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**THE WATCHER AT THE CROSSROADS:  
IDEOLOGICAL NEGOTIATIONS IN THE FICTION OF  
N. BRYSSON MORRISON**

**Submitted for the degree of Ph.D.**

**UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW**

**DEPARTMENT OF SCOTTISH LITERATURE**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis contributes to the recuperation of N Brysson Morrison, 1903-1986, a Scottish woman writer who has largely been omitted from accounts of Scottish literary history, and whose oeuvre has received little critical attention. This detailed literary study of all her published novels is supplemented, where appropriate, by reference to her biographical and religious works. Contextualising her fiction within the Scottish literary tradition, the thesis argues that the world view communicated by Morrison's novels represents an articulation of the complexity of Scottish experience during the period of social and cultural change that defined her career as a novelist.

Herself a victim of critical exclusion, Morrison's preoccupation with marginality is foregrounded. Although deeply concerned with the articulation of the problematic position of women in patriarchal society, her work should not be seen as dealing only with 'women's issues', an assumption present-day readers might make from the example of *The Gowk Storm* (1933), the only Morrison text in print at the time of writing. The thesis indicates that Morrison's fiction also demonstrates a robust engagement with such questions as the re-visioning of history, the role of religion in Scottish culture, and the representation of national and social identities, topics that are more widely acknowledged to have preoccupied Scottish male writers of her time.

Post-Saussurean discourse theory and the Bakhtinian concept of dialogism provide much of the theoretical framework underpinning critical discussion. The term 'ideology' is used in accordance with Althusser's theory, and the ideological vision of Morrison's fiction is analysed as a negotiation of the different subject

positions available within the ideologically-inscribed discourses articulating Scottish experience. Morrison's novels adopt a complex, often ambiguous perspective; they are identified as presenting a dynamic equilibrium between subversion of, and collusion with, cultural, religious and socio-political aspects of the dominant ideology supporting the bourgeois-capitalist social formation.

The discussion adopts a thematic approach, attention being given to areas of interest which recur throughout Morrison's fiction; for clarity, however, detailed discussion of each theme generally focuses on the close reading of two or three representative texts. Morrison's position as a historical novelist is reasserted. Her early novels are shown to offer a re-vision of history and a reformulation of the historical novel. Her fiction is shown to subvert the genre's ideological assumptions by foregrounding 'counter-historical' elements that refuse to conform with the Enlightenment concept of progress, on which conventional plot resolution is predicated. Alternative constructions of the past are also shown to be presented through the feminising and psychologising of history. It is argued that her novels undermine the notion of the forward directional impetus of historical progress by disrupting narrative linearity with frequent intrusions of the past. Morrison's ambivalence towards the concept of progress is highlighted by identifying in her representation of historical change sympathetic identification with the various conservative and progressive tendencies that she portrays as coexisting in constant tension throughout time.

The thesis also argues that Morrison's fiction evinces a preoccupation with religion shared by many more widely recognised Scottish writers. Although offering a social critique of the Presbyterian church as an institution, her novels adopt a liberal approach to religious belief; but these views are shown to be complicated by

adherence, conscious or unconscious, to residual Calvinistic tendencies. Morrison's engagement with history and religion have been chosen because of their prominence in her novels, and also because, as central formative elements in the construction of national, social and female identities, they provide a context within which to explore her handling of these topics.

Identity is shown to be constructed in discourse, and responsive to historical changes in Scottish discursive practices. The thesis examines the ways in which Morrison's fiction questions conventional representations of national identity, and regards this in the context of contemporaneous interest in redefining Scottishness. Her handling of class and social mobility in urban and rural settings is considered, observing how her own class position influences their representation. Female identity is shown to be portrayed in Morrison's novels as a contested space where feminist- and patriarchally-inscribed discourses compete. Her early fictional explorations of the restrictions imposed on women in patriarchal society are discussed, and ambivalence towards marriage as the defining role for women is also highlighted as a key issue in Morrison's early novels. Her later fiction is shown to question new definitions of 'femininity', and the exploration of the feminist possibilities of sisterhood as an additional, if not alternative, defining role for women, is discussed as a major focus of her last novel.

Although organised thematically, each topic is discussed chronologically, thereby enabling developments in the ideological vision of Morrison's fiction to be contextualised within a framework of socio-economic cultural change and contemporary literary trends. In adopting such an approach the thesis gives a sense of the breadth and depth of Morrison's fiction.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are several people to whom my thanks are due for the help they have given me in completing this thesis.

Firstly, I should like to record my appreciation of the generosity of Dr Elizabeth Michie, N. Brysson Morrison's literary executrix, who has allowed me to borrow those texts which I could not obtain elsewhere. She has also given of her time to answer my many questions, and has given me access to biographical notes made by her husband, the late Dr James Michie, for Morrison's obituary.

My most sincere thanks must also go to my supervisor, Dr. Carol Anderson, whose helpful suggestions and constructive criticism have kept me on course, and enabled me to see through the detail to the bigger picture. Her support and understanding at a difficult period during the gestation of the thesis is particularly appreciated.

Lastly, I must thank my husband; without his help, both practical and emotional, this thesis would not have been completed.

It is dedicated to my grandchildren, Jonathan and Sophie, in the hope that when they are old enough to understand it, N. Brysson Morrison's work will have received the recognition it deserves.

## PREFACE

‘A writer [ . . . ] must have the persistence of the watcher who stands at the crossroads of all other discourses . . . .’

Roland Barthes (1977)

Inaugural Lecture, Collège de France.

Published as *Leçon* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1978); translated, by Richard Howard, collected in *A Roland Barthes Reader*, edited and introduced by Susan Sontag (1982; repr. London: Vintage, 1993)

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

## 1. MORRISON'S NOVELS

*B*     *Breakers* (1930)

*S*     *Solitaire* (1932)

*GS*    *The Gowk Storm* (1933)

*TS*    *The Strangers* (1935)

*WWB* *When The Wind Blows* (1937)

*WY*    *The Winnowing Years* (1949)

*HF*    *The Hidden Fairing* (1951)

*FW*    *The Following Wind* (1954)

*OT*    *The Other Traveller* (1957)

*T*     *Thea* (1963)

## 2, MANUSCRIPT MATERIAL

All manuscript material cited belongs to the collection of N. Brysson Morrison papers held in the National Library of Scotland and is given as NLS, MS ( ), fol.( ).

## INTRODUCTION

- i**      **Introductory Comments**
- ii**     **Biographical Details**
- iii**    **Historical Background**
- iv**     **Ideas Informing Morrison's Fiction**
- v**      **Theoretical Framework Underpinning Critical Discussion**
- vi**     **Thesis Structure**

## INTRODUCTION

## i) INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

In 1934 Edwin Muir recognised Eric Linklater, Neil Gunn, Lewis Grassie Gibbon, Willa Muir and N. Brysson Morrison as ‘writers who in any country would be acknowledged to possess original gifts’.<sup>1</sup> Gunn and Grassie Gibbon have long been recognised as the most important novelists of the twentieth-century Scottish Literary Renaissance. Linklater, too, has been given his rightful place in Scottish literary history. Until recently Willa Muir’s achievements as a novelist and translator, went largely unrecognised; now, however, feminist interest in recovering and re-evaluating ‘lost’ female-authored texts has begun to restore Muir to her place in literary history. Her work, previously out of print, has been reintroduced with the publication of an omnibus edition of her novels, and scholarship is being directed towards her reappraisal.<sup>2</sup>

But what of N. Brysson Morrison? Her writing career extended from 1930 until 1974, yet apart from brief references to selected novels in the recently published *A History of Scottish Women’s Writing*, earlier mention by Douglas Gifford in ‘Scottish Fiction since 1945’, and the mere apologetic listing of her name in Joy Hendry’s ‘Twentieth-century Women’s Writing: The Nest of Singing Birds’<sup>3</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup> ‘New Paths in Fiction: the Scottish Novel Since the War’, in *Glasgow Herald Book Exhibition Supplement*, 22 November 1934, I-II, cited in Moira Burgess, *Imagine a City: Glasgow in Fiction* (Glendaruel: Argyll, 1998), p.139.

<sup>2</sup> *Imagined Selves* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1996); See, for example, Margaret Elphinstone, ‘Willa Muir: Crossing the Genres’, in *A History of Scottish Women’s Writing*, ed. by Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), pp. 400-415.

<sup>3</sup> Gifford: *Scottish Writing and Writers*, ed. by Norman Wilson (Edinburgh: Ramsay Head, 1977), p.17; Hendry: *The History of Scottish Literature*, IV: *Twentieth*

she has been forgotten. Her oeuvre had received no extended academic study until the recent publication of Margery Palmer McCulloch's article, 'Poetic Narrative in Nancy Brysson Morrison's *The Gowk Storm*'.<sup>4</sup> Only one short story, 'No Letters, Please',<sup>5</sup> and one novel, *The Gowk Storm*,<sup>6</sup> are in print at the time of writing; copies of the other novels, her historical biographies and religious works are difficult to obtain. Although previously omitted from Scottish literary history, her work merits recuperation. As a preliminary step in her recovery, this thesis gives serious scholarly attention to the fiction of N. Brysson Morrison. Primarily a literary study which provides close reading of all Morrison's published literary novels, the discussion focuses on the world-view articulated by her texts, and considers them within their appropriate historical and literary contexts. The study includes relevant insights from her historical biographies and religious texts and also uses, where appropriate, information gained from her notebooks, typescripts and correspondence held in the National Library of Scotland. My discussion concerns itself only with Morrison's published literary fiction, and does not consider her romantic fiction or her historical biographies, both of which have literary merit. Nor do I include two late unpublished novels (post-1964 and post-1974), typescripts of which are held in the manuscript collection of the National Library of Scotland. My decision to omit these novels was based on the fact that the latter was written, according to Dr

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*Century*, ed. by Cairns Craig (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), p. 305.

<sup>4</sup> In *Scottish Women's Fiction, 1920s to 1960s: Journeys into Being*, ed. by Carol Anderson and Aileen Christianson (Edinburgh: Tuckwell Press, 2000), pp.108-119). Since this book was published immediately before the thesis was submitted no extended reference to it is made in the text.

<sup>5</sup> *Casual Columns: The Glasgow Herald Miscellany* (Glasgow: Outram, 1955), collected in Moira Burgess, ed., *The Other Voice: Scottish Women's Writing Since 1808* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1987), pp. 186-191.

<sup>6</sup> (Glasgow: Collins: 1933; repr. Edinburgh: Canongate, 1988); all references are to the Canongate edition and will be given in the text as (GS, page number).

Elizabeth Michie, when Morrison was suffering from indifferent health, and because both remained unpublished, either because the author was dissatisfied with them, or because they failed to find a willing publisher.

The author is referred to as N. Brysson Morrison throughout, the name by which she chose to be known, and not *Nancy Brysson Morrison*, as Canongate designated her when they reprinted *The Gowk Storm*. This is a significant point; for while the thesis shows her involvement with the position of women, it also argues that her interests were wide-ranging. Morrison's choice of a non-gendered name may have been a deliberate stratagem undertaken to avoid prejudiced or reductive approaches to her texts. Early experience of a patriarchal tendency to dismiss women's writing as trifling and 'pretty', received at the hands of J. M. Barrie, who wrote of some essays she had sent him: 'They are very nice and some things in them are as pretty as your name ... ','<sup>7</sup> might have influenced her later decision to substitute the androgynous 'N'. for the feminine 'Nancy'.

Morrison's exclusion from literary history is not unique. Although well received by its contemporary readership, for generations women's writing has failed to achieve adequate scholarly attention, and has, therefore, left little or no trace. Elaine Showalter has observed that this has caused the tradition of women's writing to be 'full of holes and hiatuses', and created the situation whereby each generation of women has 'found itself, in a sense, without a history, forced to rediscover the past anew, forging again and again the consciousness of their sex'.<sup>8</sup> The situation is

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<sup>7</sup> Letter, 21 February 1918, N. Brysson Morrison papers, Manuscript Collection, National Library of Scotland, MS 27368, fol.1. All future references to this collection will be abbreviated to NLS, and where appropriate, will be included in the text.

<sup>8</sup> *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*, rev. edn (1982; repr. London: Virago, 1988), pp.11-12.

changing; gaps are being filled. In various areas of study, academics, frustrated by the lack of reference to female writers and their role in the development of literature, are recovering long-buried texts and reviving long-dead reputations. They are thus providing a more comprehensive understanding of their areas of study. Such activity has not only ranked women's work alongside men's, but has discerned trends and influences hitherto undetected that have, in turn, questioned conventional, patriarchal representations of the movements and influences within literary history.

Since the pioneering work of Moers<sup>9</sup> in the 1960s and Showalter in the 1970s feminist interest has uncovered a wealth of women's writing that has questioned previously-accepted generalisations. Particularly fruitful in this respect have been investigations into women's role in the development of the novel. For example, as will be discussed in Chapter 1, the recuperation of Jane Porter has questioned Scott's previous position as the originator of the historical novel. Working closer to the period in which Morrison's literary career began, Jane Eldridge Miller has identified in Edwardian novels about and by women a previously unacknowledged straining at the conventional limits of the novel.<sup>10</sup> She calls this a 'modernism of content, an antecedent stage to the more familiar, canonised modernism of form' (Miller, p.7). Rather than accepting only the conventional, predominantly masculine genealogy of modernism, Miller sees the changing position of women in society as a major force in the development of the modernist novel. In May Sinclair's fiction she observes 'an important link between the new fiction of the 1890s and the modernist novel' (Miller, p. 198). In Chapter 5

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<sup>9</sup> Ellen Moers, *Literary Women*, intr. by Helen Taylor (1963; London: Women's Press, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> *Rebel Women: Feminism, Modernism and the Edwardian Novel* (London: Virago, 1994).

of this thesis I suggest that Morrison's handling of Emmy's predicament in *The Gowk Storm* can be read as a further stage in the development of the novelistic portrayal of the ethical choice between inclination and duty facing women. This choice can be traced through Sinclair's *The Life and Death of Harriet Frean* (1922) back to George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860). Sinclair's novel, *The Three Sisters* (1914), can also be seen to share with *The Gowk Storm* (1933) a female appropriation of the representation of the limited opportunities open to women that links Chekhov's *The Three Sisters* (1901) to Liz Lochhead's similarly titled (2000) adaptation, with its Scottish, wartime setting. Such considerations help to place Morrison's fiction in its literary historical context and fill in some of the 'holes' identified by Showalter.

Miller's study follows on from the pioneering work collected in *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (1990), edited by Bonnie Kime Scott, whose association of women with modernism has helped to raise the profile of women's writing. Since its publication further studies have uncovered a corpus of women's writing that questions accepted generalisations about literary trends in the modern(ist) period. For example, Janet Montefiore's re-examination of the 1930s, conventionally classified as the decade of the left-wing politics associated with bourgeois males of The Auden Generation, has found that women writers were also political.<sup>11</sup> However, she notes that because of ideological skewing, conventional accounts of the 1930s exclude both women and working-class writers (Montefiore, p.17). A related point is made by Alison Light who has discovered in conservative women's writing of the inter-war years 'something radically other to, and rebelling

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<sup>11</sup> *Men and Women Writers of the 1930s: The Dangerous Flood of History* (London: Routledge, 1996).

against, the domestic world pre-1918 which at the same time was quite compatible with deeply defensive urges'.<sup>12</sup> In identifying what she has termed 'conservative modernism' Light has further expanded the concept of modernism, and reasserted its feminine focus.

Alongside studies of specific periods, detailed appraisals of women writers, both major and lesser-known, have helped to open up the field of English literary history and have shown it to be populated by a more varied, and therefore richer, set of responses to human experience than earlier accounts would have suggested. This is also true of Scottish literary history. Recent work on women writers from the sixteenth century onwards has uncovered a wealth of literary responses that supplements earlier accounts, and questions the ideological implications of their previous exclusion. Cairns Craig's four volume *The History of Scottish Literature*, includes discussion of women writers, and, as the title implies, Gifford's and McMillan's *A History of Scottish Women Writers* extends the range and depth of this treatment. Scholarly publications identifying and reassessing previously-forgotten or little-studied works by women have begun to redefine the parameters within which Scottish literature is viewed. It is against the background of such activity that this thesis is presented.

My interest in N. Brysson Morrison grew out of a wider interest in Scottish women writers of the 1920s and 1930s. I was particularly interested in how such women articulated their responses to change, and how the social and economic turmoil through which they lived was represented in their fiction. I found that the writers' attention was frequently focused on female subjectivity, and on finding

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<sup>12</sup>*Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London: Routledge, 1991), p.10.

ways of subverting the novel's ideologically-inscribed conventions to represent possibilities for female development. Morrison's *The Gowk Storm* conforms to this general pattern. But the chance find of *The Hidden Fairing* (1951) showed that her interests were not confined to what could reductively be called 'women's issues'. Written almost twenty years later, *The Hidden Fairing* returns to the setting of *The Gowk Storm* but now offers an alternative narrative focus on the life of the enigmatic dominie featured in the earlier novel. Comparison of the treatment of religious marginalisation, as represented in the dominie's experience in each of these novels, registers an alteration in society's religious toleration, and suggested that in Morrison's fiction I might find a reflection of wider social trends. Further searching confirmed this; I identified not only a lively preoccupation with female subjectivity that reflected the changing demands and restrictions experienced by women as the twentieth century progressed, but also an engagement with elements of European philosophy and an interest in topics conventionally understood to have engaged male writers of her time. For example, the focus on the reinterpretation of Scottish history and its importance in raising national consciousness, traditionally associated with male writers like Gunn and Grassie Gibbon, is found within Morrison's earliest novels, from 1930 onwards.

Recognising the breadth and complexity of Morrison's fiction, two things particularly intrigued me. Running through all her novels can be detected an interest in marginality, not only as applied to women, but as a concept with wider application. I was also interested in the way ambiguity is created by the balancing of ideological subversion and complicity that takes place to varying degrees in her texts. Indeed, in her best novels, what I refer to as a dynamic equilibrium can be almost 'felt' as currents and counter-currents whose opposing directional flows take

the reader into ideological eddies. The term ‘dynamic equilibrium’ is borrowed from chemical thermodynamics where it describes reversible chemical reactions which proceed until reactants and products are held in a situation of constant, simultaneous association and dissociation; that is, where forward and backward motion occurs together. This provides a useful analogy for the manner in which Morrison’s fiction simultaneously subverts and complies with the cultural, religious and socio-political aspects of the dominant ideology of her time. Morrison’s interest in marginality and ‘otherness’, and their expression in her negotiation between dominant and oppositional ideological positions have been adopted as the structuring principles of this thesis. The discussion adopts a thematic approach, focusing on the main themes of history, religion, and identity, which recur throughout Morrison’s fiction, and argues that she is a Scottish woman writer worthy of greater recognition.

## ii) BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

Although her date of birth is given as 1907 in the Canongate reprint (1988) of *The Gowk Storm* and by the Select Bibliography in Gifford’s and McMillan’s *History*, Morrison’s birth certificate states that she was born Agnes Brysson Inglis Morrison, on 24 December 1903, at Merchiston, Scotstounhill, in the parish of Renfrew.<sup>13</sup> The third daughter in a family of three girls and three boys, she was

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<sup>13</sup>Morrison’s birth certificate is held in Renfrew Registrar’s Office; date of entry 1904, entry number 13. Scotstounhill is generally considered to be part of Glasgow, but in 1904 Renfrew Parish extended north of the Clyde, and as far east as the village of Yoker; *Gazetteer of Scotland*, rev. edn, 6 vols, VI, ed. by Francis H. Groome (London: Mackenzie, [n.d.]), p. 242.

named after her mother. An error in the birth certificate spells her middle name Bryson, but the correct French spelling is retained in her mother's name. This surname is derived from Huguenot ancestry, and also has Covenanting associations; George Brysson was the name of one of Morrison's forebears who fought at Bothwell Bridge and who is remembered in the dedication of her ecclesiastical history *They Need No Candle: The Men Who Built the Scottish Kirk* (1957):<sup>14</sup> 'For Dorothy Webb whose ancestor and ours George Brysson fought for the faith at Bothwell Brig.'

Morrison's family background was middle-class. Her father, Arthur Mackie Morrison, was an engineer, and, according to Stewart Hunter's authoritative article in *The Scots Magazine*, their paternal grandfather had been a Glasgow Bailie.<sup>15</sup> While not specifically designating him 'Bailie', Glasgow Corporation records indicate that John Morrison served as a Town Councillor, firstly in the capacity of Deacon Convenor (1857-9), then as elected representative for Ward 10, Scotstoun (1859-61), and finally as Master of Works (1861-5).<sup>16</sup> Her mother, Agnes, was the daughter of Thomas Inglis, an Edinburgh lawyer. The Morrison family's notable position in Glasgow society is suggested by the C.B.E. awarded to her mother for charitable services to the community. Particularly interested in child welfare, Mrs Morrison was president of the Glasgow Branch of the Scottish Children's League of Pity for seven years. She organised eighteen Charity Matinées; the first, on 31 March 1900, being held to raise money for the Lord Provost's Fund for victims of

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<sup>14</sup>(London: Epworth Press)

<sup>15</sup>'The Morrisons', vol. 59, June 1953, pp. 186-192 (p.187).

<sup>16</sup>*Biographical Sketches of the Lord Provosts of Glasgow 1833-1883*, ed. by Boyd (Glasgow: Tweed, 1883), pp. 176-230.

the Boer War. She also organised Union Jack Day, the first charity flag day ever held in Glasgow, on 5 September 1914.<sup>17</sup>

The daughters were educated at the Park School in Glasgow, and the registration records show that they were then still resident at Scotstounhill. Little evidence of Morrison's academic interests or achievements is available. Her personal papers give no indication of her schooldays; and trawling through back issues of the Park School magazine produced only references to her elder sister Peggy's participation in the dramatic activities of the Stevenson Society, but no direct references to either Nancy or her other sister, Mary. However, literature was a great preoccupation with the Morrison family as a whole, for out of six children, five became published writers. Only one brother, Russell, who emigrated to New Zealand some time before 1935, has left no trace of any literary talent. John Morrison wrote poetry and worked in publishing, while the third brother, Tommy, T.J. Morrison, was a novelist and worked in the film industry. Peggy, the eldest sister, wrote novels, and Mary wrote short stories.

In the 1950s, a comparison was drawn between the Morrison and Brontë families (Hunter, p.187). Although this comparison should not be carried too far, the young Morrisons were clearly influenced by the Brontës. Whilst this thesis highlights some features of Morrison's early novels that are reminiscent of Emily Brontë's work, I think the girls were also influenced by what they knew of the Brontës as personalities and the conditions under which they wrote. For example, the idea of the imaginary worlds of Gondal and Angria could be seen to have inspired Morrison's childhood story of the Avatii (NLS, MS 27352, fols 1-4). Like the Brontës, the Morrison sisters decided to adopt pseudonyms. All would use the

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<sup>17</sup>*Who's Who: 1926* (London: Black, 1926), p. 2077.

surname Cost; Nancy would be Ann Cost and Peggy would be March Cost, a name she actually did use when she left the stage to concentrate on novel writing. But childhood influences can also be traced to Robert Louis Stevenson, and Morrison's early story, 'The Adventures of the Five Children and the Patchwork Quilt' (NLS,MS 27352, fol. 11), betrays evidence of both the Brontë and Stevensonian influences that inform much of her subsequent work. An early poem, signed 'Ann Cost' and dated 26 December 1923, two days after Morrison's twentieth birthday, entitled 'When I Am Dead' also suggests both Brontë and Stevensonian influence (NLS, MS 27352, fol. 18). Morrison's overt interest in the Brontës, after initially being directed during the period 1932-1947 towards the planning of a biography of Emily Brontë, found its final expression in *Haworth Harvest: The Lives of the Brontës* (1969). Morrison's published fiction evinces a distinct Brontë influence, something Dot Allan recognised in *The Gowk Storm*.<sup>18</sup> Echoes of *Wuthering Heights* suffuse this novel, observable in the 'wild poetry' and the 'imaginative urgency' (Hunter, p.188) that both novels share. My discussion also draws comparisons between Morrison's fiction and ideas expressed in the work of other writers such as May Sinclair and Neil Gunn. These latter comparisons are conjectural insofar as I have found no documentation to confirm that she knew their work. The only firm evidence of Morrison's personal reading refers to her early enjoyment of Thackeray and Austen (Hunter, p.187), and to a collection of Katherine Mansfield's letters sent by her brother, John, as a birthday/Christmas present in 1933.<sup>19</sup>

It is unclear when Morrison abandoned the pseudonym, Ann Cost, for no authorial designations are suggested in notebooks, dated from 1924 onwards,

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<sup>18</sup>Letter, 22 May 1934, NLS, MS 27368, fol. 121.

<sup>19</sup>John Morrison, letter, 14 December 1933, NLS, MS 27368, fol. 115.

containing notes for two unpublished novels. By 1930, with the publishing of *Breakers*, the feminine *nom de plume* had been relinquished in favour of the genderless N. Brysson Morrison. These notebooks contain ideas that eventually appear in her later fiction, such as cross-class and cross-cultural relationships, dysfunctional families, and Protestant-Catholic conversions, and it is probable that by this stage the childhood pseudonym would have been dropped in favour of the more worldly-sounding N. Brysson Morrison.

Attention will be paid throughout the thesis to Morrison's concern with the apposite naming of her novels and their characters. For the moment, however, it is important to note that her publishing career was divided between serious fiction, historical biography and religious topics, published under her own name, and popular romantic novels published between 1942 and 1959 under the pseudonym, Christine Strathern. I think it is significant that she should have chosen as a pseudonym the name of Stephen Wingate's rejected fiancée in *The Gowk Storm* (1933), because her sister, Peggy, had earlier commented that this character, Christine Strathern, epitomised 'the weak nature taking refuge in make-believe again'.<sup>20</sup> Could this have been what Morrison was doing? She never married, and it is possible to regard her romantic fiction as a sublimation of repressed desire. But it is also possible that she assumed the alter ego in order to earn enough to secure her future; for sometime between the late 1930s and early 1950s she and Mary were obliged to move from what had, at least since the early 1920s, been the family home in High Burnside to a flat in Hillhead Street, close to Glasgow University. What is also important is that she kept the two personae very strictly separated. It was not generally known that N. Brysson Morrison and Christine Strathern were one. That

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<sup>20</sup>Letter, 14 July 1933, NLS, MS, 27372, fol. 43.

financial expedience may have determined Morrison's entry into popular romantic fiction, is suggested by the impression that, despite her success in this field, she appears to have been uneasy, perhaps even ashamed about it. There is a suggestion that she might have felt that her literary talents had been prostituted by working in this 'inferior' genre, a point hinted at in a letter from her sister, Peggy, referring to *Love in the Limelight* (1954):

It is just ridiculous that such a book should be in that series. It is a wonderful piece of work. Not only is every character alive -- but the drama is pregnant throughout, and the nature descriptions perfection, and yet a living part of the story too.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, among the personal effects left to her literary executor is a notebook in which all the dust-jackets of the twenty seven Christine Strathern romances are pasted, together with press reviews for many of them. The fly-leaf of the notebook bears the inscription: 'Christine Strathern: her book', but the book is inserted, as if for concealment, in an old hand-embroidered cover, bearing the initials AM, such as might be used to protect the binding of a Bible. Yet, like the ambiguity that this thesis identifies in Morrison's fiction, her private life is open to multiple interpretation, for the cover could equally have been intended for a diary or journal, and the notebook could represent an articulation of the romantic love and sexual fulfilment that Morrison may have been denied. Whatever the reason, it is significant that it was not until after Morrison's death that her first literary executor, Dr James Michie, knew about her 'pot-boilers'.

Little factual evidence is available about Morrison the woman. However, comparison between her novels and information contained in the typescript of a talk

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<sup>21</sup>Letter, 5 January 1855, NLS, MS 27372, fol. 98.

given at Wellington Church, Glasgow in 1957 suggests that her fiction grew out of personal experience (NLS, MS 27354, fols 35-43). Whilst it is dangerous to read the reality of an author's life from incidents in his or her fiction, Janet Montefiore has noted that fictionalised autobiography was a popular literary mode employed by writers of the Auden group, amongst others, in the 1930s and later (Montefiore, p.26). Working on this understanding of the spirit of the times in which Morrison's early fiction, at least, was published, I suggest some obvious comparisons between her fiction and her life. For example, her doting mother, who was always late, according to the typescript, could be seen as a model for the mothers in *Breakers* and *The Gowk Storm*. Similarly, the description of her father, as one who never gave any praise, and was always so early that he caught the train before the one he went for, could fit many of her fictional fathers. Even the recounting of how her sister, Mary, had to hide the edition of the magazine in which her first short story was published for fear that her father would stop her pocket money if he learned of her earning potential, is fictionalised in Glen Gillespie's experience in *Breakers* (1930). A lack of paternal affection permeates her novels, and finds what is perhaps its most poignant expression in a passage from the notebook for her unpublished novel, *The Moonling*: 'How Foagher used to see her father go down the brae from the little hillock and turn the corner and how she wished he would turn and wave to her.' Such longing for fatherly love and recognition drives Foagher to live in 'a world of true fancy' (NLS, MS 27287, fols 17, 18). Autobiographical elements could, perhaps, be finding expression here, too.

The lives of other family members also appear in fictionalised form in her work; Glen's decision to take up journalism in *Breakers* echoes the original career choice of Morrison's brother, Tommy, although he later became a novelist and then

a screenplay writer, reputed notably for the films *Ice Cold in Alex* (1958) and *The Stars Look Down* (1939). Tommy also recognised himself in the portrayal of Bernardo in *The Strangers* (1935).<sup>22</sup> In *The Winnowing Years* (1949) the acting career of Arthur Lindsay recalls the fact that Morrison's sister, Peggy, was originally an actress before becoming a novelist. Even the topic of divorce, which is central to the narrative of *The Other Traveller* (1957), had personal significance, for her brother, John, divorced his first wife. However, although *Breakers* (1930) raises the intriguing possibility of illegitimacy, there is no evidence to suggest any such real-life occurrence. Rather, I think that it provided an apposite metaphor for the novel's re-visioning of history, and may even speak of Morrison's own reservations about the social acceptability of the radical perspective it offers.

Morrison's novels are also set in places that she knew well. Perhaps the most obvious of these is the village and parish church of Carmunnock, the setting for *The Winnowing Years* (1949). Much of this novel has its basis in the factual history of the district. The descriptions of the church and its graveyard can easily be correlated to the building as it stands today, as can the features of the surrounding landscape. Indeed Morrison's portrayal of Drum Tower corresponds exactly with Mains Castle, one of whose recently restored features is the magnificent fireplace in the garret bedroom,<sup>23</sup> the construction of which is used in Morrison's novel to represent the waning social authority of the landed gentry. Her familiarity with the church was gained by her attendance at services there while the family were resident at High Burnside.<sup>24</sup> The same building is also used to furnish some features of the kirk in *The Gowk Storm*, although Morrison has identified the location this time as a village

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<sup>22</sup>Letter, 21 September 1934, NLS, MS 27368, fol. 125.

<sup>23</sup>Photograph, *The Herald*, 25 February 1998, p. 26.

<sup>24</sup>Jack Webster, *The Herald*, 19 April 1994, p.14.

on Loch Tay (NLS, MS 27354, fol. 42). I have found a church and manse, built at approximately the same time as is indicated in the novel, mid-eighteenth century, located on the north side of Loch Tay, mid-way between Killin and Kenmore, whose situation at the loch's edge, beyond a sheltering line of trees, recalls the settings of both *Breakers* and *The Gowk Storm*. Indeed, close by is a low cottage that could easily have been the original for Croft Fionn, the MacDonalds' cottage in *The Hidden Fairing* (1951). In 1933 Morrison spent a holiday on the isle of Lismore, and this provided the setting for *The Strangers* (1935) (NLS, MS 27368, fols 138,139). There is no reference to the setting for *The Other Traveller* (1957) among Morrison's letters. However, while searching for her burial place at Ballater, the layout of the town square, situated between the railway station and the Monaltrie Hotel, located on the river bank, recalled the descriptions of the village of Drochet, and suggested that the latter building might have been the inspiration for the Drochet Arms Hotel, which is central to the narrative of that novel.

The settings for Morrison's novels about modern Glasgow are much easier to locate. Both *The Following Wind* (1954) and *Thea* (1962) are clearly derived from her experience of living in Hillhead in Glasgow, and 51 Mountview Street, prominent in both novels, resembles 41 Hillhead Street which was Morrison's own address in the 1950s. Perhaps the most obviously autobiographically-inspired of Morrison's fiction is Book Four of *The Winnowing Years* (1949), a novel dedicated to the memory of her parents. Here are references to the fact that while resident in Glasgow the daughters of the family attended Park School, and that the eldest wanted to go to Art School, something Peggy Morrison actually did. It is interesting that at the end of this novel, earlier misunderstandings about paternal love are rectified. The daughter, perhaps significantly named Christine, who is left to look

after her ageing father discovers, to her great surprise, that he really has her best interests at heart when he unselfishly sends her to visit her brother in India, thereby offering her opportunities which she thought she would always be denied.

When originally published, Morrison's fiction was well received. Hugh Walpole said of *Breakers*: 'She writes like a poet'.<sup>25</sup> An anonymous reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement* praised her 'sensitive and restrained precision [which] encloses a truly poetic creative vision', recognising *The Gowk Storm*'s 'uncommon beauty [ ... ] that recalls the grave intensity of passion below the strict formal rhythms of old Scots airs'.<sup>26</sup> A reviewer in the *Glasgow Herald* praised the 'economy shown both in the writing and in the treatment of the theme' in *The Strangers*, opining that 'the book is indeed one of the best trimmed works of Scottish fiction since Stevenson'.<sup>27</sup> Reviews of her later work in *The Scots Magazine* were less favourable; but criticism of *The Winnowing Years* as the work of 'another experimenter', the discontinuities of which left the reviewer frustrated, and his or her tendency to expect only conventional narrative strategies and happy endings, suggest the reviewer's prescriptive approach to literature, rather than faults in the works themselves.<sup>28</sup> This opinion is substantiated by the fact that in 1950 *The Winnowing Years* won the first Frederick Niven Award for the best novel by a Scottish writer. *The Gowk Storm* has been the most popular of Morrison's novels. It was a Book Club choice and was dramatised both in Morrison's lifetime (after which film rights were bought but the film never materialised), and again in 1986 by Colin MacDonald under commission from the Royal Lyceum Theatre in Edinburgh.

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<sup>25</sup>Publisher's order form.

<sup>26</sup> 7 September 1933, p. 590.

<sup>27</sup> Anonymous, Thursday 31 January 1935, p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> Vol. 53, May 1950, p.163; vol. 66, March 1957, pp. 479-480.

As with several other Morrison novels and her short story 'No Letters, Please', *The Gowk Storm* has been broadcast on BBC Radio.<sup>29</sup> Morrison's historical biographies were also well received, *Mary Queen of Scots* (1960) winning an American Literary Guild Award. In her biographies it was her novelist's insight that was praised rather than any attempt at scholarly historiography, for her intention seems to have been to give 'life' to her subjects, to continue her aim of psychologising history discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis.

After her sister Mary's death in 1977 Morrison moved St John's Wood in London to be close to her brother Tommy and his wife Hedy, who lived in Hamptead. Morrison died of bowel cancer at St Mary's Hospital, Paddington, on 27 February 1986. Her memorial service was held on 17 April 1986 at St Andrew's United Reform Church, Finchley Road, London. Following cremation, her ashes were buried in her sister Mary's grave at Tullich Cemetery in Ballater; also commemorated on their headstone is their brother, Arthur Russell, who died in New Zealand in 1978.

### iii) HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Morrison lived through a period of great social, cultural and political change. To place her life in its historical context, it is useful to recall that she was born only two years after Queen Victoria's death, yet when she, herself, died eighty two years later, there had been two World Wars, Britain had lost her Empire, Scotland's political climate had been transformed, sexual equality had been enshrined in law,

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<sup>29</sup>*Storyline*, BBC Radio Scotland, 'No Letters, Please': 15 February 1996 and 20 February 1997; *The Gowk Storm*: 7-18 July 1997. BBC Radio Archives have no record of dates of earlier broadcasts.

and, in the wider arena of human achievement, man had walked on the moon. As this thesis relates Morrison's fiction to the cultural conditions of its production and consumption, the historical context of her work will be given detailed consideration in the body of the text. For the present, a brief synopsis of the main events will provide an insight into some of the changes experienced in Scotland during her lifetime.

Growing up in Glasgow, Morrison would have been aware of the social impact of militant suffragette agitation. Although too young to benefit from the first extension of the franchise to women over thirty in 1918, she would have received the vote in 1928 at the age of twenty four. Throughout her long life she would have seen a significant increase in the number of women entering tertiary education, and witnessed a growing female representation in the professions. Over this period other employment opportunities for women also proliferated, and although social attitudes did not always keep pace with women's aspirations, by the time of Morrison's death, equal opportunities legislation had begun to dismantle the remaining barriers to female emancipation. Greater use of birth control, popularised by the publication in 1918 of Marie Stopes's *Married Love*, made it easier for women to limit family sizes. This enabled them to see child-rearing as an episode in their lives rather than as the totality of their experience within marriage. Although devastating in other respects, the two World Wars contributed positively to female emancipation by removing women from the home to replace men who were on active service.

Social change was another feature of Morrison's lifetime. When she was born, class demarcation lines were rigidly drawn, and extreme poverty was endemic among both urban and rural labouring classes. Although this was alleviated somewhat by the Liberal Reforms of 1911, the economic crisis of the Depression,

which began to be felt in Scotland in the 1920s, reduced many to abject poverty. Declining economic prospects were instrumental in causing emigration levels to rise in the inter-war years, and this period saw the first stages in the decimation of Scotland's traditional heavy-industrial base. Morrison's lifetime saw a complete transformation in the country's industrial face, for by the time her last biography was published in 1974, the technological revolution had taken place, and the electronics industry was becoming established as a growth sector in Scotland's economy.

Following the Second World War, the creation of the Welfare State made social provision a Government responsibility, and while poverty was not eradicated, people were protected in times of illness and unemployment. This thesis suggests that, although welcomed by the poor, those in Morrison's class sometimes viewed radical social change negatively. Such change was largely the result of Socialist influence, the proliferation of which became apparent in the growing numbers of Scottish Labour MPs and Local Government Councillors. As well as the rise in Socialist politics, Scottish Nationalism was reasserted during Morrison's lifetime with the formation of the Scottish National Party in 1934. There was also an upsurge of literary activity, evident in the cultural movement of the 1920s and 1930s, spearheaded by C. M. Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid), which sought to reassert Scotland's distinct cultural identity. In Morrison's lifetime, too, Germany's threat to British sovereignty during the Second World War fostered a reaffirmation of British identity, thereby diminishing the appeal of the Nationalists' call for independence, and complicating the way Scots saw themselves.

Although the twentieth century witnessed the increasing secularisation of society, in Morrison's early years religion would still have exercised a significant

influence on how many people lived their lives. Residual effects of social or secularised Calvinism would have continued to inform Scottish attitudes to morality and behaviour. By the 1920s the Presbyterian way of life was perceived to be threatened by falling church membership and by the growing strength of Catholicism, resulting from the influx of Irish immigrants. In an attempt to bolster the position of Presbyterianism, the Free Church and the Established Church of Scotland reunited in 1929. Despite the Kirk's efforts following reunion, church membership continued to decline. A brief upsurge of evangelical activity in the late 1940s and early 1950s refocused attention on religion, but its effects were short-lived, and the secularisation of society continued.

Morrison's perspective would have been coloured by her experience of the cumulative effects of the historical events through which she lived. Consequently, since her literary fiction was published between 1930 and 1963, it is probable that its vision would have been informed by historical changes such as those outlined above.

#### iv) IDEAS INFORMING MORRISON'S FICTION

The intellectual climate within Scotland in the early decades of the twentieth century, which would also have contributed to the vision expressed in Morrison's fiction, was greatly influenced by the debates encouraged by popularisation of the work of European scientists and philosophers in periodicals such as Orage's *New Age*.<sup>30</sup> English translations of the philosophical theories of Bergson and Nietzsche

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<sup>30</sup>See, for example, "The Most Brilliant Journal"; A.R.Orage and *The New Age*, in

were brought to Britain, as were translations, reviews and discussions of the psychological theories of Freud and Jung, and the scientific discoveries of Albert Einstein. It is not surprising, therefore, that evidence of the informing influence of such new ideas, and the exciting possibilities they offered, should be found in the work of Scottish writers associated with the Scottish Literary Renaissance. In Morrison's case, the works of Bergson and Jung are seen to inform the ideological background against which her novels are written.

This discussion of Morrison's fiction foregrounds its preoccupation with psychological interiority, its anachronous representation of time, and its focus on memory, at both individual and collective levels. The significance of inherited memory, or the collective unconscious, is particularly relevant to the exploration of the ideological perspectives communicated by her fiction with regard to identity, both individual and national, and to her representation of the process of history. The focus on psychological 'inner space' speaks of a desire to represent 'reality' subjectively rather than objectively, and Morrison's fiction applies this modernist perspective to historical narrative to fill the gaps left by conventional accounts. Her use of time-warping narrative techniques, coexisting with repeated references to clocks, indicates participation in the contemporaneous wish to circumvent the restrictions of linear time, complicated by the rational acceptance that such evasive action was limited. Such preoccupations can be explained as a reaction against the reification of the individual and the tyranny of chronological time that resulted from the growth of Britain's highly mechanised industrial society.<sup>31</sup> They can also be

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Catherine Kerrigan, *Whaur Extremes Meet: The Poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid 1920-1934* (Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 1983), pp. 27-45.

<sup>31</sup>Randall Stevenson, *Modernist Fiction: An Introduction* rev. edn, (Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall, 1998), pp. 87-91.

viewed as the application of the philosophical theories of Henri Bergson and other European thinkers to literary practice. While I believe that direct connections can be made between Morrison's fiction and Bergson's theories, I think that what is perceived in her novels is as much an articulation of the spirit of the times in which she wrote, as the deliberate application of philosophy to literature. I view the intellectual climate, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s, as the result of the adoption of such abstract philosophical theories, not simply because of a desire to apply philosophy *per se*, but because it was recognised that these theories articulated responses to modernity with which individuals, themselves, could identify. That said, the central philosophical concepts which can be identified in Morrison's fiction originate with the theories of Henri Bergson.

Bergson's 'theories' occupy a seminal position in the development of European thought, and their influence can be discerned in the work of Einstein, Freud and Jung. Contrary to the mechanistic focus on time as a measurable commodity of fixed uni-directional linearity, experienced and analysable in discrete units, Bergson conceived of time as a psychological phenomenon: 'Wherever anything lives [. . .] there is, open somewhere, a register in which time is being inscribed'.<sup>32</sup> He postulated that the individual lives in a constant state of becoming, with one state of consciousness coexisting with and overlaying another, but that this is mistakenly registered as discrete units of time only because of the 'cinematographic' nature of the human intellect. Duration (*durée*) is the name given by Bergson to psychological time, and in *Matière et Mémoire* (1896) duration is 'renamed and also partially re-conceived as "memory"'.<sup>33</sup> Bergson's psychological

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<sup>32</sup>*L' Evolution Créatrice* (1907); *Creative Evolution*, trans. by Arthur Mitchell (London: Macmillan, 1911), p.17.

<sup>33</sup>Pete A.Y. Gunter, 'Bergson and Jung', in *Jung in Contexts: A Reader*, ed. by Paul

duration consists of overlapping states of consciousness in which there is no distinct separation of past and present states. Conceived thus, there is no distinction between the present and *all* of the past in the individual consciousness. Like Freud, Bergson postulated that all memories were preserved in the unconscious:

Behind the memories which crowd in upon our present occupation and are revealed by means of it, there are others, thousands on thousands of others, below and beneath the scene illuminated by consciousness. Yes, I believe our past life is there, preserved even to the minutest details; nothing is forgotten; all we have perceived, thought, willed, from the first awakening of our consciousness, persists indefinitely.<sup>34</sup>

Memory, the reservoir of the totality of all formative experiences, is regarded by Bergson as the individuating core of the subject: ‘What are we, in fact, what is our character, if not the condensation of the history that we have lived from our birth -- nay even before our birth, since we bring with us prenatal dispositions?’<sup>35</sup> In *Creative Evolution*, with phrases like ‘prenatal dispositions’ and the idea that memories are ‘messengers from the unconscious, [that] remind us of what we are dragging behind us unawares’ (p.5), Bergson edges towards the conception of a human unconscious that becomes ‘suprapersonal’, although he does speak directly of the collective unconscious as later articulated by Jung (Gunter, ‘Bergson and Jung’, p. 267). In Jung’s psychology the collective unconscious can be understood as ‘a potentiality carried from the ancient past in the form of mnemonic images which were inherited as part of the anatomy of the brain.’<sup>36</sup> As such, it was

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Bishop (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 265-282 (p.266).

<sup>34</sup>*Mind Energy: Lectures and Essays* (1919), trans. by H. Wildon Carr (London: Macmillan, 1920), p.94. Quoted in Randall Stevenson (1998), p.108.

<sup>35</sup>*Creative Evolution* (1911), p. 5.

<sup>36</sup>Stanley Grossman, ‘C.G.Jung and National Socialism’, in Bishop, *Jung in*

conceived as a store of 'excited fantasies in the mind which humanised or personified the forces of nature in the form of archetypes or primordial images' (Grossman, p.101). It was a relatively short step, especially in the atmosphere of intense nationalism that swept Europe in the 1930s, to redirect the idea of the collective unconscious containing 'memories' inherited from all (wo)man's ancestors in the process of evolution, towards the positing of racially-specific collective memory as a means of underwriting separate racial identities. Jung himself saw this:

Thus there must be typical myths which are really instruments of a folk-psychological complex treatment. Jacob Burckhart seems to have suspected this when he once said that every Greek of the classical era carried in himself a fragment of Oedipus, just as every German carries a fragment of Faust.<sup>37</sup>

National myths, landscape, and relics from Scotland's prehistoric past were used by writers of the 1930s to tap into the resources of the supposed specifically-Scottish collective unconscious to bring about a heightening of awareness of national identity. Indeed, despite the discrediting of racial memory because of its over-zealous adoption by Hitler as justification for his vision of Aryan supremacy, specifically-Scottish interpretations of the collective unconscious have engaged Scottish writers, Morrison included, from the inter-war period until the 1990s. In the 1930s the collective unconscious appears in Gunn's and Grassie Gibbon's fiction as a means of intuitive identification with the distant past, and it is recognised in

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*Contexts*, pp. 92-121, ( p.101).

<sup>37</sup>*Psychology of the Unconscious*, trans, by Beatrice M. Hinkle (New York, 1944), pp.40-41: quoted in Grossman, 'C.G.Jung and National Socialism', in *Jung in Contexts*, p.102.

Edwin Muir's poetry by George Mackay Brown who continued to rely on the concept :

Muir adventures far into the racial memory, and the treasures of image and symbol he brings back are steeped in the purity and light and tranquillity of the beginning. My poems have a much narrower range in time -- a thousand years maybe.<sup>38</sup>

Morrison's range is comparable to Mackay Brown's. However, as will be further discussed in the thesis, while she accepts the concept of the collective unconscious, and perhaps even its redefinition as racial memory, she does so with reservations about its usefulness, often portraying its effects as problematic. Such reservations are particularly evident in books written after the Second World War.

The idea of psychological inheritance, derived from Bergson and Jung, but applied to specific characteristics of individuals passed on through familial links, is important in Morrison's fiction. However, Stevenson, rather than Bergson or Jung, could be seen as the precursor of ideas of inheritance underlying Morrison's portrayal of Callum Lamont in *Breakers* (1930) or Mary Queen of Scots in *Solitaire* (1932). As early as 1887, in his essay, 'The Manse', Stevenson articulated ideas that anticipated those of later writers. His statement: 'Our conscious years are but a moment in the history of the elements that build us', reads like a paraphrase of Bergson; and his extension of this proposition to include shared 'memories' inherited not only from those who 'shook spears in the Debateable Land', but, going even further back into the 'still cloudier past', from our earliest common ancestors whose habits were 'probably arboreal' not only anticipates the Jungian theory of the collective unconscious but gives it a personal dimension by relating it to a particular

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<sup>38</sup>For *The Islands I Sing: An Autobiography* (London: Murray, 1997), p.165.

family tree.<sup>39</sup> It is in this latter individual appropriation of the concept of psychological inheritance that Morrison's fiction most resembles Stevenson's view; for while the implications of the broader concept of racial memory are often treated ambivalently, familial psychological inheritance appears to be accepted as unquestioningly as the genetic transmission of physical characteristics.

#### v) THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK UNDERPINNING CRITICAL DISCUSSION

In arguing that the fiction of N. Brysson Morrison is worthy of recuperation this thesis focuses on the world-view presented by her novels as the structuring principle of its discussion. To provide a platform for the analysis of her novels, some unpicking of the ideas and terminology involved is necessary, as is a consideration of the theoretical framework on which the discussion is based.

In the first instance, it is necessary to define exactly what I mean by ideology in general, and bourgeois ideology in particular. In some uses of the terms, which will be obvious from the context, 'ideology' will refer to a specific body of thought and conform to Hayden White's definition: 'a set of prescriptions for taking a position in the present world of social praxis and acting upon it (either to change the world or to maintain it in its current state)'.<sup>40</sup> This definition implies that such bodies of ideas can be accepted or rejected, and that the individual always has freedom of choice in such matters. In contrast, the meaning and mode of operation of ideology on which much of my discussion is based derives, in part, from the work of Louis Althusser, which argues that 'ideology represents the imaginary

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<sup>39</sup> *Memories and Portraits* (1887; repr. Glasgow: Drew, 1990), p. 82.

<sup>40</sup> *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe* (1973; repr. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), p. 22.

relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence'.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, as these imaginary representations of the real social formation are encoded in myths, discourses and cultural symbols, ideology is held to work at a subconscious level by appearing as 'common sense' because it is 'inscribed in' the everyday language which articulates our beliefs and is part of our social practices.<sup>42</sup>

Althusser has argued that it is this inscription of ideology in language, language often erroneously assumed to be transparent, that facilitates its operation. For by this means the values and practices of those constituents of the social formation, termed Ideological State Apparatuses, such as the family, the church and educational institutions, are communicated. This accounts not only for ideology's role in acting with political and economic forces to produce a given social formation, in this case bourgeois capitalism, but it also accounts for its ability to 'interpellate' the individual as both active and passive subject. By this is meant that ideology, inscribed in discourse, interpellates or 'hails' the individual directly, conferring on him or her the status of subject. This subject position is the locus from which meaning is determined, and from which the 'obviousness' of the perceived social relationship conveyed by ideology appears as 'common sense'. Yet, at the same moment, ideology subverts that supposed interpretative autonomy and subjects the individual to its obfuscating mechanisms by which it substitutes 'partial truths [. . .] omissions, gaps rather than lies', for the real social conditions under which the individual lives (Belsey, p. 57). Conceived thus, ideology is held to have a 'material

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<sup>41</sup>"Ideology and the State", in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (1969), trans. by B. Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1977), in *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader*, 3rd edn, ed. by Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh (London: Arnold, 1998), pp. 53-61, (p.55).

<sup>42</sup>Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (1980; repr. London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 5-6.

existence' since it 'always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices' (Althusser, 'Ideology and the State', Rice and Waugh, p. 56.), and is transmitted to the way people see themselves and conduct their social relationships according to their beliefs (Belsey, p. 57).

Marxist insofar as it envisages ideology as a false representation of social reality that works to maintain the interests of the dominant social group, and uphold the capitalist social formation, Althusser's conception of ideology differs from that of Marx and Engels, which sees ideology as a deliberately contrived set of illusions.<sup>43</sup> Rather, Althusser views ideology as a material part of the individual's understanding of how society operates, and his or her place in it. It is this concept of the nature and powerful all-pervasiveness of ideology, and its inscription in discourse, which will be utilised throughout my discussion. Furthermore, the total social formation consists of different interest groups, each of which shares 'taken-for-granted assumptions, beliefs and value systems', which are inscribed in their discourses.<sup>44</sup> This means that ideology can be dissected for study, and its inscription in various discourses analysed with respect to specific social and cultural contexts.

In addition, by bourgeois ideology I mean those aspects of the imaginary relationship which operate to maintain the ascendancy of the middle classes in a capitalist society. The term is not used with the same rigour or disparagement as in the original Marxist designation. Rather it is used to focus on how ordinary people might have understood the totality of their social relationships in the periods of

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<sup>43</sup>*The German Ideology*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1965), cited by Belsey, p. 57.

<sup>44</sup>Paul Simpson, *Language, Ideology and Point of View* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 5.

which, and during which, Morrison wrote. It is also necessary to recognise that in any social formation, while the dominant ideology enjoys a position of supremacy, this is not monolithic. In constant contention are remnants of residual ideologies, communicated in folklore, myths, and the symbols and practices of earlier cultures, in which are encoded the values of earlier social formations. In opposition also are emergent ideologies which represent the aspirations of groups that are currently in positions of marginality, but are mounting a challenge to the hegemony of currently-dominant social groupings.<sup>45</sup> This idea of contention is important. Recent theorists, uncomfortable with the use of ideology as the basis of a theoretical model for subject identification, either because of its affiliation with Marxist politics, or because it appears to offer no scope for resistance and social change, have redirected their focus to an analysis of the discourses in which ideas, values and beliefs are encoded. In so doing, they have disassociated their work from the discredited prescriptiveness of Marxism, and have found new freedom to posit the existence of sites of struggle in language. Such struggles are power-related, but are not necessarily based solely on the economic imperatives implicit in Marxist analysis. Even the advances from the notion of false consciousness made by Althusser in his critique of liberal humanism are now considered something of an oversimplification, for his argument concludes that interpellation is the *only* mechanism by which subjects are identified. As Diane Macdonell says:

Althusser's critique has been most useful. Even so, it stops slightly short [ . . . ] in positing only a single mechanism of recognition, or of identification, in all ideology. That notion of a single mechanism can make us blind to what, even in the setting up of ideologies, is, I

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<sup>45</sup>Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 122-123.

would argue, most material: contradiction and thereby struggle. That notion risks taking us out of history and making change and revolt unthinkable.<sup>46</sup>

Since my interest in Morrison's fiction centres on her handling of different ideological perspectives it is essential that, while acknowledging my debt to Althusser's theory, I should also state that my discussion will also incorporate the subsequent developments of Michel Pecheux.<sup>47</sup> His work is important to my analysis because it posits three distinct mechanisms by which the construction of subjects may be accomplished: identification, counter-identification and dis-identification. This provides a theoretical underpinning for the various ideological perspectives which I shall explore. His contribution to discourse theory is also relevant to my study because it identifies language as the vital link between ideology and the subject, seeing it as the common medium of the discourses which encode ideological practices and beliefs, and the everyday vehicle through which we construct ourselves and our society.

The redirection of focus towards discourse, as a means of exploring the various ways people perceive themselves in relation to the social formation, requires that a working definition of this term be formulated. While Sara Mills states that '[discourse] has perhaps the widest possible range of significations of any term in literary and cultural theory',<sup>48</sup> Macdonell offers as a basic definition: 'Whatever signifies or has meaning can be considered part of discourse'; but she also emphasises that 'discourse is social' (Macdonell, pp. 4,1). It is the importance of

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<sup>46</sup>*Theories of Discourse: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986; repr. 1987), p.39.

<sup>47</sup>*Language, Semantics and Ideology: Stating the Obvious*, trans. by Harbans Nagpal (1975; London: Macmillan, 1982), cited by Macdonell, p. 43.

<sup>48</sup>*Discourse* (London: Routledge, 1997), p.1.

discourse's social context in the generation of meaning which is most useful, and I shall generally follow Mills's amplification of Macdonell's formulation:

A discourse is not a disembodied collection of statements, but groupings of utterances or sentences which are enacted within a social context, which are determined by that social context and which contribute to the way that social context continues its existence. Institutions and social context therefore play an important determining role in the development, maintenance and circulation of discourses. (Mills, p.11)

This thesis explores Morrison's 'ideological negotiations'. The term 'negotiations' is deliberately used to convey the dialogic nature of the process by which Morrison's fiction appears to hold different ideological perspectives in contention. In the absence of an unambiguous controlling narrative, as is the case particularly in Morrison's novels conceived and/or written before the post-Second World War period, each of the contending perspectives remains a potentially disruptive element even when another has gained apparent 'victory'. No ideological standpoint is ever *completely* discredited, even though others are allowed to argue what may be, in many respects, a more convincing case. Similarly, none is accorded an untroubled or unquestioned acceptance. Rather, different ideological perspectives interact with each other in such a way that what can be envisaged as a dynamic equilibrium is set up between them, with displacement towards one side of the balance point being matched by a corresponding shift in the opposite direction. In this way the *apparent coherence* of the negotiated perspective is paradoxically maintained by means of constant movement forwards and backwards, and, most

significantly, the point of balance requires the presence of each of the opposing sides for its very existence.

Clearly, such an interpretation of Morrison's fiction draws heavily on Bakhtinian dialogism.<sup>49</sup> Although Catherine Belsey states that Bakhtin's area of concern was with the author's position and not the reader's (Belsey, n.16, p.150), I would suggest that, because the text is a web of utterances which each imply a response from the reader, the model can be extended to cover the relationship between the text and the reader. My justification for adopting this position is that in his explication of Bakhtinian theory Michael Holquist implies that it allows room for this manoeuvre.<sup>50</sup> He states that 'dialogism argues that all meaning is relative in the sense that it comes about only as the result of the relation between two bodies occupying *simultaneous but different* space'. He further contends that 'simultaneity [an underlying principle in dialogism] is found in the dialogue between an author, his characters, and his audience, as well as in the dialogue of readers with the characters and their author' (Holquist, pp. 20, 69). Such an approach would also be supported by recent reader-response theories, and I suggest that Morrison's novels' ideologically-inscribed discourses enter into a dialogic relationship with the reader, whereby his/her own ideological standpoint is reinforced or questioned. It is in this second 'dialogue' that meaning is created, and I believe that the inherent ambiguities in Morrison's fiction provide an opportunity for the reader to reconsider and, if appropriate, re-evaluate his or her understanding of the true implications of the relationships which constitute the social formation.

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<sup>49</sup>See Sue Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), pp. 45-111, especially p.62 for discussion of language as site of contradiction between socio-ideological groups.

<sup>50</sup>*Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World* (1990; repr. London: Routledge, 1997).

This thesis also posits a relationship between the ideological contention in Morrison's novels and the historical circumstances of their time of production, an approach that also finds justification in Holquist's interpretation of Bakhtinian theory:

Literary texts, like other kinds of utterance, depend not only on the activity of the author, but also on the place they hold in the social and historical forces at work when the text is produced and when it is consumed. (*Dialogism*, p. 68)

In relation to fiction in general, and with a specific interest in its applicability to the inter-war period, Alison Light has restated Bakhtinian dialogism in a way which summarises much of the above argument:

All novels, whether they mean to or not, give us a medley of different voices, languages and positions, and none can sustain a single 'argument' with the reader. Novels, as Salman Rushdie has written, quarrel with themselves, and it is this quarrelling which seems to take us right inside a time and place even as it gives us a breathing space in which to be distant and reflect. (*Forever England*, p. 2)

It is valid also to suggest that there is additional merit to be gained from a reconsideration of Morrison's fiction because it addresses such an 'argument' from a previously under-examined and undervalued female perspective. For while recent scholarship has considerably extended the recognition accorded to women's contribution to Scottish literary history, much work still remains to be done in this field.

Since my discussion is concerned with the indeterminacy of meaning, it will refer to post-Saussurean linguistic theories and their assimilation into literary critical praxis. Roland Barthes's differentiation between writerly and readerly texts informs

my analysis of Morrison's novels; and his vision of the writer as 'the watcher who stands at the crossroads of all other discourses' seems an appropriate description to use in the context of this thesis.<sup>51</sup> Also fundamental to the discussion will be use of Pierre Macherey's work on the inherent contradictions in classic realist texts.<sup>52</sup> In many instances my analysis of texts will be directed towards discovering meanings that are the result of inconsistencies, places where expectations are confounded, and where narrative closure leaves scope for oppositional subtexts to mount a final challenge. In seeking to discover ways in which the texts 'say' what they 'do not say', Rachel Blau DuPlessis's *Writing Beyond the Ending : Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers*<sup>53</sup> provides a valuable interpretative model.

#### vi) THESIS STRUCTURE

This thesis recuperates N. Brysson Morrison as a twentieth-century Scottish woman writer by examining her handling of important themes which recur in her novels. I have adopted a thematic approach because it enabled me to explore the ramifications of her nationality and her gender by examining how her novels articulate what it means to be Scottish, and then by considering how her fiction represents the position of Scottish *women*. With the exception of Chapter 2 which considers only *The Winnowing Years*, each chapter discusses two or three representative texts in detail, but refers to others where appropriate.

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<sup>51</sup>'Inaugural Lecture, *Collège de France*' delivered 7 January 1977; published as *Leçon* (1978), collected in Susan Sontag, *A Roland Barthes Reader* (1982; repr. London: Vintage, 1993), p. 467.

<sup>52</sup>*A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. by G. Wall (1966; London: Routledge, 1978).

<sup>53</sup>(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

Morrison's career began in 1930 with the publication of *Breakers*, when awareness of a distinctly Scottish consciousness was being reawakened, and cultural nationalists were advocating a re-visioning of Scottish history. Although unrecognised as such, Morrison was an accomplished historical novelist. Accordingly, the first two chapters of the thesis consider the ideological implications inherent in her (re)presentation of history, both as narrative and as process. Her novels are shown to favour ambiguity rather than ideological certainty or prescriptiveness. Her subversion of late-Enlightenment discourses promoting Union, and her valorisation of what had hitherto been omitted from Scottish history, would seem to advocate a separatist ideology. But this is complicated by instances of apparent complicity with centralist ideology, as in the adoption of conventional plot resolution in *Breakers* (1930), or with signs that the author was swayed by the same dubious veracity of historical documentary 'evidence' that her own narrative sets out to challenge in *Solitaire* (1932). Chapter 2 considers how Morrison's handling of history as process in *The Winnowing Years* (1949) subverts the notion of historical progress by emphasising the continuity represented by the manse, and by the constant interruption of forward motion by the intrusions of remnants of the past. Uniformly evident in all her handling of history, as indeed throughout her fiction, is her emphasis on 'otherness', on what is marginalised and excluded.

Since Scottish religion retained its unique identity after the Union, distinctly Scottish subject positions are also identified in religious discourses. Chapter 3 examines Morrison's treatment of religion, and it is found that there is evidence of the same rejection of Calvinist extremes and their social influences that have exercised the imagination of many Scottish writers. In opposition to the narrowness of Calvinism Morrison proposes a religious liberalism that embraces even

pre-Christian rites and practices. Yet underlying Morrison's critique is discovered a complicity, perhaps unconscious, with Calvinist discourses and the determinism with which they are imbued.

Having worked towards an understanding of Morrison's conception of 'Scottishness' as articulated in her treatment of dominant ideological views of history and religion, Chapter 4 considers her treatment of national and social identities. Complicity and subversion are again seen to coexist with respect to conventional conceptions of Highland and Scottish identity, and the ideology of Highlandism on which such identifications are based. In *The Other Traveller* (1957), in particular, there is evidence of a troubled relationship with Scottish nationalist ideology, even in its cultural, as opposed to political, manifestation. Morrison's portrayal of social identities is shown as evincing a desire to represent Scottish society as non-homogeneous, rather than as an expression of the values of any single group. Yet the achievement of this aim is seen to be compromised by the intrusion of Morrison's own class prejudices.

The last two chapters deal with Morrison's treatment of the position of women. In Chapter 5 rebellion is seen to predominate, both against the restrictions imposed upon women, and against patriarchal ideas of marriage as constituting women's only acceptable role. But as in her handling of the other themes, subversion is undercut by complicity, and especially in *The Gowk Storm* (1933), the emotional energy expended in subversion of patriarchal ideology is somewhat challenged by the counter-current of resignation that the novel also contains. The last chapter considers the 'woman question' as interpreted by an older woman. It considers how in *Thea* (1963) Morrison represents the constructed nature of identity, and it focuses on her use of sisterhood as an additional, if not an

alternative, method of defining female identity. Throughout the discussion of Morrison's fiction, identity is seen to be portrayed as a contested space where different discourses compete for supremacy. And in each of the last two chapters female identity is represented as a site of even greater struggle, because it contains elements of all other contests that define the individual subject as Scottish, of a particular religious persuasion, occupying a particular place in the social formation, and finally as a woman. Therefore, my thematic approach, beginning with her treatment of Scottish history, provides scope for discussing the full breadth and complexity of Morrison 's fiction.

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## CHAPTER 1

### REINTERPRETING HISTORY: HISTORY AS NARRATIVE

- 1.1 Contextual Comments
- 1.2 Re-visioning History: *Breakers* and the 'Counter-historical'
- 1.3 Psychologising History: *Solitaire*

## CHAPTER 1

## REINTERPRETING HISTORY: HISTORY AS NARRATIVE

## 1.1 CONTEXTUAL COMMENTS

History is more than a study of things past. It is a study of the roots of the present, of the seeds of the future. No man can guide present or future who forgets it, and one major cause of Scotland's unhappy present is that, although her sense of the past is still keen and vivid, she recalls it only confusedly and in part.

Agnes Mure Mackenzie (1938)<sup>1</sup>

Although Mackenzie's comments of 1938 are offered as justification for what claimed to be a scholarly historical text, they reflect a corrective impetus that was already present in the historical fiction of what is now recognised as the Scottish Literary Renaissance. As early as 1925 C. M. Grieve had called for a new approach to Scottish history.<sup>2</sup> In 1926 he advocated the production of novels which, because they were 'distinctively Scottish in the deepest sense' would themselves 'make history in a fashion that the whole tale of Scottish novels since *The House With the Green Shutters* [had] completely failed to do'.<sup>3</sup> It is generally accepted that Lewis Grassie Gibbon and Neil M. Gunn were the among the first to respond to the challenge and that they did much to reinterpret the past and redirect the focus of

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<sup>1</sup> General Preface, *The Foundations of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1938), p. vii.

<sup>2</sup> 'The New Movement in Scottish Historiography: George Pratt Insh' (18.12.25), collected in *Scottish Educational Journal* (1976), pp. 68-70, cited in Richard Price, *Neil M. Gunn: The Fabulous Matter of Fact* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> 'Newer Scottish Fiction (2)', (2,7,26), collected in *Contemporary Scottish Studies*, First Series (London: Parsons, 1926), p. 313.

Scottish historical fiction. Most surveys of Scottish literary history acknowledge the important contribution made to the historical novel by Gunn's inclusion of peripheral voices. His novel *Butcher's Broom* (1934) is credited with presenting the previously unheard and/or unheeded Highland perspective on the Clearances, as opposed to the more generally accepted, progressive, Lowland perspective. Recognised also is Gibbon's significant achievement in *Sunset Song* (1932), where his portrayal of Kinraddie as a community 'fathered between a kailyard and a bonny brier bush in the lee of a house with green shutters' avoided the extremes of either Kailyard sentimentality or the opposing Zolaesque naturalism of many of his predecessors.<sup>4</sup> Credit has, rightly, been given to these achievements as they addressed the complexity of traditional rural life and its response to the processes of historical change. What has, until recently,<sup>5</sup> and in my estimation, unjustly, been completely excluded from such reviews of Scottish fiction is the fact that in her first novel, *Breakers* (1930), Morrison's treatment of the Clearances anticipated Gunn. Omitted also was recognition that her castigation of the Kirk's collusion in the evictions anticipated much later novels, such as Fionn MacColla's, *And The Cock Crew* (1945), and Iain Crichton Smith's, *Consider The Lilies* (1968). Nor was there any acknowledgement of the fact that her portrayal of Scottish life, with its avoidance of Kailyard or anti-Kailyard excesses, predates Gibbon's *Sunset Song*. In this chapter I shall argue that Morrison's fiction offers a new approach to Scottish history of the type envisaged by both Grieve and Mackenzie. It will be shown to be one that strives towards coherence and completeness by juxtaposing contending ideological perspectives so that the dialogic texts thus produced emphasise the

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<sup>4</sup> *Sunset Song* (1932; repr. Edinburgh: Canongate, 1994), p. 24.

<sup>5</sup> See references in various chapters of *A History of Scottish Women Writers*, ed. by Gifford and McMillan.

possibility of multiple interpretations. This dialogism will be shown to reflect the complexity of what, to avoid using the reductive concept of a single national identity, might be termed Scottish *experience*.

To contextualise Morrison's historical fiction, it is important to emphasise that *all* historical narratives, even the most scholarly, are no more than *versions* of what actually happened in the past. This is because the past can only be viewed through the distorting lens of the historian's imagination and is therefore, consciously or unconsciously, skewed by his or her ideological and/or psychological baggage. Hayden White has now debunked the previously-held notion that historical narratives provide unique access to 'the truth' about the past: 'In general there has been a reluctance to consider historical narratives as what they manifestly are -- verbal fictions, the contents of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences'.<sup>6</sup> However, when Morrison was writing her historical novels, it would more probably have been the older views, championed by historians like Herbert Butterfield, that would have predominated. In 1924, just before Grieve's call for a new Scottish history, Butterfield, conducted what he thought was a defence of the historical novel, calling it 'a "form" of history, [...] a way of treating the past'. But blind to the possibility that his own profession could be similarly indicted, he accused novelists of 'often subordinat[ing] fidelity to the recovered facts of history, and strict accuracy of detail, to some other kind of effectiveness', unlike the 'authenticated data of history books, the *definitely*

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<sup>6</sup> 'The Historical Text As Literary Artefact', in *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding*, ed. by Robert Canary and Henry Kozicki (Madison, 1978), p. 42, quoted in *The Houses of History: A Critical Reader in Twentieth-Century History and Theory*, ed. by Anna Green and Kathleen Troup (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 206.

*recoverable things of the past*' (my italics).<sup>7</sup> By offering alternative interpretations, such as the psychological perspective adopted in *Solitaire* (1932), or the view of the dispossessed in *Breakers*, Morrison's novels point up the narrow, selective perspectives adopted by what, in her day, would have been considered more orthodox, non-fictional and fictional, historical interpretations. Furthermore, as history is an ideologically-inscribed story by means of which the dominant social group explains (and justifies) its present position, subversion of these orthodoxies would also, at least to some extent, have undermined the power base and social formation that both endorsed and were upheld by such 'official' historical discourses. In this respect, Morrison's historical fiction can be seen to challenge both centralist and gendered interpretations of history.

From Grieve's call for a different kind of novel, it is clear that Scottish fiction had previously failed to represent the complexity of Scotland's historical experience. Grieve saw market forces as largely responsible for this, and endorsed the comments of Robert Angus:

'The simple reason [is] that, with the mobilisation of output under the now commercialised system, the novel writer has to write for a buying public, and as eighty per cent. of that public is English or Anglicised, the novelist must avoid like the devil anything that would look real, any attempt to depart from Scottish types as fixed by English humour or exiled by sentiment.'<sup>8</sup>

While possibly providing an accurate reflection of the predicament of the Scottish novelist in the 1920s, this summary also hints at the socio-economic developments,

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<sup>7</sup> *The Historical Novel: An Essay* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1924), p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> *The Scottish Nation*, cited in *Contemporary Scottish Studies*, First Series (London: Parsons, 1926), p. 312.

both within Scotland itself and Britain as a whole, which directed the perspectives adopted by writers of the historical novel as it evolved from its beginnings in the early nineteenth century. To contextualise Morrison's efforts at refocusing the historical novel, it is necessary to consider the tradition within which she was working.

Recent scholarship has indicated that Jane Porter's novel, *The Highland Chiefs* (1810) predates *Waverley* (1814)<sup>9</sup>, and, therefore, questions previous claims that the historical novel originated with Scott.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, it remains valid to suggest that the genre was inspired by the concept of historicism as understood by the Scottish Enlightenment school of 'Whig' philosophical history.<sup>11</sup> Briefly summarised, this is the belief that history is shaped by natural laws, and that each age has unique characteristics, determined mainly by the predominant mode of economic production, which separate it from its precursors and successors. Movement from one stage to another is regarded as progress in the transition from barbarism to civilisation, and the differences in social mores associated with each era mean that one age cannot apply its own ethical standards to another age, but must employ the 'historical imagination' to understand how previous circumstances would have determined behaviour.<sup>12</sup> John MacQueen has argued that mastery of the

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<sup>9</sup> Aileen M. Riddell, 'At the Verge of their Proper Spheres: Early Nineteenth-Century Scottish Women Novelists' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Glasgow, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> See Avrom Fleishman, *The Historical Novel: Sir Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), p. xii.

<sup>11</sup> See Cyrus Vakil, 'Walter Scott and the Historicism of Scottish Enlightenment Philosophical History' in *Scott in Carnival: Selected Papers from the Fourth International Scott Conference, Edinburgh, 1991*, ed. by J. H. Alexander and David Hewitt (Aberdeen: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1993), pp. 404-418.

<sup>12</sup> See R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* rev. edn, intr. by Jan Van Der Dussen (1993; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 282.

concept of historical time enabled nineteenth-century novelists to create the dialogic relationship between past and present which characterises the historical novel:

Historical time [. . .] entailed the idea of movement and change which was at least partially unpredictable, and of contrast between one era, or one population group, and another, even when the two were closely adjacent. The unpredictability implied the abolition of the omniscient narrator, while at the same time the element of contrast heightened rather than diminished the immediate sense of the present. The present, no less than the past, entered the novelist's work as a special creation of the movement of history.<sup>13</sup>

Important also in the genre's development was its ability to foster a retrospective sympathetic identification with the situations and characters of the past. This was another legacy of the Scottish Enlightenment. Hume's anti-rational, humanist philosophy emphasised the importance of sympathy, and this was allied to the belief that there was sufficient continuity in basic human nature for readers in the present to recognise and empathise with the predicaments of characters of the past. At its inception, the historical novel was a distinctly Scottish phenomenon. Therefore, alongside the philosophical foundation from which it drew its enabling concepts, recognition should also be given to the impetus provided by the unique social, political and economic situation of Scotland at the start of the nineteenth century. Robert C. Gordon has suggested that historical awareness was translated into fiction in Scotland at that particular moment because:

Scotland was *the* place on earth where centralism and its opponents – whether within Scotland itself or in union with England – played out their conflict in the most dramatic and observable way, in which

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<sup>13</sup>*The Rise of the Historical Novel: The Enlightenment and Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1989), p. 7.

geographical and topographical considerations provided ‘past’ and ‘present’ with both spatial and temporal significance, and in which every native, in Scott’s words, ‘has a pedigree’. (my italics)<sup>14</sup>

The ideology informing Scott’s fiction has recently undergone reinterpretation. Earlier critics, such as David Daiches, commented on what they perceived as Scott’s dualistic attitude to change (Vakil, *Scott in Carnival*, pp. 404-405). They identified a tension between the romantic urge to recapture the rapidly-disappearing Scotland of majestic scenery and Gaelic culture, and the rational acceptance of the Union as the only means of economic viability. More recently, Cyrus Vakil has identified in Scott’s novels ‘a consistent, non-dualistic “philosophical politics” which was a late (perhaps last) expression of Scottish Enlightenment “Whig” philosophical history’ (*Scott in Carnival*, p.405). Acceptance of this perspective, Vakil argues, can be seen to have imbued Scott’s novels with the belief that economically-driven change is an inevitable historical process in which all societies would participate, albeit at different times and at varying rates, and that the outcome of such progress would be ‘the convergence of extremes towards the moderate, relatively homogenous middle’ (*Scott in Carnival*, p.406).

Perhaps what is really important about these different readings of Scott’s novels is that they corroborate the view that Scotland was undergoing a period of unprecedented change, and that for many, including Scott and Porter, the experience necessitated a realignment of their subject positions within the discourses from which their identities were constructed. Scott criticism is already extensive, so I use

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<sup>14</sup>Review of MacQueen, *The Rise of the Historical Novel*, in *Scottish Literary Journal*, Supplement No 33, Winter 1990, p. 8.

Porter's novel as illustration. In *The Scottish Chiefs*, Porter's romantic descriptions of Scottish landscape, and her valorisation of the struggle for independence are moderated by what appears to be a rational advocacy of an economically- and socially-beneficial Union in the present. Moreover, it appears to advocate an ethical code of personal commitment to the kind of transformational politics that would have been familiar to readers experiencing the spirit of bourgeois ascendancy prevalent at the time of the novel's publication.<sup>15</sup> Gary Kelly has observed that the biblical references in *The Scottish Chiefs* 'tend to attach to Wallace, and serve a function of characterisation, reinforcing Wallace's divinely appointed mission of national redemption, his Christ-like personal virtues, and his piety' (Kelly, p.98). He sees Porter's portrayal of Wallace as 'a heroic version [. . .] of the idealised professional middle-class man' and interprets the novel as a 'fantasy of social reconstruction and reform through idealised and individual middle-class virtues' (Kelly, pp.96-97). But implicit in this interpretation is the fact that Porter's perspective is largely determined by British, rather than distinctly Scottish, concerns. For despite Wallace's conversion of other Scots to his ideal of 'national redemption', the concept of a united Scotland and the ideology of Scottish independence are both undermined by setting Wallace's bravery in the context of the scheming duplicity and cruelty of barons like Soulis.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, although Edward's tyranny is acknowledged, it is portrayed as a personal failing, as distinct from a national vice, by setting it alongside instances of the innate goodness of

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<sup>15</sup> Gary Kelly, *English Fiction in the Romantic Period 1789-1830* (London: Longman, 1989), p. 97.

<sup>16</sup>Jane Porter, *The Scottish Chiefs : A Romance* (1810; repr. London: Bentley, 1838), p. 69.

individual Englishmen of various ranks, from the knight, Sir Gilbert Hambledon, to the veteran soldier, Grimsby (Porter, pp. 28, 36).

Furthermore, in keeping with what Kelly sees as the then-current ‘consolidation of a *national* dialect [. . .], based on the writing culture of the élite learned professions’ (my italics),<sup>17</sup> Porter offers no challenge to the novel’s then-current linguistic conventions, and writes exclusively in English. This suggests that it is largely within the discourses of that language that Scottish subject positions, at least as Porter understands them, are constructed. Such prioritising of standard English within the hierarchy of available languages can be interpreted as a tacit devaluation of the uniquely Scottish cultural heritage by assuming assimilation within English cultural traditions. In addition, the novel’s ending, with its vision of ‘a lasting tranquillity [which] spread prosperity and happiness throughout the land’, is suggestive of pro-Union, economic discourses. That such resolution is achieved, or so it would seem, as much by England’s ‘honourable terms of pacification’ as by the blood of Scottish patriots, suggests identification with a subject position which incorporates those available in both Scottish and English historical discourses (Porter, p.560). The Scottish historical novel, then, fictionalised (and sought to resolve) the tension between traditional Scottish and new British identities.

Galt, writing a decade later, articulated the dialectic between past and present by focusing on the local and the particular. In *Annals of the Parish* (1821) the ironic distance created by the narrator’s naïveté subtly points up how change affects society at all levels, often without the individual’s full comprehension. Although Galt’s irony shows polite Scottish society to be unaware of how its values

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<sup>17</sup>‘Romantic Fiction’, in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, ed. by Stuart Curran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 200.

and manners are changing, he does seem to argue for a distinctive Scottishness within the wider British context, and this can be seen particularly in his treatment of religious history, as in *Ringan Gilhaize* (1823). The emphasis on the psychological motivations behind religious extremism, rather than the summary dismissal of fanaticism which Galt read in Scott's *Old Mortality* (1816), has much in common with the work of another contemporary, James Hogg. However, it has been observed that Hogg's refusal to eschew the metaphysical (MacQueen, p.199), and his reliance on folklore as opposed to written history, distances him from historical novelists who were more wholehearted in their adherence to Enlightenment empiricism.

In the Victorian period the historical novel acquired a British perspective. Novelists, like Margaret Oliphant and George MacDonald, did produce some Scottish fiction which portrayed a distinctly Scottish experience by retaining the local and metaphysical dimensions of Galt's and Hogg's fiction. However, even Stevenson's use of Scottish history and setting has been interpreted as elegiac, and Peter Keating views Stevenson's historical novels as 'essentially non-nationalistic, except insofar as they spoke for a lost Scotland'.<sup>18</sup> Stevenson emphasised the romantic component of the historical novel and although his own later fiction, such as *The Ebb Tide*, was strongly anti-imperialist, in other hands, a different political complexion was given to the historical novel; and, like the adventure novel, it often articulated the ideology of British imperialism. This is an interesting development, for at its inception the historical novel was informed by an *internal* imperialist ideology. Indeed, James Kerr has suggested that 'Scott's novels are fictive

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<sup>18</sup>*The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Historical Novel 1875-1914* (London: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1989; repr. London: Fontana, 1991), p. 353.

reconstructions of a historical subtext of which English colonialism is a central pattern'.<sup>19</sup>

From the late 1880s, Scottish historical regionalism became distorted by the Kailyard School of Crockett, Maclaren and (early) Barrie, to cultivate a whimsical, sentimental image of Scotland's rural past which satisfied the escapist, nostalgic appetites of urban Scots and exiles alike. The ideological thrust of the Kailyard can be interpreted as a denial of history. It produced a travesty of the past in order to distract attention from the reality of the Scottish present. Stasis, rather than change, was the characterising feature of this fiction, and this can be interpreted as the removal, or at least marginalisation, of the uniquely Scottish experience from the dominant narratives of history. This provoked a backlash which adopted Zolaesque naturalism to portray Scotland as a land brutalised by 'progress'; but novels like *The House With the Green Shutters* (1901) and *Gillespie* (1914) simply overemphasised one aspect of Scottish life, and failed to represent the complexity of Scottish experience, past or present.

Some writers, including women such as Jane Findlater and Violet Jacob, had produced historical fiction which grappled with the complexities of eighteenth-century Scottish history and its implications for the present.<sup>20</sup> But the urgency of Grieve's call for novels that were 'distinctively Scottish in the deepest sense' suggests that much remained to be done. What was required was a less pro-Unionist, more open-minded reappraisal of Scottish history and a concomitant realignment of the Scottish historical novel. Attempts to produce this have since

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<sup>19</sup> *Fiction Against History: Scott As Storyteller*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Jane Findlater's *The Green Graves of Balgowrie* (1896), which deals with the position of women in the late eighteenth century, and Violet Jacob's *Flemington* (1911), which deals with the 1745 Jacobite Rebellion.

been identified in the work of novelists such as Gunn, MacColla, Jenkins and Grassie Gibbon. A similar attempt can, I believe, be found in Morrison's fiction.

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## 1.2 RE-VISIONING HISTORY: *BREAKERS* AND THE 'COUNTER-HISTORICAL'

BREAKERS:      Rocks on which waves  
                         break; the waves so  
                         broken . . .

Dictionary

Morrison's first novel, *Breakers*,<sup>21</sup> is prefaced by the definition quoted above. This can be read as a metaphor for the novel's re-visioning of history. The metaphor operates on different levels; and when unpicked with reference to post-Saussurean linguistics and current understanding of the social implications of language, the definition can be seen to anticipate many of the novel's thematic concerns.

Firstly, it confronts the indeterminacy of language by indicating that signifiers have been arbitrarily assigned, and that one signifier can refer to more than one signified. Just as the word 'breakers' has its meaning determined by how the speaker views the situation with regard to action and agent, so perspective and context are vital in the designation of meaning to all the sliding signifiers of which

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<sup>21</sup>(London: Murray, 1930), all references will be to this edition and will be given in the text as (*B*, page number).

historical narratives are composed. In addition, in the hierarchy of social discourses one meaning may be privileged over another, or, in the ideological nature of discourse, one may carry opprobrium and the other *seem* to be neutral, or appear to be 'common sense'. This is important when we realise that Morrison's text offers an alternative perspective on history; one that subverts those historical novels and non-fictional histories which upheld bourgeois values by privileging discourses that were inscribed with the ideologies of class superiority, internal imperialism and socio-economic progress. I suggest also that the definition edges towards a Derridean conception of *différance*, the endless deferral of meaning, not only in the ellipsis, which acknowledges further possibilities, but because each meaning relies on the existence of the other for validation. Without the watery component, the solid breakers would simply be rocks; without the rocks, the liquid breakers would just be waves. This recognition of the reliance on (an)other to engender meaning is, I suggest, one contribution which *Breakers* makes to the tradition of the historical novel.

Secondly, in conflating cause and effect Morrison questions the principle of causality on which historical theories have been based. The Enlightenment concept of historical progression from barbarism to civilisation, reflected and endorsed by earlier historical fiction, is set against a cyclical, repetitive view of history. This latter is reminiscent of biblical history in which Old Testament events and personages prefigure later occurrences in the New Testament. Furthermore, conventional expectations of permanence and evanescence are confounded by the context in which interaction between waves and rocks occurs. Rocks, aeons old, are normally regarded as a symbol of permanence, but, as breakers, they will eventually be eroded by the repeated assault of the waves; that to which the dictionary has

attributed agency becomes the passive victim, and that which is conventionally held to be broken assumes power. This concept carries revolutionary implications, and forms a significant subtext in *Breakers*, which offers an alternative reading of Scottish history to the Establishment version into which the ideologies supporting Union and Improvement were encoded. Breakers are also the first waves to strike the shore as the tide turns. It is interesting that 'Breakers', used in this context, is given by Kurt Wittig as the title of the chapter on the Scottish Literary Renaissance in his review of Scottish literature.<sup>22</sup> Finally, connotations of destruction and violence haunt all other possible readings of the definition. As with the indeterminacy inherent in language itself, this violence is not confined to the crashing of waves on rocks, but is left free to overlay all possible meanings with which the 'definition' can be associated, and, indeed, provides an undertow for the novel itself.

*Breakers* is set in the early part of the nineteenth century, the narrative's pivotal historical event being the Highland Clearances. It tells the story of a minister's family in the remote Highland parish of Barnfingal, the local focus and the absence of any 'real' historical personages echoing Galt's approach. But the presentation of a major historical event from the unusual perspective of the illegitimate grandson of a minister is somewhat radical. Reinterpreting history from such an angle could simply be seen as participation, within the fictional arena, in the growing academic interest in social history which flourished after World War 1.<sup>23</sup> However, I believe such an approach is politically-loaded. By deliberately avoiding exclusive identification with the bourgeois perspectives more usually expressed in

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<sup>22</sup>*The Scottish Tradition in Literature*, (Edinburgh; Mercat Press, 1978)

<sup>23</sup>See Robert William Fogel and G. R. Elton, *Which Road to the Past?: Two Views of History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 16-17.

the ideologically-imbued historical discourses that support imperialism and economic progress, and by focalising on the humble and castigating those with power, it engages with what might now be termed post-colonial and socialist ideologies. Even in its exploration of the specifically Highland catastrophe of the Clearances, *Breakers* represents a departure from the more usual thematic concerns of the Lowland middle classes to which Morrison belonged. Previous avoidance of the mass evictions as a suitable topic for fictional representation has been recognised by Richard Price, although his comment was made in relation to Gunn's *Butcher's Broom*: 'Previously the centralist, elitist historiography of both the English and the Scots had rendered the whole episode a no-go area' (Price, *The Fabulous Matter of Fact*, p. 54).

*Breakers* explores the complexities of the Scottish cultural heritage. These are embodied in Callum Lamont, the unacknowledged, illegitimate son of Euphemia Gillespie, the middle daughter of the Barnfingal manse, and Duncan Gow, son of a local tenant farmer. In Callum's parentage Morrison encapsulates the diverse religious, social, cultural and literary antecedents of Scottish identity. His father comes from generations of farming stock with close association with the land and its traditions. Even the use of the surname Gow would seem to be intended to serve a universalising function, as Morrison understood it to be the Gaelic equivalent of Smith, providing also a link with a traditional craft.<sup>24</sup> Callum's mother's family provides the paradoxical union of two ostensibly disparate aspects of Scotland's heritage, the religious and the commercial; for although Euphemia's father is an impecunious minister, her mother comes from an affluent upper-middle class, Edinburgh background. There are echoes here of Robert Wringhim's parentage in

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<sup>24</sup>Notebook for unpublished novel, *The Moonling*, NLS, MS 27287, fol. 31.

Hogg's *Justified Sinner* (1824) which can be interpreted as particularly significant when Callum's position within the novel is considered. This connection will be explored later in this chapter; but for the moment, it is sufficient to note that Gary Kelly views Hogg's novel as an exposure of the chasm that exists, despite ideologically-inspired efforts to disguise it, between 'past and present, premodern and modern consciousness, [and] superstition and Enlightenment' (Curran, *Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, p.214). As I will demonstrate, *Breakers* belongs to that branch of Scottish literary tradition which, as Kelly observes: 'Subverts the new discourse of combined history and romance being used to invent the Romantic nation and thereby reconcil[ing] social divisions of class, gender, and region under the aegis of the professional middle class' (Curran, p.215). Subversion of the illusion of a unified national identity, as promulgated by dominant discourses, is also suggested by Callum's mother's name, Euphemia Gillespie. This unites disparate elements of Scotland's literary heritage, for Gillespie carries connotations of the malevolent disciple of economic progress, Gillespie Strang,<sup>25</sup> and Euphemia evokes older resonances of Effie Deans in Scott's *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* (1818).<sup>26</sup>

In addition, Callum's illegitimate status, which largely determines his fate, opens up a debate about the wider applicability of the term 'illegitimate'. Fiona Stafford has observed that 'in the Highlands in the eighteenth century there was no social stigma attached to being a bastard'.<sup>27</sup> This means that insofar as Callum's inferior position is recognised by Highlanders like Annie Lamont, and its social

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<sup>25</sup>See J. MacDougall Hay, *Gillespie* (1914).

<sup>26</sup>I am indebted to Dr Carol Anderson who originally made the latter observation.

<sup>27</sup>*The Sublime Savage: A Study of James Macpherson and The Poems of Ossian* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), p.12.

stigma felt by his father's family, illegitimacy is being judged according to values that have been imported into the Highlands in the intervening period. Such opprobrium would have originated in the Lowland-based, middle-class, Calvinistic value system that was enforced on the Highlands in the aftermath of the Jacobite uprisings, principally through the efforts of the educational and missionary endeavours of the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, SPCK.<sup>28</sup> It is conceivable that the SPCK would have discouraged illegitimacy because it offended against bourgeois rules concerning property and propriety. Moreover, together with its specific legal and moral relevance to Callum's birth, the term 'illegitimate' also questions the legitimacy of cross-class and cross-cultural unions and their place in achieving 'the convergence of extremes towards achieving the moderate, relatively homogenous middle' that was, according to Vakil (*Scott in Carnival*, p.406), Scott's view of the process of Scottish history. The concept of illegitimacy also challenges the probity of those discourses that deny the validity of any processes of assimilation that might weaken the hegemony of the dominant social group.

It is useful to consider *Breakers* in conjunction with the other texts suggested by Euphemia's name; for I believe, given Morrison's obvious emphasis on the possibilities inherent in naming, that these texts can assist in arriving at a meaningful reading of *Breakers* as a re-visioning of Scottish history. As already observed, Scott's historical novels can be seen to adhere to the philosophy of historical convergence, and achieve resolution by compromise and the avoidance of extremes. But, if we consider the example of *The Heart of Midlothian*, it becomes apparent that this resolution is *actually* achieved as much by removal of those

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<sup>28</sup>Malcolm Chapman, *The Gaelic Vision in Scottish Culture* (London: Croom Helm; Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978), pp. 56,58.

elements which cannot be made to conform to Scott's vision of the middle way, as by moderation of excesses. Scott's version of moderation requires writing out those characters whose behaviour or moral, social or psychological status would pose a continued threat to the establishment of the kind of compliant society necessary for his conception of progress. There is no place in Roseneath for deviants like Staunton, Effie, the Whistler or Madge Wildfire.

Hay's novel, *Gillespie*, proposes an alternative construction of historical progress, in which the ultimate result of the improving impetus informing Scott's *The Heart of Midlothian* is presented as the destructive commercialism of Gillespie Strang. However, what this novel really attempts is the anti-historical reinstatement of traditional, rural, pre-commercial values and practices, which are symbolised in the ploughing of the Laigh Park. These are achieved by silencing Gillespie Strang, first with lockjaw and then by killing him. I interpret Morrison's novel as an attempt to negotiate a position between these opposing views of Scottish history. Like Scott's novel, *Breakers* accepts the inevitability of progress; but in its portrayal of Callum, the illegitimate, the misfit, it questions Scott's vision, or at least the kind of fictional social engineering required to achieve it. Instead, *Breakers* suggests that a nation's psychological, spiritual and moral development cannot be made to conform to the path, or proceed at the rate, predicated by economic or even philosophical imperatives, and, furthermore, that those who do not conform are written out of history at the nation's peril.

*The Heart of Midlothian* can be read as a palimpsest of *Breakers*. Both Euphemias are unwed mothers, and daughters of men noted for their religious standing; although in Mr Gillespie's case it is a professional attribute rather than innate spirituality or conviction (B,32). Callum, the illegitimate son, is in the same

abandoned and eventually ostracised position as the Whistler. Neither has been reared according to his parental station; neither is certain of having been baptised; therefore neither can lay claim to the veneer of 'civilisation' which religious discourse, pressed into the service of cultural imperialist interests, confers on the Christian community. Each grows up angry and alienated. Whistler's uncivilised behaviour leads to unconscious parricide, and because there is no place for him in the new kind of Scottish society, represented by the community at Roseneath, he is written out of Scottish history and sent to the colonies to live among the 'savages'. In some respects, Callum's fate is similar, but to understand how Morrison's approach differs from Scott's, it is helpful to consider what Cairns Craig refers to as the 'counter-historical' tradition in Scottish fiction.<sup>29</sup>

Craig defines the counter-historical as the story of 'the relentlessly returning alternative world' which it has been the purpose of conventional historical narrative to suppress and exclude in its advocacy of the progress whereby the barbarism of previous ages is shown to have been displaced by progressively more civilised societies (Craig, p.72). He sees this counter-historical tradition continuing throughout nineteenth-century Scottish fiction, in the depiction of the refusal of elements of human nature, inherited from the past, to conform with the rationality demanded by conventional historical narrative. As already suggested, Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* belongs to this category, and Craig cites this novel and Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* as typical manifestations. Moreover, he maintains that conventional historical narrative does not represent 'reality', but is only the *story* that man tells himself to justify his

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<sup>29</sup>*Out of History: Narrative Paradigms in Scottish and British Culture* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996), p. 72.

current ideological position and conceal the fact that the civilising order which 'history' has imposed on man's development is only a fiction that conceals his capricious nature and chaotic existence. Accordingly, any novel which purports to explore the peculiarly Scottish dimension, as opposed to the British (English, really), must take into account everything which contributes to Scottish experience, especially whatever has previously been omitted. To follow the logic taken by conventional historical narrative is to share Scott's vision, which sees the geographical separation between Highland and Lowland Scotland as a metaphor for their differences in both historical development and the degree of psychological and moral maturity of their inhabitants. Such an approach does allow for the existence of disruptive tendencies in national character, but Scott's plot resolutions either 'civilise' its more barbarous elements or, if that is impossible, banish them altogether. I interpret Callum Lamont as Morrison's embodiment of the counter-historical. I suggest that his portrayal disputes the 'reality' which conventional historical narrative claims to represent, by implying that such uncivilised tendencies, or versions of historical development that are unacceptable to the dominant social group, cannot simply be removed by denying them legitimacy, or by writing them out of plots. Recalling the various ideas suggested by *Breakers'* prefatory definition, the counter-historical could be seen as the *other* against which history defines itself.

The suggestion that *Breakers* offers an alternative view of history to that conveyed in *The Heart of Midlothian* is supported by comparing their main elements. In both novels, the narrative dealing with the quest of the main protagonist is preceded by an exposition of the ills which beset Scottish society. In *Breakers*, the main societal problems appear to lie in the focus on wealth, and the

self-centred lack of responsibility demonstrated by members of the middle classes, as represented by the Gillespie family (B,39). Euphemia's brother acts irresponsibly when he exchanges a secure job for the uncertain profession of journalism (B,34), and marries on impulse, with no means of supporting himself or his wife (B,42). Euphemia herself refuses to take responsibility for the repercussions of her denial of Callum (B,262). Lilith, her niece, appears to act responsibly, but her motivations stem as much from fear of social opprobrium as from any moral code. Only the minister, Mr Gillespie, who is 'full of old saws' and has 'nothing in common with anyone' (B,12), perhaps sees that his society's values are flawed. His sermon, based on the text, 'All the foundations of the earth are out of course', (B,256), means nothing to Lilith who is consumed with her own predicament as an unwed, pregnant mother.<sup>30</sup> But it could suggest that one of the novel's middle-class characters has some sense of social justice, even though most are too selfishly preoccupied to bother about the plight of others. However, even the minister is shown to be preoccupied with their lack of money. His oft-repeated joke, that 'they would all have a holiday or go abroad for a while "when Alice marries her duke"' (B,33), suggests that a focus on wealth, often achieved or consolidated by marriage, is endemic within the novel's middle-class society. It suggests also that it is biblical direction which is being ignored or misinterpreted; for the biblical quotation gives a clue to the novel's vision by suggesting that its society's values are flawed because they are built on the unsound 'foundations' of bourgeois capitalism. This is suggested, too, by the emphasis on the acquisition of money, and its concomitant

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<sup>30</sup>Psalm 82.5; this is glossed: 'All magistrates, rulers and governors, that should settle and establish justice and order, have disturbed it by their irregular and disorderly proceedings', in *Cruden's Complete Concordance*, 3rd edn, Student's edn, (1769; repr. London: Warne, [n.d.]), p.178(3).

status and power that is found throughout the Gillespie's social circle. Money is constantly alluded to in references to bills, financial difficulties, legacies, and annuities paid to Callum's foster mother. Its centrality is also encapsulated in the name of Lilith's unsuccessful suitor, Napier Rand, whose procrastinating deliberations, caused by fear of maternal disapproval, epitomise his commercially-successful society's relative emotional immaturity.

In *The Heart of Midlothian* Scott sets the cowfeeder's daughter, Jeanie Deans, in opposition to the corrupt society around her, to provide what Douglas Gifford recognises as a 'symbolic protagonist' who will 'create a myth of Scottish regeneration';<sup>31</sup> Morrison seems to offer the cowherd, Callum, as a radical alternative. I do not think this is done to discredit Scott's vision of the regenerative potential of the 'grass roots of the peasantry' (Gifford, *History of Scottish Literature* III, p.221), for *Breakers* offers its own version in Fiona Stewart, the rightful heiress to Inchbuigh farm. But I believe Callum's role points up the errors (and dangers) inherent in a view of history which designates as illegitimate, and eliminates, all non-conforming elements.

Initially ignorant of his real identity and illegitimacy, Callum embodies the union of Highland and Lowland cultures, and presents a possible path of assimilation which could provide a more inclusive Scottish identity. Adopting Jung's theory of the collective unconscious, or its earlier Stevensonian antecedent, Morrison assumes that Callum inherits 'memories' from his forebears. Accordingly, his paternal inheritance endows him with cultural memories transmitted from his agricultural ancestors, which manifest themselves in an intuitive knowledge of

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<sup>31</sup>'Myth, Parody and Dissociation: Scottish Fiction 1814-1914', *The History of Scottish Literature*, III, *Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Douglas Gifford (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988), pp. 217, 221.

farming practices, an intensely superstitious nature, and inexplicable preferences and dislikes, such as his aversion to stamping down the barley, or his fascination with the old walled garden at Inchbuigh (B,86). From his mother he inherits an argumentative temperament and a rationality which does not match either his rural inheritance or his coastal upbringing. Significantly, it is when Callum exercises his maternal psychological inheritance that he is most anti-historical. In exposing the casuistry of the Inchbuigh minister, who defends the evictions as God's punishment for the crofters' 'unchastened secret pride' (B,114), and in challenging the Marquis's right to assume God's authority, Callum undermines society's powerful élite and tries to stop what is 'sold' as historical progress (B,116). Significantly, this action also attracts the curse that eventually drives him to suicide. From Euphemia he inherits 'polite' society's lack of responsibility. This fault makes him abandon Fiona, his now-dispossessed Highland 'fiancée', for a more profitable match with Lilith, his cousin. He also inherits something of the Gillespie preoccupation with money and the status it brings. Eventually leading him back to Barnfingal to claim financial recompense for his years of enforced poverty, it surfaces earlier when he envisages his ideal future: 'He had very patriarchal ideas. He would have liked a farm of his own with well-filled out-houses and flourishing crops and *men to order about*' (B,104, my italics). Again, the novel's polite society is disrupted by Callum's obvious possession of one of its own traits, as opposed to those it would traditionally have associated with his Highland status. Callum is disruptive because he does not conform to what Peter Womack recognises as 'Anglophone [culture's identification of the Highlander] [. . .] with the traditional stereotypes of the social reject [. . .] the fool, [. . .] the rogue, [. . .] and [. . .] the beggar'.<sup>32</sup> Callum neither

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<sup>32</sup>*Improvement and Romance: Constructing the Myth of the Highlands* (Basingstoke:

completely conforms to the behavioural codes of polite Lowland society, nor does he accept the 'illegitimate' subject position that has been created for him, or the 'history' to which he has been consigned. Furthermore, *Breakers'* allusions to the generations-long Highland tradition of peasant farming and land-holding, the unscrupulous land-grabbing activities of local gentry, and the class-based, cultural-imperialist tendencies of the Kirk, undermine not only the myth of the Highlands as it developed in the eighteenth century, but also the probity of the ideological underpinning of the bourgeois social formation that created it.<sup>33</sup> In effect, it questions conventional history.

Callum personifies *Breakers'* revisionist presentation of Highland history. As the product of a peasant Highland and middle-class Lowland union, his psychological inheritance is unsuited to the conditions of his upbringing. Physically separated from his roots until he reaches Barnfingal, the idea of cultural rupture is emphasised by his inability to articulate his inchoate, 'heavy, cumbersome, complicated thoughts' (B,72) with the limited linguistic range of his school and adoptive home. Even while resident at Inchbuigh he can only just put into words what still seem to him like 'unallowable thoughts' (B,90), though they clearly indicate a continuing misalliance between his birthright and the position society has given him: 'Why should he be herd? Why should he have to say nought to Howard Stewart when he called out to him? Why could he not give him the good clout he longed to give him?' (B,90). His supposed genetic inheritance brings intuitive farming knowledge (B,84); he is instinctively drawn to his Gow grandparents' pew in Barnfingal kirk (B,200), and to their derelict farm, even though it had remained

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Macmillan, 1989), p. 6.

<sup>33</sup>Malcolm Chapman, *The Gaelic Vision in Scottish Culture* (London: Croom Helm; Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1978), p.19.

untenanted for twenty years (B,153). *Breakers* suggests that Callum would have made a good farmer had social convention not disinherited him, and historical progress not destroyed the potential for the evolution of the culture to which he belongs. Moreover, it implies that many of his negative traits actually come from his middle-class background. Nevertheless, *Breakers* does not share Gillespie's vitriolic, anti-capitalist antagonism. Nor does it sentimentalise rural life and the counter-historical narrative it presents, by ignoring the negative elements derived from Callum's peasant background.

From the outset, Callum is rejected and denied legitimacy; the positive potential which he represents is thwarted by his mother's society's values and aspirations, and by his father's family's over-willingness to shoulder blame because of their inferior status. His development is hampered by the limitations imposed upon him, a point metaphorically conveyed in the physical effects of his cramped home: 'He did not grow up slim and tall but broad-shouldered and thickset -- as though the squat little cottage had not given him sufficient room for growth, and before he was in his teens he had the strength of a man' (B,72). It is significant, however, that such restrictions do not overcome his ability to offer resistance. Rather than incapacitate him, his reduced stature is more than compensated for in enhanced physical strength. Even as a child in the coastal village of Stonemerns, unaware of his illegitimacy, he does not fit in. Social alienation forces him to become introspective, and it is suggested that his psychological baggage makes him self-obsessed and suspicious of the motives of others:

Even among these reticent, hard-working fisher-people he stood out as dark-browed and dour, 'ill to do wi.' He was suspicious and aggressive, with a head full of dimly-imagined wrongs. His thoughts

all revolved round himself, heavy, cumbersome, complicated thoughts. He dwelt on them as a cow chews its cud. (B,72)

Although the narrator demonstrates that Callum's circumstances are responsible for his negative traits, these two extracts suggest menace. From the perspective of the novel's polite society (and perhaps that of 1930), such strength allied to 'a head full of dimly-imagined wrongs' could be seen as a social threat, and given Callum's symbolic status, a challenge to the hegemony of anglophone culture.

The portrayal of his sexual potency can also be interpreted in this light. Whilst both Fiona Stewart and Callum's cousin, Lilith, find him sexually attractive, their romantic relationships are overlaid with vermin imagery. Read from the perspective of Lowland society at the time of the novels' action, this could reinforce the perception of the Highlander as repugnant and verminous, especially when such stereotypical images had long been encouraged by verses such as: 'There swarms of vermine, and sheep kaid /Delights to lodge beneath the Plaids'.<sup>34</sup> The live rat guddled from the river by Fiona as she challenges Callum to catch a trout (B,96), and the vermin-infested surroundings where he encourages (or perhaps forces) Lilith to have sex with him could be interpreted as indicative of the threat thought to be posed to 'civilised' society by his procreative virility: 'It was a dusty, ghostly place, with death-ticks beating in its rotten walls, ridden with mice and overrun with skuttling spiders and giant beetles' (B,222). But such menace, while it is in keeping with the portrayal of the disruptive nature of the counter-historical in novels such as Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, is balanced by sympathetic identification with Callum's predicament. In Hogg's novel Robert

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<sup>34</sup>William Clelland, *A Collection of Several Poems and Verses* (1697), p. 35; quoted in Womack, p.15.

Wringhim, the embodiment of the counter-historical, is portrayed as an obsessive fanatic compared with both his more humane brother and Enlightenment ideology, as represented by the Editor. In *Breakers* Callum is presented as a victim of circumstances not only outwith his control, but the direct result of the selfish irresponsibility and profit-motivated actions of others. Morrison does not underplay his disruptive potential, for that is the nature of the counter-historical; but she portrays Callum sympathetically alongside the questionable values of the social formation whose dominance is assured by his (and its) suppression.

Like the Whistler in *The Heart of Midlothian*, Callum does not belong; but unlike the Whistler, his 'crimes' do not include murder, even though, in her distraught state, Lilith blames him for the death of their sickly baby (*B*, 286). Apart from gratification of his sexual appetite, his only real 'crimes' have been to try to force himself into a society which does not want to accept him (*B*, 84), and to attempt to halt the evictions (*B*, Book 2, Chapter 4). Yet within the logic of the plot, it would seem that these are considered serious offences; Callum's futile attempt at the latter results in his being forced back to Stonemerns to confront the fact of his illegitimacy; his success in the former is punished by his mental imbalance and eventual suicide. Not only does Callum question the Kirk's collusion in the extermination of the Highland way of life, he dares to stand in the way of progress.

In the novel's ending, it initially seems that Morrison's handling of historical nonconformity is even more severe than Scott's, for not only does Callum die, beset with severe depression, but his progeny is sickly and dies also. The threat implied by the vermin imagery seems to be eliminated. All possibility of *Breakers's* alternative construction of history would seem to be denied; middle-class values and conventional history would appear to be reasserted. Lilith is free, beyond the

narrative's boundaries, to marry Rand and achieve the projected resolution which would ensure preservation of conventional middle-class society. But the complicity with conventional ideology that such a projection would imply is subverted by the sympathy which has been engendered on Callum's behalf, and the symbolism implicit in the manner of his death. In its ending *Breakers* offers its final, powerful challenge to the ideological implications of 'orthodox' historical narratives.

For much of the novel, Callum is the principal focaliser; and, despite his uncouth behaviour, the reader is encouraged to sympathise with him. His sense of alienation is emphasised in the scene where he looks through the manse window at the inhabitants inside (B,156). This evokes powerful resonances of *Wuthering Heights* when Heathcliff looks into the brightly lit room at Thrushcross Grange; only whereas Heathcliff *is* an outsider, the reader knows that Callum *should* belong because he is watching his mother and aunts in their home. This scene is only one of many instances where the text encourages sympathy with Callum's predicament, and it shows how the sadness experienced in confronting the reality of his rejection is felt at such a deep, almost visceral level, that he misinterprets it as anger and fosters a desire for revenge: 'At last he turned away, angry and sick at heart. Although he did not know it, he was nearer tears than he had ever been' (B,156).

Sympathy for Callum is engendered, too, in the lack of maternal feeling exhibited by Euphemia. Although Morrison refrains from passing moral judgements on the actions of her characters, the juxtaposition of the baby's need and the mother's lack of response elicits a sympathetic response: 'No maternal emotion stirred in Euphemia when she saw it for the first time, no protective yearning welled up in her when she heard its helpless cry. [. . .] And it looked so strong. She wished it were not so strong' (B,66). So, too, does the realisation of the horror with which

she regards this guiltless human being because he reminds her of her relationship with his father: 'The little stone house had become something sordid, for it was the cupboard which held her skeleton -- a live skeleton with flesh on its bones, a large head and round, sloe eyes which stared blackly past her' (*B*, 68). I think the horror expressed in this quotation could have implications which reach beyond the personal, for it could refer to the fear which civilised society has of being forced to come face to face with the realities of its buried history. Like the disinterred corpses of Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, and Stevenson's *The Master of Ballantrae*, the 'live skeleton' is the *other* of Scottish history, and the emphasis on the 'flesh on its bones' means that it is still alive and refuses to remain buried.

Whilst Morrison's text is sympathetic towards Callum in particular, and the counter-historical in general, the Highland culture which is being extirpated in the Clearances is not painted in a romantic haze. This novel is no Kailyard text. By presenting the harshness of crofting life as well as its sense of community, *Breakers* offers a balanced view of Highlanders and their history. Yet even this portrayal evinces signs of acceptance of negative stereotypical images. For, despite her liberalism which normally embraces society's marginalised elements, Morrison's anti-Semitic description: 'Ian had stooping shoulders and a Semitic cast of face' (*B*,91), invites stereotypical responses to emphasise Ian Stewart's meanness in making Callum wear a kilt to save wear on trousers (*B*,87).<sup>35</sup> Such allusions would possibly also have helped project an alienating view of the Highlander as 'gloomy and pessimistic, going out of his way to meet trouble more than half way' (*B*,92).

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<sup>35</sup> T. M. Devine notes that by the 1930s Jews, particularly in Glasgow, were more upwardly mobile than any other immigrant group, yet 'social prejudice still flourished'. See *The Scottish Nation 1700-2000* (London: Penguin, 1999), p. 521.

But this must be set against the sense of community evident at Inchbuigh, and the kindness and contentment of Ian's elder brother, Donald (B,91). The portrayal of the docility of the crofters at the hands of their exploiters, although in some ways typical of popular misconceptions of Highland passivity, can also be seen as an attempt to explain their actions in the context of their cultural tradition of loyalty to the clan chief. Morrison's approach repositions Highland social attitudes within the social formation in which they make sense, rather than decrying them as examples of insane behaviour when they are taken out of their proper context (Womack, p.8). Such contextualising encourages interpretation of Donald Stewart's final leap into his flaming home with the cry, "They can do whit they like but I'll dee Stewart o' Inchbuigh" (B,129), as the ultimate assertion of Highland resistance to the forces of historical change. Furthermore, seen from a Highland perspective, and aided by Callum's superior rationalising powers, the evictions are portrayed as an abdication of the chief's paternalistic responsibilities and a breaking of faith in the interests of personal, commercial gain.

Identification with the Highlanders' plight is also encouraged by the unsympathetic depiction of their minister and the Kirk's part in facilitating the Clearances. Physically, he is Callum's antithesis; he is a 'thin, high-shouldered man' with 'a quick, light footstep' (B,113). The minister is differentiated from the others by his speech; he has 'a clipped voice, different from the others in timbre and accent' (B,113). In keeping with the hierarchical order of language he uses standard English with biblical phraseology, while the others use a demotic language form, registering their lower social status. However, whereas English had normally been used as the language of rationality (Curran, p.200), Callum's use of the vernacular to expose the minister's self-interested casuistry subverts the assumptions of

cultural superiority underlying this convention. Moreover, the minister's words are seen to be false and detrimental to the general good, whereas those of the countryman, castigated as the devil, contain sound logic and practical suggestions.

Sympathetic identification with the Highlanders is also encouraged in the dignity conferred on the crofters' deputation's attempt to petition the Marquis (*B*,121-2). Although it initially seems that 'a malicious fate had chosen from their midst the eight most ineffectual' (*B*,121), as their mission proceeds they gather strength, both in conviction and numbers, from the people they meet on their way to Gel Castle. From a shambling start their step hastens to adopt the rhythm of a march:

Hearts beat quicker, blood rose higher, and the tramp of their feet became almost rhythmic, like the tramp of soldiers. Through the Pass of Naver, over the Fionn moors, ferried across Loch Tarrol, through Drura and Auchendee, past a shabby manse on the loch's side, to little Barnfingal. (*B*,121-2)

Their tension is shared by the reader in the change of tense as they reach their destination. A sense of the imminence of their fate is captured in the use of the present tense: 'The black figures stream up the avenue [. . .] The doors are opened. One man stands out from the rest and asks to see the Marquis' (*B*,122). So, too, is their disappointment, when the brisk marching rhythm is replaced once more with the shuffling pace of defeated men: 'They gaze at the closed doors like uncomprehending sheep, then slowly they turn and wind down the sweep of avenue like mourners at a funeral, no longer like marching soldiers' (*B*,122).

This can be interpreted as more than straightforward identification with the plight of the Highlanders in that particular historical context. The funeral imagery

suggests also the death of Highland culture; in the economically-depressed climate of the 1920s and 1930s it could also apply to the threatened demise of Scottish culture, a possibility which Edmund Stegmaier has observed occupied the ‘missionary zeal’ of contemporary Scottish writers.<sup>36</sup> This is the first example of the repetitive, rather than progressive, nature of history which was suggested by the prefatory definition. It highlights the similarity between the attempted extermination of Highland culture for the economic benefit of the Lowland and/or anglicised élite, and the modern decimation of Scottish heavy industry that was forcing thousands to emigrate or endure conditions of extreme poverty while centralised power in London did little to help.<sup>37</sup> The second example of repetition is found in Callum’s impregnation of Lilith. This is accomplished as an act of revenge, to give him access to the birthright denied him by his own illegitimacy. It is the repeated spectre of illegitimacy, rather than any desire to recompense Callum that makes Lilith marry him. Because of the impregnation, Callum’s fate describes a circular path from victim to aggressor then back to victim.

It is in the symbolism of Callum’s death, however, that the real significance of repetition becomes apparent. His drowning has been prefigured by references to underwater imagery throughout the text (e.g. *B*,74), and in the association of the sea with his failed epiphanic experience:

A tense, suppressed excitement mounted up in him, the opening in the sky gaped abnormally before his blinded eyes; he felt so powerfully colossal that the sea lay like a puddle at his feet.

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<sup>36</sup>“Facts” and “Vision” in Scottish Writing of the 1920s and 1930s’, *Scottish Literary Journal*, 9.1 (1982), 67-78.

<sup>37</sup>See Rosalind Mitchison, *A History of Scotland*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1997), p.180.

He waited, his breath indrawn, within an ace of omnipotent knowledge. The moment passed and he felt, creeping coldly between his toes, the ever-gnawing sea . . . (B,78)

Unlike Scott's deportation of the Whistler to the colonies to live among 'savages', Morrison keeps Callum's spirit closer to home by returning it to the sea. This is particularly significant if we recall the Romantic associations of the ocean as 'the Almighty's form' and its use as a metaphor for power and freedom from social restraint<sup>38</sup>. Connotations of eternal movement and the restless energy of the sea, of which Callum's spirit is now a part, suggest not only the possibility of the continuity of this kind of vital, cultural force, but also the inevitability of repeated assault by revenant counter-historical forces on the shores of 'civilised' Scotland. Callum is presented as a source of both creative and destructive potential, and this inherent paradox could be explained by suggesting that while *Breakers* welcomes the inclusion of elements that have been omitted from orthodox historical narratives, it recognises that this would inevitably damage the social formation whose existence is explained and justified by such partial historical discourses. With Callum's death, therefore, *Breakers'* ending holds conventional historical resolution and symbolic counter-historical subversion in a dialogic relationship, each relying on the other for definition.

The ambiguity inherent in *Breakers'* ending is further compounded by Morrison's treatment of Fiona, the only child of the eldest Stewart brother at Inchbuigh. In the overall plot, she is a relatively unimportant character, but, at a symbolic level, she, too, can be seen to carry the text's subversive message.

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<sup>38</sup>Robin Skelton, ed., *Selected Poems of Byron* (1964; repr. Oxford: Heinemann, 1989), p. 57.

However, even here, Morrison's final position refuses to be pinned down. An unusual girl, Fiona lacks the conventional 'feminine' characteristics that would make her acceptable to polite society. She is plain, has an ungainly walk, her hair is 'a bright and ugly red', and she has a wild temper (B,94). She is of pure Highland stock, and her ancestors have farmed Inchbuigh for centuries. Adept at all the tasks about the kitchen and the farm, she also possesses ancient rural skills, such as guddling for trout. She is also associated with the traditional magical properties of the rowan tree (B,94). As they grow older, Callum falls in love with her, but despite her love for him, and his relentless persuasion, she refuses to give in to his sexual demands, for she knows that this is the only real power she has in a man's world. Although Morrison offers no moral judgement on the sexual activities of her characters, Fiona's virginity is portrayed alongside the pre-marital sexual experiences of the Gillespie girls, and could be intended to indicate either her greater practical awareness of its dangers, gained from exposure to farmyard copulation, or her greater virtue. The reader is left to decide. On balance, I think the point is emphasised to suggest a combination of innate virtue and common sense in the Highlander, as opposed to the intemperate behaviour and intellectual slowness historically attributed to them by Lowlanders.

Fiona's speech is strangely disjointed because she punctuates everything with exclamations: "'Och-hey, och-hey [. . .] it's a' bad thegither that is happening. But ho! it will a' come back on them that causes it'" (B,124). Yet, although her verbal incoherence is reminiscent of Madge Wildfire, I do not think the text suggests madness, for there is a self-sufficiency about Fiona: 'Her conversation was peculiar, for it was punctuated with broken ejaculations which often had nothing to do with what she was saying, as though she were communing with herself at the

same time as she was talking' (B,94). Nevertheless, echoes of Madge Wildfire haunt the text, and in the difference in its treatment of the 'aberrant' female *Breakers* is subversive. Discourse is associated with power, and since Scott's vision of history could not allow power to remain with social deviants, they are silenced. Accordingly, Madge dies in silence, and power remains in 'proper' hands. Not so with Morrison's text. When Callum breaks off his relationship with Fiona, she remains powerful, and he is afraid of her. Having originally seen her as a talisman, then as 'totem turned tabu' (B,125), he now sees her as a witch, and interprets her words as a curse (B,211). What is important, I believe, is that this is the last appearance of Fiona in the novel, and the episode ends while she is still speaking. Not only does she have the last word, but her sentence is left unfinished; her prediction is still to be heard, and her power remains intact: "Ye'll see ye'll want me noo mair than anything else . . .och-hey . . .ye'll see ye'll . . ." (B,212).

Throughout the novel Fiona is associated with traditional Highland culture. It is she who recounts the history of her glen, telling how her ancestors and others were tricked into handing over the titles to their land by a previous unscrupulous Marquis of Moreneck (B,102). Unlike the more docile menfolk, it is also she who realises that those who are unjust in their exercise of power will one day have their subordinates rise up against them. Significantly, she uses the example of once-obedient sheep-dogs savaging their masters as a metaphor for social revolution (B,124). This canine behaviour had previously been discussed by the crofters in its literal context, without their realisation that it could equally apply to themselves (B,112). The men's vision appears bounded by convention, whereas Fiona sees things in a much wider context. She is also more enduring than the men, for most of them are removed from the narrative by the Clearances, either to Canada or to the

Lowland factories, where Joe, the most rebellious of her cousins, “‘juist laid on his back wi’ his tongue oot and de’ed”” because he could not live in a town (B,207).

Fiona not only survives, but finds she can adapt to town dwelling:

She used to think she would die unless she got one more breath of mountain air, or smelt again the smell of wind through wet grasses. But she did not die. Five o’clock came round each morning, the procession of dirty dishes began all over again, and she had to tell herself grimly that evidently it took a lot to kill Fiona Stewart. (B,134)

There are similarities between Fiona’s role and that of Dark Mairi of the Shore in Gunn’s *Butcher’s Broom* (1934). Both are history tellers with access to traditional lore. Just as Callum sees Fiona as a witch when his aspirations are no longer centred on the way of life she represents, this is also Mairi’s fate once the crofters are settled on the coast. But whereas in Gunn’s novel Mairi and her special knowledge are killed by sheepdogs, Fiona remains vibrantly alive, threatening her oppressors with the savage ‘crushies’. Here *Breakers* lacks *Butcher’s Broom*’s apparent pessimism regarding the survival of Highland culture. On the surface, at least, Fiona is a viable channel for its preservation, for although she is considered rough and uncouth by her middle-class employers, as a housemaid, with the care of children, she is in a position to keep Highland culture alive. When the text’s estimation of her employers is taken into account, it seems that the relative strength of Highland characteristics will ensure their survival:

She [. . .] did everything in fact but think for them, and perhaps, she thought rudely, they would be brighter if she did. It was their lifelessness which depressed her. Mr. Mather might have been an automaton wound up every night to go to his business next day, read

his paper, execute his work and write his small cheques. What good was life -- vital, unprocurable life -- to Mrs. Mather, who fretted it away worrying over trivialities? (B,137)

But any certainty that this is an accurate reflection of the fate of Highland culture is undermined by Fiona's equating her position to that of 'serfdom' (B,138), and thinking of herself as an 'exile' (B,133). Once she has left Inchbuigh, her thoughts are purely nostalgic. She no longer thinks of the harsh reality of her former way of life; her memory recalls only the scenic beauty of Inchbuigh and 'her blessed Callum', now almost deified because of his association with what has been lost. Highland culture, it is now suggested, is imbued with romantic nostalgia. Furthermore, the possible significance of Fiona's name now becomes apparent. Fiona was originally created as a Latinised form of Fionn in MacPherson's translations of 'Ossian's' poetry (1759-62), and was later used by William Sharp as the pseudonym, Fiona MacLeod, for his works of the 'Celtic Twilight'.<sup>39</sup> Viewed in this light, its association with the Gaidhealtachd could speak of what Douglas Gifford calls the 'anglicised [. . .] socially acceptable' voices which over two centuries presented a sanitised and Romanticised version of Highland literature against which authentic Gaelic culture had to struggle for survival.<sup>40</sup> But equally, especially considering her unusual speech, it could place her with what Gifford sees as the 'older, rougher, and often vernacular assertion that the professed new and improved identity [as envisaged by Scott] is not the real essence of the country' (*History of Scottish Literature*, III, p.8). Both possibilities are held in a dialogic

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<sup>39</sup>See Patrick Hanks and Flavia Hodges, *A Concise Dictionary of First Names*, rev. edn (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 89.

<sup>40</sup> 'Introduction', in *A History of Scottish Literature*, III, ed. by Douglas Gifford (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988), pp.1-12 (p.8).

relationship, and in so doing *Breakers* emphasises the ambiguity with which history is imbued, and reiterates the notion of the repetitive struggle between the counter-historical and orthodox history. With its focus on the counter-historical *Breakers* anticipates Mackenzie and offers a re-visioning of Scottish history. As the comparison with *The Heart of Midlothian* argues, *Breakers* questions the ideological implications inherent in Scott's formulation of the historical novel. Yet in registering the counter-historical's destructive potential *Breakers* is also sensitive to the damage that the existing social formation would sustain were all the 'deviant' aspects of the past incorporated in the nation's history; for this would challenge the power base of Scotland's anglicised bourgeois élite, of which Morrison, herself, was a member.

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### 1.3 PSYCHOLOGISING HISTORY : *SOLITAIRE*

Ambiguity and counter-historical otherness can also be read as informing concepts in Morrison's second novel, *Solitaire*.<sup>41</sup> A fictional history of Mary Queen of Scots, it is significant that although this text advertises its fictionality, large extracts of it are reproduced *verbatim* in her later, non-fictional historical biography, *Mary Queen of Scots*.<sup>42</sup> Although possibly done for creative economy, the fact that the same text sits comfortably in both genres illustrates, within Morrison's own oeuvre, the imprecision of the distinction between history and the serious historical novel. Furthermore, in drawing attention to its own fictionality, by its reliance on the use of the supernatural, and by its psychological interpretation of Mary, *Solitaire* tacitly subverts the claims of authenticity made by earlier histories which can be shown to be flawed by factional interest or reliance on inconclusive evidence.

Even before her decapitation in 1587, three seminal 'histories' of Mary's life were extant. The Casket Letters and Sonnets, allegedly written by her, form the evidence on which future assessments of her guilt were based. However, their authenticity has never been conclusively proved; forgery by Mary's enemies being suggested as their provenance. But, even if Mary's authorship of the sonnets is assumed, they are shot through with sufficient ambiguity to render them inconclusive proof of her adultery and complicity in regicide.<sup>43</sup> Buchanan's *A*

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<sup>41</sup>(London: Murray, 1932); all references are to this edition and will be given in the text as (*S*, page number).

<sup>42</sup>(London: Vista, 1960).

<sup>43</sup>See Sarah M. Dunnigan, 'The Creation and Self-Creation of Mary Queen of Scots: Literature, Politics and Female Controversy in Sixteenth-century Scottish Poetry', *Scotlands*, 5.2, (1998), 65-88.

*Detection of the Actions of Mary Queen of Scots* (1571) collected much of his earlier anti-Marian writings, and was influenced by the author's Protestant religious and political affiliations. *Defence of the Honour of . . . Marie* (1569), written by John Leslie, Bishop of Ross betrays the author's Catholic sympathies in his rebuttal of the charges against her. Therefore, even while alive, Mary defied reduction to impartial data from which accurate history could be constructed. The 'real' Mary hovered somewhere between her various citations of whore and saint, murderess and innocent victim, political intriguer and religious martyr. Jayne Elizabeth Lewis has argued that it is Mary's ambiguous position that has made her a frequent source of literary exploration and historical exegesis.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, although Mary is an actual historical figure, her position as the representative of an older social formation that required repression and replacement to give birth to modern Britain, identifies her as the embodiment of that loss. Lewis argues that her reappearance in the literature of successive eras can be explained by the recurrent need for each age to rationalise its position relative to the alternative that she represents. This allows her to be categorised as another example of history's counter-historical *other*.

*Solitaire* recreates the generally accepted matrix of historical data around which Mary's story is woven. Its factual nodes are mapped out by her three marriages, the murders of Rizzio and Darnley, her defeat at Langside and subsequent escape to England where she was imprisoned and finally executed by Elizabeth. But it departs from previous novelistic portrayals of her story, such as Scott's *The Abbot* (1831) or Hewlett's *The Queen's Quair* (1904), in its attempt to view these events as Mary, herself, might have perceived them. Twenty eight years

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<sup>44</sup>*Mary Queen of Scots: Romance and Nation* (London: Routledge, 1998)

after *Solitaire's* publication, Morrison explained her approach by stating what she understood to have been Mary's part in the process of history:

Within the compass of forty-five years, a tidal wave of change shook Europe. *Because she was a queen*, she took the shock of the tumult. *Because she was the woman she was*, she contributed to the happenings around her. Her story is what it is because of her involuntary reaction to the influences that pulled, the biases she withstood and the principles to which she adhered. (*Mary Queen of Scots*, p.11; my italics)

*Solitaire* attempts to fix the 'real' Mary by giving her a psyche; it adopts a modernist interest in 'inner space' and psychologises history (Randall Stevenson, *Modernist Fiction*, p.16). It places her, as queen and woman, at the centre of the matrix and registers her emotional responses to each historical situation; but it also looks on from the periphery, conveying how her actions are perceived by others. In offering such diverse perspectives, *Solitaire* acknowledges the possibility that some truth exists in each of her citations; it holds them all in a dialogic relationship, allowing the reader to appreciate the complexity of her historical situation and Mary's own multifaceted character. In previous, largely male-authored texts, sympathetic identification has encouraged the use of determinist historical forces, religious factionalism, political intrigue and gender as reasons for assigning her the essentially passive role of victim. For example, in Maurice Hewlett's novel *The Queen's Quair*, she is viewed as a pawn on the male-dominated chessboard of politics.<sup>45</sup> Antagonistic texts, on the other hand, have conflated Mary's person with the religious/political formation she represented and attributed to her alone, activities which were possibly carried out by others, or charged her with crimes

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<sup>45</sup>(1904; repr. London: Macmillan, 1914), p. 4.

which were reflections of the morality to which their own ethical code was opposed. *Solitaire* does not exonerate Mary from charges of adultery or regicide; nor does it labour her guilt. The novel's construction acknowledges the views of her apologists and detractors, but it holds them at equal distance, to recreate Mary from the inside and the outside.

Like *Breakers*, *Solitaire*'s title provides the novel's keynote. As a pre-text statement, *Solitaire* is defined as 'a game which a person plays alone on a round board, with thirty-three or thirty-seven balls, and as many hollows'. Although, strictly speaking, it cannot be called a feminist text, *Solitaire*'s aim of re-visioning history by focusing directly on a woman is foregrounded, for Mary is now the solitary player; no longer merely a pawn, her agency has been acknowledged. However, the novel does not presume that she is completely unfettered in her actions, but suggests that Mary's ability to act is constrained by her historical circumstances. The definition emphasises that she is playing a game -- a game with rules, and whose outcome is determined as much by chance as by skill. *Solitaire* suggests that her religious and political isolation, her inherited psychological makeup, and her gender are the constraints which determine her actions.

The definition also highlights the solitary state of the player, and although she is always presented in the company of others, the novel focuses on Mary's isolation. She is shown to need love and acceptance, to belong: "We were meant to live fully, to love others, to have, not to shut ourselves in ourselves, to die long before we are buried" (*S*, 218). But the text frequently demonstrates her alienation from her countrymen, principally because of her religion. Often Mary's isolation is seen to be her fault, and the distance is registered from the perspective of others. In many such instances the reader actually 'hears' how she is viewed; but this is done

in such a way that the views of other characters seem to share the authority of authorial discourse. The reader, too, becomes implicated in the assessment of Mary's guilt when, by moving from complete objectivity, the narrative voice adopts the scornful tones of her subjects to ask the question on everyone's lips: 'Corn and wheat were trampled down by the heavy rains as though an enemy's army had ridden over the impoverished land. But what less could be expected with a Papist Queen daily enraging God with her idolatry and joyousities?' (S,114). Her Catholicism is the principal reason for her alienation, and partisanship is apparently adopted when the narrative voice reinforces the separation between Mary and her Scottish subjects by seeming to sympathise with her main religious adversary, John Knox, in his criticism of the frivolity exhibited by her court:

He found some half-score ladies of the court, Papists every one of them, garbed like so many peacocks, [. . .] He looked on with a stranger's eyes, a stranger from a country where minutes were so precious they dared not be danced away. (S,112)

At other times, however, her sense of isolation is appreciated from Mary's perspective. Now the use of free indirect discourse makes the fault seem to lie with Scotland and the unreasonable demands of its people: 'Oh, it was an unbending country this, which expected you to be as it, unyielding, forbidding, strong. . . .' (S,105). By the end of her captivity, the apportioning of blame seems irrelevant; the poetic intensity of the language registers Mary's appreciation of her loneliness in imagery that confers universal significance to her particular situation:

Each came into the world by himself and each, faltering or unfaltering, had to take his departure alone. Birds flew in droves, kine grazed in herds, sheep gathered in flocks, man was laid with his kin, but each was solitary, apart, by itself. (S,302)

Unstated in the definition, but nevertheless significant, is the fact that the term 'solitaire' also refers to a single gemstone, usually a diamond, and this connotation allows further ambiguity to overlay the novel's representation of Mary. The exterior brilliance of the diamond conceals its hard core; Mary is portrayed as possessing the same duality. Her personal charm has the power to captivate:

Ye ken her by the bold bright glance of her . . . and the way she hauds her head . . . as like to good King Jamie as woman could be . . . and the braw familiar-like way she smiles to ye as though she kent ye! A gallant day for Scotland now her Queen's come home.

Run oot! run oot! and gie a shout for the sake o' her faethers afore her -- and for the sake o' her ain sweet face. (S,66)

But this surface attractiveness is undermined, when, by her own admission, she is shown to be scheming, hard-hearted and coldly resolute when it comes to her participation in the conspiracy to kill Darnley: 'And if I had not proof of his heart to be as wax, and that mine were not *as diamond*, no stroke but coming from your hand would make me but to have pity of him' (S,187, my italics).

*Solitaire's* method of portraying Mary also has a double quality. She is viewed from without, both as a queen and a woman, whose behaviour is largely explained by the exigencies of the complex historical circumstances in which she operates; and she is viewed from within, the interiority of the text providing insights into what might have been her responses and her motivations. Frequently, both perspectives are presented simultaneously as the text appears to weave seamlessly between the objective exteriority of the third person narrative voice and the subjective interiority of free indirect discourse. This is demonstrated in the portrayal

of her dissatisfaction with her husband, Darnley, when she is beginning to acknowledge her desire for Bothwell:

If only she had been tied to such a man . . . but in his place stood a boy only fit to flush and sulk, who strutted where other men would have strode, smiled when they would have frowned. His very presence raised in her a revulsion against him, but once out of sight she was never sure what was going on around him, what schemes others were putting into that oblong head, what foolish tongue was tattling. Why had he ridden off to a distant place without telling her the reason for his departure? Was ever queen so vexed and tried as she? (*S*, 175)

As already observed, this narrative technique is also used in delineating the responses of other characters. It provides an insight, too, into the perspective of the common people whose 'comments' about Mary register the factors determining their relationship to their monarch. This results in the constant shifting of the focus of the reader's sympathy. Therefore, although sympathetic identification with Mary is encouraged by setting her at the centre of the action, this is simultaneously questioned and limited by the variety of perspectives that, at different times, appear to command authority by association with the controlling discourse of the narrative voice.

Mary's behaviour is largely explained by her inheritance of characteristics from her Stewart ancestors. This would appear to register a then-contemporary interest in the possibility of genetic transmission of psychological traits, for it anticipates the approach taken by Eric Linklater in his biography, *Mary Queen of Scots* (1933). Like Morrison, Linklater notes the complexity of Mary's character and its unsuitability for its destined role, but he dismisses her as another in the Stewart

line of 'polygonal pegs in severely square holes'.<sup>46</sup> *Solitaire*'s approach, however, recognises that unsubstantiated assertions of historical causation should not be considered valid, and exposes the flaws inherent in reductive judgementalism. For while it bases Mary's actions largely on her supposed psychological inheritance, it simultaneously questions the validity of so doing. This is done by representing psychological genetic transmission as the ghostly visitation of her ancestors to the baby on the night of her coronation, with each successive Stewart king evolving from his predecessor to warn the new queen to avoid the pitfalls that befell him:

He seemed to change as she watched him -- his features merged into those of another; he became bearded, bent, more feeble, and limped as he walked.

'What have I to bring thee but too much trust? [ . . . ] I was the worst of kings and the most wretched of men'. (S, 18-19)

Although the use of the supernatural to represent the psychological recurs in Scottish literature,<sup>47</sup> I think its use in this instance foregrounds the text's fictionality and questions the deductions that the assumption of psychological genetic transmission allows it to make. Moreover, echoes of *Macbeth* in this episode presage ill and unsettle the reader, perhaps because they suggest a link between ambition and regicide; perhaps because that play represents another erroneous portrayal of Scottish history, a connection that will also be highlighted in Chapter 4. Thus, in subverting the validity of its own assumptions about Mary, it goes some way towards subverting assumptions made by other historical texts.

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<sup>46</sup>(repr. Edinburgh: Davies, 1934), p. 37.

<sup>47</sup>There are precedents in Hogg etc. and there is contemporary usage in J.M. Barrie's *Farewell Miss Julie Logan* (1932).

Deducing Mary's psychological makeup from characteristics thought to have been demonstrated by her ancestors, *Solitaire* presents her as an ambitious Stewart politician, frustrated by the interference of Elizabeth and her own advisers, and insecure in her relationship with her subjects. Yet her royal inheritance is shown to be in conflict with her female gender. Her love of action, the excitement of which is transmitted in the tempo and harshness of the descriptive language, makes her resent the restrictions imposed by her femininity: 'The unbridled wind, tearing over desolate moors, hooting like an owl from the scarred, split mountains, set her pulses racing and her heart throbbing, made her wish she was a man' (S,103). Her Stewart inheritance, with its belief in Divine Right, portrayed in almost megalomaniac imagery, is also shown to cause her emotional problems in reconciling her aspirations and abilities with the realities of her historical situation; this is suggested in Jungian terms by using the medium of dreams and their ability to reveal the unconscious. Her femininity, represented by her apparent insignificance, negates her political potential; released from such restriction, her Stewart blood makes her feel omnipotent. It is significant that each prospect disturbs her, and that in each situation she is alone:

Sometimes she would dream she was so tiny she could scarce be seen as she stood all alone in a great room with giant furniture. On other nights the dream would be reversed and she would be towering like a colossus, the sky heavy upon her shoulders, dwarfing everything, nothing big enough for her. She did not know which dream was worse. (S,60-1)

The text suggests that it is Mary's Stewart pride and impatience that makes her marry Darnley. Her marriage is portrayed as an act of political defiance rather

than a love match. While the interiority of free indirect discourse communicates Mary's determination and frustration, the reader's sympathy is undermined by the narrator's juxtaposed observation of her duplicity, describing 'her lips smiling in her mysteriously masked face' (S,120): 'She would marry him despite the queen of England [. . .] she would marry him in spite of her glooming brother [. . .] she would marry him for all the carping, condemning preachers and a people she had never been able to please' (S,121-122). Yet there is also the suggestion, expressed in the knowing resignation of the populace, that given her heritage, she had no real option but to act thus: 'They might have kent . . . they might have kent . . . ay, they should have kent that she would gang her ain Stewart gait' (S,122).

While the novel does not defend Mary's participation in the conspiracy to murder Darnley, possible motivation is shown to come from her sexual attraction to Bothwell. She is portrayed as a passionate woman who is presumed to have inherited her father's sexuality, which is emphasised at the beginning of the novel. This is interesting because, favouring a purely political explanation for the historical Mary's actions, Eric Linklater discounts the influence of sexual passion, seeing her as one whose 'sexual enthusiasm and even ability were comparatively slight'.<sup>48</sup> *Solitaire* explains the attraction by previously registering Bothwell's sexual magnetism (S,85), and differentiating him from Darnley, whom it regards as little more than an 'overbearing young loon' (S,134). Morrison interprets Mary's sexual needs, as a woman, in terms that seem at odds with her queenly status. One part of her Stewart inheritance makes her assert her royal might, as in her marriage to

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<sup>48</sup> *Mary Queen of Scots*, p. 36. This view is also supported by Rosalind Mitchison who thinks her 'undersexed' as both adult marriages lasted less than six months; *A History of Scotland*, 2nd edn (London: Methuen, 1982; repr. London: Routledge, 1997), p.127.

Darnley; another part, the sexual woman, makes her want to submit to a powerful man. Darnley is a disappointment: 'Too soon she had learnt the quality of the man she hoped would be her master' (S,133). Bothwell, on the other hand, has a 'mastering manner', but, because of her married state, her conscience-burdened emotional response is first expressed in negative terms: 'feelings of uneasiness and dissatisfaction, of awakened interest and strangled misgiving' (S,137). When fully acknowledged, the intensity with which her emotions are conveyed, and the underlying hint of violent mastery, suggest that she is a victim of an overwhelming, natural desire, rather than one who actively seeks gratuitous gratification. Echoes of the language of *Wuthering Heights* intensify this impression:

If this were love [. . .] then love was no shining thing that transformed everything around her. It was something wild and unconquerable, something she could not subdue and which might even be cruel. It gave her no rest and mastered her so completely she would have done anything to win his heart in return. (S,174)

While the text does not exonerate Mary for her part in Darnley's murder, it does attempt to show that her blinding passion for Bothwell could have influenced her moral and political judgement. Moreover, it suggests that she was misguided in her affections and began to suffer in expiation of her guilt long before her military defeat, exile and execution. It does so by painting Bothwell in an unflattering light, showing him to be driven by personal ambition, and to be callous in his dealings with Mary, both in his promise to continue to have conjugal relations with his divorced wife (S,213), and in his treatment of Mary herself after their hastily-arranged marriage: 'Strange things the Palace of Holyrood heard in those three weeks after it had listened to wedding-vows -- cries of a woman calling for a

knife with which to kill herself and a man's raised voice, uncontrolled sobs and muffled threats' (S,226-7).

*Solitaire* portrays Mary as a complex woman, capable of a range of emotional responses. It shows her face 'twitching' nervously as she realises that Huntly's defeat has placed her at her brother's mercy, and that she has no alternative but to comply with his veiled command to witness and publicly condone John Gordon's execution. It shows her capable of taking pragmatic action to camouflage her distress, for the apparent callousness registered in her politically astute reply is negated by the narrator's comment on the emotional turmoil it concealed:

'That is not much to ask -- 'deed no. And at which window shall I stand to see the better and be better seen. A little thing to do, surely, to put to end so cruel a malignity. And all stain will be taken from you, brother, and my honour left untashed.'

Her words came in a gush, as though she were trying to drown the silence between them, to sweep aside the thoughts in her own brain.  
(S,110)

She is shown in the pangs of childbirth, philosophically facing the possibility of death, contemplating the struggle that was human existence, realising that her soul would be answerable for its actions regardless of what 'threatening odds' or 'desires [. . .] pulled it unwillingly all ways' (S,165). Her womanly, as opposed to her queenly, characteristics are shown to predominate in times of danger, as when at Dunbar she thinks wistfully of the uncomplicated happiness that might have been hers had she been of humbler birth:

If she had been born in the house of a Netherbow weaver, had as a husband a halberdier, with a roughly kind face, and a youth burdened with children, what would she have asked of life? A little more to

make do mebbe. . . . She put her cheek against the flat velvet hat.  
 Jesu, that soldier's wife . . . what unknowing happiness. . . . (S, 234)

She is also portrayed as a rightful queen denied her throne, when her extreme distress at being imprisoned in the provost's house in Edinburgh, forces her, dishevelled and half-undressed to beg her subjects either to kill her or to free her from her captors. This emotional outburst makes the crowd realise that they are bound to her by 'something older than Protestantism' (S,244), temporarily re-establishing a psychological link with the old order she represents by acknowledging their shared cultural heritage.

*Solitaire* also questions the validity of using primary source documents as incontrovertible evidence of historical fact, and of supposing that even if a relic is authentic, it can tell the whole story. In the novel, as in life, Mary spent much of her time writing and embroidering. The former occupation provided 'evidence' which, in life, procured her condemnation as an adulteress and conspirator in Darnley's death, and in this fictional representation, allows her to condemn herself. Comparison of the text of *Solitaire*'s letters from Mary to Bothwell with translations of the original Casket Letters suggests that Morrison used them as authentic historical documents written by Mary.<sup>49</sup> Privately, however, the author admitted that although she believed these documents to be authentic, they could well be forgeries.<sup>50</sup> As if to point up the possibility that posterity had misunderstood Mary on the basis of false evidence or partial information, *Solitaire* also focuses on her other occupation, embroidery. Indeed, as if to emphasise its relevance, the title and

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<sup>49</sup>See, for example, Samuel Cowan, *Mary Queen of Scots and Who Wrote the Casket Letters ?* (London: Sampson, Low, Marston, 1901), pp. 358-367; Letter II contains many similarities to that in *Solitaire*.

<sup>50</sup>Reply to letter of 8.5.32 from J. C. Scott of Kelso, NLS, MS 27368, fol. 62.

author are given within a diagrammatic representation of cross-stitch tapestry inside the cover of Murray's first edition of the novel. The Victorian popular historian, Agnes Strickland, used the evidence of Mary's embroidery skill in producing 'specimens of feminine taste and industry' to refute allegations of her participation in activities 'of a bloody and barbarous nature which emanate from restless minds, unaccustomed to the peaceful and sedative labours of the needle'.<sup>51</sup> *Solitaire's* use of Mary's tapestry, however, suggests that any work of literature or art must provide an incomplete record of the reality it attempts to represent. It stresses that despite Mary's troubled life, the embroidered relic that she leaves contains only simplified symbols of family, heraldry, national identity and tradition. Representation is constrained by the medium, and rendered static by its two-dimensional quality. The text draws attention to this, and like Keats's Grecian Urn, what the embroidery is shown to capture is not life, but an idealised moment, frozen in time, with no past and no future: 'Here was a little ship with embroidered sails poised for all time on the crest of a wave, and here an apple-tree whose fruit would never fall, and here a small bunched figure who would stay forever young' (S,286). In effect, what the reader of *Solitaire* is being asked to do is to re-evaluate representations of Mary Queen of Scots, including its own, and to realise the implausibility of their claims of objectivity or all-encompassing truth; to realise that life is not static; that for every crest there is a trough and that nobody stays 'forever young'. We are directed towards the silences, gaps and omissions in historical texts, and in this, I believe, *Solitaire* edges towards Pierre Macherey's call to become aware of the ideological implications of texts by reading what is unsaid and consequently repressed.

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<sup>51</sup>*Life of Mary Queen of Scots*, 2 vols, II (London, 1844), p. 408; quoted in Lewis, p.183.

In offering alternative historical narratives that focus on what has been omitted from orthodox histories, Morrison subverts the ideological motivation underlying their construction. Consequently, her fiction challenges the probity of the social formation whose hegemony is justified and perpetuated by such prejudiced discourses. Whilst *Breakers* and *Solitaire* achieve their re-visioning of history by considering how the forces of continuity that perpetuate characteristics from the past, by means of heredity, are often at odds with modernising change, they make use of such oppositional tendencies to explore history as a verbal artefact; history as narrative. Chapter 2 will give extended consideration to the ideological implications of Morrison's representation of the operation of history as process.

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## CHAPTER 2

### REINTERPRETING HISTORY: HISTORY AS PROCESS

#### 2.1 Introductory Comments

#### 2.2 Stasis and Change in *The Winnowing Years*

## CHAPTER 2

## REINTERPRETING HISTORY: HISTORY AS PROCESS

## 2.1 INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.

Karl Marx (1859)<sup>1</sup>

The angel [of History] would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.

Walter Benjamin (1970)<sup>2</sup>

The previous chapter argued that Morrison's early historical novels can be read as an expression of the 1930s' desire for a new approach to Scottish history. It demonstrated that they offered dialogic narratives which reflected the complexity of the ideological environment of the inter-war years by replacing 'certainties' with alternative possibilities, extending historical horizons with the inclusion of what had

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<sup>1</sup> *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Buonaparte*, trans. by Eden and Cedar Paul (London: Allen & Unwin, 1926), p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> *Illuminations* (London, 1970), p. 259, quoted in Cairns Craig, *Out of History*, p.67.

previously been excluded, and by psychologising and feminising history. This chapter will look more closely at what her fiction reveals of the ideological implications of Morrison's interpretation of the processes of history, and for this purpose I shall concentrate on a later novel, *The Winnowing Years*, which takes history itself as its subject.<sup>3</sup>

Fundamental to my discussion is Hayden White's premise that 'just as every ideology is attended by a specific idea of history and its processes, so too, [. . .] is every idea of history attended by specifically determinable ideological implications'.<sup>4</sup> These ideological implications refer to the author's general world-view and do not necessarily imply active identification with political parties. Writing of nineteenth-century ideological perspectives that would still have enjoyed currency when Morrison wrote her first novels, White simplifies Karl Mannheim's classification and identifies Anarchist, Conservative, Liberal and Radical as the four main positions.<sup>5</sup> He acknowledges that while they all recognise the inevitability of historical change, they are differentiated by their perceptions of the optimum extent, rate and means by which such change should be effected (White, pp.22-29). A conservative perspective would valorise tradition and, thinking in terms of a plant metaphor of organic growth, would see history as a process of gradual evolution in which the status quo is considered the best formulation of society that is possible for the time being. A liberal approach would envisage society moving towards an improved 'utopia' in the distant future, and would favour change that proceeded by

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<sup>3</sup> (London: Hogarth Press, 1949). All references will be to this edition and will be given in the text as (*WY*, page number).

<sup>4</sup> *Metahistory* (1975), p. 24

<sup>5</sup> *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, trans. by Louis Worth and Edward Shils (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1946), cited in White, *Metahistory*, note p. 22.

regulated adjustments in accordance with parliamentary procedure and educational improvement. Radicals would see their utopian goal as ready and waiting to be grasped by revolutionary means, and would feel hampered by the backwards pull of the past. Anarchists, on the other hand, would tend to idealise the remote past, viewing history as the trajectory of man's fall from natural innocence to the corruption of the current social formation. Their utopian goal is non-temporal and is believed to be within the reach of anyone, at any time, provided he or she can escape from society's corruption.

Working in the field of English women's fiction of the 1930s, Alison Light has identified a somewhat metamorphosed conservatism which she has termed 'conservative modernism'. This she has defined as 'a conservatism itself in revolt against the past, trying to make room for the present' (*Forever England*, p.11). She sees this 'conservative modernity [as] Janus-faced, [because] it could simultaneously look backwards and forwards; it could accommodate the past in the new forms of the present; it was a deferral of modernity [. . .] yet it also demanded a different sort of conservatism from that which had gone before' (Light, p.10). If it can be assumed that the historical crisis of the Great War catalysed the coalescence of various emergent dissatisfactions with representations of both the past and the present, to produce a modern(ist), more complex conservative ideology in England, then I suggest that the ideological reorientation in Scotland could possibly have been even greater, especially in the light of what T. M. Devine observes as the emergence at that time of a feeling of national victimisation which replaced the previous pride in Scotland's imperial partnership with England.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, in the

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<sup>6</sup> 'Personal Touch', an interview with Johnston MacKay following the publication of *The Scottish Nation 1700-2000*; B.B.C. Radio Scotland, 3 October 1999.

light of the effects of total war, the ideological perspectives available in the aftermath of the Second World War would have been even more complex; it is this new complexity that would have been reflected in how the processes of history were interpreted when Morrison published *The Winnowing Years* in 1949.

The two introductory quotations help to explain my position. Clearly, the first statement is a classic example of a straightforward, radical ideological perspective, where man is seen as the driver of historical progress, prevented only from seizing utopia by the inertial drag of the past. Although also informed by Marxist ideology, the second quotation does not appear to share either the equanimity about the future, or the effects of progress, of the first. Moreover, man is no longer seen to be in relative control of his destiny, for the 'storm' of progress comes from 'Paradise'. Such implications would appear to suggest a considerable deviation from Marx's original position, and this is further complicated by the reduction in importance attributed to the effects of the past. Now the past is no longer seen to act as a brake, but is just chaotic debris; the future is unknown and unpredictable. It would appear as though the past has ceased to be regarded as either the 'roots of the present' or the 'seeds of the future'.

Such differences provide one indication of how the actuality of historical progress necessitated the changing emphases of ideological exposition that developed during the century separating the statements. Although *The Winnowing Years* predates Benjamin's statement by twenty years, before views of this kind had been precisely formulated and given general currency, it is, I believe, feasible to assume that the novel was written in a climate of readjustment of perspectives on history. Indeed, I suggest that it is possible to read in *The Winnowing Years* a

similar blurring of distinctions in the complexity of the ideological implications that can be deduced from its interpretation of the process of history.

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## 2.2 STASIS AND CHANGE: *THE WINNOWING YEARS*

*The Winnowing Years* deals with three hundred years of the history of the fictional parish of Drumban, near Glasgow. In some respects it can be seen to follow the approach adopted by Galt in *Annals of the Parish* (1821), for the parish is seen as a microcosm of Scottish society, subject to the changes operating at both national and international levels. However, the time-scale covered in Morrison's novel, 1642 till 1939, is vast compared with the fifty years covered by Galt's narrative. Such a long period enables the novel to provide a panoramic view of the general effects of the process of historical change; but *The Winnowing Years* also highlights the illusory nature of the apparent directional uniformity of the mechanism of historical process that such a picture creates. By representing historical progress as the cumulative effect of many instances of contention between conservative, sometimes even reactionary influences, and the forward thrust of progressive change, the novel analyses the mechanism by which change occurs, and suggests that the internal dynamics of this are themselves historically-specific. *The Winnowing Years* represents an ambitious undertaking, and its successful accomplishment earned Morrison the first Frederick Niven award in 1950 for the best novel written by a Scot; but, with the exception of its inclusion in Gifford's and McMillan's *History of Scottish Women's Writing*, it has subsequently been denied recognition.

Vast though the time-scale is, the novel avoids the problem of 'baggy' by dividing itself into four books, each of which deals with the period of incumbency of one of Drumban's ministers; the intervening years being covered by brief synopses of significant events. It operates within four discrete time frames, involving four different village societies, four unique sets of historical milieux, and four distinct groups of characters. This narrative technique forces the reader into a dialogue with the past which encourages him or her to become aware of his or her own historicity; for in the periods when the years seem to pass more slowly the reader becomes familiar with the social formation that each represents, and is thereby able to distinguish not only differences between them but also their respective differences from the present. The novel's format creates the effect of time-lapse photography, the extended sections allowing detailed scrutiny of historical processes, the rapid sections registering their effects with a broad brush effect. The structure also reflects the practice of historical periodisation in which boundaries are arbitrarily imposed on a period because of some particular unifying feature, regardless of the existence of numerous other factors which would link it, whole or in part, with other periods. As already noted in the Introduction, one reviewer at the time of publication found the novel's structure flawed because it produced a sense of disorientation when one group of characters was dropped and another introduced.<sup>7</sup> I think, however, that the novel's fragmented nature evinces an awareness of the complex relationship which we, in the present, have with the past. In its process of disorientation *The Winnowing Years* recognises the discontinuities in our knowledge of the past; it testifies to the transience of individual lifetimes; it places the reader at the end of a long line of historical precedents; and it

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<sup>7</sup> Anonymous, *The Scots Magazine*, vol. 53, May 1950, p. 163.

acknowledges that our memories are often incomplete. It also focuses attention on the fact that generalisations about the process of history can be erroneous; for it demonstrates that the overall pattern of historical process cannot always be observed in the detailed study of specific aspects of the past.

As in the two novels already studied, Morrison eschews monologic certainty in her portrayal of history. Once again ambiguity of perspective is foregrounded in the novel's title, *The Widdowings Years*. On first reading, this suggests change with the passage of time. However, ideological implications can be attributed to this title, for it suggests ameliorating, even necessary, change. As well as implying the more general process of improvement by selection, perhaps of an evolutionary nature, the associations derived from the separation of chaff from grain to provide food make the changes to which it refers seem to be prerequisites for life itself. This would appear to indicate, and approve, a drive towards modernity. But such a conclusion is complicated by the old-fashioned agricultural associations of the word 'widdowing', associations which are later reiterated in the villagers' resistance to the use of a mechanical 'fanner' (WY,188). Further complication is added by the title's religious connotations. These are derived from the appropriation of the term 'widdowing', as a metaphor for spiritual and doctrinal purification, by reforming zealots of the Scottish Presbyterian Church, at least as they have been represented in literature.<sup>8</sup> These connotations are reinforced in the Covenanted fervour of the first incumbent of the manse of Drumban, at a time when historical change is also resisted in the survival of pagan rites and superstitions.<sup>9</sup> Such undermining *tacitly* questions the

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Habakkuk Mucklewraith's language in Scott's *Old Mortality* (1816: repr. London: Penguin, 1985), p. 357.

<sup>9</sup> The Parish of Carmunnock, on which Morrison based Drumban, has a Covenanted history. Much of the fiction has a strong factual basis, and today the parish magazine is still entitled *The Covenanter*.

inevitability, and even the desirability, of change, and hints at the ambivalence that can be detected in the novel's ideological perspective with regard to historical progress.

The novel's premise that historical progress, regardless of the value attributed to it, is a constant struggle between the imperatives of innovation and tradition is *explicitly* foregrounded on the title page with the juxtaposition of the title with a biblical verse celebrating stasis, continuity and resistance to change: 'The rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon the house; and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock. Matthew VII, 25'. *The Winnowing Years* provides a metaphorical re-enactment of that struggle. For while the narrative is driven forwards by the impetus of historical change, that progressive movement is constantly held in check by the sense of stability provided by the manse itself, the one 'character' to survive throughout the three centuries covered by the novel. Added to this persistent brake, there are frequent retardations in the forward movement caused by references to the past. As well as the manse itself, these take the form of traditional practices, superstitions, ancient standing stones, the inherited memories or characteristics of the protagonists, and allusions which prompt the reader to remember details of the narrative's past, to which, in the novel's present, he or she has had access. Indeed, as will be suggested later, it is this very penetration of the past into the present, in the mind of the reader, that enables the novel to register its final ideological ambivalence about historical progress and emphasise the necessity of a re-visioned Scottish history.

Although set amid periods when national and international affairs were disrupted by political and social upheaval, and imperialist expansion, *The Winnowing Years* maintains a local focus. Extraneous events receive only oblique

reference; for example, the colonial wars in America and India are only mentioned to explain the mutilated state of the eighteenth-century laird's hand. The ecclesiastical life of the parish sets the tone of its secular affairs. This is consonant with Morrison's belief, stated in the Prologue to her history of the Church of Scotland, *They Need No Candle: The Men Who Built the Scottish Kirk*, that this was how Scottish history could best be represented:

It is not through her kings and queens, nor through parliaments or social practices, that the history of Scotland can readily be traced. It is through her Kirk. The chapter headings read like upheavals of the country's surface -- Reformation, Covenant, Revolution, Secession, Disruption, Reunion.<sup>10</sup>

The nature of the simile in this quotation is particularly significant, for it interprets revolutionary movements as natural phenomena, rather than as the result of man's alteration of the status quo. This would suggest a determinist perspective whereby change is viewed as inevitable and operating on such a grand scale that nothing could withstand its effects. It is useful to keep this image in mind when considering the manse's function of preserving continuity in *The Winnowing Years*. The text indicates the violent struggle the manse has to endure to oppose the intrusion of extraneous influences:

From the inside the door seemed to be torn open on the outside, where the winds, as though awaiting their chance, rushed in to take over, strangling the thin scraping sounds, expanding the weak piping into the bluster of a blow, swallowing all hollowness of opposition by the forces mustered behind them. (*WY*,12)

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<sup>10</sup>(London: Epworth Press, 1957), p. 7.

It is significant that as well as marking important landmarks in Scottish history, the chosen periods reflect a much wider pattern of historical change, when similar influences or sudden shocks were also felt in England and in the world at large. The first period, 1642-1687, deals with what has become known as the 'Killing Times'. These were the years during which ministers who refused to recognise the re-established hierarchy of bishops (regarded by many as a retrogressive, Catholic-inspired measure) were driven from their charges and forced to live as fugitives. The English counterpart of this is seen in the revolutionary activities of the Parliamentarians in the Civil War and the Glorious Revolution which deposed James II and established William and Mary as Protestant monarchs. The second period, 1779-1824, marks an era of religious secession, with the Protestant community divided into factions depending on their position regarding patronage, State intervention, Covenants, and liberal or evangelical theologies. This proliferation of differences within Protestantism and questioning of traditional authority is a reflection of the general unrest experienced by the world at large in the revolutionary activities in France and America. The period of the Disruption, 1843, the subject of the third Book, saw yet another division within Scottish Protestantism, when the Established Church was significantly reduced by the secession of many of its ministers and their congregations to form the Free Church. Once again the question of patronage was the cause. This disruption, too, had its counterpart in the disunity in the Church of England, and in the general unrest and challenge to traditional authority that accompanied poor harvests and industrial change, leading to the growth of Chartism in Britain and to the revolutions that convulsed Europe in 1848. Book 4, covering the period 1901-1939, examines the challenge posed to religion by modern secular philosophy, and this, too, can be seen

as part of a universal trend when old certainties were exploded as comforting myths, and change proceeded at an unprecedented pace.

*The Winnowing Years* provides an overview of the significant changes undergone by Drumban, of which the most obvious is the physical growth of the parish. From its initial description as a small group of thatched cottages ‘huddled round the church as though anxious to be within reach of its shadow’ (*WY*,92), some isolated farms and a Tower, completely surrounded by wild moorland, it grows and acquires sufficient amenities and transport links to make it an attractive retirement retreat for Glasgow businessmen. Its craft base diversifies; the traditional occupations of farming, weaving, milling and stonemasonry being augmented by textile-based cottage industries. Despite its proximity to Glasgow, it escapes the incursion of industrialisation, even though nearby Brierley acquires a cordwainery and a printworks. Paradoxically, it would seem to be Drumban’s links with Glasgow, in the shape of wealthy businessmen wishing to escape from the adverse effects of historical progress, that help to preserve much of its original rural character. But outside influences are increasingly felt, a fact subtly registered in the language of the inhabitants. This begins with the broad dialect, rich in craft, and agricultural metaphors. Such language is used and understood by all, even by the laird who uses an agricultural metaphor to express his regret that he has less children than the minister: ““Tell your father from me that happy he is who has no empty stalls in his stable”” (*WY*,32). This is followed by movement towards a class-based differentiation of language that increasingly favours standard English, which is seen to reach its zenith in the penultimate incumbent who is pedantic about the derivation of words and their correct usage (*WY*,227). However, the value of this trend is undermined by its representation as indicative of dissociated sensibility, in,

for example, the case of Hew Muir who acquires English with his education for the ministry, but resorts to his childhood dialect in moments of extreme emotion (*WY*,165). Its acceptability is challenged, too, in the distance it creates between the high-born Victorian incumbent, Stephen Kuld, and his elders:

‘Could you make out what he was saying? [ . . . ] It was only when he said something twice over that I kent what he was reaching for. And he seemed no to be able to make out what we said. [ . . . ] More than once he had to speir, “What’s that you said?” What’s wrong with us that our minister can no make out what we’re saying plain as a man can speak?’ (*WY*,182)

However, towards the end of the novel there are hints that operating alongside such linguistic hierarchical organisation, and perhaps even challenging it, is an informal language usage. For example, despite their father’s pedantry, the children in the last section use modern colloquialisms such as ‘they only let you see them jam side up’ (*WY*,222). This is far removed from the archaic vocabulary and rhythms of Bartilimo Pinkertoun’s speech in Book I: ““Twenty three years have I bielded at Law”” (*WY*,21). Altered language usage also indicates the decline in the importance of religious discourse as a source of subject identification. Through time the characters cease to think in terms of biblical injunctions and increasingly identify with alternative discourses. Indeed, by the end of the time-span covered by the novel religious discourse has been debased sufficiently for the young evacuee to use it casually, and in a manner that some might consider blasphemous: ““Dae ye think I’m God [ . . . ] that I should ken wha every yin is?”” (*WY*,286).

Change is registered, too, in the parish’s altered social hierarchy. At the novel’s beginning, a feudal system operates in which the villagers, including the

minister, defer to the laird, Sir John Kuld. The decline of this social formation is recorded in the gradual withdrawal of successive lairds from community affairs, their eventual decline into eccentricity, and their final removal from their family seat as they anticipate the extinction of the line. Interestingly, this important social change appears, at first sight, to be presented as a supernatural phenomenon, achieved by the operation of determinist forces beyond human control. The Kuld family is said to carry an ancient curse that limits it to one heir in every generation, and in the Victorian era, that heir dies in a riding accident (WY,208). However, Morrison's handling of this incident introduces the possibility of further ideological implications that anticipate later trends in historical exegesis. The fact that the heir's *black* servant boy absconds after witnessing, or perhaps even contributing to the accident, and is not found and brought to task, suggests a tenuous link between the decline in both aristocratic and British imperial power. The Kuld family has already been implicated as participating in the wars of British colonialist expansion with the references to the eighteenth-century laird having fought in America and having had his hand mutilated while on military duty in India (WY,119). Bearing in mind that this novel was published in 1949, when war-ravaged Britain was unable to retain control of her empire, the association of the gentry with colonialism in the novel could be interpreted as a suggestion that the demise of both was the result of a more general movement towards the decline of centralist power and the removal of privilege. Alongside supernatural determinism the novel can, therefore, be seen to offer both democratising and anti-colonial ideologies as alternative explanations of historical movements. Such democratising forces can also be seen at work when the village women are openly disrespectful of the laird, in front of the minister, his relative, when they say that the laird was partly to blame for the accident because

the child was far too young to be allowed to ride. Their lack of deference is also seen in their assertion that no one, not even the aristocracy, can escape death (WY,208). In *The Winnowing Years*, such modern interpretations of socio-political change coexist with more ancient, supernatural ones. In keeping with an important focus of this section of the novel (Book 3), the tension between the attempted extirpation of superstition and its tenacity in the mind-set of the villagers, both interpretations of historical change are held as possibilities.

Amidst this catalogue of change *The Winnowing Years* sets the manse as a point of stasis, a medium through which the past is communicated to the present. Indeed, the narrative begins, ‘The house stood [. . .]’ (WY,11), and the manse’s unique characteristics are delineated in a manner that emphasises its almost-animate nature: ‘But there was something about the way the house was settled on its mound that made it look as though it, too, grew; its flowering, its heather thatch, its sap a secretive life of its own’ (WY,11). Its perdurability is suggested by the observation that when ‘it went the way of all clay and rubble, the place where it had once stood would still be taken up, gathering darkness or stroked with light, its ground dug to unseen foundations’ (WY,11). This is carried further in the apparently paradoxical statement, applied to the legend above the lintel, that permanence can be achieved through decay: ‘They were beginning to green so that she felt neither time nor weather could obliterate what decay was securing’ (WY,15). Even when rebuilt on a grander scale, the manse’s physical continuity is preserved by the re-use of the original stones, although they are kept to the back so as not to detract from its modern façade. This is recognised by Stephen Kuld, the third incumbent, who wonders:

But had it been cleared away? Was a tree destroyed when its roots were left grave-deep in the ground? Did the old ever relinquish its hold on the new until it had become was? [*sic.*] Instead of superseding, was this house, raw with newness, not overshadowed by what once stood in its place? (*WY*, 184)

As well as providing a physical bulwark against the all-encompassing effects of change, the manse's symbolic function would appear to be the representation of the Scottish heritage. It seems able to record all the events, both religious and secular, which it witnesses, and to reverberate with echoes of the past. Such an interpretation would accord with Morrison's belief that 'places have auras, as people have personalities [. . .] and places, like people, have memories'.<sup>11</sup> As such, the manse provides a focus of continuity with the past, achieved by its apparent ability to resonate in tune with the psychological tensions experienced by its various inhabitants, tensions that originate in their own particular, often troubled, relationship with the past.

At first sight, the preservation of such a potent reminder of the past, presented as it is in organic, plant metaphors, might suggest an uncomplicated reflection of conservative ideology, with its valorisation of tradition. But the role of the manse is more complex than this. Even before the religious turbulence of the first Book is introduced, Marion Bowman, the wife of the first incumbent in 1642, is troubled by the strange atmosphere that pervades the house, something which she feels she has to overcome by hard work and fecundity. A later inhabitant experiences a distinct sense of entrapment within its walls, as though they confined something of the external forces of Nature which struggle to escape: 'It had reverted

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<sup>11</sup>'Spooks, Sorcery and Superstition', talk given at East Church Literary Society, Rutherglen, 23 January 1934, NLS, MS 27353, fol. 22.

to what it had been before they entered, sighing with draughts, its walls creaking like floors; with winds, unable to free themselves, caught in the chimney where they ruminated or thrashed themselves senselessly in their narrow captivity' (*WY*,131). The imagery of winds struggling to free themselves from the confines of the manse seems to anticipate Benjamin's concept of the storm of progress quoted as a pre-text to this chapter, and emphasises the idea that the manse is interfering with the process of change. All of this makes the position of the manse somewhat ambiguous; sometimes its aura, and the past it echoes, appear to represent something worth keeping; at other times its atmosphere appears threatening. Even the noises it makes in the twentieth century send out contradictory messages: 'It still creaked, as though its wood were either pulling together or drawing apart' (*WY*,220).

Particularly in the early Books of *The Winnowing Years*, the lives of the susceptible characters seem to be circumscribed by their historical circumstances which are somehow at odds with the manse's atmosphere. This idea of enclosure by a circle finds echoes in the derivation of the word kirk, to which the manse is attached, and in the village which is situated around both in a circle that expands with time. Eventually, one meaning of this encirclement and its relevance to the role of the manse as guardian of the *whole* Scottish heritage becomes clearer. Mr Lindsay, the penultimate minister, realises that 'a circle leaves so much out' (*WY*,278). This suggests that selective inclusion or exclusion of aspects of the past can create a false or incomplete appreciation of the nation's heritage, and that this can, in turn, cause psychological rupture between emotional and rational responses to it. In Drumban's case such circumscription has been effected by the proliferation of the religious and secular constraints of Calvinist Presbyterianism, which have

worked towards the extirpation of pre-Reformation Scottish culture. Furthermore, Drumban has also been isolated from the changes associated with industrialisation which transformed much of Scotland, a feature of its history that is particularly evident in Book Four, and in the Epilogue when the young evacuees arrive at the start of World War II.

Notions of oppositional emotional and rational responses can also be derived from the significance of a circle of ancient standing stones that provides another link with the past. Now the focus is directed towards Scotland's pre-Christian heritage, which, although increasingly moderated in intensity throughout the novel's time-span, nevertheless continues to make itself evident in superstitious beliefs and practices. Through the stones the narrative communicates an understanding of a basic human appreciation of supernatural forces, and, given the significance attached to such ancient relics and their function as the site of spiritual wholeness in Gunn's fiction, the reader is tempted to read into them a beneficent source of continuity between past and present (and even future). But in Morrison's text, as in Grassie Gibbon's *A Scots Quair* trilogy, their role is less straightforward.

The derivation of the name Drumban -- shining ridge -- is suggestive of sun worship, and to the early inhabitants the stones provide links with an earlier pre-Christian, oral culture still largely alive at an emotional, if not at a rational level despite the efforts of the Kirk to eradicate it. Physically, the stones resist change, and are even actively preserved by the penultimate minister, but the text's assessment of their value is ambiguous. Although Beltane rituals are still observed at the start of the narrative, the culture and religious practices represented by the stones are both suggested and trivialised, or perhaps even demonised, in the children's ritual of encouraging the eldest to recite the catechism backwards when

playing among them (*WY,26*). The stones are also associated with prophecy, but the fates foreseen are unhappy, though accurate. In this category are Jamie Bowman's foreknowledge that he would have to leave Drumban and never return (*WY,27*), and John Sudden's prophecy that although Nicholas Pollock likes to be in control, she will one day be left alone with no one to command (*WY,135*). Separation rather than continuity and community would appear inherent in their legacy, because those who assemble within them are separated soon afterwards. Even the traces of Celtic matriarchal social organisation that they seem to perpetuate bring grief to the women who draw courage or freedom from their contact with the stones. For, although this ancient matriarchal force is still seen to exist, and is intuitively felt by women within the stone circle, patriarchal authority has usurped and renamed it even there, and extinguished it beyond the circumference: 'Each had a stone *he called his* and *each knew her own* as though her name were written on it' (*WY,26*, my italics).

This is convincingly illustrated in the experience of Nicholas Pollock, the daughter of the manse in the revolutionary period who responds to the ancient power of the standing stones. Within their circle she contravenes the patriarchal conventions of feminine decorum and allows her innate female sexuality to express itself by yielding to the passionate advances of John Sudden, a man she has only just met. She also asserts her *female*, as opposed to what was conventionally understood as *feminine* identity when she asserts her own will and refuses to comply with Sudden's wishes and meet him again before he leaves Drumban: 'He was shaken by her directness. Yes he did know she would not come. But what shook him was that a woman should make so clear what she meant and what she did not mean' (*WY,127*). But rather than enabling her to achieve any meaningful female power, her

actions are interpreted in the light of eighteenth-century patriarchally-determined feminine norms and result in her humiliation and abandonment (Book 2). Examples like this seem to suggest that the standing stones should be viewed as relics of a past that has been superseded, and that attempts to recreate that past would be detrimental, because its values are oppositional to current religious and social practices. Yet, the poetic characteristics that enter the language whenever the stone circle or the ancient stone that blocks the path to the manse are described, subvert, even while affirming, rationalisation of their obsolescence: ‘There was witchery afoot to-night; she could feel the excitement rising in her. [ . . . ] He felt her take his hand in both of hers and place it on the stone worn thin with age that stood, where no stone should stand, in the middle of the path’ (*WY*,242). This is significant, for the poetic intensity of the language used when referring to the effect of the stones emphasises the fact that since they are relics of an oral culture that predates history, their effects are registered emotionally, in the collective subconscious, rather than rationally, in keeping with historical progress. In this way *The Winnowing Years* reflects the operation of the historical process as a dynamic equilibrium between an emotional attachment to the past and a rational commitment to the idea of progress. It is dynamic because the relative weighting given to each directional force varies with specific historical circumstances, net forward motion only becoming possible whenever the emotional hold of the past is diminished.

Examination of how the dialectic between progressive change and the residual influence of the past is shown to operate in the historically-specific circumstances delineated in the individual books of *The Winnowing Years*, provides a clearer indication of the ideological implications that can be drawn from the novel. In Book 1 it is the minister’s wife who is uncomfortably conscious of the manse’s

aura which seems to accentuate her own feelings of guilt. Historical change has taken place at a faster rate than her psychological ability to reconcile her present position with the predispositions fostered by her cultural memories. Past associations haunt her like nightmares. Only brief reference is made to the fact that it was 'but a matter of a hundred years since priests had become ministers and could marry like those they served' (WY,13). However, the implied continuity of sacerdotal office, and its earlier association with celibacy, explains Marion Bowman's dis-ease and its manifestation in a 'quietness akin to dumbness' that makes her 'go softly' to 'palliate a formless sense of guilt' (WY,13). Guilt about her residual superstitious beliefs is also accentuated by the manse's atmosphere, and expiation is attempted by confining herself to the house and the work of a wife and mother:

She saw to it that the manse was astir from the moment she awoke in the morning to the moment she lay down to sleep. To fill it with busyness was the only way she knew of making it really theirs, to subdue that feeling she had had the moment she had first entered, to change this house into their home. They were not joint-tenants but in sole possession. (WY,14)

In combination, these residual psychological tendencies interact with her current position to produce what Protestant patriarchal society would classify as ideal womanhood; God-fearing, subservient, fertile and hard-working. Presentation of such a scenario might be interpreted as endorsement of the social benefits of the resultant Hegelian-type synthesis produced by the interaction of progressive change (Protestant Reformation) and its antithesis, retrogressive affinity with the past. Such a reading *can* be supported by Marion's achievements in raising her family in

accordance with Protestant patriarchal rules, and by the eventual success of the Presbyterianism so ardently defended by her husband. Yet I believe that the narrative also subverts this position by encouraging sympathy with Marion's own unhappiness in the death of her son as a covenanting martyr. It is subverted, too, by the experience of her third daughter, another Marion, who has been ideologically conditioned to accept her 'feminine' role, and so becomes the fearful wife of the brutish Bartilimo Pinkertoun, and eventually dies dispossessed and in childbirth, an innocent victim in a male power struggle (*WY*,86). Thus, progressive change and retrogressive intrusion of the past are shown to interact to drive forward the historical process, but the text refuses to pronounce absolute judgement on their relative merits. Nevertheless, as with the references to the stones, the past and its resonances within the house operate on the reader at an emotional level, beside which the rationality of progressive action often seems less convincing. There appears to be more at stake than just a disagreement about whether or not Adam Bowman should have visited his son before his execution in the exchange between the minister and his normally taciturn wife:

'I place no faith in what is flesh and blood.' His voice was cold.

'But you were wrong,' she insisted. (*WY*,81)

His rational justification of his conduct as his historic duty seems to speak of an impersonal programmatically-driven progress, while her passionate rejection of its methods and consequences repudiates the cost in human suffering. Furthermore, within the text, even the status of the resultant synthesis is questionable; for while it is accepted as inevitable, the position of women is shown to be problematic in patriarchal society, as can be seen in the case of the younger Marion Bowman, who is terrorised by her husband, or her elder sister, Barbara, who is forced to avoid the

humiliation of spinsterhood by marrying the objectionable, elderly weaver, Thomas Farie. Even the success of Protestantism is subtly undermined in the residual superstition that exists, albeit in diluted form, up until the end of the novel. Furthermore, there is irony in the fact that the minister is returned to his charge by state intervention in church affairs, when this was the very principle against which he had originally been so violently opposed.

Whereas in Book 1 emotional weighting appears to be given to the past, in Book 2 the reverse occurs. The main protagonist in this period is Nicholas Pollock, the rebellious daughter of the manse, whose attempts to break free from the restrictions imposed by tradition and convention echo the era's revolt against what was seen as arbitrary and unjust authority. The reader is encouraged to sympathise with her desire to dress like other children rather than be made to wear old-fashioned styles cut from patterns worn by her grandmother and even her great-grandmother. But dress acts as a metaphor for the more general restrictions of socially-constructed femininity. Just as the high bodices and the 'blue-striped, tick stays which stood up like a fortification' make Nicholas feel 'outlandish', so her self-expression is stifled by the restrictive ideology that originated in the society that wore them (*WY*,100). She wants to move forward, but she feels the manse, and its links with the past, restricting her. Overjoyed at leaving to live in Edinburgh, 'she felt as though, in their case, the natural cycle of life had been reversed; they were leaving old-age behind them to enter into their heritage of youth' (*WY*,133-4).

It is important, however, to realise that it is the more recent, and not the distant past that she rebels against. She responds to the liberating power of the standing stones and defies relatively recent conventions of feminine behaviour to act in accordance with more ancient constructs of female sexuality and equality.

Nevertheless, she is restricted by the narrative and is not allowed to make change outstrip the effects of the past. Her own unconventional behaviour in announcing to the man that she would subsequently marry that she was going unchaperoned to visit another man, returns to blight her relationship with her husband. He cannot forget about what he wrongly assumes was her immoral conduct in the past: 'Always it was the same in the years to come. The moment they seemed to be drawing together, he would turn aside as though suddenly reminded of something' (*WY*, 158). She, on the other hand, has so little truck with the past that she cannot remember anything that might have troubled her husband, or even realise that what separates them lies in their failure to confront their past together: 'In some inscrutable way, she felt she had failed him, not only by being unable to produce the mittens, but by her very forgetfulness of what was apparently of such importance to him' (*WY*, 159). It is only with her husband's death that Nicholas becomes reconciled with her own past. However, this does not bring the satisfactory resolution that might be expected from the text's earlier tendency to favour sympathetic identification with the past. Now the emotional thrust is for change, and the reader, although not necessarily always in agreement with all of Nicholas's actions, finds the picture of her as a lonely old lady, living with partial and distorted memories, an unsatisfactory ending for a young life of such vibrant potential.

As if to balance the earlier weighting given to the past, the novel now seems to deviate from its previous conservative ideological position, the equilibrium shifts and change is advocated. But this perspective can only be upheld as far as the position of women is concerned, for the text does not seem to applaud contemporaneous change in other directions, most notably in the rise of the urban entrepreneurial class, as exemplified by John Sudden. The narrator dismisses

Sudden as superficial: '[His] quick intelligence was quite unfounded in learning, [and . . .] a quotation was sufficient for John Sudden to speak with the authority of one who has read all a man's works' (*WY*,119). This accords with the minister's view of the man and his class as inferior to the gentry whose position they are usurping: 'Handsome, fine-looking, with the polished manners of ease and confidence, he was nevertheless but a rich man's son, whereas young John Kuld was the son of many men set apart from the common lot' (*WY*,120). Now the text appears to be asserting the value of tradition, and, in encouraging the reader's antagonism towards Sudden, it negates the value of the social change he represents. Once again a dialogic relationship is established between the different ideological implications contained in the narrative, and this further complicates the position established in Book 1.

In the third Book the mechanism of change and the ideological implications that can be attributed to its representation become even more complex. This episode deals with the Disruption of 1843, and concentrates one of the most significant events in post-Reformation, Scottish ecclesiastical history into the novel's shortest period. Drumban's participation in the church debate indicates the magnitude and speed of change in the Victorian era, and the disorientating effects on the individual of the tension between past and present, stasis and change, are mirrored in the personal experience of the minister, Stephen Kuld.

*The Winnowing Years* emphasises the democratising nature of the ecclesiastical reform by making the choice of leaving the Established Church, over the issue of patronage, a matter of conscience for the elders. Already distanced by their social élitism, the laird and his distant relation, Stephen Kuld, whom he has appointed as minister, are shown to be reactionary in their dismissal of the common

people as ‘totally unfit to deal with such things’ as appointing clergy, and supercilious in their certainty that such a thing would only lead to ‘one outcome -- deterioration of the clergy’ (WY,191). The elders are seen to be divided; yet, paradoxically, both sides appeal to the past to justify their position. Now the mechanics of change seem more complex; opposing tendencies are seen to result from selective consideration of past precedents. Those favouring the status quo are shown to refer to emotional links with the recent past and the traditions of their forefathers; those favouring reform, and eventually, secession, make a rational appeal to the ancient authority of Scripture. The text appears to favour democratising reform, for it portrays the apologist for secession, James Clachlan, as a thoughtful, conscientious Christian, who had already taken a public stand against patronage before Stephen Kuld’s appointment, and can calmly argue his case by referring to biblical precept. Moreover, he is shown to live by his religious convictions, for he accommodates the new Free Church minister in his own home, and donates land for a church and a school (WY,209). By comparison, the conservative lobby is painted in a less attractive light. It is personified by James’s more loquacious bother, Lachlan, whose argument, though emotionally charged, lacks scriptural or spiritual foundations. In addition, he is portrayed as unchristian and unnaturally alienating in his condemnation of the other’s viewpoint: “‘I swear I shall not own you as my brother. I spew you from me as a dog its vomit’” (WY,205). Nor is the rump of the Established Church painted in a very flattering light. Just as the split in the Clachlan family can be interpreted as representative of the schism in the Kirk, so the local brawling that takes place inside the church, as the pews are reallocated, can be understood to represent nation-wide arguments as the Established Church regrouped after its loss. Moreover, Stephen Kuld’s physical

collapse and death can be seen to prefigure the collapse of the authority of the old order he represents. Clearly, the text does not sympathise with this position.

Yet neither does it seem to be wholly in favour of the Free Church, especially with respect to its theological strictness. A note of scorn seems to intrude as the narrator tells of the Free Church descendants of Ebenezer Burns, the undertaker elder who opposed Stephen Kuld's attempts to ban drinking at funerals:

There were Burnses still living in Drumban, direct descendants of Ebenezer, who attended the Free kirk at Brierley, were all strict teetotallers, and who allowed neither a bed to be made or a kettle to boil on Sunday lest the sanctity of the Sabbath be broken. (*WY*,219)

The rumour of internal disagreements in the infant Free Kirk, and the fact that it never really took hold in Drumban (*WY*,219) further complicate the ideological implications of the novel. On balance, *The Winnowing Years* appears to favour democratising progress in ecclesiastical organisation, but there are suggestions that the revolutionary action of schism, as in the Killing Times of Book 1, might be held to have been an unnecessarily violent means of achieving reform that would probably have happened as part of an organic process. Yet the text's kind of conservatism differs from that of the laird or Lachlan Clachlan and has much in common with the radical aims, but not necessarily the methods, of James Clachlan. When viewed retrospectively in 1949, when the novel was published and the historical process had been further completed, the Established Church's current position could have been interpreted as a compromise that borrowed from both camps.<sup>12</sup> The kirk's then-current position retained the emotional security of tradition while it reaped the benefits of the democratisation sought by the seceders, without

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<sup>12</sup>Patronage was abolished by the Patronage Act of 1874, and most of the Free Church reunited with the Established Church in 1929.

having to accept their rationalistic doctrinal rigidity. Such a resolution would accord with the ideological perspective suggested by this section of the novel.

The complexity of the historical process in the Victorian period of rapid change is further exemplified in the emotional experience of the minister, Stephen Kuld. His characterisation personifies the conflict between the backward pull of the past and forward thrust of modernising change. Kuld's zeal for agricultural improvement and his abhorrence of superstition portray him as a modernising influence (*WY*,188). Yet, paradoxically, his psychological inheritance binds him to the past. Indeed, it is the suppression and sublimation of the effects of the past that fuel Kuld's reforming zeal. It is significant that he recognises the manse's ability to preserve the past even after reconstruction, as this applies equally to his own psyche:

They might have taken the old manse down, stone by stone, but it had left something that still made itself felt. Just as he housed in himself his own forebears long since dead, could not shake their earth from his roots no matter how often he transplanted himself. (*WY*,184)

His fear of the past, in the shape of his inheritance of familial insanity, causes him to have an irrational terror of anything connected with death. It also makes him so uncomfortable with the wild landscape surrounding Drumban that there are hints of mental imbalance in his reaction to his environment. He sees in the moorland a wildness of 'savage sterility', and feels that it 'invade[s] with its presence his dwelling, across sill, through skylight and over threshold, until it [makes] him feel like a wanderer in his own home' (*WY*,183).

His repressed past, in the form of both the memory of the 'leering, half-shut eyes' (*WY*,212) of his dead, mad father and the genetic inheritance that links them, is sublimated in a desire for modernisation for its own sake. He believes that

'nothing is so well in this world it could not be the better', and he certainly does not believe in 'letting bad alone' (*WY*,188). Part of this 'bad' that he does not consider should be left alone are the superstitious beliefs which cause his parishioners to resist the introduction of agricultural improvements. Stephen Kuld wants to cultivate the unhallowed land of Cloutie's Croft and open up the graveyard on the north side of the church to relieve congestion. He is angered by the villagers' refusal to comply with his wishes, holding their beliefs as 'worn-out mummery' (*WY*,198). Regarded rationally, his plan is laudable and the reactionary stand taken by the parishioners appears nonsensical. Progressive change would seem to be advocated, especially when the text draws attention to the unfounded theological sanction that one farmer uses to justify his refusal to weed his land and plant trees: "The Bible says the ground shall bring forth thorns and thistles. Far be it from me to disbelieve the curse and fight against God" (*WY*,188). The reader also seems to be encouraged to ridicule their reactionary beliefs when informed of the villagers' refusal to work with Sir John's mechanical winnowing machine: "They believe to make a wind by a machine will be bound to bring a curse because it is taking upon themselves what only God should be allowed to do at His will" (*WY*,188).

From a rational perspective, the modern reader would be inclined to take the side of progress, and the text seems to encourage this; but only up to a point. Once again, rationality is balanced by an oppositional emotional response; the poetic intensity of the narrative voice, as it explains why change is resisted, presents such a powerful justification for the preservation of traditional ways that wholehearted acceptance of progress is undermined:

This was something that went further back than Roman Catholicism.  
It was something as embryonic as a root that has never been able to

thrust out growth above the ground and that now was pulverised into the very soil from which it has once sucked sap. (*WY*,200-201)

Even Stephen Kuld himself has sensed that the stone that blocks the manse path must have been connected with some ancient ritual, possibly concerned with male rites of passage. Although diminished by the effects of time, its power is still felt by the villagers who retain something of the old ritual of kissing the stone (*WY*,200). The perseverance of such rites, and their importance in Scottish culture has figured in many novels, but here Morrison anticipates George Mackay Brown's more recent *Greenvoe* (1972), and registers not only their residual place in folklore and superstition, but indicates how the need they were designed to satisfy in an ancient culture is still felt by modern man:

What worn-through stump of custom, left over from the days when those of common descent were twisted into a tribe, took place there as sons separated into men? What was implicit in that gesture as they stooped to kiss a stone which had probably been set up when the first primitive community had been established, which would be associated with both reaping and sacrifice in some dark past? (*WY*,200)

The relentless pursuit of progress is undermined, too, in Stephen Kuld's eventual realisation that it is impossible to compartmentalise time, or, more importantly, to exclude the influence of the past and build the future on a rootless present:

He had been wont to draw in his mind a line between the Old Testament and the New. Now past, present and future merged for him into one. He heard the thunders of Mount Sinai round Calvary, and the promise of Calvary rise like a flight of angels' wings from the vehemence of Mount Sinai. (*WY*,213)

The imagery used in describing how Kuld came to this realisation could also have significant implications concerning Morrison's approach to the selectivism practised within religion, a topic discussed in detail in the following chapter.

*The Winnowing Years'* analysis of the historical process involved in the Disruption suggests that the major directional thrust lies in favour of modernising change, but this is moderated by a backwards influence that answers the need for the emotional rootedness provided by tradition. In Stephen Kuld's case the resultant direction is backwards into the irrationality associated with the past, despite his forward dash to evade it. Operating in the same historical moment, these different directional thrusts suggest the impossibility of reducing the mechanism of change to a simple formula, especially when it occurs in a complex historical environment. As in the previous Books, the past plays an important part, but the *nature* of that role is shown to be capable of variation; sometimes change is driven by reaction *against* the past, sometimes change is altered in extent or direction by attraction *towards* the past.

When Book 4 opens in 1901, Drumban has undergone considerable change even though it retains many of its old features. Nevertheless, what is significantly different is that it is no longer typical of the environment enjoyed by the majority of Scots, but is a retreat from industrialised Scotland. Like the retired businessmen who have built new villas on its periphery, the minister has come to escape the harsh reality of modern Scottish urban living where everything seems to him to move at a frenetic pace:

The senseless urgency of modern life; motor-cars allowed to go at twelve miles an hour, yet the speedier transport [*sic*] the more people

hurried. Instead of easing, there was tightening; instead of a means to an end, the end became the means. (*WY*,224)

Indeed, Drumban seems like the location of a Kailyard novel, and, to a certain extent, the backward-looking habit of this school is embraced by the minister, Mr Lindsay, who researches the parish's history partly as a means of 'escaping' from the present. But his approach to the past is completely devoid of the Kailyard's sentimental nostalgia. For him the past is a matter of facts to be ascertained and deductions to be drawn. Unlike his daughter, Christine, who finds comfort in the loud ticking of Stephen Kuld's grandfather clock, Mr Lindsay finds only its provenance of interest: 'Fettercairn, Edinburgh, 1796' (*WY*,228). He becomes the local historian, and judging by the sympathy evinced in the text for the valuing of past influences, one might expect that contact with the past would bring him equanimity and that he would meet with the narrator's approval. Nevertheless, neither happens. Mr Lindsay is portrayed as a pedant, whose sole interest is in uncovering facts; he has no emotional identification with the past. Consequently, he makes wrong assumptions and sweeping generalisations, and when he does stumble across significant information, such as the fact that the parish had a minister who was outed for twenty five years and then reinstated, he dismisses it as 'the only out-of-the-ordinary thing' that had ever happened (*WY*,259).

His study of history leads to further investigations into archaeology, anthropology, folklore and comparative religion, and results in his loss of faith, especially concerning miracles. This would seem to contradict the implicit approval of the preservation of links with the past that has balanced the novel's acceptance of change. Moreover, although the manse still stands, its influence would seem to be diminished, for now it no longer troubles its inhabitants; perhaps its increased

accommodation has made it more accommodating; perhaps the memories locked in the oldest part are now so remote from its current inhabitants that their resonances are too weak to make contact; perhaps the explanation lies in the fact that humankind has become so accustomed to adapting to change that there is no longer a psychological tension between the present and the remote past of which the manse or the stones speak. As in the quotation from Benjamin's *Illuminations* (1970), given at the beginning of this chapter, the past would seem to have lost its influence on the present.

Two of Mr Lindsay's children, Christine and Keith, do immediately appreciate the manse, but to them its aura now extends to the kirk and the graveyard. They sense a spiritual quality in the atmosphere, although not necessarily spiritual in a strictly Christian sense. Christine is aware of presences about the graveyard 'as though here it was perpetually Hallowe'en' (WY,232). Keith senses that there is 'something insistent about [the church's] very position, that the soil it stood on had the power to draw' (WY,227). Yet even they fail to interact with the manse, and the heritage it represents, with the same intensity as their predecessors did. The connection between past and present would appear to have been weakened, for although, at a fairly superficial level, both argue for the preservation of tradition (WY,283), they are heavily involved in present concerns. Keith is so influenced by H.G.Wells's modern free-thinking philosophy that he, like his father before him with Renan's influence, almost loses his belief in God. Attempting to help his son out of his difficulty the older man articulates the desirability of separating past and present. He criticises the practice of concentrating on the past and of studying materialist arguments about historical causation, arguing instead for a focus on the present: "I think, when you go feeling amongst the roots of things so much, you are

inclined to forget the flower -- what after all the root is there for. You stop short, and step backward, not forward” (WY,279). Since both father and son appear to find resolution of their crises of faith as a result of this realisation, the novel would now seem to be promoting a progressive ideological perspective that warns against allowing the past to exert too strong an influence. But such progressive optimism is undermined by several factors. Firstly, the return to orthodoxy in the acceptance of religious doctrine suggests the endorsement of a conservative perspective. In addition, his conclusion must be qualified by the fact that Mr Lindsay’s understanding of the past is partial and confused. Moreover, his appreciation of what really constitutes the present is similarly flawed, because Drumban has escaped the *real* historical changes that have now transformed Scotland.

As a reflection of the complexity of historical process, conservative and progressive tendencies co-exist; however, the ideological implications of the text are further complicated by the epilogue with which the novel actually ends. This places Drumban, and the reader, amid the upheaval and uncertainty of the first days of the Second World War. The complexity is furthered by the arrival of evacuated Glasgow children, Maggie Bowman and her young brother Jamie. Although the name, Bowman, registers only a faint echo in Keith Lindsay’s mind, the reader recalls the original family with which the novel began; the possibility that they might be related becomes more concrete when, echoing previous Bowman practice, Maggie is called by the more familiar ‘Muggie’. Their arrival in Drumban can be interpreted as analogous to the effect that Cairns Craig attributes to the effect of World War 1 on Scotland as a whole, where ‘history is reintroduced into the historyless Scottish environment’.<sup>13</sup> Total war forces Drumban to re-enter history; it

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<sup>13</sup>‘The Body in the Kitbag’, in *Out of History*, p. 48.

also reintroduces those who have hitherto been denied a place in Scottish historical narrative -- the urban working classes. Furthermore, the arrival of the Bowman gene pool brings the possibility that the children will be able to reconnect, via their inherited cultural memories, with Drumban's forgotten past. History would now seem to have come full circle; but in the light of the relevance previously attached to circles, and what they leave out, it is left uncertain what this circle will mean.

Different possibilities and interpretations present themselves. Identification with the emphasis on continuity with the past, embodied in the preservation of the manse, that has formed such an important strand of the novel, would lead the reader to hope that the necessary connections will be made, and, reunited with their cultural roots, the children, and consequently Drumban, itself, and Scotland as a whole, would be better equipped to understand the present and build the future. Unlike Benjamin's image, the past would again become linked to the present. The novel's conservative tendency, embodied in the manse, would receive final endorsement, and regeneration would be facilitated. Such a position would accord with the spirit of Naomi Mitchison's post-war novel, *The Bull Calves* (1947) which advocates reconciliation of past divisions within Scotland as the path to the future. But it could be argued that Morrison appears less sanguine about this than Mitchison, for within the boundaries of *The Winnowing Years* reconciliation between past and present is not achieved by the protagonists. The Bowman children are ignorant of any ancestral links with the parish, and their foray into the graveyard shows that they misinterpret the signs of Drumban's past. The only past they know is the poverty and deprivation of the slums of industrial towns like Glasgow. In this they are typical of the people who had, until the 1930s, usually been left out of

Scottish history and fiction. Still to face the chaos of war, their future, and Drumban's, are both left uncertain.

However, reading beyond the ending, regenerative possibility is not completely denied, for as yet the children have had access to neither the manse nor the standing stones. The possibility that they can pick up their resonances of the past has still to be explored. Moreover, the biblical echoes, suggested by the imagery of sheep and shepherd, hold a tentative promise for the future in the narrator's comment: 'The girl did not even glance at him but she felt enfolded by that look, like a sheep that knows it need not crop beyond its own pasturage' (*WY*,281). And there is a faint hope expressed in the fact that Jamie responds to something in the crude drawing of the angel's head on the ancient tombstone that 'spoke to him in his own language and he knew what it meant' (*WY*,286). But since the novel ends amid the uncertainty of war, and 'the mess it leaves behind to clear up' (*WY*,283), such an outcome must remain a possibility rather than a probability.

Just as the novel's conservative impulse is complicated by the uncertainty of its ending, so the progressive thrust, to which it has previously given rational assent, is also questioned. The very notion of progress, and the amelioration suggested by the term 'winnowing' are undermined by the lifestyle to which the Bowman children have become accustomed, especially since this would possibly have been representative of the experience of many Scottish slum-dwellers. Social degeneration is represented by their fear of getting into a bed made up with sheets because, in their experience, sheets have always been reserved for the dead (*WY*,282). Three centuries earlier their ancestors enjoyed more 'civilised' living conditions than those to which the children have become accustomed. Moreover, in the children's apparent unfamiliarity with religion, their uncouth, even blasphemous

speech and aggressive manners, the novel would seem to be suggesting that historical change has resulted in moral corruption. But even this is countered, to a certain extent, in the novel's portrayal of the independent spirit and vivacity of Maggie Bowman, a vivacity that is reminiscent of her ancestors and quite different from the present staid propriety of Drumban. The ambiguity created by such contradictory perspectives reflects the struggle between change and stasis delineated by the novel. Such ambiguity is somewhat resolved, however, by the enigmatic statement with which the epilogue ends: 'He never dug a grave in this, the old cemetery, but he noted to himself that the grass grew greener here than anywhere else in Drumban' (*WY*,286). This recalls the legend above the door of the original manse and reiterates the paradoxical notion that permanence can be achieved through decay; the use of the organic metaphor implying a conservative ideological perspective on historical process.

Although reconciliation between past and present is not achieved by the protagonists, the arrival of the Bowman children makes the reader realise the extent to which he or she has become implicated in recording the historical processes to which Drumban has been subjected. Already aware of privileged access to the past that has been reactivated by echoes in the form of names and references to earlier happenings, the reader possesses the cultural memory that the children appear to lack. It is the reader who recognises the significance of the name, Kuld, while it is meaningless to them (*WY*,286). The reader also feels indignant that Nicholas Pollock's name is wrongly interpreted as belonging to a man, thereby devaluing her struggle against patriarchal conventionality (*WY*,285). The reader is encouraged to bring knowledge of Drumban's past to correct the mistakes, and fill the gaps that have occurred as a result of the dislocations and discontinuities of history. Since

Drumban is presented as a microcosm of society, it becomes feasible that such re-visioning will encourage the adoption of a similar approach to Scotland's history as a whole. Such a position would mean that the ideological implications of *The Winnowing Years* are more in keeping with the post-war desire for regenerative reconciliation between past and present that inspired Mitchison's *The Bull Calves* than the progressive implications of the title of Morrison's novel and its ambiguous ending might suggest. In *The Winnowing Years* Morrison has developed her interest in providing a more inclusive version of Scottish historical narrative by engaging the complicity of the reader in recognising the part played by the past in the dynamics of historical process. It is the reader who has access to Drumban's (and Scotland's) previously unwritten history; and it is the reader in whom the emotional links with the ancient past have been re-established.

The handling of history as process in *The Winnowing Years* resists simplistic reduction to a single uncomplicated ideological perspective. Although it evinces a backwards-looking tendency, the fact that the novel envisions a way forward which includes Scotland's pre-Reformation past must question the application of the term 'conservative', as that term is conventionally understood in relation to notions of Scotland's Presbyterian, Protestant identity. In its early Books *The Winnowing Years* would seem to be arguing that it is the circumscription of Scottish life by the constraints imposed by Calvinism, even in its social manifestations, that has been instrumental in causing a cultural rift and a distortion of history. It appears to call for an end to the proscription of Scotland's Catholic and pre-Christian heritage so that a more inclusive national identity, one that embraces cultural diversity, can be forged. Furthermore, the text's progressive perspective with respect to the position of women and its rational acceptance of change also complicate the ideological

implications that can be drawn from it. Accordingly, if the term 'conservative' is to be applied to Morrison's text, it must refer to something akin to the metamorphosed conservatism identified by Alison Light. Like that identified by Light, it must be seen as 'a different sort of conservatism from that which had gone before' (*Forever England*, p.11). In Morrison's case it would seem a to be conservatism accepting of necessary change and in revolt against the detrimental effects of a skewed and selective approach to the past. It is significant that Morrison should make religion figure so prominently in the re-visioning of history from which a more inclusive sense of 'Scottishness' could be forged. Therefore, to examine further the contribution made by her fiction to a more comprehensive representation of Scottish experience, her treatment of religion and national identity will be explored in greater detail in the following two chapters.

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## CHAPTER 3

‘SOMETHING DARK AND HARD, LIKE A KERNEL’:

RELIGION AS A SHAPING FORCE IN MORRISON’S FICTION

- 3.1 Contextual Comments
- 3.2 Calvinism: A Qualified Rejection
- 3.3 A Wider Vision?
- 3.4 The Vision Narrows: The Later Novels

## CHAPTER 3

‘SOMETHING DARK AND HARD, LIKE A KERNEL’:<sup>1</sup>

## RELIGION AS A SHAPING FORCE IN MORRISON’S FICTION

## 3.1 CONTEXTUAL COMMENTS

[Christianity:] Great, improving, softening, compassionate it may be but it has lent itself with amazing facility to cruel distortion and it is the only religion which, with its impossible standards, has brought an infinity of anguish to innumerable souls -- on this earth.

Joseph Conrad<sup>2</sup>

Although the previous discussion was concerned with Morrison’s (re)interpretation of history, religion plays a fundamental role in each of the texts cited. In *Breakers* it provides the setting and contributes to the ideological framework within which the action takes place. In *Solitaire*, the isolation of Mary Queen of Scots is largely brought about by her untenable position as a Catholic monarch in a Protestant country caught up in the process of European religious and political realignment. In *The Winnowing Years*, ecclesiastical history is presented as a substitute for the unique socio-political history that Scotland was denied by the Unions of 1603 and 1707. Indeed, whether present in its organised, denominational forms, its theological ramifications, its social consequences, or its more individual or spiritual manifestations, religion figures prominently in each of her novels. This

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from Virginia Woolf, ‘I am Christina Rossetti’ (1930), collected in *The Second Common Reader*, annotated edn, ed. by Andrew McNeillie (1932; San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1986), p. 239.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters from Conrad*, ed. by Edward Garnett (London, 1927), p. 265, quoted in David Craig, *Scottish Literature and the Scottish People 1680-1830*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961), p.197.

chapter examines Morrison's handling of religion. It argues that her earliest novels are severely critical of many aspects of Scottish Calvinism, but that running counter to this criticism there are indications of a fundamental complicity with the ideology from which the perceived 'abuses' are derived. Morrison's subsequent novels are shown to explore religion at a more personal level, and here, too, evidence is found of a tension between alternative interpretations of the relationship between God and (wo)man, and a tendency to remain bound by a single orthodox perspective. The following discussion also indicates a recurring willingness in Morrison's fiction to probe beyond the boundaries imposed by Christianity and consider the ancient pagan religion of Scotland's earlier inhabitants. In addition, her novels are shown to evince a pessimistic undercurrent of fatalistic determinism that questions the validity of the essentially optimistic Christian ideology with which they are principally concerned. This is particularly true of Morrison's early fiction which engages with religion in a manner that defies reduction to complete identification with any specific ideological perspective. In her later novels, however, orthodoxy seems to be favoured, rendering these texts more monologic than her earlier work.

Such a broad spectrum of interests can be explained by considering what the concept of religion meant to Morrison. The previous discussion has suggested that she regarded Scotland's religious history as being at least as important as political history in explaining the present and shaping the future. Despite the emphasis on Presbyterianism in her fiction, Morrison would seem to have been sympathetic towards a wider, non-denominational concept of religion. Indeed, in her history of the Presbyterian Church, *They Need No Candle: The Men Who Built the Scottish Kirk*, published relatively late in her career in 1957, she suggests that the concept of religion should not be reduced to adherence to the principles contained in the

Westminster Confession, or subsequent constitutions adopted by the Church of Scotland. In the prologue to *They Need No Candle* she emphasises that the word 'religion' is derived from the Latin *ligare*, to bind, and gives the dictionary definition: 'the recognition of supernatural powers and the duty upon man to yield obedience to these'.<sup>3</sup>

Her use of this definition suggests several things. Firstly, it would appear that in Morrison's mind-set religious observance is not optional, but is a 'duty'. It is not surprising, therefore, that her personal commitment to fulfilling this duty can be seen to extend beyond conventional denominational affiliation, to inform her choice of subject matter, and influence the texture of her fiction. Secondly, there is the emphasis on obedience; but there is no allusion to the mechanism by which commands are transmitted, or the form of obedience demanded. This admits the possibility of different mechanisms of communication, even of different interpretations, leading to a recognition of denominational differences. Thirdly, the use of the collective 'man' could imply that the duty of obedience falls on all (wo)men; but it could also be seen to stress the individual nature of religion, with each soul responsible for its own relationship with God. This ambiguity is also inherent in the Latin root; individually, each (wo)man is bound by duty to the deity, but this common duty also binds them together. Perhaps the most significant ambiguity contained in the definition is the use of the term 'supernatural powers'. The vagueness of this term allows, and even encourages, multiple interpretations. It is this openness to possibilities other than her own Presbyterian Protestantism<sup>4</sup> that

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<sup>3</sup> (London: Epworth Press, 1957), p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> I am informed by Dr Elizabeth Michie, Morrison's literary executrix, of the author's Church of Scotland membership. For anecdotal evidence of her membership of Carmunnock Church in the 1930s and 1940s; see Jack Webster, *The Herald*, 19 April 1994, p.14.

makes Morrison's engagement with religious themes interesting, especially as that openness is often seen to be held in tension with an undertow of fatalistic determinism that could be attributed to internalisation of Calvinist ideology.

It could be argued that, in an increasingly secular world, a preoccupation with religion would predispose an author to adopt ideological perspectives that would favour different aesthetic criteria from those appealing to a more secular bent. If this were the case, the intrusion of religion could alienate the reader by introducing a barrier between the fictional world and his or her own comprehension of reality. Just such a point is made by Douglas Gifford in his essay 'Scottish Fiction Since 1945', where he opines: 'If [Morrison] has a weakness, it is that her overt Christianity, like Mackay Brown's, becomes intrusive and at odds with the real aesthetic shape of her work.' Although he does not expand his critique of Morrison, he does earlier criticise what he sees as George Mackay Brown's tendency to produce fiction that is '*too* fixed in a *prescriptive* vision'. Gifford attributes this failing to Mackay Brown's Orcadian Catholicism, which, he believes, 'compels him to a predictable denouement [ . . . and] an artless obviousness and repetitiveness of situation and image'.<sup>5</sup> As I shall demonstrate, such a charge *can* be levelled at Morrison's later novels, especially *The Following Wind* (1954). These novels belong to the period about which Gifford was writing, and, as will be suggested later in this chapter, this is a valid criticism as far as they are concerned.

However, I believe that Morrison's earlier fiction evinces a more interesting engagement with religion. I shall show that it not only adopts an overtly critical approach to the religious ideology implicit in her later novels, but that it avoids prescriptiveness by maintaining an openness to multiple possibilities. This

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<sup>5</sup> See *Scottish Writing and Writers*, ed. by Norman Wilson, pp. 17, 15.

willingness to consider other interpretations of the 'duty' imposed by religion gradually increases in intensity until it reaches its peak in *The Hidden Fairing* (1951), after which it is replaced with a greater commitment to Presbyterian orthodoxy. Furthermore, I also detect in her earlier novels an underlying fatalistic determinism that could be the result of identification, whether conscious or unconscious, with the subject positions available in the Calvinist discourses against which the main thrust of her narrative is directed. Therefore although religion is a major focus in these earlier novels, I view it not as a limiting factor with regard to aesthetic shape, but as a contested core around which are constructed dialogic narratives which encourage the reader to consider their multiple interpretations.

Morrison's preoccupation with religion can be seen as the continuation of a tradition within Scottish literature. The nature and extent of the engagement has changed, but religion, in some form, recurs in Scottish novels over the past two centuries. Essentially concerned with the period before 1830, David Craig observes that 'Scottish novelists seem to have been genuinely preoccupied with their religious past and how their country's religious traditions still affected the people'.<sup>6</sup> F. R. Hart notes in the tradition of the Scottish novel a willingness to grapple with the paradoxical complexities inherent in religion. He reads there examples of Calvinism's hold on the creative imagination, both as a 'suppression of life, a betrayer of culture', and as a 'force of ancestral dignity and independence'. He notes in the twentieth century its continued presence '[haunting] the Scottish sense of the past' and underlying the 'ambivalent pastoral of Jenkins, Blake, and Brown'.<sup>7</sup> Isobel Murray and Bob Tait have observed that the preoccupation with religion is still an

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<sup>6</sup> *Scottish Literature and the Scottish People*, p.166.

<sup>7</sup> *The Scottish Novel: From Smollett to Spark* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 400, 401.

important element in recent Scottish fiction, stating that in the fiction examined in *Ten Modern Scottish Novels* ‘even more attention [was paid] to Calvinism and its inheritance than [they] had expected’. They also recognise ‘explicit or implicit condemnation of the bitter religious divide between Catholic and Protestant in [west central] Scotland’ and ‘a wider concern’ with what could be described as ‘quasi-religious or spiritual’.<sup>8</sup> All such aspects of religion appear in Morrison’s fiction.

The tenacity of Calvinism’s hold on the popular imagination can be adduced from the fact that despite its many organisational disputes and schisms, it remained ‘intellectually monolithic’ until the latter part of the nineteenth century, and was the religious ideology with which most Scots identified.<sup>9</sup> Even when its doctrine of predestination was attacked by ‘heretical’ propositions of universal atonement, Calvinism’s hold over Scottish Presbyterianism was maintained until its anchor point, the literal truth of the Bible, was undermined by scientific and historical discoveries, and eventually destroyed by Higher Criticism (Smout, p.193). While still a viable theology, Calvinism, or rather its perversion Antinomianism, informed Hogg’s *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), and fanaticism and division within the ranks of Calvinism’s adherents became the themes of novels such as Scott’s *Old Mortality* (1816) and Galt’s *Ringan Gilhaize* (1823). Once Calvinism’s stranglehold on the Presbyterian mind-set began to be undermined by the proposition of universal salvation, and its concomitant questioning of the existence of Hell, Margaret Oliphant revisited the Catholic concept of a purgatorial state in her short stories, and explored alternative religious

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<sup>8</sup> (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1984), pp. 5, 6.

<sup>9</sup> See T.C. Smout, *A Century of the Scottish People 1830-1950* (1986; repr. London: Fontana, 1987), p.192.

affiliations in *The Perpetual Curate* (1864).<sup>10</sup> The ramifications of defection to such alternative religions were explored later in Morrison's fiction, once religious diversity had become more common in Scotland.

Change in focus from a vengeful to a loving God, and the renewed evangelical emphasis on Christ and the New Testament inspired the fiction of George MacDonald, and in examples like *Robert Falconer* (1868) and *Sir Gibbie* (1879) we see what the author believed was humanity's Christ-like principle in operation.<sup>11</sup> F.R. Hart sees in Stevenson's novels 'devil-ridden Calvinism [. . .] portrayed as a national idolatry, [while] its other side is an atavistic, sometimes demonic vitalism'.<sup>12</sup> Jane Findlater's novel *The Green Graves of Balgowrie* (1896) proposes the existence of an innate sense of religion which survives despite attempts to stifle its development; the later *Crossriggs* (1908), co-written with her sister Mary, emphasises the sacrifice of personal fulfilment demanded by the Presbyterian sense of duty. George Douglas Brown's turn-of-the-century novel *The House With the Green Shutters* (1901) can be seen as an exaggerated corrective to the sentimental religiosity of Kailyard fiction and the Free Church values promulgated, in particular, by Ian Maclaren who used this medium to extend his ministry and 'preach' his doctrines of liberal theology.<sup>13</sup>

Even after rejection of its central tenet of election, Calvinism's residual social and moral influences persisted. In this form -- what could be called a

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<sup>10</sup>See Margaret K. Gray's introduction to *Margaret Oliphant: Selected Short Stories of the Supernatural* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985), p. x.

<sup>11</sup>See David S. Robb, *George MacDonald* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987), pp. 61-68.

<sup>12</sup>*The Scottish Novel*, p. 401.

<sup>13</sup>See Thomas D. Knowles, *Ideology, Art and Commerce: Aspects of Literary Sociology in the Late Victorian Scottish Kailyard* (Goteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1983). p.168.

'secularised Calvinism' -- it remained a significant part of Scottish experience. Some commentators have viewed its effects negatively. Allan MacLaren, a Scottish Marxist historian, has charged the Calvinist ethos with sanctioning the class differentiation necessary for the growth of capitalism.<sup>14</sup> Others have viewed its secular effects more positively, attributing entrepreneurial confidence, ambition, thrift, and the valorisation of the work ethic to the application of Calvinist theology to secular, particularly economic, affairs. George Elder Davie has seen in Scottish Universities evidence of Scotland's Calvinist inheritance in the formulation of what he termed the nation's 'democratic intellect'.<sup>15</sup> Calvinism has also been associated with the creation of a sense of 'Scottishness'. Although national identity will be examined in the following chapter, it is interesting to note here a sociological argument which suggests that it is this particular dimension of Calvinism's secular influence that has prolonged its effect on the Scottish imagination. David McCrone states:

Presbyterianism was clearly a more democratic form of church government than Catholicism or Episcopalianism, and the doctrine of predestination, the essence of Calvinism, helped confirm the equality of this elect. Its association with national identity helped it retain its hold for longer than elsewhere.<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, despite its theological demise, in its secularised form Calvinism continued to haunt the creative imagination, and received fictional treatment in works such as John Buchan's *Witch Wood* (1927), Grassie Gibbon's, *A Scots Quair*

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<sup>14</sup>Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland Since 1707* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p.178.

<sup>15</sup>*The Democratic Intellect: Scotland and her Universities in the Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1961).

<sup>16</sup>*Understanding Scotland: The Sociology of a Stateless Nation* (London, 1992), pp. 36,99; quoted in Callum G. Brown, p.183.

trilogy (1933-35), Fionn Mac Colla's *And The Cock Crew* (1945), and James Barke's *The Land of the Leal* (1939). What were perceived as the detrimental effects of Calvinist ideology on women received extended consideration in Catherine Carswell's *Open the Door!* (1920) and *The Camomile* (1922), and in Willa Muir's *Imagined Corners* (1931) and *Mrs Ritchie* (1933). In 1961, one year before the American publication of Morrison's last novel, *Thea*, Calvinism functioned as a central theme of Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, and in 1991 it reappeared in Elspeth Barker's *O Caledonia!*. The effects of successive generations of subjection to Calvinist ideological interpellation would seem to have left a mark on Scottish imaginations, for while a distinctly anti-Calvinist perspective is adopted in many Scottish novels, there can sometimes be detected traces of internalisation of the original ideology, as F. R. Hart observes: 'The severest anti-Calvinist seems unable to escape a sense of its power, or for that matter to shake off its conviction of man's pettiness, idolatry, delusion and distance from old Eden' (*The Scottish Novel*, p.400). It is this paradoxical relationship that informs much of Morrison's fiction.

From a historical perspective it is significant that Morrison's early novels were written during a period of insecurity within Presbyterianism. 1929, the year before the publication of *Breakers*, saw the reunion of the Established Kirk with the United Free Church to form the National Church of Scotland. Although sometimes rationalised as an attempt to concentrate resources dissipated by previous secessional activity, Graham Walker has argued that reunion was undertaken in an attempt to strengthen Presbyterianism whose hegemony was understood to be threatened by the cumulative effect of several factors. These included the perceived threat posed by the influx of Irish Catholic immigrants, the erosion of Presbyterian control over schools following the 1871 Education Act, and the decline in Protestant

social influence presaged by the abolition of Parish Councils in the 1929 local government reforms.<sup>17</sup> Insecurity was also fostered by the increasing secularisation of Scottish society. Such secularisation is often explained as part of the longer-term demographic and sociological effects of urbanisation and industrialisation; however Callum G. Brown considers that the decline in the evangelical zeal of the middle classes also made a significant contribution (*Religion and Society in Scotland Since 1707*, p.125). The Kirk's unpopularity resulted, too, from the enthusiastic support it had given to the war effort. In the aftermath of the carnage of the trenches, many of those who were maimed or had suffered loss indicted the Church with complicity, and by the 1930s such resentment was being articulated in novels such as Grassie Gibbon's *Sunset Song* (1933) and James Barke's *Land of the Leal* (1939).

Although by 1929 the Presbyterian churches were organisationally and doctrinally compatible, their union still encountered difficulties. Previous generations' denominational rivalry meant that even small communities could have had two or more church buildings, and, more importantly, two or more congregations. The realignment of loyalties that the reunion demanded of congregations might have proved problematic, and could have led to a rekindling, at parish level, of the very denominational differences which those at the highest levels of the churches' organisations had considered obsolete. Indeed, J. H. S. Burleigh has suggested: 'It is one thing to unite denominations, and quite another to unite congregations which are proud of their traditions and tenacious of their rights. And Presbyterianism has always fostered strong congregational life'.<sup>18</sup> It is against this

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<sup>17</sup>'Varieties of Protestant Scottish Identity', in *Scotland in the 20th Century*, ed. by T. M. Devine and R. J. Finlay (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), pp. 250-268.

<sup>18</sup>*A Church History of Scotland* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 410.

historical background that Morrison's early novels were written, and I believe that it is possible to read them as a troubled response to these conditions. Moreover, given that a 'Protestant reassertion' was being undertaken (Brown, p.145), and ecclesiastical resources were being directed towards evangelism, Morrison's early fiction can be interpreted as a warning against returning to the excesses of Scotland's Calvinist inheritance. Her novels point up the failings of organised religion, principally through attacks on its clergy, and criticise the social effects of its ethos, especially with respect to the position of women. Yet, complicating this critical perspective there is an underlying respect for the Bible, the source of Presbyterian authority, and in the darker aspects of the novels, such as their fatalistic plots and threatening imagery, there is the recurrent imprint of the Calvinism against which the narratives are working.

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## 3.2 CALVINISM: A QUALIFIED REJECTION

The Word made flesh is here made word again,  
 A word made word in flourish and arrogant crook.  
 See there King Calvin with his iron pen,  
 And God three angry letters in a book,  
 And there the logical hook  
 On which the Mystery is impaled and bent  
 Into an ideological instrument.

Edwin Muir<sup>19</sup>

In several novels Morrison focuses attention on the very heart of Scottish religion by situating the action, wholly or in part, within the manse. If the purpose of her fiction were to endorse 'conventional' Presbyterian ideology, then her portrayal of life lived at the centre of the church would probably present the reader with a microcosm of the Reformers' ideal of the Godly commonwealth.<sup>20</sup> But this is not what Morrison presents. Instead, she portrays abuses of authority, tenacity to outmoded, narrow doctrines, hostility to other theological viewpoints, and a misogynistic attitude that is still harmful to women centuries after the introduction of Knoxian Calvinism.

In Morrison's earliest novels, and in the first sections of *The Winning Years*, the Presbyterian Church is accused of repressive harshness. The Kirk is often presented as an uncaring organisation, served by an inferior clergy, alienated from the people whose lives it orders and whose vision it restricts by its tenacity to the idea of an angry and vengeful God. Morrison's attack is multi-pronged. The

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<sup>19</sup>'The Incarnate One', from *One Foot in Eden* (1956); in Edwin Muir: *Collected Poems*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), p. 228.

<sup>20</sup>See Smout (1987), p. 67.

ministers, as figureheads of the church, and examples of how Christianity should be perceived in practice, are the butt of sustained criticism. As an organisation at the heart of the community, the Presbyterian Church *in* Scotland is criticised in its material forms -- the church, the manse and the parish.<sup>21</sup> Detailed theological disputations are often avoided in those novels that focus on life in the manse, but the Calvinist influence in Presbyterian ideology is criticised by examining its effects on character formation and social mores. Morrison's criticism is not restricted to the more austere elements of Protestantism. All forms of Presbyterianism would seem to come under censure; yet, as I shall demonstrate, such subversion is itself undermined by a degree of complicity with Calvinist ideology.

In *Breakers*, the minister, William Gillespie, whose surname contains echoes of J. McDougall Hay's eponymous anti-hero, is portrayed as self-opinionated and intolerant of others: 'It seemed such a pity, [. . .] that he differed so with all his assistants' (B,11). His unsuitability for his calling is questioned when it is stated that he found 'the large, friendly congregation [. . .] so great a strain' (B,11), for the inclusion of the word 'friendly' locates the problem with the minister, and not with the people. His sense of his own intellectual superiority is emphasised in his tendency to undervalue the work of others, as illustrated in his summary dismissal of Wright's dating of the church: "'You can never depend on Wright -- he merely sweepingly asserts and never substantiates'" (B,14). Here, too, the punning of the historian's name serves to emphasise Gillespie's stubborn, disputatious nature; he is prepared to argue that (W)right is wrong. Furthermore, his impatience with his family over trifles suggests his sense of priorities is flawed, and that were they to

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<sup>21</sup>I use this term advisedly because I do not believe that Morrison's criticisms are necessarily restricted to the Established Church *of* Scotland, but apply also to various secessional organisations.

contravene his wishes, he would be impatient and unsympathetic towards his parishioners: ““That boy [. . .] is sleeping with his mouth open again. When *will* he learn to breathe through his nose?”” (B,14-15). However, perhaps the most damning indictment of Gillespie, and, consequently, of the church he serves, is that ‘he was not a spiritual man’ (B,22). In fact, the narrator emphasises the point by stating that ‘it was doubtful if he ever thought of God except as an elusive subject for his sermons’ (B,22). This seems to imply that if the Reformers’ ideal of a country dedicated to God had not been achieved, then the reason could be found in the absence of a proper relationship with God within the Kirk itself. As Muir’s poem, quoted above, suggests, the Kirk’s relationship with God has lost its spiritual dimension, and He has been reduced to ‘three angry letters in a book’.

Were Gillespie an isolated aberration in an otherwise wholesome clergy, Morrison’s criticisms would be less damning of organised Presbyterianism; but they are part of a sustained attack that recurs in other novels. Mr Gillespie is a prototype for the irascible Mr Lockhart of *The Gowk Storm* (1933), and their common characteristics are also shared by other ministers in Morrison’s novels until after the publication of *The Hidden Fairing* in 1951. What these ministers also have in common is that their behaviour, and by implication, the ideology to which they subscribe, is so austere that it encourages rebellion in others. Morrison stresses the centrality of this relationship by situating that rebellion within the manse itself. For example the daughters in both *Breakers* and *The Gowk Storm* are forced to practice deceit because of their fathers’ intransigent natures. In *Breakers* not only do the restrictions imposed upon her life cause Euphemia to seek excitement by indulging in premarital sex -- what her father and the church would condemn as fornication -- but all the female members of the household, principally the minister’s wife, collude

in constructing a web of deceit to conceal from the minister not only Euphemia's 'immorality' but also her pregnancy and the birth of her illegitimate son.

Other, more subtle points are also being made here. Firstly, the novel would seem to suggest that Presbyterian morality has been so distorted by an over-emphasis on the inherent sinfulness of (wo)man's carnal nature that every other fault fades into insignificance beside it. The narrative force of *Breakers* suggests that Euphemia's greater sin actually lies not in Callum's conception, but in disowning her son, and not facing the consequences of her actions. Clearly this is at odds with Calvinist-inspired morality, and the text seems to be arguing that the Calvinist ethical code has distorted people's conception of morality. The novel appears to be advocating a broadening of the concept of personal conscience to encompass adherence to a more socially-responsible moral code and a lessening of the fixation with carnality.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, it suggests that perhaps it is the very vehemence of the church's prohibition of sex that makes it seem more attractive; in short, perhaps it is the church's ideology, misguided as it is made to appear, that is actually working against its own objectives. Secondly, in causing Callum to be alienated because of the stigma attached to his illegitimacy, Presbyterian social mores actually deny Gillespie, and hence the organisation he represents, a male heir, and the tradition paves the way for its own decline.

The perceived failure of the Kirk to meet the needs of its people has already been mentioned in relation to its part in the Clearances (Chapter 1). *Breakers* seems to suggest that one reason for this failure could be that the interests of the clergy differ from those of their congregations, as a result of differences in social status.

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<sup>22</sup>This perspective is itself questioned by the ideological implications inherent in her subsequent novel, *The Strangers*, which will be considered later in this chapter.

Language is used to suggest this, and in the case of Mr Cameron, the minister of Inchbuigh in *Breakers*, his ‘clipped voice’ is emphasised as being ‘different from the others in timbre and accent’ (B,113). Although the original minister in *The Winnowing Years*, Adam Bowman, is more akin to his congregation in language and social outlook, the later incumbents, Hew Muir and Stephen Kuld, have a different linguistic register from their parishioners. Furthermore, while the situation is reversed in her later fiction, in Morrison’s early novels the Kirk does not command a central position *within* the community it serves. The repeated use of the isolated location of the Barnfingal manse, midway between the two congregations it serves,<sup>23</sup> and emphasis on the fact that ‘the minister’s deep pew stood in an *impartial* position’ (B,17, my italics), could be taken as further indications of the perceived distance between Kirk and community. Moreover, perhaps reflecting the actual situation of amalgamated parishes within the National Church of Scotland in the 1930s, *Breakers* suggests that rather than fostering Christian charity, parochial politics emphasise rivalry and ill-feeling between the villagers of Auchendee and Barnfingal: ‘Two elders were chosen from the Barnfingal side and two from the Auchendee, and the minister had to be careful to address each first in turn’ (B,15).

In Morrison’s novels the ministers’ families are portrayed as centres of subversion of the residual influence of Calvinism on Presbyterian ideology. In addition to their duplicity and sexual laxity these fictional families also express dissatisfaction with the more general strictures that religion imposes on their lives. The sisters in *Breakers* ‘loathe Sundays’ (B,24), and even the minister’s wife finds nothing to relieve the ‘tedium’ of her husband’s services (B,17). Organised religion,

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<sup>23</sup>In *Breakers*, *The Gowk Storm* and *The Hidden Fairing* the manse stands halfway between Barnfingal and Auchendee.

at least in Morrison's early novels, is cast in a harsh, uncompromising light. This is not to say that she is unsympathetic to religion *per se*. Indeed, it is in its repeated suggestion of the validity of religion's wider definition, and in its portrayal of a personal, almost intuitive, relationship with the supernatural, that her fiction more subtly, but just as effectively, rejects identification with institutionalised Presbyterianism. In this respect, perhaps her greatest subversive tactic is to make one of the inhabitants of the manse actively undermine the validity of Calvinist-inspired Presbyterianism either by refusing to adhere to Calvinism's rigid judgementalism, by questioning its doctrines, or by evincing an openness to those religions or philosophies against which Calvinist-inspired Presbyterianism was most opposed.

Morrison's handling of religion in her early novels is often more complex than a simple reliance on overt criticism of a particular aspect of Calvinist ideology. In *The Gowk Storm*,<sup>24</sup> for example, she offers a critique of what are perceived to be the constricting effects of Calvinist Presbyterianism, but she presents the story in the words of a 'victim' who, despite her complicity in rebellion, apparently remains unconscious of the extent of her own ideological interpellation. In this way Morrison emphasises the centrality of religion in Scottish culture and experience, and marks personal identity as a site of religious ideological struggle. This aspect of Morrison's engagement with identity that will be discussed more fully in Chapter 5, but for the moment it is important to note that Lisbet's characterisation suggests the extent to which Calvinism has shaped Scottish imaginative responses. Furthermore, while it is recognised that the use of a first person narrator denies the reader an

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<sup>24</sup>(1933; repr. Edinburgh: Canongate, 1988). All references are to this edition and will be given in the text as (*GS*, page number).

external framework against which to measure the distance between the author and the fictional character, this situation is further complicated in *The Gowk Storm* by repetition, within the narrative discourse, of elements that occur elsewhere in Morrison's fiction. These include biblical imagery, superstitions, and echoes of Hopkins's poetry, and they make the reader uncertain whether any specific perspective is restricted only to the fictional creation, Lisbet, or if it can also be attributed to the author's vision.

Lisbet's narrative discourse exhibits a polyvocalism that can be read as both subversion of, and complicity with, the Calvinist-inscribed Presbyterian ideology that the novel overtly criticises. Often the subversion is well-defined, as, for example, when Lisbet, the narrator, indicates her own sympathetic identification with proscribed religions, such as Catholicism, despite the presumed hegemony of Protestant Christianity. Frequently, too, she states her conviction in the continued existence of the world of ghosts and spirits in a manner that speaks of pre-Christian or Fairy belief, or she refers to a spirituality that is divorced from adherence to the doctrinal limitations of Heaven and Hell. In her visits to the deserted shielings she does not doubt the existence of the 'invisible things [that] rush past [her] on the wind' (*GS*,60), or that she heard 'fugitive whispers, bugles blown softly and muffled, [and] caught glimpses of white faces straining through the mist' (*GS*,61). Equally vivid are her perceptions of the spirits in the old graveyard (*GS*,58).

On other occasions Lisbet's narrative discourse is complicated by her apparent identification with the ideology against which she and her sisters are rebelling. For instance, her use of Old Testament imagery suggests that her imagination has been so shaped and conditioned by Presbyterianism's emphasis on

the Bible that it provides the ideological prism through which she views even the Scottish landscape:

The river, blue as the cold spring sky above, wound through the desolate glen between low red banks, which made me picture Jeremiah digging up his girdle on the shore of the Euphrates, of the kings who came to war against Joshua pitching by the waters of Merom, and of god-lit Elijah standing by Jordan. (*GS*,21)

Such a description could be explained by saying that the scenic beauty so moved Lisbet that it demanded the use of the most exalted language to which she had access. Viewed from another perspective, however, the choice of specific prophets enable it to be read as a covert endorsement by Lisbet and/or Morrison of the Calvinist vision of the Kirk's struggle to subject Scotland to its discipline. In recalling Jeremiah it brings prophesies of doom unless society abandons its sinful ways; in Elijah there is condemnation of idolatry; and in Joshua there is the prospect of victory in securing the 'Godly commonwealth'.

Lisbet's discourse is multi-layered, and together with such instances of apparent identification with a Presbyterianism focused almost entirely on the Old Testament there is also evidence of adherence to a more evangelical, and indeed non-denominational, form of Christianity.<sup>25</sup> This is suggested by Lisbet's recognition of the benefits of Catholic monasticism, against which Calvinism was resolutely opposed, when she contemplates the changes in the dominie's life effected by his entry into the monastery at Fort Halliam: 'Or, fortified by prayer, did he keep himself so tuned and strung that Christ could play?' (*GS*,94). Morrison's ecumenism will be explored later, but at present it is useful to note the ideological

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<sup>25</sup>By evangelical religion I refer to the belief in personal salvation through the death of Christ, derived from the Gospels of the New Testament.

implications inherent in the use of the verb ‘play’ in the above quotation. In this context it is reminiscent of Hopkins’s poem, ‘As kingfishers catch fire . . .’, and its presence in Morrison’s text introduces the possibility of sympathy with that poet’s identification of the Christ-principle in man.<sup>26</sup>

For Christ *plays* in ten thousand places,  
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his  
To the Father through the features of men’s faces.<sup>27</sup>

The dialogism of Lisbet’s narrative and, by implication, of Morrison’s vision, is also apparent when she speaks of how she interprets humanity’s place in the universe of space and time. Perhaps what most strikes the modern reader about Lisbet’s world-view, particularly when we remember that she is a minister’s daughter, is that it often seems devoid of the promise of salvation, or even the controlling presence of a benevolent Christian God. Often she appears to subscribe to a fatalistic determinism that views (wo)man’s fate as hopeless, and submits to this with a resignation that speaks of the futility of resistance, either by act of human will or by praying for Godly intervention. Indeed, complete religious scepticism can be read into her comment about Mrs Wands’s acceptance of theocratic determinism, “‘Whate’er happens to ye, it’s God’s will and happens for the best” (GS,40):

As I sat at the fire and watched the tiny pieces of ash dancing on the black kettle and the heated resin wetting the burning logs, I wondered if one had to live to be nearing eighty before one could believe that.  
(GS,40)

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<sup>26</sup>As will be discussed later, there is at least one other instance in Morrison’s work where the imagery used recalls Hopkins’s poetry.

<sup>27</sup>*The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 4th edn, ed. by W. H. Gardner and N. H. MacKenzie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 90.

Whilst it could also be argued that this comment merely attests to Lisbet's own lack of lived experience, I think that since it is made retrospectively, when she is an older woman, and no corrective comment is added, doubt about the existence of a beneficent God persists. The fact that Lisbet's doubt is articulated as she watches the fire further complicates the issue. If the fire is interpreted as an allusion to Nature's Heraclitean bonfire, this would emphasise not only a rejection of God and Christian optimism, but also Lisbet's mockery of the old woman's credulousness for subscribing to such a view.<sup>28</sup> If, on the other hand, the fire is read as an allusion to Hell, then Lisbet's pessimism could speak of identification with Calvinist discourse and its doctrine of an angry God and predestination of most souls to eternal damnation. Viewed in this light, Lisbet's narrative discourse speaks of what Barke later called 'the spiritual determinism of the Scottish Presbyterian peasant'.<sup>29</sup>

There is also a lack of overt Christian optimism in Lisbet's perception of the insignificance of humankind in relation to the perdurability of Nature and the endlessness of eternity:

A sadness filled me as I watched, an aching sadness, not for things lost in this life, but in some other world, I suddenly felt wearied; it was all so old; the rough grass which generations of bare feet had never permitted to grow rank, the ploughed field on either side, the one small stunted tree; and beyond, the tireless loch and lined mountains. The very rhyme they chanted was old as the groves of the Druids. Scattered on the grass, the jigging children gave me the

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<sup>28</sup>Heraclitus believed that 'this world order (*kosmos*), the same for all, was made by no god or man, but always was and is and will be an ever-living fire, being kindled in measures and quenched in measures'. From H. Diels and W. Kranz, eds, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 10th edn (Berlin, 1952), quoted in Terence Irwin, *A History of Western Philosophy, I: Classical Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 24.

<sup>29</sup>*Land of the Leal* (1939; repr. Edinburgh: Canongate, 1987), p. 553.

uneasy impression of mites gambolling at the foot of an unseeing eternity. (*GS*,69)

But here, too, Lisbet's words are open to different interpretations. The Heraclitean concept of perpetual flux, suggested by the 'things lost [. . .] in some other world', is held alongside the possibility that her sadness is caused by a Calvinist-inspired despair of achieving salvation; both readings are also held together in the imagery of 'mites gambolling at the foot of an unseeing eternity'. Somewhat similar sentiments are expressed in Lisbet's ruminations as the sisters walk along the shore at St Andrews. Once again the immensity of Nature makes her think of humanity's eventual extinction, and once again her thoughts do not extend to the possibility of a Christian afterlife:

When I saw the sweep of the sky joining the sea at the pale horizon, I thought of the light waning to wax, imprisoned in the globe of the world. And as my thoughts ebbed and flowed to the drow of the sea, I thought of the earth after millions of years when life has left it, like a shell worn with holes, filled only with windy vibrations: the faint echo of the sea, the whisper of spent rain, a weak sighing as of prayer. (*GS*,98)

Yet, evangelical religion is not completely excluded here as there are two subtle references to prayer; once in the imagery associated with sea-shells, 'tiny joined hands like angels' prayer books', and the final image encouraged by her thoughts. Therefore, while it is possible to interpret Lisbet's statements as conscious or unconscious articulations of a determinism that has its basis in the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, such a reading is complicated by its dialogic relationship with the atheistic philosophical interpretation suggested by the Heraclitean bonfire,

and by the overt criticism of Calvinist misogyny and narrowness of outlook that the narrative also offers.<sup>30</sup> More specifically, to understand Morrison's complex handling of religion, the Calvinist echoes in *The Gowk Storm* must also be read in conjunction with instances that suggest acceptance of a non-Calvinist conception of Christianity; one that focuses on New Testament Christology and acknowledges the beneficial effects of prayer. Lisbet's willingness to reject the concept of predestination is particularly obvious in her use of prayer. Despite knowing that her father would condemn her sister Emmy's action in running away to marry Stephen Wingate, Lisbet tells of how, as she searched for Emmy in the storm, she offered 'frantic prayers [. . .] for some miracle' and engaged in 'wild bargainings with God if only He would grant what [she] asked' (GS,169), and how she *still* prays for the doctor who came to their rescue. But such faith in prayer is undermined, and the reader is not encouraged to share Lisbet's conviction because the prayers are unanswered; Emmy dies of a fever induced by exhaustion and exposure. The role of the Christian God in human affairs is left unresolved.

Such uncertainty is emphasised, too, by the novel's final images. The Calvinistic influence that haunts Lisbet's discourse is displaced by identification with a non-specific spirituality that has pervaded the novel and flares up at the end to undermine the rigid Presbyterian morality that the novel's system of reward and punishment would seem to uphold.<sup>31</sup> According to Rachel Blau DuPlessis, a novel's resolution is the place where subtexts and repressed discourses can throw up one

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<sup>30</sup>Calvinist misogyny and narrowness of outlook will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

<sup>31</sup>A belief in the spirit world also informs many of Morrison's other novels. It is also of interest to note that her sister Peggy, the novelist March Cost, was a confirmed believer in Swedenborgian spiritualism and wrote two proselytising novels, *After the Festival* (1967), and *Two Guests for Swedenborg* (1971).

last flare of meaning, [. . .] where the author may side-step and displace attention from the materials that a work has made available' (*Writing Beyond the Ending*, p.3). The final triumphant expression of subversive belief in the 'presence' of Emmy's spirit during Lisbet's last walk (*GS*,177) undermines the validity of Calvinist theology. Nor does Calvinism's doctrine of election *completely* account for the final doubt concerning Christian salvation expressed in Lisbet's comment with which the novel ends: 'The last glimpse I had of it was of the raised, hummocked graveyard on the hill, with its grey gravestones all *blankly* facing east' (*GS*,178, my italics). For, as Margery Palmer McCulloch observes, this image 'subverts traditional Christian symbolism of resurrection'.<sup>32</sup> Yet despite the alternative interpretations that her words can sustain, and the criticism of the repressiveness of organised religion that the novel presents, Lisbet's narrative is redolent with Calvinistic resonances.

Morrison's complicated approach to religion is also found in her handling of paganism. As already suggested with the standing stones' role in *The Winnowing Years*, she appears to have appreciated something of paganism's residual fascination, insofar as its practices answered a basic need in humankind. But in a talk, she also stated that Christianity had replaced paganism and the superstitions associated with it (NLS, MS 27353, fol. 22). Yet her novels provide evidence of a reluctance to relinquish the old beliefs; an unwillingness, certainly, to subscribe to the outright denunciation demanded by Calvinist Presbyterianism. Indeed, when speaking of superstition, she is on record as saying that there 'remains within each one of us the shadow of other days' (NLS, MS 27353, fol.1). Accordingly,

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<sup>32</sup>'Poetic Narrative in Nancy Brysson Morrison's *The Gowk Storm*', in *Scottish Women's Fiction, 1920s to 1960s: Journeys into Being*, ed. by Carol Anderson and Aileen Christianson (East Linton: Tuckwell, 2000), pp.108-119 (p.118).

Morrison's references to paganism and its residual superstitious practices are often ambiguous. While they share something of the approaches of both Gunn and Buchan, they resist complete identification with the vicarious excitement encouraged by Gunn's sympathetic depiction of pre-Christian religion of the Grove in *Sun Circle* (1933); nor are they identical to David Sempill's 'wrath against witchcraft', experienced because of 'his own awe of the Wood and his disgust at such awe' in Buchan's *Witch Wood* (1927).<sup>33</sup>

Morrison's ambiguity is demonstrated in the characterisation of Bartilimo Pinkertoun in *The Winnowing Years*. Bartilimo has a 'superstitious soul' (*WY*,20), and it is on his farm that Beltane fires continue to be lit despite Kirk prohibition. Although one of the Bowman sisters recognises something unchristian about him, seeing him as 'something that had come in through the north door of the kirk' (*WY*,45),<sup>34</sup> and the reader recognises cruelty in his actions, the narrator emphasises his affinity with Nature, describing him with tree imagery: 'He was standing massive as a tree in which storms brood' (*WY*,46), and 'his features grew on [his face] like knurrs on a tree' (*WY*, 61). Suggestions of the diabolical are made in the description of Bartilimo standing at the smithy door, when he is seen through the eyes of the minister's timid, unworldly daughter: 'And sometimes [Bartilimo] stood there, neither inside nor outside, but leaning against the door jamb, while the red glow inside cast the deil's light over half his body' (*WY*,45). Morrison's ambivalence is evident even here. Outright condemnation, or complete identification with diabolism is withheld. Unlike Buchan's hostile description of the diabolist, Chasehope, acting like a dog (*Witch Wood*, pp.357-8), Morrison

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<sup>33</sup>(London: Nelson), p. 226. Subsequent reference to this edition given in text.

<sup>34</sup>'Giants and ill-luck strode from the black north', *The Gowk Storm*, p. 61.

consistently maintains the dual perspective until Bartilimo's last appearance: 'His complexion roughened and scaled until it looked like the fungi that grows over wet, old wood and is called Witches' Meat or Fairy Butter in country districts' (*WY*, 86). Even here, although the imagery is redolent of dehumanisation and the 'idolatry' of Nature worship, the last image, 'Fairy Butter', associated with white magic, balances the more sinister connotations of parasitic evil that are also contained in the description. In its ambivalence the description recognises that while pagan forms of worship may not conform to 'conventional' ideas of acceptable religious practice and belief, they provide one answer, among many, to the basic human need to relate to the inexplicable forces of Nature.

This refusal to be restricted to one view of what is meant by religion is extended in other novels to a reluctance to be bound exclusively to one denominational outlook. But as in the examples considered above, residual traces of subject identification within Calvinist discourse frequently attest to what I have called a qualified rejection of Calvinism.

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### 3.3 A WIDER VISION?

[Mary Seton] was sitting a little apart, pondering over the unbridgeable difference between the two religions. The Blessed Virgin Mary wept with one over the hardness of the road, but Master Knox's God pointed out pitilessly the way one should go. 'It has been hard,' he seemed to say, 'but it will be harder still.'

N. Brysson Morrison<sup>35</sup>

Morrison's fiction recognises the importance of naming. Therefore, it is interesting to observe that in all her novels only two names, Bartle (or Bartilimo) and Bernard (or Bernardo) are used for those characters whose religious beliefs deviate from the orthodox Presbyterianism of their time. The Catholic and/or New Testament associations of these names explain why they might have been chosen to distinguish their bearers from the generality of her characters, but it is unclear why Morrison restricted herself to this pairing. One explanation might be that while she was interested by the imaginative possibilities afforded by such characters and their religious beliefs, her own ideological conditioning made her reduce their potential disruptive power by confining them to a small group of two 'foreign' names. Whatever her reason, it is significant that Morrison's fiction is somewhat unusual in the degree of sympathetic exposure it gives to such views, especially at a time when Presbyterianism was attempting to reassert itself, and Catholicism was viewed as a major threat to Protestant hegemony.

The 'unorthodox' religions espoused by Morrison's 'deviant' characters range from pre-Christian beliefs and practices, through alternative versions of

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<sup>35</sup>*Solitaire* (1932), p.114.

Protestantism to Roman Catholicism. Her approach to Catholicism resembles her ambiguous treatment of Bartilimo Pinkertoun's pagan superstitious beliefs in *The Winnowing Years*. However, in *When The Wind Blows*<sup>36</sup> her handling of Quakerism and its spiritual foundation in a personal relationship with God, a following of the 'Inner Light', is more straightforward. Uncomplicated sympathetic identification with the 'deviant' character, Bartle Skene, suggests that no opposing tendency existed within the author; that she agreed with his fundamental premise that religion is a spiritual relationship with a loving God.

Portrayed as part of a family saga set in Glasgow from 1825 onwards, Bartle Skene's story is essentially a fictionalisation of the ministry of John McLeod Campbell. Just as Campbell was deposed for preaching the 'heretical' doctrine of universal salvation before it had gained acceptance within Protestant theology, so Bartle experiences the same fate. Yet, it must be noted that in dealing with this particular challenge to Calvinist ideology, Morrison was remaining within the orthodox Protestantism of her own time. As she notes in her ecclesiastical history: 'Through [M'Leod] theology advanced steadily towards a broader, more tolerant expansion. [. . .] Indeed thinking men believe that to him perhaps more than to any other single mind we owe a spiritual interpretation of the central Christian ideas.'<sup>37</sup>

In this novel Morrison's approach lacks the dialogism that makes her other treatments of religion interesting; for while Bartle is portrayed as a sympathetic character, the strength of whose convictions is clearly meant to be admired, the forces pitched against him are portrayed in an antagonistic manner. For example, the family members who oppose his marriage to Florah are her mentally unstable

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<sup>36</sup>(London: Collins, 1937); all references are to this edition and will appear in the text as (*WWB*, page number).

<sup>37</sup>*They Need No Candle*, pp. 51-52.

brother, Stavert, and her embittered spinster sister, Clementina, whose Calvinist leanings are early made clear. It comes as no surprise that Clementina should also be the one who cannot forgive Bartle for either his heretical theology or for the family scandal his deposition brings, especially when we compare her interpretation of the reading from the Book of Job to Bartle's response of epiphanic ecstasy: 'One must depend on God and God alone, even although He frightened one and crushed one with His weight, for God alone changeth not -- God who was so terrible out of His holy places' (*WWB*,87). The elders at Garnlusk, where Bartle is minister, are painted in an equally unflattering light. They are dour and there is the implication that they are somewhat slow of understanding, for were it not for a slight impediment in Bartle's speech we are told that they would not have been able to keep up with him (*WWB*,192). Furthermore, there is, I believe, encouragement to laugh at the elders as well as with them when, so indoctrinated by Calvinist doctrine, they misinterpret Bartle's inner light:

'It's juist as though he had a lamp inside him and for the life o' him he canna trim his wick.' [. . .]

'A lamp! [. . .] It's mair like a Hallowe'en fire.' (*WWB*,193)

Against this background of prejudice and ignorance Bartle is made to shine as something of an impossible saint, without a single human failing to make him more believable. The reader has no overtly controversial narrative comments to encourage her/him to question anything about Bartle; nor does there appear to be any unconscious subversion of the novel's religious message. I think such monologism is a weakness in an otherwise interesting novel about socio-economic change in early nineteenth-century Glasgow. But I suggest that Bartle is presented in such an uncomplicated manner because, at the time of writing, the specific Calvinist

doctrine of election by a God of wrathful might, against which Bartle rebelled, had been replaced by a more liberal Protestantism that recognised the Christ-like in humanity, and where God was accepted as a loving deity because of the humanity of Christ. Taking up the case of this particular Bartle did not conflict with Morrison's own subject position within Protestant ideology, for she was revisiting a battle with Presbyterian orthodoxy that had already been fought and won.

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This is not the case in either *The Strangers*, or *The Hidden Fairing*.<sup>38</sup> In each of these texts the protagonist is a Catholic; and, as with Bartilimo Pinkertoun's Nature worship in *The Winnowing Years*, the narratives exhibit a dialogism that speaks of both sympathy and antipathy towards the characters and their religion.

Ostensibly, the 'Strangers' of the title is the name given by local inhabitants to the two women from whom the main protagonist, Bernardo Monti, buys the inn on Moluag, a small island off the Scottish mainland (*TS*,94). It soon becomes evident, however, that, although 'every creature in this book is a stranger', the designation really refers to Bernardo and his sister Grata.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, unlike its casual use to describe the MacPhersons as in-comers, 'stranger' now becomes a more loaded term, denoting difference in nationality, culture, temperament and religion. Significantly, it is also the term used in J. M. Barrie's *Farewell Miss Julie Logan* for the ghosts of the Jacobites that are said to haunt the environs of Adam Yestreen's manse.<sup>40</sup> In this context, the term 'stranger' brings connotations of what

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<sup>38</sup>*The Strangers* (London: Collins, 1935); *The Hidden Fairing* (London: Hogarth Press, 1951). All references will be to these editions and will be given in the text as (*TS*, page number) and (*HF*, page number) respectively.

<sup>39</sup>March Cost, letter of 13 September 1934, NLS, MS 27372, fol. 47.

<sup>40</sup> Ed. by Alistair McCleery (1932; repr. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1989),

has been called the embodiment of ‘the less inhibited culture of Scotland’s past’ (McCleery, *Miss Julie Logan*, p. 93). By locating the action of *The Strangers* on an island whose name and atmosphere recall Celtic Christianity, and by making the main protagonist an Italian immigrant, Morrison is able to undertake an exploration of what she perceives as a Catholic mind-set without resorting to the conventional literary association with Jacobitism. In this way, too, the novel is given a more topical relevance that still allows distancing and containing of the possible threat to Calvinist-influenced sensibilities by identifying Catholicism with the ‘otherness’ inherent in the citation ‘strangers’.

The modern Scottish Presbyterian perspective in the novel is supplied by the Saundersons, an Edinburgh family, who meet the Montis while on holiday in England, and whose eldest daughter becomes Bernardo’s wife. It is interesting that while the mother and the younger siblings are painted in a reasonably favourable, if unremarkable, light, Willis and her brother are portrayed negatively. Willis, as her name suggests, is selfish and determined to have her own way; Alec, though a practical person, lacks spontaneity or sympathy with anything beyond the range of his limited, and often prejudiced, experience. It is in the different responses of the Scots and the Italians to the island and to events that happen there that Morrison locates and explores the moral ramifications of their separate religious traditions.

Morrison’s portrayal of Bernardo is ambivalent. Initially, he is aloof (*TS*, 10) and guilty of spiritual pride (*TS*, 12). From the beginning, the existence of an innate moral rectitude that verges on implacability is hinted at in his abhorrence of his father’s adulterous relationship, even after it is legitimised by marriage (*TS*, 12). However, Bernardo’s care of his sister, Grata, redeems him in the reader’s

estimation, as does her regard for him (*TS*,25). So, too, does the devotion of Ailie, the servant at the inn (*TS*,242). Moreover, by denying the reader direct access to the scene of the struggle between the irate Bernardo, and his wife's lover, Sir Torquil Kuld, and only allowing the action to be mediated through Ailie's fears (*TS*,251-254) and Bernardo's trauma-induced partial recollection (*TS*,278), the narrator obfuscates the issue and makes it more difficult to condemn Bernardo for Kuld's death. Bernardo is also marked out as emotionally different from the other male characters by his passionate nature, something Willis recognises:

He was violent with his thoughts: that was the difference between him and her brothers or cousins. Willis knew as kindred knows kin that the blood flowing through his veins was passionate, warm and strong, that behind his lazy lids, he was living. (*TS*,128-9)

The attitudes of the characters to the island are important, for Moluag represents a link with Scotland's pre-Reformation Catholicism. To Alec Saunderson, all such ties have been severed; Moluag is simply a place to enjoy outdoor leisure activities. To his sister, Willis, it is just an isolated island 'with nothing but sea and sound' (*TS*,59). Bernardo, on the other hand, senses its spiritual quality: 'Bernardo felt that on this island life was bound by an invisible charmed circle where no evil could enter. [ . . . ] What had once been ghostly and haunted was now beautified and spiritualised' (*TS*,89). Yet, the use of words like 'charmed' and 'haunted' introduce notions of ghosts, magic and superstition to cloud the impression that the island retains something of the sanctified atmosphere created by the prayers of St Moluag and his monks. It is as though the narrator wants to convey the impression of sanctity, yet is prevented from subscribing wholeheartedly to this

notion, and, unconsciously or otherwise, resorts to terms that have traditionally been used since the Reformation to denigrate Catholicism.

Just as the two groupings of characters differ in their response to Moluag, so their moral codes differ. This is demonstrated in how they apportion blame for Kuld's death. It is significant, I believe, that the rational, unemotional Alec Saunderson can find no justification for Bernardo's action, and that rather than blame Willis for her part in instigating the affair, he praises her for admitting to it in open court. Moreover, his real concern is that the scandal will harm his own medical practice. Grata, on the other hand, although she is now Alec's wife, blames Willis. She disapproves of the shamelessness of Willis's infidelity, saying that she has no conscience, and in their closing conversation Morrison juxtaposes Alec's Protestant rationality with Grata's more emotional, Catholic approach: "She has no conscience that will kill her trying to strangle [*sic*]. It makes you wonder what hell would be to a person such as she, who has no feeling through which you could hurt her" (*TS*, 257). What is notable is that the fixation with sexual morality, previously associated with Calvinism in Morrison's novels, has now been transferred to Catholic characters.

Unlike Willis, Bernardo is so troubled by his conscience that he feels he cannot even pray. His guilt is so great that he feels he must punish himself by blotting out everything else in an attempt 'to purify [himself] with suffering' (*TS*, 278). Only when he eventually realises that his own self-pity is keeping him from God, can he find inner peace. It is interesting to note that despite the fact that his crime is the more serious, the narrative allows him, rather than Willis, to find reconciliation, and that the terms used to describe Bernardo's spiritual struggle are

reminiscent of those found in Hopkins's sonnet, 'Carrion Comfort':<sup>41</sup> 'He felt for all these years he had been wrestling with a giant who, now he looked at him, was merely a shadow in his arms' (*TS*,281). Sympathy with Bernardo is encouraged to grow throughout the narrative, and overt criticism of his religious beliefs is avoided, although the existence of anti-Catholic prejudice is acknowledged (*TS*,161). Even if Morrison's treatment of Bernardo is not construed as being completely sympathetic to Catholic perspectives and beliefs, her willingness to explore a Catholic view, and her placing of religious speculation with Catholic characters, both good and bad, is an unusual perspective for a Scottish Presbyterian writer to adopt. So, too, are the echoes of the Jesuit poet, Hopkins, in the thoughts of Bernardo and his father (*TS*,268), especially when other members of Scottish society, represented by the hotel guest, Dr Livingstone, make dismissive statements about religion: "I have no patience with last minute religious fervour" (*TS*,246).

However, Morrison's text offers no monologic advocacy of present day or pre-Reformation Catholicism, for it also distances itself from the Catholic perspective. There are distinctly Calvinistic sympathies in the narrator's account of Bernard's final realisation that his emotional responses, equated in this novel with Catholicism, are impediments to the proper working of the conscience: 'It was his conscience, that incorruptible witness, which was the covenant between man and his God, and his emotions were like weeds checking growth' (*TS*,280). There are also resonances of the rigidity of Calvinism in Bernardo's recognition of the need for self-discipline to attain spirituality; and what is particularly interesting is that this is juxtaposed with an apparent refutation of the Calvinist doctrine of election; 'Yet spirituality was not an unseen halo presented to some and withheld from others; it

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<sup>41</sup>*Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, pp. 99-100.

was only attained by rigid self-discipline, self-rooting. When there was growth there was always pain' (*TS*,281). Furthermore, there are suggestions that Dr Livingstone's words, with their Calvinistic implication of the futility of trying to change by prayer what has already been decreed, are in keeping with the final image of the God whom Bernardo knows on his death bed. It is Calvin's God who sits in judgement:

For the first time he was conscious of the power of God, not a God Who could be supplicated with, Whose will one could despairingly superimpose with one's own, but a God forever terribly the same, Whose might would still prevail uncumbered in a crumbling world as in a shrinking soul. (*TS*,282-3)

Morrison's ambiguity is developed, too, in her use of the allegory of the sheep-dogs that is worked out alongside Bernardo's story. On the crossing to Moluag, Grata overhears two shepherds discussing how sheep should be herded. One likes his sheep-dogs to take 'a puckle o' wool' to make the sheep 'mair skeart o' him' (*TS*,77). The other disagrees, saying that this could lead to more sheep being lost; for a dog who bites is likely to go wild and kill for pleasure. It is possible to interpret this as a veiled discussion about Calvinist theology; the value of control by fear being weighed against the life-threatening dangers of an over-repressive regime. The negative image of a dog killing twenty lambs just for killing's sake would at first sight appear to argue against the stricter regime. But it later becomes obvious that many of the island's sheep need the rough handling because they are blind, their eyes having been pecked out soon after birth by black gulls. When one such sheep gets marooned in rising waters, it is only saved because the sheep-dog does not rely on circling and barking, but grabs it by the horns and pulls it to safety (*TS*,220). Without such violence, the animal would have perished. Now Calvinism's

repression seems to be advocated. Bernardo, himself, draws attention to the relevance of the allegory. When he witnesses the rescue and has the necessity of the rough handling explained to him, he states: ““No wonder we are strongholds divided against ourselves [ . . . ] where the beast is forever warring with the angel”” (TS,221). Moreover, what would seem to be held as man’s natural propensity for evil is emphasised by the remaining two references to sheep that occur in the novel; firstly, when Bernardo, on his way to the rendezvous to challenge Kuld, observes that sheep have ‘faces like satyrs’ (TS,248), and lastly when the prisoner in the next cell has ‘a cough like an old sheep’ (TS,280). Working against the apparent sympathy for Bernardo and his religion is an undercurrent of Calvinist ideology.

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In *The Hidden Fairing* (1951) Morrison again uses ambiguity to complexify her handling of religion. She draws attention to the significance of ambiguity by defining ‘fairing’ in a pre-text note: ‘A present given at a Fair: a drubbing, deserts’, thereby suggesting that it can be difficult to differentiate between the polarities of reward and punishment. This novel locates such uncertainty in a religious context, emphasising (wo)man’s difficulty in interpreting worldly events as expressions of God’s judgement. *The Hidden Fairing* reworks the story of Bartle MacDonald, the Highland Catholic dominie of *The Gowk Storm*. It registers a greater toleration of Roman Catholicism within the community, for now a majority vote in Bartle’s favour allows him to keep his job (HF,209), whereas the earlier dominie suffered instant dismissal and removal from the district (GS,78). To some extent this novel follows the pattern adopted in *The Strangers*, whereby Catholicism is considered

against a Presbyterian background; only now the dichotomy exists *within* Bartle himself. He lives with his strict Presbyterian mother and his grandmother who still secretly adheres to the Hebridean Catholicism of her youth. Although he has internalised the Protestant work ethic and his outstanding mathematical prowess indicates his rational bent, he experiences an intuitive identification with Grannie and her mysterious religion, and eventually converts to Catholicism.

Ostensibly the novel favours Bartle, viewing events largely from his perspective. As a reviewer observed when the novel was first published, while the Catholic dominie is very sympathetically drawn, Protestants are not generally shown in a good light.<sup>42</sup> But this is an oversimplification of Morrison's approach. For from the outset Catholicism is often portrayed in an unflattering light. In Grannie's ramblings it appears more like ignorant superstition than a form of Christianity (*HF*,26); indeed, in Barnfingal Catholics are considered to be 'a sight worse than any pagans' (*HF*,92). The tales of the evil activities of Catholics on Wrack, where they lured ships to the rocks to avail themselves of the cargo and personal property of dead sailors (*HF*,28), serve to distance them further from the reader's sympathy. There is also an encouragement to view Bartle's intuitive attraction to Catholicism (*HF*,203) as a further example of his childhood tendency to be easily deluded by representatives of a way of life that seems less harsh and restrictive than his own. For example, perhaps because of the trappings of her social elevation, perhaps because he knows that in Wrack Gaelic her name means 'hope' (*HF*,54), Bartle's admiration of Lady Wain is translated into a golden glow with which he imaginatively clothes her person:

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<sup>42</sup>Anonymous, *Scots Magazine*, vol. 54(6), March 1951, p.502.

Bartle looked from one to the other, his lips compressed tightly together to keep himself from shouting them down that the visitor had worn grey -- grey which was next to black. They must have seen her clothes were golden as sunshine; even now she was gone her personality was diffused about the room in splinters and beams of light. When he passed her chair, he placed his hand on its wooden arm to discover if it would be lit by the radiance that still clung to where she had sat. (*HF*,21)

Nevertheless, caught in a Scottish society, that, in both its rural and urban manifestations, seems devoid of morality, Bartle is portrayed as an inherently good man who, although guilty of one sexual transgression, recalls other Christ-like characters such as Sir Gibbie in George MacDonald's fiction.<sup>43</sup> Again allegory can be seen to underline the novel's religious meaning. As a boy Bartle loses a finger while saving a vixen that has been caught in a trap. His altruism is eventually rewarded, for by rendering him unfit for active service, his injury effectively saves him from death in the trenches. This might lead the reader to assume that Bartle's adult altruism in saving the reputation of the Wain family would lead to earthly reward and/or heavenly approval. It might reasonably be expected that Bartle's refusal to expose Lady Wain's son, Alfred, as the father of a servant's illegitimate baby, especially when suspicion then falls on himself, would receive a commensurate reward. But Morrison's novel defies such reductive reading; earthly reward is denied him. To punish Bartle for refusing to enter into an adulterous relationship with her, his former lover, Maysie Wain, prevents his marriage to Effie, who is the now-mature illegitimate Wain grandchild, by telling her that Bartle is her father. Revolted at the thought of incest, Effie marries a former classmate, whom

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<sup>43</sup>See *Sir Gibbie* (London, 1879).

she does not love, before confronting Bartle with her knowledge; she then leaves Scotland for India. Devastated by her loss, Bartle enters a monastery and, assuming the name Father Bernard, purposely closes his mind to all that it meant to be Bartle MacDonald. In so doing he completely denies his Presbyterian inheritance. Years later, the entry of the eight-year-old Bartle, Effie's youngest son, into Father Bernard's care in the monastery school forces the older man to face what he has done with his life. To calm the boy's anxiety, Father Bernard tells him to think of Saint Matthew, whom Christ had taught 'not to count the cost' of following Him (*HF*,12). This would seem a fitting motto for one who, like the dominie, has suffered in life for doing what he believed was right. The thought of due heavenly reward is also suggested by the description of Bartle, the dominie, that Effie had given the other Bartle, her son: "She says he was the lealest man she ever knew" (*HF*,249). While Effie's use of 'leal' indicates Bartle's loyalty, the word's religious meaning, faithful to God, carries echoes of Lady Nairne's poem, 'The Land o' the Leal'.<sup>44</sup> But held in a dialogic relationship with an untroubled anticipation of 'the joy that's aye to last / In the land o' the leal' is the suggestion that in becoming a Catholic monk, he has been unfaithful to the God of his childhood. Once again in Morrison's fiction, a Catholic character faces judgement by Calvin's angry God:

But Father Bernard's thoughts were not far away: they were near as thunder to judgement-tied mountains. He was not thinking of Matthew but of his Master whose words Matthew had stored. And as he remembered them, 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away,' *Father Bernard's eyes were wide open.*  
(*HF*, 250, my italics)

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<sup>44</sup>Collected in *The Poetry of Scotland*, ed. by Roderick Watson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), p. 419.

It is impossible to reduce the italicised sentence, with which the novel ends, to one single meaning. Personified in the boy, Father Bernard's faining, is both reward and punishment. There is sufficient evidence in the text to support the reading that as Bartle MacDonald, the dominie's goodness is rewarded; his eyes are opened to a revelatory experience of salvation. But there is also that which suggests that, as Father Bernard, his eyes have been opened to the fact that in turning his back on his Protestant religion and losing his real identity in Catholicism, he merits God's wrath. Neither reading can stand alone without subversion by the other. Together they exemplify Morrison's complex handling of religion in which a willingness to consider possibilities other than her native Presbyterianism is complicated by the recurrence of motifs that speak of the residual influence of her Calvinist heritage.

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### 3.4 THE VISION NARROWS: THE LATER NOVELS

It is a crisis of religious practice, a crisis of the people's connections with churches, and a crisis of even a diffusive Christianity. In extremely large numbers, the people have stopped going to church, stopped becoming church members, and no longer recognise a substantive religious influence in their social lives. Callum G. Brown<sup>45</sup>

Thus far my discussion of the handling of religion in Morrison's novels has focused on the existence of an underlying tension between residual Calvinist

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<sup>45</sup>*Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707*, p.158.

influences and the desire to criticise this religious ideology or to explore other possibilities. I have indicated how this tension manifests itself in an ambiguity that makes her novels interesting. I would go further and suggest that in presenting this ambiguity Morrison is participating in the literary engagement with the question of the 'dissociation of [Scottish] sensibility' that has long engaged Scottish writers.<sup>46</sup> Alistair McCleery describes this dichotomy as a separation between 'the orthodox, the pedantically logical, on the one hand, and the romantic, the feeling, on the other'.<sup>47</sup> Presbyterianism, with its Calvinist overtones, represents the orthodox, the rational, 'the head'; Paganism, Non-Conformist Protestantism and Catholicism, infused in Morrison's fiction with intuitive emotional and spiritual elements, represent 'the heart'. It is this unresolved tension, I believe, that makes her earlier novels 'work'; its absence accounts for the relative 'flatness' of the treatment of religion in *When the Wind Blows*. As I shall demonstrate, its absence can also account for the marked difference between the handling of religion in *The Hidden Fairing* and Morrison's subsequent novels.

I have found no factual evidence to suggest why Morrison's approach should have altered between 1951 and 1954 when *The Following Wind* was published. It is, however, possible to speculate that it might have been influenced by the 'Tell Scotland Movement', inaugurated in 1952, which campaigned to convince Presbyterian church members that evangelism was 'a continuing engagement at every level with the whole life of man' (J.H.S. Burleigh, p. 413). This could have provided the justification for allowing a unity between the romantic and the rational to be portrayed within Presbyterian orthodoxy, where beforehand any sympathy with

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<sup>46</sup>Rewording of T. S. Eliot, 'The Metaphysical Poets', (1921); collected in *Selected Prose of T.S.Eliot*, ed. by Frank Kermode (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 64.

<sup>47</sup>Afterword, *Farewell Miss Julie Logan*, p. 91.

the romantic elements of religion had to be explored via some oppositional ideology, and had to be in held in contention with the dominant ideology. Again speculation permits me to suggest that since Morrison's brother, John, was actively involved in the work of the Iona Community, evangelism could have been a family concern.<sup>48</sup> Whatever the reason, the result is what Douglas Gifford has criticised as an intrusion of Christianity that spoils 'the real aesthetic shape of her work' (*Scottish Writing and Writers*, p.17). The most immediately obvious difference between the novels *The Following Wind*,<sup>49</sup> *The Other Traveller* (1957), and *Thea* (1963), and those already discussed is that their settings are exclusively modern. This overt engagement with modernity supports the idea that some contemporary change of focus enabled her to dispense with the sanitising distance of temporal separation or the exploration of religious ideologies which were thought to be less ordered by rationality in order to explore the possibility of integrating romantic sensibilities with Presbyterian values. In these novels Morrison continues to explore the spiritual condition of Scotland, but does so with an altered Presbyterian focus.

The increased secularisation to which the opening quotation refers is really a phenomenon of the second half of the twentieth century. However church membership must have begun to be seen as a contemporary problem in the middle years of the century or the home missionary movement would not have been so active. The perceived decline in interest in religion, particularly between the generation that grew up before 1939 and its post-war counterpart, appears to have engaged Morrison's imagination, and informed *The Following Wind*. Here contemporary religious attitudes are encapsulated in the world-views of the

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<sup>48</sup>I am indebted to Dr Elizabeth Michie for this information.

<sup>49</sup>(London: Hogarth Press, 1954); all references are to this edition and will be given in the text as (*FW*, page number).

members of the Garnett family and their associates. At the beginning of the novel, one brother, John, has no real faith, but is prepared to observe religious formalities; for him the Kirk is only called upon for weddings and funerals. Soon, however, John experiences a sense of heightened spiritual awareness that represents his 'conversion' to religion. His brother Bruce, ten years his junior, is vociferous in his rejection of Presbyterianism and is quick to attack their local minister as though he, and not Bruce, himself, were responsible for the latter's lack of religious conviction (*FW*,32). John's fiancée, Ailsa, is a church member, but her involvement with religion is on a very superficial level; it is more a badge of respectability than real commitment. The elder Garnett daughter, Iris's religious commitment is so slight that she had converted to Catholicism to marry a Polish airman, but is prepared to revert to Presbyterianism if it will enable her to find a suitable husband. Only Lennie, the younger daughter, attends church regularly. Lennie is also seen to possess an innate spirituality, nourished, it is to be presumed, by her habit of reading aloud the biblical text printed daily on the front page of the *Glasgow Herald* (*FW*,26). But most importantly, she is the only person to share John's newly-experienced intense religious 'joy' (*FW*,106).

Just as his father's death sets in motion a train of events that lead to his religious rebirth, so John Garnett becomes a sacrificial victim to save the family (and by extension, society), from its position of desensitisation to religious influence. There are echoes of the Tell Scotland Campaign's intention to bring religion into every aspect of life in the fact that John's conversion, his experience of heightened spiritual awareness, takes place in Buchanan Street, Glasgow, while he is engaged in the mundane act of lighting a cigarette (*FW*,77). This is clearly an attempt to introduce religion into the modern urban setting; it is also an attempt to

relate religious experience to everyday life. However, the need to relate the new articulation of religious awareness to the traditional authority of the Bible is still present in John's discourse: 'There was what he had always thought of since a child as a Biblical sky, with thunderclouds like prophets storming across it, their robes swelling round them, holding in their out-clenched fists scroll and mountain-top' (*FW*,58). But to the conventional Old Testament imagery of religion is now added psychological involvement. Immediately prior to John's religious awakening, his speculative faculties are heightened by comparing his own rootless generation to the older women 'whose roots had been allowed to settle in a less disturbed age' (*FW*,76). This awakens him to his need of something with which to anchor his life. His sensory perception is also raised to an acute level, for in the city he can smell what seems like a breath of country air from the hawthorn, lilac and apple blossom trees that line the side streets past which he walks. His romantic, imaginative faculties are also brought into play when the vista of chimney pots and roofs becomes transformed by his angle of approach into 'the homogeneity of some fabulous castle' (*FW*,76-7). With *all his faculties* acting in concert he experiences an epiphanic moment which has both sensory and extrasensory components: 'John felt himself steady as a rock even as he reeled with the impact of it. This was not a sensation, it was something that had taken possession of his senses, something that held, preserved and enclosed him' (*FW*,77). Moreover, it cannot be described as being simply rational, for 'he did not think this, he did not even believe it, he knew it' (*FW*,77). In John's experience of what the minister had called a following wind, the comfort of belief in God and in his own particular place in God's plan, Morrison has ceased to separate the sources of religious motivation and direction. Protestantism is established as a matter of the heart *and* the head.

Moreover, the spirituality of religion, with which Morrison's fiction has long struggled, has not only been given a modern setting, it has been described with a modern metaphor which, coming from the minister, is seen to have official Kirk sanction. In Dr Gentles' analogy of the security of a personal relationship with God with the tail wind that shortens the flight-time from America to Britain (*FW*,33), we have an attempt to re-introduce religion into a secular world in images that are at once immediately relevant and beneficent. Even the name of the minister, Dr Gentles, which is also used in *Thea*, casts the Kirk in a new, softer light. But Morrison is still careful not to weaken the church's image, for as she is at pains to point out: '[Dr Gentles] belied his name, being a short vigorous looking man with an exceptionally fine head. The set of his shoulders, the thrust of his chin, the challenge of his glance -- everything about him bespoke the fighter' (*FW*,30). Indeed, with its joint emphasis on physicality, intellectuality and determination, this could be a description of how she visualises the modern Kirk itself. The description also suggests approval and, in so doing, differs greatly from the criticism inherent in her early descriptions of ministers as cantankerous old men, like Mr Lockhart of *The Gowk Storm*, misogynists like Mr Whitecross in *When the Wind Blows*, or the lecherous and self-important Mr Boyd of *The Gowk Storm*.<sup>50</sup>

Following his conversion, John dies suddenly as the result of a ruptured aortic aneurism. The shock of his death makes his brother face his own mortality, and he, too, begins to look for an anchor. There seems little doubt that he will eventually share John's religious conversion, for the novel ends as it began, with the aftermath of a funeral; and it is significant that John's words on the first occasion

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<sup>50</sup>The last two ministers will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5 in relation to Morrison's handling of the position of women.

are now repeated by Bruce. It is significant also that looking at the clouds, at what John had called a biblical sky, Bruce is reminded that John had told him about experiencing the following wind, although, as yet, he does not understand what John meant by it (*FW*, 220).

With this novel I think that Morrison has tried to devise a plot that would allow her to work out her new-found religious premise. While she has been fairly innovative in locating religion in a post-war urban setting, its articulation seems strained. There are obviously attempts to speak of religion with a secular vocabulary that emphasises the complex interplay of emotions that Morrison appears to have believed are involved in the experience of a personal relationship with God. Given Morrison's former emphasis on the indeterminacy of language, John's difficulty in finding an adequate description for Lennie's spirituality reflects the author's difficulty in verbalising her new concept of Presbyterianism: 'What [Lennie] had was not happiness, for happiness hung on the word hap, and this had a security, a serenity, which did not depend on chance. It was too active to be described as peace. The nearest John could get to it was the word joy' (*FW*, 106). But for all its struggle with articulation and vocabulary, the novel is monologic. There is no undertow of subversive ideology; gone is the struggle between rationality and intuitive spirituality that provided the contested core in her earlier fiction.

Morrison's last novel, *Thea*, does return to a more interesting engagement with religion as a formative element in the construction of female identity, and this will be considered fully in Chapter 6. But even in this novel the intrusion of conventional religious teaching at the end of the narrative (*T*, 148), as the guiding light which prevents Greta Chetwude, the protagonist, from committing suicide

seems somewhat forced, and in modern settings Morrison's overt Christianity can seem intrusive and contrived, at least to more secular tastes.

However, even Morrison's intrusive Christianity speaks of the complexity of her treatment of religion. Were one to judge Morrison's approach to religion solely on the evidence of the only novel in print in 2000, *The Gowk Storm*, one might tend to view it reductively as intensely critical of organised religion. As I have shown, however, this would be to underestimate both the complexity and direction of her engagement with religious ideology. For despite my criticisms of the monologic nature of Morrison's handling of religion in her later novels, it is still feasible to see religion as a shaping force in her fiction. However, what was formerly a contested core, where, to use Roland Barthes's image, the author was 'a watcher who stands at the crossroads of all [religious] discourses', has become a unidirectional highway. Polyvocalism has given way to one voice, and in *The Following Wind* the writer has become its opposite, what Susan Sontag calls 'an activist or a purveyor of doctrine'.<sup>51</sup> But this does not deny the centrality of religion to Morrison's perception of the Scottish experience. Indeed, in *The Other Traveller*, as in *Thea*, Presbyterianism is taken for granted as a fundamental constituent of the nexus of ideological interpellations that identifies the Scot. Morrison's handling of the other constituent discourses that are used in the construction of Scottish national and social identities will be explored in depth in the following chapter.

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<sup>51</sup>'Writing Itself: On Roland Barthes', in *A Roland Barthes Reader*, p. xxi.

CHAPTER 4  
NATIONAL AND SOCIAL IDENTITIES

- 4.1 General Introduction
- 4.2 National Identity: Constructing the Myth
- 4.3. National Identity: The Myth Reconsidered
- 4.4 National Identity in Morrison's Fiction
- 4.5 Social Identities: Introductory Comments
  - 4.5.i Rural Social Identities
  - 4.5.ii Urban Social Identities

## CHAPTER 4

## NATIONAL AND SOCIAL IDENTITIES

## 4.1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Two things [constitute the nation]. One lies in the past, the other lies in the present. One is the possession of a rich legacy of memories, the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form. . . . The nation, like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of endeavours, sacrifice, and devotion.

Ernest Renan (1882)<sup>1</sup>

Post-Saussurean theory views identity, whether shared or individual, as a construct, with the identifying subject recognising himself or herself among the subject positions available in the various ideologically-inscribed discourses to which he or she is exposed. Renan's definition, given above, also views national identity as a cultural construct rather than the product of an inherent characteristic such as ethnicity. Both approaches emphasise the centrality of the community's cultural history, regarding it as fundamental to the construction of national identity. Since Morrison's fiction engages in a reinterpretation and re-visioning of Scottish historical and religious discourses, it is also concerned with how these discourses are used in the construction of national identity, and the extent to which such an identity can be regarded as representative of Scottish life experiences. It is

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<sup>1</sup> 'Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?', translated and cited by Bernard Yack, 'The myth of the civic nation', in *Theorizing Nationalism*, ed. by Ronald Beiner (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), pp. 103-118 (pp. 106-7).

significant, too, that her fiction was produced during a period when attitudes changed towards nationalism *per se*. Her first novels were published in the early 1930s, when the cultural nationalism of the Scottish Literary Renaissance was directed towards finding ‘a stable identity’ that could encompass the complexities inherent in the nation’s history;<sup>2</sup> then, too, political nationalist enthusiasm led to the formation of the Scottish National Party in 1934.<sup>3</sup> Her later novels were published after 1945 when political nationalism had been discredited by Germany’s aggressive Aryanism.

Social identity, another construct of ideological interpellation, is also explored in Morrison’s fiction. During her career as a novelist Scottish social attitudes also changed. Widespread emigration and the economic crisis of the Depression further destabilised the earlier social formation that had tried to remake itself after the Great War. Social identities, as articulated in the discourses formerly associated with Presbyterian respectability, class and gender regulation, were no longer stable and unchallenged in the inter-war period. This situation was exacerbated by the levelling effects of the Second World War, when even middle-class women had to participate in the war effort, and by the creation of the Welfare State after the war. This chapter considers Morrison’s handling of national and social identities in the context of contemporary trends.

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<sup>2</sup> See Cairns Craig, ‘Twentieth Century Literature: An Introduction’, *The History of Scottish Literature*, IV, pp. 6-7.

<sup>3</sup> T. M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation 1700-2000*, p. 325.

## 4.2 NATIONAL IDENTITY: CONSTRUCTING THE MYTH

The definition of national identity is problematic for Scots, partly because for much of her past Scotland has effectively been a divided nation. Geographically distinct, the Highlands and Lowlands were the homelands of two different indigenous ethnic groups traditionally separated by language, religion, culture and degree of historical development. Moreover, both groups, conscious of their compatriots' 'otherness', lived in mutual distrust. The creation of a cohesive national identity was further complicated by the loss of political autonomy effected by the Union of 1707. The anglicisation of Scotland's social élite, and the attempted eradication of Gaelic language and culture following the Jacobite Risings also altered perceptions of what it meant to be Scottish. Indeed, Scottish national identity gradually became partially subsumed in British, or at least North British, identity. Yet cultural and artistic expressions of Scottish identity, albeit perpetrated in sometimes dubious forms, persisted. Such representations of 'Scottishness' fostered an 'engineered' identity, wrought, at different times and to varying degrees, to suit the requirements of powerful groups, from the dominant discourses of Enlightenment philosophy, imperialism, political and economic expedience, and Romantic aesthetics. Nevertheless, Scottish people chose to identify with the subject positions available within the 'imagined community' created by such discourses.<sup>4</sup> In so doing they gave the 'consent', the 'daily plebiscite', which, in Renan's view of the *civic* nation, operates on a shared 'legacy of memories' to constitute national identity (Yack, pp.106-7).

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<sup>4</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 2nd edn (London: Verso, 1991).

Even today, when the settled will of the Scottish people has been articulated in an assertion of national identity that demanded the restoration of a measure of political autonomy in the creation of the devolved Parliament, tartan kitsch is still the badge by which Scottish ‘identity’ is often advertised. Although different from experienced identity, such cultural expressions of Scottishness retain currency; as Malcolm Chapman observes: ‘The face that Scotland turns to the world is, in many respects, a Highland face. When Scottish identity is sought, it is often by the invocation of Highland ways and Highland virtues that it is found’.<sup>5</sup> The construction of Highland identity and its conflation with Scottish identity originate in the discourses associated with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century political and economic imperatives, a process that is exhaustively discussed by Peter Womack in *Improvement and Romance: Constructing the Myth of the Highlands*.<sup>6</sup> Womack’s discussion highlights the ‘insubstantiality’ of the myth of Highland ‘nationhood’ (Womack, p.179), yet, at the same time, acknowledges that its appeal rests in its ability to extend ‘beyond its local object because it encodes a paradoxical nostalgia for a homeland which no one has ever had, but which everyone has been promised’ (Womack, p.178).

Throughout the Victorian period, when Scottish identity was increasingly assimilated within British identity, as economic prosperity and imperial partnership with England became the touchstones by which status was measured, the cultural expression of Highland ‘identity’ acted as a repository of what had been sacrificed to historical progress. Womack identifies the importance of nostalgic longing in the contribution made to the representation of Highland identity by the ‘Celtic’

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<sup>5</sup> *The Gaelic Vision in Scottish Culture*, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989).

discourses of 'Ossian' and Fiona MacLeod. Nostalgia for a lost past can also be seen as a formative element in the fiction of the Kailyard School. Although, as Moira Burgess has observed, some novelists such as J. J. Bell and Neil Munro transposed the conventions of the Kailyard to an urban setting, the original Kailyard writers maintained a rural focus and encouraged urban Scotland to participate vicariously in an alternative 'Highland' identity.<sup>7</sup> But this, too, was a bogus identity. It was constructed by portraying ideologically-prescriptive versions of the rural tradition within Scottish literature that has articulated a 'national self-consciousness, a search for "Scottishness" vis-a-vis England, actively cultivated by the middle-class since the Union in 1707 [. . . and has also reflected . . .] the "spiritual inability" of the Scottish people (presumably both audience, publishers and authors) to cope with the realities of urbanization and industrialization in fiction'.<sup>8</sup> Such fiction has been criticised for being unrepresentative of the reality of Scottish experience, but as Knowles has argued, its best-seller status at home and abroad, could suggest that it was, in fact, in tune with the 'current ideas and social values of the purchasers' (Knowles, p.16). T. M. Devine explains Kailyard popularity by drawing attention to the rural ancestry of many urban Scots: 'For a society that was one of the most urbanized in the world but which had strong and recent roots in the countryside the Kailyard tales had an irresistible attraction' (Devine, p. 297). Therefore, although the Kailyard stories portrayed an idealised as opposed to an historically accurate past, they provided a comforting 'escape' from present uncertainties, and Devine's explanation of their appeal again reiterates the idea of nostalgic identification with a lost past. Early twentieth-century writers rejected the Kailyard's version of

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<sup>7</sup> *Imagine a City: Glasgow in Fiction*, p. 69.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas D. Knowles, *Ideology, Art and Commerce*, p.14.

Scottishness and sought to redefine and reassert their national identity before it became completely subsumed in Britishness.

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#### 4.3 NATIONAL IDENTITY: THE MYTH RECONSIDERED

The myths of the twentieth century are not necessarily the same as those of the nineteenth, but they, too, colour reality -- in so far as reality can be said to exist with respect to a topic so abstract and so charged with emotions as the identity of the Scottish nation.

Susanne Hagemann<sup>9</sup>

Dissatisfied with previous constructions of national identity, the writers who participated in the resurgence of national consciousness associated with the Scottish Literary Renaissance sought new ways of articulating Scottishness that would link tradition with the concerns of the modern world. Although motivated by this common goal, individual writers undertook the quest in different ways, and no single articulation of national identity resulted. Some were committed to a cultural nationalism that sought to define Scotland in terms of a common culture, and to ensure the perpetuation of that culture.<sup>10</sup> Others argued for varying degrees of political autonomy as the way to define and preserve national identity; yet others

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<sup>9</sup> “‘Bidin Naitural’: Identity Questions in Scottish Twentieth-Century Renaissance Literature’, in *Scottish Literary Journal*, 21 (1994), 44-55, (p.52).

<sup>10</sup>See Will Kymlicka, ‘Misunderstanding Nationalism’ in *Theorizing Nationalism*, pp.131-140, p.132.

rejected both nationalist agendas and saw further assimilation within Britain as Scotland's best chance of survival. Central to all their deliberations, however, was the question of the unity of Scotland, and, as their differing attitudes to nationalism suggest, individual writers held different views concerning the possibility of identifying a single coherent Scotland. Some, including Edwin Muir, emphasised the country's many divisions, seeing them as indicative of the 'intestine dissensions' and 'exaggerated individualism' that throughout history had torn, and continued to tear, the nation apart.<sup>11</sup> For Muir, as for Barke, the Highland/Lowland geographical division mirrored fundamental divisions in the nation as a whole.

Commentators such as Susanne Hagemann have observed that others, like the political nationalists Gunn and MacDiarmid, believed in the essential unity of the Scottish nation which they identified as being rooted in Celtic culture. For them its long historical tradition and its continued existence could be used to link what they believed was Scotland's original unified past with the present, thereby forging a coherent national identity. MacDiarmid saw our unconscious motivations, 'our "ur-motives"', originating in Scotland's ancient Gaelic culture.<sup>12</sup> Gunn, himself a Highlander, viewed the Celts not as a distinct ethnic group but as 'upholders of a tradition' from which national identity could be constructed (Hagemann, p.47). Therefore, although these Literary Renaissance writers believed that they were challenging previous representations of Scottishness, their involvement with Celtophilia suggests that in some ways they, too, were influenced by the traditional

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<sup>11</sup> *Scottish Journey* (1935), intro. by T. C. Smout (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1996), p.227.

<sup>12</sup> Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Towards a "Scottish Idea"', *The Pictish Review*, 1 (1927), 1-2, p. 2.; quoted by Hagemann, p. 46.

associations of Highland identity that had informed notions of Scottish identity since the eighteenth century.

Lewis Grassie Gibbon's stance was more complicated. He rejected the Celtophilic tendencies of Gunn and MacDiarmid, as did Muir, but he did share something of their regard for ethnic culture in his valorisation of the Celts' predecessors, the Picts, as Scotland's original ethnic group. His sense of national identity, expressed in the self-conscious Scottishness of his fiction was held in tension with his firm Socialist belief in internationalism. In his essay 'Glasgow' he states that while, as an intellectual, he is interested in the preservation of Scottish culture, he regards it as mere 'parlour chatter' and 'would welcome the end of Braid Scots and Gaelic, our history, our nationhood under the heels of a Chinese army of occupation if it would cleanse the Glasgow slums'.<sup>13</sup> His fiction also undermines cultural nationalism. The experimental use of Scots in the poetry of Pittendrigh MacGillivray and Marion Angus, and Lewis Spence's introduction of 'gentleman's Scots'<sup>14</sup> are mocked by their association with the narrow-minded spinster, Miss Murgatroyd in *Grey Granite* (1934); even MacDiarmid's synthetic Scots is ridiculed in Archie Clearmont's opinion that 'epileptic' would be a more appropriate adjective.<sup>15</sup> Yet all of these writers strove to provide a more inclusive, less sentimental representation of Scottish identity, and it is against this background that Morrison's handling of national identity is examined.

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<sup>13</sup>Collected in *A Scots Hairst: Essays and Short Stories*, ed. by Ian S. Munro (London: Hutchinson, 1972), pp. 86,87.

<sup>14</sup>See Maurice Lindsay, *History of Scottish Literature* (London: Hale, 1992), p. 376.

<sup>15</sup>(repr. London: Pan, 1973), pp. 34-35.

#### 4.4 NATIONAL IDENTITY IN MORRISON'S FICTION

Morrison's novels are self-consciously Scottish. To varying degrees they speak of a strong identification with the land and with Scotland's past. Many have a Highland setting, and this might lead one to assume that, like many other writers of her time, she sought to locate the 'essential' Scotland in such a milieu. However, she does not restrict her focus to the Highland, nor even to a more general rural perspective. Like Barke's *Land of the Leal*, her novels are alive to the differences that exist between Scotland's different communities; differences that are expressed in separate histories, cultural traditions, religions, social experiences, dialects, and even languages. Whilst the possibility of reuniting such groups, separated and alienated by history, is addressed in, for example, *The Winnowing Years* with the return of the Bowman children to their ancestral home, Morrison does not seem altogether convinced that it can work. Furthermore, although like those of other Literary Renaissance writers her novels explore the unifying potential of recourse to the past, especially through the link provided by the collective unconscious, they also suggest some ambivalence about the efficacy of this strategy. *The Winnowing Years* also exemplifies this in the incompatibility of the 'memories' evoked by the manse and the standing stones with the historical moment in which women like Marion Bowman and Nicholas Pollock live. However, what is, I think, most significant about Morrison's fiction is that it treats national identity as a construct; it plays with national stereotypes and subverts the constructed nature of identity while itself complying with many of the assumptions that it would appear to be undermining. In so doing, Morrison's novels emphasise the complexity of the Scottish situation. As with her handling of history and religion, Morrison's approach

to national identity suggests the existence of a tension between rational rejection of the concept of nationalism and a strong emotional identification with Scotland. Even the confused and/or confusing messages given by her less satisfying novels, such as *The Other Traveller*, suggest authorial difficulty in grappling with so problematic a subject.

Whilst one of Morrison's principal themes is the reassertion of the counter-historical, particularly her re-visioning of Highland history, and its significance as another identity-determining discourse, her fiction refuses to view Scottish national identity as exclusively Highland; nor does she ignore extraneous influences. Even *Breakers*, with its re-visionary Highland focus, views rural identity in relation to different kinds of Scottish urban experience, and, perhaps more significantly, in relation to English values and influence. The increasing influence of anglicisation is charted in Glen Gillespie's experience, and in the external perspective that his wife, Lucy, brings to Barnfingal. Measured against the restricted career opportunities available in the Highlands in the middle of the nineteenth century, and even in Edinburgh, London, as the centre of imperial commerce, is shown to offer prospects that make it more profitable for Scots to assume British, as opposed to Scottish, identities. English cultural values are also shown to have a marked influence on Scotland. Literary publications are said to prefer topical articles to 'Nature notes', and topicality is thought to be impossible to achieve in the Highland milieu (B,46). Scottish landscape, often romanticised, even in Morrison's own fiction, to create a positive emotional effect, is seen by Glen's English wife in terms that are reminiscent of how it had appeared a century earlier to hostile English commentators like Edward Burt:<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>See *Letters from a Gentleman in the North of Scotland to his Friend in London*

She had been born and bred in London. This place with its dead-looking green hills filled her with an unutterable melancholy. Everything about it, the mountains, the hills, the Loch, was so eternal that one felt if one's little life suddenly stopped it would not matter at all. They would still be there. (B,48)

A later generation's altered perspective is captured in the Romanticisation of the Highlands as portrayed by Lucy's daughter, Lilith's attraction towards what she sees as *different* about Callum's unsophisticated rusticity and his exotic language. This is reminiscent of the nineteenth-century Romantic reconstruction of Highland identity. But *Breakers* suggests that such a construction is doubly dangerous for it debilitates the Highlander and deludes the Anglophile, especially since Callum, like the Highlanders he represents, has effectively concealed his true identity by adopting a new (anglicised) Christian name and a surname that identifies him with no family -- Malcolm Armit. The falsity on both sides of the partnership means that it can only produce results (progeny) that are sickly and short-lived. Thus *Breakers* seems to be pointing up the problematic nature of previous constructions of Highland and Scottish identities, and calling for a more robust construction that will incorporate not only the recorded processes of history but also the counter-historical discourses which Callum Lamont, and not Malcolm Armit, represents.

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Morrison's apparent ambivalence regarding Scottish national identity is further evinced in *The Strangers* (1935), an early novel whose title emphasises the 'otherness' associated with foreigners in the construction of national identity; what

Sigmund Freud in 1919 called the ‘narcissism of minor differences’.<sup>17</sup> Juxtaposed with this suggestion of a collective identity that is at least partly determined by the exclusion of others, Morrison offers a dedicatory verse that encourages subjective identification, even among non-Highlanders, with the loss of the mythical Highland way of life:

Mountains divide us and the waste of seas --  
 Yet still the blood is strong, the heart is Highland,  
 And we in dreams behold the Hebrides.

Peter Womack notes that this oft-quoted stanza, ‘presented in 1829 as a translation of a Canadian Gaelic rowing song’, works because: ‘as a possible but denied wholeness of life, the Highlands accept in a lavish geographical embrace all the lost homes, everything that isn’t, in the end, what it once had a right to turn out as’ (*Improvement and Romance*, p.179). It is interesting that Morrison should have chosen this verse, ostensibly to suggest a continued shared Scottishness with a brother who had earlier emigrated to New Zealand, for not only does it work by means of a ‘*rapprochement* between naïve ethnicity and sentimental universality which is ultimately fraudulent’ but it is, itself, a fake. It was most probably written in Edinburgh for *Blackwood’s Magazine* (Womack, p.179). Since the supporting evidence was not published until 1935, it is unlikely that Morrison was aware of its provenance (Womack, note, p. 206). But its use seems apposite since it encourages acceptance of the possibility of a shared ‘Highland’ identity while, by showing how the islanders use the term ‘strangers’ even for mainland Scots who have resided on

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<sup>17</sup> Cited in Michael Ignatieff, ‘Nationalism and the Narcissism of Minor Differences’, in *Theorising Nationalism*, pp. 91-102 (p. 96).

Moluag for forty years, the novel, as a whole, undermines the practice of conflating Highland and Scottish identities.

*The Strangers* subverts conventional assumptions about the 'universality' of Scottish national identification by showing how the actual reactions of Scots to their heritage differ from the image that is commonly presented of them. Moreover, it emphasises the falsity of the construction by showing that foreigners can identify with Scotland's land and its history, commonly regarded as repositories of the nation's identity, in a more profound way than Scots who have grown away from the rural environment and become absorbed in the urban world of industry and commerce. The Saundersons from Edinburgh represent typical urban Scots who enjoy the unspoilt tranquillity of the island of Moluag as a holiday retreat. But it is actually 'other' to most of them; they are as much strangers there as are foreigners. Only one, Ian, really identifies with the place, feeling more at home there than in Edinburgh where he has always lived (TS,208). The others only value its recreational facilities, and Willis, the eldest daughter actively dislikes it. Bernardo Monti and his sister, Grata, on the other hand, are Italian immigrants who adopt the island as their new home and adapt themselves completely to the island's lifestyle. As already noted, Bernardo's Catholicism enables him to identify with the resonances of the aura of the monastery on whose site their inn now stands, suggesting that for him the island evokes an identity that is older than the Protestantism that has long been seen as emblematic of Scottishness. Even Bernardo's speech, another conventional identifying feature of nationality, becomes indistinguishable from that of his middle-class Scottish guests, and it is only when shocked by the knowledge of his wife's adultery that he reverts to the accented phraseology of the foreigner. The additional irony in this incident is that it is

Bernardo's fluency in *English* that makes his Scottish friend cease to regard him as 'other': 'Mr Monti habitually spoke English so well that when they were in conversation together, the Scotsman usually forgot he was talking to a foreigner' (TS,248).

Scotland's landscape and the 'memories' it is thought to evoke from the collective unconscious are motifs frequently used in the reassertion of national identity in Literary Renaissance fiction. In *The Strangers* Morrison subverts this approach, and while the poetic intensity of the language encourages the reader to identify with the landscape, it is shown not to have any such effect on the novel's Scottish characters. Instead the contours of the Scottish landscape evoke submerged, indistinct 'memories' in Grata, the Italian, suggesting that the collective unconscious reaches back to a common ancestry that predates national identification: 'As she looked at those great heights, their boldness thrall'd by impalpable mist, Grata choked. At the sight of them, something -- some memory, some thought -- struggled to form in her consciousness' (TS, 76). Grata's psychic linking with a distant, pre-national human experience, associated with imagery of mists and mountains, evokes resonances of Grassie Gibbon's vision of wandering, Golden Age Maglemosian hunter gatherers in the Islands of Mist before the arrival of civilisation.<sup>18</sup> This suggests that Morrison, like Grassie Gibbon, entertained internationalist tendencies, and it is interesting that at a time when bellicose nationalism was being asserted in Europe, and the question of national identity was being explored in pre-war Scotland with the organisation of political nationalism, she should be ambivalent about rigid national identification. Like Grassie Gibbon's fiction, Morrison's novels speak of a distinct Scottishness that strongly identifies

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<sup>18</sup>'The Antique Scene', *A Scots Hairst*, p.124.

with the land. Also like his, although less innovatively, her novels assert their Scottishness in their use of language, and in their portrayal of different aspects of Scottish experience, encompassing past and present, urban and rural, middle- and labouring-class life. And like his fiction, too, her novels are complicated by a dis-ease with the exclusivity of national identity, especially when, as in Scotland's case, the stereotypes by which it is recognised are of dubious origin and do not have universal applicability. Although, as I shall discuss later, I do not think her 'internationalism' stemmed from Socialist sympathies, her work does seem to point up a constructed, rather than an essential, national identity that is superimposed on a more ancient international or pre-national identity. Although she professed a belief in 'undefined racial memories', her fiction seems to represent this as the existence of a general human collective unconscious, rather than as the narrower concept of racial memory that underpins ethnically-exclusive nationalism (NLS, MS 27353, fol. 22).

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A later novel, *The Other Traveller*,<sup>19</sup> published in 1957, continues Morrison's exploration of the problematic nature of Scottish national identity. The timing of this novel is interesting, for although nationalism, *per se*, had become discredited as the ideology that had inspired the atrocities of the Second World War, in the specifically Scottish context national identity remained an important, if contested, form of subject identification. Although the Scottish Nationalist Party had been weakened by the removal in 1942 of those favouring Home Rule rather

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<sup>19</sup>(London: Hogarth, 1957). All references are to this edition and will be given in the text as (*OT*, page number).

than Independence, and was unable to sustain its brief Parliamentary success of 1945, a focus on distinct national identity was maintained, for a time, by MacCormack's Covenant movement. Whilst this was, according to T. M. Devine, 'avowedly non-partisan and apolitical' (*The Scottish Nation*, p. 566), party politics also kept the focus on Scottish national identity in the post-war period. The Unionist Party re-ignited Scottish national self-consciousness by using the threat of usurpation of control of Scottish industry by Whitehall to incite antagonism against Labour's nationalisation policy. Religion, too, sustained a nationalist focus. According to T. M. Devine, ecumenical discussions between Presbyterians and Anglicans raised fears of the possible erosion of the distinctive nature of the Scottish Kirk in an attempt to establish commonality with the episcopalian structure of the Church of England (Devine, p. 568). Yet running in parallel with this sense of a distinct Scottish national identity there remained a British identity that had been strengthened by the need to face the common enemy in Germany. *The Other Traveller* should be viewed in this context of multiple identities.

In 1957 a reviewer dismissed *The Other Traveller* as 'two well-worked-out studies of broken marriages', to which had been added 'numerous other ingredients', some of which s/he found 'difficult to accept'.<sup>20</sup> Although this novel lacks the structural and thematic coherence of some of Morrison's earlier fiction, it can be interpreted as a multi-layered text in which the failed marriages provide a framework on which hang interesting explorations of the reconstruction of individual and national identities, to which another layer of complexity is added by the interjection of the supernatural. Central to the book's narrative technique is the bifocal vision with which Richard Sadler, the main protagonist, is viewed.

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<sup>20</sup>Anonymous, *Scots Magazine*, vol. 66, March 1957, pp. 479-480.

Throughout the text, interior and exterior narrative discourses are interwoven to present him from within and without. This enables the reader to experience a sharing in Sadler's regenerative experience, while at the same time affording an objective distance from which to evaluate the ramifications of this experience. Such bifocal presentation allows Morrison to portray the complications inherent in identity construction, and as neither perspective predominates, the novel resists closure; Sadler's *real* identity, individual and national, is left deliberately, if somewhat disconcertingly, unresolved as the narrative ends.

It is some time before the protagonist is identified as an Englishman named Richard Sadler; his Christian name suggesting English monarchy and his surname recalling Elizabeth I's ambassador to Mary Queen of Scots, and signatory to her execution warrant. Before this he is seen simply as a man 'clamped in his corner seat' in a northward-bound train, 'his lips compressed, his lids tightly shut' (*OT*,9). Although he is English, his troubled psychological state could also be more generally interpreted as representative of the problems besetting modern, anglicised, urban Scotland, a point that is suggested by his attempt to distract himself by focusing on the *British* Railways logo on the carriage carpet (*OT*,9). His agitation is transmitted by the narrative's short, taut sentences. But as the journey proceeds northwards, the language becomes more fluent, and his thoughts gradually adopt an outward, as opposed to an inward, focus. Moreover, it becomes apparent that the change is caused by the countryside through which the train is passing. Initially, his approach to the Scottish landscape is expressed in prosaic language:

Yes, this was the country all right. He noticed a field full of grey birds with rather long necks; it was April, and there would be a migration or something. Birds either came into or left Britain about

now and autumn. [ . . . ] He knew that birds flew, and animals walked on four legs, and that was about the extent of his knowledge. (*OT*,11)

But what is even more significant is that Morrison signals, at this early stage, the ‘textuality’ of the Scottish landscape: ‘The countryside was a closed book to him’ (*OT*,11). Although at first he misreads its signs, throughout this novel the landscape functions as a text, a discourse from which Sadler constructs his new subject position. Moreover, that text is inscribed with the ideology of Highland/Scottish conflation of national identity, and is imbued with connotations derived from earlier Romanticisations of Scottishness.

Like Lucy in *Breakers*, however, Sadler’s initial English response to the Scottish landscape is one of non-identification; he sees it as ‘bleak infertility’ that ‘was apparently not desolate enough for its inhabitants as it was, so they burnt the heather just to make it a little more so’ (*OT*, 11). But even before his journey ends, the interiority of the narrative shows him responding to the landscape’s distinctive discourse:

How incredibly green was that golf course. There must be a brightness in the northern air that made colours appear very much themselves; perhaps it was the kind of day. The earth was tilting dangerously as it ran towards the sea, the grasses at its edge must fairly be whistling in the wind. (*OT*,33)

It is significant that, as well as encouraging an imaginative response in Sadler which would also find an easy, if naïve, response in the reader, this passage endows the discourse of landscape with a veracity upon which the narrative continues to build. The ‘truth’ of the landscape is also seen to extend to, and perhaps be responsible for, the authenticity and naturalness of its inhabitants. Sadler notes, for example, that the

girls who work in The Drochet Arms, girls of Highland and Island stock, are very different from their English counterparts; a difference manifested in the absence of 'ersatz blondes' with 'inflated brassières or pat-a-cake make-up' (OT,69). The implication would seem to be that there is an 'authenticity' communicated by the Scottish landscape which they have assimilated, and here Morrison uses this myth, as do writers like Gunn, to provide a focus of authenticity for a distinct, Scottish national identity. Indeed, the fact that the main character in this novel who epitomises such values is also called Gunn suggests that Morrison is deliberately imitating the cultural-nationalist perspective adopted in Neil Gunn's fiction.

The novel also stresses the importance of literature as a discourse in which subject positions are identified. The only literary link that the hostile, English Sadler can make with Scotland is the vague memory of a schooldays' reading of *Macbeth* (OT,11). Significantly, the only phrase he can remember, 'Stands Scotland where it did?', confronts the issue of Scotland's identity and present status, questions that were still engaging Scottish writers in the post-war period. The literary reference also links Scotland with Sadler's childhood. I think this is significant, for Sadler's perception of his own history, scarred by his parents' divorce, is prejudiced and incomplete, in much the same way as Shakespeare's portrayal of Scottish history in *Macbeth* is flawed. The literary link is continued throughout the novel in the name of the local gentry, Thain, a punning on the title, Thane, signifying a feudal baron, by which Macbeth was known. It is present, too, in the notable characteristic of Fiona Thain, that 'she would never equivocate' (OT,177), which recalls the porter's scene (Act II, Scene III) of Shakespeare's play. The text seems to suggest that, just as Sadler's prejudiced view of his mother has distorted his childhood, so the biased perspective transmitted by literature can inculcate false impressions of characters

and of history. In the course of the novel both sets of misconceptions are addressed. Sadler learns the truth about his parents' divorce, and the version of Scottish history and character presented in *Macbeth* is replaced by a more benign representation.

Instrumental in achieving this is another intertextual reference, this time to Stevenson's children's verses. Fairly quickly Sadler notices that 'the very lie of the land here was different to what it was in the south', and this is described in language that recalls Stevenson's poem, 'The Land of Counterpane': 'Here it was as though the counterpane of the ground had been shaken in the wind which still ruffled underneath it when it was spread out again' (*OT*, 12).<sup>21</sup> Association of the landscape with the things of childhood continues, and in this way the Scottish landscape is seen to function as an alternative to Sadler's real childhood, suggesting that, in the process of subject identification, one set of discourses can be replaced by another, especially if the alternative discourses are connected with access to the collective unconscious. Such a situation arises when Sadler experiences what could be interpreted as a process of Jungian individuation when he ascends the narrow pathway leading up to the Eden-like landscape of the moor: 'It was as though this place had given him a borrowed childhood. "It's a state of consciousness that has nothing to do with memory. That's why you feel no ties or threads fastening you"' (*OT*, 150-151). That the transition is complete is suggested by Sadler's willingness to renounce his former associations and frames of reference when he agrees that Fiona Thain's scarf is not, after all, the curaçao blue he had associated with the liqueurs in the bar at his road-house, but the Fair Isle blue she associates with the Shetland Islands (*OT*, 151). Sadler's identification with the Highland scene is also effected by the citational practices of its inhabitants; from the beginning, the local

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<sup>21</sup>*A Child's Garden of Verses* (London: Bodley Head, 1923), p. 27.

traders had called him 'Drochet' instead of using his own name. And, even before his moorland experience, he had begun to identify with the discourse of the landscape, for the vastness of the mountains, something that he had initially found intimidating, had now assumed a familiar, welcoming ambience:

It was as though [the vastness] had a spirit of its own, a spirit that moved on mountain top and the flood of waters, like light across empty places, that left nothing void, a spirit with which he felt in tune. He was no longer a stranger here. He was at home. (*OT*,139)

Sadler is also seen to become absorbed by the history of The Drochet Arms. From his first arrival he is aware that the building's atmosphere is redolent with the fragrance of the past, 'like the bouquet distilled not from wine but from long past summers' (*OT*,49). Its proprietor, Mr Gunn, is similarly linked with the past, a past which, initially, has no connection with Sadler. And although aware of Sadler's original outsider status, the reader is encouraged into a complicity with the text in approving his gradual identification with the discourses of history and tradition that are encoded in the aura of The Drochet Arms and in the attitudes of its proprietor:

He had the curious feeling that this man was still linked to his forebears, as he had the feeling that the fragrance which imbued his house would not grow any fainter with the years, that it would remain when there was no longer a house. (*OT*, 49)

It is not surprising, therefore, that in the end Sadler should have become so assimilated into its ways, and so identified with its traditions, as he perceives them, that, when the dining room is refurbished, he should object to the changing of the late Victorian paintings of idealised Highland scenes, popularised by the cult of Balmorality, for older ones of European origin. This seemingly trivial incident

points up the fact that it is a particular brand of Scottishness with which Sadler identifies. He knows or cares nothing for Scotland's more ancient cultural and mercantile links with northern Europe, preferring instead to identify with the popular images by which Scottish culture is more reductively known. Even his mentor, Mr Gunn, observes the staunchness with which he has adopted his new subject position, and although the remark is jocular, it speaks of a new national identity that surpasses the intensity of that of the hotel's receptionist who is a native Scot: "You'll soon be more Scottish Nationalist than Jenny Shields" (*OT*, 203).

Even Sadler's linguistic register alters to suit his new national identity. At his preliminary interview with Mr Gunn in London he had noted the older man's habit of asking a question by means of a statement that required corroboration or dissent (*OT*,41), and soon after his arrival Sadler himself adopts this turn of phrase (*OT*,63). His sister, Winifred, notices the alteration in his speech: "You even talk like a Scotchman now. If you stay on much longer at that Drochet Hotel, I won't be able to make you out the next time I come back" (*OT*,131). But more importantly, Sadler believes he has developed an insight into the depths of meaning attainable in the Gaelic language that cannot be encapsulated in the English equivalent. He has learned to think and feel like a Highlander, even though he still has to use English to try to articulate his thoughts:

Now he knew what immortal meant. It was a word Highlanders would understand, they would not need to learn its meaning as he had learnt, they would be born in the knowledge of it as they were born amongst mountains. Immortal -- the shine of youth on age and the strength of age in youth so fused that neither could outlast the other.  
(*OT*,153)

In *The Other Traveller* Morrison employs the various discourses by which Scottish national identity has conventionally been constructed, demonstrating how stereotypical attributes of Scottishness can be learned and accepted by those born outwith the Gaidhealtachd. The implication would seem to be that if an Englishman can identify with the subject positions they offer, then such identification would be a straightforward matter for Lowland Scots. Moreover, as already suggested, the use of the name 'Gunn' for the man who is the guardian of Highland values is suggestive of the Highland focus of the fiction of Neil M. Gunn, and this could be taken as representative of the Celtophilic emphasis that informed the cultural nationalism in much of the fiction of the Scottish Literary Renaissance. But *The Other Traveller* goes further, for while the narrative of Sadler's re-identification paints the scenario outlined in the above discussion, another narrative strand simultaneously subverts the assumptions the former would seem to endorse. The novel's supernatural elements undermine the authenticity of the construction of a universally-accepted national identity which has been based on discourses that are not representative of the real experience of most modern Scots, and question the desirability of attempting such a construction.

The concept of the universality of Scottish identity is first suggested when Sadler recalls the men of the Scottish regiment with whom he had shared a landing-craft on D-Day. Their blackened hands and faces made it impossible to distinguish the man who had broken him off a piece of his lucky white heather -- one of the universal icons of Scottish kitsch:

A minute later he could not have told which 'Scotty' had been its donor, but as heightened consciousness enlarged each moment, until it stood apart with the sharpness of a lifetime, so each man with every

distinguishing feature effaced, stood out for him as individual as himself. Not one, but every single man had shared his luck with him.  
(*OT*,22)

But Morrison is at pains to show that this is an erroneous view of Scots; differences do exist between Highlanders and Lowlanders. For example, to begin with Sadler feels most at home with the receptionist, Jenny Shields. This is not just because they are contemporaries, but because she, like himself at this stage, is linguistically differentiated from the others; for ‘although she might speak with a Glasgow accent [. . .] she had no other tongue, such as Gaelic, from which to unwrap her thoughts’ (*OT*,74). Moreover, Jenny herself registers the difference between Highlanders and Lowlanders, in terms that echo historical suspicions and animosities, and even suggest the existence of divisions within the Gaidhealtachd itself: “‘They’re different up here, clannish. It doesn’t affect me, me being Scots I suppose, but I know what you mean. They’re even clannish among themselves’” (*OT*,76). Used here, the word ‘clannish’ evokes connotations other than those of the loyalty and community conventionally associated with Scottish clans in the Romanticised view of the Highlands; now it suggests narrowness and exclusion of others. Although Jenny Shields is, in many respects, an unsympathetic character whose ideology differs from the view of national identity represented by The Drochet Arms, her undermining of the Highland myth strikes an early discordant note in the harmony that is being composed around Sadler.

Morrison demonstrates that even the subject of Scottish nationalism itself draws different responses from Scots. It is Jenny Shields, the Lowlander, who is the political Nationalist; the cultural nationalist, Mr Gunn, as custodian and promoter of Scottish/Highland cultural values dissociates himself from such separatist activities

by referring to her as a ‘*rabid* Scottish Nationalist’ (*OT*,66, my italics). If, as I have suggested, Mr Gunn is meant to represent his namesake, then there is some inconsistency here, for Neil Gunn *was* an active *political* nationalist although his fiction promotes *cultural*-nationalist aims. There is more than a suggestion, however, that such an anti-political-nationalist stand is indicative of ill-disguised authorial sympathies. While distinction must always be made between narrator and author, I can see no thematic validation, other than the possibility that it is meant to contribute to the novel’s ultimate subversion of the national identity it constructs, for the narrator’s belittling of the Scottish Covenant: ‘She did not tell him it meant signing her name to a list in a tweed shop in Sauchiehall Street’ (*OT*,76). This is one point in the novel where the meaning becomes somewhat confused. But antipathy towards political nationalism is certainly encouraged in Jenny Shields’ characterisation. In the novel’s value-system, nothing about her is attractive; she is plain, lacks integrity, acts without conventional feminine decorum and reacts to Sadler’s repudiation of her amorous advances in a spiteful and vindictive manner. For the most part, this is how she is perceived by Sadler, and as the reader is encouraged to look with his eyes, political nationalism, like Jenny herself, remains an unattractive, even disruptive, option in the novel’s world.

The opposite applies to the cultural tradition represented by Fiona Thain. Like Mr Gunn, she is seen by Sadler as the embodiment of the ‘essence’ of the conventional image of Scottishness: ‘He felt with her very much as he felt with Mr. Gunn, as though he had reached through the loose scattering of words to the unity of silence behind them’ (*OT*,113). This quotation can be read simply as the expression of a rapport, but I think that it also hints at the possibility that both she and Mr Gunn, like the landscape they inhabit and the culture they perpetuate, are meant to

represent an authenticity underlying and underpinning conventional discourses defining Scottishness. This idea is further substantiated by her similarity to the symbolic female characters in Neil Gunn's fiction, such as Dark Mairi of the Shore in *Butcher's Broom*. Fiona's association with the land is emphasised in her 'mossy look' (OT,91), 'her face [. . . that] was as cold as spring water brimming at its source' (OT,152), and in her resemblance to 'the flaw-flower that, for all its translucent white fragility, knew how to withstand the blast' (OT,150). Yet, despite the symbolic significance that she would seem to carry, her portrayal lacks strength. She is associated with childhood, not in a maternal fashion, but as one who still frequents the nursery. On two of the three occasions that Sadler meets her in her home, he finds her in the nursery. Even when he walks with her in the garden, her younger siblings are present (OT, 113), and his thoughts dwell on what he envisages as her past; and when he kisses her, it is under the disapproving gaze of her older brother (OT, 152). Compared to the spirit, albeit apparently misdirected, of the Lowlander Jenny Shields, as a female character Fiona Thain seems two-dimensional; and as the anonymous reviewer cited earlier opined, 'far, far too good to be true'.<sup>22</sup> But I think this is intentional, for her demeanour, for the most part, belongs to a bygone age. Jenny Shields' political activism, sexual freedom, and occupational advancement speak of post-war Scotland, whereas Fiona Thain, as her name, with its Ossianic and Celtic Twilight connotations and its association with an outmoded social formation suggest, speaks of a way of life that is passing, if not already dead. In portraying Fiona as a 'flat' character Morrison undermines the version of Scottish identity constructed by the cultural discourses with which she is associated. Yet even here Morrison could, perhaps, be seen to equivocate, for the

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<sup>22</sup>*Scots Magazine*, vol. 66, March 1957, pp. 479-480.

novel ends with the report that ‘the winter’s by’ because the Thains have returned to Drochet with ‘Miss Fiona at the wheel’ (*OT*,223,224). Used in this context, ‘winter’ could echo the metaphorical association which Susanne Hagemann has observed was frequently used by Renaissance writers to convey their vision of Scotland’s ‘prevalent desolation’ (*‘Bidin Naitural’*, p. 52). This reading could mean that the potential union of the newly reconstructed Sadler with Fiona, the personification of the remnants of traditional Scottish feudal society, is offered as a possible resolution of Scotland’s identity crisis. It could also imply that Fiona is more of a driving force than her two-dimensional representation had hitherto conveyed.

However Morrison’s meaning is unclear, for the idea of death and of something unnatural connected with the conventional construction of Scottish identity is further strengthened by the novel’s supernatural elements. The title is derived, at least in part, from the legend, attached to The Drochet Arms, that no matter when a visitor calls at the former drovers’ inn, he or she is always accompanied by an ‘other’ traveller. Various meanings can be adduced to the ‘other’ in this novel, but a supernatural interpretation is substantiated by many textual references to ghostly presences and paranormal sensations. Even before he is aware of their significance, Sadler experiences responses for which he can find no explanation, such as when he ‘found himself pushing his shoulder against the back of the seat, like an impatient child would do, to encourage the train to be on its way’ (*OT*,37). It is only later that he realises that this is how Hew Gunn, the dead son of the proprietor would have acted on his way home. From his first sight of Hew’s photograph, Sadler knows that he is dead, but he is also aware of his strangely-vibrant presence throughout the hotel:

It was almost as though he, the living, were passed by the dead, who was more alive than he was. Not that Dick saw anything or anyone, but he felt someone. Or rather, the house was so full of the stir and movement of wind that for a moment it had made him think of someone passing him, someone in a hurry. (*OT*, 62)

When Sadler learns that Mr Gunn's son died fighting on the Rhine, where he, too, had been engaged in combat, he becomes convinced that it was Hew who shared his piece of white heather with him on the landing-craft:

'I suppose I could find out if he were one of those I went over with, but even then there's nothing to prove it was he who gave me the heather. But I'm not going to find out. I don't need to. I know. Not only from this, but from other things.' (*OT*, 114)

The implication of this would seem to be that in the transference of the heather, the badge of Scottishness, something of the identity of the giver has been transferred to the recipient. Two possible deductions can be drawn from this; firstly, that national identity *can* be encoded in, and transmitted by, symbols of nationality; and secondly, that the heather provided a medium by which a more sinister transfer of identity could take place. I believe that in *The Other Traveller* Morrison conflates both possibilities.

One reading of *The Other Traveller* can interpret the heather as a symbol of the discourse of Highland identity by which Sadler achieves a rootedness, a sense of belonging that he has hitherto lacked. Compared with the alternative, unrooted future represented by his wife's proposed new hotel venture, The Bouquet Garni, the world of The Drochet Arms allows him to draw strength from its 'roots'. But the narrative suggests more than this; for in finding the clump from which it was picked

and the girl who first gave it to her lover, Sadler is able to take that man's place. However, this is no mere substitution. What would seem to be involved is the complete abandonment of his original identity, individual as well as national; for despite the supposed inculcation by Mr Gunn of a more acute sense of moral values, Sadler callously rejects his estranged mother's explanation of the events leading to her divorce and her attempts at reconciliation (*OT*,196). This could be interpreted as a final rupture of the umbilical cord that binds him to his original identity; but whatever the precise explanation, Sadler's action leaves this reader with a feeling of discomfort at his disloyalty to his real origins. Even at this stage, the cost involved in acquiring a sense of rootedness seems inordinately high.

However, a feeling of greater discomfort is generated by the novel's ending. Having rejected his origins and finally freed himself from the encumbrance of his wife, Sadler learns that he is to inherit The Drochet Arms. In view of the vicarious participation in his national and individual reconstruction that the text has appeared to encourage, this would seem to augur well; but the situation is clouded by his meeting with Willie, the local simpleton who had formerly been befriended by Hew Gunn. Sadler had met Willie some months earlier when the latter had brought his fishing rod to be stored in the hotel's equipment room. On that occasion Willie had been aware that Sadler was the new manager, and had told him that the rod had been a gift from Hew. Now, not only does Willie address Sadler as "Master Hew", but, as if to drive home the mis-identification, he says, "You were aye one to see I had the best" (*OT*,223). Although initially startled, Sadler does not contradict him, for Willie goes on to tell him what he wants to hear -- that the Thains have come home. For the reader this is a powerful suggestion that something more sinister than assimilation of Sadler into the community could have taken place. This possibility is

also suggested by Willie's status as an innocent, often thought, especially in rural communities, to be endowed with an insight denied to others. It now seems possible that Sadler has been possessed and has become the vehicle by which the spirit of the dead Hew Gunn can resume its life at Drochet. The implication of this, as far as Scottish national identity is concerned, is that such an identity, founded as it is on conventional 'Highland discourses', has the unwholesome nature of a revenant, even though the novel has handled such discourses sympathetically. However, Willie's simpleminded status, and the optimistic tenor of the closing images go some way towards dispelling this darker interpretation. Nevertheless, it cannot negate it, and both possibilities remain.

Perhaps some of the discomfort and confusion generated by this novel results from its bifocal perspective and its crossing of generic boundaries. Its interiority encourages the reader to participate in Sadler's 'reconstruction'; yet its exteriority maintains objectivity and questions the integrity of the identity so created. The novel's realist vein encourages the reader's complicity in its construction of Highland/Scottish identity; yet its supernatural elements undermine both the legitimacy of doing this and the validity of that identity. The net result is uncertainty. It seems to me that this novel explores Morrison's apparent ambivalence regarding the relevance of conventional representations of Scottishness in post-war Britain; it juxtaposes emotional identification with the landscape and its traditions, which the reader experiences vicariously by means of focalisation through Sadler, with a rational questioning of the kind of Scottish identity that this engenders. That the novel's vision is unclear merely serves to re-emphasise the problematic nature of such conventional constructions.

National identity is, however, only one expression of belonging, and it is possibly one of which the individual is less immediately aware, on a day-to-day basis, than his or her social identity. The remainder of this chapter examines Morrison's handling of social identity by examining her treatment of class and changing social hierarchies.

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#### 4.5 SOCIAL IDENTITIES: INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

The simple truth of the matter seems to be that literature is national in origin and has found its subject-matter or drama precisely in those class differences or inequalities which together make up the life of the nation.

Neil M. Gunn (1936)<sup>23</sup>

It is possible to look beneath the umbrella term 'nation' to its constituent communities. I shall now consider the ideological implications inherent in Morrison's handling of the different social identities found in such communities. Such a discussion necessarily involves the use of the term 'class'; although I use the term in its orthodox Weberian sense, where class denotes positioning within a social formation that supports a particular type of economic organisation, such as bourgeois capitalism, I also include the whole gamut of assumptions and prejudices that contribute to the ideological interpellation by which members of each class recognise themselves. It is significant, however, that Morrison does not represent

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<sup>23</sup>'Literature: Class or National?', collected in *Landscape and Light: Essays by Neil M. Gunn*, ed. by Alistair McCleery (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), p.118.

Scottish society as being monolithic. Distinction is made between urban and rural societies, and what is particularly noticeable is the difference in narrative perspective regarding the hierarchical inequalities within both social frameworks. Nor do her novels portray social organisation as static. Changing hegemonies are explored, and here, too, it is interesting to note how Morrison's treatment of different instances of social mobility suggests the betrayal of authorial sympathies. Morrison's treatment of social identities is interesting because it covers a wide range of Scottish social experience. It is significant also in what it suggests about the author's own ideological interpellation; for I think that although she tried to be even-handed in her treatment of this topic, her own middle-class position and Conservative political leanings dictated the slant from which other social identities were viewed.<sup>24</sup> Morrison's gender would also have been instrumental in directing her view of Scotland's patriarchal society. However, because of the focus of this chapter, I shall postpone consideration of the special case presented by women and limit my discussion to Morrison's handling of the more general social identities, designated by class, as found in Scotland's rural and urban communities.

Two preliminary points should be emphasised. Firstly, the narrative perspective is often that of a middle-class observer. By this I do not mean that Morrison sets up a definite persona through whose consciousness events are mediated; rather, I mean that her manner of focalisation often communicates a character's middle-class consciousness so that it appears to borrow something of the narrative voice's authority, and often seems to expect a willing complicity with like-minded readers. Secondly, in Morrison's fiction social identities are usually considered within a hierarchical structure. Apart from her later novels where

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<sup>24</sup>Morrison's political affiliations have been confirmed by Dr Elizabeth Michie.

modern middle-class groups provide the principal focus of attention, we do not usually find social groups dissected in isolation. They are presented in relation to others; their actions are measured against others' yardsticks as well as their own. Consequently, like national identity, the construction of social identity is shown to consist, at least partially, of a recognition of the 'otherness' of different classes.

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#### 4.5.i RURAL SOCIAL IDENTITIES

Much of Morrison's fiction adopts a rural, or more specifically, a Highland focus. Significantly, the indigenous society created in such novels is restricted to either the gentry who own the land, or the folk who work it. Conspicuous by its absence, particularly in her historical novels, is a sizeable middle class. Restricted normally to the doctor, the minister and the dominie, Morrison emphasises that the middle class is extraneous to rural society by frequently having such characters travel into their country abode. *Breakers*, *The Strangers* and *The Winnowing Years* all follow this pattern. This means that no matter how well they absorb country values, they still retain something of their urban middle-class ethos, and bring to the evaluation of rural social attitudes a wider external perspective. Their median position also gives them access to both poles of the social spectrum. It is also Morrison's own class perspective, and could explain why in her rural novels the focalisers are often middle-class characters, most frequently ministers' families.

However, the middle classes do not escape censure. For example, as noted in Chapter 1, in *Breakers* the Edinburgh middles classes are criticised; but this is

because their 'Enlightened' urban values oppose the rural values the novel promotes. This criticism extends to the 'rural' middle classes, because both they and their urban counterparts share the same social values. What seems most appalling about Lilith's marriage, to both her rural aunt Elizabeth and the urban lawyer, Rand, is that Callum 'is not even of her class' (B,275). In later novels the middle-class perspective becomes more dominant, particularly with reference to the urban working classes.

Earlier discussion of *The Other Traveller* suggested that one reading of the novel sees the landed aristocracy, personified by Fiona Thain, still figuring prominently in the construction of national identity. Such a conservative view might appear to contradict the historical decline of the landed influence as presented in *The Winnowing Years*, or Morrison's unsympathetic treatment of the aristocracy in *Breakers*. However, her handling of the landed classes evinces a tension between attention to historical accuracy and a degree of authorial sympathy.

In her early novels particularly, Morrison appears to sympathise with the peasantry and portrays the landed aristocracy as unscrupulous in its dealings with its tenants. In *Breakers* the evictions on the Marquis of Moreneck's estate are presented as recent examples of that family's traditional disregard for honesty in acquiring land and justice in treating its tenantry by Fiona's comment: "A Stewart's had Inchbuigh lang afore the Morenecks were heard o', and we used to own it, but we were done oot o' it by a Marquis near twa hundred year back" (B,102). In *The Gowk Storm* the aristocracy's greedy materialism is highlighted when the Marchioness tries to trick old Mrs Wands into parting with a valuable piece of china. Their absenteeism and sexual profligacy are both suggested when one of the Lockhart sisters recalls that the Marquis "used to ogle mamma most disgracefully

in Princess Street in Edinburgh” (GS,80). Yet even in these early novels, the anger directed against this social élite’s behaviour is moderated by a recognition of their role as linchpins of old Highland society. In *Breakers*, the crofters’ respect for the Marchioness and their conviction that she would stop the evictions (B,117) demonstrate their belief that their feudal superiors would honour the ‘principles of *duthchas*’ whereby the landlord protected his tenant (Devine, p.182). And in *The Gowk Storm*, even while recognising their many faults, Mrs Wands sympathises with the plight of the gentry. It is their lineage and breeding that are seen to command her respect:

‘I thocht to masel’ no a’ the baptism stanes in Christendom will keep ye oot o’ hell. *But he comes o’ a guid family*, ev’n supposing they did get a’ their land by murdering ither folk. But they’re in a sad way these days whit wi’ thirlages and debts. When ma graundfaether was alive, they had four castles in a’, and noo they have but twa.’ (GS,80, my italics)

Interestingly, though, in *The Strangers* where events are filtered largely through the consciousnesses of Bernardo an Italian immigrant and other urban ‘strangers’ to Moluag, the portrayal of the local gentry’s decadence, encapsulated in the spendthrift ways and maternal inadequacy of Lady Kuld, and her husband’s adultery, is not moderated by acknowledgement of any innate, redeeming qualities attributable to generations of ‘good breeding’. Rather, the narrator emphasises that history has witnessed a sustained ‘drapping awa’ of the Kuld fortune and lineage, an ‘enfeebling [. . .that] could in every instance be traced [. . . ] to a woman’ (TS,114):

Women brought beauty and wit with marriage to enliven the northern Kuld stock, but none ever yet brought wealth, and few came endowed with wisdom. Lands never reclaimed, had to be sold to pay the Marchioness of Mhoreneck's extravagance and folly in the seventeenth century as they had to be mortgaged in the nineteenth because of the wife of her descendant. (*TS*,115)

While capable of interpretation as being antagonistic towards women, such comments can also be read as criticism of the Kuld male line's lack of financial acumen. Over a period when the aristocracy were securing their fortunes by undertaking agricultural improvement, making speculative investments, and marrying into wealthy families, the Kulds did none of these. Such inaction could be viewed by middle-class urban eyes, accustomed to a plutocratic social formation, as culpable ineptitude and unworthy of sympathy.

Motivated by different urban imperatives, an even more unsympathetic attitude towards the landed élite is evinced in Jenny Shields's description of the Thains' position in *The Other Traveller*. She is delighted that their wealth has gone: "They're the big people in the district. At least they were. He's the laird. They used to have money to burn but they haven't now" (*OT*,92). Jenny's statement communicates her anger that money should have guaranteed social status. But more significantly, it also articulates her unwillingness to recognise any inherent qualities that could have validated the Thains' social elevation in the past, or could account for their residual status. Her description is riddled with contradictions in which past and present alternate. Moreover, she expects Sadler to share her anger, and her pleasure at their decline:

'They're a law unto themselves, the Thains are, and always have been. They just don't care what people think and never have. That's

their style. You'll never guess what their motto is. Abune All.' Surely the amusement she saw splintering his dark eyes was directed at the Thains and their high-hat ways, there was nothing to be amused at over her. 'Above all! Did you ever hear of such conceit? Think of having that for your motto. Well, all they've got now is their motto. They're not abune any more. They're just like everyone else.'

(OT,94-5)

Jenny's reiteration of the Thains' reduced status is complicated by her repeated references to their former superiority. Despite her efforts to render them like everyone else, she cannot help but emphasise the fact that they see themselves as socially élite, and are still seen like this by others, including herself, even though she refuses to recognise it. I think that with the confused vehemence of Jenny's attack Morrison discredits her hostility towards landed privilege. This is suggested not only by the unsoundness lent to her argument by her overt vindictiveness and jealousy, but also by Mr Gunn's somewhat facetious remark about her own urban working-class background: "She is from Glasgow, nevertheless manages to survive separated from the comforts of the Saltmarket" (OT,65). Moreover, because of Morrison's unsympathetic portrayal of Jenny's appearance, her behaviour and her political affiliation, the reader is dissuaded from accepting her reading of social identities. This exemplifies Morrison's tendency to assume that her readers will be unsympathetic towards urban working-class perspectives.

Sadler's estimation of the Thains' social position differs from Jenny's. Because he accepts the traditional rural values personified in Mr Gunn and Fiona Thain, he sees her family from a rural *and* an urban middle-class perspective. Although Sadler's background is closer to the Thains' privileged sphere than is Jenny Shields's, there is still a mutual hostility between himself and Ninian, the

laird's heir (*OT*, 99, 153). This could indicate the competition for social supremacy between the declining gentry and the ascendant bourgeoisie to which Sadler belongs. But unlike Jenny, Sadler's middle-class origins make his position relatively secure, and class differentials are not as important to him as they are to Jenny who is struggling to leave her urban working-class identity behind her. More significantly, Sadler's assimilation of rural values predisposes him to register the Thains' decline in terms that celebrate their former prestige. Their predicament is personified for him in the enfeebled but dignified demeanour of the old laird, 'a tall silvery man, the glory of his former good looks clinging to his over thin body like the shreds of a banner' (*OT*, 100). *The Other Traveller's* focalisation through Sadler encourages the reader to adopt his view of the gentry.

What Morrison's fiction seems to value is the tradition represented by families like the Thains, and their association with the land and the community. Although Sadler's view of the Thains could be criticised as being over-romanticised, examples from elsewhere in Morrison's fiction suggest that in their rural domain even the gentry's harshness was respected by a tenantry that knew its place in the social hierarchy and accepted the laird's 'natural' superiority. The old gravedigger in *The Strangers*, for instance, articulates how a worthy laird formerly inspired obedience and loyalty:

'Auld Sir Torquil Kuld wha bided at Mearnaik Hoose in those days was ne'er so auld or so ill that he couldna lose his temper but he had a grund way o' giving orders that warmed the very heart o' ye.'  
(*TS*, 98)

Yet, despite the lingering sympathy shown for the élite of the old rural, feudal hierarchy, Morrison's fiction is historically accurate, and presents the landed gentry

as a construction of social identity that is in decline. Even the name, Kuld, given to the landed family in several of her novels suggests, in its punning with ‘culled’, both their privileged status as society’s chosen élite, and their fate as species destined to be weakened by historical forces. As Morrison’s political Conservatism might lead one to expect, the aristocracy’s decline is presented as part of an organic process, resulting from changes within that social group rather than the result of revolutionary challenges from their social inferiors. Historical forces, in the shape of economic exigencies, have depleted their wealth and eroded their power base. Aristocratic qualities are also shown to have suffered dilution, or to have been transmitted only through the female line. Ninian Thain in *The Other Traveller* has failed to inherit the laird’s innate nobility: ‘Ninian probably inherited his red hair from his mother; his sister took after their father except that she was not tall’ (*OT*,100). In *The Strangers* a similar diminution in what their social inferiors regarded as the aristocracy’s characteristic ability to control rural society is registered in the gravedigger’s comparison between the laird of his boyhood and the present one:

‘The Sir Torquil noo is no an angry man like his graund-faether, but he’s mair deeficult o’ approach for a’ that. His graund-faether had no back to his mind, if ye ken whit I mean, his thochts cam stracht to ye and went through na filtering on the way. But the Sir Torquil noo says so little, ye’re wondering a’ the time whit he’s for thinking.’  
(*TS*, 98)

This observation also suggests that it is not only the landed élite whose social identity has been altered; now the rural poor are also aware of concomitant changes in their own identity. The stratification of rural society has been displaced by

aristocratic decline, and Morrison's use of articulations of disorientation, like the gravedigger's, suggests that the traditional values and loyalties of the countryfolk have also suffered erosion.

However, Morrison is at pains to distinguish between true aristocratic stock whose pedigree and association with the land date back for centuries, and those later arrivals who used wealth gained from mercantile and industrial enterprises to buy the prestige still associated with land ownership. Such *parvenus* are critically portrayed. For example in *The Winnowing Years*, although refraining from overt narrative comment, Morrison uses the thoughts of the minister, Mr Pollock, to distinguish between the privileges due to aristocratic breeding and those usurped by wealthy urban industrialists. Even the name, Sudden, registers the family's *nouveau riche* status, and John Sudden's treatment of Nicholas Pollock alienates the reader's sympathy from his class, so that even though the merits of the Kuld heir have not been rehearsed, agreement with Mr Pollock's opinion is encouraged:

This young man brought up in a palace for a house, who would enter into an inheritance one day richer far in the way of wealth than the Kuld heir. Handsome, fine-looking, with the polished manners of ease and confidence, he was nevertheless but a rich man's son, whereas young John Kuld was *the son of many men set apart from the common lot.* (WY, 120, my italics)

A similar distinction is made in Morrison's treatment of the Wains in *The Hidden Faring*. This family's *nouveau riche* status and recent acquisition of land is registered in the description of the newness of their country residence, and the implicit criticism of the lack of taste and imagination in its design:

The Big House had no history attached to it, having been built to Sir Alfred's own design. He had something to do with railways and shipping and his country house had the uncomplicated lines of a

short-cut, standing square and solid on ground reclaimed from moorland, entrenched with elaborate plumbing. (*HF*, 15)

Lady Wain's beneficence towards Bartle MacDonald suggests she has aristocratic connections, but money-making is the only attribute that the countryfolk in *The Hidden Fairing* associate with Sir Alfred Wain: 'Sir Alfred was so busy turning everything he touched to gold in the city that he did not spend the weeks his family did at their country home, but when he did he fished most of the time' (*HF*, 18). This behaviour, the novel suggests, was typical of the new landed élite, who had no relationship with the poor beside whom they lived. Even the Wain children are shown to be arrogantly dismissive of the locals; while still a child, Alfred Wain's confidence in his social superiority is such that he believes he can dictate how others should moderate their speech in his presence: "And after this say 'live' and not 'bide' when you're talking to me" (*HF*, 65). But perhaps the novel's most trenchant criticism of the *parvenu* class is contained in Bartle's recognition that the Wain's elevated status was only possible because their 'mythical wealth' seemed so vast when viewed in relation to the poverty endemic in Barnfingal (*HF*, 15), and that they had no claim to what he considers real greatness:

For he knew now it was just an accident that Alfred Wain was her son and had red hair. He knew now for certain he was no Caledonian, for the Caledonians had fought with too small shields and with blunt swords. (*HF*, 67)

With its depictions of rural communities that emphasise their harsh living conditions and foreground the injustices perpetrated on the poor by their social superiors, Morrison's fiction does not present an idealised or Romanticised view of

rural society. Yet her fiction evinces a nostalgic identification with the old Highland society of feudal lord and dependants bound together by mutual bonds of respect and responsibility. Her novels appear sympathetic towards the declining fortunes of the old Scottish aristocracy, even though this class is shown to have reneged in its duty towards its social inferiors, and been instrumental in its own demise. Unsympathetic towards those *nouveaux riches* who sought to use urban wealth to appropriate the aristocracy's social prestige, Morrison's fiction depicts families like the Wains as introducing alien urban values that contribute further to the disequilibrium caused to rural society by aristocratic decline. That her fiction should appear so hostile to the intrusion of urban mercantile and industrial values into a rural hierarchy seems strange when we recall that she was herself a member of the urban middle classes. But what seems to enable her to adopt this position is her conservative approach to tradition and her absolute insistence on 'good breeding' as an indicator of social worth.

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#### 4.5.ii URBAN SOCIAL IDENTITIES

Morrison's novels also explore urban social identities, and as with her rural societies, her treatment of social ascendancy and decline is particularly interesting, for in it she recreates something of the social dynamic that operates within communities. Social identities are presented as being in a constant state of construction. The values and aspirations of one social class are painted more vividly by being juxtaposed with those of another. Once again Morrison's middle-class sympathies can be seen to influence her characterisation. However, not only are the working classes unsympathetically portrayed, but those characters who could be

called lower middle class are often similarly treated. As with her handling of rural social identities, good breeding would seem to be Morrison's yardstick of social worth.

The main difference between urban and rural social change is that whereas the landed classes were not immediately replaced by another indigenous social group, but managed to retain much of their social standing despite their depleted wealth, this did not happen within urban society. The plutocratic nature of its organisation left urban society susceptible to the vagaries of commerce. Fortunes could be made and lost overnight, and in a society where social status was predicated on wealth, social identities were less fixed than in rural societies. Yet, despite this Morrison still empathises with the social status attributed to established wealth as opposed to that bought by new money, even though, as in *When the Wind Blows*, the old money came from slave labour.

*When the Wind Blows* is set in Glasgow in the first half of the nineteenth century. It juxtaposes the decline of the Murray family with the rising fortunes of the MacDiarmids. As the narrative opens the Murrays enjoy an extravagant lifestyle bought by a fortune made in Jamaican plantations; they live in a lavishly appointed town mansion and spend part of the year in their 'marine villa at Largs' (*WWB*, 20). The MacDiarmids, father and son, are cloth merchants and live in an apartment above their shop in the Briggait. Since his trade depends on satisfying his customers' wishes, Peter MacDiarmid is obliged to act in a subservient fashion to the Murrays, for a sale would often seem to depend as much on the massaging of the customers' egos as the quality of his merchandise. The Murrays accept this treatment as an affirmation of their own sense of social identity. However, closer scrutiny of the account books of both families complicates the picture. Mr Murray,

the representative of his class, has become so debilitated by illness that he can no longer conduct his own affairs. That his class has passed its zenith is further suggested by the fact that his heirs, twin sons, cannot succeed him. The elder son dies in a shipping accident, and the younger is left mentally unbalanced by his brother's death. The latter's condition is exacerbated by the discovery that their fortune has been squandered on injudicious investments by their father's attorney. Peter MacDiarmid's son, on the other hand, has been reared to succeed his father, and the novel's opening scene describes how the erection of a new sign above the door celebrates the fact that he has been made a business partner on his coming of age.

From this synopsis it might appear that Morrison charts the rise and fall in an even-handed manner which suggests the acceptance of the ideology of social mobility. But what is significant about this novel is the manner in which the narrative voice manipulates the reader's sympathy so that although both aspects of the reconstruction of social identities are presented in positive and negative lights, sympathetic identification lingers with the fallen Murrays. From the outset, 'trade', personified by Peter MacDiarmid, is presented in an unfavourable light. The location of his residence, above his shop, is far from salubrious:

The shop stood in the Bridgegate, a street which, even in the gathering gloom of a September twilight, betrayed unmistakable signs of having come down in the world. Clothes hung out from corner windows, signs flapped above decorated doorways, and panes of glass in some of the bow and tympany windows were broken and stuffed with pieces of cloth. (*WWB*, 7)

His demeanour is presented as an uneasy mixture of fawning obsequiousness and self-importance. His language and his manner of speaking distance him as much

from the refined speech of the educated, professional class, represented by the minister, Mr Whitecross, as the latter is removed from the social status of the family of the 'all-powerful Arthur Murray' (*WWB*,11). Peter MacDiarmid 'dirled his *r*'s, span his *s*'s and brought his *ch*'s from some remote region of his throat, speaking his Scots with such energy that his words seemed to tear in his mouth' (*WWB*,10). Even his physical appearance is described as inferior; manual labour has distorted his hand so that his 'first finger [is] appreciably broader than the other four' (*WWB*,10), and there are suggestions that his clothes are normally stained with the 'traces of snuff or of food' (*WWB*,55). Despite his thriving business, Peter MacDiarmid's pedlar origins cannot be concealed, and compared with the 'height and clear-cut features [that] gave a certain splendour to [Mr Whitecross's] appearance' (*WWB*,10), MacDiarmid has the appearance of inferior quality, with 'the thumb of the potter stamped heavily upon him' (*WWB*, 11). It is significant that it is not until the end of the novel that Peter MacDiarmid is considered in direct relation to Mrs Murray, and I believe that this is done to create a final emphasis on the gulf that separates them.

His son, Hugh, however, although 'square and massively built' (*WWB*,34) compared with the Murray sons, is more refined than his father. He has had the benefit of education, and deals with the company accounts. His speech, apart from a few Scotticisms, bears more resemblance to that of the Murrays than to his father's. Eschewing the gaudy materials favoured by his father, his sombre appearance is in keeping with sophisticated fashion trends (*WWB*, 56). But what most distinguishes Hugh from his father is how he constructs his own social identity in relation to that of the Murrays. His father's impoverished roots cause him to maintain a degree of deference towards his social 'superiors', while the young, politically Radical Hugh

is resentful of the Murray's position even though, before their demise, he is forced to affirm their own perception of themselves:

They were all proud, you could tell that at a glance, proud as lairds. Well, and why shouldn't they be? They were Arthur Murray's children with wealth and the things wealth could never buy behind them. Moodily he stared out of the window. They had plenty to be proud of. (*WWB*, 35)

But co-existing with the reading of this passage that views it as free indirect discourse 'spoken' by Hugh MacDiarmid, there is the possibility that it is meant to convey a more general perception of the Murrays' social identity, delivered by the narrative voice. If this is the case, then the text would appear to favour an élitist world-view and endorse the construction of social identity by which the Murrays recognise themselves.

Further evidence that the text encourages sympathetic identification with the Murrays can be found in the 'persona' of the narrative voice. What is unusual about it is that while the narrator remains an apparently transparent medium through which the story is told, focalisation is seen to take place within the family as a whole. While no one member is singled out as mediating consciousness, the narrator operates from within the family circle. This is achieved by referring to Mr and Mrs Murray as though they were the narrator's parents, and it is significant that this technique is employed in the very first sentence in which they are described: 'The early autumn sunset burnished into a dusky glow the large and lofty room in which mamma sat with papa' (*WWB*, 17). Note also the impression of warmth and comfort created by the description. This is in stark contrast to the way Peter MacDiarmid has already been introduced; not only is he described externally, but he is viewed in the

context of surroundings whose unattractiveness is conveyed so that the reader is distanced even before MacDiarmid himself is described. Therefore, before any information is given about the families' respective positions, a contrast is set up by the difference between the narrator's exterior and interior approaches, and the reader's sympathy is manipulated in favour of the Murrays. Throughout the text, despite the failings exhibited by individual members of the Murray family, as a unit their social cachet is reinforced by interjections that implicate the reader in its recognition: 'He had plenty of friends, *of course*; the Murrays were popular as a family because they had so much vitality, they shed it around them wherever they went' (*WWB*, 286, my italics).

As with the rural landed classes, so the urban 'aristocracy', the upper middle-class group with established wealth and social prestige, represented by the Murrays, is in decline. Historical forces, in the shape of changing economic imperatives, have largely been responsible. But as in the rural example, Morrison's fiction suggests that some of the responsibility must fall on the inability of the urban social élite to maintain their supremacy because of an endemic weakness in the group as a whole. It is those who are able to grasp the initiative, read the signs and adjust their businesses to meet a changing marketplace that survive and prosper. Such men are the MacDiarmids. The demands of historical accuracy oblige Morrison to acknowledge this, but neither they nor their ascendancy is represented with warmth. Indeed something of how she sees the relative standing of the Murrays and the MacDiarmids is figuratively represented in an early incident in the novel when the young Hugh MacDiarmid joins the coach in which the Murray children are travelling back to Glasgow from Largs. Although they share the same confined

space, the notion of Hugh's social exclusion is conveyed in the observation that he and Kindry Murray are 'separated' by the window in which she sees his reflection:

He sat some seats away from her, but in the reflection she could have touched him. She put her hand over his face and felt the glass icy cold. It gave her an empty feeling to know that the son of the cloth-merchant was not seeing her although his eyes under drawn brows were gazing straight into hers behind her outspread hand.

(*WWB*, 36)

As the novel ends, however, the MacDiarmids' wealth elevates them to such a social position that Hugh can marry Kindry, the youngest Murray daughter. Although Hugh's surly nature and Radical politics have somewhat alienated him from the narrator's sympathy, Kindry's feelings for him overcome the narrator's implicit class prejudice, at least as far as Hugh is concerned. This is not so with his father. There is a strong sense of the grotesque in the description of Peter MacDiarmid drinking tea with Mrs Murray and talking about the fine house he is building for his son and daughter-in-law. One gets the impression that it is not only the hostile sister, Clementina, who is mocking MacDiarmid's gaucheness:

But he did not pour the contents into his saucer as he wanted to do, for that was one of the things Hugh had warned him against as they sat in the carriage on the way to the Murrays that afternoon. 'Yes, and don't stir your tea as though it was a plumb-pudding you were making and don't pour it into your saucer and try to mind not to blow on it, and don't be all haver and clash with the servant who opens the door to us, even though you are her Elder.' (*WWB*, 296-297)

He is also shown to commit the ultimate solecism of over-familiarity that betrays his lack of breeding and questions the validity of his new social identity, when he says

to Mrs Murray, “‘A pot or twa o’ paint would no do your lobby any harm’” (*WWB*, 301).

This contrasts sharply with the portrayal of Mrs Murray’s innate good breeding. Treating everyone with grace, regardless of their station, she epitomises what the novel’s value system regards as the superior standard of behaviour associated with her social class. Significantly, however, it is noted that none of her children emulate her good manners. Although appreciation of her demeanour is initially registered as having been felt by MacDiarmid, the interiority implicit in his encomium is held alongside the exteriority of the narrative voice, with all the authority that commands:

Fine manners was scarcely the right word for this thing that shone through and showered from her, for after all manners were what most people kept for special occasions, like their Sabbath jacket. Mebbe the secret with Mistress Murray was that to her all occasions were special, and she never doffed her Sabbath jacket even on lawful days, while the ground she trod she made common ground to which every one had an equal right. (*WWB*, 297)

Therefore, although Morrison’s fiction does not encourage sympathetic identification with the intrusion of the urban bourgeoisie into rural society to replace the aristocracy, it does treat the refined urban bourgeoisie in a more favourable manner when their own failing fortunes make it easy for ‘commoners’ to usurp their social position. This would suggest that Morrison was opposed to the principle of social mobility because it enabled those without ‘breeding’, particularly the urban working classes, to assume more elevated social identities. Indeed, in her characterisation of Annie Cupples, the Murrays’ ‘needle-dumper’, Morrison

rehearses the inimical portrayal of the urban working-classes that would later appear in Jenny Shields's characterisation. Annie is presented as a garrulous busybody. Extravagant with her employers' materials, she is ungrateful for the work they give her. Like Jenny Shields, she exults in the misfortunes of her social superiors, and criticises the marriage of Kindry Murray and Hugh MacDiarmid even though she agrees that he has been "brought up carefu'-like". But she cannot resist denigrating his father, saying that he "wasna brought up at a'" (*WWB*, 310). Annie is portrayed as a malcontent who resents advancement in others, and there are distinctly militant undertones in her complaint to Bella: "Why should I be born juist to spend ma life pricking my fingers shaping and sewing for ithers?" (*WWB*, 315). Annie is seen to represent the threat inherent in the progressive levelling of society: "And it's no only the times that are changing but folk wi' them. The tailor yesterday tak's the pins oot o' his mouth to speak like gentle folk to-day, and wears the brows he used to mak' for ithers'" (*WWB*, 310). Bearing in mind her own trade, the next change could see people like herself identifying themselves with the bourgeoisie. That we are meant to interpret this as a threat rather than social improvement is emphasised by her credulous stupidity, for she diagnoses Stavert Murray's stroke as the result of having inadvertently swallowed an asp. Her suggested cure of salt herring (*WWB*, 311) indicates her ignorance, and is surely meant to convey the danger facing society if social levelling continues.

Thus, although Morrison's fiction deals with social mobility she is no egalitarian. Her own middle-class identity and her conservatism (both upper- and lower-case variety) skew her social perspectives and cause her to present a somewhat prejudiced view of social identities. Her early novels, in particular, evince a sympathy for the rural poor, but even her novels of the inter-war period show no

such sympathy for the urban working classes. This was possibly because, as a middle-class urban dweller she could not, with honesty, entertain any idealised notions of their worth or lifestyle that literary and vocational encounters permitted her to have of the rural poor. Consequently, their representation betrays authorial disdain and alarm. While her views might appear inimical to modern, more egalitarian readers they are significant because they provide an insight into the mind-set of one section of an earlier generation of Scots who feared that social levelling would compromise their own social identity.

My discussion has, however, omitted any specific consideration of the implications of gender on social identities. The following chapters will therefore explore Morrison's portrayal of gendered identity, and will examine how her fiction represents Scottish women's experience.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUBVERSIVE SUBMISSION / SUBMISSIVE SUBVERSION: FEMALE IDENTIFICATION AND PATRIARCHAL IDEOLOGY

- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Contextual Considerations
- 5.3 A Troubled Bid For Freedom: The Early Novels
- 5.4 The Effects of War

## CHAPTER 5

SUBVERSIVE SUBMISSION / SUBMISSIVE SUBVERSION:  
 FEMALE IDENTIFICATION AND PATRIARCHAL IDEOLOGY

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The sphere of literature can be seen covertly to secure consent -- unconscious 'choice' -- from its participation in naturalizing social conventions which define gender roles; yet by the same token it can also show such 'norms' to be a matter of invention and interpretation, and thus open to alternative choices or possible change.

Carol Watts<sup>1</sup>

Previous discussion has shown that Morrison's novels can be interpreted as sites of contention between identification with, and subversion of, the discourses of history, religion, national and social identity that provide subject positions within the specifically Scottish context. Although the epithet 'feminist', with its double agenda of 'understand[ing] the social and psychic mechanisms that construct and perpetuate gender inequality and [. . .] chang[ing] them' cannot strictly be applied to Morrison's fiction,<sup>2</sup> many of her novels explore what could be termed a

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<sup>1</sup> 'Releasing Possibility into Form: Cultural Choice and the Woman Writer', in *New Feminist Discourses: Critical Essays on Theories and Texts*, ed. by Isobel Armstrong (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 83-102 (pp. 83-4).

<sup>2</sup> Pam Morris, *Literature and Feminism: An Introduction* (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass., 1995), p.1.

'proto-feminist' perspective, and evince an interest in gendered subject positions as contested spaces. The next two chapters will examine Morrison's handling of female identification; the first will focus on the earlier novels whose dialogism suggests the existence of a dynamic equilibrium between challenge and conformity with respect to patriarchal ideological interpellation; the second will deal with a perceptible alteration in the later novels' ideological perspective that results from addressing both the altered discursive norms of a later historical moment and the resultant conflicting subject positions facing an older woman.

Morrison's early fiction explores the complexities inherent in female identification within a society where the available subject positions were still largely determined by patriarchal discourses that claimed their validation by appeals to historical and religious precedent. These novels challenge the restrictions imposed upon women, and subvert the stereotypes by which they have been represented both to society at large, and to themselves in particular. However, as I shall demonstrate, the acts of challenging and subverting are themselves complicated by an acceptance of the futility of such action in the face of the operation of dark forces of determinism, and by a tendency to comply, albeit reluctantly, with conventional expectations. Their narratives are often constructed in such a way that excuses for the (ab)use of patriarchal authority can be found, and endings often appear to uphold the status quo. But the engagement with submission and subversion which Morrison articulates is not just a straightforward move in one direction balanced by an oppositional thrust. Rather, each stance is modified by qualifications and ambiguities which seem to hold all possibilities in a dialogic relationship. Such an approach could be attributed to her reaction to her specific historical moment; and the debate which is represented in her fiction could be interpreted as a re-enactment

of the then-current debates concerning the position of women in Scottish society, and, perhaps more importantly, an articulation of the confusion experienced by individual women as they attempted to reconcile their own particular feminist aspirations with their position as interpellated subjects of patriarchal ideology.

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## 5.2 CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

Even with the vast changes which have taken place in the position of women in Scottish society over the past hundred years, and most especially since the 1960s, it has been suggested that, ‘despite some convergence’, Scotland, at the end of the twentieth century, was still a more patriarchal society than England.<sup>3</sup> Various sociological factors have been cited to explain the difference, including variations in class structure, skill levels, and unequal employment possibilities. However, I suggest that underpinning these factors there are reasons which stem from Scotland’s past, especially from her inferior position within the Union, and the cultural effects of her distinct ecclesiastical history. Joy Hendry has called the peculiarity of the Scottish woman’s position the ‘double knot on the peenie’.<sup>4</sup> Rather than accusing Scottish men of being inherently dominant and unenlightened, she blames what she sees as their need to find a compensatory mechanism for their psychological ‘emasculatation’, suffered because of the deprivation of national, linguistic and cultural autonomy, the trauma of deracination, and the horrors of

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<sup>3</sup> Arthur McIvor, ‘Gender Apartheid: Women in Scottish Society’, in *Scotland in the 20th Century*, ed. by T. M. Devine and R. J. Finlay (1996; repr. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), pp. 188-209 (p. 206).

<sup>4</sup> ‘A Double Knot on the Peeny’, in *In Other Words: Writing as a Feminist*, ed. by Gail Chester and Sigrid Nielsen (London: Hutchinson, 1987), pp. 36-45 (p. 36).

industrialisation and urban poverty. Hendry has also blamed a misogynistic emphasis in Presbyterianism, citing Scotland's greater enthusiasm for witch-burning as a symptom of the way in which women have traditionally been blamed for instigating 'sins of the flesh'.

What could be called the 'Eve syndrome' has long plagued Scottish women. One possible explanation can be attributed to John Knox's dissemination of Calvin's injunction that, although the Seventh Commandment explicitly forbids only adultery, 'fornication is a scandal and a sin', and his belief that adultery should be a capital offence.<sup>5</sup> Yet here misogynistic inequity can be seen to pertain. While Calvin justified the historical relieving of husbands who had had adulterous relations with unmarried women, he agreed that it had been proper that guilty wives were 'committed to the flames', 'not only on account of their immodesty, but also because of the disgrace which the woman brings upon her husband, and the confusion caused by the clandestine admixture of seeds'.<sup>6</sup> Clearly, there are other than purely spiritual considerations in operation here; preservation of the male line and male pride appear to be just as important, and it is their perceived offence against these which seems to tip the balance and render women more culpable than men. I suggest that in the transmission of Calvin's teachings there may have been some blurring of distinctions between fornication and adultery that could have been fuelled by motivations similar to those identified above. In addition, although legal sanction for the death penalty was never granted, the translation dates of the publication of Calvin's teachings, to which Boyd refers, indicate at least a continued

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<sup>5</sup> *The Harmony of the Last Four Books of Pentateuch*, 1854 translation, vol.III, p.69, quoted in Kenneth M. Boyd, *Scottish Church Attitudes to Sex, Marriage and the Family 1850-1914* (Edinburgh: Donald, 1980), p.6.

<sup>6</sup> *Commentaries on Genesis*, 1850 translation, vol.II, p. 286, quoted in Boyd, p.6.

interest in their spirit, if not their practice, well beyond the Reformation years. Moreover, although commentators such as Kenneth M. Boyd indicate that formal church discipline for fornication, exacted through public repentance, was abandoned in the first decades of the nineteenth century (Boyd, p.4), I suggest that social attitudes, moulded by generations of indoctrination, would have continued to operate well into the twentieth century, contributing to the subordination of women in a society still under the influence of social Calvinism.

Whatever its cause, when Morrison was born in 1903, Scotland still had 'an intensely patriarchal society' which, in legal terms, meant that women were unenfranchised and their attainment of economic independence was severely curtailed by educational and professional restriction or exclusion (McIvor, *Scotland in the 20th Century*, p.188). Ideologically translated, this meant that women were still identified as occupying a separate sphere from men; the public sphere was man's domain, the private and domestic belonged to woman. Even at the end of the Great War, when new doors had been opened to women because of the exigencies of war, and the enfranchisement of a number of them was a subject of current Parliamentary business, resistance to change among ordinary Scottish males persisted. Typical of their opposition to female emancipation is a speech made by Charles Robinson, Motherwell Trades Council delegate to the Scottish T.U.C. in 1918, in which he argued that wartime employment of women had had 'a depressing effect on public morality' because a woman's 'natural sphere is in the home' (*Scotland in the 20th Century*, p.188). Given the perpetuation of such myths, myths that enjoyed the sanction of historical precedent and moral sanction, and which, in many instances, were believed and promulgated by women themselves, it is hardly

surprising that feminist progress suffered setbacks before the advent of the Women's Movement of the 1960s.

More academic studies have been conducted into the position of women in England in the inter-war years than have been devoted to the Scottish situation, and recent literary studies, such as those by Heather Ingman, Anthea Trodd and Alison Light have traced connections between their actual historical moment and the fiction of English women writers.<sup>7</sup> In the absence of similar work on Scottish women, I propose to use these English studies as a background against which to examine the ideological implications of Morrison's work. When *Breakers*, Morrison's first novel, was published in 1930 women's progress out of the private and domestic sphere, that had been started by enfranchisement, recognition of legal status, and educational access, had not only been halted, but was actually being reversed. Ingman notes that the Civil Service and Local Authorities responsible for appointing teachers had, by the late 1920s, introduced the marriage bar and other 'spurious reasons for discrimination', thereby reducing the employment possibilities for middle-class women (Ingman, p.8). Also, prompted by fears of population decline, Government policy was directed towards returning women to the home. This was promulgated not by coercion but was ideologically driven by an extensive media campaign.

Single women were also discriminated against on a psychological level. The spinster had been portrayed in Victorian fiction as a social problem because her 'failure' to be chosen for marriage meant that she remained a burden on her family's

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<sup>7</sup> Ingman, *Women's Fiction Between the Wars: Mothers, Daughters and Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998); Trodd, *Women's Writing in English: Britain 1900-1945* (London: Longman, 1998); Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London: Routledge, 1991).

economic resources. By the 1930s it was her sexuality that was considered problematic. Freud had categorised female celibacy as an abnormal repression of sexual activity and it was held by many men to be symptomatic of a tendency to insanity. Perhaps underlying such fears lurked the possibility of clandestine lesbianism, a 'spectre' which had so troubled the male Establishment that in 1921 M.P.s called for lesbians to be declared lunatics and imprisoned or even sentenced to death (Ingman, p.11). Winifred Holtby's comment suggests the pervasiveness of such anti-spinster antagonism and its effect on unmarried women:

Today there is a far worse crime than promiscuity: it is chastity. On all sides the unmarried woman today is surrounded by doubts cast not only on her attractiveness or her common sense, but upon her decency, her normality, even her sanity.<sup>8</sup>

Thus in the inter-war years, many women were subjected to patriarchal ideological pressure inscribed in discourses of exclusion that categorised them as aberrant.

The campaign to return women to their 'proper sphere' ignored the fact that there was a national surplus of marriageable women. The carnage of the trenches had depleted the pool of prospective husbands; so while women were encouraged to view marriage as their *true* vocation, and magazines promoted the cult of domesticity with stereotypical images of perfect wives and mothers, many women had to confront the reality that this was not an available option. For others it was not a desirable option. Many women resisted sexist pressure and maintained or began careers outside the home. In earlier times, such women could have counted on support from the feminist movement to assist them in their struggle for equality. By

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<sup>8</sup> *Testament of a Generation: The Journal of Vera Britain and Winifred Holtby* (repr. London, 1985), pp. 91-2, quoted in Ingman, p.10.

the 1930s, however, the movement had split into Old and New Feminists. Whereas the Old Feminists still argued for equal rights, the New Feminists accepted that life for the majority of women still revolved around the home, and opted, therefore, to concentrate on improving the position of wives and mothers. Nevertheless, even among those who accepted the domestic sphere argument, it was not always a matter of straightforward compliance. Alison Light in her study of the period has identified a resistance, even among conservative women, to return to their pre-war status.<sup>9</sup> Yes, they would go back to the home; but only on terms which appropriated many of the tenets of feminist thought and called for a removal of abuses and a dispelling of earlier myths of domesticity. Feminist ideology had now become fragmented, one section interpellating women as subjects in the domestic sphere, the other hailing them in the public domain, the beliefs of each faction being encoded in its own discourse.

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### 5.3 A TROUBLED BID FOR FREEDOM: THE EARLY NOVELS

If you keep the cage door open, the bird is not  
nearly so likely to fly away.

N. Brysson Morrison (1933)

This quotation, which comes from *The Gowk Storm*, the only one of Morrison's novels in print at the time of writing, succinctly captures the dialogic interaction between the desire for freedom, and acceptance of the basic principle of

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<sup>9</sup> *Forever England* (1991).

restraint, around which much of her fiction is constructed. In her early novels, those written between the ages of twenty six and thirty three, freedom from patriarchal restraint is generally associated with the right to make a free choice of marriage partner, or, indeed, to choose none; it means the right to live in a family environment where women's actions are not subject to arbitrary rules set by men; it means the right to act on impulse, and to seek enjoyment. Restraint, in these novels, is palpable; it is in the atmosphere the females breathe, the routines they observe, and the limitations which their environment imposes on their self-knowledge. Although, like Naomi Mitchison's early fiction, Morrison's early novels are set in the past, their topical relevance would not have been lost on modern female readers who, having recognised echoes of the then-current situation, would have been encouraged to ask whether they were prepared to accept a return to such a rigid regime. Furthermore, the representation of currently-important themes through the sanitising lens of temporal distance can itself be interpreted as an indication that subversive tactics, rather than overt criticism, were considered necessary to challenge the status quo, suggesting, too, the insecurity with which women mounted their challenge.

*The Gowk Storm* provides an excellent example of how Morrison holds together, in a dialogic relationship, an impassioned cry for freedom and a complicity with the restrictions of patriarchal society. In the discourse of its narrator, Lisbet, the novel implicitly encapsulates the conditions of containment within which female lives were lived; it empathises with the rebellious demands of those who resented the imposition of arbitrary regulations, and it exposes the contradictions inherent in male claims of superiority. Yet, it holds these alongside an acceptance of the futility of human agency against the forces of determinism, whether religious or historical,

and a recognition of the invisible, and therefore more insidious, limitations which existed *within* women themselves as the result of internalisation of sexist ideology. It is, I believe, the effect of this internalisation, especially on Lisbet herself, which continues to haunt the reader; and together with the ending, unresolved and clouded with ambiguities, it gives the book its power to disturb (and disrupt).

The plot of *The Gowk Storm* involves the lives of three sisters, daughters of the minister of a Highland parish, at the dawn of womanhood. It focuses on the thwarted attempts of the two older girls to marry the men they love, when their choices, for different reasons, do not meet with paternal approval. But such a summary fails to address the subtleties of characterisation and narrative technique with which this densely packed novel subverts the patriarchal authority that its resolution would *seem* to uphold. Its real significance lies, I believe, beneath and beyond the surface text, in the dialogic interaction of feminist and patriarchal ideologies and, following the theory of Pierre Macherey, it can be argued that a deeper meaning is to be found in what it does *not* say.<sup>10</sup>

The key to unpacking *The Gowk Storm* lies with Lisbet, the narrator. With the novel's first word, 'I', the mediating consciousness is identified. Everything is seen through her eyes; it is she who selects and interprets events, and all that is related is coloured by her ideas and beliefs. Moreover, her narration is displaced in time from the novel's present, for she speaks as an older woman. This lends her voice a duality, a dialogic quality, encompassing both the adolescent's view and the adult's, each constructed from the competing ideologically inscribed discourses to

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<sup>10</sup>See *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. by Geoffrey Wall (1966; London: Routledge, 1978). This connection is also made by Margery Palmer McCulloch in 'Poetic Narrative in Nancy Brysson Morrison's *The Gowk Storm*', in *Scottish Women's Fiction, 1920s to 1960s*, ed. by C. Anderson and A. Christianson.

which she has been subjected. It is in contemplating the interplay between these perspectives that the novel's subtlety can be appreciated. It can be appreciated, too, in the space created by the narrator's limited perspective and self-knowledge for the interjection of authorial irony, although because of the lack of any external framework against which to judge the extent of the separation between author and fictional character, the extent of Morrison's complicity with Lisbet's position remains problematic. Lisbet's partial vision and her blindness to her own ideological interpellation are evinced unconsciously, and they are juxtaposed with many instances when her narrative, apparently equally unconsciously, disrupts the authority of patriarchal discourse. *The Gowk Storm* is particularly interesting in this respect because in it Morrison explores how Lisbet's sense of identity, as a member of a marginalised group, is largely 'constructed through impersonal and social relations of power' (rather than a sense of identity as the reflection of "inner essence"), an approach which Patricia Waugh has also observed in other novelists' work 'long before post-structuralists and post-moderns began to assemble their cultural concerns'.<sup>11</sup>

According to post-structuralist theory, the subject 'I' is created in language, and therefore derives its identity from language. But language is not a transparent medium that refers directly to a pre-existent reality; rather, it is a socially constructed system by which meaning is conferred by difference and constant deferral, and where meaning at any specific moment is determined by the context in which language is used. It is also ideologically-inscribed, for each social group has its associated discourse which uses language in a manner that encodes its own beliefs and values. This means that the individual female subject is forced to locate

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<sup>11</sup>*Feminine Fictions* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 3.

and identify herself in language which is composed of the various discourses which belong to the social formation. However, it is in negotiating the subject position that a site of resistance can be created. By manipulating the *différance* inherent in language, the hegemony of the most powerful social groups can be subverted and social change instigated. In *The Gowk Storm*, such subversion frequently occurs through Lisbet's use of metaphor. As Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik have observed, metaphor is frequently used in women's writing as a subversive agent because it provides a loophole in the discourse through which other possibilities, that are perhaps 'only half recognised, or completely repressed' can enter.<sup>12</sup> The ambivalence and ambiguity inherent in the metaphorical nature of Lisbet's narrative contribute to its dialogic quality.

From the opening paragraph the reader is aware of an ambivalence, perhaps unconsciously present, in Lisbet's recollection of her upbringing. What appears as an innocent memory also encapsulates the restrictions imposed upon the girls. The pleasant image of a sheltered, secure home is clouded, even effaced, by the atmosphere of stifling enclosure and subsequent distortion evoked in the telling sentence: 'Everything grew a little *wildly* in that *muffled, breathless place*' (my italics *GS*,1). But this paragraph also introduces and juxtaposes trees and the wind which are used metaphorically throughout the text; trees, replete with phallic symbolism, to represent the boundaries imposed by patriarchal authority, and the wind which acts as the epitome of freedom and the possibilities which exist for women beyond patriarchal limits. What is significant about the choice of metaphors here is that neither is man-made. The trees are organic; they may be planted and

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<sup>12</sup>*Landscapes of Desire: Metaphors in Modern Women's Fiction* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), p. 4.

fashioned by men, but they are not fabricated like the walls or ha-has of Austen's *Mansfield Park*, which represent the visible external, and the invisible internalised policing by sexist ideology, respectively. This makes their use more sinister, for as trees are part of the natural world, the inference is that the limits they set also have some natural sanction and are not merely a product of man's industry. It also extends their power to imprison. Walls and ditches cannot be erected everywhere, but trees are ubiquitous. Their significance as barriers to freedom, emphasised in the shadows of their boles which 'striped the ground' (GS,21) in the garden, is reiterated and their scope extended when Julia is in the dominie's arms in the bothy and 'the shadows of the [roof] sticks fell faintly across her face, making her look as though she were behind bars' (GS,64). It is significant also that Emmy's account of her failed attempt to reach Stephen emphasises the presence of a tree which seemed to her to act as a moving barrier to the achievement of her goal: "It's only eleven miles to Kilgour -- only eleven short miles, and it's taken me so long to pass that tree" (GS,171).

However, the use of trees as a metaphor for enclosure also provides a subversive loophole. Close planting has distorted them; like the girls, they lack freedom to grow properly, and this can be attributed to man's lack of vision. Nor are they immune to the assaults of the wind; indeed, they are 'stripped bare on one side' (GS,1). Whether or not it is consciously used, and I shall return to consider this later, the sexual innuendo cannot be ignored; it suggests that it is freedom in this sphere which is excluded, the ravages suffered by the trees indicating the possible consequences of exposure. In addition, trees do not present a solid, impenetrable barrier. There are spaces between the trunks through which one can pass, a point Lisbet herself makes when she realises that the light from the window can 'signal

brightly between the trees to some sacred stranger without' (GS,18). And although long-lived and deep-rooted, trees are eventually felled by natural means, whether by wind action or internal decay, regardless of man's efforts to sustain them. Also, as their leaves die they produce a litter of 'grey skeleton leaves' that provides mould to nourish 'valiant' yellow dornicums (GS,1). Again this seemingly innocent description disturbs the settled security of the patriarchal Victorian domain with its juxtaposition of grey and yellow. Virginia Woolf also employed such *apparently casual* colour pairings to set up a binary opposition between non-conformity, as represented by yellow because of its association with subversive, *fin de siècle* morality, and 'the crushing weight of convention and respectability', represented by grey (Horner and Zlosnik, p.110). I suggest that Lisbet's narrative discourse goes further; not only does it establish the polarity, it then deconstructs it by having the non-conformity feed on and grow through the remnants of conformity and respectability.

I have suggested that the wind is set up in metaphorical opposition to the confinement represented by the trees, and just as there is ambivalence about the efficacy of the patriarchal boundaries, so there is ambiguity about the desirability of the freedom of the world beyond them. As with all Morrison's novels, the wind blows continually through *The Gowk Storm*; but its presence is not always welcome. For instance, Lisbet's mother, whose internalisation of sexist ideology has stifled her natural exuberance and led to a life of ineffectual conformity, dislikes the wind because it challenges her and disturbs her equanimity: "I don't like to hear it -- it's like some one keeping on arguing with you" (GS,8). Nanny, although largely conformist, shouts to overcome it. Lisbet's reaction varies. Sometimes she finds the wind exhilarating, exulting in its 'unbridled' freedom (GS,60). Here the sexual

connotations are accentuated if one recalls the equine imagery used in her earlier impression of Nicholas Strathern as 'a handsome, angry-looking man with slightly distended nostrils like those of a rocking-horse' (*GS*,22). Sometimes the wind links her with unknown happiness of the past, providing, she presumes, a key to the collective unconscious:

I felt as one with the gangrel winds, the desultory sunshine and the ground that had once stirred with the roots of trees. It was as though I had once been very happy on a day such as this and now, decades later [ . . . ] I was warmed by the memory of that long ago forgotten happiness. (*GS*,54)

While the above occasion, when she accompanied Julia and the dominie to the moors (also figuratively representing freedom), exemplifies an appreciation of the beneficial aspect of access to extended possibilities for women, other references to the wind demonstrate Lisbet's ambivalence. After Julia's happiness has been ruined by her father's prohibition of her marriage to the dominie, Bartle MacDonald, and the latter's subsequent departure, Lisbet realises that transgression of limits and escape into the world of love and sex bring penalties. Her reaction to the wind now conveys the realisation that the girls' confinement, also figuratively portrayed as shoes that pinch and low-ceilinged, irregularly shaped rooms (*GS*,11), confers protection as well as restriction. She has been chastened by Julia's experience, and perhaps because of her own dawning womanhood, the world beyond the pale is seen as threatening, and as trying to invade their sanctuary:

No matter how the wind thundered and raged outside, I had always felt quite safe there. But now something had destroyed this sense of security, though all was the same as it once was [ . . . ] I no longer exulted with the storm in the glory of its strength; it sounded piteous

to me now, the shut-out, unhappy wind. Unlikely things happened in this world [ . . . ] and the storm gusts rattling at the door were like someone trying to get in. (GS,92)

Later, too, when she learns of Emmy's love for Stephen Wingate, Lisbet anticipates further sorrowful intercourse with the world. This is not only because Wingate is already engaged to be married to Emmy's friend, Christine Strathern, but also because she had originally presumed that her sister loved Nicholas Strathern, and this had made Lisbet confront her own feelings for him. Lisbet's ambivalence is foregrounded both in her appreciation of the damaging effects of the wind and in the conflation of both pity and fear in her use of 'livid' to describe the trees: 'I was seeing the world distorted then through lobes of tears, and the trees outside seemed livid things to me, fretted and frayed with winds and knurled with age' (GS,116).

Trees have long held religious connotations, their significance in Druidic ritual predating their biblical association with Eden. This pre-Christian religious connotation lends something that both endorses and subverts their metaphorical association with the proscriptive authority of patriarchal Presbyterianism. The 'sanctuary' which they enclose is legitimised by doctrinal precept, and it is fitting that Lisbet should perceive the opposition between increased female autonomy and its restriction in terms of a contest between the wind and the Kirk, especially since religious prejudice was responsible for the dominie's dismissal. It seems almost as though, in her memory, the gales of 'Mr Lockhart's Blaw Sunday' represent a retaliatory attack on behalf of liberalisation in both sectarian and patriarchal affairs. In recalling her father's attempts to overcome the noise of the wind there appears to be an appreciation of the ludicrous and the futile in his attempts to overcome Nature:

We all sat crowded together in the four front pews, thinking each furious blast that set the church rocking must surely be the last, until another yet more violent would come, drowning papa's stern raised voice, which sounded over-loudly through the creaking church when the wind died into the distance to marshal its forces for the next assault. (GS,86)

Yet, on the eve of Julia's wedding to Edwin Strathern, when her sister has abandoned the desire for freedom in favour of conformity, with its financial security and social approbation, Lisbet's experience of spiritual communion with her Presbyterian heritage makes her view the wind differently. Now, alone in the Kirk, the wind and its connotations disturb her, although she is not sure why: 'Beyond them I heard the familiar wind *feeling* round the church and *fumbling* at the door: it haunted my mind, disturbing me with unrecalled memories of other days' (my italics, GS,104). Lisbet's choice of verbs, italicised in the quotation, and her recourse to the collective unconscious can be interpreted as a subconscious dis-ease with sexual activity, a dis-ease that could find shelter, even justification, behind the prohibitive barriers erected by her religion. Such a reading is given further credibility by the legend of the Lady of Fingal, whose 'virtue', in other words, her conformity to the ideal of *saintly* womanhood, as conventionally understood, is celebrated in the rowan tree into which her mortal remains have been transmuted. Significantly, Highland culture views the rowan as a protection against evil spirits, and the stillness of the Lady of Fingal's rowan, whose 'creamy blossom [. . .] neither shook nor rustled in the high wind tearing round it', conflates the achievement of patriarchal ideals of virtue with the ability to withstand the assaults of evil (GS,57). Here we have a perfect metaphorical representation of the

internalisation of patriarchal ideology, and it appears consonant with the psychological state of Lisbet suggested above. Yet it is also significant that she is uncomfortable with all that this entails; for she is equally afraid of the ghost of the saintly Lady of Fingal as she is of that of Evil-Eyed Florah Malcolm, the fruit of whose apple trees, with their sexual connotations of Eve as temptress, men are afraid to harvest. Lisbet's reaction suggests that she is equally uncomfortable with the opposing citations of saint and whore by which patriarchal religious discourse has traditionally identified women.

Like her sisters, Lisbet has difficulty in constructing a complete image of herself. In Julia's case, this is represented figuratively by having 'one side of her face lit by the candle's flame, the other in profound shadow' as she sits at the dressing-table mirror (*GS*,11). Emmy's predicament is captured by the effects of the belladonna that she used for cosmetic purposes: 'She could only see an indistinguishable image of herself in the mirror -- as though she were looking at her reflection in rippled water' (*GS*,13). Lisbet's problematic identification appears to be centred in her dis-ease with the subject positions available to her in the discourses which uphold the superior position of men and, while offering social respectability through marriage, relegate her to a position of sexual submissiveness and economic dependence. Her rebellion against accepting patriarchal authority, which she admits operates through the exercise of fear in the domestic arena (*GS*,9), finds expression in her ridiculing of her father's *performance* of masculine superiority in the task of re-hanging the fallen picture (*GS*,10), the theatricality of which is emphasised in his need of an audience, and the authenticity of which is questioned in his need of female assistance. Subversion is seen, too, in the fact that the patriarchal head is portrayed as a peevish hypochondriac, and his replacement, a

potential husband, mocked as the fatuous, lecherous, authoritarian assistant, Mr Boyd.

It is noteworthy, too, that all the male characters are, in some way, undermined by Lisbet's descriptions; even the dominie, for whom Lisbet has a sincere regard, is distinguished by the 'peculiarity' of his odd eyes (*GS*,26), and by her recollection of Mrs Wands's comment: "They micht have kent a' alang frae his een mischief lay in him, for he wasna marked wi' twa different een for ony guid" (*GS*,83). However, what is perhaps most notable is that Mr Boyd, who is obviously interested sexually in Emmy, should be likened to a kite, and Nicholas, to whom Lisbet herself is physically attracted, is described as resembling a rocking-horse. Such descriptions could convey a subconscious recognition of repressed sexuality within these characters, themselves; but I would suggest that this must be held alongside the possibility that Lisbet's adoption of such imagery articulates her subconscious recognition and tethering of their male sexual potency. A kite can fly in the wind, but it is controlled from the ground, and transposition of the Lawrentian sexual connotation of horses to the safety of the nursery effectively controls it and makes it safe.

While Lisbet colludes in her sisters' attempted defiance of patriarchal authority, we are left uncertain about the extent to which she eventually conforms. There are strong echoes of Ibsen in her appraisal of Christine Strathern, the model of conventional femininity, whom she dismisses as a woman reduced to nothing more than a plaything, whose 'features were so indeterminate [. . .] they were like a wax-doll's which have melted ever so slightly at the fire' (*GS*,19). Her resistance to the conventional image of feminine subservience and submissiveness in marriage is foregrounded in her understanding of how being a wife and mother has reduced her

own mother's life to 'nothing but anniversaries' (*GS*,8), and she extends this idea of damaging confinement, suggesting both restriction and childbearing, in her use of Gothic imagery to describe the living conditions of Mrs Wands, the ferryman's bedridden mother: 'Shadows tottered on the walls, great misshapen shadows of the hams hanging from the rafters, the hook of the swee and the back of a chair, like instruments of torture. They shifted over the old woman in the bed' (*GS*,79). Yet, this resistance to conformity is contradicted by her approach to Julia's early pregnancy. Despite recognising Julia's lack of love for her new husband, the inevitability of conjugal sex and her subsequent assumption of the role of motherhood is glossed over in Lisbet's mention of the 'half- knitted shawl [. . .] for Julia's baby', emphasis being reserved instead for its part in the security of home where 'all was comfortable, orderly and quite sane' (*GS*,173). It is contradicted also in her public acceptance of the amorous attentions of Nicholas Strathern, attentions which appear to be sanctioned by her father's blessing, and which would seem to indicate the prospect of marriage (*GS*,178).

However, I think it is significant that this union is suggested rather than advertised. If it takes place, it does so beyond the novel's ending, and in so doing it makes us question whether, given the psychological complexity revealed in Lisbet's narrative discourse, the conventional romance closure of marriage seems appropriate. Reading within the generic conventions of romance, the reader would expect such closure. But, as Rachel Blau DuPlessis has noted, women writers frequently subvert the patriarchal ideological assumptions inherent in the conventions of the romance genre by making such an ending seem too 'pat', and not conforming with the expectations created by the narrative discourse (*Writing Beyond the Ending*, p.7). By ending this way the novel simultaneously conforms

with and resists conventional closure, thereby mirroring Lisbet's troubled identification with patriarchal ideological interpellation. Unlike *Jane Eyre*, there is no equivalent to Brontë's declaration, 'Reader, I married him'.<sup>13</sup> This could be explained by the fact that, unlike in the earlier novel, nothing has happened in *The Gowk Storm* to redress the power imbalance between men and women. The status quo has been maintained; the rebellious women are forced into compliance, or are punished by death. Indeed, I would suggest that the probability of marriage being presented as a matter of course is in keeping with the atmosphere of fatalistic determinism which pervades the whole novel. The greys and browns of the dawn landscape with which the book opens paint a picture of dull conformity which seems coterminous with human existence. This notion of the apparent perdurability of sexual inequality is repeated in the frequent references to oppressive climatic conditions, ominous landscape formations, and the similarity between the environment of Barnfingal and gloomy Old Testament landscapes (GS,29). The hopelessness of the sisters' predicament is echoed in Lisbet's realisation that things had been lost to the world, ages beforehand, and in the image of the children in the playground, as 'mites gambolling at the foot of an unseeing eternity' (GS,69). The universality of the fate of the Lockhart girls, growing to maturity in a restricted environment, is given cosmic dimensions by Lisbet's premonition of the world being reduced to a hollow shell:

I thought of the light, waning to wax, imprisoned in the globe of the world. And as my thoughts ebbed and flowed to the drow of the sea, I thought of the earth after millions of years when life has left it, like a shell worn with holes, filled only with windy vibrations. (GS,98)

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<sup>13</sup>(1847; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996), p. 498.

Yet the Scottish Calvinist inheritance, to which such a determinist outlook might be attributed, is subtly subverted even while it is seen to provide a structuring device for the narrative, and a prop for the patriarchal social formation. For, paradoxically, it appears to be Calvinism's preoccupation with the inherent evil in women's sexuality which provides Lisbet with a stumbling block to a ready acceptance of the patriarchal expedients of marriage and a submissively 'feminine' sexuality. Mention has already been made of the religious significance of the tree; biblical discourse teaches that Eve's sin was in tempting Adam to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, and for this all (wo)mankind has suffered. I suggest that, at a rational level, Lisbet has identified with the religious sanction against sexuality, but that, initially at a subconscious, then at an emotional, level, she is aware of the contradictory promptings of her own biological sexual drives, and she understands similar urges in her sisters. Her difficulty would seem to lie in reconciling the dichotomy in patriarchal definitions of 'the feminine'.

Throughout the narrative, spoken as an old woman, sexual connotations frequently slip into Lisbet's word choice. Even her first meeting with Nicholas Strathern is recalled using the word 'coupled'. Nevertheless, she seems to distance herself from intimacy, and there is a strange conflation of resignation and exclusion in her words: 'They said good-bye to each other in the same way, *I suppose*, that all lovers bid each other good-bye' (my italics, *GS*,60). It is also significant that she admits to having wanted Nicholas to prefer her to the others 'with a passion that terrified [her]' (*GS*,126). And, after she has been kissed for the first time and retreated to the greenhouse where her emotional state finds a correlative in its sultry atmosphere, her conscience troubles her in the shape of the tree whose 'emblematic shadow' replete with phallic symbolism and patriarchal prohibition, '[was] thrown

across the lawn' and between whose branches 'eternity was caught' (GS,126). Moreover, in her confused state of arousal, her musings are juxtaposed with observations of the unusually vibrant colours of moulds, fungi and 'creeping banes' (GS,127). While suggesting her heightened state of sensual awareness, such a description also foregrounds the fact that their outwardly-attractive appearances are maintained by the organisms' parasitic activity. This could be an unconscious recognition by Lisbet of the danger to the integrity of selfhood inherent in sexual relationships, perhaps especially in marriage, as well as the perceived moral danger to the soul posed by sexuality itself. Although I have found no evidence of Morrison's conscious intention, it is possible to interpret the juxtaposition of thoughts of romantic involvement and parasitic plant activity as an intertextual reference to the 'female parasitism' identified in Olive Schreiner's *Woman and Labour* (1911).<sup>14</sup> Although this originally referred to the state into which Victorian middle-class women had been relegated by their exclusion from the world of work, it could also be applicable to the position of modern, middle-class wives who were constrained by sexist employment regulations and then-current ideas of respectability to remain at home in a state of economic dependence and sexual submissiveness.

A further example of Lisbet's difficulty in negotiating a suitable subject position between conflicting patriarchal ideological interpellations of femininity occurs when she has rescued Emmy from the storm and is trying to find some words to comfort her. Taking up the Bible from the window-sill of the toll-house, Lisbet finds that the pages fall open, through frequent usage, at Psalms. It is, I think, significant that her eye is caught by Psalm 51, and that within this text she focuses

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<sup>14</sup>See Anthea Trodd, *Women's Writing in English*, p. 2.

on the notion of sacrificial reparation, in the shape of a 'broken spirit' and a 'wounded heart', rather than confront directly what is suggested therein as the cause and means of perpetuation of (wo)man's sinfulness (GS,171). Verse 5 of Psalm 51 clearly indicates the origins of concupiscence in another phrase which Lisbet omits: 'In iniquity I was brought to birth / and my mother conceived me in sin.'<sup>15</sup> In making her omit what seems to me a pivotal theme of this psalm, I think that Morrison emphasises Lisbet's discomfort with sexuality and the procreative implications of marriage. I believe Morrison would have expected her readers to be sufficiently familiar with biblical texts to supply what is missing from Lisbet's account, and, in so doing, register her reticence. It is interesting, moreover, that this same text is used by another Scottish woman writer who, writing in America under the pseudonym Lorna Moon, causes her female protagonist in *Dark Star* (1929), the illegitimate Nancy Pringle, to ask directly what the Bible means when it says: 'for I was shapen in wickedness, and in sin hath my mother conceived me'.<sup>16</sup> I think this comparison is fruitful, for it highlights the difference in approach to sexuality and its religious proscription not only between different fictional characters, but also between women authors. Those who left Scotland, like Catherine Carswell, Willa Muir and Lorna Moon, were, perhaps, freer to reject its Calvinist-inspired discourse of sexual repression, and could write from the safety of physical and psychological distance. Those who stayed behind appear to have remained more constrained to work within Scottish cultural expectations and limitations, even while subverting those conventions. The incident in *The Gowk Storm* points up the extent of Lisbet's acceptance of religious ideology and its citation of women as sinners. Whereas in

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<sup>15</sup>*The New English Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 653.

<sup>16</sup>*Dark Star* (1929), (repr, Aberdeen: Gourdas House, 1980), p. 120.

*Dark Star* Nancy confronts the problem posed by her innate sexuality, eventually gets an answer which suits her, rejects the citation of sinner, and moves on, Lisbet skirts around it. Consequently, it remains in the background to trouble her future position with respect to conformity with patriarchal expectations.

The dynamic equilibrium between conformity and non-conformity is also seen in Lisbet's descriptions of her sisters and the other women whom she recalls. Her mother is ostensibly conformist; she married because it seemed the right thing to do, even though she had ceased to be interested in Mr Lockhart (GS,51). She is represented as the stereotypical Victorian mother who merges with the background and, as the incident of Emmy's late arrival at breakfast demonstrates, acquiesces with her husband's 'law' (GS,11). She convinces herself that she is happy like this, and that, given a second chance, she would do it all again, as though women had no other option (GS,51). But Lisbet penetrates the façade, and realises that her mother must harbour thoughts which subvert her outward compliance (GS,115). While her subversion does not rank with that of Euphemia's mother in *Breakers*, who lies to her husband and conceals their daughter's pregnancy and their grandson's existence, Mrs Lockhart cannot make herself, even after twenty five years of marriage, conform with her husband's fixation with punctuality (GS,138), a fixation which is portrayed as being symbolic of male power in a domestic setting. Like Mr Lockhart, who imposes his authority by repairing Lisbet's grandmother's clock so that it was always ahead of the real time (GS,1), Nicholas Strathern and Stephen Wingate are both shown to be obsessed by time (GS,178,157). Indeed it is Emmy's failure to meet Wingate's deadlines that causes her demise. The girls' unconventional Uncle Octavious is the only male to whom punctuality is unimportant; he is 'untethered by

time' (*GS*,107). It is significant, too, that this information about him is juxtaposed with his rejection of received views on love and marriage:

'After all love is merely seeing the loved one hopelessly out of proportion. Then, you'll find, you'll both waken up one day to the fact that the other is quite ordinary and is peopling the world in hundreds. That's why I never married [. . . ] I always knew I would be the first to waken up.' (*GS*,107)

Even Julia, who is portrayed as headstrong and intelligent, and prepared to stand up to her father in defence of her right to marry the dominie, is basically conformist. Emmy notes that, unlike her own ill-fitting shoes which squeeze her toes, Julia's feet shape her shoes (*GS*,11). Yet the detrimental effect of Julia's restrictive environment on her self-awareness is suggested by the fact that she cannot stand upright under the low, sloping ceiling of their bedroom, and the lighting, and the dressing-table mirror's size and positioning prevents her from seeing her full reflection. After Christine's ball, she not only tidies away her clothes but assumes the mantle of conforming responsibility and castigates her sister for being rebelliously untidy (*GS*,15). She also assumes a censorious position concerning the reliability of Stephen Wingate's behaviour even though unaware of his developing relationship with Emmy (*GS*,144). At St Andrews, her natural, social affiliations are suggested in her preference for the town's houses and gardens (*GS*,98), and incidents such as these, and the knowledge that both she and Lisbet take after their father (*GS*,20), prepare the reader for the seeming inevitability of her marriage to Edwin Strathern, even though, like her mother before her, she does not love her husband. Yet, inevitable though it is made to seem, such conformity to social expedients is not unquestioningly accepted, for Lisbet also records the price

which Julia has to pay for her compliance in the undercurrent of unhappiness with which her marriage is plagued (*GS*,124).

There is a detectable verve in Lisbet's delineation of Nannie. She is drawn as another composite character, who, while deferring to Mr Lockhart in her capacity as servant, subverts economically-motivated marriage, the basis on which patriarchal society is perpetuated, with sayings like: "Ne'er marry for siller or ye'll carry a heart heavy as gold" (*G.S.*18). Although she maintains sexist differentials in her preference of boys to girls, and, in her song acknowledges their separate sphere (*GS*,2), Nannie is generally critical of men and of marriage, attesting: "There's worse things than being an auld maid" (*GS*,18). In Lisbet's recollection, it is Nannie, and not her mother, who provides the centre of security; yet she does not conform to conventional patriarchal expectations of feminine respectability, and Lisbet's narrative is ambiguous about how she should be interpreted. Nannie's old saws and the folk experience that spawned them appear to offer the girls an alternative discourse to that which advocates feminine submissiveness. Yet her opinion that Christine should have been strong enough to 'thole things' (*GS*,154), sits uncomfortably with the inability of the rebellious Julia and Emmy to remain unscathed by their own particular Gowk Storms. Even Nannie's language suggests both marginalisation and complicity in her subversiveness. Lisbet's highlighting of the quaintness of Nannie's Scots vocabulary could suggest recognition of the outmoded irrelevance of her ideology to the 'respectable' society in which the girls move. Alternatively, as Lisbet's own discourse contains such words, it could be interpreted as a celebration of Nannie's language and its cultural norms, investing the words with the significance of shibboleths, and indicating Lisbet's identification with Nannie's subject position. Similarly, rejection and identification can both be

read into Nannie's representation as a witch -- the ultimate, female, subversive figure:

As she sat at the fireside, a ball of wool stuck with knitting pins on her lap, she looked as though any moment she might go up the chimney in a whiff of smoke, leaving behind only two wrinkled boots with their laces out. (*GS*,16)

Her disappearance from the end of the story would, however, seem to suggest that she is a remnant of the past, and therefore has no part in Lisbet's adulthood. Significantly, that past was pre-Victorian, the era of Mrs Lockhart's 'carefree upbringing and lively youth' (*GS*,8), when, although a patriarchal social formation had existed, it had not been so rigid in its definition of 'femininity' and had produced women of character like Nannie. But her worth is undercut by her inferior status in the novel's society. Once again, the narrative appears to steer a course which includes both subversion of, and submission to, patriarchal ideology.

A similar position occurs with the treatment of Emmy. From the beginning, it is evident that Emmy is a rebel; we are informed that as an adult Nannie still treats her 'as though she were a child too fond of her own will' (*GS*,3), and her temperament is apparent even in her unruly hair (*GS*,9). Her non-conformity is signalled also in readiness to disobey her father's edict about mealtime punctuality (*GS*,9), especially when such domestic rituals symbolised discipline and social order on a wider scale. But Lisbet is never critical of Emmy's spirit; in fact, there is a genuine bond between them, and Emmy's musical abilities, which give expression to her temperament, are valued by Lisbet (*GS*,10). Most tellingly, Emmy is represented metaphorically in Lisbet's narrative as a bird (*GS*,117) -- a creature that can inhabit the land, but which nests in trees, and assumes its full potential in the

air, riding on the wind. This is significant when considered in relation to the metaphorical significance carried in the novel by both trees and wind. Unlike her elder sister, Emmy's preference at St Andrews is to wade barefoot along the water's edge, with her skirts hitched up to her knees, looking like the seagulls that inhabit the shoreline (GS,98). This identifies her as a creature of the margins, an inhabitant of borderlands which are social and moral as well as geographical; a position whose implications she fully appreciates: "Why is heaven always so near the brink of hell?" (G,S.113). In her crossing of these borders Emmy mirrors the predicament of many women both in the time frame of the novel and when it was published.

The moral dilemma that confronts Emmy is whether she should acknowledge her love for Stephen Wingate, her friend's fiancé. Her question, "Do you think it's wrong to want something you know you can't have?" (GS,113), echoes the conversation between Julia and the dominie in which he said he thought the purpose of life was to see how much you could do without (GS,32). In his case this resulted in his renunciation of Julia because of what he saw as insurmountable religious barriers. Julia's subsequent unhappiness would appear to point to the questionability of such a view, and, given Lisbet's association of Emmy with the bird metaphor, we might expect Morrison to offer a more favourable resolution to her predicament.

Such an expectation might also be expected if we consider *The Gowk Storm* in relation to two other novels in which female protagonists share Emmy's moral dilemma. These are May Sinclair's *The Life and Death of Harriett Freen* (1922), and George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860). In her introduction to the Virago (1980) edition of Sinclair's novel Jean Radford observes that it explores the possible consequences of the denial of natural emotions in favour of a learned moral code.

She views Sinclair's novel as 'a delayed response to Maggie Tulliver's question which has echoed down the corridors of women's writing: "Is it not right to resign ourselves entirely, whatever [. . .] may be denied us?"' (Introduction, p.1). Radford sees it as providing an answer by fleshing out the possible consequences of the dilemma posed by Maggie Tulliver's love for Stephen Guest which Maggie's death prevented Eliot from having to address. In Sinclair's novel, Harriett's renunciation of her love for her only friend's fiancé results in the failure of the couple's marriage, her friend's psychosomatic illness and eventual death, her lover's misery and decline, and Harriett's own continued unhappiness and wasted life. Clearly Sinclair's answer is a resounding 'No!'. I would suggest that in *The Gowk Storm* Morrison takes a different approach from either Eliot or Sinclair; she allows Emmy to ignore what conventional morality would recommend and makes her act on her love for Stephen Wingate. Even the shared Christian name invites interpretation of Emmy's predicament as a re-visioning of Eliot's novel. Unlike Maggie (and Harriett), Emmy decides that she *will* have what she knows she should not want, despite Nannie's contention:

'God's will is as clear noo as it was then [ . . . ] but mebbe we are no so clear aboot looking for it whit wi' always wanting whit we havena been gi'en. Ye can do withoot so muckle ye ne'er thocht ye could -- ye can do withoot almost anything.' (GS, 92-3)

Julia's earlier experience, and her bitterly expressed doubt about the operation of God's will in human affairs, which precede Nannie's words (GS,92), serve to question the basis of Nannie's faith. Like her belief that any Gowk Storm can be weathered by patience and perseverance (GS,63), a view which the events of the novel dispute, this advocacy of resignation and renunciation is discredited. Instead,

sympathetic identification with the lovers' plight is encouraged. Responding to resonances of Cathy's impassioned language in *Wuthering Heights*, the reader is encouraged to believe in the depth of their passion and the sincerity of the love which the couple share:

'And I cannot kill it, it is more alive than I am. If I died tomorrow, it would still live on. If he went to the other end of the world, he would still be bound to me and I to him, his thought stepping on my thoughts and mine on his.' (GS,114)

This would also appear consonant with the impression of fated inevitability that is fostered throughout the novel by the operation of dark, determinist forces, suggested by oppressive weather (GS,29) and inhospitable, even otherworldly landscapes (GS,7). Emmy is presented as innocent of blame for her predicament, her rebellious nature being sympathetically drawn from the beginning. It is Stephen Wingate who coaxes her into compliance by offering an argument that exonerates her in order to get what he wants for himself (GS,156-7). Here is where Lisbet lays blame, and despite recognising the similarity with Emmy's temperament, her revised opinion of Wingate lacks the sympathy felt for her sister: 'This man [. . .] was not so tolerant as I had imagined. His eyes could darken, he might be moody, and I saw from a certain mettled imperiousness in his bearing I had not marked before that he would bear no restraint' (GS,133).

Yet, it seems that there is a limit to the extent of complicity in overt feminist rebellion which *The Gowk Storm* can countenance. Patriarchal authority, in the shape of the objectionable, lecherous Mr Boyd, prevails. His imprisonment of Emmy in her room (GS,164) delays her departure and not only prevents her from reaching Stephen in time to enter into what Boyd considers as a disreputable form of

marriage, but ultimately results in her death (*GS*,175). Female rebellion is seen to be punished, and, at least on the surface, a life of resignation and renunciation is tacitly shown as the softer option. However, I suggest that this interpretation cannot be freed from the residual animosity towards both the person and the actions of Mr Boyd, the agent of patriarchal dominance. This animosity is carefully orchestrated by Lisbet's recollections of his pretentiousness (*GS*,102), his lecherous attentions towards Emmy (*GS*,122), his spiteful treatment of her after she rejected his advances (*GS*,130), his spying on their activities (*GS*,155), and his physical repulsiveness encapsulated in the description of his 'mouth like a frog's and [. . .] hands padded with fat' (*GS*,162). There is also a lingering regret at the waste of such a vibrant young life, In addition, the references to the 'scattering of birds', 'butterfly wings', 'winds roaming eternally free' and the 'yellow faces' of the marguerites, all of which attend Lisbet's last walk at Barnfingal (*GS*,177), forge a link with Emmy's rebellious spirit. And, for this reader, at least, there are lasting resonances of her tragic fate *and* her defiant spirit in the final cry of the curlew, in which 'all the world's sorrow, all the world's pain, and *none of its regret*, lay throbbing' (my italics *GS*,178).

In his introduction to the Canongate edition (1988) Edwin Morgan identifies in *The Gowk Storm* a 'pathos [. . .] which encompasses tragedy without making the whole book tragic in its implications' (*GS*,vii). He views Julia's 'moderately happy marriage' and 'the prospect of a second' as indicating that the family has weathered its Gowk Storm, and that the novel ends in an optimistic vein. I disagree strongly with this interpretation, because I think it simply reads the narrative according to the conventions of the romance genre, and ignores the subversive undercurrents that pervade the book and cry out against the 'patness' of its ending, where resolution

conforms with conventional literary expectations and awards marriage as the reward of successful socialisation. I would suggest that acceptance of such expectation may be coloured by Morgan's willingness to accept patriarchal norms for women, and fails to take due cognisance of Lisbet's feelings of entrapment, her ambivalence towards sex, and the unhappiness portrayed in the marriages in this novel. To condone Julia's incomplete happiness is bad enough, but to consign Lisbet to the fate of her sister and her mother is not to guarantee her happiness. It could, indeed, be argued that the apparent inevitability of this fate would explain the feelings of enclosure and pessimism with which *The Gowk Storm* is imbued. I believe it is the final prospect of Lisbet's marriage that reactivates all the discordant notes sounded throughout her narrative. Here again Rachel Blau DuPlessis's observation that the ending is 'where subtexts and repressed discourses can throw up one last flare of meaning', assists interpretation (*Writing Beyond the Ending*, p.3). Such a 'flare' can be seen in the predictability of Nicholas's patriarchal behaviour and Lisbet's foreknowledge that criticism of their tardiness would precede any sign of affection. Viewed in this light, his reliability is clouded by less benevolent connotations: 'I could see him in my mind's eye standing, tall and reliable, with his watch in his hand, telling us exactly how many minutes we were late before he kissed me' (GS,178). This is surely a signal that marriage to this man would be bound by the same patriarchal rigidity to which her mother had been subjected, and would deny female autonomy. Such an interpretation is also suggested by the sandwiching of the passage, quoted above, between the metaphorical associations of freedom in the description of Lisbet's last walk in Barnfingal, with its evocation of Emmy's spirit in the cry of the curlew, and Lisbet's final expression of religious doubt. Moreover, since 'no [literary] convention is neutral, purely mimetic, or purely aesthetic' but are

all 'working apparatuses of ideology, factories for the "natural" and "fantastic" by which we live' (DuPlessis, pp.2,3), I also think that in subverting marriage as closure in this way, Morrison questions the conventional boundaries of the literary genre which disseminates patriarchal ideological assumptions by consigning only two fates to women -- marriage or death.

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In view of 1930s' attempts to re-establish marriage as women's proper vocation, through media coverage and even its eroticisation by the sexologists,<sup>17</sup> it is not surprising that marriage should feature prominently in Morrison's early treatments of female identification. As the marriages in *The Gowk Storm* suggest, she appears to have recognised the difficulty in accepting the ideologically propagated assumptions about its desirability, and yet could not, in her fiction at least, adopt the radical feminist stance which advocated either celibacy or lesbian relationships. Unlike Nan Shepherd, who allowed Martha Ironside to eschew marriage yet find happiness in rearing one of her mother's foster children<sup>18</sup>, Morrison could not refrain from moderating her criticism of marriage by resorting to stereotypical representations of embittered spinsters. Nor could she dismiss heterosexuality altogether and suggest an alternative route to happiness in inter-female relationships, as Willa Muir did with Elizabeth Shand and Elise

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<sup>17</sup>See Sheila Jeffreys, 'Women and Sexuality' in *Women's History in Britain, 1850-1945: An Introduction*, ed. by June Purvis (London: University College London Press, 1995), pp.193-216.

<sup>18</sup>*The Quarry Wood* (1928).

Mütze.<sup>19</sup> Morrison's last inter-war novel, *When The Wind Blows* (1937) provides analysis of several dysfunctional marriages, and exposes the fallacy of conventional notions of marital bliss. Yet, while the concomitant unhappiness is foregrounded, it runs alongside an accumulation of dramatic tension as the plot develops towards the final marriage in which Victorian Glasgow's future is symbolised. Although I believe this novel is the least successful of Morrison's novels of the inter-war period, it is important insofar as it addresses the complexity of the problem of redefining marriage. It suggests that if marriage is to remain a linchpin of society, its parameters must be renegotiated to accommodate women's needs and aspirations. However, Morrison offers no simple solution, and once again an ideological position is negotiated between compliance and opposition with regard to the status quo.

In chronicling the fortunes of the Murray family in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, *When The Wind Blows* sounds a discordant note in its portrayal of marriage when it early becomes apparent that the parental relationship has ossified: "The children's father" -- that was what her dearest dear had become, grown from a loving adventuresome husband into a slightly irascible father' (*WWB*,18). Ill health has distanced husband and wife. He is confined to his chair, incapable of moving without assistance; she has resorted to an inner life (*WWB*,17), imaginatively recreating the excitements of her youth, and planning her children's futures. Given her experience, it seems strange that she should enthusiastically encourage her children to marry, but the fact that she does so only serves to emphasise not only her own interpellation as a subject in (and of) patriarchal ideology, but also the centrality of marriage in underpinning conventional social

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<sup>19</sup>*Imagined Corners*, (1931).

organisation. Yet, in highlighting Mrs Murray's action, and emphasising the discrepancy between the ideal and the actual with regard to marriage, Morrison not only subverts the patriarchal ideological platform upon which the social formation rests, but, as in *The Gowk Storm*, she also undermines the novelistic conventions in which such ideology is encoded.

The power imbalance created (and perpetuated) by the economic dependence of women within marriage is considered in this novel. Clementina, the eldest Murray daughter, to whom money and status are important, refuses to be subjected to what she sees as the ignominy of marrying without a dowry. She cannot subscribe to her mother's identification with the discourse that perpetuates female economic dependency: "I have always heard it said that the happiest marriages are those where the bride has little more than what she stands up in" (*WWB*,125). Consequently, she ends her engagement when it becomes apparent that her family's fortune has been mismanaged (*WWB*,125). Considered from a feminist perspective, this action could be interpreted as demonstrating the character's independence of spirit and her refusal to trade herself for an economic security to which she had been unable to contribute. Such a perspective could also allow scope for the provision of alternative means of fulfilment, such as those anticipated in the examples of Martha Ironside and Elizabeth Shand cited above. But this is not Morrison's approach; we do not find Clementina's actions vindicated or alternative means of happiness provided. Rather, her fiancé misinterprets her position, and angrily presumes she has left him to look for someone richer in order to make up the deficit created by her lack of dowry (*WWB*,130). As time goes by her actions suggest that she becomes more embittered. What appears as her jaundiced approach to marriage causes her to oppose Florah's wedding (*WWB*,175), and makes her find faults in Kindry's choice

of Hugh MacDiarmid as a prospective husband (*WWB*,292). To the end, this portrayal of her as a stereotypical spinster is maintained, culminating in the scene where the writing of her will provides an inventory of her material possessions and emphasises in economic terms, always so important to her, the adverse result of her renunciation (*WWB*,304-8). Yet running in parallel with this external portrayal of Clementina is an interiority that reveals the sadness and loneliness of her situation. While appearing to conform with the conventional stereotypical representation of the spinster, Morrison undermines it by communicating something of the pain that such a life situation could bring:

One would have thought, after making a sacrifice such as she had made, that some glow from it would have lit and cheered her on her way. Religion led one to believe that, but religion made Clementina feel as though she were trying to warm her hands at a fire that might comfort others but was only ashes to her. Life now meant nothing to her. (*WWB*,132-3)

Furthermore, the reader's sympathy is encouraged by the manner in which the drawing up of her will is portrayed. Significantly, Clementina is shown to have greatest difficulty in disposing of the gifts that her fiancé had given her, the mere sight of which, even after so many years, reopens her old wounds (*WWB*,306). By focusing on how Clementina appears to the outside world, it could appear as though Morrison is suggesting that perhaps she should have swallowed her pride and married for love:

Oh Clemmy, thought Florah as she climbed into bed, you think marrying a cousin against everyone's wish is sinning, but there are other kinds of sinning, the sin of living against the grain for instance,

of shutting yourself up with your own pain and not letting it unlock you to the suffering of others. (*WWB*,178)

But the investment of the narrator's sympathy questions this interpretation. Suspended in Morrison's critique of Clementina's behaviour is the notion that she is not completely to blame for her subsequent predicament, and that it is the subordination of women, by means of their economic dependence within marriage, that is at fault.

As I have indicated, narrative closure in this novel appears to uphold the patriarchal view of marriage; yet this perspective is questioned by the reversal of conventional expectations in the union of Polly Skene, the Murrays' cousin, and John Whitecross, their minister. In treating this marriage Morrison probes the conventional power imbalance in heterosexual relationships and reverses the conventionally expected sexual dynamic to explore women's right to define their sexuality as other than submissive to male dominance. That this should be a matter of topical interest is clear if we remember Winifred Holtby's assertion that in the inter-war years female 'frigidity' was a matter of social concern. Furthermore, as Sheila Jeffreys states, in order to oppose feminist calls for celibacy and female encroachment on male territory in the workplace and public life, sexologists had brought to patriarchal discourse the authority of a scientific discipline ('Women and Sexuality' p.199). They assumed the task of '[re]creating traditional concepts of wifehood and motherhood, but with sexual enthusiasm thrown in as an extra requirement' (Jeffreys, p.202). Their motivation was political, and, far from being altruistic, their aim was to encourage women to undermine feminist resistance to

male supremacy by encouraging them to 'eroticise their own subordination' (Jeffreys, p.203).

In her study of the Skene-Whitecross marriage, Morrison edges towards a redefinition of the parameters of heterosexual relationships by reversing the conventional roles. She makes the wife sensual and the husband frigid and disgusted by his wife's 'unnatural' appetites:

He had taken to himself an industrious, retiring and capable minister's wife, one who roused in him no ardour, over whom he never felt he had to wrestle with himself, but he had taken it for granted that a modest exterior was a reflection of what was inside. How was he to have known that a woman would be passionate without inspiring passion, that sensuality could lurk in a small face like a button with a stitched-in mouth? This exaggeration of her womanhood to have attention paid to it disgusted him; already these hidden, persistent claims on him had changed married life into a grudging compromise. (*WWB*, 179)

But the effect of the alteration to the commonly accepted sexual dynamic of the patriarchal view of marriage is shown to be at least as detrimental to Polly as the undue subjection to the demands of her husband might have been. Their sexual abstinence renders Polly childless, and her frustration and concomitant unhappiness become translated into an obsession with housework and domestic economies. Moreover, because of the widespread internalisation of sexist ideology, and the presumption that a 'normal' sexual dynamic exists, their childlessness is regarded by the community as a natural misfortune, and no fault is laid at Whitecross's door. However, even the unsympathetic gossip, Annie Cupples, is aware that there is something unnatural about Polly's housekeeping: "Whit a wife he has. I've never

been ben such a tidy hoose in a' ma days; it's so neat it sort o' frichtens ye'" (*WWB*,313).

The topical relevance of Polly's obsession with domestic affairs as a compensatory device for her frustrated sexuality should not be overlooked; for at that time emphasis on the twin pillars of 'femininity' -- homemaking skills and the centrality of participating in *appropriate* sexual relations within marriage -- featured prominently in the dominant social and scientific discourses within which women were encouraged to construct their identity. For a modern Polly, subjected to the discourse of sexologists, the poor sexual relations would seem to be her fault, and undermine her sense of self. In its denial, then, sex is shown to be as great an instrument of male power as its abuse, but it is no easy matter to discern Morrison's precise ideological standpoint. Clearly, we are meant to read in John Whitecross's discourse the result of Calvinist indoctrination about the need to protect oneself from the snares of fornication -- even within marriage:

It was sinful, unholy in him, not only as a minister but as a man, to entertain these feelings for any woman [Florah]. They could be prompted by one thing only; he did not hesitate over the word for he never spared himself -- lust. And because those who do not spare themselves rarely spare others, he felt there must be something wrong with this girl, full of in consequence, to rouse so ardent and contradictory motions (*sic.*) in him. (*WWB*,150)

I believe also that we are intended to object to his denigration of women, articulated in his assumption that a wife should 'remain in the background', 'be evident only when she was needed and efface herself at all other times' (*WWB*,154). But, more significantly, we are intended to interpret his sexual behaviour as an indication of his more general misogyny which is also demonstrated in his aversion to clever

women: 'That was what he could not bear. Cleverness, even intelligence, were not necessary in a woman, indeed the first was to be deplored; he needed no one to soar with him in flights of thought' (*WWB*,154). Morrison goes further than just exposing the misogyny that underpins Whitecross's inflated self-image. She suggests that men are aware that their privileged social position is unwarranted and in jeopardy. In the metaphor of the soaring capabilities of the lark and the eagle she encapsulates the equal potential of the sexes, and hints that men realise that any recognition of women's capabilities would necessarily involve not only a reciprocal diminution in their social status, but would undermine their very sense of self: 'The eagle did not care to know that the heights it gained by the strength of its pinion had been reached on the weak wings of the lark' (*WWB*,154).

However, despite her portrayal of Whitecross's misogyny and Polly's frustration, Morrison's ideological perspective cannot be described as uncomplicatedly feminist. While we can sympathise with Polly's unhappiness, our identification with her is purposely limited. Even as a young girl she is disliked by her cousins (*WWB*,44) and since, as noted earlier (Chapter 4), the narrator seems to speak from within the family circle, the reader is encouraged to view things through their eyes. Polly is portrayed as a malicious gossip (*WWB*,107) who is resentful of Florah's beauty and her comparative poverty beside the wealth of her Murray relations (*WWB*,49). She delights in the misfortunes of others, and there is more than a hint that she is reaping the just rewards of having married above her station and 'stolen' the minister whom everyone thought would marry her pretty cousin, Florah.

It is a moot point whether Whitecross, had he married Florah, would have been able to overcome his religious scruples and respond to her as his instinct

demanded, or, indeed, if this union would have made her happier than her marriage to Polly's brother, Bartle. What is important is that yet again Morrison seems to be calling into question the patriarchal distribution of power, and its definition of the sexual power dynamics of marriage, and that here, too, she avoids outright condemnation of existing practices or the espousal of a platform of radical reform in the shape of celibacy or lesbianism. Her middle course, with which the plot culminates, keeps what can be considered good in marriage -- mutual love expressed in a sexual partnership -- and adds a greater emphasis on equality. To the Murray-MacDiarmid marriage, with which the novel ends, Kindry brings the distinguished Murray genes and generations of good breeding. Hugh brings mercantile acumen and economic security derived from the profits of a thriving business. But can it work? Significantly, Morrison leaves the last words on the matter to the gossiping 'needle-dumper', Annie Cupples, who, while noting that Kindry will no longer have to 'ca' canny', resorts to traditional lore: "Change the name and no the letter, Change for the worse and no the better", and foretells misfortune (*WWB*,310). Clearly any prognosis based on such arbitrary evidence has little credibility, and faith in it is further undermined by evidence of the woman's ignorance and her malicious tongue (*WWB*,311). But the seeds of doubt in the efficacy of the plot resolution have, nevertheless, been sown. Moreover, the economic factor, which deterred Clementina and encouraged Polly is still present in this last marriage, and Morrison seems to be implying that until society can dismantle the existing economic and sexual power base of men in marriage, women will always risk unhappiness.

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#### 5.4 THE EFFECTS OF WAR

Because of its ideological centrality in underpinning the patriarchal social formation, marriage provided Morrison with a vehicle for exploring female identification. As I have argued, her early novels exhibit a dialogism that contains both submissive and subversive approaches to the subject positions that patriarchal discourses on marriage offered to women. Such an approach can be interpreted as indicating the difficulty women of the 1930s experienced in negotiating a satisfactory position between competing feminist and patriarchal (religious, social and historical) ideological interpellations. Furthermore, the novels' historical settings suggest a diffidence in confronting the problem in its contemporary context, and this could be yet another indication of female insecurity. However, Morrison's career spanned three decades, during which time patriarchal discourses changed to suit the varying needs of inter-war economic crisis, total war, and post-war regeneration; corresponding changes can be detected in her fiction.

Following the 1930s' attempt to relocate them in the domestic sphere, the exigencies of total war necessitated a change in the ideological interpellation of women. Suddenly they were expected to be active participants in a war economy, a position that contrasted with their previous, passive role; and while many women exulted in their new freedom, others found the psychological transition problematic. Gill Plain explains this problematic identification by positing that 'war almost represents itself as a constructive reinscription or even rejection of the age-old formulations of gender', where the new gender 'equality' that is adopted is 'more accurately a partially sighted blindness to the social, cultural and historical

specificity of women'.<sup>20</sup> Plain notes that study of women's literature has led M. and P. Higonnet to suggest that the identification crisis caused by war does not end with the cessation of hostilities, but continues to inform their writing beyond its actual duration (Plain, p.20). This is important as far as Morrison's fictional exploration of female identification is concerned. Perhaps because of publishing restrictions in a war-directed economy, or because she experienced the initial stifling of creativity of which authors such as Elizabeth Bowen have complained (Plain, p.2), she produced no serious novels during the war years. However, the two novels published immediately afterwards, *The Winnowing Years* (1949) and *The Hidden Fairing* (1951), were, I believe, influenced by wartime experience. Since both texts have already been discussed in the context of other thematic concerns, I propose to limit further reference to a brief synopsis of how their treatment of the identification of female subject positions differs from that adopted in the earlier novels, and links them with the ideological positions explored in her later novels.

*The Winnowing Years* is interesting because it offers a history of Scottish women, delivered from a woman's perspective. It delineates how the interpellation of women as subjects in patriarchal ideology has changed from the text's starting point in the aftermath of the Reformation, to its ending at the beginning of the Second World War. While on the surface it can be seen to trace a progressive trajectory, this progress is constantly undermined by retardations and reversals, such as the conformity imposed on Nicholas Pollock, or the ambiguity introduced in the portrayal of the young evacuee, Maggie Bowman. It is significant that although the novel suggests that women have gained in autonomy, it demonstrates that they have

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<sup>20</sup>*Women's Fiction of the Second World War: Gender, Power and Resistance* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), pp. 20-21.

always been obliged to conform with male expectations and definitions of femininity, or risk rejection. The novel shows that although the discourses may have altered, the need for conformity has remained. Yet this position, too, is destabilised by the introduction of Maggie Bowman at the end of the book. Her sense of self is so different from that of her ancestor, that with it Morrison seems to hold out a hope for the future; but simultaneously that hope is undermined by ending the novel at the start of hostilities, when all the horrors of war have still to be faced. The uncertainty of Maggie's future symbolises the uncertainty with which Morrison seems to view the future of all women in a world where an altered environment has dictated that women should change how they see themselves, yet again, to accommodate the patriarchal establishment. However, what is, I think, most significant about the ending of *The Wincing Years* is that Maggie is not enclosed or entrapped as earlier females have been, both in this novel and in previous ones; we only see her in the open air, and, thus far, she has not been subjected to the atmosphere of either the manse or the Kirk. Furthermore, her misinterpretation of the significance of the names on the gravestones (*WY*,285) can be read as indicating her freedom from the social and religious conditioning that made Lisbet fear the ghosts of both the saintly Lady of Fingal and Florah Malcolm, the witch (*GS*,59). Morrison, however, remains ambivalent regarding her assessment of such altered possibilities for female identification. Just as the children's life experience of slum squalor subverts the notion of social progress, so Maggie's linguistic register dissociates her from the middle-class language of the narrator, and consequently suggests that what may be interpreted as a raw stridency is obtruding into the *douce* world of Drumban. This critically-viewed stridency finds further expression in Morrison's later portrayal of 'modern' women in subsequent novels.

The identification crisis precipitated by war can also be detected in Morrison's treatment of gender in *The Hidden Fairing*. The wartime predicament of many women, forced into previously 'masculine' roles, is represented in the portrayal of Bartle's widowed mother, Kirstie MacDonald. Obligated to work her dead husband's croft to keep herself, her son and her mother-in-law, Kirstie is shown to have had to build a protective, almost 'masculine' carapace that disguises her previously-obvious femininity (*HF*,23). Her description, with its conflation of masculinity and femininity, emphasises the dual identification imposed on Kirsty and the war-time generation of women she can be seen to represent. This process of dual identification can be seen as the overwriting, but not obliteration, of an earlier-adopted subject position by another that is dictated by altered circumstances:

She wore men's boots which usually had clods of earth sticking to them, and her hands, tanned as though stained with tea, were large and coarse skinned with broken nails. Yet she always had to take the cockerels to the roadman to have their necks drawn, and after having seen a duck devouring tadpole jelly she could never eat a duck's egg. (*HF*,31)

Morrison's portrayal of Kirstie evinces an ambivalence towards her subject position, for while she is often negatively portrayed as uncaring towards Bartle, her son, and positively vindictive towards her mother-in-law, this can, to some extent, be excused because of her extenuating circumstances. I think, however, in Kirstie's careful preservation and bequeathing of the teapot that Bartle had bought for her with his first wage (*HF*,219), there is a quiet acknowledgement of her lasting maternal affection for him, despite his conversion to the Catholicism she has learned

to abhor. Suspended in the 'masculine' there remain traces of the 'feminine', and I feel that Morrison was fairly sympathetic to such problematic identification.

There is, however, no sympathy extended to Maysie Wain, Morrison's representative of the younger generation of women who have readily identified with the new, more 'masculine' subject positions. Maysie is shown to be devoid of all vestiges of previous modes of feminine behaviour. She completely lacks the sexual ambivalence that characterised Lisbet. Indeed, in having intercourse with the young Bartle she merely concludes the process of seduction that she herself instigated (*HF*, 141). The narrator's disapproval of her is conveyed in the symbolic description of the scene of their sexual encounter: 'If the hut were removed, there would be revealed a plot so withered and parched it would take years to restore it to its virgin state -- if ever it could revert to what it once had been' (*HF*, 151). Such disapproval is repeated in the focaliser Bartle's disgust at her later suggestion that they should have an adulterous relationship to provide her with the child her husband is unable to sire (*HF*, 229). Although I think that the delineation of Bartle's reaction here rings slightly untrue, I believe that the reader is intended to sympathise with it, and reject Maysie's opinion that adultery is sanctioned because 'everyone does it nowadays, as [Bartle] would have known if [he] hadn't been living in a backwater all these years' (*HF*, 229). Here, although ostensibly expressing Bartle's conventionally patriarchal view of marriage, Morrison's adoption of a male focaliser courts the reader's sympathy for the patriarchal view. While this is moderated slightly by the possibility that female readers, myself included, might recoil slightly from his righteous indignation, the lasting impression is that contemporary discourses represent a violation of the institution of marriage, and should, therefore, be treated with circumspection. Furthermore, Maysie's vindictiveness in lying to Effie that she is

Bartle's daughter, thereby preventing their marriage, finally distances her from the reader's sympathy. All traces of sympathetic identification with the rebellious positions adopted by women such as Nicholas Pollock or the Lockhart sisters have vanished from Morrison's delineation of Maysie, and such dis-identification becomes a feature of her treatment of some the younger female characters in her later novels which will be examined in the following chapter.

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## CHAPTER 6

### FEMALE IDENTITIES IN MORRISON'S LATER NOVELS

6.1 Introductory Comments

6.2 A Period of Transition: Gender Issues in *The Following Wind*

6.3 'Caught Between Worlds': Female Identities in *Thea*

6.4 Concluding Comments

## CHAPTER 6

## FEMALE IDENTITIES IN MORRISON'S LATER NOVELS

## 6.1 INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

. . . we, daughters of educated men, are between the devil and the deep sea. Behind us lies the patriarchal system; the private house, with its nullity, its immorality, its hypocrisy, its servility. Before us lies the public world, the professional system, with its possessiveness, its jealousy, its pugnacity, its greed. The one shuts us up like slaves in a harem; the other forces us to circle, like caterpillars head to tail, round and round the mulberry tree, the sacred tree, of property.

Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (1938)<sup>1</sup>

In *Only Halfway to Paradise: Women in Postwar Britain 1945-1968* Elizabeth Wilson has observed that when we look at the portrayal of the 1950s, we find we are dealing with the construction of a myth.<sup>2</sup> More recent commentators, Deborah Philips and Ian Haywood, have noted that British society in the fifties has generally been regarded in the public imagination as 'a touchstone of traditional moral virtues and "family" values'.<sup>3</sup> According to this image, the family was reaffirmed as the core social unit, and marriage was again promoted as the only 'respectable' vocation for women. Within marriage the husband worked to support his family, enabling them to share in the prosperity of newly-reconstructed Britain;

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<sup>1</sup> *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*, ed., by Morag Shiach (1928; 1938; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 261.

<sup>2</sup> (London: Tavistock, 1980).

<sup>3</sup> *Brave New Causes: Women in British Postwar Fictions* (London: Leicester University Press, 1998), p.1.

the wife abandoned all thoughts of paid work that she might have had during the war, and settled down to child-rearing in an emotionally-secure home. Sex outside marriage was frowned upon, and divorce carried social opprobrium. That the decade should be regarded as a time of social cohesion, imbued with conservative values, can be explained when it is contrasted with the hedonism and permissiveness of the sixties, and the revolutionary social changes brought about, at least partly, in response to agitation by the Women's Movement in the seventies and beyond. The impression of the inherent conservatism of the 1950s has been further reinforced by successive Conservative Party policies that have attempted to reintroduce the social structuring and ethos of respect for authority that they felt underpinned British society during that decade (Philips and Haywood, p.1). Feminist historians have also opined that it was a period when patriarchal values predominated, and feminism was a spent force. But, as Elizabeth Wilson has demonstrated, the age was not as harmonious as the popular image would suggest; nor, indeed, did feminist activity cease -- it merely changed direction (Wilson, p.186).

Wilson has suggested that the myth surrounding the 'consensus' of the fifties evolved because official discourses played down the extent to which the ideal differed from reality. To create the social cohesion required for national regeneration, people had to be 'convinced' that they were content with their lot. Consequently, official discourses glossed over social inequalities, such as those of class and gender, and people were interpellated as subjects in (and of) consensus-promoting conservative ideology. If such official discourses are the researcher's sole primary sources then it would indeed appear that Britain was becoming an egalitarian society, one that would 'bring the whole nation within the

wide circle of citizenship' (Wilson, p.2). But Wilson suggests that other discourses of the period show that the effectiveness of the ideology of consensus was limited:

Although affluence may be recalled as a past reality, to sift through the collective memory stored in stale newsprint and old photographs is to wonder whether the oasis was not always a mirage, receding as the traveller in time approaches it. For examined more closely, the remembered certainties of the period dissolve into a series of contradictions. There was more than one 'society' and many moods in Britain between 1945 and 1968. (Wilson, p.2)

Regardless of the mythical status of the consensus, the conservative ideology underpinning its construction was real. Effectively a re-articulation of Victorian patriarchal values, it aimed at dismantling much of the reformulation of female identities that wartime blurring of gender boundaries had encouraged. This reassertion of patriarchal ideology aimed at restructuring society by repositioning women as centres of moral stability within the family and, by extension, as society's anchor points. It achieved this by re-interpellating women as wives and mothers. However, as recent studies have shown, this did not mean that women necessarily experienced reversals of the extended employment opportunities originally brought by war. Official government action was not directed towards returning women to the home because they were still needed outside it. Even the number of married women in paid employment increased steadily. From 10 per cent in 1931, it rose to 21 per cent in 1951, and to 32 per cent in 1961 (Philips and Haywood, p.4). Consequently, the ideological mechanism of consensus involved discourses that advocated domesticity together with others ostensibly supporting the 'dual role' that women could play. The latter stressed that while women's natural attributes were ideally

suited to the nurturing of stable families, and thereby, of a stable society, this did not necessarily preclude the choice of having a measure of economic and intellectual independence that paid employment could bring. The concept of the 'dual role' satisfied several demands. It created an extra temporary workforce to meet specific post-war demands; it prevented the incursion of women into the workplace from being interpreted a serious threat to male hegemony; and it 'silenced' women by giving them the illusion of choice.

But the 'dual role', worker and mother, offered contradictory constructions of femininity, and throughout the decade women struggled to negotiate appropriate subject positions between them. Some discourses, such as Caroline Haslett's *Problems Have No Sex*, saw the definition of femininity broadened by the skills of the workplace.<sup>4</sup> Others, like Monica Dickens's *Woman's Own* article published in 1956, cited by Sheila Rowbotham, warned that career women risked losing their children's affection.<sup>5</sup> In *The Second Sex* (1949), which became available in English in 1953, Simone de Beauvoir identified the problem that the contradictory definitions of femininity, inherent in the 'dual role', posed for the *real* emancipation of women. She noted that although women were now educated, and able to take up the jobs that had been made available to them, social opinion still favoured marriage as the only '*honourable* career' for women (my italics; Philips and Haywood, p.6). That the ideologically-constructed ideal differed from the social reality has largely failed to be lodged in the cultural memory of the decade. But, as Rowbotham has observed, beneath the apparent 'consensus', the 1950s produced 'a generation of cultural contortionists' who juggled with the contradictory definitions of femininity

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<sup>4</sup> (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1949); cited in Philips and Haywood, p.6.

<sup>5</sup> *A Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain and the United States* (London: Penguin, 1999), p. 292.

to arrive at new subject positions that sought to combine the positive elements of each:

And so it was that amidst the pastel shades and the thick pile carpets of 1950s new prosperity, heroic aspirations, images of adventure, sacrifice for a noble cause, courage and daring somehow crept into the production of the feminine self. (Rowbotham, p. 281)

Even overt feminist activity in the period became channelled in different directions. Advances in the legal, political, educational and employment-related status of women had reduced the need to focus on these areas. Concern was now directed towards finding ways of making it easier for women to have the choice of domesticity and/or a career. Regarded retrospectively, such activity seems reactionary rather than progressive, and could explain why it has appeared as though feminism had ceased to exist in the period.

Consensus-promoting discourses concealed the fact that while increased affluence raised the living standards and expectations of many working-class wives, middle-class housewives who stayed at home found their lives harder. This was due to the double pressure of higher expectations of domestic proficiency and child-rearing skills coupled with the loss of domestic servants. The period's dominant discourses overlooked such negative effects. For example, Wilson cites the commentary of a journalist-economist in the early sixties who recognised the 'deproletarianization of the working-class woman' as the most significant recent social advance (Wilson, p.13). Wilson argues that it would be 'more accurate to call this process the "proletarianization" of the middle-class wife' (Wilson, p.13). Significantly, this was still predominantly the class of women who wrote, Morrison included. Given her own position, it is understandable, therefore, that in her fiction

resistance to the notion of an egalitarian society is expressed as criticism of falling living standards, and attacks on what are observed as the disadvantages of the Welfare State. In their handling of the subject positions which the discourses of 1950s' society offers to middle-class women *The Following Wind* (1954) and *The Other Traveller* (1957) are unsatisfactorily confused and confusing because they tread an uneasy path between recognising some advancement in the position of women and looking backwards to more conservative, patriarchal formulations of female identity. However, Morrison's last published novel, *Thea* (1963), is more satisfactory. It articulates the difficulties encountered by older women in a society whose discourses offer different subject positions from those with which they had identified in their youth, and, anticipating the feminist aspirations of the Women's Liberation Movement, it suggests the self-fulfilling potential of sisterhood. However, it stops short of offering sisterhood as an alternative to the patriarchally-defined norm of marriage.

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## 6.2 A PERIOD OF TRANSITION: GENDER ISSUES IN *THE FOLLOWING WIND*

Elizabeth Wilson notes that some women writers of the fifties did voice concern about the reality of continuing sexual inequality; but because the dominant ideology of successful emancipation was so widely accepted, they tended to wage a covert war against continued patriarchal oppression by transposing it to the past in their fiction, or by focusing on madness or on 'perverse abnormalities in men'

(Wilson, p.60). This general situation is interesting, because in her last three novels Morrison abandons her previous historical focus and locates her action in the present. I have found no documentary evidence to explain this change of focus. However, several possibilities present themselves. It could have been that no historical situation could provide an exact correlative for the then-current situation in which women had achieved a degree of emancipation, but were still encouraged to regard homemaking as their 'proper' occupation. It may also have been that obfuscation was no longer necessary because by that time the peculiarly Scottish restrictiveness of residual Calvinism exercised less control over the author's (and her readers') sensibilities. Or, given Morrison's evangelical bent, it may have been that the relative 'godlessness' of the age demanded a more direct approach; this would apply particularly to *The Following Wind* which deals with personal spirituality. While all of the above reasons possibly contributed, I think it very probable that Morrison's perspective was influenced by the sexual, social, and political implications of post-war social-engineering which, despite the ideology of 'consensus', made the Scottish middle classes aware that the differentials separating them from the working classes, both in terms of affluence and values, were being eroded. The perceived threat of the 'proletarianisation' of middle-class women may have demanded more direct treatment. What is significant, however, is that in the novels published in the 1950s Morrison employs a male narrative focus, and female identities are considered, for the most part, from a patriarchal perspective.

Since I do not believe that Morrison's approach to gender issues in this period can easily be separated from her overall socio-political standpoint, I think that historically-determined, class-based perceptions of what constitutes femininity figure prominently in her fiction. This is particularly apparent when we consider

how these later novels handle career opportunities for women, and how the pursuit of such careers is portrayed as having altered women's identities. Because they appear to favour a patriarchal perspective, her 1950s' novels evince a distaste for modern career opportunities that take women into the 'masculine' world of commerce. Indeed, Morrison's novels echo something of Virginia Woolf's concern that modern 'emancipated' women were becoming forced to 'circle, like caterpillars, round the mulberry tree, the sacred tree, of property' (quotation given above). Furthermore, whilst Morrison adopted a non-judgemental approach to Euphemia's extra-marital sex in *Breakers* (1930), her 1950s' novels evince a hostility towards women whose sexuality is not expressed solely within marriage. Such disapproval of 'modern' women is exemplified in the handling of Ailsa Craig in *The Following Wind* (1954), who is a successful business-woman, and Vivian Sadler, the protagonist's adulterous wife, in *The Other Traveller* (1957). These women are shown to possess radically different characteristics from the conventionally 'feminine' characters who are preferred in the patriarchal value systems operating within these novels.

*The Following Wind* is an unsatisfactory novel. Characterisation is weak. Apart from its religious dimension, plot development is poor. The text resists straightforward analysis, not because it is inherently and intentionally complex, but because, as already noted, it is confused and confusing. In the context of its historical moment, however, the novel is interesting because it questions the values of post-war society, thereby opposing the idea of consensus. Yet, the alternatives it offers are largely conservative because, although the novel combines traditional concepts of femininity with some modernising elements in an attempt to give them topical relevance, it locates its models of subject identification in pre-war values. It

is this passing off the old as something new that makes *The Following Wind* somewhat shallow. But its exploration of 1950s' constructions of femininity marks a development in Morrison's ideological perspective, and leads to the more satisfying approach adopted in her final novel, *Thea* (1963).

What makes *The Following Wind's* treatment of female identity seem unsatisfactory is that whilst the female characters are largely presented as though seen through the eyes of the principal male protagonist, John Garnett, the reader is left uncertain as to how reliable his perspective is intended to be. This is because while his perspective is given prominence for much of the text, and is frequently corroborated by the authority of the narrative voice, the narrator does not maintain a consistent position with respect to John's view. The reader is thus denied a fixed external framework against which the protagonist's patriarchal perspective can be evaluated, and the novel's vision is thereby blurred.

Some aspects of the novel work towards promoting conservative sympathies; for example, the figurative use of the polarities of light and shade appears to valorise the unconventional Garnett family over their neighbours, the Craig and Latimer families, who conform to 1950s' social expectations. Nevertheless, the present-day reader has difficulty in identifying with John Garnett's value system because his is an out-dated ideological perspective that clings to patriarchal definitions of femininity. Even at the time of publication it would have been recognised that John's idea of femininity is compromised by the suggestion of authorial interest in its more modern formulations, as conveyed by the narrator's sympathetic handling of Ailsa Craig's psychological responses to her predicament. Moreover, whilst the novel seems to take a moral stand against what the Garnetts perceive as the 'evils' of their society, the personal morality of some of their own

family members is more reprehensible than that of the others who, although consigned to the 'padded, brown-toned comfort' of their dull world (*FW*,16), are generally more sinned against than sinning. Such confusion in the novel's vision is compounded by the fact that John is portrayed as flawed, the representative of 'a breed that was dying out' (*FW*,8). Weakened by an aortic aneurism which could be either congenital or sustained as the result of a wartime injury, he dies before the end of the novel, inviting the interpretation that he and his ideology cannot survive in the modern world.

The reader learns early in the narrative that John Garnett's values belong to an earlier period, and is conscious that they are presented in a more favourable light than the prevalent values of the novel's post-war society. Although only ten years older than his brother, Bruce, John recognises that it seems as though 'they belonged to different generations' (*FW*,9). Bruce, 'bristlingly intolerant [. . .] with that touchiness about him of one angry to find himself in the world at all' (*FW*,9), typifies the aggressive spirit of his times. The brothers' attitudes to women and marriage also reflect their different mind-sets and the social discourses that have formulated them. Bruce speaks frankly about sex, and dismisses women as sexual objects: 'You can get what you want without marriage [. . .] Any girl -- and it doesn't matter what her class' (*FW*,24). I think that the contrast between Bruce and John, who is more prudish, even to the extent of thinking about sex as 'that sort of thing' with regard to his relationship with his fiancée (*FW*, 24,47), is intended to encourage the reader's sympathy for the latter's perspective. Furthermore, John's willingness to observe the traditional religious rites of passage (*FW*,12) and his eventual religious 'conversion' (*FW*,77) would seem designed to make his

perspective appear moderate and acceptable when contrasted with Bruce's antagonism towards the minister (*FW*,32).

John's characterisation also invites sympathetic identification with his perspective when he is shown in relation to Ailsa Craig, the woman from the flat below, to whom he is engaged at the start of the novel. Their incompatibility is suggested, and Ailsa is distanced from the reader's sympathy, when she is described in adversarial imagery that make her seem masculine and aggressive, instead of exhibiting the passivity associated with patriarchal expectations of femininity:

Their long engagement had had the effect of most long engagements; they were like company commanders who might still be in the same camp but whose liaison had now reached straining point as they waited for the battle to be joined. (*FW*,10)

Although her name carries connotations of dull solidity, Ailsa possesses innate organisational skills. But her business-like efficiency is presented in a negative light when it is shown to undermine John's self-confidence and question his supposed masculine intellectual superiority: 'He felt inadequate, as he had often done in the past, in the face of such competence. Ailsa always thought of everything; it used to irk him being posed with all the things of which Ailsa could think' (*FW*,61). Ailsa is portrayed as having an abrasive manner; even the narrator's complimentary remark about her good dress sense is undercut by a distinctly hostile character attack: 'There was always a crispness about her, and her appearance had none of the cutting edge that her manner had' (*FW*,60). However, what is significant about this remark, and something that contributes to the confusion about the degree to which authorial sympathy is invested in John's patriarchal perspective, is that it is juxtaposed with

the narrator's observation that women, rather than men, approve of Ailsa's appearance and, presumably, the statement of identity that this encodes.

What differentiates Ailsa from the women who do receive John's approval is that she does not conform to patriarchal expectations of womanhood, but is a successful buyer for a large independent Glasgow retailer. Her prestigious position offers her the same opportunities for travel and for making interesting contacts that John's job as a sales representative offers him. In other words, she is his equal in the business world. Identifying with the new subject positions available to women in post-war Scotland, Ailsa does a job that would formerly have been done by a man. Since the text views her largely from John's perspective, it conveys the impression that because she holds down a man's job, she must lack femininity. This opinion is articulated by John, himself, when he contrasts Ailsa's 'precision' with the homely clutter of bills and knitting patterns that surrounds the female hotelier, Miss Saunders. In his eyes, and in the ideology to which he subscribes, it is the nurturing maternal attributes that are really important in a woman. He believes Ailsa lacks these:

[Miss Saunders] might never marry, yet there was a fruitfulness about her, the wholesomeness of bread, that debarred one thinking of her as a spinster. He felt sure Ailsa would marry, but that would not rob her of her precision. Women, he came to the conclusion, fell into two categories: that of mother or aunt, and whether they were married or not, had children or were childless, altered their category not a whit. Miss Saunders was a mother, Ailsa was an aunt. (*FW*,92)

But here, again, John's perspective does not remain unchallenged. For although the narrator does not contradict the impression that Ailsa's employment is

not conducive to the cultivation of feminine characteristics, a degree of sympathetic understanding is extended to her because social convention dictates that she must decide between her 'interests' and her 'instincts':

With marriage she would be giving up a good post as buyer in one of the few large Glasgow shops remaining in private hands. The sacrifices would, therefore, all be on her side, whose interests were not the housewife's but those of the assured business woman accustomed to the stimulation of travel and contacts. Yet below her interests were instincts, none the less strong because they were buried. (*FW*,14)

Here Morrison appears to be adopting the position of one of Rowbotham's 'cultural contortionists', for it seems as though she neither wholly condemns, nor wholly sympathises with, the 'self-identification' of modern women like Ailsa.

The novel gives a less complicated endorsement of John's conservative, patriarchal perspective in its portrayal of Lennie, his younger sister. Despite her somewhat androgynous name, Lennie possesses the kind of feminine qualities that Ailsa lacks. Their difference is emphasised in Lennie's comment: "I find it so difficult to be what Ailsa expects me to be, because I just haven't a clue what that is" (*FW*,19). Whilst this difference could be rationalised on the basis of the age gap separating them, the text stresses that Lennie differs even from other girls of her own age: 'She was [ . . . ] not yet twenty-one, but the very way she wore her clothes set her apart from her contemporaries' (*FW*,19). Even as a teenager, Lennie had not been inclined to follow fashion trends: 'She had never gone in for sling-back shoes, head scarves and shoulder bags' (*FW*,26). I interpret Lennie's lack of fashion-consciousness as a metaphor for her dissociation from modern 'fashions' in female identification. Furthermore, Lennie is regular in her church attendance and

from an early age has absorbed scriptural insight from the popularisation of the Bible in the form of daily quotations in the *Glasgow Herald* (FW,26). Like John, she has also experienced the ‘joy’ of heightened spirituality (FW,106). Interestingly also, it is Lennie who articulates Conservative politics most vociferously when the Labour-voting Tom Ritchie comes to dinner. Here, I believe, it is possible to view Lennie as a mouthpiece for Conservative values that are perceived to be threatened in post-war society:

All Scotland got out of the Socialists in power was more Londonisation; [. . .] the terrible thing about the Welfare State [. . .] is that you not only can’t save in it, you can’t economise; [. . .] You bribed the doctors into the National Health Service [. . .] and you blackmailed the dentists. (FW, 69)

Perhaps most important of all, in the book’s value system, is the fact that Lennie chooses to embark on a cookery course to enable her to work as a cook in a large establishment. By giving her a career which utilises traditional feminine homemaking skills, *The Following Wind* presents Lennie as a modern woman who has not compromised her femininity in order to gain financial independence. There is also the suggestion that in becoming engaged to Tom Ritchie she is even participating in a measure of social levelling, for Tom’s parvenu status is disparagingly noted in the narrator’s comment that ‘he quaffed off the glass of sherry with the dispatch of a drinker who has never had to titillate himself with apéritifs’ (FW,68), and in Iris Garnett’s dismay that her young sister will marry someone with a ‘Glasgow accent you could cut with a knife’ (FW,217). *The Following Wind* even suggests that in her marriage Lennie will achieve a measure of autonomy unattained in the marriages of previous eras that were criticised in

Morrison's earlier novels. Following John's unexpected death, it is Tom who turns to Lennie for support, confident in her strength of character: 'It eased something in her that Tom came to her for healing instead of feeling he must always strengthen her. She realised he would always turn to her thus, as though she had all the answers' (*FW*,216). There are resonances here of young Maggie Bowman's retort at the close of *The Winoing Years*: "'Dae ye think I'm God [ . . . ] that I should ken wha every yin is?'" (*WY*,286); only now Morrison presents the female character as confident in her knowledge. Lennie is portrayed, therefore, as woman whose sense of self is derived from identification with elements of patriarchal *and* feminist ideologies.

In Lennie's portrayal the novel seems to welcome a degree of strengthening of women's position in society, and in its valorisation of John's perspective it seems to emphasise that such increased autonomy should not be attained by entering the masculine world of business or by developing what have conventionally been regarded as 'masculine' characteristics. Yet if the novel is read against the grain, as in the instances suggested earlier, there can be detected, running counter to the narrative's apparent valorisation of John Garnett's patriarchal perspective, a subtext which intermittently undermines its validity. Although this oppositional subtext is less sustained than the novel's conservative ideological perspective, its presence is sufficient to produce a fluctuation in the manipulation of the reader's sympathy that makes it difficult to reduce *The Following Wind* to an unequivocally-single vision of female identity. Whilst this faint ideological counter-current makes the novel seem unsatisfactorily confusing, it may, indeed, reflect the confused position in which women found themselves in the transitional period of the 1950s.

One notable manifestation of the subtext that undermines the novel's apparent conservatism is the *manner* in which the female characters are delineated. Despite Lennie's favoured position she is not portrayed in any great psychological depth. Similarly, John's later fiancée, Flora Mure, is given a two-dimensional representation, resembling the portrayal of Fiona Thain in *The Other Traveller*. But what is also significant is that Flora's value-system is questioned when her own mother disputes her choice of husband by preferring the young, enthusiastic Bruce, to the older, staid John. Ailsa, on the other hand, is subjected to a greater degree of psychological exploration, even though she is normally seen through John's unsympathetic gaze, and his perspective is frequently corroborated by the narrator. Working against her generally antagonistic portrayal are occasions where the narrative voice encourages sympathetic identification with Ailsa's predicament. Although, as already noted, the use of battle imagery portrays Ailsa as aggressively antagonistic, when she and John are breaking off their engagement her emotional responses, as she returns the ring, are handled in such a way as to reveal a psychological complexity which encompasses both intense emotion and perfect self-control:

Her words were barely audible, fierce with feeling. 'You *will* take it.' She put the ring into his pocket to make sure he would. 'What do you think I'd do with it?' She wanted to scream with laughter in his face, but had herself too well under control for any such hideousness. (FW,46)

Although the plot of *The Following Wind* cannot accommodate women such as Ailsa, just as *The Other Traveller* cannot allow Jenny Shields, or Sadler's adulterous wife, Vivien, to have their way, Morrison seems to have been interested

in the possibilities women of this type offered as psychologically complex characters. Yet her sympathy with modern women is held in tension with identification with earlier formulations of femininity that were strongly influenced by internalisation of patriarchal ideology. Consequently, their representation, in her novels of this period, in roles that run counter to the novels' conservative ideological perspectives undermines that perspective, but does so in such a manner that its challenge is contained and defused within the narrative. Whilst such a representation acknowledges the complexity attending female identification in the post-war period, Morrison's novels of the 1950s seem to distance themselves from *real* involvement with the position of women, such as characterised *The Gowk Storm*, by adopting a male focus. This, I think, leaves the reader uncertain about her implied vision. However, I see this as a transitional phase, for with her last novel, *Thea* (1963), a much less confusing position is adopted. Now Morrison acknowledges that identities can undergo reconstruction and, abandoning the male perspective, views female identity through the eyes of an older woman.

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6.3 'CAUGHT BETWEEN WORLDS':<sup>6</sup> FEMALE IDENTITIES IN *THEA*.<sup>7</sup>

The body is both a 'locus of cultural interpretations' which have been socially pre-established, *and* a 'field of interpretative possibilities' in which possible roles and identities proliferate: a nexus, then, of culture and choice.

Carol Watts (1992)<sup>8</sup>

'For there is no friend like a sister  
 In calm or stormy weather;  
 To cheer one on the tedious way,  
 To fetch one if one goes astray,  
 To lift one if one totters down,  
 To strengthen whilst one stands.'

Christina Rossetti, 'Goblin Market' (1862)<sup>9</sup>

The first quotation is an extension of Simone de Beauvoir's theory of female identification: 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman'.<sup>10</sup> It provides a fitting introduction to the discussion of Morrison's last published novel, *Thea*, for this text explores the constructed nature of female identity, and considers how the process of identification involves not merely passive submission to ideological interpellation,

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<sup>6</sup> This is a reference to Douglas Gifford, 'Caught Between Worlds: The Fiction of Jane and Mary Findlater, in *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*, ed. by Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan, pp. 291-308.

<sup>7</sup> (London: Hale, 1963). All references are to this edition and will be given in the text as (*T*, page number).

<sup>8</sup> 'Releasing Possibility into Form: Cultural Choice and the Woman Writer', in *Critical Essays on Theories and Texts*, ed. by Isobel Murray (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 43.

<sup>9</sup> *Christina Rossetti: Selected Poems*, ed. by C.H. Sisson (Manchester: Carcanet, 1984), p. 97.

<sup>10</sup> *The Second Sex* (1949, English translation 1953; repr. London: Everyman, 1993), p. 281.

but active selection of appropriate subject positions within those discourses most in tune with the individual subject's fears and aspirations. Significantly, in this novel Morrison abandons the patriarchal perspective of her previous two novels, and views the process of construction of identity from a female point of view.

The novel's engagement with identity is suggested by the title, for it offers the possibility of a conflation of the specificity of the direct article with the indeterminacy of the indirect: The(a). In this novel the identity of one sister, Thea, is posthumously reconstructed, while that of her living sister, Greta, is deconstructed. The characters are seen to be variously 'constructed' depending on how they have adopted subject positions within the discourses of history, cultural tradition, religion, national and social identities, as well as those specifically concerned with gender. Greta has actively chosen to abandon her Scottish past and identify with the discourses of materialism and patriarchal respectability, associated in the novel with England. She thus acquires an altered sense of who she is and how she relates to others, a process for which I shall adopt the shorthand terminology of 'self-identification'. As the novel proceeds she is made to confront the 'monster' she has become, and reconstruct her identity so that she can achieve psychological wholeness. But the identity so produced, while different from that which defines her at the beginning of the novel, is one which is still largely constrained by her social relationships and obligations.

It is significant that although the novel is entitled *Thea*, the focaliser is Greta Chetwude, a married woman in her late fifties. Thea is the name of her younger, unmarried sister who has been dead for six years when the action starts; it is also the name to be given to Greta's newly-born granddaughter as the novel ends. The name 'Thea' therefore represents the past and the future, and it is in successfully

relocating herself between these two positions that Greta ultimately avoids complete psychological breakdown. In this novel Morrison uses the relationship of sisterhood as a means of holding a mirror to Greta, one that shows her not only what she is, but what she might have become, and suggests how she can negotiate a new position between the two. Nina Auerbach has demonstrated that since the nineteenth century women writers have appropriated the concept of sisterhood, previously used in (male-authored) literature to denote an ‘antisociety, an austere banishment from both social power and biological rewards’, and endowed it with ‘subtle, unexpected power’.<sup>11</sup> *Thea* adopts a similar ‘feminist’ perspective as that identified by Gilbert and Gubar in George Eliot’s fiction, whereby ‘women share their potential for becoming each other, and it is their recognition of this potential that defines the heroism of sisterhood within patriarchy’.<sup>12</sup> By re-establishing the bonds of kinship with her dead sister Greta is enabled to dis-identify with the patriarchal ideology of the English Establishment by which she, herself, has been interpellated. Morrison’s strategy follows the literary tradition whereby sisters are presented as opposites, and where the wise or virtuous sister offers herself as a sacrificial victim to save the weaker or errant sibling. This echoes a similar example found in the earlier case of Laura and Lizzie in Christina Rossetti’s ‘Goblin Market’ from which the second quotation given above is taken.

Initially Greta is presented unsympathetically. She is shown to be extremely snobbish, and devotes her whole life to keeping up appearances (*T*,13). Motivated entirely by materialistic ideals, she feels angry and ashamed that her son has married

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<sup>11</sup>*Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1978), p.1.

<sup>12</sup>*The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), p.517.

a girl from a less privileged background than his own; a girl who, it seems, will never meet Greta's expectations. She is afraid, too, that since the newlyweds will be living far from her, but in the same town as the bride's family, her son will be corrupted:

'She'll never be Nan Chetwude if she lives to be a hundred. . . Larry will become a Williams before she becomes a Chetwude. That's what I'm afraid of -- that, living in her circle, he'll lose all his personality. It's a pity he's going to live in the same town as her people. He's so easy going, it will be the simplest thing in the world for him to become assimilated by people who don't know what's what or have any standards to keep up.' (T,8)

Yet the influence she wishes to maintain has already been rejected by Greta's daughter, for Joy and her husband chose to move to a different county when they married, even though her father, Martin, had offered to help them buy a house close to the Chetwudes' own (T,18).

Greta has internalised conservative patriarchal ideology, and believes that a woman must give up all thoughts of her own career on marriage. The reader is given the impression that it is her new daughter-in-law's rejection of patriarchal ideological subjection, exemplified in her intention to have a career as well as a husband, that Greta finds particularly hard to accept:

'It isn't a proper marriage at all, when she is keeping on with her work. For the life of me, I can't see the point in it. As though Larry couldn't afford to keep his wife.' (T,7)

Greta's views on working married women are typical of those old-fashioned patriarchal ideas which Simone de Beauvoir observed were still widespread in the fifties and early sixties, and which stood in the way of the full emancipation of

women (Philips and Haywood, *Brave New Causes*, p.6). Even in the case of women with whom Greta has no personal concern, such as the waitress in her Glasgow hotel, she cannot help but denigrate their decision to work. Ignorant of their personal circumstances, she concludes that greed is their only motivation, and there is an inescapable note of snobbery as she dismisses both the woman herself, and her decision to work:

The waitress was so raven dark Greta felt sure her hair was dyed. She was competent, wore pink pearls and a wedding ring -- probably part-time. It astounded Greta the way women nowadays went out to work just to make more money when their husbands were bringing in a packetful every week. (*T*, 54)

Yet Greta's characterisation shows her to be ideologically complex, for although she is not shown to represent positive 'feminist' strength, neither does she provide a complete endorsement of conventional ideas about marital power dynamics. For, although firmly believing that wives should remain economically dependent on their husbands, Greta, herself, does not conform to the patriarchal ideal of wifely submissiveness in other things. In her own marriage she is clearly the dominant partner, and whilst Morrison's fiction previously advocated more autonomy for wives, the reader is discouraged from endorsing Greta's personification of the wifely role. To preserve domestic peace her husband, Martin, has had to develop the habit of beginning every response with "'well", as though in appeasement' (*T*,7). Their son's wedding has forced him to realise that Greta has turned him into a 'stuffed shirt, so set in his ways[ . . . ] that automatism had taken the place of living' (*T*,9), and that his use of 'well' is a protection from 'her cutting edges', an attempt to 'negate her effect on him simply by underestimating

everything she overestimated' (*T*, 8). Perhaps the most alienating image the reader is given of Greta is that of the spider who only allows Martin freedom to wander over her web provided he does not overstep his bounds by disagreeing with her, particularly about working on beyond his normal retirement date:

So he would retire at sixty-five. But because it meant something to him, always, when the subject was raised, he made some protest, put forward a demur. He knew it was only a show. He was like a favoured fly allowed to roam at will over the whole radius of the house spider's web, with not even trip threads to impede his explorations. Only the upward tilt of the thread at the circumference to keep him safe in the net. (*T*,13)

Although Greta now lives affluently in Farling, an English garden city, she originally lived in a flat in Glasgow, a past from which she has actively disengaged herself. Therefore, like her house, 'built in the modern style with much glass', and Farling itself, 'which was beautifully planned' (*T*,17), Greta Chetwude is a work of comparatively recent construction. Her Scottish heritage is confined to the name of her house -- Strathlurig -- and the occasional use of words like 'nous' (*T*,6). Publicly her past is misrepresented; she uses her father as 'a handy impressive passport' when she informs people that her house is named after one of his ships, implying that he had owned them, rather than merely sailed in them (*T*,18). Privately, she is ashamed of her past, and it still 'rankles' that her friend Louise Serle, who comes from a wealthy, academic family, 'had known [Greta] when she lived around the corner -- in a flat, not a house, with her clumsy clothes and no beaux, and a mother who prided herself in the "good Scots tongue" she had in her head' (*T*,11). But even more than her youth in the Glasgow flat, Greta is ashamed of her mother's links

with Scotland's older rural tradition, encapsulated in the name of the village, Loam, and the farm, Plewlands (Ploughlands), where she was raised. Indeed, Greta's only consolation is that with each generation her Black inheritance is being diluted by what she considers more acceptable genes, even though these include genes from the socially inferior Williams family into which her son has married:

Whether the Blacks liked it or not, Joy and Larry were the only descendants of a line that, with the stronger, more predominant strains of Chetwude, Rivers and Williams, would tend to grow fainter until it died out altogether. The sole record that Blacks had once existed would be in some tilting stones in the hummocked ground of a forgotten graveyard. As she thought of this, Greta felt in some indefinable way she had scored over these relations of hers she had never cared to own. (*T*, 83)

Because she associates Scotland with unsophisticated backwardness, Greta has chosen to identify herself as an Englishwoman (*T*, 55), but her confidence in her assumed identity is undermined even more by becoming reacquainted with her sister than by the comment of a foreign acquaintance who tells her: "We have a proverb in our country [ . . . ] that no child outgrows the cradle of his nation" (*T*, 55).

Greta's process of re-identification begins when she decides to sort through a chest containing Thea's belongings -- notebooks, letters and papers -- that she had brought back to Farling after her sister's death six years earlier. It is through the contents of this chest that Greta is first reunited with Thea, and through it she begins to confront her own past and, more significantly, her own present. What is particularly interesting about this old black chest is that it is probably the same chest that the girls' mother had used to transport the contents of her bottom drawer from Plewlands, when she married Greta's and Thea's father. The chest, then, links the

lives of all three women. Its colour recalls her mother's maiden name, Black, and the heritage associated with it which they all share. Just as it was possible to interpret the phallic symbolism of the trees as representations of patriarchal authority in *The Gowk Storm*, so it is possible to attribute Freudian significance to this chest, and view it as a symbol of female identity. But the language used to convey the chest's effect on Greta evokes an image of menopausal infertility, and its contents suggest wizened sterility:

She bent to unlock it and felt her face hot, as though the blood had suddenly rushed to it.[ . . .]

The lock was rusty and the key quite difficult to turn. The moment she lifted the lid a smell assailed her nostrils, of must and dried seeds and old leather. The lid creaked as it fell back, for its straps had snapped long ago. (*T*,25)

The latter part of the description could refer to the fact that Thea never married; but as the chest links all three women, I think it more probably refers to the specifically Scottish articulation of female identity that they all initially shared, but which has now been denied fruitfulness since Thea and her mother are both dead, and Greta has rejected it in favour of subject positions in the discourses associated with the English upper middle-class patriarchal Establishment. Looked at in this light, the chest, like the sisterhood it recalls, can be seen as the repository of an older Scottish female identity that is set in opposition to the modern, English patriarchally-conditioned femininity which Greta has chosen to adopt. Further specifically female connotations are evoked by the reference to the fact that the 'strong ticking' of the chest's lining was 'torn in places' (*T*,27). This recalls the stays which Nicholas Pollock cut in an act of female rebellion against patriarchal

control in *The Winnowing Years* (WY,100). However, in *Thea*, ticking has more complex connotations, for its appearance is later shown to upset Greta so much that she is compelled to conceal it. This could be because Greta herself has now become a representative of old-fashioned patriarchal authority, and the association of the chest and its contents with an oppositional articulation of female identity, as expressed in sisterhood or as her former female identity, makes her feel uncomfortable. Perhaps she feels that it represents an assault on her assumed identity. Perhaps she interprets it subconsciously as a repudiation of the path she has taken to acquire that new identity. Whatever the precise reason, there are suggestions of guilt in her prolonged attempt to cover up the exposed ticking in her hotel bedroom in Glasgow. Clearly this is meant to represent an unconscious association with Thea, but what is still undetermined at this point in the narrative is whether she is trying to hide the truth about Thea, or about herself, for she has not yet appreciated the value of the sisterhood that unites them.

She noticed the slip of her underpillow was tucked in at one corner, revealing the blue-striped material it covered, and took some trouble to put it right so it no longer showed. She did not know why but she did hate ticking -- perhaps because it was strong and coarse, fit only for things to be hidden. (T,70)

Even when she has decided to return to Glasgow to find out what happened to her sister in the year prior to her death, Greta is still unaware of the unusually close bond that had united her with Thea. As she begins to re-establish that bond it is suggested that their closeness existed because they looked to each other for companionship as a refuge from their mother's strict rules of household management and as a compensation for her lack of overt displays of affection. Yet

the text also suggests that the peculiarity of their situation did not, of itself, completely explain the strength of the bond that linked Greta to Thea. It suggests that there is something unique in the bond between females that cannot be replicated in heterosexual relationships:

Their mother had not been a maternal woman, and despite the eight years of difference between the two sisters they had been bound together, like two ears on one blade of wheat. Greta had not thought of their closeness, which curiously made Thea as old as Greta and Greta as young as Thea -- she had taken it for granted because they were sisters. It was only when she met Martin's family that it struck her how impersonal was the relationship between brothers and sisters. Nor had anything like it existed between Joy and Larry. (*T*,24)

I do not think that Morrison necessarily intended connotations of lesbianism to be read into this kind of relationship, but bearing in mind the frequency with which groups of sisters appear in her fiction, and her own closeness to her sister, Mary, it is possible that she saw sisterhood as a viable alternative to the patriarchal ordering of society.

The chest provides the vehicle by which this relationship is re-established. Its contents bring Thea back into Greta's memory, and she begins to realise that whereas she has changed, Thea had always remained the same. This is important because it establishes the oppositional nature of the sisters' identities that has overlaid the original unity that once characterised their relationship. Unlike Lizzie and Laura in 'Goblin Market' they are not inherently different; Greta has *become* different, and I use the verb intentionally, to echo Simone de Beauvoir's contention: 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' (*The Second Sex*; 1993, p281). As the chest's contents are examined several interesting features that associate Thea

with older Scottish formulations of the category 'woman' emerge. Firstly, the discovery of the fortune-telling book, *Leonora's Fortune Teller*, prompts Greta to remember how Thea could read the cards, and foretold details of her developing relationship with Martin with unfailing accuracy (*T*,26). She remembers, too, that Thea always wanted things to work out well for her sister, and would reinterpret any bad omens presaged by the cards. This associates Thea with the traditional Scottish female character, the spae-wife. The idea of a woman seeing into the future is subversive of Calvinistic patriarchal authority, and that Thea should participate in such activities places her alongside oppositional female characters like Nannie from *The Gowk Storm* who is figuratively, yet fondly, portrayed as a witch (*GS*,16). Such an association with magic also confers extraordinary powers to the kind of female identity Thea represents.

The chest also contains a menu card from Greta's wedding lunch on which are pencilled the initials 'T.T.' surrounded by a heart pierced by an arrow carrying the letter 'T' (*T*,27). Greta dismisses this as representing nothing more than a gallant gesture by Martin's best man, whom they still call 'T.T'. But she also finds his photograph and a love letter from him, in which he tells Thea that he has verified with Greta the dates of Thea's proposed visit to England, and promises that he will come to see her at Greta's home before he leaves to take up his position in India. Even when faced with the evidence of the letter, Greta finds it difficult to envisage her sister as a sexually desirable woman. What makes this particularly difficult for Greta is that because she is in awe of T.T's title and aristocratic lineage, she has always credited him with sophisticated and impeccable taste. She cannot, therefore, reconcile her image of her 'plain' young sister with some one to whom T.T. could possibly have been attracted. The chest, then, shows Thea as a sexual being, with an

attractiveness and capacity for emotion that is at odds with the conventional picture of the stereotypical spinster. Thus, even before Greta has travelled north to Glasgow, it is apparent that Thea's real identity was different from the image Greta had formed of her.

It is significant, too, that nothing written by Thea herself is contained in the chest. This makes her typical of the many women whose writing, professional or recreational, is devalued when judged by patriarchal criteria and so fails to be preserved for posterity. Greta admits that Thea wrote well, as though conveying a life that was crammed full of significant events (*T*,36); but since the subject matter of Thea's writing held little interest for Greta, just as, more generally, women's 'domestic' themes have often been considered trivial by men, they had been quickly read and then discarded. The lack of anything written by Thea connects her also with the oral tradition of Scottish folk culture, and this, too, associates her with communities of women who kept alive ballads, stories and sayings of folk wisdom by passing them from one generation of females to the next, until they were 'collected', that is appropriated, by men, and given the patriarchal authority of textuality. Indeed, their mother had been just such a source of folk wisdom: 'her uncompromising dictums, in which she distilled the maximum of sense in the minimum of words, [had been] bandied about with the familiarity of proverbs' (*T*,15). The lack of Thea's 'textuality' represents her exclusion from conventional patriarchal approval, and this contrasts sharply with the preserved pile of authoritative letters from patriarchally-interpellated Greta, that had been written in her 'ample handwriting' (*T*,30).

The only written evidence of Thea's self-professed identity is her name, Thea Shaw, and a date on the flyleaf of a hymn book, written when she was about

nine years of age (*T*,155), and discovered when Greta visits their former church in Glasgow. Thea's religious life is given great significance by this solitary written relic, and it is the religious aspect of sisterhood that is most familiar to the popular imagination. As in other tales of sisterly devotion where one sister's loyalty and self-sacrifice redeems the other, it is shown to have been Thea's unswerving loyalty to Greta that indirectly caused her own death. Thea, then, can be seen as a female Christ-like figure. It was sisterly loyalty that made Thea stop visiting Louise Serle's flat after she had discovered that Louise and Greta's husband, Martin, were lovers. Her death was precipitated because this action removed her from the orbit of anyone who would have realised that during her last year she was receiving inadequate medical attention, and knew her well enough to insist that she attend for investigation by a specialist. Moreover, after Greta has discovered the truth about Martin and Louise and is facing such complete psychological breakdown that she even contemplates suicide, it is the memory of one of Thea's letters, relating a sermon preached by her minister about curlews flying through the blitz, that gives her enough hope to recover:

It was like a miracle to Greta when she heard them as they flew above the sleeping city. It was meant that she should hear them. Birds tuned to some secret wireless that guided them from compass point to compass point, flying in rank above the wrinkled earth, carried a message only for her.

A message that she was not alone, linked not only to Thea but to something symbolised by unseen birds on the wing,[ . . .]. Something or someone that could only be described by words found in a black book at home, a book of strange old forgotten words that did not so much shudder with thunder but stood steady as Kingdom Come after

the thunder had passed -- Retribution, Regeneration, Salvation.  
(*T*,148-9)

I have quoted this passage at length because it shows that by this later stage in the novel, after she has returned to Glasgow, Greta has once again identified with the subject position of her youth, a position she shared with Thea. That Greta had originally identified with such a specifically Scottish definition of femininity, with its Calvinistic overtones, is emphasised by her memory of the essentially matriarchal environment in which she and Thea grew up, when their father was at sea:

She and Thea had been brought up on the Bible -- Mother had seen to that -- and the Bible began with 'In the beginning . . .'. She remembered that now. Her past and Thea's had been clapped between the batters of a black book. She had escaped when she married, but Thea never had. (*T*,14)

This passage emphasises the notion of marriage undertaken as a means of escape. But it also hints at the formative elements of her past that Greta has rejected to achieve her escape -- family, female community, tradition, and religion. The harshness of the consonants mirror both her unfavourable impression of her upbringing, and the vehemence with which she has rejected it. The idea of forcible rejection of her past, of denying that it ever existed, is also suggested by the imagery of the boulder that blocks her memory:

The security of a lifetime of marriage had effaced completely the insecurity of her spinsterhood. She found herself now on the other side of the boulder that blocked up the past and felt chilled in its shadow. (*T*,27)

Indeed, even when she first returns to Glasgow, Greta is so determined to remain dissociated from the subject positions available in the discourses of her past, even after the contents of the chest have begun to make her remember things she would rather leave buried, that she is angered by a quotation in a copy of the *Glasgow Herald*: 'A man's real possession is his memory, [. . .] In nothing else is he rich, in nothing else is he poor -- Alexander Smith' (T,106).

Yet when she once again sees the West End of Glasgow in Spring sunshine, she realises that 'it was not always winter behind the boulder that stoppered up the past for her' (T,58). Clearly the impression of her past that Greta has formulated has been selective; she has preferred to focus on the bad points to the exclusion of much that even she found good. Although this would have made its rejection easier, the idea that Greta's past has been forcibly shut away is captured in the recurring imagery of the boulder that prevents her memories from surfacing. Such imagery is used when Greta is forced to recall that it was her own selfishness which denied Thea the opportunity of marriage because she did not want to be left to look after her bedridden mother when, as was inevitable, Thea accompanied her prospective husband to India. It conveys also the precarious psychological state that Greta experiences when she is forced to remember that the real reason why she prevented Thea's romance with T.T. from blossoming was that the prospective husband was a titled aristocrat, and this would have given her young sister social precedence over herself. Once she is forced to admit to this, Greta begins to dislike the woman she has become:

But now she found herself cramped in midstream on a boulder that rocked but that she could not leave. She would have dared anything to have plunged elsewhere . . .

. . . memories began to unwind that had been so tightly rolled they had taken up no space, [. . .]. This was immutable as rock, against which thoughts broke like spray. (*T*, 68)

Although she vehemently refutes the suggestion that her visit to Glasgow is a 'pilgrimage', because 'Glasgow was certainly the last place on earth so far as Greta was concerned to find a shrine' (*T*,57), the transformation it achieves in her personality is nothing short of miraculous. For whilst the contents of the chest force her to begin to think differently about Thea, it is Greta's visit north, and her meetings with people who had known the mature Thea better than she had done, that reassert the bonds of sisterhood and effect Greta's own self-revelation. Before her trip Greta thinks of Thea as 'small' and 'plain' (*T*,10), with no dress sense; her clothes had only been fit to give to the Salvation Army, 'who refused nothing' (*T*,25). She thinks that she had been the only star in Thea's orbit, and that her sister's life must have been unutterably boring in the twenty-something years since Greta's marriage. Thea's childless spinsterhood is regarded by Greta with patronising condescension. Even Thea's selfless devotion to their bedridden, often short-tempered mother is dismissed as nothing short of laziness, because Greta thinks that her sister should have taken a secretarial course so that she could then have used her spare time profitably: 'Greta did not think Thea could be busy if she tried' (*T*,15-16). But Martin does not share Greta's opinion of Thea; to him she was 'a dear' (*T*,50). Even as a young child Joy sensed something special about Thea and her home: "Everything's the same here, while at aunt Thea's everything's quite, quite different" (*T*,37).

Two features emerge from this sketch of Greta's opinion of Thea; everything about Thea is measured relative to Greta's current position as the wife of a wealthy English company director, and everything conforms with patriarchal ideology. When Greta returns to Thea's home environment, however, she discovers that there Thea is judged differently. If Greta was surprised to learn that T.T. had been in love with Thea, she is shocked to learn that for years Thea had encouraged the friendship of Donald Frew, whose proposal of marriage Greta, herself, had refused in favour of Martin's. Moreover, Greta's self-confidence is severely shaken when she learns that Donald had repeatedly proposed marriage to Thea during the intervening years, whilst she had presumed that he had remained unmarried because he was still in love with her. Six years after Thea's death, Donald is still disconsolate, even though he knows she rejected him because she loved another man, whom Greta now knows to have been T.T. Such a scenario questions the patriarchal interpretation of spinsterhood as male rejection of the female because she is unsuitable for marriage. It represents spinsterhood as the result of a positive decision not to marry, taken by the woman for her own reasons. Thea had chosen not to marry, even though Donald had promised to take full responsibility for herself and her mother. Thea was unwilling to marry just for financial security. This evinces an integrity which is not so evident in Greta's own past. For, although she had held a well-paid post before her marriage, Greta had believed that women needed the security of a husband to provide for them. Furthermore, there was the social stigma of spinsterhood, and, at twenty-six, she could have been worried that she were she to refuse Donald Frew's proposal, this disgrace would be hers. Clearly, she only requested time to consider Donald's proposal in the hope that someone more suitable would come along:

Greta had forgotten all about those days, and how much it had meant to her to marry Martin. The security of a lifetime of marriage had effaced completely the insecurity of spinsterhood.[ . . .]

After all, she had been twenty-six when she married. She remembered how those twenty-six years had weighed on her. Had Martin not appeared on the scene, she would have accepted Donald Frew, but the undreamed-of had happened and Martin had appeared on the scene. (*T*,26-27)

As she unearths the truth about her sister's last year, Greta is also forced to admit that because of their mother's frugality, Thea had insufficient money to keep the flat going after prices had risen due to post-war inflation. In her heart Greta had always known this to have been the case, but she was so self-assured in her own comfortable security that she either chose to ignore any veiled pleas for financial help (*T*,30-31), or sent discarded clothing to salve her conscience (*T*,35). She even dismissed Martin's suggestion that Thea was 'living on the edge of sixpence' (*T*,33), and later lied to him about the reality of their financial situation once Thea and their mother were both dead (*T*,34).

It is only when Greta visits their father's sister, the wealthy Aunt Miller in her large, comfortable house, that she is confronted with the meanness with which they had both treated Thea. Despite her wealth, all that Aunt Miller ever gave to Thea was an annual pair of pantomime tickets, which Thea promptly gave away to children because she did not like pantomime. Greta is angered to be reminded of this when her aunt states that the really bad thing about Thea's death was that, as should have been her due as their father's only sister, she was not given her place and properly informed with a visit, but was left to read the announcement in the newspaper (*T*,65). Before the visit the reader is informed that Greta had always

‘unconsciously identified herself with their father’s side of the house, personified by Aunt Miller’ (T,61). As the visit proceeds Greta realises that Aunt Miller ‘could think of nothing or no [one] except in relation to herself’ (T,64). This, as we have seen, is similar to the way Greta, herself, has always viewed Thea. By the end of the visit Greta has become so disgusted with the old lady’s egocentricity, and so upset by the accusations of neglect directed at herself, that she visualises her aunt as a ‘slug whose world, the succulent heart of a lettuce, is its meal’ (T,68).

The identification of Greta with Aunt Miller is pushed to its final stage, later, when Louise Serle, forced to admit that she has been Martin’s lover, blames Greta’s ‘*amour propre*’ for her husband’s infidelity and Thea’s death, and says that Greta reminds her of the ‘pulpy and horrid’ animal that once made her feel ‘quite sick’ when she picked up its pretty shell and then discovered it was still inside it (T,138). Having made a similar assessment of Aunt Miller, it is this image of herself which makes Greta realise that her own overbearing, self-centred personality has driven away her children (T,145). She now realises why Joy moved away to another county and why Larry married someone who bore absolutely no resemblance to his mother (T,12). She is tormented by the image of herself as a slug like Aunt Miller, and it is this new sense of what she is really like that threatens to cause Greta’s complete psychological breakdown:

Face to face with herself, it was not only a passing family resemblance she caught. There was no escape from the vicious circle until she recognised herself as the living image of Aunt Miller. Only thus could she extricate herself from swaddling bands before they could knot themselves in to a winding sheet. (T,146)

Yet despite her despair and her children's separation from her, Greta's maternal responsibilities deny her the freedom to commit suicide because of the effect it might have on Joy or her baby.

In the midst of her emotional turmoil, flashes of simple childhood memories of herself and Thea help Greta regain a sense of psychological equilibrium:

That was her sole loophole to safety, to think back to when she and Thea were children, [. . .].

[. . .] When you took Thea's hand to run down the hill in the dusk to do a message for Mother and felt you both were flying. When the door banged behind you after you came home and Thea's voice sang out, 'There's buttered toast for tea.' (*T*, 143-144)

Eventually Greta realises that just as the enormous mirror that dominated Louise's flat had made her feel uneasy (*T*,122), it is because Louise has held up a metaphorical mirror and forced her to look long and hard at herself that she can now see not only herself, but Thea, in a new light. She is stricken with remorse at her cavalier treatment of Thea, and belatedly recognises the look of concern on her sister's face during their last meeting. When questioned about the reason for her 'ineffable expression', Thea had dismissed it as "nothing" (*T*,44), but now Greta realises that it had been compassion because Thea knew that Martin had been unfaithful to her. Because Thea realised that her sister had constructed her identity around her social position as Mrs Martin Chetwude, she had been thinking, 'If Greta knew, it would kill her' (*T*,146). Greta recognises, too, that Thea had acted selflessly on her behalf, denying herself Louise's companionship out of loyalty to her sister: 'Thea had been her deputy, she had stood in for her, and Louise would find the substitute more to be reckoned with than she had ever found Greta' (*T*,146). When

the bonds of sisterhood are re-established, Greta realises that she cannot achieve wholeness until she acknowledges her debt to Thea. She also recognises the hitherto unrecognised significance played in the construction of her female identity by her own membership of such a close-knit community of women. No longer can she define herself solely in her own, or more specifically, in patriarchal terms. From now on, she must also construct her identity to include the 'feminist' idea of sisterhood:

Thea alone mattered. They were sisters, sprang from the same root, grew on the one branch. Nothing could separate them, even Greta. It was the closest bond there was, the family tree, because what they shared was bedrock. She had made the discovery tonight that her roots were on the other side of the stone that stoppered up the past, her marriage the quick-growing flowering that succumbed to the first blast. (*T*, 147-148)

By being forced to look not only at Thea, but at herself through her relationship with Thea, Greta realises that, like Aunt Miller, she, too, has become an uncaring egocentric monster: 'What happened in a vicious circle was you came face to face with yourself. You saw yourself for the first time not as you imagined, but as others saw you' (*T*, 148). As the process of reconstruction of her identity proceeds, Greta is increasingly portrayed in a more sympathetic manner. At its completion, her former bombastic, aloof mien is shown to have given way to an appreciation of the funny side of being locked out of the hotel, and the means by which she and another rather inebriated male guest gain entry (*T*, 149). She also shows a consideration for others, that harks back to her mother's regime, and goes quietly about her hotel bedroom so as not to disturb anyone (*T*, 150). The dramatic nature of the change in her personality and its significance for the future is demonstrated, even before she

leaves Glasgow, by her sympathetic reappraisal of her daughter-in-law. When she first receives Nan's letter, forwarded from home, Greta is irritated even by the way the envelope has been addressed: 'Strathlurig, enclosed by inverted commas. Where had the girl been brought up?' (*T*, 105). She lacks sympathy for her new daughter-in-law who is distressed that her wedding photographs have turned out badly. Indeed, Greta had already predicted as much, because Nan had had her hair permed the day before the wedding, and had not removed her glasses for the photographs (*T*, 7,6). That Nan should have taken the trouble to write to ask Greta to forgive her for not having had a white wedding is not interpreted as an attempt at reconciliation on the girl's part. It is simply a reminder of how much Greta is annoyed by her, the articulation of which betrays all the class prejudices from which it is derived:

Her very name annoyed her -- Nan, not Nancy, or Ann with or without the 'e'. Just Nan -- so like someone behind a counter, in a small shop where you knew her name, Nan in the dairy, or the girl in the bookshop who kept your favourite woman's magazine for you. (*T*,105)

However, after her self-revelatory experiences Greta is moved to reconsider the letter, this time more sympathetically:

She had not noticed before that Nan's gauche phrases and trite sentiments were trying to say something to her.[ . . .] She was trying to tell her mother-in-law she wished she had been married in white. [ . . .]

Behind the spectacles and indeterminate features there apparently struggled something of Eve. The prickly self-assurance, the buttoned-in assertiveness hid the abasement of the plain girl. Why on earth had Greta not seen that before? (*T*, 153)

That she now decides to offer to have the photographs redone and help Nan to gain the self-confidence she lacks, represents a complete character transformation in Greta, one that speaks of the example of Thea's selfless consideration for others. Greta even encourages her daughter, Joy, whom she had previously schooled in her disapproval of Nan, to help her new sister-in-law overcome her shyness (*T*,167). Significantly, no negativity is expressed about Nan's determination to have a career and a husband.

The novel's feminist perspective, evident in its portrayal of sisterhood, is re-emphasised in its closure, when Greta, the erstwhile female upholder of out-moded patriarchal ideology is effectively silenced. Having left explicit instructions that she was to be contacted in any emergency, Greta is hurt that she had not been informed that her daughter had gone into premature labour, until the baby had been safely delivered. Nevertheless, she is uncharacteristically silent when her son-in-law telephones with the news (*T*,151). This is in stark contrast to the reaction of the other grandmother, a woman of Greta's former disposition, who takes such a fit of pique that she creates a fuss and refuses to visit Joy and the baby in hospital. Greta is similarly 'silenced' when Joy apprehensively informs her of their decision to break with tradition and refrain from naming the baby Greta, after her mother. Sickened at the implicit rejection, but prepared, nevertheless, to give the younger generation its place and accept what she thinks is Joy's choice of the other grandmother's name, Greta is genuinely delighted to hear that the baby is to be called after Thea (*T*,168).

But once more, as in Morrison's earlier novels, 'feminist' subversion is complicated by patriarchal complicity, for it is possible to deduce that the

ideological implications which can be drawn from Greta's silencing are complicated by the fact that she is also unable to confront Martin with her knowledge of his infidelity and leave him, as she had planned. Instead she confesses her own guilt for not ensuring that Thea had had enough money, and, as the focus of his anger, and the recipient of his forgiveness, Greta realises that Martin, like Thea, is part of the 'bedrock' on which her selfhood depends (*T*,176). She needs both kinds of relationship to complete her new self-identification process. However, as the result of her experience, Greta's position within her marriage has altered. This is emphasised by the fact that when Martin tells her that he has been formally requested to work on beyond his due retirement date (*T*,174), she is quietly acquiescent -- a position that is diametrically opposed to her stance at the start of the novel. Clearly, Greta has changed, and this change augurs well for her marriage, for both partners are equal in their guilty pasts, and Greta is no longer a bully. But while this could be interpreted as the adoption of a conservative endorsement of marriage, especially since Martin never has to own up to his infidelity, it must be appreciated that the change in Greta also augurs well for her relationship with the younger women in her family; for in not imposing her will on her daughter, the female bonds that bridge the generations and establish a matrilineal continuity are strengthened:

'We're exactly the same as you were,' smiled Joy, 'just as *she* will be when she grows up. The loveliest thing of all is going to be to teach her all the things you taught me . . . how to fold my nightgown, you remember?' The way Mother had taught Greta and Thea. (*T*,66-167)

Much of Morrison's fiction has been engaged with the reformulation of the concept of marriage. Opposed to the traditional imbalance of power that favours men, Morrison's fiction would also seem to disapprove of a complete reversal of the

power polarity, and appears to seek resolution in real sexual equality. Viewed in this light, the strengthening of Greta's marriage, that can be regarded as a complicating factor in Greta's (and Morrison's) espousal of the feminist concept of sisterhood, seems like less of a weakening of that position. There seems to be something inherently 'right' in the final narrative comment about the Chetwudes' reformulated relationship: 'Something reached him from his wife, and he became conscious of her' (*T*,174). Once again in Morrison's fiction complicity with, and subversion of, patriarchal ideology coexist, only now the equilibrium seems to have shifted away from the position it occupied in *The Following Wind*, and is more akin to that of her earlier novels. Therefore, despite its failure to reject marriage, *Thea* can be interpreted as progressively feminist in its attempt to reformulate the power dynamics of that relationship, and in the convincing argument it presents for the recognition of the value of the wider concept of sisterhood in establishing a balanced female identity.

Another progressive feminist ideological implication that can be drawn from *Thea* is suggested by the movement away from such ambiguity concerning female self-identification that the new generation heralds. At the beginning of my discussion I suggested that reading the novel as an exploration of possible constructions of female identity was signalled by the conflation of determinacy and indeterminacy in the name Thea. The juxtaposition of Thea's 'identity' with Greta's patriarchally-informed 'misconstruction' of it, and Greta's own alteration from one construction of female identity to another, speak of female identity as a contested space. Female identity is shown to be, as Carol Watts says, 'a nexus[ . . .] of culture and choice' (Armstrong, 1992, p.43). It is significant, however, that the novel holds out hope for a less contentious approach to female identification in the future. In the

new baby's name, Theodora, the ambiguity surrounding The(a) has disappeared, and as her mother comments: "Theodora Rivers -- she should do something with a name like that, shouldn't she?" (T, 169).

#### 6.4 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

I have argued that Morrison's early fiction is characterised by a dialogic approach to the position of women in patriarchal society. Subversion and submission go hand in hand, because the celebration of rebellion and the assertion of alternative constructions of female identity are constrained by a measure of acquiescence that is suggestive of the interpellation of the characters, and perhaps also of the author, by patriarchal ideology. Her novels of the immediate post-war period explore the blurring of gender boundaries, and while there is obvious sympathy for characters like Nicholas Pollock in *The Winnowing Years*, other characters who possess an excess of what have hitherto been regarded as masculine traits, such as Maysie Wain in *The Hidden Fairing*, are portrayed very unsympathetically. Even male characters who are rendered passive, like Bartle MacDonald in *The Hidden Fairing*, are treated in an ambivalent fashion; sympathetic identification is encouraged, but plot developments leave the reader unsure whether the sympathy is justified or misplaced. The overall impression gained from these novels is one of uncertainty about blurred gender roles and a tendency to revert to older models as reliable standards of judgement. Apart from the female characters in the early sections of *The Winnowing Years* these novels do not give the impression that Morrison found it easy to identify with the subject

positions adopted by more 'masculine' women. This is also the case in *The Following Wind* and *The Other Traveller* where more conservative constructions of femininity tend to be favoured. However, even here the novels' final position is unclear, and Morrison's conservatism is moderated by a degree of understanding of the difficulties facing women as they negotiate their 'self-identification' amidst conflicting contemporary ideological interpellations of womanhood.

*Thea* presents a more interesting case than the novels immediately preceding it. I interpret *Thea* as the response of an older woman who realises that the psychological baggage that she carries -- her identification with patriarchal ideology and her class-based prejudices -- distances her from the younger generation of women who identify with different formulations of womanhood. I read in its silencing of the older woman the possibility that a self-conscious reflection on Morrison's own role as a novelist is implied. *Thea* was Morrison's last published novel; even the romances that she wrote under the pseudonym Christine Strathern ceased in 1959. After that she devoted her energies to the writing of historical biographies, of which she published five in all. Perhaps Greta's silence mirrors Morrison's own recognition, at that time, of her incompetence to deal adequately with current social attitudes about the position of women.

Writing of the Findlater sisters, writers of the generation before Morrison, Douglas Gifford recognises in their fiction evidence that they were 'caught between worlds' (Gifford and McMillan, p.291); they were conditioned by their upbringing at the end of the late Victorian era, yet were aware of the exciting possibilities for women in the early years of the twentieth century. I would suggest that at this point in Morrison's career, she, too, had possibly reached the point where she found it easier to identify with the discourses from which she and her 'sisters' had

constructed the subject positions of her youth and middle years, than with those which were currently emerging. I do not think this necessarily implies rejection of new possibilities for women, but simply that her own ideological interpellation would have prevented her from giving adequate representation of the aspirations of society's Nan Chetwudes or, more especially, its maturing Theodoras. In attempting to rationalise her decision to abandon the novel, I am reminded of the reply which the Findlaters are reputed to have given to admirers who urged them to go on writing novels after 1923: "The present age must make its own novels."<sup>13</sup> Perhaps Morrison was percipient enough to realise that to younger women her ideological stance could have appeared old-fashioned, and so she bowed before the new wave of feminist activity embarked upon by the Women's Liberation Movement.

All of this is conjecture. But what is evident in Morrison's engagement with feminism is that the warm, vibrant colours with which the rebellious women are sympathetically painted in the novels of the 1930s changed to harsher, more garish tones in the novels of the war years. In the novels of the fifties rebellious women are no longer favoured, but yet those who appear to carry narrative approval are portrayed in insipid hues and two-dimensional representation. Furthermore the equilibrium between feminist aspiration and patriarchal containment has shifted. I interpret what seems like a sympathetic approach to the patriarchal perspective in her 1950s' novels as an expression of her difficulty in relating to the new formulations of the category 'woman' offered by emergent feminist discourses. Accordingly, the tension between the competing subject positions that produced the dialogic ideological engagement of her earlier novels has been supplanted by what

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<sup>13</sup>Quoted in Eileen Mackenzie, *The Findlater Sisters: Literature and Friendship* (London: Murray, 1964), p. xi.

seems like a more monologic approach which looks backwards to earlier formulations of femininity. Yet even in these novels Morrison captures the confusion inherent in what was a transitional stage of female emancipation. Like Woolf's opinion that women were now between 'the devil and the deep sea', Morrison's late fiction betrays a discomfort with what emancipation had brought; because of the generation gap separating Morrison from the Women's Liberation Movement, her novels cannot share Wilson's optimistic belief that the post-war period had taken women 'only halfway to *Paradise*'.

It must be emphasised, however, that Morrison's engagement with feminism ends not with its denial, but with the deflation and silencing of the representative of those older females (perhaps including herself) who had internalised patriarchal ideology. It ends, too, with a reassertion of the value of sisterhood, and in so doing, her last novel prepared the ground for a new generation of more 'liberated' women writers.

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## CONCLUSION

N. Brysson Morrison  
 is a gowk if there was ever one,  
 for instead of being a  
 ranter and roarer  
 she writes good novels  
 and so the Scots ignore her.

Willa Muir (1951-53)<sup>1</sup>

Like Willa Muir's verse, this thesis has argued that Morrison did indeed write good novels, which, with the exception, perhaps, of *The Gowk Storm*, have not been given due recognition. But why should her work have been ignored? It may have been that the subtle complexity of her approach caused it to be rejected by readers accustomed to more sensational or more overtly controversial literature, and in response to market demands publishers stopped reprinting her books. Furthermore, since Morrison's fiction does not belong to any particular 'school' or fashion, its individuality could have made its inclusion in critical appraisal of literary trends problematic. Her novels may also have been dismissed as 'lightweight' because they possess a surface simplicity; but as this thesis has shown, her gentle narratives are, in fact, complex, multi-layered ideological negotiations in which several interdependent thematic concerns are explored. Perhaps, like many others, it was just because they were written by a woman. Indeed, it is tempting to see in the representation of the lack of textual evidence of Thea's existence in

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<sup>1</sup> From 'Ephemeridae', National Library of Scotland, Edwin and Willa Muir papers, MS 19703, fols 39-54, quoted in 'Introduction', *Scottish Women's Fiction 1920s-1960s: Journeys into Being*, ed. by Carol Anderson and Aileen Christianson (East Linton: Tuckwell, 2000), p.11.

Morrison's last novel, her foreknowledge of her own fate as a Scottish woman writer.

As this thesis has demonstrated, it is particularly appropriate to consider Morrison in terms of Roland Barthes's conception of the writer as 'the watcher who stands at the crossroads of all other discourses', for this model locates the writer at the point where the different socially-determined meanings of language struggle for supremacy.<sup>2</sup> It sees the writer as transcribing this struggle, rather than trying to impose order and fix 'meaning'. Barthes's writer deals in ambiguities rather than certainties, and Morrison fits this description. Her novels highlight the ambiguities inherent in language; they demonstrate the dialogic nature of discourse whereby different ideological perspectives can be seen to compete. In addition, Morrison's handling of narrative point of view often denies the reader an uncontested ordering narrative discourse, and her encouragement of sympathetic identification frequently questions the novels' endings, rendering plot resolutions ambiguous and subversive of dominant ideological assumptions. Furthermore, since each of her novels presents a negotiated ideological position in which all contending positions retain their influence, and because each novel has its own unique equilibrium, Morrison remains a complex writer whose precise ideological position is difficult to determine. This is exemplified by her approach to national identity; the obvious Scottishness of her novels seems designed to appeal to a market that appreciates the cultural nationalism of writers like Neil Gunn, yet, at the same time, Morrison seems critical both of cultural nationalism itself, and the market it satisfies.

Morrison's fiction evinces an interest in identity. Her novels point up the fact that identities are constructed in language, and as such depend on how the

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<sup>2</sup> Full citation given in prefatory statement.

individual, the social group, or the 'nation' identifies their own subject positions from among the various ideologically-inscribed discourses that describe their condition. What is particularly notable about Morrison's fiction is that each of these identities is represented as a site of struggle between distinctly progressive tendencies that are held in check by what appears to be an innate conservatism. Often, particularly in her early novels, the dynamic equilibrium tends to favour progressivism. And, even in those novels where Morrison's conservative sympathies *appear* to hold sway, there is still an undercurrent of rebellious progressivism that maintains a degree of ambiguity which makes it impossible to reduce them to a single 'meaning'. For this reason, Alison Light's term 'conservative modernist' (*Forever England*, p.11) could be borrowed to describe Morrison, and while this tension makes her work interesting, the fact that she is not wholeheartedly progressive might have contributed to her having been neglected by a later generation of readers who no longer identified with her troubled position. This is perhaps most apparent with regard to recognition of her treatment of the position of women which stopped short of an overtly feminist approach. Yet her work must be regarded in its historical context, spanning as it does the residual Victorian influences of her upbringing, through two World Wars, and finally into the cultural changes of the 1950s and 1960s.

Whilst what I would call Morrison's 'proto-feminism' might be seen to be influenced by the patriarchal ideological interpellation of her youth, in other respects her 'vision' can be considered as highly innovative. Her handling of the historical novel, for example, marks a departure from what preceded it, and her concentration on what had been marginalised and excluded anticipates later theoretical trends. As I have argued, her re-visioning of history should be considered alongside that of more

widely recognised male writers, and her feminisation and psychologising of history suggest a feminist approach that questions even my previous designation 'proto-feminist'. Her treatment of history in *The Wincing Years* combines an intellectual approach to the dynamics of the process of historical change with a narrative fluency that skilfully implicates the reader in the ideological negotiations it undertakes. The merits of this novel alone call for Morrison to be recognised as a noteworthy historical novelist. Morrison's robust handling of religion, especially her engagement with a wider definition of religion than is normally associated with Calvinist-inspired Presbyterianism, deserves recognition. From the above, I would contend that Morrison's omission from accounts of the Scottish literary history should be rectified.

Because I have adopted a thematic approach in my discussion of Morrison's ideological negotiations I have isolated particular novels as exemplars of specific thematic concerns. It is important to stress, however, that her novels are not mono-thematic; in all cases several inter-related concerns are explored simultaneously, giving them a further complexity which adds to their breadth and depth. It should also be emphasised that Morrison's novels are not formulaic; rather, as well as possessing their own inherent differences, they question the boundaries imposed upon the realist novel by undermining literary conventions and subverting the ideological assumptions on which such accepted norms were predicated. I have referred to Morrison's use of Modernist literary techniques such as her subversion of linear time and her focus on interiority. Such references have, of necessity, been limited to the requirements of my discussion of her ideological negotiations. Further study of this aspect of her work would be rewarding. This could be undertaken with a view to placing Morrison's work alongside that of other women writers whose

involvement with Modernism is now being uncovered, as well as with the men of the Scottish Literary Renaissance whose similar focus on language and engagement with European ideas has already received scholarly attention. My discussion has also foregrounded Morrison's use of poetic language, perhaps most notable in her use of rhythm and metaphor. Margery Palmer McCulloch's recently-published essay, 'Poetic Narrative in Nancy Brysson Morrison's *The Gowk Storm*', has taken the first step in bringing this aspect of Morrison's oeuvre to a wider audience, and much work still requires to be done.<sup>3</sup>

Morrison's romantic novels would lend themselves to scholarly investigation, as would her historical biographies which, despite their attention to factual detail, are obviously the work of a novelist. I find it particularly interesting that she came from a literary family, and while a literary biographical study of Morrison, herself, would be a fruitful endeavour, so, too, would be a comparison of her fiction with that of her siblings. Therefore, as well as further study of Morrison's literary fiction, her writing provides scope for investigation by those with interests in various literary fields. It is to be hoped that such scholarly attention will be devoted to her work, and that the final part of J.M. Barrie's response to her adolescent writing may prove prophetic:

. . . some day I expect when you are grown up you will be writing all us old stagers out.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In *Scottish Women's Fiction, 1920s to 1930s*, ed. by Carol Anderson and Aileen Christianson.

<sup>4</sup> Letter, 21 February 1918, NLS, MS 27368, fol. 1.

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