarks upon a destructive (and incestuous) relationship with a woman, Delilah Puddock (of whom more will be said later) against all rational considerations, and it is through this relationship that disaster befalls the peaceful households of Ettrick. Wat makes history, not through his public efforts to end senseless warfare, but because of a senseless personal relationship which leads him to the gutter (literally) and nearly destroys his civilisation.

By placing Wat, whose anti-heroism and pessimistic rationalism identify him as akin in spirit to other twentieth century literary figures,¹⁰ in a twenty-third century context, Gray paints a bleak picture of 'modern man' and critiques contemporary paradigms of masculinity; Wat is hopeless in life and in love. Elsewhere, Seidler has elaborated on what he sees as the consequences of such modern conceptions of masculinity for relations between women and men:

Feminism has also helped illuminate the ways modernity has been shaped by a prevailing distinction between public and private life. It involved a brutal reordering of gender relations as women were excluded from the public sphere and as the public sphere was redefined as the sphere of male reason. Women were confined in the private sphere of emotional life and sexuality. (1994: xii)

Gray seems to be aware of the damaging dichotomy between public and private life and explores it effectively in relation to Wat. However, while A History Maker places increased *value* on women's domestic and nurturing roles, it does not challenge the ideologies under which gendered social roles and spheres are actually constructed.

At the end of the book, Gray grants Wat his wish to return to a patriarchal lifestyle, but shows how this leads to his sad demise: folklore finds him dead in a ditch by the final page (222). In the

¹⁰Stuart Hall (1992) draws attention to "that host of estranged figures in twentieth century literature and social criticism who are meant to represent the unique experience of modernity" (285).

screenplay, the behaviour of Wat's character (called Angus in this version) does in fact lead both to the devastation of the society and the re-establishment of patriarchy; however, in the novel, the destruction caused by one individual man is not enough to counter the collective efforts of everyone else and, eventually, peace and prosperity are re-established. Gray's critical exploration of individual heroism in A History Maker, in contrast to the screenplay, avoids exaggerating the power of an individual to 'change the world' and so avoids reinscribing (anti-)heroic masculine agency by default.

Why, Why, Why Delilah?¹¹

The crisis of masculine identity also emerges in The/A History Maker through relationships between male and female characters. Gender relations are as strained and problematic for Wat Dryhope as for others among Gray's male protagonists--Jock McLeish and Kelvin Walker leap to mind--whose world is that of the twentieth century. The way in which A History Maker reinscribes strict social divisions on grounds of gender is an aspect of the novel that, strangely, has attracted little comment. The men and women occupy separate spheres and follow prescribed social roles. In the Outline for the screenplay, Gray offers some insight to his future society:

The play is set in a future where scarcity and labour have been abolished by fully automated generators driven by solar energy. . . a device in every home that can reduplicate anything. Since the home is still where women preside and bear children, the world has become matriarchal, but the basic social unit is no longer the family, it is the household.
(1)

In the screenplay's Outline, Gray also describes The History Maker as "A large-scale 90 minute science fiction film with a strong feminist slant."¹² This is interesting because Gray's scripts predate the popular surge of the women's movement in Britain and North America in the early nineteen-seventies. Although feminist ideas

¹¹From "Delilah" by Les Reed and Barry Mason.

¹²NLS, Acc 9247/1(d).

have circulated throughout the twentieth century, Gray does not seem either to be jumping on a popular feminist bandwagon or to be reacting negatively against feminism or changes in women's roles at an ideological level. However, the kind of feminism Gray appears to be espousing might suggest a more deep-seated uncertainty and ambivalence about the correlative change in masculine roles and male identity.

Interestingly, Gray's screenplay offers two alternative openings: his preferred option is a battle scene on a grand (and expensive) scale; his alternative proposal is a domestic scene which he notes would be much cheaper to produce. The sharp contrast between an open-air setting which is public, violent, and male dominated and the indoor domestic setting, which offers more privacy, nurture, and is inhabited mostly by women, could hardly be more marked. The novel accommodates both beginnings, in Gray's preferred order, but the strict polarities established by these scenes reveal a deep-seated unease about increasingly ambiguous gender roles in contemporary social relations that Gray struggles to resolve, not only in The/A History Maker but in other texts too.

In Gray's matriarchal society, almost all the women occupy a domestic sphere, albeit one that carries out the most essential social functions and carries great social prestige and power. There is a certain measure of egalitarianism within the "Private Houses" that have replaced families as the main social unit, and a great deal of nurture. Women take it in turns to be 'mother' for a week (avoiding struggles of authority); all younger women are 'aunts', while the wisdom of the older women, 'grannies', is valued and respected. These labels, traditionally associated with women's relation to child-bearing (the means of production?) are no longer directly related to their reproductive functions. In this social order children are held in common to the whole family and are well looked-after:

the great-grandmothers ensured nobody was neglected by distributing among their daughters and grand-daughters news and suggestions which brought friends and opportunities to the most lonely and despairing. (206)

Gray's futuristic vision owes a very great deal to earlier utopian visions of society, and to historical divisions of women and men into separate social spheres. In The Republic, Plato, writing from a context in which women and men occupied well-defined and distinct social roles, envisions an ideal society in which, "children should be held in common, and no parent should know its child and no child its parent"(457d). In Gray's Ettrick, the children only find out who their physical progenitors are when they are old enough and intrigued enough to enquire. Perhaps the Greek Frieze-style graphic that accompanies the sections of A History Maker concerning domestic life are Gray's acknowledgement of the Platonic influence.

Gray adopts the notion of the 'powerplant'--with its twentieth century connotations of pollution from heavy industry and from both nuclear energy and fossil fuels --and, subversively, transforms it into an organic, environmentally-friendly image of a botanical plant which gives sustenance to and empowers the whole household. These are the more attractive aspects of life in the 23rd century and have a highly appealing quality. Nevertheless, the association of women with a kind of 'organic domesticity' has been used by feminists and non-feminists alike to justify a so-called 'natural order.'¹³ Gray's imaginary future in which the values and customs of patriarchal society are reversed contains utopian elements, but it poses no challenge to the prescribed gender roles themselves. In Gray's matriarchal society women are still imagined as homemakers, baby-sitters, and sex objects--these are the very roles and representations which many feminists have struggled to redefine.

Gray's enthusiasm for his non-capitalistic model of society means that he does not, perhaps, interrogate very thoroughly the ways in which domestic ideologies have functioned in history--ancient and modern--to the serious detriment of women. By imposing strict gender distinctions upon his futuristic society, Gray risks essentializing and idealizing even further those aspects of femininity already essentialized and idealized in contemporary

¹³Linda Williams discusses Hegel's infamous comparison of women to plants alongside matriarchal models of feminism in "Happy Families? Feminist reproduction and matrilineal Thought," where she criticises the cultural essentialism evident in both.

Scottish society. In 1982, Janine, Gray problematises such rigid gender distinctions and social roles by creating a far more complex and convincing literary picture of human subjectivity, radical in its critique of patriarchy and its implications for understanding gender. However, the matriarchy of Gray's 23rd century is an inversion of patriarchy, rather than a radical departure from gendered social divisions.

In creating a society without poverty or economic inequality, Gray has taken a crucial factor of twentieth century social life and political discourse out of the social equations of his futuristic society. This in itself is a huge imaginative leap, and one with strong utopian impulses. The removal of all economic considerations from The/A History Maker detaches it, to a fairly large extent, from many of the more pressing political discourses of the twentieth century--including those formations of feminism which see economic exploitation and inequalities as part and parcel of a social order founded on gender division as well as class division. However, on the other hand, the absence of economic factors in The /A History Maker can, when combined with the futuristic setting, help to highlight other systems of power which operate in contemporary society, but which are often rendered invisible by the omnipresence of economic factors. To some extent Gray's exclusion of economic factors from his screenplay and novel about warfare and gender refutes the notion, evident in more reductive forms of Marxism, that economics is the over-riding determinant of all human culture and relations; in other words, he suggests that not all the ills of the world can be explained-away with recourse to the evils of capitalism.

Where the women in The/A History Maker are fulfilled in creative, sustaining, nurturing social roles, the men, even though they are loved and valued by the women, are socially obsolete. They have become redundant, except to inseminate women, and their "only occupation is fighting"(screenplay outline). The perceived historical roles of men as providers and protectors have disappeared in Gray's fictional world, just as they have been diminished in the twentieth century. Because women are no longer dependent on men in The/A History Maker, important ideological assumptions that have traditionally underpinned

notions of gender difference and social relations between women and men are seriously undermined. Notably, the social prescription for the men in Gray's novel--warriors, first and last--is as limited and stereotypical as the women's roles--and much less socially useful. In an early manuscript of The History Maker, Sheila, one of the central female characters explains:

An old woman has things to do; minding babies; remembering recipes; telling stories to the children. An old woman is useful. An old man is no use at all. (9)

Her words may seem severely utilitarian, but do hint at an acute tension evident in late-twentieth century Scotland, where de-industrialisation and the economic policies pursued by government have led to high levels of male unemployment. The erosion of men's roles as family breadwinners has been accompanied by increased opportunities for women in employment and education, and shifts in attitudes towards gender roles.

In the scripted versions of The History Maker it is clear that the central protagonist has very mixed feelings about women. Angus expresses his unease in terms which highlight the power relations attached to gender relations when he says, "Young girls make me nervous. They're so fragile and so ruthless"(9). In the novel, such ambivalence is reflected in the contrasting roles of the two central female figures. The first, Kate Dryhope, Wat's mother, is portrayed as a wise, learned, almost 'all-knowing' Henwife. An enormously powerful figure, Kate is the 'editor' of A History Maker, her role being reminiscent of that of Victoria McCandless in Poor Things who edits her late husband's memoir. However, Kate's role is more extensive than Victoria's because hers is the *only* editorial voice in A History Maker; the novel is unusual amongst Gray's longer novels in that he does not appear in any thinly veiled 'cameo role', either as Author (Lanark), Playwright (1982, Janine), Editor (Poor Things) or as a comedian (Something Leather). It is appropriate to Gray's matriarchy that the role of the text's key matriarch mirrors the positions occupied by masculine personae in Gray's earlier novels. This draws attention to the way in which masculine figures occupy privileged subject positions in these earlier texts.

The second key female character in A History Maker is altogether more problematic. Her name, Delilah Puddock, (which she has chosen herself) reveals her as a cold-blooded, reptilian creature who, like her Biblical namesake, Delilah, Samson's Philistine lover, is untrustworthy and ready to betray her man. She sexually assaults, humiliates, and abuses Wat, which, perversely, only serves to make him even more utterly enthralled by her. Gray's portrayals of ruthless, cold-hearted, amoral women who exploit and abuse men in order to control them--Ludmilla from McGrotty and Ludmilla is another good example--are troublesome in that they reinforce a negative and damaging stereotype of female power. Gray's portrayal of Delilah makes Wat seem like the hapless victim of a cruel temptress, taking from Wat the onus of responsibility for his own subsequent behaviour. Gray seems to unquestioningly perpetuate a myth of femininity which can be used to reinforce or even defend misogynistic attitudes and practises. The abusive relationship between Delilah and Wat is rooted in their shared desire to return to patriarchal values; however, it is Delilah, the female character, who abuses Wat, a male victim, a portrayal which contradicts the pattern of male abuse of women in patriarchal societies. Delilah's abuse of Wat distorts the social reality of extensive male abuse of women in Scottish society.¹⁴

At times Gray attempts to deconstruct such female stereotypes. My own view is that he does so most persuasively in 1982, Janine. Such a deconstructive project is evident but less convincingly executed in relation to Harry Shetland in Something Leather. In both these novels Gray does succeed in 'humanising' his female stereotypes to some extent, making it more difficult for readers to accept the demonised stereotypes. However, Delilah, like Ludmilla in McGrotty and Ludmilla, has few redeeming features, even though as the narrative unfolds, Gray gives some explanation for her warped behaviour. It becomes evident that Delilah started life as Meg Mountbenger, an intelligent, lonely girl

¹⁴In the last decade the number of women contacting Scottish Women's Aid for help and advice has increased from 12,000 to nearly 43,000 in 1995/96 (The Scotsman 1st August 1997, p.9). By contrast, there is little evidence to suggest that instances of women abusing men are anything other than relatively isolated. While domestic violence is an acknowledged problem, the extent of emotional abuse is harder to quantify.

who was in love with, and was rejected by, Wat in their youth. We learn that Wat,

wanted attractive nieces and young aunts to stand outside his little room and say timidly, 'Wat, O Wattie, please let me in.' He found cruel pleasure in imagining their sufferings. . . . Unluckily the only girl who had begged to enter his room was a tall awkward eleven-year-old lassie from Mountbenger. (145)

Gray shows how their mutual dependency in adulthood is grounded in loneliness, rejection and alienation and how, contrary to Will's belief, it has profound social repercussions. Kate asks Wat, somewhat rhetorically, "Does her brand of nooky mean more to ye than the proper feeding of the world's bairns?"(152), but Wat has a different perspective on the situation:

"She needs me like I need her! There was hatred in what she did with me last night but nothing calculating, nothing political!"(152)¹⁵

Wat (like Samson) refuses to make any connection between his affair with Delilah and the fate of his people.

Games Without Frontiers.¹⁶

Although Gray's exploration of the troubled relations between the sexes in A History Maker generates, perhaps, more heat than light, a far more persuasively developed aspect of the novel is its satirical critique of the role of corporate media interests in defining the terms of public debate on issues of social and political importance.¹⁷ The novel also raises far-reaching questions about

¹⁵In James Hogg's story "The Brownie of the Black Hags"(The New Penguin Book of Scottish Short Stories, ed. Ian Murray, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1983.) the Lady Wheelhope, an "inexorable tyrant,"(1) meets her match in her strange servant Merodach. Her attempts to destroy Merodach backfire until she eventually runs after him. When they are found, the Lady casts on her tomenter, "not a look of love nor of hatred exclusively, neither was it of desire or disgust, but it was a combination of them all. It was such a look as one fiend would cast on another in whose everlasting destruction he rejoiced"(13). The mutually destructive dependency of Meg and Wat echoes that of Merodach and Lady Wheelhope.

¹⁶Peter Gabriel, Peter Gabriel, Mercury, 1980.

¹⁷See Herman and Chomsky's Manufacturing Consent for an influential discussion critical of the political role played by corporate media interests in contemporary society. Interestingly, John McGrath's play presented at the 1996 Edinburgh International Festival, A Satire of The Four Estates translates the social satire of David Lindsay's The Thrie Estaitis into the late twentieth century with the addition of a 'fourth estate'--the media.

the power of visual images--most pertinently, television reportage-- to construct historical narrative whilst subject to relatively little challenge or analytical critique. In the futuristic society of A History Maker visual surveillance has replaced military might and territorial conquest as the chief form of social control.

There are echoes here of George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four where surveillance ('Big Brother is watching you') is also a key feature of Orwell's futuristic society. Critical note was made of Gray's debt to Orwell as early as 1981 when, in one of the earliest reviews of Lanark, William Boyd compared the environment of Unthank to that of Nineteen Eighty-Four.¹⁸ In Nineteen Eighty-Four Orwell uses the notion of 'doublespeak' to explore the extent to which a gulf can exist between ontological 'facts' and their representation (most memorably, when O'Brien asks, "How many fingers am I holding up, Winston?" [200]) and explores the political implications of offering the 'wrong' answer.¹⁹ When Orwell writes in Nineteen Eighty-Four, "Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past," (199) he could be writing an epigraph for A History Maker, as Gray's central concern is to highlight the processes by which historical discourses are constructed. Gray demonstrates their partiality, their lack of objectivity, and shows that they can be revised for expedient political ends. However, while Gray is acutely aware of the 'fictions of factual representation,'²⁰ that is, with epistemological relativity, he does not confuse epistemological with ontological issues. Throughout his experimental literary representations, Gray is at pains to assert

the 1996 Edinburgh International Festival, A Satire of The Four Estates translates the social satire of David Lindsay's The Thrie Estaitis into the late twentieth century with the addition of a 'fourth estate'--the media.

¹⁸William Boyd, "The Theocracies of Unthank," in the Times Literary Supplement 27th February 1981, p.219.

¹⁹In McGrotty and Ludmilla Gray acknowledges his borrowing of this scene from Nineteen Eighty-Four in the following encounter between McGrotty and Sir Arthur Shots: 'How many fingers am I holding up McGrotty?' asked Shots. 'Two, Sir Arthur?' 'Correct. But what if I told you the actual number was three? What would you say then?' McGrotty thoughtfully scratched the stubble on his cheek and at last said, 'I would say there was something wrong with my seeing.'(34).

²⁰From the title of Hayden White's essay "The Fictions of Factual Representation," in Tropics of Discourse.

the value of the material world, emphasising the ontological 'reality' of human experience, however complex and contradictory the processes of representing that reality may be.

Gray's concerns may spring from questions raised in Orwell's novel, but A History Maker refines and modifies these issues to give them greater relevance for a late-twentieth century readership. The concerns articulated by Orwell in 1949 are pertinent to any contemporary discussion about the role of television in constructing society's 'self-images' and in shaping its cultural narratives, but may need to be updated somewhat. For example, there is no 'Big Brother'-type authority in A History Maker, but rather, a less easily discernible, more fluid system of power which is unacknowledged by the characters in the novel themselves, but can be seen by readers to wield enormous influence. Although surveillance happens with popular consent in A History Maker, Gray shows its malign influence and oppressive effects. The questions raised by Orwell about the nature of 'truth' and its representation have been even more hotly debated in subsequent decades when all 'truth claims' have come under increasingly sceptical scrutiny. Gray invokes the discourses of militarism and modern-day warfare not only to critique Western military thinking and defence policies, but also to engage with these bigger questions about truth and representation.

A most disquieting feature of the society portrayed in A History Maker are the 'public eyes' which hover over events in the novel like omniscient wasps. These spherical cameras are first encountered as they record 'the 'last stand' of the Ettrick warriors; they will transmit the battle around the globe and provide the official public record of events.²¹ Chapter One opens from the aerial perspective of the 'public eye'. In the novel and screenplay alike, the opening battle scene is presented in terms of a large sporting fixture, with heraldic emblems that reflect sporting history--for instance, "the Milburn football. . . the Charlton winged boot"(3). The battle's commentators also use the style and vocabulary of sports commentary. At the end of battle, for instance, the public eye says:

²¹The "Public Eyes" do not feature in the screenplay The History Maker; however, Gray's concern about visual surveillance is apparent in his earliest drafts of the play.

After half a century of victories Clan Ettrick has drawn on a technicality. There goes the bell for end of play. And now as the Red Cross aircraft descend on the field of honour some of you may want to switch to the banks of the Alamo for a peep at the big fight between the Tex and Mex sharpshooters. (18)

There is a sharp contrast between the serious subject-matter of the report--armed warfare--and the comparatively trivial way in which it is presented. The 'public eye' portrayal of war as entertainment satirises the aggressive approach towards international sporting events often evident in Scottish society (at times one might be forgiven for assuming that football matches, particularly against England, are--as Bill Shankley so famously insisted--a matter of life and death). However, the satire of the 'public eye' commentary has a more serious target in highlighting the way in which the style and language of media reports can shape the responses of their viewers. While the 'public eye' valorises the battle and presents it as entertainment, something which is questioned by only two characters in the novel, Wat Dryhope (the flawed central protagonist) and Mirren Craig Douglas (who has lost her sons to successive battles), Gray distances his readers from the 'public eye' perspective of the battle by revealing something of its human costs. He puts words in the mouth of General Dodds of the opposing army, a willing participant in the fray, which expose the dreadful extent of the losses sustained on all sides. Dodds, himself grotesquely disfigured from successive battles, admits that, quite apart from his own injuries, he has lost, "A dad, nine brothers, seven sons, six grandsons, five hands and three legs"(4). The use of familial terms reminds readers of the personal impacts of the battle and contrasts sharply with the impersonal reports of war fatalities familiar from contemporary media coverage; there may even be a hint of black-humour in the itinerary of losses suffered. Gray questions the terms in which violent conflict is often reported in television narratives by taking an alternative measure of its destructiveness. In doing so, Gray shatters any residual complacency about the potential ability of television to 'anaesthetise' its audience. He also questions the ease with which

the discourses of television documentary acquire cultural authority and can construct 'authentic' histories relatively unchallenged.²²

That Gray poses large political and philosophical questions in relation to the portrayal of military conflict and screened warfare in A History Maker seems more relevant in 1997 than in 1965 when Gray's original screenplay was written, given that the Gulf War of 1991 became, as Dick Hebdige puts it, "the world's first totally screened war."²³ In contrast to the screenplay version, A History Maker makes overt allusions to the kind of televised warfare encountered in the early 1990s. In the novel, the sports commentary of the battle scenes is intermingled with references to Geneva Conventions, the Red Cross, and the United Nations; Gray blurs the distinction between war and entertainment, but also seems to take a critical swipe at the role of these institutions by suggesting that their survival into the 23rd century will depend on their failure to prevent disastrous conflicts.²⁴ Gray satirises the 'rules' of war--those intricate regulations set out in treaties and Geneva Conventions, designed to limit conflict, but which in fact rarely do much to prevent carnage--by presenting them as reactive and ineffectual rules for sporting matches.

Such regulations came under intense public scrutiny during and after the Gulf War. Despite evidence of urban destruction and civilian casualties in Iraq, the actions of the Allied forces were, apparently, within the 'rules' laid down by the Geneva Convention. Iraq was reported to have 'broken' these rules. Gray's trenchant anti-war sentiments are well to the fore in A History Maker; the fact that the Ettrick warriors win a draw "on a technicality" (18) by finding a loophole in the regulations, emphasises that for Gray there is nothing sporting or orderly about the carnage caused by violent conflict; the notion of legally sanctioned conflict is held up to scrutiny and found to be badly wanting, with Gray ridiculing the notion that war is a game that can take place within a

²²This concern is also evident in The Fall of Kelvin Walker where Kelvin's meteoric rise to fame and public influence comes via his career as a BBC television presenter. See Chapter Two for further discussion of this point.

²³Dick Hebdige, "Bombing Logic", Marxism Today, March 1991, p.46.

²⁴This aspect of A History Maker echoes the World Summit in Provan which takes place in Lanark.

'civilised' framework. Another clear allusion by which Gray encourages readers to relate A History Maker to events of the nineteen-nineties is to the traditional Scottish song, attributed to James Hogg, "Blue Bonnets Over the Border" (A History Maker, 67). From a contemporary perspective, this allusion can hardly fail to evoke the all-too familiar images of the blue-bonnets of UN forces which have become a regular feature of television news reports.

Gray uses his futuristic setting to distance his readers from the military values of the late-twentieth century, and to encourage more critical attitudes towards its underlying ideologies. This is nowhere more clear than when Joe and Wat discuss centuries long past:

the dark ages when men fought wars without rules, and burned bombed looted peaceful houses, and killed raped enslaved whole families of women children old ones--and boasted about it in their filthy newspaper! . . . When Granny Pringle showed us films from those days I had nightmares"(33).

Of course, the twentieth century is the first to film warfare; moreover, the horrific features of war highlighted by the fictional characters in the extract above are features of conflicts of the 1990s--in the Gulf and in former Yugoslavia, for example. Gray draws attention to the extent to which the twentieth century has become 'accustomed' to such reports and suggests that a future era will indeed view these times as a 'dark age'. Gray exhibits a sense of outrage about events in the contemporary world which attract minimum 'air-time' and stir little public debate. This is a concern shared by other leading cultural commentators.

Interestingly, Noam Chomsky, a leading critic of the media and militarism in contemporary Western culture, quotes Orwell to explain the way in which media self-regulation operates: "Unpopular ideas can be silenced and inconvenient facts kept dark, without any need for any official ban," by means of a "sinister" and "largely voluntary" process.²⁵ Chomsky relates Orwell's assessment to that of John Dewey who in 1935 urged consideration of the:

²⁵Noam Chomsky, World Orders, Old and New, p.89. Chomsky cites George Orwell's unpublished preface to Animal Farm, published by Bernard Crick in the Times Literary Supplement, 15th September 1972.

effect of the present economic system upon the whole system of publicity; upon the judgement of what news is, upon the selection and elimination of matter that is published, on the treatment of news in both editorial and news columns.²⁶

In A History Maker, Gray poses very similar questions, reframing them for a technologically advanced, postmodern age.

The extent to which the Gulf War was a kind of 'virtual warfare' has been debated extensively following post-conflict reports of more extensive military engagement than was apparent at the time. However, the controversial claims of Jean Baudrillard that the Gulf War was a "virtual apocalypse" rather than a 'real war'²⁷ stimulated considerable philosophical debate about how to establish 'the facts' of the conflict and the extent to which its engagements depended on technological simulation. Gray seems to be responding to such debates in A History Maker.

There is little doubt that new technology, including the visual media, played an unprecedented role in representing the conflict, but the claim that the conflict itself was largely a media simulation has been challenged by Christopher Norris (among others) who, in his volume Uncritical Theory: Postmodernism, Intellectuals and the Gulf War, uses the debate around media representations of the Gulf War to challenge the theoretical frameworks within which the distinction between epistemological representations and ontological events can be blurred to such an extent that it is impossible to determine any 'facts' at all. Norris rejects any notion that all historical narratives are relative and have an equal claim to truth. However, Norris does not take issue with Dick Hebdige's assessment that:

The battlefield today is electronic. Wars are waged, as ever, over real territories and real spheres of influence. But conflicts between 'major players' are now conducted in a 'virtual space' where rival hypothetical scenarios, 'realised' as computer simulations, fight it out over the data supplied

²⁶Chomsky, *ibid.* Chomsky takes the quotation from Dewey from John Dewey: The Later Works, vol. II (ed. Jo Ann Boydston) from "Common Sense", November 1935.

²⁷Jean Baudrillard, "The Reality Gulf," in The Guardian, 11th November, 1991, p.25.

by satellites. Meanwhile, hygienically edited highlights of the action get replayed nightly on the news through ghostly green videos. . . .In this screened space anything can happen but little can be verified.²⁸

There are clear parallels with A History Maker where the satellite-type 'public eye' cameras record battles to then broadcast them as entertainment. In the screenplay, it is a plain old-fashioned TV camera rather than a 'public eye' which films events, but even the most early drafts emphasis the role of the camera as the key to 'history'. For instance, General McEwen inspires his men by telling them, "the film of our death will be screened and screened again to the last days of mankind and television and time,"(13) and the central protagonist is warned, "If you frighten the televisors, they won't screen the battle; nobody will see us fight so we might as well not fight at all"(7). The 'public eye' of the novel takes on an even more sinister role because it seems to film the battle as entertainment *on the public's behalf* as well as making a public record of public events.

The 'public eye' is a crucial metaphor in A History Maker for a social phenomenon which Michel Foucault has identified as a powerful method of social control. Foucault writes:

There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer.²⁹

Gray examines the power of the gaze in a rather different way in 1982, Janine. A number of feminist theorists have also drawn attention to the powerful role of 'the gaze' in maintaining patriarchal systems.³⁰ While this issue will be addressed more thoroughly later in this chapter, for now I intend to concentrate on relating Gray's 'public eye' to the notion of the Panopticon.³¹ In "The Eye of Power,"³² a conversation with Jean-Pierre Barou and Michelle Perrot, Foucault elucidates his discussion about the role

²⁸Hebdige, *ibid.* See also Norris p.123.

²⁹"The Eye of Power," in Foucault (Ed. Colin Gordon), 1980 ; p.155.

³⁰See Laura Mulvey (1975) and Teresa de Lauretis (1987) in particular.

³¹Foucault uses Bentham's idea of the Panopticon to focus his critique of social surveillance in Discipline and Punish (pp.195-230).

³²In Foucault (Ed. Colin Gordon) 1980; pp.146-165.

of visual surveillance as an instrument of social control; his comments below seem particularly relevant to the role of the 'public eye' in A History Maker. Foucault writes:

[The Panopticon] is a machine in which everyone is caught, those who exercise power just as much as those over whom power is exercised. (156)

He continues later,

each person. . . is watched by all or certain of the others. You have an apparatus of total and circulating mistrust, because there is no absolute point. (158)

The 'public eye' functions rather like the Panopticon in A History Maker, in that everyone is caught within its gaze; the warriors fight because they know they are being filmed. In this respect, Gray shows that the 'public eye's' gaze polices the society all too effectively. Its perspective is far from objective or neutral and it appropriates opposition into its hegemonic construction of events. Will can do nothing to prevent himself being portrayed as a military hero, even though his was a voice opposed to the conflict.

Gray devotes sustained critical attention to the role of the anonymous and impersonal, all-seeing 'public eye' (which in the screenplay is fulfilled by an individual TV presenter called Denis). The 'public eye' has rather sinister powers of surveillance, but also the power to construct a definitive narrative of events for posterity. Like "the prevailing consensus" in The Fall of Kelvin Walker, the 'public eye' has unregulated power because its sources cannot be identified. Notably, in the screenplay version, Angus (the central protagonist) eventually identifies his enemies not as a rival clan, but as a group of television executives. In the novel, Delilah, the evil *femme fatale*, is a television journalist who first approaches him in the guise of a 'public eye'.

The History Maker (scripted versions) shares its scepticism about the new television era with The Fall of Kelvin Walker; it might seem paradoxical that The History Maker was originally conceived as a television play. This raises the question of to what extent Gray's television screenplay is able to offer a critique of the very medium it employs. This is important, as Gray actively exploits the visual medium. In the screenplay directions he writes:

we have a film of the battle using the whole range of television techniques. . . with all the additional verisimilitude the Producer can devise. (16)

The kind of panoramic battle-scene shots possible--and often valorised--in cinematic narrative can give to the scene effects of grandeur of scale and verisimilitude that cannot be replicated in literary representations, however effective those may be in other respects. Gray's screenplay, in sharp contrast to the novel, does not offer much scope for the audience to put a critical distance between themselves and the battlefield. A crucial strength of the novel over the screenplay is the way in which its competing narrative voices provide a critical commentary on the text itself--for example, Kate Dryhope's annotations provide an alternative perspective on events to that of the 'public eye'. She provides historical information that sheds light on her son's behaviour, and enhances the interpretative framework of his history. In contrast to the screenplay, A History Maker exhibits many of the allusive, reflexive, and ludic qualities of Gray's other prose writings. This is a particularly marked occasion on which Gray's 'postmodern' strategies can be seen to improve the incisiveness and flexibility of his underlying ideological critique--in this instance, a critique of a particularly restrictive method of constructing historical discourse.

Just as Kate's commentary in the novel exposes the limits of the 'public eye's' account of her son's life, Gray also uses the narrative voice of the 'sports commentator' during the battle scene to show the limits of its visual perspective. The 'public eye' perspective on the battle is shown to be partial and partisan, as the commentator explains:

where you and I see the one surviving tribe of a gallant Border army the Northumbrians see--and who can blame them?--the remnants of a nest of vipers. (3)

It is easier to *balance* such commentary with a description of the scene in prose than on film, where the visual impact may override the competing message of any 'voice-over'. The commentary makes it clear that it is necessary to know the *history* of the conflict between these armies in order to understand their current context, and it is precisely this history that the panoramic view

offered by the 'public eye' cannot convey. Making history in other ways thus becomes an urgent necessity.

The early scripts and subsequent novel version of The/A History Maker chart the development of Gray's critique of militarism; while his staunch anti-militarism is evident in all versions, the novel, the most recent version, shows Gray adapting to changing military discourses, and engaging with technological advances of the contemporary media. However, in spite of these merits, Gray fails to fully articulate and forge the links between warfare and 'gender warfare' which present themselves in the novel. Although Gray highlights the dire consequences of the contradictions between Wat's private and public lives, the novel offers no alternative prospectus. This is a crucial difference between A History Maker and 1982, Janine. In 1982, Janine Gray's interrogation of public and private conflicts, of the Cold War and the 'battle of the sexes,' is far more incisive and explores the their interconnectedness more effectively. Whatever its flaws, in my view 1982, Janine remains one of the most ambitious and courageously written novels in contemporary literature; the discussion which follows explores further some of the issues raised earlier in this chapter, concentrating on subjectivity and national identity in 1982, Janine.

No More Heroes³³

In 1982, Janine, Alasdair Gray's second novel, a crisis of national identity is conflated with a crisis of personal identity through the mental processes of the central protagonist, Jock McLeish. Unlike Wat Dryhope, who is an accidental hero, Jock McLeish is a weak and unremarkable man who longs to realise some heroic potential. 1982, Janine shares certain preoccupations of Gray's first novel, Lanark, which, according to Alison Lee, is primarily concerned with, "structures of power, from familial, governmental and corporate control, to the manipulation of the reader and the character,"³⁴ but in contrast to Lanark, which is anchored firmly in

³³ Jean Jacques Burnel, Hugh Cornwell, Jet Black and David Greenfield, The Strangers--The Collection 1977-1982.

³⁴Lee, 1990; p.100.

the city of Glasgow, 1982, Janine uses Scotland as a textual site of ideological contest. In Chapter Two I addressed the extent to which "nations themselves *are* narrations";³⁵ Gray is one of a long line of writers in Scotland and elsewhere who have merged personal and national narratives in prose fiction. However, 1982, Janine treads this well-worn path only to break down the notion of the romantic hero and undermine romanticised national mythologies.

Jock McLeish, 1982, Janine's protagonist, is a very unexceptional and unhappy man, profoundly insecure in his job and his personal relationships. However, if Jock is a product of his society it is equally valid to say that his society, Scottish society, is a product of him. He is, after all, an example of the proverbial white, middle-class male; a "Scottish Everyman," as his creator describes him.³⁶ Several commentators have drawn attention to the social critique of 1982, Janine, but less notice has been paid to the ways in which the text interacts with feminist political discourse. Gray addresses gender-related issues because the gender politics of recent decades make plainly visible a point at which the personal and political, the private and the public, meet. The questions about gender which arise in 1982, Janine help to contextualise its broad cultural analysis of personal and national identity.

Writing in 1990, Joy Hendry argued in her introduction to the reissue of Chapman 35-36, "Scotland: A Predicament For The Scottish Writer?" that the "great Scottish success story of the eighties has been the surge of popular interest in all the arts, including literature."³⁷ However, at the time this Chapman edition was published in 1983 there appeared little to be optimistic about. In her original editorial Hendry talks of a culture "being trivialised," of a "complacent stupor" affecting those involved in Scottish writing, and, "most psychologically damaging of all . . . that sense of powerlessness, which breeds nothing but apathy." (1). The rather bleak picture outlined in Hendry's editorial, echoed by other cultural commentators in the early eighties, can to a large

³⁵Said, 1993; p. xiii. The phrase itself is borrowed from Homi Bhabha's Nation and Narration. See also Chapter Two (p.97) of this thesis.

³⁶Appendix, p.319.

³⁷Editorial, Chapman 35-36 Reprint.

extent be attributed to the aftermath of the failed attempt in 1979 to establish a devolved parliament in Scotland, a campaign to which many of those involved in cultural life had devoted considerable energy.

However, 'the Scottish writer' has been assumed to be in a perpetual predicament ever since Edwin Muir published Scott and Scotland: The Predicament of the Scottish Writer in 1936. It was the republication of Muir's controversial essay, which I referred to in my own introduction, that sparked the Chapman 35-36 issue in 1983 (after a panel discussion organised by Polygon to launch their new edition of Scott and Scotland) but the fact that the essay was republished at this particular time suggests that its argument was all too relevant to cultural debate in the post-1979 fall-out.

Muir's notion of Scottish writers being stuck in a predicament seemed all too apt during the eighties, given the unpopularity of Thatcherism in Scotland and its uneasy constitutional situation in the years immediately after the devolution referendum. Furthermore, Muir's notions of tradition remained relevant to debates in the eighties about cultural authority and links between literature and politics during a decade in which writers attempted to redefine traditions and identities. Refuelling debates from the twenties and thirties might not at first appear a productive critical strategy, yet the challenge Muir offers to 'the Scottish writer' has been interpreted in diverse ways over the last decade: some writers of Scottish formation have taken Muir's argument as a challenge to displace their so-called predicament.

1982, Janine appeared at a moment when the whole notion of 'the Scottish writer' was being called into question, not just because of the difficulty of defining literature in national terms, but also because the primacy of the author as an agent in literary production had been seriously destabilized by the increasing influence of postmodernist writing and post-structuralist criticism. Arguably, those who attempted to displace the 'predicament of the Scottish writer' succeeded in changing the ground on which the struggle for cultural authority was to be contested in the latter part of the eighties and early nineties. 1982, Janine seems to have 'captured the mood of the moment' by encapsulating popular

progressive nationalist sentiments, narrated from the perspective of a very ordinary Scotsman.

Alasdair Gray's interest in cultural debate about the state of Scottish writing is evidenced by the fact that he was one of five writers who took the platform at the Scott and Scotland republication event organised by Polygon. In an article entitled "A Modest Proposal for By-passing a Predicament,"³⁸ Gray recounts the happenings of that evening in such a way as to diffuse both "the" predicament of Polygon's public debate, and the indefinite but singular ("a") predicament posed by Chapman into a multiplicity of predicaments faced by an unlikely assemblage of writers. I draw attention to this article because Gray's argument therein paves the way for 1982, Janine; it proffers a helpful avenue of approach not only to the subject matter of the novel, but also to the literary techniques and strategies its author employs.

Describing in retrospect the speech he planned to make, Gray uses the perspective of hindsight to highlight the points at which his plan was open to ridicule. He claims that he intended to avoid personal references, preferring to subsume all particularities into one collective identity of 'the Scottish writer' so that, "the audience would know I was speaking for all of them too"(7). Further, Gray claims he planned to 'paper-over' differences by ignoring,

sexual, parental, educational, religious and emotional predicaments, since these vary from person to person. I would stick to poverty and unemployment, of which everyone has, or pretends to have had considerable experience. In general terms I would explain that The Predicament Of The Scottish Writer is the predicament of the crofter and steelworker--the predicament of Scotland itself. What a radical, hardhitting yet humane speech that would be! Since there would be no crofters or steelworkers in the audience I would not upset a single soul.(7)

Notably, the sexual, parental, educational, religious and emotional predicaments Gray refers to in the quotation above mirror those faced by Jock McLeish, the protagonist of 1982, Janine.

³⁸ Chapman 35-36, pp.7-9.

Gray claims to be unable to remember what he actually said on the occasion in question, but he does recall Iain Crichton Smith speaking "sadly about the predicament of writing within, and for, the Gaelic and Lowland Scots language groups", Trevor Royle addressing the problems he faced as a Scottish writer having been born in England, Alan Spence talking in terms "probably as general as my own", and Allan Massie presiding over the affair "with the crisp firmness of a Victorian schoolmaster"(7).

According to Gray, other predicaments became evident during the course of discussion, but most importantly, he describes how he created a new predicament for himself when he rose to the bait of "a troublemaker [who] tried to get a positive expression of personal prejudice from the platform" by asking why there were no women represented. Gray admits he was stupid to suggest that "the proportion of male to female writers, statistically calculated, might, er, not, er, perhaps justify, er, the presence of more than half a woman..."(7). Gray provides ample evidence in this subsequently written essay that he is aware his comments were inappropriate, given the quality of writing being produced by Scottish women, but by focusing on the vexed question of gender issues, he anticipates the fuller critique of gender politics evident in 1982, Janine, and shows that the predicament arising from the marginal status of women in Scotland is his own predicament also. Gray implies that 'the Scottish writer' is perhaps not as homogenous as some all encompassing theories of his predicament might suggest.

Most relevant of all, however, to 1982, Janine is Gray's description of how he by-passes his own immediate predicament on the occasion in question. After making his ill-considered comments about women writers, Gray claims that:

Like a true friend Tom Leonard interrupted me here. He asked if this did not demonstrate that Scottish writing had basically homo-erotic foundation? I was able to change the subject by denouncing him for exposing our secret.

Whereupon headmaster dismissed the entire class. (7)

By making a joke about sexuality, Gray is able to avoid Leonard's serious question and simultaneously side-step his own social gaffe. Allan Massie, cast in the role of authority figure, soon puts a stop

to their dialogue, which in Gray's account is made to read as childish sexual innuendo. A serious or frank discussion about gender issues or sexuality in relation to Scottish literature could not, it appears, be properly included on cultural or critical agendas. Things have changed somewhat since then, in that the recognition paid to women writers has been greater in the last ten years than in previous decades. 1982, Janine helps to bridge a path towards less male-centred approaches to literature in Scotland. Gray's article, in which he goes on to argue that, "the fact that Scotland is governed from outside itself, governed against the advice of the three Parliamentary Commissions and against the wishes of most Scots who voted on the matter, cannot be used to explain our lack of talent because that lack is no longer evident"(9), sets the context for 1982, Janine. Indeed, the novel is perhaps most helpfully viewed as 'an *immodest* proposal for bypassing a predicament' as it is a confident and stylish attempt to unearth and uproot cultural identity in many of its manifestations in order to cultivate a flourishing and inclusive national consciousness. In 1982, Janine, Gray brings Jock to a more secure sense of personal identity by problematising his protagonist's subjectivity.

It has become commonplace for literary critics to argue that the meanings of literary texts are mediated, provisional, and unstable, but some feminist thinkers, amongst others, pay particular attention to the role of literature as a propagator of political power: as Gayatri Spivak contends, "the role of literature in the production of cultural representation should not be ignored".³⁹ Catherine Belsey, in her influential essay "Constructing the Subject: Deconstructing the Text," traces the origins of consciously political literary criticism to Althusser's analysis of 'ideological state apparatuses'. Belsey's own main concerns are with representations of women in fiction and the status of women involved in the production of literature, and she uses Althusser to support her argument that literature not only

represents the myths and imaginary versions of social relationships which constitute ideology, but also that classic realist fiction, the dominant literary form of the nineteenth

³⁹Spivak, 1985 (in Warhol and Herndl, eds.) p.798.

century and arguably the twentieth, 'interpellates' the reader, addresses itself to him or her directly, offering the reader as the position from which the text is most 'obviously' intelligible, the position of the subject in (and of) ideology.⁴⁰

The representation of women in 1982, Janine and the subject position of the reader raise important questions with political implications for critiques of Gray's work. Alison Lee argues that, "In Lanark, the tyranny of the visual image as a mimetic device is paralleled in the exploration of structures of power"(99); her comments might equally be applied to A History Maker and 1982, Janine. Lee contends that, "while Lanark provides a critique of representation, it does so by virtually enacting the very power that is thematized and criticized in the novel"(114). Lee's analysis of Lanark can be applied to 1982, Janine where the crisis of representation centres not just upon the way in which 'the nation' is perceived, but more radically, on the way in which human subjectivity itself is defined, and the ways in which it is constructed within ideology.

It is no coincidence that feminists like Spivak and Belsey have been at the forefront of critical attempts to change notions of what constitutes subjectivity: a great deal of Western history has presented women as passive objects rather than active agents. By uncovering the assumptions at the heart of such representations, feminists have attempted to change women's social positions during the course of the twentieth century. If a key tactic of the women's movement in the US and UK during the seventies was to convince women that 'the personal is political', the maxim could equally be applied to the process by which Jock McLeish becomes aware of his own position in relation to the forces and institutions that influence his life. Just as women were encouraged to use their new-found knowledge of their bodies and their social positions to make decisions based on their own best interests and desires, so too, Jock McLeish is able to free himself from some of the more adversely determining influences on his life once he becomes aware of the cultural and institutional forces that impede his moral choices. The sources of Jock McLeish's entrapment are

⁴⁰Belsey, 1985 (in Warhol and Herndl, eds.) p.593.

dissected in 1982, Janine in order to liberate him from their effects.

Girls on Film⁴¹

By drawing parallels between the political strategies of the women's movement, feminist literary criticism, and the literary tactics of Alasdair Gray, I enter a potentially controversial area of critical debate, yet one which has yet to be thoroughly addressed in relation to 1982, Janine. The novel's central metaphor compares Scotland's political situation to that of an abused woman; some readers have considered the book's literary depictions of women to be 'pornographic'. Throughout 1982, Janine Gray uses explicit language and sexual images to make a clear connection between the personal and political, but the following extract is a particularly stark example:

But if a country is not just a tract of land but a whole people then clearly Scotland has been fucked. I mean that word in the vulgar sense of misused *to give satisfaction or advantage to another*. Scotland has been fucked and I am one of the fuckers who fucked her and I REFUSE TO FEEL BITTER OR GUILTY ABOUT THIS. I am not a gigantically horrible fucker, I'm an ordinary fucker. And no hypocrite. I refuse to deplore a process which has helped me become the sort of man I want to be: a selfish shit but a comfortable selfish shit.(136-37).

Jock confronts his own complicity in what he sees as a process of exploitation, but resists the nagging of his conscience to alter his attitudes or behaviour. At a later stage in the novel Jock makes a specific correlation between the nature of his day-to-day work as a security installations supervisor and his relationships with women.

Jock, whose technological skills have been utilised to supervise the security installations at nuclear shelters within Scotland, takes stock of the militarisation of Scotland during the

⁴¹Duran Duran (A. Taylor, R. Taylor, J.Taylor, S. Le Bon, N.Rhodes), Carnival, Harvest, 1981.

Cold War and the economic decline of Clydeside. Jock tells himself that,

since the American polaris base arrived in the fifties capital has withdrawn and manufacture concentrated in the south. I am sure there is no connection between these two events.
(136)

However, later his reasoning forces him to denounce the proliferation of the nuclear arms race as a sterile and morally bankrupt exercise, precisely because he makes a mental connection between the power relations operating in his personal sex-life and the power relations operating between nations. He reflects:

Everyone wanted the moon until one day a great nation became wealthy enough to woo her. So scientists and technicians went pimping to this great nation and got rich by selling a quick moonfuck. . . . and now nobody wants the moon. She holds nothing human but shattered rockets and rundown machines that litter her crust like used contraceptives proving that Kilroy was here. The moon is still a dead world and nightly reminder that technological men are uncreative liars, mad gardeners who poison while planting and profit by damaging their own seed, lunatics who fuck and neglect everything in reach which has given them strength and confidence, like...like... (Like Jock McLeish fucking and neglecting Denny for a woman he could not fertilise.) (312-13)

In emphasising the way in which the international arms race abuses the planet, Jock also draws attention to the fact that his "very ordinary" treatment of Denny is damaging. It is important to re-emphasise that the alignment of the national and the individual, political and personal is sustained throughout the novel.

However, even though it is possible to view Gray's wide-ranging social criticisms as criticisms of patriarchal power structures, there are some difficulties in accepting 1982, Janine as a feminist tract. The novel does contain disturbing images which emanate from a view of women which feminists (of any gender) have sought to dispel. Jock McLeish's assertion that "nowadays

Britain is OF NECESSITY organised like a bad adolescent fantasy"(139) makes 1982, Janine a confrontational book. Of course, Jock is a fictional character, and Gray encourages his readers to put some distance between Jock's opinions, his own authorial opinions, and their individual opinions by warning that the novel, "is full of depressing memories and propaganda"(Back cover). Gray also explicitly distances himself from Jock in the Epilogue ("Though Jock McLeish is an invention of mine I disagree with him"[345]) but he suggests that by becoming involved with Jock's narrative and participating in Jock's 'bad adolescent fantasies' readers are also implicated in the process of exploitation. For many pro-feminist readers this may be an alienating and upsetting process, even though Gray is equating sexual with economic and political oppression. If Jock's fantasies are found distasteful or offensive, the political strategies with which Jock explicitly associates them can be viewed in an equally dim light, but if, on the contrary, Jock's fantasies are found enjoyable or exciting--if readers identify with Jock--then those readers, if they want to maintain that identification with the protagonist (which facilitates readers' engagement with the novel in the first place) will find it hard to do so without challenging and reassessing Jock's attitudes and responses as the novel unfolds.

Is Alasdair Gray justified in presenting such negative images of women, even if his intent or effect (neither of which can be easily ascertained) is to undermine the potency of those images? Or do the images of Janine, Superb, Big Momma and Helga (Jock's fantasy figures) merely perpetuate offensive stereotypes? There is no simple, or single answer to these questions, but the political allegory of 1982, Janine relies on readers being shocked by the fantastic images and sexual brutality inside Jock's mind. If the images of these women are seen as normal and acceptable, the social and political system which is destroying Jock can also be seen as palatable. In order to render the text "obviously intelligible" (to borrow Belsey's term) readers must identify with Jock McLeish and must adopt the subject position of Gray's drunken insomniac. As every reader becomes a site of literary production, every reader who looks at Jock creates a stake for her or himself in the novel's process of representation.

Yet Gray cannot control the reception of his novels, even if he can point his readers in certain directions, and the two reading strategies I outline above are only two of a multitude of possible responses to 1982, Janine. The novel itself may not be internally consistent any more than readers are consistent in their reading practices. Some insight into the problem of defining subjectivity and the equally problematic question of how textual meaning is constructed in relation to gender is offered by Mary Jacobus.⁴² Jacobus argues, "the production of sexual difference can be viewed as textual, like the production of meaning. . . . In order to read as women we have to be positioned as already-read (and hence gendered)"(945). She continues:

The monster in the text is not woman. . . rather it is this repressed vacillation of gender or the instability of identity-the ambiguity of subjectivity itself which returns to wreak havoc on consciousness, on hierarchy, and on unitary schemes designed to repress the otherness of femininity.(945)

Jacobus makes it clear that "reading as a man must involve a similarly double or divided demand"(949); relating her argument to 1982, Janine it becomes evident that Gray's work demands a reconsideration of gender roles in the construction of personal identity.

Jock's identity is most strongly rooted in his work, in his childhood experiences of school and family, and in his intimate relationships with women. Few of Jock's life experiences are very positive; those that are have been transient. Jock, thinking back to the high point of his adult life, his relationship with a loving but unsophisticated girl called Denny, describes his destructive behaviour and disregard for her feelings as "terrible stuff. Very ordinary and very terrible"(23). Jock certainly treats Denny badly, but he is not physically abusive towards her or any of the other 'real' women in his life. His fantasies, however, detail rape and other forms of physical violence perpetrated against imaginary women who have counterparts in Jock's past.⁴³ The so-called

⁴² Jacobus, 1987 (in Warhol and herndl, eds.) pp.944-960.

⁴³Janine's name and some of the novel's circumstances appear to be indebted to Albert Camus' story "La Femme Adultère," where the travelling-salesman protagonist's wife, Janine, leaves their small hotel room in rural

'pornographic' figures in Jock's head are related to naturalised fictional counterparts. Jock can only gain pleasure from his imaginary world by persuading himself that, "there is NO CONNECTION AT ALL"(53) between his mother and Big Momma, and by listing "IMPORTANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SUPERB AND MY FORMER WIFE"(33). The women in Jock's life, like Jock himself, are all portrayed within a broad social framework which emphasises their agency as well as their powerlessness. Helen, for example, has lied to Jock (and her other lover) and tricked him into marrying her. Jock positions himself in a 'feminine' role in relation to Helen, reversing the notion of women as 'passive victims within patriarchy': he wonders if he can explain to Helen's father that "his daughter had used me like a whore, discarded me and then proposed marriage"(297). Jock is bitter about the circumstances of his marriage, which is why he can justify to himself imagining Helen as Superb and can enjoy subjecting her to various tortures. Within the context of some nasty domination fantasy, Jock is able to conclude, "When we consider how the winners shaft the losers, the strong shaft the weak, the rich shaft the poor, accusations of sex-discrimination are irrelevant. Most men are poor weak losers. Many women are not"(121). Jock McLeish attempts to empower himself by exercising control over others--something he can only do in his mind. His agency is concentrated in his imagination and in his ability (which he shares with Gray in the role of author) to construct and present women as he pleases. As the novel develops Jock's perspective and opinions undergo thorough revision and transformation. Indeed, the narrative is driven by Jock's need to realise a secure sense of identity which does not depend on the domination or exploitation of others.

One of the interesting aspects of Gray's portrayal of Jock's fantasy figures is that the correlations between the fantasy figures and the women in Jock's life are not always direct. At times clear

Algeria. Edward Said argues, "Camus' intention is to present the relationship between woman and geography in sexual terms" (1993; 213) and he is critical of what he views as Camus' reinscription of French colonial occupation. Gray's own self-conscious conflation of Scotland with a woman, by contrast, questions what Gray sees as 'occupation' of Scotland and destabilizes the eternal feminine. Gray refers to Camus' The Fall in 1982, Janine, (343) but not "La Femme Adultère". See also Said, 1980.

parallels are drawn between, for example, Superb and Helen, or Big Momma and Jock's own mother, as in the passage cited above; at other times, however, the fantasy figures assume aspects of other characters in Jock's life. For example, the commanding and threatening presence of Momma wielding her rubber 'weapon' in fact evokes Mad Hislop with his tawse. The ease with which Jock's imagination floats from Momma to Hislop illustrates the proximity of their personae in his mind. Jock asks himself:

can I imagine my Superb obeying that order? Even if she hesitates first, and sees Big Momma pick up the rubber tube in her right hand and once again suggestively smack the palm of her left? Of course I can imagine it. Mad Hislop was a small man and he terrorised six boys, one bigger than himself, into standing in a row, holding out their hands, and receiving six blows each from his three-thonged Lochgelly tawse. (53/54)

So although Superb mostly corresponds to Helen, Jock's ex-wife, there are moments like the one above where *Jock's* own subject-position seems to correspond more closely to that of Superb. Jock does not notice--at this stage--the link between Hislop and Momma, but it is all too apparent to readers. Jock is blinded to these connections because he draws sharp distinctions between male and female figures: he is a man, Superb is a woman; Momma is female and Hislop is male. By accentuating the *performance* of gender, not as a state of being but rather as a position in a sequence of power relations, Gray poses a radical challenge to categories of identity such as binary gender distinctions. 1982, Janine seems to pose a question not dissimilar to one posed by Judith Butler: "what political possibilities are the consequence of the radical critique of the categories of identity?"(Butler, 1990, p.ix). Even though Sontag points out to Jock the "convincing political structure"(67) of his fantasies, it is not until later that Jock sees it for himself. Recounting his early sexual fantasies (which involved Hollywood film stars) Jock remembers,

telling myself stories about a very free attractive greedy woman who, confident in her powers, begins an exciting adventure and finds she is not free at all. . . . The woman is corrupted into enjoying her bondage and trapping others

into it. I did not notice that this was the story of my own life. I avoided doing so by insisting on the *femaleness* of the main character"(193).⁴⁴

Towards the end of the novel Jock can more fully acknowledge, and change, that structure in his working life and in his fantasies.

Gray's novel would seem to suggest that gender difference masks the enactment of a power differential. When Jock feels ill-treated by women he describes his experiences in terms more usually used in relation to women: he thinks of himself as a "whore"(277) after sleeping with Helen and feels "raped"(59) after a consensual, if disheartening, encounter with an editor. When Jock *is* in a dominant position in his relationship with Denny, he thinks of her as, "the wee hoor I keep at home. . .a luxury I can no longer afford"(244). Simplistic binary distinctions drawn between feminine and masculine are exposed as a cornerstone of patriarchal ideology which upholds exploitative domination as its prime relational model. The blurring of gender distinctions is also a relevant issue when considering Jock's relation to Janine and will be discussed later.

As well as being an amalgamation of people, men and women, by whom Jock considers himself to have been abused, the women in Jock's fantasies are constructed from the disembodied physiologies of film stars:

Let Superb have Marilyn Monroe's body, no. . .Jayne Mansfield's, JESUS, NO. . . give Superb Jane Russell's body and face. Remember nobody but Jane Russell, I mean Superb, and mother, I mean Big Momma. (53)

The boundaries *between* the fantasy figures are indistinct at times; for example, Janine and Superb both resemble Jane Russell. Jock dresses his fantasy figures identically at times (for example, when he lines them up in the gymnasium [p.116]). Here Gray again shows himself to be in some proximity to Butler, who is concerned to explore, "the boundary and surface of bodies as politically constructed"(x). When Gray presents Jock's women as a half-page of upside-down upper-case Ys (which revert to ordinary capital Ys after a few lines) he emphasises the constructed nature

⁴⁴Gray cites the classic French film Belle de Jour, wherein an attractive financially secure young married woman becomes a prostitute, as one of his sources in the epilogue of 1982, Janine.

of their representation; the Ys, which in Jock's mind represent the women standing astride, eradicate all human reference points from the figures and subsume all distinctions between them. This typographical trick, one of several typographically experimental passages in the novel, is a particularly disturbing one--much more so than some of the more explicit descriptive passages--which exposes the political and ideological structure of Jock's systems of representation.

Critics sympathetic to 1982, Janine have felt it necessary to defend its contents. Marshall Walker's second reference to the novel in his essay "The Process of Jock McLeish and the Fiction of Alasdair Gray"⁴⁵ describes it as "the anti-pornographic 1982, Janine". Christopher Harvie,⁴⁶ too, is slightly apologetic, arguing that the novel, "*despite its obsessions and perversions*, ends with a distinct if tentative sense of optimism"(83)[my emphasis]. Since the 'trial of Lady Chatterley' in 1959, literary forms of explicit representation have been increasingly available. Most of the contemporary political debate about sexually graphic material has centred on visual, not literary representations, and the extent to which legal sanction should be exercised over their production and distribution.⁴⁷

Arguably, there is a great deal more graphic imagery in fiction produced for mass markets (often oriented towards women)--and certainly no fewer sexist assumptions--than in 1982, Janine. However, even well-informed and reasonable commentators have argued that "a novel or a painting should not be exempted as pornography because the white male literary establishment calls it art"(Itzin, 452).⁴⁸ 1982, Janine attracted controversy upon publication because of its 'pornographic' content. Gray assimilated early reviews into a three-page "Criticism of the Foregoing" at the end of the paperback edition. The comments range from "Radioactive hogwash" (Peter Levi) to J.A. McArdle's

⁴⁵Walker, 1991 (in Crawford and Nairn, eds.) p.38.

⁴⁶Harvie, 1991 (in Crawford and Nairn, eds.) p.83.

⁴⁷Current debate centres on television violence and the wide availability of videos which depict explicit sex and violence. During the 1980s support for campaigns to remove erotic magazines from High Street news agencies was widespread amongst women's groups.

⁴⁸Catherine Itzin, "Pornography and Civil Liberties: Freedom, Harm and Human Rights" in Itzin, ed., 1993.

assessment that the novel is, "a thoughtful and sad study of the human predicament; to be trapped in a world where the little man, woman or country will always be exploited by the big bullies." Gray juxtaposes positive and negative reviews against each other, emphasising the seemingly contradictory responses of the literary style-setters of the press: Paul Ableman suggests that Gray's prose style could be "refined and strengthened," while William Boyd, in the very next excerpt argues: "His style is limpid and classically elegant." In actual fact, it seems that all the reviewers, even those who deprecate the novel, make pertinent points--they are all right and consistent within their own frames of reference. Whilst mocking journalistic review styles, the inclusion of review snippets also serves to illustrate that meaning is determined by readers' preconceptions, however hard an author may try to exert her or his influence. Gray's readers are strongly encouraged to make up their minds for themselves, not only about his book, but about all the moral and political questions it raises. The "advertisement", then, provides useful access to the source of 1982, Janine's controversy.

Alasdair Gray invites his readers to become voyeurs in Jock's mental landscape; a landscape which contains depictions of women similar to those found in the mass-produced erotic magazines sold by every newsagent. Any discomfort caused by the depictions of Janine, Superb, Big Momma, and Helga is heightened by the fact that few, if any readers can come to the book innocent of its sexual content. Readers are well-warned on the back-cover that the novel is "mainly a sado-masochistic fetishistic fantasy," and the Table of Contents explains that Chapter Two is "a recipe for pornography and political history." Following the success of Lanark, 1982, Janine was widely reviewed upon publication;⁴⁹ no-one need be in any doubt before entering Jock's imagination that there are likely to be, depending on individual preferences, a few shocks or thrills along the way.

Yet there seems to be a certain queasiness and reticence surrounding discussions of sexuality in Scottish literary criticism, in sharp contrast to the subject matter of many of the most lauded

⁴⁹Graphic excerpts from 1982, Janine also appeared in Cenchrastus No.12, April 1983, prior to the novel's publication.

fictions of this century. Voyeurism and sexual fantasy are not new in Scottish fiction, as Stephen Boyd points out,⁵⁰ but unlike Tam o'Shanter, Jock McLeish is, in a sense, a professional voyeur. He is a supervisor by trade, and of security installations. Gray breaches the security systems of social propriety not only by exposing Jock's sexual fantasies, but also by implicating his readers. This observation adds weight to the point made earlier that whether we identify ourselves as readers looking into Jock's mind or allow ourselves to identify with Jock the textual subject we become implicated in his world.

Scopophilia is arguably a more important component in the reading of 1982, Janine than other conventional sources of textual pleasure. Stephen Boyd is the only critic to have drawn more than passing attention to the cinematic aspects of the novel, despite the fact that from the outset the temporally and geographically specific location of the novel, Scotland in 1982, is juxtaposed to the remote and materially unconstituted terrain of Hollywood.⁵¹ 1982, Janine uses cinematic techniques as literary devices: the novel's fantasies are (rather self-reflexively) constructed as a cinematic narrative, and readers are positioned as viewers. Good evidence for such a reading is provided by the explicit cinematic references made in relation to Helga, who in Jock's fantasies is a film director. Jock says, "Helga is crucial, she brings all the other girls together" and tells himself he must "get back to Helga in the viewing theatre"(157). More importantly, Gray creates a literary montage effect by 'switching scenes' from Jock's historical memories to his ahistorical fantasies. Although Janine's opening scene is repeated again and again ("Janine is worried and trying not to show it . . ."[12]) its meaning is unstable. The novel is 'cut' like a film which returns to this same image of Janine. Yet, the ever 'worried' Janine *responds* in markedly different ways to her feelings of apprehension at the outset and the finale of the novel; the image takes on changing significance as the novel progresses. In part, Gray achieves this effect by interspersing the fantasy scenes with vignettes from Jock's past--his childhood, his working life, his personal relationships. Often strong parallels are evident between

⁵⁰Boyd, 1991; p.108.

⁵¹ibid, p.112.

the underlying power structures of the fantasies and the events Jock recalls. Perhaps the clearest example of this is Gray's metaphoric use of 'prostitution'. In Jock's fantasies, Janine, a struggling actress, is persuaded to dress and behave as she does by the lure of career advancement and substantial sums of money; Jock recognises that he too has been 'bought' by the attractions of his steady, well-paid job. The recurring images of Superb, a frustrated housewife, in handcuffs highlight the ambivalence of 'security': her domestic security is a form of entrapment. Similarly, Jock's work in security installations is a jail which he projects onto the women in his imagination. Consciously, he can recognise these structures in his own life, but he does not consciously connect them to his fantasies. Until he does, he cannot find resources to change the patterns of his life. He says:

Yes, intelligences go whoring after money more than bodies do, because we are not taught that it is whoredom to sell a small vital bit of our intelligence to people we don't like and who don't like us. (258)

By returning to upsetting images of Janine and the others, having contextualized them in the patterns and events of Jock's own life, Gray makes it much more difficult for readers to see the fantasy figures as objectified 'others'. Rather, the acceptable surface of Jock's life--his steady job and outward respectability come under critical scrutiny. When Jock's sexual fantasies are thought of as a cinematic text of moving, changing images, it becomes possible to read the novel as an assault on the politics of the voyeuristic gaze, where the widescreen of the reader's mind is the site of the action and conflict.

Describing how scopophilia (a less loaded term than voyeurism) can operate in cinematic representations, Laura Mulvey (from Freud) associates 'pleasure in looking' with "taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze"(434). The act of looking does not *necessarily* always imply control, but certainly, Jock wants his fantasy women to become "objectified others"(434) within the terms of Mulvey's definition, because as director of his own imagination, Jock can enjoy a level of mastery and control that eludes him in his real life. Jock in turn is subjected to his reader's controlling

consciousness. However, Mulvey also highlights another aspect of scopophilia relevant to 1982, Janine--"its narcissistic aspect," which, "comes from identification with the image seen"(435). Mulvey argues that "the voyeuristic-scopophilic look that is a crucial part of traditional filmic pleasure can be broken down,"(441) by exposing the structure of 'the gaze' and upsetting its conventions.

Alasdair Gray, I want to argue, actually breaks down both visual conventions and narrative expectations in this cinematic literary text (perhaps more so than in A History Maker) by upsetting Jock's, and by extension the reader's, subjectivity. *Unlike* conventional cinematic text, 1982, Janine, as I have demonstrated, actually destabilizes the boundaries between characters: the fantasy figures are conflated from different women known to Jock, from film stars, and from aspects of Jock himself; they are also, at times, conflated with each other. The strongest association Gray creates is, in fact, the link between Jock and Janine. Even her name, a feminine form of John, links her to her creator. Towards the end of the novel, Janine reads a story about a young woman called Nina who is seduced into up-market prostitution by a rich and charming man. Nina's story mirrors Janine's (note the similarity of *their* names) just as Janine's story mirrors Jock's. The first interruption to the Janine/Nina fantasy occurs when Jock reflects, "on second thoughts I certainly can change things overnight. Wait for me Nina, I have to do a job before you put on that skirt for me"(321-322). Jock sits down and writes his letter of resignation. However, when he tries to return to his fantasy, he realises that resigning from his job is not enough:

For twenty five years my sexual daydreams and loneliness and drinking and work for National Security have propped each other up. . . . Nothing new will grow in a mind containing a Cadillac containing Janine reading a story about Nina surveying herself in a full-length mirror. (324)

At this point Jock faces *himself* in the mirror. Gray all-but merges the identity of protagonist and victim so that by the end of the novel Jock can say, "Oh Janine, *my silly soul*, come to me now"(341)[my emphasis].

The process of Janine's development shows Gray breaking down fixed categories of representation. Janine eventually becomes an active agent in her own narrative, but only when Jock realises that he too has some agency:

the story must stop because Janine has now been forced to see she is a character in it. . . .She is like most people, but not like me. I have been free for nearly ten whole minutes. (332)

Janine responds to this new realisation with gusto. When Jock's fantasy returns to the familiar scene of Janine nervous before her audition, she refuses to be intimidated: "Hell no! Surprise them. Shock them. Show them more than they ever expected to see"(341), decides Janine. Janine's liberation is sexual because Jock has used sexuality to disempower her. Jock too, able to say, "I was a character in a script written by National Security,"(333) is able to change his existence by uncovering the processes, personal and political, through which it has been constructed. Gray's graphic and discontinuous images make evident the political implications of gender and subject construction. Jock's creative agency--even in the exploitative forms with which he creates Janine and the others--invites parallels with the agency of his author and readers in constructing textual subjectivity. For example, Jock's description of how he abandoned Denny draws attention to the power of systems of representation--like language, or text--to distort and diminish subjectivity:

Only horror films and fairy-stories tell the truth about the worst things in life, the moments when hands turn into claws and a familiar face becomes a living skull. My words turned a woman into a thing and I could not face the thing I had made because the thing saw in my face the disgust it caused me. (244)

However, key questions posed in relation to Alasdair Gray's use of "bad adolescent fantasy" have often been framed in moral, even juridical, terms: does the existence of sexual exploitation, in particular the sexual and social marginalisation of women in the material world, justify the reproduction of oppressive images, even where the intent (in so far as intent can be established) is to

undermine the prevailing social assumptions that give rise to it? Gray would seem to think so. 1982, Janine presents itself as a novel within a literary tradition of social dystopia, and shares with A History Maker strong marks of the influence of Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four. Originally published in 1949, Orwell's novel enjoyed an enormous reappraisal in the year to which its title alluded--also the year in which 1982, Janine appeared. Apart from cashing in on the titular association 1982, Janine, in contrast to Orwell's novel and A History Maker, projects backwards into history to interpret the present, rather than using a futuristic vision. An epigraph on the cover of the first edition of 1982, Janine reads: "Truly the remedy's inside the disease and the meaning of being ill is to bring the eye to the heart"(Alan Jackson). Gray paints a bleak picture of the present in order to emphasise that the social malaise Jock McLeish perceives in Scottish society is made manifest in his personal experiences. The metaphor can be reversed too: Jock's own 'degeneracy' (he keeps his sadomasochistic fantasies and his political preferences secret because he suspects they are socially unacceptable) is symbiotically related to social decay. Jock is indeed 'cured' in 1982, Janine, at least partially, but to bring Jock to self-knowledge requires Gray to intrude upon the most private corners of Jock's mind.

Gray's linkage of individual to social or national concerns is hardly a new development in fiction. Writers of the Victorian and Edwardian eras who sought to draw attention to social injustice through the portrayal of poverty and human suffering in their fiction, like Dickens, Shaw, and Wells, seem to have had a particularly strong influence on Gray since his teens.⁵² Gray is far from original in considering the social issues of the day appropriate subject matter for fiction; the nuclear arms race and gender inequalities were two of the eighties' most pressing issues. Surprisingly, the sexual content of 1982, Janine has been considered more shocking than Gray's account of nuclear

⁵²While the influence of these writers may be seen as pervasive in Gray's writing, Gray's 'Report on Reading' from Whitehill Senior Secondary School shows that he read extensively from these authors at a relatively young age. A photocopy of this, in Gray's handwriting, was given to me by Robert Crawford.

escalation. Possible reasons why this might be so lie in Gray's transgression of propriety's boundaries in his depiction of Jock's sexual fantasies. Discourses of sexuality are immensely powerful, and subject to many kinds of legal, social, and self-regulation. Gray makes 'public' in 1982, Janine what normally remains 'private'; the iconography of the 'top-shelf' from which Gray draws Jock's fantasy figures are an 'open secret' of discourses of sexuality; it is 'dirty laundry' tolerated, Gray suggests, in much the same way as the 'obscenities' of the Cold War were tolerated in Scotland.

In the seventies and eighties, however, women became more outspoken in their criticisms of gendered representations. As I suggested in Chapter Three, women's bodies have been a site of ideological conflict over a considerable period of time, but it is easy to see why 'second wave' feminists, many of whom were well-educated and financially independent, and many of whom were for the first time in a position to control their fertility, reasoned that the physical restraints placed on women had been far more instrumental in maintaining gender discrimination than had educational or economic factors. Women have challenged man-made iconographies of women forcefully in recent decades, making the representation of women a political issue.

Andrea Dworkin, a leading figure in feminist politics since the seventies, places great emphasis on the centrality of sexual imagery in the oppression of women: "At the heart of the female condition is pornography: it is the ideology that is the source of all the rest; it truly defines what women are in this system."⁵³ More recently she has argued: "Equality for women requires remedies for pornography, whether pornography is central to the inequality of women or only one cause of it."⁵⁴ However, Dworkin still maintains that "the oppression of women occurs through sexual subordination"(526).⁵⁵ Jock McLeish might well agree. Twice in 1982, Janine Jock confides that his "problem is sex" (12 & 16), the second time adding the proviso that "if it isn't, sex hides the

⁵³Andrea Dworkin, 1983; p.223. Quoted by Rubin, 1993; p. 34.

⁵⁴Dworkin, 1985 (in Itzin,ed., 1993) p. 533.

⁵⁵Dworkin's views are often misrepresented or taken out of context. She is less of an essentialist than some of her critics suggest, and her arguments have undergone considerable development over time, as the quotations above demonstrate.

problem so completely that I don't know what it is." Arguably, the weakness of Dworkin's thesis lies in the fact that she considers pornography a *cause* of gender inequality. There is no evidence to suggest that *sexually* graphic metaphors or images are any more effective in shaping negative attitudes towards women than non-sexual ones, despite extensive research which has attempted to prove causal links.⁵⁶ In the course of 1982, Janine, Jock discovers that his sexual problems are symptomatic of his moral problems, and that those are rarely matters of private morality, but more often of social morality.

The second problem with criticism of 1982, Janine on the grounds of its so-called 'pornographic' content is that pornography is particularly hard to define. Gloria Steinem has tried to differentiate between 'erotica' and pornography', but as there is no legal definition of either, the distinction becomes, as Ellen Willis puts it: "what I like is erotica, and what you like is pornographic".⁵⁷ One point on which both Dworkin and leading anti-censorship campaigner, Gayle Rubin agree is that "erotica is simply high class pornography."⁵⁸ Those who attempt to argue that pornography is "sexist and violent by definition" find themselves in a tautological position, whereby 'pornography' "by definition cannot be reformed," (Rubin 27) but remains as difficult to characterise as before. Ironically, such definitions would probably exclude a great deal of 'hard-core' porn where women are shown as equal and willing participants, or even in a position of dominance. To define porn as material which 'demeans or degrades' women also falls into the trap of assuming that all women are degraded and demeaned by the depiction of certain acts. For Laura Kipnis the danger of pornography lies in its,

hypostatizing [of] female sexuality and assigning it to all women [which] involves universalizing an historically specific class position. . . not as something acquired and constructed through difference, privilege, and hierarchy, but

⁵⁶See Rubin, p.30. Also see Alison King, "Mystery and Imagination: the Case of Pornography Effects Studies," in Assiter and Carol, eds., 1993; pp. 57-87.

⁵⁷Ellen Willis, Village Voice, 15th October 1979, p.8 and 12th November 1979, p.8; quoted by Rubin, 1993; p.28.

⁵⁸ Andrea Dworkin, 1981; preface. See also Rubin, 1993; p. 28.

as also somehow inborn--as identical to this natural female sexuality. 381

Unfortunately, many arguments decrying pornography fall into the same trap of adopting a universalising view of women. This is not to say that certain images are anything other than extremely offensive within the particular context of contemporary Scottish society, but Kipnis's observation makes it difficult to argue that 1982, Janine is 'pornographic' without also subscribing to an objectifying view of women or reading the novel highly selectively by focusing only on the fantasy scenes. By contrast, Alasdair Gray, as I have already demonstrated, specifically connects Jock's female sex objects to naturalised women, whose material circumstances he is careful to detail.

By describing 1982, Janine as "pornographic", Alasdair Gray also positions his novel within the terms of a specific contemporary feminist debate. Gayle Rubin points out that:

pornography in the contemporary sense did not exist before the late nineteenth century" when it "was coined *from Greek roots*. . .when many of the sex terms still in use (such as homosexuality) were assembled from Greek and Latin root words. (35)

Rubin, who attempts to give a historical context to the debate, argues that pornography can be considered as a central component in the condition of women only if it "is conceptualized as a trans-historical category" (35). For Rubin, the term "embodies not the prejudices of the Greeks, but those of the Victorians"(35). The prudery now often associated with the Victorian era may present an exaggerated or partial picture of nineteenth century society.⁵⁹ However, even if Gray's use of the word 'pornography' alludes to a set of so-called Victorian values the novel seeks to debunk, and inhibitions which it seeks to dispel, the issue at stake remains whether or not he is justified in his use of such explicit imagery. It is possible that the 'message' given by, for example, the image of Superb tied-up against her will, yet sexually aroused (55) is in direct conflict with the textual 'message' that women are harmed by exploitative behaviour.⁶⁰ Rubin offers evidence that

⁵⁹See Mason, 1994; Showalter, 1997; Miller and Adams, eds, 1996.

⁶⁰Laura Kipnis uses the example of a notorious Hustler cover which depicted "a woman being ground up in a meat grinder"(385) with the

there is "no systematic correlation between low status for women and cultures in which sexually explicit visual imagery exists, and high status for women and societies in which it does not"(35), despite extensive research attempting to establish such a correlation. However, Gray's fiction as a whole teaches that standards of decency are important to our society and that society collectively, as well as individually is responsible for supervising its own 'security installations.' Perhaps the influence of the Thatcherite concept of neo-Victorian values in the nineteen-eighties has, to some extent, influenced concepts of morality in contemporary Scottish culture; or perhaps it is a hangover from Scotland's puritanical past that has caused critical consternation about 1982, Janine. Whatever conclusions individual readers might draw, it is clear that the ideals of Victorian *and* Puritan femininity are well-served by the notion that all sexual images are morally suspect, and that women who exercise sexual agency are somehow 'unnatural' or 'whores.'

Discussion so far has examined some of the tensions and ambivalences of 1982, Janine in relation to subjectivity and gender; however, at the climax of the novel there is a decisive point at which the identification with, and sympathies towards exploited people fostered by Gray's text are transformed into a more explicit challenge to patriarchy. Mention has already been made of Mad Hislop and his violent bullying of his male pupils; yet when Hislop's victims cry he assaults their masculine identity: "the worst thing he could call a boy was a lassie"(82); surely a misplaced ultimate insult, but one which reinforces gender hierarchy. Hislop plays a particularly large role in Jock's life because Jock believes that Hislop is harsher with him than with the other boys. There are strong suggestions and circumstantial evidence in the text to suggest that in fact Hislop is Jock's biological father. As a child Jock is asked by a stranger if his name is Hislop "by any chance?"(82); we learn of Jock's mother's sympathy for Hislop on account of his invalid wife (82); we learn that Jock's parents "married three months before"(83) he was born. Such evidence is all unverifiable, but the fact that Jock

caption "We will no longer hang woman up as pieces of meat" to illustrate the way in which conflicting meanings can be constructed.

considers it so intently indicates how Hislop is a father figure to him, even if Jock's actual paternity remains obscure.

Yet at the end of the novel we learn that Jock's one moment of glory has been as the adolescent boy who stopped Hislop flogging another boy in order to cure him of a speech impediment. Jock intervenes, telling Hislop, "He can't help talking like that" and "You shouldnae have done that"(336). Jock challenges directly the 'law of the father', the pathetic, crumbling authority of the teacher who thinks he is beating manhood into boys. It is in recalling this moment of defiance, this explicit rejection of patriarchal authority, that Jock becomes aware of his own potential to live differently.

In 1982, Janine and A History Maker Gray places gender-related issues at the centre of Scottish cultural debate. These remain vexed areas of concern in public and private life; 1982, Janine in particular stretches the terms in which debates about masculinity and femininity take place and challenges essentialist notions of gender. By contextualising personal relationships within discourses of militarisation in Scotland in both novels, Gray prises open a window on those aspects of patriarchal ideology which sustain the objectification of women as surely as they sustain the 'New World Order' which has followed the Cold War. Whatever the respective limitations of A History Maker and 1982, Janine, both are eminently successful in drawing attention to what Gray sees as crucial flaw-lines in the Scottish cultural fabric. Gray poses questions in his novels about nuclear proliferation, about sex discrimination, about unbridled capitalism, which are dismissed as 'crank questions' in the mainstream media, yet he does so in a way which highlights their relevance to the day-to-day lives of ordinary people. In the process, he puts his finger on acute tensions, particularly in relation to cultural representations, which some might consider better left alone. But Gray persists. Whatever assessments are made of the results, or however ambivalent a response is aroused by novels like A History Maker and 1982, Janine, it is evident that the battles are far from over.

Chapter Five: Telling Tales

Throughout this thesis I have argued, explicitly and implicitly, that literary fiction is a powerful creator and carrier of cultural discourses; literary texts not only carry social and political assumptions, but also construct and reinforce ways in which societies, nations, and individuals define themselves. One of my central contentions has been that literary texts can affirm and reinforce, but can also modify and challenge, the discourses with which they engage. Alasdair Gray, as I have suggested, appears acutely aware of the role played by literary fiction in shaping cultural mythologies. I have already mentioned some of the extensive allusions Gray's work makes to other writers and their work and drawn attention to Gray's playful, yet serious, interaction with what he sees as critical establishments.

By this stage it should be evident that Gray's fiction is actively engaged in reshaping conceptions of what literature is, and what it is *for*. Gray positions art and the artist in an arena of social responsibility by suggesting throughout his fictions that art *has* purpose, and that its purpose includes helping societies make sense of their past histories and present realities. His characteristic playfulness and humour stress the importance he attaches to pleasure, to play, as an indispensable aspect of communal human life, and emphasise that he wants his fiction to be entertaining. Gray's fiction acquires at least part of its social usefulness by virtue of the pleasure it generates.¹ This might seem self-evident, but academic discussion of Gray's work--my own included--can tend to neglect the pleasure and enjoyment associated with reading. Gray's concern with the reception of his texts also helps to explain why he so often relates his novels and stories to each other, to specific texts by other authors, to broader literary traditions, and to the 'extra-literary' historicizing

¹Gray tells Axelrod: "I told you Poor Things would please academics and nonuniversity folk because I enjoyed writing it so much I was sure many would like reading it" (114). Entertainment is also Gray's recurring concern in a promotional interview for A History Maker with Annie Webster, broadcast on BBC Radio Scotland, November, 1994.

discourses of literature more usually the preserve of academic and journalistic writing.

In my introduction, I stressed Gray's engagement with the discourses of literary tradition; throughout the thesis I have suggested that Gray's work examines the political assumptions underlying cultural discourses and redefines the terms in which they are constructed. I have argued that literary discourses create and sustain cultural mythologies, and that Gray's fictions modify and redirect such mythologies. Gray's allusions to other 'texts' (in the broadest sense), not only place his own fictions within interpretative contexts, they also alter the terms in which those other literary works are interpreted.

Gray's tactic of rewriting literary modes, of 'wrestling with his literary precursors', might seem to bear some relation to Harold Bloom's concept of literary revisionism. According to Bloom, a would-be poet has to destroy the power of mighty literary forebears, while taking-on and refashioning their qualities and their 'mantle of authority'. For Bloom this is an oedipal process marked by an uneasy blend of rivalry and love; the poet's struggle is figured as the Freudian struggle of the son against the Father. Although Bloom concentrates on *poetic* influence, he does relate his concept to "the larger phenomenon of intellectual revisionism" (28); Bloom's concept of revisionism, at first sight, is highly relevant to Gray's prose writings, because Gray *does* refashion and reinterpret the work of his predecessors. Indeed, it is possible that such revisionism has an oedipal aspect and may be related to the conflicts within father and son relationships which figure quite prominently in Gray's work. In the previous chapter, for example, I highlighted Wat Dryhope's difficult relationship with his father, and Jock McLeish's relationship with Mad Hislop. In Chapter Three I highlighted the theme of lost and disputed paternity in Poor Things. Cairn's Craig has also argued:

The conflict of realism as history-inscribed-on-the-world and a world where history has been negated is

dramatised in Lanark in the conflict between father and son.²

In this final chapter I intend to discuss two novellas by Gray in which revisionary strategies and oedipal conflicts are equally marked. Absent paternity is a significant feature of McGrotty and Ludmilla, where the anti-hero, Mungo McGrotty, has never met his real father, but adopts the manipulative Sir Arthur Shots as a surrogate father-figure. Nowhere, however, is Gray's dramatisation of conflict between father and son more evident than in The Fall of Kelvin Walker where Kelvin has to contend with, and fails to overthrow, the authority of an overbearing patriarch.

However, while these aspects of Gray's work certainly merit investigation, Bloom's theory, while suggestive, can offer only limited insights into Gray's revisionary approach. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar point out in their essay "Infection in the Sentence,"

"Bloom's model of literary history is intensely (even exclusively) male, and necessarily patriarchal. For this reason it has seemed, and no doubt will continue to seem, offensively sexist" (290).

Nevertheless, they argue that "Western literary history *is* overwhelmingly male--or, more accurately, patriarchal--and Bloom analyzes this fact, while other theorists have ignored it" (290-91). While Bloom's work affirms the patriarchal values of the literary discourses it analyses, Gray's revisionary approach to literary traditions actively challenges patriarchal values and critically re-evaluates the ideologies of literary discourses. While I use the term revisionism in relation to Gray's work, I do so aware of the limitations of Bloom's approach for any critical practice seeking to redress the androcentric biases of its own discourses. Alasdair Gray's revisionary approach, which questions and troubles patriarchal authority, should be distinguished from Bloom's.

Gray's allusiveness and literary eclecticism is staggering: he appropriates themes, scenarios, narrative structures, styles, and even plot-outlines from an enormous range of

²In "Going Down to Hell is Easy," (Crawford and Nairn, eds. 1991) p.94.

writers and genres. It is not my intention to catalogue these, but in earlier chapters I have mentioned or discussed some key examples of writers from whose work Gray regularly borrows. Individual writers, however, make up only a proportion of Gray's allusive resources; he appropriates literary genres and modes with equal ease. For example, Charlton, as I mention in my introduction, has shown how Gray recasts the Epic in Lanark; in 1982, Janine Gray recasts the cinematic narratives of nineteen-fifties erotica, and in "A Report to the Trustees" he recasts the Picaresque. He recasts Bible stories in the 'Axletree' stories and "The Wedding Feast" (in Ten Tales Tall and True), and in Poor Things he employs many conventional elements of Gothic romance and Victorian fiction.

However, the two texts under discussion in this chapter reveal particularly clearly the political agendas which underlie Gray's 'retellings' of familiar stories. Power (in a variety of forms) is the central concern of Gray's novellas The Fall of Kelvin Walker and McGrotty and Ludmilla. These novellas recast popular literary forms but are also, in fact, prose rewrites of Gray's own earlier work. They also use pre-existing texts as formal and ideological 'springboards'. In these novellas Gray uses revisionary narrative strategies to rewrite cultural mythologies, and his interaction with literary traditions can be read as a subversive attempt to upset the universalised and romantic grand narratives of empire, nation, gender and class. In this respect, discussion of The Fall of Kelvin Walker and McGrotty and Ludmilla helps to draw together threads that have run through my earlier chapters. There are numerous points of comparison and contrast between the two novellas; nevertheless, the texts address issues of power and corruption in the political *and* cultural institutions of the British State in distinct ways and merit independent discussion. I foreground these textual discussions, however, with some further general comments about Gray's engagement with literary discourses.

Plotting Resistance

One question I raised in my introduction concerns the extent to which Gray's work destabilizes the notion of literary tradition and subverts its categories. Although Gray's work is littered with allusions to other writers, and he openly acknowledges multifarious literary progenitors, many of those works with which he associates his own novels are canonical and widely considered to be great works of art while others are written by personal friends without widespread literary acclaim.³ Gray exposes tensions relating to the status of art (in the broadest sense) *and* the status of artists in late-capitalist society. These tensions, also explored in Chapter One, are used by Gray to prompt questions about conventional distinctions made between so-called 'high' and 'low' art forms; Gray's work, to put it simply, blurs the boundaries between 'pulp fiction' and 'great literature'. In The Fall of Kelvin Walker and McGrotty and Ludmilla Gray's allusions are overwhelmingly to works of *popular* fiction, and the fictional paradigms he employs are paradigms of popular culture.

In my introduction I was at pains to argue that hierarchical conceptions of literary tradition frequently depend on binary distinctions for the construction of their literary values. I suggested that literary value systems conceal their ideological investments and are defined against that which they exclude or denigrate. I attempted to contextualise the construction of a Scottish literary tradition within its specific conditions of formation, and *also* in relation to the hegemonic social and economic discourses of modernity. I drew on Andreas Huyssen's considerations of modernity in After the Great Divide to argue that the evaluative

³In Lanark's 'Index of Plagiarisms' Gray mentions many of the most influential writers and philosophers in the English language from this and other centuries. For example, he refers to Shakespeare, T.S. Eliot, Joyce, Hobbes, and Freud amongst others. He also refers to icons of popular culture: Walt Disney, H.G. Wells, Lewis Carroll. He mentions key figures in Scottish literary discourse Hume, Carlyle, and Burns, but also lesser known figures like George Douglas Brown. He also mentions several contemporary Glaswegian writers who were not house-hold names at the time, although one or two have since come to prominence.

dichotomies between 'high' and 'low' culture frequently drawn between art forms, genres, and modes, are neither helpful nor very relevant to considerations of literature in the contemporary era of mass-production.

In a "Postscript" to Lean Tales, Alasdair Gray talks of the social and economic realities facing writers and the conditions that give rise to (and inhibit) literary production. He introduces readers to "a sturdy ship called H.M.S. Literature" (285), the preserve of an elite and exclusive band of academics and journalists. However, significantly, he writes:

Such a ship exists, but it is a work of communal imagination, and those who talk like captains of it are misleading or misled. (285)

The metaphor he employs is an intriguing one. One of the most abiding and interesting contradictions of Alasdair Gray's fiction is the way in which his work 'plays' to literary traditions, but at the same time seems to displace and subvert them. Gray's appreciation of other writers' work appears to be wholehearted, but he resists attempts to create or validate a 'Great Tradition'. Gray's makes some investment in the 'sturdy ship' but not so much as to prevent him from spinning the needle of its metaphorical compass from time to time. His image here recalls the sea-faring figure of Sir Thomas Urquhart who adorns the early pages of Unlikely Stories, Mostly and might point towards an idiosyncratic, even anarchic approach to the high seas of literary production on the part of the author.

Although evident in early work like Lanark, Gray's self-consciously ironic appeal to literary hierarchies has become increasingly evident in his more recent novels Poor Things and A History Maker. The two novellas under discussion in this chapter explore the indistinct borders between fictional modes and the levels of prestige attached to them; they also explore the borders between Scottish and English identities and the cultural-values that pertain to them. Anglo-Scottish relations in Gray's work have already been discussed in Chapter Two. It may be possible to see Gray's general critique of imperialism become more geographically and culturally

specific in his novellas. However, before I discuss The Fall of Kelvin Walker and McGrotty and Ludmilla individually, it is worth tracing some of their most prominent concerns in Gray's other writings; I also want to consider, briefly, how the novellas relate to Gray's other writings. These considerations are highly pertinent to the reception and interpretation of the two novellas.

The Fall of Kelvin Walker (1964) and McGrotty and Ludmilla (1975) both had their genesis as plays. Although written in the late-sixties and early-seventies,⁴ like many of Gray's plays of that period, they have been adapted into prose fiction in the wake of Gray's greater success as a prose writer. Several issues related to the reception of these novellas and their transformation into prose bear attention. While most initial reviewers were enthusiastic about The Fall of Kelvin Walker's satirical comedy, few outside Scotland gave adequate weight to its political subtlety. For example, Peter Kemp's review of the novella in the Times Literary Supplement places heavy emphasis on Kelvin's "repressive Calvinist background," but pays little attention to the ironic portrayal of London in Kelvin's adventures. Kemp (who earlier had reviewed 1982 Janine sympathetically and perceptively) reaches an enthusiastic but inconclusive verdict on The Fall of Kelvin Walker, arguing that the novella "raises a whole range of notions, and then juggles with them. Neat and nimble, a fable that never stays still long enough to be pinned down to a single significance, it is yet another idiosyncratic triumph".⁵ By contrast, Isobel Murray, writing in The Scotsman, is more sensitive to the novella's range of cultural allusions, concluding that it is "an extraordinarily accomplished brief treatment of one of the most potent Scottish archetypes".⁶ However, Murray's insightful review is an exception. Gray's

⁴The Fall of Kelvin Walker was originally a television play written in 1964 and was networked by the BBC in 1968 (see Charlton in Crawford and Nairn eds., p.168). McGrotty and Ludmilla, or The Harbinger Report (1975) was first broadcast on BBC Radio in July 1975 (see McGrotty and Ludmilla, p.126).

⁵TLS, 29th March 1985, p.341.

⁶The Scotsman, 23rd March 1985.

entry in the Cambridge Guide to Literature in English describes The Fall of Kelvin Walker as a "slighter" work; indeed, his novellas have, by and large, had far less critical attention and acclaim than his story collections and longer novels. There are a number of possible reasons for this, none of which might seem persuasive on its own, but which, collectively, have worked to diminish the status of these pieces of fiction. Some reasons are more significant than others, but it is worth outlining the others, if only to discount them. Firstly, the 'recycling' of material could be seen as expedient, opportunistic, or lacking in originality--in spite of the fact that Gray seriously problematizes the notion of artistic originality, most notably in Lanark's 'Index of Plagiarisms'. One does not have to accept theories of intertextuality wholesale to see that Gray's recycling of his *own* material is quite consistent with his earlier artistic expressions and outlook.⁷

Secondly, the slimness of the two novellas might be taken to indicate a lack of depth or seriousness. This might seem a particularly weak argument, but it is a serious point from the perspective of the book trade. To some extent, Gray's early publications do create a climate of expectation for later works, and the grounds on which the novellas can be compared to a novel set in an Epic vein like Lanark are not grounds which cast much light, favourable or otherwise, on the most interesting aspects of McGrotty and Ludmilla and The Fall of Kelvin Walker. Ironically, the construction of the so-called 'greater' work, Lanark, involved much debate between author and publishers about whether the opus worked better as one novel or two.⁸ Gray found it hard to find a publisher willing to publish the book as a whole. He was paid an advance by Quartet Books for first option on the completed novel, but, according to Gray, Quartet considered Lanark too long to risk publication. Gray says that, "the three London publishers who were interested said they would only

⁷Note also my earlier comments about the 'profit motive' in Gray's literary output (Chapter Four, p.203; Appendix, pp.306-307).

⁸See my interview with Gray, Appendix, p.308.

print it if I would divide it into the two books: Lanark/Thaw". Gray was afraid that if this happened, "they would never be joined together again".⁹ It would seem that size does, in fact, matter. Eventually Lanark was published by the relatively small and, at that time, independent publisher, Canongate of Edinburgh. Presumably Canongate was prepared to risk the novel's lack of a clear niche in the market against its originality and literary merits. The company's gamble can be seen to have paid off.

This last point owes at least as much to marketing considerations as it does to the thematic contents of Gray's work. Gray's concern with the marketability of his fiction emerges at an early stage in his literary career when the author in Lanark explains that Thaw and Lanark's narratives are "cemented by typographical contrivances rather than formal necessity" (493). In a footnote he suggests that "the author thinks a heavy book will make a bigger splash than two light ones" (493). The question of commercial impact is closely linked to questions of genre, presentation, and audience, and these questions become particularly acute in relation to those texts that have crossed generic boundaries from drama to prose. Gray's work has shown an increasing awareness of the critical distinctions between 'popular fiction' and 'avant-garde literature'. It is a divide he frequently complicates and displaces playfully--for instance, by describing Lanark, his most acclaimed novel, as a "blockbuster" on the cover of A History Maker.

However, the twin 'blurbs' on the inside flap of Poor Things' dust jacket are possibly the most stark example of Gray's self-conscious engagement with what Huyssen terms 'the great divide'. The first paragraph, "BLURB FOR A HIGH-CLASS HARDBACK," attempts to situate the novel in a particular social and historical context: "Since 1979 the British government has worked to restore Britain to its Victorian state so Alasdair Gray has at last shrugged-off his postmodernist label . . ." By contrast, the "BLURB FOR A POPULAR PAPERBACK" stresses instead the action, mystery

⁹Appendix, p.308.

and suspense of the plot, the romance between "rich" Bella Baxter and "poor" Archie McCandless, and the morally satisfying resolution of the story whereby, "the good people thrive, while the villainous . . . get what they deserve". This second paragraph is almost completely dehistoricized and reinforces a binary distinction between good and evil. Apart from a passing reference to "late-Victorian Glasgow," the content of the novel is presented in the universal terms of romantic partnership, social aspiration, and conflict between good and evil. Interestingly, in the supposedly 'high class' blurb, Gray makes reference to a number of writers whose works, although they have stood the test of time, are certainly outwith the 'Great Tradition' as defined by critics such as Leavis and Eliot. Gray cites writers whose creations have moved into the popular iconography of the twentieth century: "Mary Shelley, Lewis Carroll and Arthur Conan Doyle". Many people for whom these names mean nothing have heard of their characters, Frankenstein, Alice, and Sherlock Holmes. Although these writers may not be part of the so-called 'great' tradition, they are part of a rather more enduring one.

One of the most pleasing features of Poor Things' presentation is the way in which the novel manages to fulfil the expectations of 'high-brow' literary fiction and popular fiction: it is a clever and splendid parody of a Victorian novel which appeals to, and teases, erudite audiences accustomed to self-reflexive and sophisticated literary techniques; but it is also a racy and immensely readable tale of romance, intrigue, and the success of the protagonists against incredible odds. However, the deft presentation of Poor Things is in marked contrast to the clumsy presentation of The Fall of Kelvin Walker which was marketed, at least in its paperback edition, as a rather trivial comedy. Douglas Gifford is right to call the cover of Penguin's paperback edition a "travesty"(1988:101); in contrast to the Hollywood-style clinch between a seductive looking woman and terrified looking man on the paperback cover, Gray's own design for the Canongate hardback depicts the figure of a naked man, also used on the cover of 1982, Janine and to illustrate "Prometheus" in Unlikely Stories.

Mostly; however, on Kelvin Walker's cover the figure is inverted.¹⁰ Kelvin Walker's fall announces itself in this stark, vulnerable, all-too human image before we even begin to read. The Penguin cover robs the novella of this valuable intertextual reference to its author's previous work and diminishes the expectation that The Fall of Kelvin Walker will have anything serious to say about the power of social and cultural systems to damage and destroy human beings.

Another possible explanation for the lack of critical attention towards both McGrotty and Ludmilla and The Fall of Kelvin Walker lies in their deceptively simple narrative perspectives. I would highlight again Hobsbaum's comments about Gray being "a master of *ostranenie*".¹¹ Given Alasdair Gray's predilection for self-consciously playful narrative strategies in so many of his stories and novels, the seemingly uncomplicated narrative style of both The Fall of Kelvin Walker and McGrotty and Ludmilla is surprising and might raise readers' suspicions. Both are narrated by an omniscient third-person, and seem devoid of the playful complications of perspective and narrative voice that Gray uses in those prose fictions published earlier during the nineteen-eighties.

Gray has shown himself to be a writer acutely aware of the extent to which his literary texts interconnect, not only with other literary texts, but with a much broader 'text' that encompasses all aspects of cultural life and knowledge. Kristeva's theory of intertextuality, that every text builds itself as 'a mosaic of quotations, every text is absorption and transformation of another text' is a helpful pointer in this respect.¹² Kristeva's notion is adopted by Judy Newman who further suggests that, "we may wish to consider that paradigmatic *plots* abound, not just in literary culture, but also in general culture. The term 'intertextuality' can describe this sense of life as repeating a previously heard story" (113)

¹⁰The figure in Gray's illustrations bears some resemblance to Leonardo da Vinci's famous drawing, *Human Figure in Circle, Illustrating Proportions*, 1485-90, in The Academy, Venice.

¹¹O'Brien, ed., p.150. See also Chapter Two, pp.113-114.

¹² Paraphrased by Judie Newman (in Linda Anderson, ed.) p.113. See Kristeva, 1980, esp. pp.23-25; see also Moi, 1985; p.156.

[my emphasis]. In other words, fictional plots can provide narrative frameworks in which 'real people' make sense of the actual events in their lives. In his earlier works Gray has exploited such intertexts in ways that are potentially subversive and playful and has striven to make his readers aware of their positions in relation to the social and literary discourses at stake. The Fall of Kelvin Walker was Gray's third published novel, appearing the same year as the politically strident and unconventional volume Lean Tales and shortly after the appropriately named Unlikely Stories, Mostly. Gray's published prose works prior to The Fall of Kelvin Walker are characterised by self-reflexive, ludic narratives. McGrotty and Ludmilla appeared in 1990 between Something Leather and Poor Things, both of which tease their readers with playful narratives. Yet although the novellas' narrative strategies are troublesomely uncomplicated, questions of point of view are of crucial critical importance.

Lost Boys on Lonely Summits.

The Fall of Kelvin Walker is an extremely hard book to 'place', not only in market terms, and in relation to its author's other works, but also in terms of its setting and content. In Chapter Three I made much of the 'cultural cartography' of Glasgow evident in some of Gray's more acclaimed works, but The Fall of Kelvin Walker is set in London, in a landscape that lacks the rich detail, colour, and vitality of Gray's Glasgows. It is an imaginary space constructed from a great distance; it is a foreigner's London, seen through decidedly Scottish eyes.

Kelvin Walker is named after the river that runs through Glasgow's West End, which is in turn named after Lord Kelvin, the great Scottish scientific innovator. The protagonist's first and second names both carry connotations of progress. Read as a place-name and noun, rather than as a proper noun, Kelvin 'the Walker' is also positioned as another of Gray's flâneurs, those recurring figures on his abstract cultural landscapes. In The Fall of Kelvin Walker, Kelvin is relocated to the strange terrain of London. When he arrives in

London his itinerary comprises of places familiar as tourist destinations; after his arrival at the bus station, he sets out on foot to familiarise himself with his new environment, but, in fact, we find him "Crossing Trafalgar Square for the third time that afternoon" (2).

Until meeting Jill, Kelvin travels little further than "Marble Arch, Westminster Abbey, and St. Pauls" (3). Later, in a restaurant with Jill (recognisably the Post Office Tower) he looks out onto these and other internationally renowned tourist landmarks. Unlike the hill tops from which Duncan Thaw looks out over Glasgow, Kelvin's high place of vision revolves. For the most part, the novella remains in these, and other, public spaces. We catch only fleeting glimpses of the back streets, the alternative Londons, and the private lives of its inhabitants. When we do see Jake and Jill together in their own home, Jake is portrayed as a violent bully, and their relationship represents extreme inequality and abusive power relations in crude, thinly sketched terms. The novella plays on the reversal of perspective whereby London, the imperial capital, is seen from the outside, with little sensitivity, and its native inhabitants are objectified as well-meaning, but incomprehensible, slightly less-than-civilized beings. In The Fall of Kelvin Walker an objectifying gaze is turned back upon the imperial centre and its people.

However, Gray does not offer a straightforward reversal of cultural values whereby Kelvin and Mungo's 'Scottish' values take precedence over those of the English upper-classes; much of the humour of both novellas, but particularly The Fall of Kelvin Walker, works by focusing on the ridiculous behaviour of the central protagonist. In fact, distanced from their home environments, the absurd aspects of Kelvin and Mungo are even more clearly observed. Isobel Murray and Stephen Bernstein have pointed out the significance of Kelvin's origins in the town of Glaik--Kelvin is more than just a little bit 'glaikit', although few commentators outside Scotland seem to have picked up on Gray's little ironic joke.¹³

¹³See Isobel Murray's review in The Scotsman, 23rd March 1985; also see Bernstein (in O'Brien ed.) p.172.

Gray is laughing at, and criticising, Scottish society just as much as he is caricaturing and criticising English society; indeed, the humour of both novellas serves to enhance rather than detract from their 'serious' concerns. Arguably, the central 'joke' levelled at Kelvin *and* at Mungo is that they take everything too seriously and too literally: neither has any sense of humour.

Many of the more penetrating insights of The Fall of Kelvin Walker are reserved for Gray's wry criticisms of Scottish culture. Much of the humour depends on cultural misunderstandings between the protagonists, and the narrative tensions are fuelled by the disparity between Kelvin's perceptions and Jill's. When Kelvin describes his home town, Glaik, he assures Jill that "it's big" (7) and on the strength of some small manufacturing concerns and one 'famous son' claims, "geographically speaking, Glaik is more than a dot on the map" (7). He discovers, too, that "riches, it seems, are comparative" (16) when he cannot afford to pay the bill at the aforementioned restaurant. Jill comes out of these encounters in a rather less foolish light than Kelvin. Thus, Kelvin's role in the narrative is partly that of a clown; the privileged Scottish subject of Gray's reversal of perspective is actually held up to scrutiny and ridicule.

Much is made of Kelvin's cultural dislocation on arriving in London. Cultural difference and gender difference cause misunderstandings on both sides in his initial conversation with Jill--Jill concludes, "you're much more foreign than I thought" (7). However, it is national difference that asserts itself most strongly in Kelvin's encounters with prospective employers. Kelvin assumes the identity of a famous Scot, Hector McKellar,¹⁴ in order to secure interviews for prestigious positions, making it clear that he is interested only in power, not status. Ironically, it is his meeting with a fellow

¹⁴Bernstein also draws attention to Gray's choice of name here, relating it to R.L. Stevenson's character Ephraim Mackellar in The Master of Ballantrae (1889). However, in more recent times, the Scottish singer Kenneth McKellar who has enjoyed popular acclaim, in and (especially) beyond Scotland for his renditions of Scottish songs, may be an alternative source of the name of Gray's character.

Scot that presents him with his first real break; Mr. Brown knows Kelvin is not who he claims to be but, in a Scottish manifestation of the 'old boys' network', arranges an introduction for Kelvin at the BBC. Once there, Kelvin is told that "the BBC just now is suffering from a dangerous personality deficiency, particularly in the field of regional dialect" (73) and so he uses his Scottishness as his chief selling point whilst pursuing a British identity:

In six days his accent changed from distinct Scots to a form of Anglo-Scots and then grew indistinguishable from BBC English, except during interviews for television when he reverted to his aboriginal Glaik. (103)

Kelvin, to put it bluntly, 'turns native', adopting the lifestyle and attitudes of those he initially set out to 'conquer'.

That Gray is quite explicitly reversing the conventions of imperial adventure in The Fall of Kelvin Walker is made manifest in the table of contents, where the chapter titles use metaphors of expedition and territorial conquest: "The Discovery of London", "A Meal with a Native", "The Base Camp", "Taking the Summit", and "The Conquest of London" are just some examples. Gray's raw, conscious exposure of the novella's chief paradigm--as a tale of adventure, ascent, conquest and expansion--rests rather uneasily with Kelvin's naiveté and ~~un-self~~conscious buffoonery, and his passivity in the face of adverse events.¹⁵ Despite his vocal ambitions, Kelvin is an innocent abroad who happens to fit in with the schemes of others. In this respect, Kelvin is another of Gray's accidental heroes, but one off whom considerable irony is

¹⁵Gray makes Kelvin's imperial ambitions seem incongruous with his character. However, unlikely, amateur 'gentleman' heroes abound in adventure stories--most memorably, perhaps, in Buchan's prose fiction. Discussing attitudes towards imperial policy in Victorian England, Donald Read highlights Sir John Seeley's widely quoted assessment that, "we seem, as it were, to have conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind," (The Expansion of England, lecture series, 1883). Read interprets Seeley's comment in light of comments made by another historian, C. Gill that "Empire is congenial enough to the Englishman's temperament but is repugnant to his political conscience" (in National Power and Prosperity, 1916), suggesting that a sense of benevolent 'mission' was necessary to alleviate unease about aspects of British imperialism even among its proponents (Read, 1979; pp.190-191).

deflected. Gray's equally conscious break from this imperial narrative framework in the final chapters, titled "The Fall" and "Exodus" (which anticipate Kelvin's reversion to the cultural and literary paradigms of austere, judgmental Calvinism) and "Anticlimax", breaks the pattern of imperial adventure.

In Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire, Martin Green relates the development of adventure literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the rise of the British Empire, arguing that adventure tales from Defoe onwards provided "the energizing myth of English imperialism" (3). Green devotes considerable attention to Walter Scott as a key figure in the development of imperial narratives in English, and emphasises the social, political, and economic conditions within which Scott's work appeared. He stresses also the importance to Scotland of its trading, commercial, and military links with India. Although Scott's novels rarely mention overseas colonies directly, Green argues:

when we read Scott celebrating the ancestral virtues of Scotsmen--virtues no longer rife in modern England--we should think of India as being implicitly referred to. Those virtues habitually found an important political function, and a large economic reward, in the administration of India. . . Scott was in a sense writing about the nineteenth-century empire under the guise of writing about feudal Scotland. (118)

Green is also sensitive to the ambivalence of "Scots participation in the empire--the disengagement (compared to England) despite the deep involvement" (121) and he notes the prominence of Scottish writers as he traces the development of adventure stories. As might be expected, he pays particular attention to Stevenson, but in my view seriously underestimates Stevenson's work when he suggests that it displays "no real interest in large historical forces" (228). More astutely, however, Green connects Stevenson's work with that of J.M. Barrie, arguing that Barrie's Peter Pan transposes the themes of Treasure Island "into a different key" (229) which anticipates the end of the British Empire.

The ideological interpretation Green places on the rise of popular adventure stories, and the emphasis he places on distinctive Scottish identities and cultural mythologies, have some parallel in Gray's treatment of imperial adventure in The Fall of Kelvin Walker. Interestingly, Gray's novella, which revises the paradigms of imperial narrative, makes strong allusions to Barrie's work.

In The Fall of Kelvin Walker Gray rewrites Scotland and England's respective mythologies of social advancement and economic progress. Jill and Jake, the English couple Kelvin meets shortly after his arrival in London, are also two of the most familiar figures of English nursery rhymes. In the rhyme they (like Kelvin) go 'up the hill', but fall down again; when we meet Gray's two, they are facing uphill financial, emotional, and artistic struggles. Jake's surname, Whittingham, recalls another powerful English cultural icon, Dick Whittington, the self-made man who becomes Lord Mayor of London. The provincial belief that 'the streets of London are paved with gold' has often been derided in an era of rising social deprivation and problems facing inner cities, yet the mythology of urban wealth has some truth to it and retains its attraction: London is undoubtedly one the wealthiest financial centres in Europe (hence the world) and it reaps many benefits from its status as a centre of commerce and government. The existence of poverty and its related problems reflects the distribution of resources rather than their absence. Kelvin Walker believes that London will present him with scope for his talents. He has read Nietzsche, thinks God is dead, and believes that his human qualities of 'energy, intelligence, and integrity' will secure his success.

Kelvin's ambition recalls J.M. Barrie's influential Edwardian figure of 'the Scotsman on the make' in London, immortalised in his 1918 play, What Every Woman Knows: "A young Scotsman. . . what could he *not* do?" asks one of Barrie's characters, "Especially if he went among the English" (31). Gray appropriates Barrie's archetypal figure but reverses his fortunes in nineteen-sixties Britain. The epigraphs to The Fall of Kelvin Walker give resonant clues as to the novella's

central themes. The first, the beginning of St. John's Gospel ("In the beginning was the word. . . ") has had a particularly marked influence on Scottish public life since the Reformation--an influence that has come in for considerable criticism in the late-twentieth century.¹⁶ Kelvin Walker is a product of his culture in so far as he is raised in an extreme environment (even by Calvinist standards) against which he reacts; nevertheless, patriarchal Calvinism remains a dominant influence on him. The full significance of Gray's epigraph, however, lies in the primacy it places on the written word, or put another way, the power of narrative to give shape and interpretative frameworks to cultures.

The second epigraph can be linked to the first in that it, too, focuses on the power of words to define and propagate cultural mythologies; it is a fairly well-known line from What Every Woman Knows: "My lady, there are few more impressive sights in the world than a Scotsman on the make" (55). That the figure of the upwardly-mobile Scot in London was recognisable enough to have become a popular cultural stereotype for Barrie to 'milk' in Edwardian Britain, may in fact undermine the rampant individualism and naked ambition the figure might be seen to embody.¹⁷ The Fall of Kelvin Walker appropriates many of the central features of Barrie's play, but refigures its political discourses. The intertextual relations between Barrie's and Gray's portrayals of the upwardly-mobile young Scot in London are subtle, but clearly show that Gray is attempting to 'rewrite' the British

¹⁶Tom Nairn's famous quip about strangling the last Church of Scotland minister with the last copy of The Sunday Post (from his essay "The Three Dreams of Scotland" but given wider currency when it appeared on the cover of the first issue of Radical Scotland in February 1983) highlighted the more negative aspects of reformed Christian traditions in Scotland. Perhaps more pointedly, Tom Leonard subverts the Biblical text cited above in Intimate Voices, modifying it to "In the beginning was the Sound".

¹⁷The 'Scotsman on the make' has some connection with the many young Scottish men who Gordon Donaldson and Martin Green note made considerable fortunes in the colonies. However, the emigration of young upwardly-mobile Scots to London, as well as further afield, finds other literary expressions. For example, the 'Scotsman on the Make' appears in comic yet demonic form in Muriel Spark's The Ballad of Peckham Rye (1960) where Dougal Douglas, an ambitious graduate of Edinburgh University, causes mayhem amongst the inhabitants of Peckham Rye.

cultural landscape by contesting Barrie's figuring of the discourses of empire, nation, gender and class.

Yet Gray's choice of the Barrie epigraph is important for other reasons too. Barrie, knighted in 1913, is one of Scotland's most successful literary émigrés. His most famous creation, Peter Pan, a boy who remains youthful for ever in the Never Land, has become an immortal figure in the popular imagination as surely as in Barrie's play. However, Barrie has tended to polarise critical opinion. He has not always enjoyed critical favour within Scotland where he has sometimes been deprecated as a chief exponent of the much-maligned 'Kailyard' school.¹⁸ Some critics have denigrated Barrie's portrayals of Scottish provincial life because of their lack of social realism and the rather cosy, conservative, and nostalgic images of Scottish life they convey.

However, Barrie (like Gray) is a highly self-conscious writer; his portrayal of the 'Kailyard' is clever and ironic, and should not, perhaps, be so swiftly dismissed out of hand. His work was immensely popular with the reading public of its day, even if its sentiments offended certain kinds of radical. Unless we assume that Barrie or his readers were 'cultural dopes'¹⁹ it would be presumptive to conclude that Barrie's representations of Scottish life were intended, or were interpreted, as nostalgic portrayals of an earlier era and its cultural values. While Barrie often provokes strong responses, it is not my intention here to take sides 'for' or 'against' Barrie's work. Indeed, such sweeping 'all or nothing' divides can only inhibit my present discussion, as I want to avoid binary critical distinctions which might risk dehistoricizing literary texts, or creating a hierarchy of acceptable cultural representations.

Gray's appropriation of Barrie's play raises some interesting issues, however. By associating his own play with

¹⁸R.D.S. Jack (1991) notes that "Barrie began to lose his reputation in the period roughly between 1918 and 1940" (7). Jack devotes considerable discussion to the negative criticism levelled against Barrie in Scotland and highlights the influence of Hugh MacDiarmid and David Daiches in shaping negative perceptions (pp.5-6).

¹⁹Stuart Hall's phrase, used in Samuel ed. 1981; p.232.

Barrie's, Gray inserts his play into an as yet uncanonised Scottish theatrical tradition. Like The Fall of Kelvin Walker (originally broadcast by the BBC in 1968) Barrie's play constructs discourses of 'Scottishness' on the London stage for a predominantly English audience; but Gray, to a greater extent than Barrie, challenges the objectification of the Scottish protagonists. While both plays explore discourses of national identity and gender, Gray's revisioning of What Every Woman Knows' thematic conflicts upsets and challenges some of the underlying ideological assumptions of Barrie's play.²⁰

Barrie's play explores, and explodes, the myth of the 'self-made man', using the topical controversies of the early-twentieth century over women's emancipation to reveal flaws in this particular heroic paradigm. What Every Woman Knows is a serious and witty comedy which explores sympathetically the marginalisation of women in Edwardian society, and exposes deep seated insecurities about the emerging role of women as active subjects in social life. However, by replacing an assumption of masculine superiority with a myth of universal female superiority--what *every woman* knows--the play fails to displace universalised concepts of women as all-knowing Others, and offers little creative space for women (or men) to imagine any alternative to the role of the 'great little woman behind the great man'. Nevertheless, the play is at its most effective in showing that its hero is, all-along and unbeknown to him, indebted to his wife for his career successes. There are strong parallels with The Fall of Kelvin Walker. A brief comparison of the plays reveals that John Shand, the hero of Barrie's play is, like Kelvin Walker, a young man of humble origins and mammoth ambitions who goes to London to seek his fortune. Abandoning his original intention to become a minister of religion (Kelvin eventually becomes a minister--his metaphoric 'fall from grace') Shand stands for parliament and climbs the political ladder in London with remarkable haste, owing to his talents as a orator. Kelvin has

²⁰Gray, it is worth noting, is following Barrie's example in transforming his plays into prose--Peter Pan is Barrie's most famous example of a play transformed into prose fiction.

an equally "inspirational gift of the gab" (52), but seeks his fortune in the blossoming world of television. John Shand has the reputation of "a self made man" (53), but the audience is aware from the start that his fortunes are being steered by others.

From Barrie's opening scene, which opens on two men (John's future brothers-in-law) engaged in the strategic, tactical game of chess, it is clear that Shand is a pawn in a larger operation. His education is financed by the (aptly named) Wylie brothers on the condition that he marries their rather plain sister, Maggie, on completion of his studies. Maggie raises objections to the scheme, but is allowed little part in the decision-making process. Once in London, it becomes evident that Maggie, the most intelligent and 'knowing' character in the play, is responsible for the dazzling speeches which ensure her husband's political advances. When John leaves Maggie for a young London socialite his career crumbles around him until he accepts Maggie's help again.

Kelvin and John Shand share a common social ineptitude and unease in London, but both try to assimilate by becoming part of what they perceive to be the Establishment--John in parliament, Kelvin in the media. They play on their respective images as honest, straight-talking, tough-minded Scots, but are actually 'cultural chameleons'. Shand, like Kelvin Walker (and Mungo McGrotty) "wears tweeds" (133) all year round which conveniently disguise and distort his class origins. Apart from losing his Scottish accent with remarkable haste, Kelvin buys himself social status with consumer goods and the potential acquisition of a "photogenic wife" (94). Jill becomes to Kelvin as much a commodity to be "obtained" (120) and "got" (121) as his other new material gains.²¹ Kelvin, who has honourable, if patronising, intentions towards Jill initially, in wanting to rescue her from a miserable, violent relationship with Jake, soon extends his newly acquired system of social

²¹Jill's commodity status compares to that of Denny in 1982. Janine (See Harrison, 1995; p.164).

values to his private life. Jill soon leaves Kelvin to return to Jake, just as Sybil, John's English mistress, leaves him.

When we first meet Kelvin he is in reaction against his Calvinist upbringing and claims to be an avid disciple of Nietzsche. He is not interested in the "old neglected Nietzsche who died insane, but the new effective Nietzsche who will triumph through me" (13). Kelvin's 'will to power' is of momentous and grotesque proportions and, though comic, is intrinsically linked to his desire to "own and control things" (12). Ironically, the only arena where Kelvin can exert control and ownership is in his personal life, thus he thinks of Jill as a possession but fails to realise that in spite of her vulnerability and weaknesses, it is Jill who steers their relationship. Kelvin thanks God for 'giving' him Jill, when in fact Jill has seduced Kelvin, mainly because she feels protective towards him and wants to help him. He attributes power to an outside source because he is unable or unwilling to acknowledge Jill's agency as an active subject.

In the public sphere, Kelvin's naked individualism is no match for the greater power of the Prevailing Consensus. At the BBC, as presenter of a cultural and political magazine programme called, significantly, "*Power Point*," Kelvin does access the considerable power of the mass media; but *Power Point* is a programme in the service of the status quo. The "liberal BBC governor whose underlings called him the Prevailing Consensus" (86) who devised the show, intends it to "inform us of our political situation" (86). The governor responds to his producer's complaints that mainstream politicians "don't really disagree. . . they just pretend to," by drawing the perverse conclusion that this, "proves the country is not seriously divided" (87). By a circular piece of logic, he concludes:

Since the nation's leaders choose to make politics a form of shadow-boxing we will falsify the situation if we show anything else. (87)

The Prevailing Consensus shuts down the possibility of the media offering any challenge to the existing political order and perpetuates a myth of national unity. Kelvin Walker is

assimilated into this state of affairs, and by his presence actually helps to create the false impression that the programme embraces cultural and political diversity. Kelvin *sounds* as if he speaks from the geographical margins, but in fact he adopts and propagates the values of the cultural centre.

The notion of 'prevailing consensus' is one explicitly addressed by Christopher Norris in Uncritical Theory, his critique of ultra-relativist approaches to historical and narrative discourses. He argues:

the turn toward post-structuralist, postmodernist and neo-pragmatist doctrines of discourse and representation is one that can only lend support to prevailing (consensus) notions of reality and truth by making it strictly *unthinkable* that anyone could offer good arguments. . . against the elective self-images of the age. (93)

Norris, addressing theoretical positions adopted by some academics, perhaps overstates his case, but has salient points to make about the ability of the contemporary mass media to ignore historical material realities by manufacturing cultural representations that subsume difference. A key point of Norris' thesis is that while he accepts that the 'camera *can* lie'-that mass media representations can not only distort, but may actually construct (or acquiesce to) narratives that exclude the possibility of other formulations of 'truth'--he countenances the unfashionable possibility that 'truth' might actually exist. In this respect Norris is close to Chomsky's notion of 'manufactured consent'. It is quite significant that The Fall of Kelvin Walker was originally written as a television play and that Kelvin is a TV presenter rather than, say, a politician or businessman. Gray, it seems, is sounding an early warning system in The Fall of Kelvin Walker regarding the power of television to produce highly exclusive and homogenising discourses under a veneer of cultural pluralism.²²

²²A similar concern is evident in A History Maker and has been discussed in Chapter Four. It is worth noting the relatively close dates of composition of the

Interestingly, material sources of power are never made evident in The Fall of Kelvin Walker; the Prevailing Consensus is an anonymous figure, who seems not to speak on behalf of anyone, even himself. Hector speaks for the prevailing consensus when he tells Kelvin:

"You are going too fast for us, Kelvin."

"Who do you mean by 'us', Hector?"

"In the narrow sense of the word I mean The Prevailing Consensus. In the wider sense I mean the British Public."

"But I am not travelling too fast for the public! A great part of it is behind me. Have you seen my viewing figures, Hector?" (122)

In short, the prevailing consensus is (like the great ship 'H.M. Literature') a figment of collective imagination. It is an empty signifier used to mask the operations of power and defend the perpetuation of inequalities. Similarly, Kelvin's early atheism evaporates when he has 'acquired' Jill and his other material advances: "I said he [God] was dead. But he came alive again on the night when I finally obtained you" (120), he tells Jill. There is no transcendental referent at the base of Kelvin's belief system, and he urges the British people, via Mrs. Hendon's typewriter, to:

abandon mere limited earthly beliefs and believe. . .
once and for all in Belief itself. (115-116)

Kelvin's success is empty, and his belief in 'belief' proves to be worth little in the face of the material realities he is forced to confront: cultural discrimination, class disadvantage, and an angry over-bearing patriarch.

Gender is a crucial contested concept for Gray, as for Barrie, because it reveals most explicitly the links between the public discourses of economic and cultural power and the 'personal' discourses of love and romance. Power is gendered in The Fall of Kelvin Walker in ways that cut across mere sexual difference. Kelvin, when placating the landlady who has the power to evict Jake and Jill, talks to her "man to man"

(76); Jake, who explicitly links virility to economic power, refers to Kelvin as "Auntie Kelvin" (97) when he is attempting to win Jill back. Indeed, the power differential between the masculine and feminine over-rides the imbalance of power between competing national identities. As Hector McKellar says to Kelvin:

I'm as Scottish as you are!. . . I am well aware that mankind--and to a lesser extent, womankind--is made in the image of God. (123)

Like Barrie's protagonist, Gray's is naive and insecure around women, but John Shand adopts the Suffragettes' cause as his own political platform. In contrast to John, who "champions women . . . because his blessed days of poverty gave him a light upon their needs" (Barrie, 80), Kelvin is a political and social reactionary, who links together the causes of "Marxism and Maoism and Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation," only in so far as they all "bedevil the age" (115). He appoints himself as a spokesman for Great Britain--"capital 'g' at Great" (115)--and resolves to complain loudly about:

such topics as the miniskirt, the singing beetles, bearded flower-power student revolutionaries spoonfed from the tax payers' pocket by the permissive attitude of a bureaucracy run mad, and of course the greed of the unions. I will not refer to the greed of the stock exchange and the legal and managerial professions. (112)

Kelvin's hysterical tirades against some of the more benign aspects of sixties' culture makes him--and the Great Britain he wants to defend--appear ridiculous. (Mungo McGrotty, once he becomes a politician, attacks similar targets: "Inflation. The greed of the Unions. Drug abuse. The Aids epidemic. Local Government dictatorship, lesbian conspiracies against the Defence of the Realm. . . " [125].) But as well as mocking this particular type of Britishness, Gray is also satirising some more conservative attitudes evident in Scottish society, most pointedly, the tendency to complain about the present whilst harking back to 'the good old days'--an imaginary past. Gray

also undermines Kelvin's attempt to 'normalise' his conservative rhetoric. Kelvin claims:

I will mock the follies of the age from the standpoint of the decent, down-to-earth, ordinary man in the street.
(113)

But Kelvin's strangeness, his remove from the 'man in the street', be he Scottish or English, has been a central source of humour throughout.

By far the most telling point of comparison between Gray's and Barrie's protagonists is that neither of them has a sense of humour. When David Wylie asks John Shand, "Are you serious minded?" he receives the reply, "I never laughed in my life" (Barrie, 25). Kelvin is emotionally inarticulate in general--"there was a wide range of emotions he never noticed himself feeling" (33)--but however absurd the situations in which he finds himself, he never sees the funny side; for Kelvin, everything is deadly serious.²³ The humour of the novella is often induced by Kelvin's inability to laugh at himself; he discusses food stains on his neck-tie at his first job interview at length without one hint of humour. He even reacts with perfect seriousness to Jake's ironic and cynical mural, "LOVE=GOD=MONEY=SHIT" (21), subjecting it to philosophical analysis.

John Shand's lack of humour is crucial to the resolution of Barrie's play, which ends with the admission, "Every man who is high up loves to think that he has done it all himself; and the wife smiles and lets it go at that. It's our only joke. Every woman knows that" (160). Maggie urges her husband, "Laugh, John, laugh. Watch me; see how easy it is" (160); the stage directions indicate that he does indeed laugh in the final moments. This ending resolves the play's tensions around issues of power (cultural identity, class, and women's roles) by subsuming all other differences to an essentialist ideology of gender difference; this may be a comfortable finale, but it is one which detracts attention from the connections between

²³Kelvin's emotional inarticulacy compares with that of another of Barrie's 'naive protagonists', the Rev. Adam Yestreen in Farewell Miss Julie Logan.

these discourses of power and their structures. It also safely reinscribes inequalities between men and women.

By contrast, Kelvin Walker returns to Glaik, assumes a patriarchal social role as a minister, marries "a girl half his age," and has numerous children, "none of whom are very happy" (141). There is no happy ending for Kelvin Walker, because the social and ideological frameworks that secured his advance and facilitated his fall remain unchallenged and intact. Kelvin never achieves a sufficient degree of awareness of himself or his society to enable him to resist; he is sucked into, and ends up perpetuating, the system he wanted to escape. By contrast, Jill and Jake, protected by their privileged class position within a cultural centre, have a happier ending--Jake ends up teaching at an art school and stops being violent, while Jill becomes more secure; they have children outwith the legal bondage of wedlock which Gray implies is Kelvin's sorry fate. Kelvin's miserable end is counterbalanced by Jake and Jill's relatively 'happy ending'. Instead of Jake and Jill falling from a great height, as they do in the nursery rhyme, it is Kelvin who falls from the peaks of success. Gray's revisions of popular cultural myths rewrite English and Scottish narratives of social advancement, but transform the myths, bringing them closer into line with contemporary social and economic conditions. The resolution of The Fall of Kelvin Walker shows how cultural mythologies retain their currency in relation to material conditions as well as imaginary constructs of community.

Grotty Goings-on.

Cultural mythology is equally important to McGrotty and Ludmilla, but in stark contrast to Kelvin Walker, Mungo McGrotty achieves all the success that ultimately eludes Kelvin. However, for both protagonists, their fortunes are a consistent outcome of their responses to the political conditions and social climate in which they find themselves. Where Kelvin gets 'too big for his boots', McGrotty, less talented and even less admirable, understands rather better

than Kelvin the reasons for his success. Although there appear to be few textual 'tricks' in McGrotty and Ludmilla, and its political messages are delivered in a forthright manner by characters who are caricatures, it is, nevertheless, a subtly crafted book. In this section, I want to discuss Gray's transformation of the play McGrotty and Ludmilla into prose fiction and assess the impact of the transition; the play is written as a modern-day Pantomime, whereas Gray presents the novella as a spy thriller. Gray's employment of these highly popular forms of mass entertainment is worth discussing in relation to the 'high/low culture' divide mentioned earlier. Moreover, in reproducing--and, in the process, reversing, subverting, and satirising--the conventions of the spy thriller, Gray situates the novella in a highly ideologically charged and politically contested literary landscape where the intersections of cultural discourses such as nation, empire, gender, and class are exposed. McGrotty and Ludmilla addresses issues of agency, power and powerlessness in relation to these discourses; I will compare Gray's dramatic and narrative approaches to his material, arguing that his narrative carries greater political resonance.

The chief protagonist of McGrotty and Ludmilla reveals his origin as a dramatic persona of a particularly Glaswegian variety. As with Kelvin Walker, Mungo McGrotty's name suggests a great deal about his background and character. He takes his Christian name from Glasgow's patron saint, but in contrast to the positive connotations of 'Mungo', his surname, McGrotty, evokes his rather shabby morals and dishevelled appearance.²⁴ Together, his names also suggest that the protagonist is the son of a city that has become run-down, grimy and grotty. Such an image of Glasgow has been widely disseminated. The sanctity of Mungo's 'dear green place' in historical imagination contrasts sharply with the images of

²⁴In the very earliest unpublished manuscript versions of the play, entitled *Daniel* and *Daniel and Ludmilla--A Political Melodrama*, the protagonist's name alludes to the Jewish prophet, Daniel, who, the victim of a political conspiracy, is thrown in a pit of lions by King Darius (Daniel 6). These early manuscripts abound with animal imagery, some of which survives in later versions. The Book of Daniel, as I demonstrated in Chapter Two, is also used by Gray in his 'Axletree' stories. See NLS, Acc. 9247/23, A.

people and places Gray portrays in McGrotty and Ludmilla. Gray's earliest typescripts of the play make suggestions for the backdrop: "a collage of London's most pompous monuments: Big Ben, the Royal Hilton, the Dome of St. Paul's, the BBC, the Post Office Tower, the Winged Victory etcetera."²⁵ The comparison between this backdrop and the imperial London Gray portrays in The Fall of Kelvin Walker is notable.

Gray seems to make little effort to encourage verisimilitude between his readers and characters; we know these characters almost wholly through their actions, appearance, and speech. Readers have only the most fleeting of glimpses into their consciousnesses and so can only construct psychological profiles from the characters' outward behaviour and speech. Like The Fall of Kelvin Walker, McGrotty and Ludmilla follows the fortunes of a young Scotsman 'on the make' in London, but as Gray points out, while Kelvin achieves all he sets out to win, then loses it, Mungo "gets everything he wants, marries and lives happily ever after" (Back cover). Gray's departure from psychological realism in McGrotty and Ludmilla (in marked contrast to Lanark and 1982, Janine) may reflect the characters' origins as dramatic personae, but also serves to highlight the unessential nature of their subjectivity--the characters acquire their 'substance' in relation to each other. Most significantly, the absence of extensive psychological characterisation reminds readers that the figures are cultural caricatures whose words and actions are designed to probe other cultural 'texts' and explore cultural mythologies.

Gray claims that the plot of McGrotty and Ludmilla is borrowed from the story of Aladdin in The Arabian Nights. In Scheherazade's version of the story, the hero obtains a magic lamp by which he acquires wealth and fortune. On the strength of his meteoric social advancement he marries the daughter of the Sultan of China, but then loses the lamp, the source of his power, and finds his palace magically transported to Africa. However, Aladdin recovers his lamp and his fortunes are restored. The story is one widely

²⁵See NLS, Acc. 9247/24.

disseminated in contemporary society and the cultural myths it carries are powerful and attractive ones; the narrative envisions the possibility of social advancement across class boundaries, it affirms the eventual triumph of an individual pitted against conspiratorial forces, and it holds out the promise of sexual rewards for material success. Such 'triumphs' come as a package, as a 'winner-takes-all' prize won *against* competing forces.

The story's prominent place in contemporary popular discourse, however, has been secured through its theatrical appropriation rather than its literary source. "Aladdin" remains an extremely popular choice for pantomimes--arguably the most popular form of theatrical entertainment in Scotland. A (much sanitised and abridged) version of the story was even made into a full-length animated feature by the Disney corporation in 1992, ensuring Aladdin's continued recognition for a further generation.

Some features of the pantomime tradition remain evident in both prose and play versions of McGrotty and Ludmilla; for example, the characters are all exaggerated theatrical stereotypes. This 'larger than life' characterisation of the leading protagonists equates pantomime archetypes with equally stereotypical counterparts drawn from contemporary British culture: Sir Arthur Shots, MP is recognisable in the role of the evil and manipulative Uncle Abanazir, replete with an 'old school tie' and impeccable establishment credentials;²⁶ Ludmilla is a glamorous, rich, unavailable, and disdainful Princess, the spoilt daughter of a government minister; Mungo himself is a suitably humble but opportunistic pretender to wealth and status. Not one of these characters is attractive; all are rather successful. They are modern incarnations of mythical figures and strip the Aladdin story of its 'innocent' and apolitical appearance by translating it into a recognisable historical context, rather like the way in which Kelvin Walker politicises the paradigm of the 'Scotsman

²⁶The Uncle Abanazir of the Arabian Nights sometimes appears in pantomimes as Uncle Ebenezer. The more familiar Hebrew name Ebenezer is reminiscent of at least two literary characters: Uncle Ebenezer in Stevenson's Kidnapped (1886) and Ebenezer Scrooge in Dickens's A Christmas Carol (1843).

on the Make'. Gray's relocation of the Aladdin story to modern Westminster makes the political system seem like a over-theatricalized charade--a political pantomime, indeed--and makes the get-rich-quick mentality and manipulative behaviour of the central characters seem as grubby, morally destitute, and soulless as the system in which they operate.

However, the trouble with the reading of McGrotty and Ludmilla in relation to Aladdin that I have just suggested is that the political conclusions I have drawn can easily be reversed; to give Mungo McGrotty the mythic status of an Aladdin figure could actually help to justify the political status quo by suggesting not only that this is 'the way things *are*', but, insidiously, by implying that this is 'how things have always been and (by extension) ever will be'. McGrotty's sorry rags to riches saga could, in fact, be universalised by the Aladdin allusions. The play, therefore, risks endorsing the corrupt system it critiques.

Whether or not audiences internalise and accept, or react against and reject the political culture Gray portrays, the parallels he draws between the political culture of twentieth-century Britain and the Aladdin mythology could work to deny the likelihood of success for alternative political strategies. The comparison with Aladdin is also extremely problematic in so far as it dehistoricizes the plot as well as universalising it. The story of McGrotty and Ludmilla becomes dislocated from its specific post-war British context and instead becomes an ageless tale of true love and political corruption. While many old tales continue to find new resonance with generation after generation, the 'eternal' relevance of the Aladdin myth might serve to naturalise its elements and undermine the possibilities of changing the mythologies of British culture.

This point, although important, should not be overstated; McGrotty and Ludmilla is primarily a play which does draw attention to political corruption and is severely critical of the social systems it represents. The popular theatrical traditions it appropriates have often acted as 'counter discourses' to cultural and political authorities. Indeed, the

success of John McGrath's The Cheviot, The Stag, and The Black, Black Oil (1973), a play which married traditional music-hall elements with the committed ideological agendas of radical European theatre, only a couple of years prior to the first production of McGrotty and Ludmilla, might be indicative of a self-consciously politicising trend in Scottish popular theatre.²⁷ It coincides with the rise of political nationalism as an electoral force in Scotland and is almost exclusively leftist in orientation. Many pantomimes in the eighties and nineties have retained a strong political edge, making anti-Thatcherite jibes, and highlighting social and political issues (like homelessness and the poll-tax) within traditional plot frameworks. Scottish popular theatre has cultivated social awareness as part of its dynamic tradition and has tried to maintain contemporary 'touchstones' while using material that can easily become historically detached. McGrotty and Ludmilla, it is worth stressing, appears in a politically charged moment for Scottish drama.

However, although many pantomimes raise worthy social and political issues, few challenge the primacy of the protagonist at the moral centre of the plot. For instance, wicked Uncle Abanazir can quite easily be transfigured as a Tory Minister perpetrating great evils on the world-at-large, whereas the heroic role of Aladdin is rarely questioned. The central tenet of 'goodies' and 'baddies' remains intact. This is a problem for McGrotty and Ludmilla as it is hard to imagine how Gray's play, using these popular theatrical conventions, can distance the audience from McGrotty and Ludmilla sufficiently to place them in the ambiguous roles they occupy in the novella, or question the values of the Aladdin narrative where social advancement is gained at the expense of other people.

This is certainly not the case in the prose version McGrotty and Ludmilla. Even if we have sympathy for the socially inadequate and much put-upon McGrotty, it is hard to

²⁷The successes of small, independent theatre companies during the eighties which, like Wildcat, Borderline, and TAG, often used elements of popular traditions in their work, perhaps shows the longer term impact of 7:84 Scotland's early success on Scottish theatrical traditions.

see him as an attractive character. Even the narrator in the novella tells us:

he was not likeable. He knew it, but did not know how to change, and deliberately exaggerated his unlikeable qualities to show he did not care. This act fooled nobody and made him ugly company. (28)

McGrotty seems to be equally unpopular north and south of the border. Mungo tells Sir Arthur: "At home nobody liked me because they thought I was stuck up. Here nobody likes me because I'm not stuck up enough" (20). Mungo McGrotty, like Aladdin, makes meteoric social advances but, in contrast to Aladdin, we are not encouraged to admire or like him for it. Similarly, Ludmilla is far more vocal, and has far more agency, than any passive and pretty Sultan's daughter, but her beauty and sexual allure are counteracted by her manipulative, callous, and power-hungry behaviour. Although McGrotty eventually becomes a Tory Prime Minister and marries Ludmilla, this most conventional 'happy ever after' resolution does not bring the narrative to a satisfactory conclusion; the novella generates a sense of deep unease about the society which it portrays. The British political system and McGrotty's success are anything but endorsed by his triumphant outcome. We are told that Mungo's appointment, "showed the Scots that their picturesque promontary [sic] was not totally manipulated by foreigners" (121-122), and showed

the employed part of the British workforce that the son of a charlady could, with honest toil and a spark of talent, be advised by the queen on the running of the country. It also showed the world that Britain was not ruled by an old unfair and corrupt system of social classification based on inherited wealth. (122)²⁸

We also hear of old ladies weeping "happy tears over newspaper pictures of McGrotty and Ludmilla: they were so obviously proud of each other" (122). Readers, however, know that Mungo's toil has been anything but honest, that he has a

²⁸In the 1992 General Election the Conservative Party used John Major's lowly Brixton origins to generate political capital in a somewhat similar way.

distinct deficit of talent, and that he has merely been the tool of self-seeking men with strong upper-class interests. Equally, the "loving couple" (122) of public life are known by readers to have matched themselves for calculated, opportunistic reasons rather than mutual affection. The fairy-tale ending is seriously undermined by the satiric, exaggerated tone of the narrative. It is hard to interpret the novella McGrotty and Ludmilla as an affirmation of cultural mythologies of social advancement because it so explicitly denounces the British political system and those yoked into its service. Instead, the novella opens up that system by showing how class, nation, gender, and empire are its most powerful defining discourses; in the process, the novella unsettles the mythological narratives of romance and upward-mobility that help sustain that system.

McGrotty and Ludmilla bears a strong resemblance to The Fall of Kelvin Walker in its destabilizing, even debunking, of these powerful cultural myths. In McGrotty and Ludmilla, however, there is an authorial 'intrusion' in the final chapter where Gray assures readers, "though a blatant plagiarist, I did not plagiarise the Whitehall comedy programme *Yes Minister*" (126). Gray does, though, acknowledge Hilaire Belloc's But Soft--We Are Observed in addition to the Aladdin story, maintaining that while he borrowed McGrotty and Ludmilla's plot from the latter, the "world it shows," (126) is informed by Belloc. It is worth noting that although the prose version of McGrotty and Ludmilla appears within the context of over a decade of Conservative government (governments which were plagued by accusations of corruption, scandals, and cover-ups)²⁹ the play version predates the radical neo-liberalism of British politics during the nineteen-eighties and nineties. This suggests again that Gray's concern about relations of power and abuses of power are not simply a reaction to Thatcherism; rather, his broad critique of capitalism finds a particularly concrete and evident focus in these decades. The subtle

²⁹Gray mentions the Stalker Enquiry in the novella (p.124), but the Westland Affair, the Scott Enquiry, the Cash for Questions row, numerous sex scandals and charges of corruption dogged successive Conservative governments during the 1980s and 1990s.

gender switch of the anonymous British Prime Minister from "he" in the early drafts and typescripts of the play to "she" in the later scripts and novel (see Arthur Shots' interview at Downing Street [40]) makes a specific connection between the fictional realm and the historical milieu it satirises.³⁰

Gray's allusions to twentieth-century political satires are intriguing, but rather than an individual text, it is a mode of popular fiction that most informs the political agenda of McGrotty and Ludmilla. When Gray refers to "the secret intelligence agencies" (127) of Belloc's satire he points towards one of the most potent themes of British popular fiction throughout this century and links it to British political culture. Indeed, Gray highlights his own previously held belief that "most secret agents were inventions of fiction writers" (129). Dispelled of his post-war faith in Britain as "an unusually decent country" (129), Gray bemoans the consensus between successive governments and official oppositions, arguing, "The only political fun has been the public scandals over our spy system" (130). How appropriate, then, that Gray uses the 'fun' of such scandals subversively in McGrotty and Ludmilla by reversing and destabilizing the conventional discourses of the fictional spy thriller to expose its supporting ideologies and demystify its intrigues. McGrotty and Ludmilla apes many conventions of the British spy thriller; several commentators have suggested that relations between post-war political ideologies and the cultural myths proliferated in narratives of espionage is a strong one which should be closely scrutinized.³¹

Some of the key elements of post-war spy thrillers exhibited in McGrotty and Ludmilla include its portrayal of an

³⁰In the National Library of Scotland archive, Gray's manuscript sent to the BBC prior to the 1975 production of the play on BBC radio (Acc. 9247/23 B) includes in the Production Notes some comments on word changes he has made. Gray writes: "I could not bring myself to turn the PM into a man--the joke is too good." However, in the BBC typescript (Acc. 9247/23 C) the PM's gender has reverted to its masculine original (p.60). Presumably, the prospect of a female Prime Minister in 1974, following Thatcher's election to the Tory leadership, was too politically sensitive a subject about which to broadcast jokes in the mid-seventies. More than twenty years later, the 'joke' might be seen to have lost all humour.

³¹See Denning, 1987; Cawelti, 1987; Bennett and Woollacott, 1987 and 1990.

unlikely civil-servant as its central protagonist (another 'little man' caught up in the process of national history) and its plot of intrigue, double-dealing, blackmail, and danger. Other common motifs Gray's novella shares with many spy thrillers include the fact that within the text not just the security of the nation, but that of the 'civilized world' is at stake. Like the popular heroes of spy fiction, there is material and sexual reward *en route* for Gray's hero; also, most of his novella's characters have parallels in the stock figures of spy fiction (something which will be discussed later in this section). Gray makes direct allusions to the spy thriller, but distinguishes its scenarios from the situation portrayed in his own novella when McGrotty tells Ludmilla,

it's not a conspiracy, or not like the conspiracies in the James Bond film with one evil mastermind. Hardly anyone in this--let's call it an organisation--knows all the organisations that are a part of it. (108)

Once again, Gray is playing with, and politicising, powerful cultural myths, in this case, those surrounding the heroes of contemporary spy fiction such as James Bond. As in The Fall of Kelvin Walker, Gray's revisionary literary strategies expose the ideological discourses at work in the system they portray.

In Cover Stories: Narrative and Ideology in the British Spy Thriller, Michael Denning explores "ways the spy thriller narrates the crisis and contradictions in ideologies of nation and Empire and of class and gender" (2). He historicizes not only the thematic concerns and structures of the genre, but also the publication processes by which such texts are produced and disseminated. According to Denning, spy thrillers are the 'Cover Stories' for twentieth-century British culture:

the novel of espionage is the tale of the boundary between nations and cultures, and the spy acts as a defender or subverter of the nation in the face of the other. (13-14)

Already, Denning's focus on national and cultural boundaries offers a clue as to why Gray might find spy fiction a suggestive model for McGrotty and Ludmilla. By the time of

McGrotty and Ludmilla's publication Gray had established his reputation as a 'highbrow' writer with strong postmodernist leanings. Hitherto, his works had been hailed within the 'literary establishment' as highly original and notable for their slippery nature *vis-à-vis* literary conventions and categorisations. The spy thriller, with its formulaic approach and contemporary themes is an immensely popular mode, but not one held in high critical esteem. Gray's use of the conventions of spy fiction is a playful reaction against literary snobbishness which complicates his position within literary discourses; however, Gray also adapts the spy thriller to his own political agenda.

It is also of some significance to my present discussion that key exponents of spy fiction in the twentieth-century (a mode which 'took-over' from the tale of imperial adventure, to some extent) are John Buchan and Ian Fleming, writers with strong Scottish connections whose political leanings would seem far removed from Gray's. While their work often explores tensions in cultural identities, it can also be seen to inscribe a particularly narrow and insular ideology of Britishness. Indeed, both writers have been criticised for the xenophobia, racism, and sexism of their work.³² Buchan's career as a Conservative politician and Governor-General of Canada might be seen to correspond with his fictional inscriptions of British imperial values against German or Eastern European opposition. His 'gentlemen heroes' (who are amateur rather than professional spies) contrast with Fleming's most famous hero, James Bond, a post-war figure who embodies the values of consumer society.³³ Gray works against these popular paradigms in McGrotty and Ludmilla by exposing and criticising their often-overlooked ideological investments.³⁴

³²While such criticism has been widespread, the Canadian-Jewish novelist Mordecai Richler attacks both writers for their overt anti-semitism in his essay, "James Bond Unmasked," 1971.

³³See Denning, 1987; Bennett and Woollacott, 1987; Bennett, ed., 1990; Del Buono and Eco, eds., 1966.

³⁴Not all spy fiction reproduces the axioms of racism and imperialism; indeed, Denning points out that several more recent writers can be seen to revise the

Gray's use of the spy thriller mode is strategic. At a superficial level the simplistic dualisms (them/us, evil/good, East/West) employed in spy fiction--and which Gray invokes when he refers to an 'evil mastermind' in the passage above--are sometimes held indicative of a lack of literary depth or sophistication; I want to stress again that the binary distinctions between 'good' and 'evil', 'them' and 'us', are standard features of popular fiction and popular theatrical traditions alike and, like critical dualisms, mask more complex ideological conflicts. Although Gray confounds the goodies/baddies dichotomy in McGrotty and Ludmilla, his spy thriller has suffered critical neglect, partly, I think, because it apes so few conventions of 'high-brow' fiction.³⁵ Gray displaces literary dichotomies between popular and 'literary' fiction, but critical values seem harder to displace.

There may also be other reasons why McGrotty and Ludmilla received such an underwhelming welcome. It could be that satire, despite its prevalence in British literature, is still sometimes thought of as a derivative art form, lacking in originality; more likely reasons, however, are related to the novella's production and distribution. While critics argue about issues of qualitative value judgement and canonisation in relation to fiction, the book trade is primarily concerned with marketing considerations. As Denning points out, it is in the interest of publishers to compare writers to each other because readers who know one author might purchase a book by another on the strength of such comparisons. Inflated recommendations can boost sales and create 'schools' of writing and even authorial hierarchies.³⁶

Gray's subversive 'blurbs' can be seen as a reaction to such marketing strategies and have already been discussed,

political structures of early spy fiction in highly self-conscious and more politically-correct ways.

³⁵McGrotty and Ludmilla was not as widely reviewed as books by Gray published by more prestigious publishing houses. However, Gerald Mangan, for example, is scathing about the novella in a review of it and Something Leather in the TLS, 6th July 1990, p.731.

³⁶See Denning for a fuller account of the role of the publishing industry in the construction of literary sub-cultures and hierarchies. See also Richard Todd, 1996, for an account of the role of literary prizes in boosting the book industry.

as has the writer's attempt to earn an honest living. Gray's recycling of his own material into a supposedly more marketable form in the case of McGrotty and Ludmilla actually uses its new form to make manifest the processes of consumer capitalism as they relate to literary production. This is particularly interesting given McGrotty and Ludmilla's origins as a play (albeit a play sold to the BBC) and the fact that it has never appeared as a 'high class hardback' (to borrow the term Gray uses in Poor Things). McGrotty and Ludmilla was published as a paperback original by independent Glaswegian publishers, Dog & Bone Press, in 1990. Although my discussion does not really address questions of book sales and distribution, such questions do have some relevance to the discussion in hand. Gray has shown strong support for publishing ventures within Scotland and exercises preferences for Scottish publishers when he can afford to do so.³⁷ The publishing industry is overwhelmingly London centred and there is a very practical point to be made here about economic centralisation functioning as a form of cultural imperialism--Scottish writers who want to make their work widely available and be adequately recompensed have to court English publishers.³⁸

Despite its use of literary conventions usually associated with fiction produced for mass-markets, Gray's novella could not have made its author much, if any, money, in part because it lacked the large-scale public launch and exposure to the London-based media received by earlier works published by large, prestigious companies. Denning, like Gray, draws attention to the direct interests of publishers in the processes of canonisation, highlighting the role of 'cover blurbs' in creating (highly profitable) literary hierarchies and dynasties

³⁷In my interview with Gray, he talked of the dilemmas he faced in taking books "out of Scotland" (Appendix, p.307) because Scottish publishers cannot match the advances offered by larger publishers like Jonathan Cape and Bloomsbury.

³⁸Gray's letters to Stephanie Wolfe Murray in the National Library of Scotland (Acc. 11203/1) give some indication of the sums involved. He offers A History Maker to Canongate for £15,000 (half the amount he received from Bloomsbury for Poor Things) in exchange for a new contract with Canongate for the Anthology of Prefaces. He concludes that Canongate are still getting a "bargain".

based on little more than hype. According to Denning, commercialised fiction markets render literary categories of "'high' and 'low', elite and popular', 'Avante garde' and 'mass' extremely problematic" (3). In earlier parts of this thesis (particularly in the Introduction and Chapter One) I have shown how Gray self-consciously problematizes generic categories and challenges aesthetic value systems which inscribe social hierarchies. It is possible to see Gray's prose version of McGrotty and Ludmilla, rewritten in an avowedly populist form, as a defiant gesture against 'cultural capitalism'.

One of the key ways in which Gray reproduces, and subverts, the paradigms of the spy thriller is through his presentation of 'stock' characters. McGrotty and Ludmilla's central figures are stereotypical figures--something which the spy thriller shares with the pantomime tradition on which the play's early versions draw. The characters become role-players in a game³⁹ and their names echo stock-figures from the spy thriller tradition. Gray's professional politicians, Arthur Shots, Charlie Gold and The Minister have names with connotations of blood-sports, wealth, and impersonal, anonymous power, respectively.⁴⁰ They represent a social class and way of life constructed and familiarised within fictional narratives and media images. They are characters who inhabit a shady world of political intrigue far removed from most consumers' everyday realities. The female functionaries of these powerful men, Miss Panther and Mrs. Bee, display those characteristics displayed (at least in traditional *literary* representations) by the animals after which they are named. Miss Panther is silent and discreet, dresses all in black, and has a "smooth, unlined face"; Mrs. Bee is industrious, efficient, motherly--and busy! They are as

³⁹The metaphor of 'the game' is a central one highlighted by Denning. Umberto Eco (in Del Buono and Eco, eds., 1966) draws attention to the formulaic elements of Ian Fleming's *James Bond* novels. Readers aware of the 'formula' will bring expectations to the texts of spy thrillers with which enterprising novelists, including Fleming, can play; the novel itself becomes a sort of 'game' in which readers are implicated.

⁴⁰These names might also evoke Fleming's Goldfinger and The Man with the Golden Gun.

aptly named as the independent career woman Miss Money Penny in Fleming's *James Bond* novels and play a similar supportive role to the 'important men'.⁴¹ Gray subtly undermines this gendered hierarchy by having the newly promoted Mungo insist on addressing Miss Panther as "Python". Mungo's sheer rudeness in failing to use her preferred title and not showing her the common courtesy of learning her name, shows that he has little respect for her and fails to appreciate the extent and quality of the work she does on his behalf.⁴² This shows that Mungo has been promoted well beyond his capabilities and is so insensitive as to be oblivious to the social *mores* of his new environment. He is unaware that Miss Panther ensures the smooth running of his office.

As I have argued, the figure of the 'knowing' woman operates in The Fall of Kelvin Walker and in Barrie's What Every Woman Knows; in McGrotty and Ludmilla knowledge is also a source and mediator of power. Ludmilla, like Jill, is an upper-class English woman whose allure lies, at least partially, in her sexual *knowledge*. This seems to cast some kind of spell over the inexperienced male protagonist. Ludmilla's role in the novella should not be underestimated. She is seen to be spoilt, self-seeking, greedy, ruthless, and cruel. She is one in a line of women in Gray's fiction whose sensibilities are never revealed to readers and whose motives appear to be based only on self-serving expediency.

Nevertheless, to Mungo she appears assured, powerful and beautiful and he soon becomes besotted with her.

⁴¹Comparisons *could* be drawn between Bond and McGrotty in so far as both are Scotsmen secretly operating at the power centres of Westminster, but McGrotty (who keeps "Youngers Tartan Special"[88] in his cocktail cabinet rather than mixing Bond's more class-indeterminate vodka martinis) is not an action hero and is less ambiguously situated in terms of social and economic background than Bond. In any case, given the enduring popularity of Bond in Scotland, especially his conflation with the Scots actor Sean Connery, it is unlikely that satire levelled against the heroic ideal on that front would be very effective, even from Gray.

⁴²Indeed this is one of the central comic paradigms of the BBC series of the 1980s, *Yes Minister* where an equally naive (but more affable and seemingly benign) politician plays the fool to the more worldly-wise senior civil servant who wields power rather effectively while presenting himself as a mere servant of elected officials.

However, the figure of the 'poor wee innocent red-blooded Scottish male', seduced by the experienced, callous, upper-class English woman is a troubling one in so far as its recurrence in Gray's fiction tends to detract from any notion that gender difference is a significant factor in social inequalities. Gray suggests that class and nationality are more influential factors in social power relations. Of course, as I have argued in Chapter Four, gender relations are a deeply contested arena in Gray's fiction; his engagement with gender discourses is complex and often critical of patriarchal power structures. However, in McGrotty and Ludmilla the heroine has no redeeming features; in contrast to Kelvin Walker's upper-class English girlfriend Jill who arouses great sympathy, Ludmilla arouses only distaste. In fact, Ludmilla is perhaps the most unlikeable of all Gray's manipulative and callous female figures. It is not only her powerful position within the hierarchies of class and nationality that render her so dislikeable, it is also that she is a *female* figure who exploits her femininity to 'trap' men.

Crucially, Ludmilla is Other than McGrotty. Despite her impeccable English pedigree she has a Russian name. Within the paradigms of the spy thriller, particularly as it developed in the Cold War era, Eastern Europe has been constructed as 'the enemy' and the image of the exotic, untrustworthy foreign woman has been presented as the major temptation facing the patriot. As Denning points out, graphic sexual encounters become a central aspect of spy fiction only with Ian Fleming's *James Bond* novels of the nineteen-fifties which inscribe East/West political conflict. Ludmilla *does* indeed seduce and corrupt Mungo McGrotty (who is a rather willing victim) and it is Ludmilla who secures his switch to the 'other side'--the British Establishment.

The way in which Gray presents Ludmilla in the text raises problematic issues, because the character confirms the most unprogressive figurations of femininity evident in popular fiction. Ludmilla is objectified in that she has power over Mungo only in so far as *he* projects it onto her. His apparent 'captivation' by Ludmilla's outward appearance

conceals the underlying power-structure of their relationship: Ludmilla dresses to play a role for men, whereas McGrotty has far more tangible physical and political power--even if he is uncertain how to wield it. In financial terms, Ludmilla is utterly dependent upon her father, her 'uncles', and, eventually, McGrotty. Ludmilla is first encountered through the eyes of McGrotty, who figures her within familiar cultural forms as a dependent victim: within the space of one paragraph she is described as a "ravishingly lovely child who had been badly knocked about and deprived of decent clothes by a cruel stepmother in a Cinderella pantomime," and as a "damsel in distress" (30); she is a child-woman who wears clothes she appears to have "outgrown", and gives the appearance of having been abused by older, stronger people, although, in fact, "her bruised, swollen looking eyelids and mouth were tinted with lavender make-up and purple lipstick" (30). She appears as a starlet of stage and screen fantasies.

Yet before readers' can adjust to these images of Ludmilla as a defenceless victim, Gray reminds us that Ludmilla's appearance of vulnerability is an illusion created with "wealth and art" (30). She is, after all, a woman who thinks nothing of interrupting her father's conversation with the Prime Minister on the authoritative (gendered) pretext that, "Mummy sent me" (31). There is a glaring contradiction in Gray's portrayal of Ludmilla; she is attractively vulnerable and yet all-powerful. This a contradiction which Ludmilla shares with the beautiful, calculating, powerful women who work for the Russians in the *James Bond* novels and films, and who are 'tamed' by the popular hero. Gray never quite displaces this aspect of the Bond paradigm because he presents a Ludmilla who pretends to be a victim when she is really a vamp. He never troubles Ludmilla's subjectivity sufficiently for the terms in which she is constructed as a textual subject to come under close scrutiny--in contrast to his treatment of the 'mass-production' stereotypes of 1982, Janine.

However, although the portrayal of Ludmilla is problematic, she is a contested figure, and one whom Gray uses to draw attention to the novella's engagement with discourses of visual and spatial power. It is important that McGrotty is lured into Ludmilla's territory, an unfamiliar domain away from the public, social world in which they first meet. Although McGrotty recognises Ludmilla's artistry with fashion and cosmetics, he finds the notion of her having a studio incongruous. That the *studio*, primarily associated with visual arts, with visual study, is located "between a commercial art gallery and a video rental agency"(89), emphasises Gray's concern with the power of representation. The protagonists depart from the familiar landscape of Bond Street, (a significant locale?) in the city centre and enter an "inconspicuous little door" (89) before climbing a long, steep staircase to Ludmilla's boudoir. Like the fairy-tale princesses her persona invokes, Ludmilla's hidden, secret 'space' near the roof-tops is inaccessible and insulated from the outside, public world.⁴³ As in 1982, Janine the language and representation systems of mass-produced erotica is employed in McGrotty and Ludmilla. Ludmilla's studio parodies the bedroom sets of *James Bond* movies with its circular water bed and black linen--or, equally, the sets from mass-market erotica.⁴⁴ Either way, the silent video Ludmilla plays of "inter-racial couplings" reminds readers that these scenes are literary reconstructions of celluloid clichés and emphasises that the allure of exotic sexualities is rooted in discourses of race and gender.⁴⁵ Here, as in Something Leather, Gray highlights the commodity status of sexuality, reminding readers of the economic inequalities--the power imbalances--between McGrotty and

⁴³Compare to "The Hideout" in Something Leather.

⁴⁴In "Figures of Bond," (in Bennett, ed. 1990) Bennett and Woollacott, highlight the fact that the first Bond book, Casino Royale (1953) appeared the same year as *Playboy*, and note the intertextual relations between the magazines and the Bond films/books. Following Denning, they argue that the 'Bond phenomenon' "is best understood . . . in relation to the narrative code of the era of mass pornography which *Playboy* inaugurated (440).

⁴⁵See Judith Williamson, "Woman is an Island," for discussion of racially inscribed portrayals of female sexuality.

Ludmilla; as in 1982, Janine, Gray stresses the power of looking, in other words, the power of 'the gaze'.

Looking is, after all, the spy's chief *raison d'être*, so the emphasis placed on visual constructions (evident also, as I have argued, in A History Maker) should not be too surprising. If Ludmilla's clothes are an artful disguise, so too are McGrotty's, and they are his passport into new realms. Although he wears "disgusting tartan neck-ties" and has a permanent 'six o'clock shadow' despite shaving three times a day, the scruffy McGrotty is transformed into a respectable member of the House of Commons' staff by "the only tailor in London worth cultivating" (33). Yet appearances are deceptive; although Mungo now looks to be dressed in accordance with his new-found responsible position, he discovers that his Saville Row suit has an inner pocket, rather like a poacher's pocket, sized to conceal a standard-size document; the Harbinger Report will fit perfectly. The garb of a country gent disguises the fact that Mungo's costume is perfectly designed for a thief; his new veneer of respectability hides sinister motives. McGrotty's image improves with age; he wears "golden brown tweed cut in a conventional but out-of-date style," which gives him, "the aspect of an old fashioned but dependable friend of the family," who, "could never be corrupted by the luxuries of the rich" (114). Ludmilla, by contrast, resorts to what are termed more "sensible" (114) clothes.

Dress-codes are pertinent to some of the most interesting points made by Denning in his discussion of early spy thrillers. Exploring distinctions between the 'British' spy and his enemy counterpart, Denning uses John Buchan's spy fiction as a model to demonstrate how spies of all national and political colours are ambiguous and transgressive figures in that they cross boundaries: they wear disguises, enter 'foreign' territory, and are not who they seem. Denning points out that in Buchan's stories the 'foreign' spy can cross national boundaries undetected: he can assume the characteristics of another nationality--appearing, for example, as the perfect archetypal Englishman. By contrast, the disguises assumed by

the home-grown spy allow him to cross *class* boundaries. Denning shows how these distinctions help to construct and reinforce a strong sense of British national identity, first by inducing a sense of outside threat against the nation state, and secondly, by cementing a sense of national solidarity through a 'classless' hero who is equally at ease with kings and peasants.

Mungo McGrotty works within *and* against this paradigm because he fulfils the role of the white-collar civil servant enlisted into heroic acts for the good of the (British) nation, crossing class boundaries, but he is *also* a Scot who crosses national boundaries. However, from another perspective Mungo can be seen as a kind of traitor who abandons his nation and class (his Scottish working-class origins) when he is appropriated into the service of the 'foreigners', who are in this case--in defiance of the traditional spy story--the English upper-class. Mungo's clothes are a costume he wears to disguise political motives and distort his origins. In contrast to writers like Buchan and Fleming, Gray undermines the notion of British national unity or identity, and suggests that the British class-system is the enemy of the common good. The establishment to which McGrotty is converted (the *same* establishment served by James Bond and Buchan's heroes) is seen as corrupt and dangerous. In McGrotty and Ludmilla the 'enemy' is figured neither as 'foreign' nor *within* the system; rather, the enemy is the system itself.

Harbinger's name in McGrotty and Ludmilla suggests his role not only as the 'prophet of doom' but also as the one who harbours knowledge of the true extent of corruption in the political system. He is represented in a rather anachronistic way as an old-fashioned "modest bachelor who collects books and sings in a church choir" (38). He is a person unhappy about the economic system in which he participates but he tries to "assuage his guilt with donations to charity and by investing in corporations which did not directly profit from armaments, apartheid and pollution; but he doubted if God was tricked by such tactics" (40). The epitome of public-

spirited English decency, Harbinger finds the truths he uncovers too much for him and does the time-honoured 'decent thing', shooting himself with the pistol issued to him while he was in the Home Guard during World War II, after arranging for a single copy of his Report to be delivered to the Minister.

Harbinger's Report acts as an empty signifier in McGrotty and Ludmilla (The Harbinger Report is the play's subtitle). Readers never discover the substance of the report, but its mere existence and Mungo's knowledge of its whereabouts are the key to his social advancement because he has a secret others want to have for themselves. In this respect the Harbinger Report can be compared to that strange indefinable concept the 'prevailing consensus' in The Fall of Kelvin Walker which gauges the zeitgeist and weighs the merits of contested knowledges and truths. As Denning points out, notions like the zeitgeist are "easier to invoke than define" (92), but for precisely this reason, the 'prevailing consensus' which has no origin, no clear definition, and no consistency is important because it *is* so politically salient. In the case of the Harbinger Report, there is symbolic significance in the fact that Arthur Shots' cunning plan to steal the report and its secrets involves stuffing another envelope with blank sheets of paper in order to fool the Minister and others into thinking the report does not exist. The trick is shown to have worked when the Prime Minister calls Harbinger "a saint who had died for the sins of the Nation" and "a martyr to the cause of the status quo!" (72).

Gray keeps us intrigued about the report's actual contents too. The word "Pantocratoraphorbia" has no dictionary definition but the first part of it (pantocrat) suggests rule over all, from the Greek 'krateein', to rule, and 'pan', all. The second part might suggest the globe from the Latin 'orbis'.⁴⁶ Whatever Gray means by the word (and 'rule over all the world' would fit thematically with Shots'

⁴⁶ I wondered if 'pantocratoraphorbia' might be a word coined by Sir Thomas Urquhart in his attempt to formulate a universal language. Given his influence elsewhere in Gray's work this remains a possibility, but my reading of Urquhart has so far drawn a blank.

ambitions) it functions in McGrotty and Ludmilla in a similar way to the 'magic words' in a pantomime or conjuror's trick--another subtle suggestion by Gray that the political system is full of slap-stick and conjuring tricks. Regardless of what it does or does not signify, the word has profound effects; its power can be measured by reactions to it. Harbinger screams "PANTOCRATORAPHORBIA!" (43) before he dies and Arthur Shots will not let the word be spoken: "No! No! Please don't ever say that word!" adding, "You don't even know what it means!" (113).

We do get some stronger hints as to what the report might contain, however. When Arthur Shots reads the report he notices that Harbinger has used the human body as a structuring metaphor:

Each unit of information was, in a quiet way, shocking, but all of them fitted into something like (he shuddered at the notion) a horrible huge, living-but-disembodied hand which gripped the throat of all Britain. . . Harbinger had deduced the body of which this hand was only part, the body of a beast which pressed on the world. (97)

The striking similarity between this passage and the grotesque body imagery of Lanark and Poor Things (discussed in Chapter Three) is of the greatest significance. Used as a metaphor for the all-consuming nature of capitalism, it is one of Gray's strongest indictments of Western capitalism's economic and political order. In McGrotty and Ludmilla the political analogy is strengthened by Arthur Shots' response to the report which recalls both Rousseau and Marx:

He thought he was forging a chain to bind the nation. He now held a chain to bind the planet, or (to put the case in a different way) the world was everywhere in chains. (97)⁴⁷

In Gray's twentieth-century maxim, the chains affect not individual subjects, or a social class, but the whole world.

⁴⁷Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-78) in The Social Contract writes, "Man is born free and everywhere he is in chains." In The Communist Manifesto, Karl Marx (1818-83) maintained that, "The workers have nothing to lose but their chains".

Arthur Shots' lust for power and knowledge is Faustian in its manifestations and seeks the promise of eternal youth. This is an imaginary territory (akin to the Never Land?) highly evident in contemporary consumer culture where youth is celebrated and immortality is a prime goal.⁴⁸ Gray 'literalizes' these cultural metaphors as he literalizes metaphors in Lanark, making Arthur Shots acquire "a chubby, boyish look which reminded some people of President Kennedy and made medical observers think he was receiving some form of hormone replacement therapy" (121). Kennedy's popular political success, widely attributed to his good looks and media performances, marks a turning-point in the role of the visual mass-media in US politics. Gray's comparison of Shots to Kennedy plays on Kennedy's 'eternal youthfulness' in public perceptions because of his premature demise; the comparison also brings to mind Kelvin Walker's 'Adolf Hitler' haircut (a common enough style) in that it too is an apparently 'innocent' comparison which carries enormous political connotations. However, despite the unease generated by the portrayal of Shots' and McGrotty's rise to power, Gray makes one small concession to 'natural justice': Shots comes to a sticky end--literally. He falls down dead at the height of his powers and we are told that

his body decomposed at a rate which struck the undertakers as supernatural. However, the coffin was lined with lead so he did not leak out during the state funeral in St. Pauls. (121)

Shots has become part of the grotesque body Harbinger warns of, and in the end his body becomes grotesque too.

Both The Fall of Kelvin Walker and McGrotty and Ludmilla are far more serious and political in their thematic concerns than is normally acknowledged. Both Kelvin Walker and Mungo McGrotty move through a foreign environment as innocents abroad, observing its customs and cultural assumptions. While

⁴⁸Naomi Wolf, for example, argues that the 'Rites of Beauty' have become a new religion in consumer society and that the "fear of age" evident in Western religions is now manifest in widespread popularity of cosmetic surgery and anti-aging creams (see Wolf, 1991; pp. 106-121).

they rise to positions of great power and influence in material terms (notably, in terms which they perceive their English hosts to measure success) neither Kelvin nor Mungo is entirely socially assimilated. The social inadequacies of Kelvin and Mungo draw attention to cultural differences between Scotland and England. They show that in spite of shared political institutions and economic systems, perspectives *towards* these institutions and systems are markedly different. The cultural differences that emerge in Gray's novellas are significant and have far reaching consequences for the protagonists and, Gray suggests, society as a whole.

Moreover, Gray shows that cultural 'norms' are neither ahistorical nor value-neutral: they are intrinsically linked to social interaction, history, gender, and class. Gray disrupts perceptions of 'cultural norms' to an extent that permits his readers to question the 'naturalness' of class distinction, gender inequalities, and most fundamentally, the myths of imperial progress. It is the untapped power of everyday social discourses--leisure, sexuality, dress-codes--which Gray uses to undermine the more dominant discourses of parliamentary power, class and gender privilege, and the influence of the media. By subverting popular fictional modes--the adventure story, and its successor, the spy thriller--Gray upsets not only narrative expectations, but also conventional ideological assumptions. His use of modes more frequently used in mass-produced fiction expose the distinction between 'high' and 'low' art as overly simplistic and rooted in outdated conceptions of art, and demystifies some of the processes of cultural production. Gray's refigurations of cultural 'texts' in The Fall of Kelvin Walker and McGrotty and Ludmilla highlight contested discourses in social and political domains and stress the necessity of adapting and transforming popular cultural mythologies in order to rejuvenate their critical potency within contemporary contexts.

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Towards a Conclusion

Conclusions might seem to be anathema to Alasdair Gray. In the last ten years he has devoted much of his creative energy to a volume entitled The Anthology of Prefaces, and it provides an ironic, yet fitting, place to end my discussions of Gray's work. A recurring theme of my argument in the foregoing chapters has been that in his fictions, Gray resists being pinned-down to any one fixed standpoint and eschews ideological absolutes. He also avoids any essentialism that would diminish the contradictions in the discourses of modernity which his works expose. The Anthology of Prefaces announces its own provisionality in its title: 'prefaces of *what?*' I ask myself. The deferred reference point of 'the preface'--eternally deferred in an anthology solely of prefaces--undermines empirical notions of beginnings and endings. Indeed, were it not for the fact that extracts from the Anthology have appeared in journals and periodicals, I would suspect a hoax on a grand scale; publication of the volume has been pending so long that one could be forgiven for suspecting that Gray's intimations announce an anticipated 'nothing', an empty signifier.

Therefore I feel uneasy about drawing my own considerations of Gray's work to a close. I also think it would be premature to draw conclusions about Alasdair Gray's fiction while he is still alive and still writing. Indeed, the very notion of 'conclusion' rests rather uneasily with the critical approach I have taken in this thesis. Conclusions carry essentialist connotations I have tried to avoid; instead, I have attempted to highlight key ideological tensions in Gray's work--mostly related to capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy--and have tried to analyse and investigate his political investments whilst keeping these tensions alive. I am loath to resolve them now merely for the sake of a more satisfying read.

In some respects it is easier to reflect on what this thesis does *not* attempt to do. It is important to stress that it by no means offers a comprehensive study of Gray's prose fiction.

There is a great deal of critical work still to be done on Gray's fiction; my own contribution cannot hope to explore every text, exhaust all the avenues open to critics, or even answer fully all of the questions I raise. However, in addressing the role of ideology in Gray's fiction, I hope my thesis will prove suggestive to other critics and readers. In this sense, my thesis and its conclusion provide yet another preface. It is also important to reiterate that the readings of texts I offer are provisional and far from exhaustive. Rather than offer definitive interpretations of Gray's work, I have attempted to convey something of the complexity of the historical milieu in which it appears.

By locating Gray within historic, geographical, personal and social contexts I have attempted to assess his relation to discourses of modernity, acknowledging not only the contradictions, tensions, and inconsistencies evident in Gray's work, but also suggesting that these tensions are intrinsically part of modernity's sustaining discourses. Gray's approach to history, I have argued, undermines the 'selective memory' of dominant discourses, reclaiming forgotten historical narratives from marginalized perspectives. Not only does Gray's approach to history reveal the relativity of historical narrative construction, it situates his own historiographical reconstructions in a politically charged context, in firm opposition to the neo-liberal political agenda of the nineteen-eighties and nineties. Discussing the power of neo-liberalism in Britain and the United States, Kobena Mercer argues:

neo-conservatism hegemonizes our ability to imagine the future by identifying its adversaries with the past. The selective erasure of the recent past serves to disarticulate not only the post-war vocabulary of social democracy, but the rhetorical vocabularies of the various "liberation" movements within the New Left and the new social movements that once defined themselves in opposition to it. (425)

Mercer's comments place Gray in a political context as well as a temporal one. His reclamations and reconstructions of recent political history can be seen to represent an attempt on his

part to find terms in which to rearticulate the values of social democracy and liberation.

Gray's fictions rename the political context in which they appear, highlighting the dynamic relations through which political power is exercised. Gray's 'renamings' locate power in geographical terms as well as historical terms; he draws attention to the *spatial* exercise of power, identifying his city, nation, and body as sites in which the hegemonic discourses of imperialism, capitalism, and patriarchy operate. By identifying the sites in which these discourses exercise power, Gray is able to suggest ways in which their power can be subverted, resisted, and challenged. He politicises Scotland, Glasgow and the body itself, allowing for the possibility of political agency.

In some ways it becomes easier at this stage in my discussion to assess Gray's place within the discourses of modernity that it was at the outset. My readings of Gray's fictions have highlighted their engagement with contemporary and controversial ideological issues; I have suggested that Gray's fictions critique capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy by troubling and destabilizing the discourses which sustain the hegemonic power of these ideologies. Gray's work upsets empirical figurations of time, space, and subjectivity; he creates alternative perspectives on history, geography, and the self. By questioning these conventional epistemological cornerstones of Western humanism, Gray problematizes empirical subjectivities and identities, rendering them unstable and provisional. The radical scepticism his work displays in relation to the discourses of Enlightened modernity aligns Gray with postmodern aesthetic practices which trouble epistemological certainties and essentialisms.

However, as I have already suggested, Gray's work also exhibits investments in the emancipatory discourses of modernity, discourses which depend upon a degree of strategic essentialism in order to name *any* site of agency, or exercise change in the material world. Such agency pertains not to what Patricia Waugh calls "a sealed aesthetic realm" (190) but rather to a material world where capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy are politically functional 'grand

narratives'. Gray's attempts to upset in his fiction the systems of representation which underpin these ideologies draw on postmodern aesthetics in order to devise (as Waugh puts it):

strategies for narrative disruption of traditional stories and construction of new identity scripts, without embracing its [postmodernism's] more extreme nihilistic or pragmatist implications. (190)

Gray's work exposes the role of literature in producing and sustaining political discourses. While I see Gray as a writer who is self-consciously engaged in a radical political critique of Western culture, I highlight conflicts and ambivalences that emerge in his work through his own investments in the ideological frameworks he seeks to subvert. However, his refigurations of modernity's discourses place question marks over previous assessments of a Scottish literary tradition and its relation to the political realm in the material world. Indeed, Gray's work encourages an intellectual overhaul of what is meant by 'postmodernism' and 'the Scottish tradition' and a rethink about relations between literary discourses and political power within contemporary society.

Alasdair Gray's success as a novelist coincides with reinvigorated campaigns for Scottish self-government in the aftermath of the 1979 referendum. His work has tapped into, and also fuelled, the upsurge of popular civic nationalism in Scotland in the eighties and nineties, a movement partly resistant to the hegemonies of neo-liberalism. Now that Scotland stands on the brink of major constitutional change, Dennis Lee's entreaty to 'Work as if you are in the early days of a better nation', adopted by Gray as an epigraph in so many of his books, has never sounded more relevant or necessary. That too is a preface rather than a conclusion.

Appendix

An Interview With Alasdair Gray

Edited transcript of a conversation between Alasdair Gray and Eilidh Whiteford, University of St. Andrews, January, 1994.

EW: I wanted to start by asking you about your plays. They were written much earlier in your career, but why have you changed so many of them into prose fiction?

AG: Well, to make new books.

EW: Is it about reaching a wider audience?

AG: Definitely. ...and money; I make my living by writing. I think the first thing I wrote for public consumption--I think I was about eight--was in school. I read a child's version of the Odyssey, which I think was quite close to the original, and there was a description about the encounter of Polyphemus' cave between Odysseus and his men and Polyphemus. I wrote it as a short script and my father typed it out; it was at the church school in Wetherby and the teacher allowed me to produce it. I played Polyphemus.

EW: Do you think the stories are changed by moving them from plays?

AG: In the case of writing *The Fall of Kelvin Walker*; that was the first play I wrote, it was in 1964, and it was bought quite quickly, and performed by the London BBC; I think it was networked in 1966.

EW: The play was revived again on the back of the book, wasn't it?

AG: I made a stage version that's been put on a couple of times. But I remember thinking I could make quite a short novel out of it; I was working on *Lanark*, but thinking, I wonder if I can make money by. . .? And I did some work on it, but eventually I didn't send it to any publishers; it was too much 'she said', 'he said'; I'm thinking, this reads like a script, it doesn't read like a novel. But after some more years, quite a few years later, I remember thinking, I *think* I can do that. I had accumulated quite a lot of plays, some which were produced and some not. *The Fall of Kelvin Walker's* play came to me; it grew organically and I thought, this is a good idea, and I wrote it. I knew too little about television; it was about two-and-a-half hours long. So I sent it out, and by good luck somebody thought it was very good--somebody in London. It had to be cut to an hour-and-a-half. But after that Stewart Conn of BBC drama said, I'm bringing out a short series of half-hour plays for radio, and could I think of any? So I thought, no.

EW: Go write some?

AG: No, I didn't think 'go write some'. I thought 'no'. I can't just down my flake if somebody asked me and I thought about an anecdote based on something that had happened to me. And I wrote a play called *Quiet People*. It never occurred to me before that I could write anything creative to order, though in fact there had been times when I'd been at art school people had asked me--there was a puppetry theatre and they'd asked me to write plays for it. I wrote a forty minute version of the Book of Jonah. Damn it, I wish I could get it back. I lent the script to somebody years later and of course it got lost. But it was taped. Years later I met a student at Glasgow Art School who said she was doing a thesis, a dissertation on my work, and she'd got hold of the tape from Miss so-and-so. I said, I'd like to have that, and she said, oh, she'd send it to me since it was mine, but she never did. I realise that when people suggest that they'd like something from me, my general reaction is 'I don't think I can do that', but then my mind starts ticking over and I think, yes, I can see how I can do that! So it was a discovery that quite pleased me since I made money by it during the seventies.

But what happened after that was that after *Lanark* I was planning to write a single book of short stories--it was going to be all my short stories-- but I'd also started writing one, a very short piece, it was going to be called something like, "If this is Kilmarnock it must be Thursday". Actually it turned into *Janine*. I asked Canongate, who were going to be doing the book of short stories, if they would print this novel of mine first 'cause I was writing it like billy-o and wanted to finish it. They said they would if they could sell it in advance to an American or paperback firm because then they'd have the money to pay me, and they tried to and they couldn't. I managed to get Bloomsbury interested and they gave me an advance, so I felt very guilty regarding Canongate, because I'd taken a book out of Scotland. Anyway Stephanie Wolfe Murray tried to persuade me that the book was meant to be all my short stories, including realistic ones as well as fantastical ones, and she persuaded me to leave out the realistic ones. Have you got a book called *Lean Tales*?

EW: Yes.

AG: All the fictional pieces in *Lean Tales* were intended to go into . . . put it this way: *Unlikely Stories, Mostly* was meant to contain all my stories. They were going to be arranged chronologically too, in order of writing. "The Comedy of the White Dog" was one of the first long ones and after that came . . . "The Answer" was the second one. There was this handful of realistic stories, stories in a realistic genre, and I wanted these to be put in together. Anyway, Stephanie persuaded me to sign a contract to say, would I give a book of realistic stories and keep all the 'unlikely stories'

together? I would have resisted this, only I felt guilty because I had taken my book *1982, Janine* to Jonathan Cape. I said, all right. What happened after then, it came to the writing of *this* book and I thought, I don't *want* to write any more short stories; I had no ideas. I wrote the Robert Louis Stevenson one.

EW: That's my favourite one.

AG: I prefer "The Grumbler". I was thinking, I don't want to go around writing other stories. It was here [St. Andrews]. I was invited to St. Andrews to give a reading and . . . his name escapes me, I know he's here. His wife lived at Boarhills and she was reader or editor for Quartet Books. I once had an agent and Quartet once paid an advance when *Lanark* was half-finished. They'd given me £75 for first option on the novel when it was finished. Seventy-five pounds was a lot of money in those days. When I finished it I showed it to them, but as usual they said it was too long for them to risk publication.

EW: Did you find that your opportunities in publishing within Scotland were limited?

AG: Well, it was Scotland that eventually published *Lanark*. Three London publishers who were interested said they would only print it if I divided it into the two books. Of course, they wanted it divided into 'Lanark' and 'Thaw', and if I'd separated these, they would never have been joined together again. I said that I didn't mind it being done as two books if they cut it half-way: Thaw section/ Lanark section, Lanark section. . . you know. But they wouldn't do that. Then I tried Canongate and eventually they said, yes, they would do it. Quartet was the firm that turned it down and I met this lady and she said they had been kicking themselves ever since because they said it was a stupid idea; and, was I tied to anybody? Would I consider contributing, say, some short stories to another book? She said she was not thinking of just another anthology of Scottish stories; she was thinking of a very particular anthology-- like me and two other writers--and who would I like to suggest for them? [laughter] So, what happened: I thought of Jim Kelman and Bernard McLaverty--friends and neighbours. I knew Agnes, but not so well then. Anyway, Bernard had a contract with Cape and so I asked Agnes. So I submitted it to the lady, who submitted it to Quartet books, and the editor there looked at it and said she was rather pleased with it. She liked all of Jim Kelman's stories, she liked practically all of Agnes's; she felt, however, that in the ones that I'd put in were some stories that weren't really stories--pieces of prose fiction or critical thingamajigs--and she felt we'd the makings of a very good book there, and would I please work on it. I thought, no, no, wait a minute. I'd gone to Canongate; I'd looked at my earlier attempt to turn *The Fall of Kelvin Walker* into a novel and

thought, I can see how to do it now, and what's more, I can do it fast. So I said to Stephanie Wolfe Murray, will you give up the short story contract if I give you a novel instead: a short one? She said, oh yes, please! The point was that in the *Lean Tales* I put the stories that had been going into the, actually originally, into the *Unlikely Stories, Mostly*. I got them together, gave it to Quartet, and they wanted me to do more work on it; I thought, ah if I was younger, I'd have found this a very encouraging letter; at this stage in life. . . I went to Liz Calder at Jonathan Cape, who was my editor there, and said, look will *you* take this book with these stories. Quartet don't want it. And she said, yes certainly. And so *Lean Tales* came out like that, but in the process I was jolted into turning *The Fall of Kelvin Walker* into a novel. Actually, it did make me think, there are all these plays. In writing the plays I'd written them in several forms; I'd written them as radio plays and they'd been rejected and I'd turned them into television, or vice versa, or sometimes into stage. Some of them have been put on in all three forms and I can't work out as which they started--but the business of shifting it around wasn't very hard. In writing *Something Leather*, I periodically thought, right, I don't need to write any more books, or rather, any more fiction. *The Anthology of Prefaces* is one that I've been on now for about seven years and therefore, whenever I have money I've thought, right, let's carry on and do that. Generally I did carry on doing that and other things, but when the money ran out I was left thinking, where do I go from here? Tom Maschler of Cape kept writing; I'd told him I'd no more novels--what I said in *Something Leather* was quite accurate. The point is that in that book and also in *Ten Tales* there are some stories that contain all the dialogue of the original plays. I could name them. There are other stories that contain more dialogue because in the prose form I felt it took a different track of development; it developed in different ways and I felt it wasn't necessary to have another scene to convey. Anyway, I want, one day, to get a book out of my plays; I've been wondering whether to put in the stage versions of all of them, or whether to put in the stage versions of those that took different directions. I have no objection at all to people seeing different versions.

EW: I wanted to ask you about genre and if it was important to you?

AG: The biography of Bill Skinner--"Portrait of a Painter", "Portrait of a Playwright" and "A Small Thistle". These are biographical vignettes; they are biographical studies of friends, two dead. I can understand you thinking, this isn't a story--it belongs to a completely different genre. I'm very fond of combining genres; I, as a reader, quite like to be surprised by variety. The first book I

intended, I intended it to contain all the fictional genres I played with.

EW: I love the little bit in *Janine* where there's the production of *McGrotty and Ludmilla*. One of the things that strikes me about so much of your fiction is its visual impact--not just in terms of your novels being 'well-made', but I can see them on a stage and they seem to be very dramatic. Yet some of them are radio plays. . .

What about history? One of the most important things you do is 'reconstitute' Scottish history; you're writing Scottish history that in some cases has never really been talked about, but you write it from a perspective that undermines the process of writing history.

AG: Would you say undermining it?

EW: Maybe not undermining it, but you're using different methodologies from those we associate with history. For example, instead of writing from the position of 'progress' or as part of an ongoing cultural elite, I'm loath to use the word, but you're 'deconstructing' it.

AG: Didn't Galt do that in *Annals of the Parish*? And Scott? And in the *Confessions of the Justified Sinner*, which is amazing for its psychological insights, but also for being very precise in presenting a period in Scottish history--the debates leading up to the Union of the Parliaments. He [Hogg] has a thing which I've only seen described as well by Scott (I think it's in *Heart of Midlothian*) in which, after the Porteous Riots, the crowd are breaking up in representative units, going off to their shops gossiping to each other. But in the *Justified Sinner* (the bit where there's a riot developing between the Whigs and the Tories in a hotel) the young semi-loyalist blades--I forget which one of the factions is attacked by an angry mob--the landlord, in order to divert the subject, steers them into attacking another adjacent party. His description of how the mob is dealt with, and how the army is called in, and how the mob when attacked by the military disappears up the wynds where the horses and others can't follow then re-emerges behind. . . I think it's something I'm interested in writing. You get it in Dickens and Hardy and Shaw; I think it's quite common in writing.

EW: I think you've done it in a very self-conscious way, though: in a way that draws attention to what you're doing. Some of these others have not been so explicit in laying bare their own assumptions.

AG: I think that's something to do with the novel in Britain. In England the effect of the Glorious Revolution. With the assurance of the Protestant succession (and that includes the Lords getting ascendancy over the monarchy) this final reconciliation between the stock exchange and the great land owners, it's quite

interesting. In *Tom Jones* (this is taking place in '45) a great part of the action is that in which Sophia, the heroine, a woman in mysterious circumstances staying in an inn, is mistaken for Clementina Walkinshaw, Bonnie Prince Charlie's mistress. The question is, how can they make money out of this discovery? If they inform the legal authorities, what will happen to them if in fact the Stewarts regain the crown? What will happen to them if, on the other hand, they gain a reward? They decide the best thing is to delay her departure as long as possible till they are sure of the exact position. This is quite an interesting and weird thing: what in Scotland was considered as a major event, in England is a kind of 'noise off', even though it's happening in the same place. And you get the same thing in Sterne. The fact that his *Sentimental Journey* is happening at the period of the war with France isn't regarded as a thing, of course, for civilized people. They understand the war; it's a commercial war. It's being fought for the glory and the commerce of Britain against France. There's no anti-English tourist feeling; the age of reason has dawned. Not even the French peasantry. The novels present plots--apart from *Pamela*--which involve a safe, stable class which actually thinks that history is a thing that has been overcome.

EW: Maybe in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* the same sort of thing is going on, where he's going off to the empire and all these women are living in this tiny community.

AG: And Cranford represents the first commuter village chronicle in which the men go off to work in the local manufacturing town of Drumble and the Amazons are left in charge. There are hints of the spinster lady whose nephew returns to save her from the genteel poverty of keeping the local sweet shop. That is a degradation; she's such a nice lady. But luckily, the nephew returns from India where he's made money and she is able to return to the genteel retirement which was her expectation of life. At the same time, there's the manufacturing town of Drumble and the business of banks possibly going bankrupt--that could plunge you into. . . yes, gosh! You've got Dickens. . . Disraeli had a look at the 'two cities' and the potentially revolutionary situation; well, all right, the industrial and agricultural revolutions are admitted: look what's happening in France. But in the 'silver fork' novel gentility has never seriously felt itself to be threatened, though here was new money coming in from below and, therefore, you can at times feel there's a strange timelessness coming in, a sense of over-all safety. The novelists who have the confidence to deal with the level of society at which people's jobs are in danger of migrating or shifting, well. . .

EW: It seems to me you're going a step further than that, writing the fiction to create the kind of society you want to live in. I

wanted to ask you about Dennis Lee and the quote that you've used extensively, 'Work as if you are in the early days of a better nation'

AG: Oh yes!

EW: I'm a big fan of Dennis Lee's poetry. When I was in Canada I went over the score about it, then I came back here and found out that you'd borrowed that line from him.

AG: Did I spell his name right? Is it L-e-i-g-h or L-e-e?

EW: No, it's L-e-e, but it's spelt right somewhere.

AG: He was over here on an exchange scheme.

EW: In 1980--I was about ten years old. But I discovered his children's poetry last year--I actually met him once. You work in very similar territory.

AG: I remember reading with great interest. Liz Lochhead had been over and brought me a copy (which I may have yet to return) of Winifred [sic] Atwood's book *Survival*. It's a study of Canadian literature in which she was giving a survey of quite a large number of Canadian novels, saying that the central characters in them are being continually defeated and are continually failing to achieve what they desire, whether it is a humble desire or not. What defeats them 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. She was talking about the historical condition of Canada which is partly to do with the hideously cold winters and the separation this caused, but there's also this business of Canada being founded by the people who did not revolt against Britain, who didn't in fact found their state by a revolutionary act of rejection, or what was named rebellion. They didn't want the British army to leave and eventually, although there were some minor rebellions against Britain, the British parliament, on the advice of a parliamentary commission, decided, yes, they'd better grant them a degree of self-government because, we don't want them to break away, and they deserve it. The Canadians were left with this sense of being on the periphery. London had given them their independence. She said in her childhood she looked up thinking of London as being the centre of the universe; of course, in her teens it gradually shifted round to New York. The Canadians were now conscious of most of their land and industries being owned by American companies and their land being regarded as a fairly harmless sub-colony.

EW: There's a strong sense of people writing against the versions of history they've been given. There are a lot of writers, especially a lot of women writers, who have kind of joined the issues of feminism and colonialism together in a way that I think is reminiscent of the way that you do things.

AG: Actually, reading this, I remember thinking many of the things she was talking about: the nationalism, the inferiority complex that if you're a Canadian you can't help having. She presented it as stages by which people learn to face the thing. Most of them are cop-outs: the first one is to deny that there is any such thing and to say, 'we're as good as them, certainly, and they don't have more control over us than we have over our selves and nothing is happening that is not by agreement and perfectly for our own convenience'. There's the other, the self-defeating thing of saying, 'Here we are, what can we do? They're richer. We haven't the strength, we haven't the power. We're in an inferior position, because we're inferior, we've been made inferior, so we can't help being inferior'. She said that the other attitude was to admit you're at a disadvantage, 'How can we establish ourselves better than this?' And the best thing is to admit the grounds of the disadvantage and how it has happened or how it works, admitting that the truth is the only basis for creating a better reality. And reading I thought, well that seems to be true for Scotland, and Liz Lochhead had mentioned that.

EW: Ten years ago in an interview with Carol Anderson and Glenda Norquay in *Cencrastus* you said, "books don't cause political change but some have speeded it up". I wondered if you'd anything more to add to that, especially now that you've written new things--I was thinking especially of the 'Cultural Capitalism' in *Something Leather*, and in *Poor Things* the whole way you've recorded the Elspeth King Affair. I don't know if you've seen the article in the New York Review of Books [passes it across]?

AG: Oh yes--I'd forgotten that portrait!

EW: There the reviewer seems to buy wholesale your interpretation of the historical situation. I also read another review in a London newspaper quite recently which took a similar line. In many ways these are not journals one would expect to be very interested in the kind of social history Elspeth King is working on. It made me think that your views are being disseminated now because they're expressed in works of so-called fiction, but people seem to be accepting it as gospel truth. If you were writing it as 'history' we would think, well that's his opinion.

AG: A novel, the only truth it possesses is in the reader's mind: 'Hey that's true,' or, 'that's like me,' or, 'that's like him,' or, 'yes, that's how they carry on,' or, 'yes, that was what happened.' [laughter] Their experience confirms something.

One very funny thing is that in *Ten Tales Tall and True* there's a story--there's two stories--I got from my wife. One is called "Interior Memorandum" ["Internal Memorandum"]. I don't know if you've read it? It's the one which is an interior memorandum, Lesley to Lindsay [Lesley to Lumley] in which

somebody is writing to their superior complaining. Well, in fact about a quarter of it I took from an interior memorandum by my wife Morag. She's left now, but for twenty-two, twenty-three years she was working in Smiths, the supplies department of Smiths the booksellers. She was in what they call 'middle management' distributing books to university libraries. Anyway she's written that to her boss. The first sentence, I think it goes something like, "Excuse me if this letter sounds as if I am flaming mad--I am," and it goes on to put a numbered stream of complaints about management conduct, the heating of the buildings, the state of the stairs, ending with, "are the management possibly planning a sell-out and is there anything we can do to stop it?" Of course, I built it up again into 'the condition of Scotland'. That's what happened to the shipping and the railways.

EW: There's something very ominous in it, not quite seeing the bigger picture--don't say things like that!

AG: The funny thing was that I changed some of the names and also indicated it was machine parts they were distributing.

EW: To protect the innocent?

AG: But last year, nothing to do with the book, she decided to resign as after twenty-two, twenty-three years she'd got tired of it; also the inefficiencies she'd been complaining of. She was given an exchange scheme with a booksellers in Tübingen in Germany since she knows German, and while she was there, having worked with a thoroughly efficient book shop that was doing everything so properly (In Germany it's possible to order a book in a book shop and get it next morning. They have fleets of trucks travelling from the warehouses. The people driving the trucks have keys which enable them to open the doors of the book shops and put in the books, and even the level of computers. . .) when she got back she thought she couldn't go on any more and handed in her resignation. Just shortly after that the book came out and she realised that Willie Anderson, who's one of the directors, reviewed it for the *Booksellers' Journal*, or something like that. The person I call Lesley, the boss to whom the memorandum had been sent, saw the book on Willie's desk and opened it, and it fell open immediately at this page. Anyway she handed in three months notice, and she said, the book's hit Kent Road (that's the warehouse place). It's being passed around the lower staff in plain wrappers. And she said, you know the heating's been turned up so high today it's positively inconvenient. The men are in mending the stairs. [laughter] So I'm thinking, Auden was wrong. Books *do* make things happen sometimes. . . But people have to take them personally of course.

EW: The other thing you have in common with Dennis Lee is that he's got a very cosmological outlook. He is looking for new gods that make sense for this age, for gods we can believe in an age of reason. You were talking about your rewrite of Jonah. I think there's a lot in *Lanark* too that suggests a reworking of the literature of the Scriptures.

AG: A bit, yes. I was always rather struck by the Jonah story--I was fond of the work of William Blake, particularly his set of Job illustrations, and when I was about fourteen or so I felt, I want to do something like that, and thought, I must get a book of the Bible which I can take-over. I found the Book of Jonah which was conveniently short and also an amazingly enjoyable story of God changing his mind, having threatened universal destruction. I also quite like this business of the prophet who doesn't want the job and has to have a succession of miracles visited on him before he caves in, realises that God is omnipotent and he'll *have* to do the job. The job tells him to go and threaten Nineveh with total destruction, which he does, and instead of endangering himself the Nineveh people listen to him, so Nineveh isn't destroyed in forty days and of course Jonah is flaming mad!

EW: Your readings of these Hebrew stories are fascinating because you're coming at them from a very literary, rather than 'theological' perspective.

AG: One of the first books. . . we always had the complete works of Bernard Shaw in the house, and *The Black Girl in Search of God*, my dad says that when I was four or five he read it to me. I don't know if you've read it?

EW: No.

AG: It's worth reading. It's got a long introduction which can be avoided, but it's broadly similar to *The Palm Wine Drinker*. Shaw wrote it after a brief visit to one of the African coasts. I forget which; maybe the Gold Coast. And he describes this English missionary in the jungle who's produced only one convert, this black girl. She asks her, how can I seek God, and she answers, seek and ye shall find. The missionary has educated her not to believe in the idols of her tribe, so she sets off through the bush with her knobkerry. It's a beautifully illustrated book, with woodcuts, and her naked with this long stick with a knob at the end. She encounters a snake, a serpent of the poisonous variety, but having been taught not to be afraid of anything, she asks it if it can help her to find God. It leads her into a clearing where on top of a pile of stones is a large handsome white man with a huge beard and a number six nose. She's immediately prejudiced against him because she believes all handsome men should be black, but she asks if he can help her to find God, and he says, 'You have found her, I mean him. Kneel down and worship me!

Bring your fatted calves to lay before me so that I might sniff the odour of burning flesh. Bring your baby and dash its brains out!' She says, 'you're not a god at all to talk such wicked nonsense,' and she dashes to the top of the mountain swinging her knobkerry, but when she gets there, there is nobody there at all. She refers to her Bible and finds that the first pages have crumbled to powder. In a bad temper she goes on and meets a sequence of gods: the god of Jonah,* who in fact Shaw sees in quite a different spirit from Blake; he's sitting at a table writing papers, saying, 'ah someone to argue about! Sit down, I like a good argument. Yes, I am God, what do you want to say to me?' 'Well, why have you made so much pain and evil in the world?' He says, 'Who are you to ask a question like that? I made the world, I know why these things exist. How can you possibly understand them? You think it's easy to make a world? Drag it up? You'll soon see, no, no! That isn't an argument, that's a sneer. I don't think you know how to argue.' God says, 'I think you should speak to my servant Job. He tried to get round me by his questions, but he had to admit eventually that I knew more than he did.' Anyway, she attacks him and he dives under the table which seems to sink through the floor. She goes on and meets Ecclesiastes the preacher, the man in Greek clothes who says there's no point in seeking god. All we know is that life is short and that we must do our best with the little we know, but to seek an ultimate explanation for a thing is impossible. She says that she can respect his attitude but it isn't good enough for her; she wants to find out something beyond that. Then she comes to a conjurer sitting by the side of a well.

EW: That sounds familiar!

AG: This is Jesus Christ. She's thirsty and he gives her a cup of water.

EW: Is he related to the conjurer in *Lanark*?

AG No, this is a different conjurer. He tells her that God is love and she tells him she can't accept that, that love is the thing that draws men and women, people, together but that in a way that makes them neglect other reasons for existing and living. She feels that love isn't the answer. He is presented as gentle. She walks a bit further and meets a Pavlovian scientist--a bloke with a beard, it's actually Pavlov--sitting on a tree trunk, telling her that there's no problem about the universe and its nature; it is all these silly old men. The universe is a gigantic conditioned reflex. Push it in one place, it reacts in another. This is true for the material and the vital; by cutting open the cheeks of dogs he has established the fact that their mouths water when you ring the dinner bell. The whole world is grovelling at the feet of this major achievement and she says, 'I knew that without cutting open dogs' cheeks.' 'Ah yes, you knew it, but you could not scientifically prove it.' But

* [Job]

coming back, she finds the conjurer lying on a cross, posing for a sculptor who's carving a crucifix portrait of him, while a rather handsome Arab is sitting beside the well. This is Mohammed. You've got these interesting things. Eventually you find her encountering Voltaire who leads her to this old man who's digging in a garden who tells her if she wants to find God the thing to do is, in fact, to come in and dig for it in the garden. She asks, 'What kind of god can you get that way?' And he says, 'Em, I don't know, if you dig well enough perhaps some day he'll jog your elbow and give you some hints about how to do it better. But unless you actually start working at something you're not likely to meet anybody. He's not likely to interest himself in anybody who isn't actually *doing* something in the world and you've got to do it as best you can and hope that God will pay attention.' A bit later she comes and lives with the elderly man, Rousseau, cultivating his garden, and one day they go down and they find that there's a red-headed bearded Irishman working in there, because he says, 'There's a lot been discovered about gardening since the old fellow took it up. In fact I think he's a bit cracked; he needs some help, so I'm doing it.' She says, 'It's not your garden, it's his.' He says, 'I'm a socialist; I don't recognise that ground belongs to anyone.' Of course this is Shaw himself, and it ends up with the old man explaining to her that it's time she married and had children, and she's better marry the Irishman. She wants to marry *him* but he explains that the difference in their ages is far too great. He rubs the flat facts into her so that eventually she resigns herself. When they go out to tell the Irishman, he screams, drops his spade and tries to jump over the gate. They say the black girl held him with a grip of steel--softly padded of course--and after some more explanations and a glass of the old man's best madeira, he said, 'Well I don't mind if I do'.

It was a kind of fable, but the business of actually taking you on a kind of intellectual excursion through many places and cultures and doing it in a narrative style--well, you know, the *Pilgrim's Progress* thing--of creating a variety of states of people who embody human attitudes. And wonderfully well-illustrated.

EW: Apart from fictional writing that's influenced you, are there any thinkers or writers of non-fiction, or philosophers who've influenced you?

AG: The point is, I dip into philosophers. I haven't read Hobbes' *Leviathan* from start to finish; I keep reading passages here and there and finding them very enjoyable and full; I'm quite interested in Duns Scotus, purely because of reading Gerald Manley Hopkins' poems, and the explanation of Duns Scotus' view. I remember thinking yes, I prefer his view to the Platonic Aristotelian view. I enjoyed the Platonic, the early Socratic,

dialogues--the ones in which Socrates emerges as a distinct character. In fact I wrote a play (which I think in some ways is my best) but it was only produced on television many years ago and it wasn't networked in Scotland so I never saw it. It was about the trial of Socrates. I was not simply taking Plato's version and dramatising it, although I used a great many suggestions from it. I think is it Thucydides who did another version? Most dramatisations present the condemners of Socrates as a single-mindedly prejudiced people without a sound reason to stand on, and it's the business of looking into it. . . although I do believe in Socrates' goodness and wisdom. But the fact that among his pupils had been Alcibiades who was a traitor who had sold his country out to the enemy and Critias who had been a very cruel dictator who was given political power after the defeat by Sparta, killed thousands of citizens--hundreds anyway. With these among the most prominent people associated with him [Socrates], you can see why it would appear, 'This bloke's done a lot of damage'. But his stimulus towards thought, the fact that Plato, that the Cynics, Diogenes, the Epicureans, the Stoics, and the Platonic idealists all regarded themselves as having derived from Socrates--he taught people to think; he didn't teach them *what* to think; he taught them to doubt any conclusion that they were perfectly sure of.

Sorry, I'm gabbling away about the elements of philosophy that I've encountered. I did dip into Wittgenstein (not the *Tractatus* but the second one) and noted down wee bits that struck me as very true, very true. But they don't fit together. I'm very keen on Hume, because as a genial sceptic, I don't think the matter has been. . .

EW: He's a bit back in vogue.

AG: Oh he will be. The fact that his philosophy exists to discount any rigid system that can be regarded as an absolute. But the kind of scepticism that he applied to his self, it was a salvation job. He'd been brought up in a faith that taught him he had an immortal soul that would almost certainly be damned to hell and that he must spend his life in charge of this soul trying to stop it being fried eternally. The process in which the controversy 'What is the self? Who is the self? What precise unit of soul is the irreducible me-ness?' And you think of him looking carefully inside and thinking, 'it's not there! Me! It is a sequence of impressions and sensations some of which recur, but oh thank heaven, I am *not* immortal.'

EW: I can see that in your work in the way you undercut the idea of individual genius and the idea of the 'human subject'. I wanted to go on to ask you about how you feel about the academic establishment and the criticism that comes out? You play to it on one hand. . .

AG: Yes, well, I'm an academic. I don't mean I'm working here; what I mean is that like anybody who reads a lot of books, criticism is the kind of light reading I most enjoy. I really *enjoy* Leavis, and when wanting to move in to read a number of years ago, when I was about twenty or so and getting round to reading *Paradise Lost* I was thinking right, I'm going to read a lot of introductions to it, essays about it, to steer me so that I would pass through more readily. I approve of universities. I also think that in a proper educational system the primary school teachers would be paid as much as university lecturers or more. That's where most education has to be done first.

EW: Yet you've written such very adult books. Would you like to write children's books?

AG: Well, I've thought about it but I wouldn't quite know how.

EW: You've certainly made your books a lot more accessible.

AG: I want my books to be as accessible as possible, but it needs a particular kind of genius. It's been suggested to me before and I remember thinking, yes, I would love to do that, but nothing's occurred to me so far.

EW: To change the subject, I think *Janine* is the most important of your novels. . .

AG: Well, it's my favourite. It seems to me to cover as much ground as *Lanark* in a shorter space. And also I felt that in it the central ego--I never expected to write a book or piece of fiction in the first person--needn't be identified with a Scottish artist or writer. I meant him to be a kind of Scottish Everyman figure. And it was the business of being able to express all my own socialist convictions through the mouth of somebody who doesn't believe in them, and who's in a state of despair.

EW: Yet I find it an incredibly hopeful novel.

AG: Yes, I found in the writing of it I didn't know how it would develop since I meant it to be a three or four page thing about this alcoholic traveller, possibly a travelling salesman, who had no interest in his own life, or past, or anything, just keeping a slightly smug, superior attitude to the universe because he had a potential that he knew was greater than any of those who knew him knew he possessed, but of course the potential would never. . . Probably get a Dostoevskian--not exactly like notes from *Underground* in which the central character is desperately pathetic and hopeless--but this bloke would be Scottish, he'd be restrained, his desperation and hopelessness will not involve a collapse or anything of that nature. Anyway, I started to write the first three or four pages and it swole up, and as it went on I got the idea of putting in wee sex fantasies that I meant to die with only a few select friends knowing about. It became larger and I started thinking about his possible past and childhood and it started

drawing in material. Having lived for about a year in Stonehouse, Wetherby, a mining town where we were evacuated to during the war, I had a kind of location and schools, and even a kind of landscape round about for his kind of past. I kept thinking, by the time I reached what is now chapter three or four, mm, this is a novella; I'll have to cut it into chapters. And as I wrote on I kept thinking, the next chapter is going to be the last. I meant it to end with, 'tomorrow morning he is standing on the station platform. Nobody seeing him would recognise that being on that platform demanded all the skills and exertions of a tightrope walker.' But at a certain point, I thought, this bloke's utterly miserable. I dislike him. He's gonna kill himself. That just needed the planting of a bottle; let's go back and plant a bottle of pills for the purpose that he's got from this chemist. Then I remember thinking, right, he takes the pills. What happens now? Well, actually, most people when they take a lot of pills vomit. The notion then came in of the kind of breakdown, the hallucinatory confusion bit. At the end of that bit I stopped, thinking there's only a wee bit more to go, but I needed more money and there was this delay of several months when I was getting a thousand pounds advance from Cape that would let me continue. But when I continued it swole up much more. The episode in Edinburgh which I'd meant to be quite short expanded and involved more characters, and then I thought of using *McGrotty and Ludmilla* and the bit of the meeting at the end. I came through it and I thought, aach, I can let him off. He has to give up his job; that's really what's been killing him.

EW: The sex fantasies in the book were very closely tied up to political vocabulary and that's something which when you went on to write *Something Leather* landed you in almost a spot of hot water.

AG: Yes

EW: I think there was some sort of invisible line that had been crossed. Why do you think that happened?

AG: Well I suppose the way the book was constructed. I'd written the first chapter and thought, well, it could go into a magazine somewhere; it's quite well written--it's rather fun. And then Tom Maschler wrote, oh sorry, I've given the account of it. But I thought, I'll bring a lot of writing together that I think is good. Nowadays you can call anything a novel. I'll make it a rag-bag; I'll put in political essays; I'll turn some plays into short stories. Anyway I started doing that and as I turned the plays into short stories I began to think these could perhaps be June or the other women at earlier stages, because the plays had in fact been written at ten, fifteen points in the past. Between Chapter One and Chapter Twelve, the sado-masochistic, fetishistic bits, you have a set of separate stories, eleven, about Glaswegians. Each involves a

Glaswegian women in some sort of relationship or connection. They could be read separately but there is a kind of evolution over time, them getting older and taking different paths. But in the doing of it I suddenly got this idea for Harry the Englishwoman, the slightly mad, not quite autistic sculptress. Writing that was quite good; I thought, my imagination has come alive in different ways. I had invented a character I hadn't foreseen inventing--and I was really pleased with her.

EW: What I liked about *Something Leather* was the way that the stories about the different relationships complicated debates that you'd set up in *Janine* and actually made it much less straightforward. For example, it complicated gender issues because it's *all* women. I think though there's a problem: the idea of the lesbian rape and June being 'liberated' by that.

AG: Yes

EW: There seems to me to be a real tension, because on one hand you've got this chapter called 'New June' and she's this born-again happy person and on the other. . .

AG: I tend to agree with you there. What I wish I had done--I even thought of doing it but didn't get round to it--what I thought of doing was that in the lesbian rape fantasy what I should have done was replaced all the letters of the alphabet: had the start of that chapter and the end of it, but in the cruellest scenes in the middle replaced every letter with an asterisk. You'd therefore have the same cluster. Anybody who had wanted to find out exactly what it was could, by applying the Edgar Allan Poe gold-bug decoding device, work it out. In fact I wish I had done that, because some people find it rather exciting, a majority find it -- well, I don't know the proportions--but quite a number of folk find it very repulsive, and a number of folk find it rather dull.

EW: I find it confusing because there's the picture of June, and you wrote very poignantly, 'June wakes in dark feeling robbed of something essential to life and dignity,' She's even got these scars. There's a conflict there that I'm not sure how to resolve. Does it have something to do with what you say in *Janine* about, the 'cure being inside the disease'? To what extent does June just make the best of the situation and refuse to be a victim?

AG: This ain't an excuse, I promise. I suppose if I were arguing to justify it--and a thing can't be justified if it doesn't work for the reader--I think the idea was partly in a sense the idea of her being a victim of her work and her job and her life. She has a notion of being in a fairly essential position in her job, but being continually by-passed because she's a woman, and also a bit straightforward and honest and not interested in playing office politics. . . and in a sense always of her having 'fitted in', of her being a conformist. I think I only present her once before in

which I imagine (what is it, Sam Lang and Miss Watson?) in which she's presented as somebody who does office jobs of a temporary nature from which, since she can't rise beyond a certain point, she moves on because it becomes dull. But I suppose the idea--I don't use it as an excuse-- but the idea that she 'needed bringing out of herself' so she wanders into a slightly treacherous area that she finds dimly exciting. And what follows. . . I know that it can be made to conform to a male fantasy, which is probably where it has its origin: ah that's what they really want. Maybe so.

EW: June says after all that, 'A man should always have money in his pockets,' I wondered if the gender switch was significant there.

AG: I meant her to be being ironical. I quite enjoyed the episode which I'd considered for the book which I embedded in the Post-script of her going into the office with her new aspect and attire and causing, chiefly among the men, huge unrest and disturbance.

EW: You also mention Kathy Acker at that point. To some extent, I think that deflected some of the criticism, but I wondered if you felt you'd anything more in common with Kathy Acker, or if you see any similarities in what you're trying to do.

AG: I met her in Glasgow, she was giving a reading with Jim Kelman and others, and I enjoyed talking to her. In London she was asked to interview me for thingamajig, and she did ask if I'd ever thought of trying to write a book from a woman's point of view, and I did say quite honestly that I didn't think I could.

EW: She's quite radical in saying that, because sometimes there's this kind of attitude that you can't 'appropriate someone else's voice'. That's why I was asking if politically you were aligning yourself with Kathy Acker in any way? I think that's maybe one reason why some feminists didn't fly off the handle at *Something Leather* as much as might have been predicted.

AG Yes, it probably was a wise thing for me to do. Listen, what time is it?

EW: Twenty to seven.

AG: My wife Morag will be waiting for me. I said I'd meet her after six in the King's Castle.

EW: Well, thanks for talking to me.

[The interview ended rather abruptly at this point.]

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