A time of interregnum: navigating nation in devolutionary Scottish fiction

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities

2016

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Word count: 78,749
Abstract

This thesis analyses four texts produced during the so-called ‘devolutionary period’ in Scotland, between the referendum of 1979 and the opening of the Parliament at Holyrood in 1999. Due to the particular political exigencies of the time, texts from this period have often been read through the prism of cultural nationalism. One particularly influential such characterisation argues that ‘in the absence of elected political authority the task of representing the nation has been repeatedly devolved to its writers.’¹ Such a critical paradigm can impose a limiting and distorting framework on these texts, reducing the scope and complexity of their political interventions by insisting too exclusively upon reading them through the lens of nation. Therefore, in this thesis, I undertake an analysis of these novels not as documents of cultural nationalism, but through Gramsci’s description of times of interregnum. Gramsci suggested that the crisis precipitated at moments of regime change as one that ‘consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; and in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.’² This delineation of the fraught character of interregnum seems an apt and helpful way to elucidate the tensions and fault lines within devolutionary Scottish fiction, and help to evade the pitfalls of readings that would recruit these writers into a narrative of resurgent national confidence directly connected to the political process of devolution.

In order to explore the dynamics of interregnum at work in devolutionary fiction, I will analyse four key canonical texts from 1979–1999; James Kelman’s How Late it was, How Late (1994), Janice Galloway’s The Trick is to Keep Breathing (1989), Alan Warner’s Morvern Callar (1995) and Jackie Kay’s Trumpet (1998). I will be attentive to the ways that these novels literalise the figurative suggestions of Gramsci’s aphorism; probing instances of death, woundings/illnesses and interrupted reproduction. Within my discussion, I will be attentive to the fault lines within Scottishness explored by these texts, in particular paying attention to the way that the nation has been gendered in damaging or occluding ways. I will also contend that the interregnum liminality of these texts is also enacted in their spatial negotiations, as the novels repeatedly press against spatial boundaries.

I hope to offer a perspective on this period in Scottish literature that complicates and refines the predominant cultural nationalism that has coloured their critical reception.

Declaration

Many of the ideas in this thesis have their genesis in my work for the MA Post-1900 literatures, theories and cultures (2011). However, the only brief sections that are replicated here are the work on Althusser (two paragraphs pp. 157–158) and cross-dressing in Jackie Kay’s *Trumpet* (four sentences on pp. 172–173, and three paragraphs on pp. 176–177). In both cases, this material has been developed substantially. Both of these instances are signalled by references in the text.

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Introduction: Scotland between referenda: a time of interregnum

At its origins, the word interregnum refers to the interval between sovereign rulers, a period of rupture in monarchical governance during which the throne is empty before the accession of a legitimate successor. The word denotes a period of discontinuity, certainly, but only insofar as is necessary when power must change hands. During his long incarceration at the hands of the Italian fascist regime from 1929 to 1935, Antonio Gramsci revisited this notion and wrote evocatively of the character of periods of ‘interregnum’ in the aftermath of the First World War. Gramsci reinvigorated the concept for the twentieth century, depicting interregnum as a sort of time lag that encompasses not just a transfer of power between rulers but a fundamental shift in ideology that implicates the whole of society. In such times, he posited, there is an ideological detachment between those in power and the masses, meaning that the tenets of the old order can no longer hold, but what is to take their place has yet to be determined. He described it thus:

If the ruling class has lost its consensus; i.e. is no longer ‘leading’ but only ‘dominant’, exercising coercive force alone, this means precisely that the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to believe previously, etc. The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; and in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.\(^3\)

In this study, I wish to suggest that Gramsci’s description might usefully be deployed in a discussion of Scottish literature from the so-called ‘devolutionary’ period between the referenda of 1979 and 1997. Looking back on this period of extraordinary literary productivity and visibility, where Scottish writing underwent what Cairns Craig has called an ‘explosion of creativity,’\(^4\) Gramsci’s description of the fraught and contested character of times of interregnum is instructive. His articulation of the simultaneous morbidity and potentiality of such periods is productive in teasing out the ambiguities, uncertainties and contradictions that are latent in the writing of novelists such as James Kelman, Janice Galloway, Alan Warner and Jackie Kay. It is my view that Gramsci’s formulation might also prove useful in revisiting and questioning the

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cultural nationalist framework and the culturalist narrative that has been so prevalent in analyses of writing from this period. Gramsci’s description of the fraught in-between character of interregnum seems an apt and helpful way to elucidate the tensions and fault lines within devolutionary Scottish fiction, and help to evade the pitfalls of readings that would recruit these writers into a narrative of resurgent national confidence directly connected to the political process of devolution.

Gramsci’s notion has also proved suggestive and productive in the decades since it was published for writers working in many different contexts. In 1981 Nadine Gordimer utilises the last line of Gramsci’s proposition as the epigraph to her novel July’s People and even more explicitly in her essay ‘Living in the Interregnum’ two years later to evoke the atmosphere of revolutionary change in apartheid South Africa, a period in which ‘historical co-ordinates [did not] fit life any longer’. In 2012, Zygmunt Bauman suggested that ‘the present-day planetary condition [could be recognised] as a case of interregnum,’ owing to the decoupling of power from the politics of the territorial nation-state, and the concomitant ambiguities and uncertainties of the future. Gramsci’s concept has also been deployed in British and Irish literary contexts, specifically in discussion of texts in the latter part of the twentieth century. Writing in the mid 1990s, as Northern Ireland was navigating its way through the fragile peace process, Richard Kirkland posited that Gramsci’s notion of interregnum was an apposite conceptual framework through which to discuss Northern Ireland’s cultural narratives and illuminate the ‘ongoing struggle to determine individual or communal cultural identity in the North.’ In the closest example of Gramsci’s concept being invoked explicitly to illuminate Scottish fiction, Katarzyna Więckowska explores the crisis in masculinity in British fiction at the turn of the century. Though the primary national category invoked in Więckowska’s article is British, rather than Scottish, literature, Irvine Welsh’s Marabou Stork Nightmares (1995) and Filth (1998) find their place amongst the novels that she analyses as ‘records of the interregnum, whose focus on suffering men is a necessary

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prerequisite for creating the space from which new masculinities may emerge."\(^9\) Though the contexts are quite different, all of these accounts of interregnum foreground the uncertainty, flux and instability fostered in moments of interregnum, looking at once backward to a past whose traditions and conventions are no longer tenable and forwards to an uncertain future.\(^10\)

There are several reasons why Gramsci’s description of times of interregnum might prove similarly illuminating when analysing the devolutionary period in Scotland. Firstly, the political situation in Scotland during the inter-referenda years was one of contestation and increasing ideological detachment from the ruling classes as the nation moved towards devolution. Electorally, therefore, it seems to very closely enact Gramsci’s description of interregnum. Secondly, Scottish culture was recruited in this period of flux as a kind of proxy for the governmental representation that was absent in Scotland from 1979–1999. Critical discussion tended to position ‘devolutionary’ Scottish writers as Shelleyan ‘unacknowledged legislators,’\(^11\) and this makes their work a particularly interesting site from which to analyse the ideological shift that characterises Gramsci’s proposition. Thirdly, the metaphorical content of Gramsci’s aphoristic description seems strikingly resonant when discussing Scottish novels from this period. Gramsci speaks of ‘morbid symptoms’, pathologising the moment of interregnum, and utilises the evocative metaphor of interrupted reproduction to illustrate the rupture and discontinuity of such transitional periods. It is telling that so many devolutionary Scottish novels utilise these same tropes. In writing from this period we see ‘morbid symptoms’ in the form of untimely deaths, diseases, wounded bodies and mental distress, and reproduction


\(^10\) It is worth noting the similarity here between the dual perspective of interregnum and Tom Nairn’s description of the ‘Janus-like’ nature of nationalism. He argued that ‘modernising ambition and novel cults of a particular past and tradition notoriously co-exist within most varieties of nationalism: the backward- and forward-looking faces of any discrete population or area struggling for tolerable survival and prosperity’ in Faces of Nationalism: Janus Revisited (London and New York: Verso, 1997), p. 71. Nairn’s influential contribution to debates on Scottish nationalism will be dealt with more thoroughly in the latter part of this introduction.

rarely runs smoothly in these interstitial novels, with familial disconnection and procreative difficulties also appearing as key themes or motifs in many of the texts that I will discuss. The shared figurative palette emphasises that Gramsci’s formulation is particularly appropriate in a devolutionary Scottish context, and suggests fruitful avenues for the exploration of these novels as accounts of interregnum. The evocation of ‘morbid symptoms’ also resonates with a critical tendency in many influential accounts of Scottish nationalism or Scottish national character to describe the nation in diagnostic terms. Characterisations that range from Gregory Smith’s ‘Caledonian antisyzgy’\(^\text{12}\) to Tom Nairn’s account of Scotland’s ‘collective impotence’ and the ‘pathological condition’\(^\text{13}\) of its national psyche seem to characterise the presence of ‘morbid symptoms’ as a constituent feature of Scottish identity. I will interrogate the way that novels from the inter-referenda period engage with these narratives of pathologisation, and the relationship of these ‘morbid symptoms’ to questions of nation.

This takes us to the second aspect of my title – ‘navigating nation’. Indeed, it would be difficult (if not impossible, or at least ridiculous) to invoke the category of Scottish literature without attending to issues of nation or national tradition. These issues loom large over the texts that I discuss, and must certainly inform the readings I will offer. However, rather than discussing these texts as simply making a case for Scotland, I will discuss how these texts explore Scottishness in a dynamic and ambivalent way. I have entitled my thesis ‘navigating nation’ in part because of the productive ambiguity of the verb. ‘Navigating nation’ could suggest that these writers are steering the nation, directing Scottishness to new horizons (in a nod to the culturalist readings discussed in more depth below). However, it also suggests that these writers are plotting their way through or around nation; that Scottishness is the rough terrain on which these novelists find themselves or around which they must tread as they forge onwards towards an unknown destination. It is also significant that the navigational metaphor takes space, and not time, as its structuring principle, and this is another key aspect of the analysis I propose to undertake. Scottish novelists writing at the end of the twentieth century locate their texts in socially marked spaces, often fraught with accumulated meaning and cultural memory. In the utilisation of ‘space’ as an analytical category, my intention is to be both flexible and catholic in my approach. My discussion will move from analysis of the intangible

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\(^{13}\) Tom Nairn, *Faces of Nationalism*, p. 88.
cultural space that these novels carve out, into analysis of the imagined spaces through which the characters in the novels move (and their relationship to corresponding spaces outside the text) and also (when pertinent) include consideration of the space of the text itself as a material object. I will interrogate the way that these spaces might also resonate with the idea of ‘interregnum’ by shifting the focus from Gramsci’s temporally-inflected formulation. I will contend that the between-ness of these texts is also enacted in their spatial negotiations, as the novels repeatedly press against spatial boundaries and limitations and insist upon space as dynamic and shifting; space as process and not as stasis. I will contend that it is perhaps through the spatial practices of these texts that we can best discern an attempt to move towards ‘the possibility and necessity of creating a new culture’ that Gramsci acknowledged could arise out of the crisis of interregnum.

In order to properly situate the novels in this interregnum context, we must first consider the political situation of Scotland at the end of the twentieth century and the ideological impasse from which these texts emerge. In Scotland, the period of 1979–1997 was certainly a time when the ruling class (taken in this sense to mean the Westminster Parliament) was rapidly losing its consensus north of the border. Significantly, this detachment was often articulated and understood in national terms, focalised around issues of self-governance and Scottish devolution. This can be charted clearly in the electoral and referendum results from the period, where the gathering support for devolution and the sharp decline in the Scottish Tory vote act as a crude but nonetheless striking measure of the increasing detachment of the Scottish electorate from government ideology.

Of course, government ideology is never wholly internally uncontested and homogenous, and this is especially true when it comes to the issue of Scottish devolution during the period in question. Despite the fact that devolution was official Labour policy in the 1970s, the party was bitterly divided over the issue. Any concrete moves to enact the policy were opposed by a significant number of its MPs who remained ‘unenthusiastic, if not positively hostile’ to the prospect of a Scottish parliament. The issue only came to the fore when by-election losses chipped away the slim governmental majority, and Prime Minister James Callaghan was forced to seek support of SNP and Plaid Cymru MPs in an attempt to stave off an early crisis.

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14 Gramsci, p. 276.
general election. Even then, the parliamentary path of the legislation was far from smooth. Weighed down with amendments and defeated once in 1976, in its second iteration the bill narrowly survived passage through parliament. However, it was not unencumbered. Labour backbencher George Cunningham tabled a successful amendment that required not just a simple majority to provide a mandate for devolution, but for the vote to be carried by 40% of the total electorate. Despite the narrow 'yes' vote, turnout meant that the result fell well short of this threshold. In 1980, Vernon Bogdanor argued that:

The 40 per cent rule provides convenient material for the growth of a powerful nationalist myth to the effect that Scotland was cheated, that an extra hurdle was erected by those who knew that devolution could not be defeated on a straight vote.\(^{16}\)

His contention attributes a degree of far-sighted and calculating opportunism to the SNP’s response. However, the decades that have passed since do suggest that there is some truth in his assessment of the way in which the Cunningham amendment could be mobilised (rightly or wrongly) for the purposes of a nationalist agenda. The 40 per cent rule allowed advocates of devolution to assert that their voices had been stifled, that the contest was rigged, that the will of the Scottish people had been transmuted by Westminster politicians to suit their own ends. The apparent disenfranchisement of the referendum perhaps indicates, in Gramscian terms, that the ruling class was beginning to ‘dominate’ rather than ‘lead’ in Scotland. The aftermath of the referendum heralded a period of crisis in national identity and self-definition for the Scottish nation.

However, this narrow referendum result was only the beginning of Scotland’s electoral frustrations. More significant to the swelling of nationalist feeling than the Cunningham amendment in these terms was the result of the 1979 general election and the subsequent eighteen years of Conservative government. With the election of Thatcher as Prime Minister, devolution was firmly off the agenda. Under this Tory government, the economic disparity that already existed between Scotland and the south of England widened and Conservative policies such as the introduction of the Poll Tax in 1989 (a full year ahead of England) inculcated and compounded the sense of disenfranchisement north of the border, fuelled also by the perceived

\(^{16}\) Bogdanor, p. 260.
‘English cultural insensitivity’\textsuperscript{17} of Thatcher’s government. Here again we see the detachment of the masses from ruling classes that is a constituent feature of interregnum, and the enforcement of the widely hated Poll Tax seems an apt illustration of the ‘coercive force’ exerted by the Conservative government. As a result of this, Tory electoral fortunes in Scotland plummeted. In 1979 the party had secured twenty-two of the seventy-one Scottish seats; this fell to ten and eleven of seventy-two respectively by the 1987 and 1992 elections, before falling off the electoral map completely in 1997 with the decisive New Labour victory. This means that, for almost two decades, Scotland was governed by a party for whom it emphatically did not vote, and whose policies were perceived by many as actively detrimental to Scottish interests.

Looking back, it is no surprise that such a political predicament would heighten nationalist sentiment. While Liam Connell argues that Scotland’s experience under Thatcher was not so different to that of cities in the north of England, nonetheless he observes that ‘the historical separateness of Scotland (a distinct kingdom until 1603 and with a separate parliament until 1707) allowed the disparities in the British economy to be interpreted in nationalist terms.’\textsuperscript{18} In 1993, Neal Ascherson commented on the (implicitly insidious) mobilisation of national feeling in the face of a Tory majority in Westminster. He observed that “Scottishness” used to be a private thing. Now, under the stagnant surface, it is being steadily politicised. It has come to include the sense of being governed against one’s will by the preferences of another, larger nation.”\textsuperscript{19} This sense of disenfranchisement and the systemic failure of political representation during this period had significant and important repercussions for the perceived role of culture. The suppression of national voice in electoral terms meant that avenues for Scottish self-expression had to be sought elsewhere. One outlet for this was found in the


\textsuperscript{18} Liam Connell, ‘Modes of Marginality: Scottish Literature and the Uses of Postcolonial Theory’, \textit{Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East}, 23. 1&2 (2003), 41- 53 (p. 46).

\textsuperscript{19} Neal Ascherson, ‘The warnings that Scotland’s patient nationalism could turn nasty’, \textit{The Independent}, 21 November 1993 
<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/the-warnings-that-scotlands-patient-nationalism-could-turn-nasty-1505824.html> [accessed 10 August 2016]. Though Ascherson is not hostile to Scottish nationalism, this particular article deals with the perceived rise in anti-English sentiment espoused by groups like ‘Settler Watch’ during the devolutionary period.
efflorescence of new writing during this period, from writers such as those discussed in this thesis. Scottish fiction gained unprecedented critical attention at this time, visible on a global scale through the unprecedented popular success of Irvine Welsh’s *Trainspotting* (1993) as well as Danny Boyle’s subsequent film adaptation but also through the award of literary prizes such as James Kelman’s Booker Prize win in 1994 (a significant moment that will be discussed at more length in my chapter on *How Late it was, How Late*).  

The novel often cited as the foundational text in this new Scottish renaissance is Alasdair Gray’s sprawling hybrid bildungsroman-fantasy *Lanark* (1981). The scale and subject matter of this text was credited by some critics as heralding a vibrant and vital literary re-definition of a nation beleaguered by political impasse. Cairns Craig argued that:

> by the scale of its ambition and its apparent eccentricity, *Lanark* proclaimed the vitality and originality of a culture which, to many, seemed to be close to exhaustion, if not extinction, and was the first statement of what was to dominate Scottish writing throughout the 1980s – the effort to redefine the nature of Scottish experience and the Scottish tradition, both to account for past political failure and to build a Scottish culture which would no longer be disabled by a lack of confidence in its own cultural identity.

In this formulation, despite the fact that *Lanark* had been almost three decades in the writing, in Craig’s interpretation the text becomes emblematic of the devolutionary cultural impulse. It is worth noting here once again that Craig’s proposition operates with a kind of dual motion; devolutionary writing looks to the past, still entangled with ideas of tradition whilst simultaneously occupied with the process of constructing new models. Crucially, this critical position views Scottish devolutionary writing as inseparable from the political climate. Literature is positioned as a kind of proxy for the thwarted democracy so lacking in the governmental sphere. Craig says as much  

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20 There were also many other awards and accolades for Scottish fiction during this period which increased Scottish literature’s visibility. To give a few examples Kelman himself also won the James Tait Black in 1989 for *A Disaffection*, Alasdair Gray the Whitbread Prize for *Poor Things* in 1992 and A. L. Kennedy was named one of Granta Magazine’s ‘Twenty Best Young British Novelists’ in 1993.


22 A point that is also made by Peter Kravitz in his introduction, ‘As it never was’ to *The Picador Book of Scottish Fiction* (London: Picador, 1997).
in an earlier preface to the *Determinations* series. He argued that ‘the 1980s proved to be one of the most productive and creative decades in Scotland this century – as though the energy that had failed to be harnessed by the politicians flowed into other channels.’

It is clear, then, that the issue of cultural nationalism is of paramount importance within the domain of Scottish literary studies. Indeed, as a discipline, modern Scottish studies (from the 70s onwards) was initially characterised by attempts to think differently about Scottish culture in large part as a means of furthering the devolutionary project of the Scottish nationalist movement. Emblematic of this sort of framework is Beveridge and Turnbull’s influential work from the *Determinations* series *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture*, wherein they argue that ‘a central task of cultural nationalism is the recovery of Scottish cultural practices (like... native philosophical traditions) which have been submerged by the intelligentsia’s adoption of English cultural modes.’ For them, Scottish cultural nationalism demands a Fanonist, postcolonial act of re-valorisation and recuperation of a real, authentic culture that has been overridden by the cultural tradition of a colonising power. Craig similarly explains that culture is of crucial importance because it operated not just as one means of colonisation, but the one that ‘overtook Empire as the mode of English dominance.’ As Carole Jones has argued, there are significant issues with this approach, but it is nonetheless significant as a marker of the anxiety that characterised Scottish self-definition during this period. She notes that the postcolonial model employed by Beveridge and Turnbull has been ‘justifiably criticised in its equating of Scotland with the colonies of European empires’ but that the analysis ‘does inform the immediate context for the anxious Scottish soul-searching in the wake of the failure of the 1979 referendum for devolution to produce a decisive vote for Scottish self-rule.’

Christopher Harvie further emphasises the importance of culture to Scottish nationalism when he describes the particular manifestation of nationalism before devolution as ‘the ambiguity of a formerly “stateless” entity whose culture had to

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become its politics.” This suggests the importance of culture not simply in the project of retrospective re-valuation being undertaken by Beveridge and Turnbull, but rather that culture was, in a very immediate way, acting as the vehicle for a nationalist agenda in the absence of political agency. Graeme MacDonald elucidates this notion at more length, arguing that ‘the significant agents of this “cultural independence” have delivered a body of work that is difficult to separate from the political momentum towards the successful delivery of devolution in 1999 – and a claim for potential future independence.’ Though her work has been significant in contesting some of the key blind spots and limitations of cultural nationalism, even Eleanor Bell concedes that ‘in the 1980s… many of these debates between culture and politics were still at an early stage of negotiation, where there was a strong need to reclaim and reassert the political role of culture, often in order to align it directly with nationalist politics.’ Though Bell's monograph does illuminate the shortcomings of approaching Scottish literary studies too rigidly from a cultural nationalist perspective, it is telling that she speaks in terms of necessity with regards to cultural nationalism at that particular moment in Scottish political history and literature. The double disenfranchisement of the devolutionary period created a particular exigency within Scottish literary studies, and it is understandable that nation became the crucible through which these novels passed into critical discourse.

In some quarters, the second successful devolution referendum marked not just a political change, but also heralded a new beginning for Scottish writing and criticism. In 1998, one year after the second devolution referendum, Christopher Whyte reflected that ‘in the absence of elected political authority the task of

28 Graeme Macdonald, ‘Postcolonialism and Scottish Studies’, *New Formations*, 2006 (116-131), p. 117. Work is beginning to attempt to disentangle this literature from the political process of devolution. See, for example, Scott Hames’ introduction to *Unstated: Writers on Scottish Independence*, ed. by Scott Hames (Edinburgh: Word Power Books, 2012), pp. 1-18 wherein he argues that ‘writers, musicians and performers may have articulated a sense of Scottish disenfranchisement in the 1980s and 90s, and brought the ‘substratum’ of cultural autonomy to the electoral surface. But the conservative political process we call ‘devolution’ – no more or less than an effort to re-legitimise the UK state – was, in the end, not meaningfully shaped by them. To read some cultural histories of the past few decades, you would think Holyrood was dreamed into being by artists. It wasn’t’ (p. 7).
representing the nation has been repeatedly devolved to its writers. Although his article stressed the pitfalls and shortcomings of shifting this representative burden into the cultural domain (especially insofar as gender is concerned), Whyte appeared to suggest that the political context of the devolutionary moment had precluded the possibility that authors like James Kelman and Alasdair Gray could evade the task of representing Scotland through their writing. Looking ahead, Whyte hoped that writers and critics could extricate themselves from this predicament, and that ‘the setting-up of a Scottish parliament [would] at last allow Scottish literature to be literature first and foremost, rather than the expression of a nationalist movement.

Almost a decade later, Berthold Schoene included Whyte’s words in his introduction to the post-devolution *Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, a citation that demonstrates the tenacity of this perspective. Schoene remarked that the 2007 collection ‘takes its cue… from Christopher Whyte’s proposition’ in order to begin a ‘critical stocktaking of the ways in which the cultural and political role of Scottish writing could be said to have changed after devolution.

I wish to take my cue from Whyte’s proposition in a slightly different way, and instead use the distance that my twenty-first century position offers to revisit novels from the devolutionary period, and interrogate to what extent Whyte’s formulation still offers a helpful way of framing them. Rather than taking as read the periodisation implicit in Whyte’s formulation, whereby the national question was the primary concern of Scottish novelists from 1979–1999, and his hope that this question would somehow be resolved by the opening of the parliament at Holyrood, I seek to challenge the proposition that devolutionary Scottish writing was engaged primarily or deliberately with representing the nation and pursuing a nationalist agenda that had been thwarted by the political system. Instead, I will posit that often novels from the devolutionary period are sites of conflict whose antagonistic energy and political critique could never be satisfied or resolved by the achievement of devolution.

Indeed, I contend that the devolutionary texts I will analyse are testaments of interregnum that often present a latent scepticism towards nationalism even as they

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31 Ibid.
33 For a fuller critique of this tendency, see Aaron Kelly, ‘James Kelman and the Deterritorialisation of Power’, in *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, pp. 175-183.
articulate a vibrant and unmistakeably Scottish perspective. By framing the devolutionary period as a time of interregnum, I hope to evade some of the limitations of the cultural nationalist model and explore the contradictory impulses within devolutionary fiction that help them to resist the representative burden assigned (and lamented) by critics such as Whyte.

Of course, I am not the first reader to find fault with the primacy of cultural nationalist criticism in Scottish literary studies, and with the culturalist argument that links Scotland’s literary output too closely to the political process of devolution. Scott Hames argues that such an argument reduces the political scope of Scottish novelists, that ‘[f]or the past twenty years, it has been very difficult to locate the politics of individual Scottish writers (or their artworks) in any context separable from politicised national identity – a pattern sponsoring the reduction of all politics to identity politics.’ Alex Thomson has argued that the primacy of nation in Scottish criticism has a tendency to exert an exclusionary and hierarchical pressure:

To set the discussion of literature in a national context is both to assume and imply the priority of national tradition over other contextual forces shaping the work of art. This in turn both presumes and tends to reinforce the authority of national community as an organisational principle in political life.

In their introduction to *Scotland in Theory*, Bell and Miller argue against what they label a ‘lingering parochialism in Scottish literary studies, where, for example, literature from Scotland must firstly be explained in terms of its Scottishness, rather than in terms of its literary or aesthetic qualities.’ In her monograph *Questioning Scotland*, Bell frequently asserts that cultural nationalists are guilty of ‘essentialism’, which exerts a homogenising, reductive and exclusionary influence on the notion of

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Scottishness they evince. A similar case is made by Laurence Nicoll in his contribution to *Scotland In Theory*. He is writing directly with regards to the analysis of Beveridge and Turnbull, but his conclusion is equally valid for any critical work that focuses too narrowly on national concerns. He argues that ‘in seeking […] to make identity a product of purely national difference, Beveridge and Turnbull obviate difference at the level of the individual: nations are – supposedly – culturally different, but the individuals within them, in order to be “authentic”, should all exhibit and seek to maintain this supposedly homogenous culture.’ This echoes the point made by Bell throughout *Questioning Scotland*, wherein she argues that postmodernist readings might be a more appropriate means of approaching Scottish literature than cultural nationalist ones. Indeed, she argues that cultural nationalism has become untenable in light of much postmodern theory; but that this might bring a rejuvenating energy to a discipline she perceives is suffering form a kind of critical stasis. She argues that ‘the postmodern fragmentation of national identity, while challenging the rigid premises of cultural nationalism, does not abandon the notion of tradition altogether either. Rather, it may actually help interrogate forms of stasis that often lurk within uncritical notions of national identity, therefore exposing the need for more expansive accounts which will question the function of the tradition, whilst, perhaps paradoxically, helping to simultaneously generate it.’

One of the most obvious and damaging and unchallenged occlusions that might ‘lurk within uncritical notions of national identity,’ is a failure to account for Scottish identities that fall outwith received notions of Scottishness, whether by virtue of sexual orientation, race or gender. Whilst this has often manifested as omission (which is, in itself, damaging enough), the maintenance of an unflinching national focus has had effects beyond the deleterious in terms of the depiction of women. Kirsten Stirling takes this as the subject for her study *Bella Caledonia*, in which she charts the deforming effect symbolic, cultural representations of the Scottish nation have had upon conceptions of women. She laments that tendency in ‘the recent wave of Scottish writing [that] tends to involve reading every new narrative of fractured identity, from Janice Galloway’s *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* to Irvine Welsh’s *Trainspotting* as an allegory for the political situation of Scotland.’

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39 Eleanor Bell, *Questioning Scotland*, p. 72.  
example of this comes in Craig’s analysis of Galloway’s work. In his fixation on the national context and content of the novel, Craig becomes less alert to other interpretative possibilities. In his reading of The Trick, Craig conscripts Galloway into his cultural nationalist cause by asserting that ‘in a world where political action may seem to have become impossible, the assertion of the centrality of the vernacular voice, the assertion of the typographic power of the author become the actions by which the nation knows itself still to exist, and still be capable of action.’ In his haste to position her textual innovation as an expression of resistance to Scotland’s political predicament, Craig elides (or at the very least diminishes) the vital gendered aspect of the work and the ways in which this inflects Galloway’s place within the national narrative, and contribution to it.

Scottish nationalism is not unique in the simplification visited upon women when gender comes into contact with nation. In an Irish context, poet Eavan Boland argues that:

Once the idea of a nation influences the perception of a woman, then that woman is suddenly and inevitably simplified. She can no longer have complex feelings and aspirations. She becomes the passive projection of a national idea.42

This problem is certainly found in analyses of Scottishness such as Craig’s discussion of The Trick. However, the position of women as ‘projection of a national idea’ is further complicated in a Scottish context. As Stirling argues, ‘for political reasons, the woman-as-nation model cannot work in the Scottish context, [so] she is pulled in opposite directions, thereby becoming monstrous.’43 This sense of gender deformity, the monstrous woman, certainly might be considered an example of Gramsci’s ‘morbid symptoms.’ To better understand this deformation, or monstrosity, it is useful to refer to Tom Nairn’s influential characterisation of the Scottish nation in his 1977 collection of essays The Break-up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-nationalism. In this volume, Nairn set out to theorise the nature of Scottish nationalism as a uniquely ‘belated’ phenomenon, charting its genesis to the 1920s and thus labelling it ‘the

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chronological companion of anti-imperialist revolt and Third World nationalism rather than of those European movements which it superficially resembles. Nairn suggested that Scotland’s political position as a stateless nation after the union of 1707 had produced a ‘rather pathological complex’, the main ingredient of which was ‘political castration.’ The whole text, as well as Nairn’s return to the subject in the 1997 *Faces of Nationalism: Janus Revisited*, is peppered with such sexualised, gendered and medicalised language: Nairn argues that the collusion of Scottish intellectuals with the Union amounted to ‘emasculaton’ and ‘neurosis,’ and there are more than a few references to national ‘schizophrenia.’ It should be noted that Nairn describes all nationalisms, not just the Scottish iteration, in diagnostic terms. He asserts that ‘nationalism’ is the pathology of modern developmental history, as inescapable as ‘neurosis’ in the individual. However, his use of the language of schizophrenia is more nationally specific, and participates in a long tradition in Scottish literary criticism. This metaphorical trope can be traced back to Gregory Smith’s 1919 coinage of the term ‘Caledonian antiszygy’ to elucidate the particularly divided, contradictory and often oxymoronic character of Scottish literature; the split between realism and fantasy in Scottish writing which he saw as a manifestation of a schizophrenic division inherent to the Scottish character. Stirling argues that ‘[t]he notion of the ‘schizophrenic Scot’ has become almost a commonplace in Scottish literary criticism, although it is generally based on a rather simplified understanding of schizophrenia as “split personality” and which may therefore personify the splits supposedly inherent in Scottish culture.’ Recent critical discussion has made attempts to reassess this pathologisation. Craig attempts, laudably, to recuperate its implications for Scottish national character by positioning this split as a dialogic, relational model of selfhood that is more capable of flexibility and understanding in the face of diversity than the bounded and ostensibly unified and ‘healthy’ cultures against which it is deemed deviant. He argues that:

The emphasis on the ‘divided self’ in Scottish culture is not, therefore, simply the reflection of a hopelessly divided society: it is the exploration of the limitations of notions of the self which have themselves reduced the self from its true complexity in order to produce a false unity in which the person is simply a spectator and a social function; it is a concern with the limitations of

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47 Stirling, p. 104.
those notions of self and society which are founded on false assumptions about the fulfilment of identity being the achievement of singularity and unity. To explore and to celebrate the multiplicities of the self is to recognise the fact that the self is never self-contained – that the ‘divided self’ is not to be contrasted with the ‘undivided self’ but with the ‘self-in-relation’: the ‘divided self’ is precisely the product of the failure of the dialectic of ‘self and other’ rather than the outcome of the self’s failure to maintain its autonomy and singularity. The inner otherness of Scottish culture – Highland and Lowland, Calvinist and Catholic – thus becomes the very model of the complexity of the self rather than examples of its failure: the self-division of the schizophrenic is not an ‘other’ to a unified normalcy but the failure of the acceptance of the other which constitutes the normal self.48

This characterisation is compelling, and I will return to this more optimistic and sympathetic description when discussing pathologisation and morbid symptoms within my thesis. However, Craig’s hopeful re-positioning of the divided self does not adequately acknowledge the imbalances inherent within the binary facets of Scottish identity, and this has far-reaching and significant consequences, especially when grappling with the repercussions of the implicit gendering of the Scottish nation.

To better understand the nexus of pathologisation and gender, it is necessary to examine the key role that a deformed and exaggerated masculinity (often present in literature as the ‘hard man’ to whom Stirling’s ‘monstrous woman’ is surely a corollary) has played in the theoretical articulation and understanding of Scottish national identity. In his critique of what he label’s Nairn’s ‘contentless nationalism’, 49 Turnbull highlights the ubiquity of sexualised language in Nairn’s discussion of nationalism, and neatly summarises its import:

The reader of *Faces of Nationalism* cannot fail to note the prominence in the text of Nairn’s sexual metaphors, or fail to grasp what they signify. The achievement of sovereignty would represent release from the condition of political emasculation, impotence and eunuchdom that Scotland has endured since 1707: the ability, at last, to experience political climax. It is all a question, in the end, of attaining virility, potency — of power.50

50 Ibid., p. 41.
This summary makes manifest the notion of straining, suppressed Scottish masculinity that underpins Nairn’s nationalism. In this metaphorical description, power and potency are explicitly and unequivocally coded as male. Unfortunately, Turnbull does not pursue the implications of this conflation of nation and gender as fully as we might hope. Instead, he suggests in a footnote that ‘discussion of the question whether Nairn’s politics and his account of national identity are “gendered” in an unacceptable way should perhaps be left to feminist critics’. In his footnoted deferral of this discussion Turnbull literally relegates female concerns to the margins, implicitly privileging the (masculine) concerns of nation above the supplementary and secondary issue of gender. More than a decade before, Janice Galloway elucidated the conflicting and damaging impact this hierarchy has had on Scottish women writers:

Scottish women have their own particular complications with writing and definition, complications which derive from the general problems of being a colonised nation. Then, that wee touch extra. Their sex. There is coping with that guilt of taking time off the concerns of national politics to get concerned with the sexual sort; that creeping fear it’s sort of self-indulgent to be more concerned with one’s womanness instead of one’s Scottishness, one’s working-class heritage, whatever. Guilt here comes strong from the notion we’re not backing up our menfolk and their “real” concerns. Female concerns, like meat on mother’s plate, are extras after the men and weans have been served.

Galloway’s description here illustrates the hierarchical perception that issues of masculine national identity (born of Scotland’s unequal and complex colonial relationship with England) should be the primary concern of Scottish writers, with gender politics only intruding as a supplementary distraction. Quite clearly, this situation is deeply damaging for women, as any attempt to challenge or redress

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51 Turnbull, p. 41.
53 While the utility of postcolonial critical models has garnered strong criticism in some quarters, see for example Connell, ‘Modes of Marginality’, I tend to agree with Carole Jones that Scotland finds itself in ‘a particularly postcolonial state of affairs’ owing to its status as both coloniser and beneficiary of Empire, and peripheralised minority nation ruled by a more powerful imperial neighbour. (Disappearing Men, p. 15).
gender inequality must necessarily go, to follow Galloway’s food metaphor, undernourished. However, her characterisation also makes clear that gender inequality is inescapably imbricated in Scottish nationalism, given that national politics are coded as masculine, whether implicitly (as in Turnbull’s footnote) or explicitly (as is the case in Nairn’s work).

Stephanie Lehner probes this issue more deeply in her work on gender in the ‘Irish and Scottish ImagiNation’. Lehner argues that the conflation of gender and nation in a Scottish context has frequently been insufficiently challenged, both before and after devolution, in part ‘due to commentators often accrediting Scottish nationalism with being more sympathetic towards, and thus ultimately compatible with, the claims of women.’ This compatibility, she argues, is assumed in large part due to Scottish nationalism’s minoritised position. As a marginalised nation, Scotland’s position with regards to England might be read as analogous to women’s minoritised position under patriarchal power structures. Given this, it is perhaps not unreasonable to surmise that Scottish nationalism should be more hospitable to women, or at least more understanding of the damaging effects of women’s situation under patriarchy. Lehner interrogates and problematises this rather generous characterisation, drawing on postcolonial and subaltern criticism to draw out the particular problems engendered, rather than ameliorated, by Scotland’s status as a minority nation. Drawing on the psycho-political model first articulated by Ashis Nandy, Lehner argues that the ‘feminised’ position of Scotland in its relationship to England has, rather than producing a national identity that is more compatible with the needs of women, in fact bred a kind of hyper-masculinity.

In this formulation, the adoption of hyper-masculinity acts as a kind of compensation for colonised males who had traditionally been feminised by the more powerful imperial culture. Declan Kiberd describes the adoption of a strategy of hyper-masculine resistance in Irish nationalism in the late 19th century, whereby sports such as hurling were encouraged by militant nationalists as a way ‘to purge

[young Irish men] of their degrading femininity. Though Scottish nationalism has no corresponding programme of re-masculinisation, Scottish literature certainly has no shortage of men hardened into inflexible masculinity. Carruthers discusses the trope of the ‘fighting Jock’, a mythic figure embodying a valiant, martial Scottish masculinity, whose existence is ‘due not so much to historical reality but as a convenient cultural and literary (or expressive) site of resistance’. The ‘fighting Jock’, in his various iterations, offers a worrying alternative to the image of Scotland as an emasculated male by emphasising instead a ‘native’ Scottish virility grounded in violence.

The legacies of both the trope of the hyper-masculine ‘fighting Jock’ and the motif of Scotland as an emasculated male find expression in devolutionary literature, but rather than simply re-inscribing the hyper-masculinity of the ‘hard man’ archetype, these texts grapple with gender roles that have been radically destabilised in their late twentieth century context. One most pertinent and oft-cited example of this predicament is Renton’s famous tirade from Trainspotting, which explicitly links Scotland’s national position to colonialism and emasculation in overtly sexualised terms:

It’s nae good blamin it oan the English fir colonising us. Ah don’t hate the English. They’re just wankers. We are colonised by wankers. We cant even pick a decent, vibrant, healthy culture to be colonised by. No, we’re ruled by effete arseholes. What does that make us? The lowest of the fuckin low, the scum of the earth. The most wretched, servile, miserable, pathetic trash that was ever shat intae creation.

Renton’s disenchanted diatribe about the structure of Scottish domination is articulated in terms of male virility and potency. His formulation suggests a kinship with Nandy’s model, only for Renton the problem is compounded in Scotland by the

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58 Christopher Whyte argues that the Scottish ‘hard man’ has its literary roots in the inter-war period, and identifies ‘the novel which effectively enshrined the “hard man” for future generations’ as McArthur & Kingsley Long’s *No Mean City* (1935), but identifies heirs of this toxic masculinity in the work of Irvine Welsh, Duncan MacLean, James Kelman and William McIlvanney. Whyte, ‘Masculinities in Scottish Fiction’, p. 275.
fact that the English colonisers are no longer able to maintain their masculine potency: they are themselves ‘wankers’ and ‘effete arseholes’. The word ‘effete’ is particularly telling, suggesting as it does both effeminacy, weakness and even (etymologically) infertility. In turn, this slippage of the colonisers’ masculinity must further compound the feminisation/emasculaton incurred by the colonised if the hierarchy between the two nations is to stay intact. The Scottish are ‘the lowest of the fuckin low’ precisely because their masculinity is so diminished that even ‘effete arseholes’ can ‘rule’ them. Significantly, this vitriolic pronouncement occurs in response to Renton’s disdain for Begbie – Trainspotting’s resident psychopathic ‘hardman’ – and an equally hypermasculine ‘squad of nutters’ who bring an aura of violence into the pub where the characters are drinking. Renton begins the pronouncement by asserting ‘Ah hate cunts like that. Cunts like Begbie. Cunts that are intae baseball-batting every fucker that’s different; pakis, pofs, n what huv ye.’ Renton’s subsequent discussion demonstrates that he recognises the national content of Begbie’s masculine intolerance, and its pernicious appeal. Despite Renton’s efforts to embody a less toxic kind of masculinity, he describes his friend as ‘like junk, a habit’ that he is only able to escape at the end of the novel through betraying his friends and escaping beyond national borders.

This crisis of masculinity is one of the clearest ‘morbid symptoms’ of the Scottish interregnum, and Carole Jones has productively probed the tendency of devolutionary fiction to focus on ‘men who are absent or anxious or uncertain and alienated or dislocated from the centre of life and meaning.’ In the title of her monograph, she frames these as ‘disappearing’ men, and it is interesting to note here the tense of the verb. Even when (as is the case in Morvern Callar and The Trick is to Keep Breathing) the men in question are already dead at the opening of the novel, Jones still describes their disappearance as an ongoing process, with their legacies haunting the (often female) protagonists that remain. Reflecting on this tendency, she attests that ‘this was certainly a period of disorientation and a process of transition which produced anxious characters often stuck between discredited old

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60 Welsh, p. 98.
63 Jones, Disappearing Men, p. 27.
models of gender identity and as yet not fully achieved new ones."\textsuperscript{64} This description certainly resonates with the unfinished, in-between nature of interregnum writing that will be the subject of my thesis. I will argue that this sense of being stuck, or between, different understandings of the self extends beyond gender identity and into other definitional parameters. The anxious characters in these novels are also in the process of renegotiating their sense of regional and national belonging, their place within family and kinship networks and their interpellation as subjects by state apparatuses. No wonder, then, that a sense of disorientation abounds in many of these texts. This sense of ideological uncertainty, and the spatial metaphor of disorientation that describes it so aptly, also informs my decision to investigate the spaces explored by these devolutionary novels.

The particular utility of employing space in an analysis of Scottish fiction has been suggested in Cairns Craig's \textit{Out Of History} (1996). In this work, he argues that the temporal fixation which characterises much of Western thought is not a necessary fact but rather a useful tool of domination by which the ‘core’ countries impose their agenda on ‘peripheral’ nations. In this he is also (sometimes implicitly, other times explicitly) arguing against the Marxist perspective offered by Nairn, whose theorisation of Scottish nationalism is resolutely tied to a temporal structure. Nairn’s ‘instrumental nationalism’\textsuperscript{65} rests upon the supposition that there is a normal, progressive trajectory that Scotland, and the UK at large, have not followed correctly. Nairn’s use of such a model leads him to deal regularly in temporal metaphors; he speaks of the ‘belatedness’ of Scotland’s nationalism, as well as the ‘premature bourgeois civil society’ and the nation’s ‘precocious development’.\textsuperscript{66} Craig suggests that the use of such terminology is misguided and facilitates core-centric attitudes that do a disservice to peripheral cultures such as Scotland. If the template for healthy growth is a replicable timeline of development, then there is no choice but to view Scotland’s case as deviant, deformed or, as Nairn contests, pathologised. However, Craig argues that this is not a failure of the Scottish nation so much as it is a failure of critical models which privilege temporal preoccupation, and have frequently become the default critical position, so ingrained are they upon the critical consciousness at large. Craig asserts that ‘veering between models of Scottish culture as fragmentary failure or false unity is the product not of the failed nature of

\textsuperscript{64} Carole Jones, ‘Coming in From the Cold – Scottish Masculinity in Fiction in the New Millenium’, \textit{C21 Literature} (2016), publication pending.
\textsuperscript{65} So called by Ronald Turnbull, ‘Nairn’s Nationalisms’, p. 39.
\textsuperscript{66} Nairn, \textit{The Break-up}, p. 94 and p. 140.
Scotland’s past but of the failure of the definitions of culture into which we are trying to shoehorn it. He argues that a more emphatic focus on the location of Scottish fiction might offer avenues that evade the pathologisation of disunity and embrace a dialogic and mutable sense of identity, whilst retaining a necessary focus on cultural specificity. In a compelling argument for the geographical emplacement of cultural analysis, and one that resonates with his attempted recuperation of Scottish self-division, Cairns asserts that:

It is not in its unity or disunity, its continuity or its discontinuity that we should value a culture; the terms in which we analyse culture have to operate within the dialectic not simply of history but of geography: culture takes place and a place exists only because it has boundaries that have to be crossed entering and leaving it, it has histories and archaeologies which are inscribed on it. Culture is a place of dialogue, between self and other, between inner and outer, between pasts and present, between invented pasts and discovered pasts and value systems past and future. Differences of culture, even in the most modernised of environments, derive from the fact that in no two places on the globe can the dialogue be the same: even if the dialectic is universal the dialect in which it is voiced will be local. Cultural analysis can be conducted from within a single culture, but only at exceptional times can it be conducted as though that culture was Culture itself: most happens between cultures, and in the ways in which cultural space is penetrated and shaped by the pressure of other cultural spaces.

This description of space as a critical category is instructive, in that it foregrounds relationality without sacrificing specificity. This analytical category offers a corrective to the potentially exclusionary aspects of cultural nationalism that I have described above. By focusing on space as an analytical category in my thesis, I hope to maintain a sense of local and national particularity without slipping into an insular or essentialist cultural nationalism.

Craig acknowledges that focusing on spatial issues aligns him with postcolonial criticism, much of which, in his words, ‘is in fact the effort to define and maintain a cultural space, or to redefine the relations of cultural spaces which were previously organised by imperial control and are now organised by the control of

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67 Cairns Craig, Out of History, p. 110.
68 Ibid., p. 117.
information.⁶⁹ This will certainly inform my analysis, especially in my discussion of
the way that Kelman has positioned his work in polemical interventions such as his
Booker Prize acceptance speech. However, I also want to focus more closely on the
internal dynamics of how Scottish spaces are constructed within the nation itself. I
will attend to the pressures exerted by accretion of cultural significance in certain
locations, thinking particularly of Glasgow and the Highlands, and what effect their
pre-eminence has on the re-negotiation of identity narratives in these interregnum
novels. By attending to the internal dynamics that inform the construction of Scottish
national space, I will attempt to highlight the processes of peripheralisation and
resistance that characterise the spatial negotiations that occur within the nation’s
boundaries. This focus on the spatial praxis of devolutionary novels will also allow
me to explore the ways that these texts resist appropriation by a model that focuses
too exclusively on national concerns. Though nation is, of course, a vital and
influential spatial category, these novels also negotiate spaces whose significance is
primarily inflected by geographies of patriarchal dominance, or the disciplinary
organisation of surveillance capitalism. By instating space as a key component of my
analysis, I hope to be attentive to the strategies of resistance that these texts offer
not just to limiting cultural nationalist paradigms, but also to their interrogation of
structural inequality more broadly.

A key figure whose work informs this endeavour is Edward Soja. His
monograph Postmodern Geographies seeks to redress the dominance of the
‘temporal master-narrative’⁷⁰ against which Craig sets himself in Out of History. In
terms that are not dissimilar to those used by Craig, he looks to discredit the
pervasive assumptions which mean that ‘space still tends to be treated as fixed,
dead, undialectical; time as richness, life, dialectic, the revealing context for critical
social theorization.’⁷¹ According to Soja, the possibilities opened by this kind of
spatial analysis are vast and potentially emancipatory. He sees his project as radical
and transformative, not just an exercise in deconstruction but also an act
of reconstitution, a way of better understanding the world in order to improve it. For him:

[t]his reconstituted critical human geography must be attuned to the
emancipatory struggles of all those who are peripheralized and oppressed by

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 114.
⁷⁰ Edward W Soja, Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical
⁷¹ Ibid.
the specific geography of capitalism (and existing socialism as well) – exploited workers, tyrannized peoples, dominated women. And it must be especially attuned to the particularities of contemporary restructuring processes and emerging regimes of ‘flexible’ accumulation and social regulation, not merely to display a newfound empirical prowess but to contribute to a radical postmodernism of resistance.\textsuperscript{72}

These remarks demonstrate that a spatial analysis might be able to both take account of Scotland’s national situation and relationship to its more powerful southern neighbour, but also to be attentive to the nuances of oppression and domination occurring within its own borders. Crucially, Soja’s remarks remind us that these geographies of peripheralisation and oppression are not nationally specific but instead aligned with the forces of late twentieth-century capitalism. The spaces navigated in the texts that I will discuss are similarly subject to these ideological forces, and afford opportunity to analyse both national specificities and more universal concerns.

The selection of authors, and novels, for this thesis has not been an easy task, and there are certainly other texts and novelists whose work would complement and complicate my analysis in productive ways.\textsuperscript{73} In making my selection, it was important for the novels that I consider to have been widely acknowledged as key texts within the Scottish devolutionary canon, and to have all been discussed in cultural nationalist terms (the better to complicate and refine such analyses). In the interests of gender parity, I have chosen two male- and two female-authored texts, and my inclusion of Jackie Kay’s novel offers a vital opportunity to discuss what Graeme MacDonald has called ‘the undetected (or underwritten) levels of Scottish racial discrimination that weigh heavily in discussions surrounding Scotland’s autonomous position.’\textsuperscript{74} In this introduction, I will contextualise the significance of each of these writers within the devolutionary moment, sketching briefly the relationships between the four novels and novelists and offering a short overview of the arguments that I will develop in the chapters to follow.

\textsuperscript{72} Soja, \textit{Postmodern Geographies}, p. 74.
\textsuperscript{73} Here, I am thinking in particular of authors such as Ali Smith, A. L Kennedy and Andrew O’Hagan.
\textsuperscript{74} Graeme MacDonald, ‘Scottish Extractions: “Race” and Racism in Devolutionary Fiction’, \textit{Orbis Litterarum}, 65.2 (2010), 79-107 (p. 81).
James Kelman

There are several compelling reasons to begin an analysis of devolutionary Scottish literature with a discussion of James Kelman. First among these is Kelman’s symbolic importance within this period. Kelman is often discussed as a figurehead whose output (both fictional and critical) captures the creative cultural zeitgeist of the devolutionary period between the referenda of 1979 and 1997. As I have already noted, this charged period of political frustration was also one of extraordinary literary productivity in Scotland, with many critics linking the ‘explosion of creativity’ directly to the political situation of the nation. Gavin Wallace sums up this perception of the devolutionary moment and its relationship to literature, asserting that ‘there has been since 1997 a critical orthodoxy, subscribed to also by writers, that Scotland’s literature played a central role in articulating the pressures towards political change that led to devolution.’ Within this ‘critical orthodoxy’, there are two features that are often cited as defining features of devolutionary literature. The first is an emphasis on vernacular, seen as key to the project of establishing a strong and unmistakably Scottish literary voice in the absence of a political one. The second is innovative formal experimentation, born of a desire to forge new frameworks for artistic expression outwith the confines of the traditional English novel. It is undeniable that both of these features are immediately identifiable in Kelman’s fiction. When these literary techniques are viewed alongside his frequent, polemical interventions in cultural debates, it is easy to see why ‘Kelman has been singled out among contemporary Scottish authors as symptomatic of a new Scottish literary revival.’

The paradigmatic position of Kelman’s oeuvre means that an analysis of his fiction is not only fruitful in its own right, but serves as a useful platform from which to examine, analyse and even challenge the ‘critical orthodoxy’ identified by Wallace.

Hames also gestures towards Kelman’s importance as a figurehead when he argues that ‘James Kelman is probably the most important Scottish writer now living; certainly he is the most influential and acclaimed.’ However, his assertion also points to the second reason for beginning the present study with Kelman’s work: the

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75 Cairns Craig, The Modern Scottish Novel, p. 36.
issues of influence and tradition. It has been argued that Kelman’s work does not sit easily within an established tradition, that ‘from the beginning… [he] had been writing not so much out of a literary tradition as against one.’\(^7^9\) Kelman himself has described the dearth of working-class Scottish literary forebears to whom he could turn when he began his literary career. In an essay that will be further discussed in my chapter on Kelman’s novel, ‘The Importance of Glasgow in my Work’, Kelman states that ‘as a young writer there were no literary models I could look to from my own culture. There was nothing whatsoever. I’m not saying these models didn’t exist. But if they did then I couldn’t find them.’\(^8^0\) Kelman acknowledges that, at the outset, he had the impression that he was writing into a vacuum. In so doing, Kelman appears to confirm Craig’s assessment of the plight of the Scottish novelist, whose particular predicament is characterised by the fact that they are denied the sustenance of a national novelistic tradition. Craig argues that ‘there can, in effect, be no such thing as the Scottish novel because there is no continuing nation: with its governance ceded to a British parliament, there can be, in Scotland, no imagining of the nation – the nation with a future rather than simply a nation with a past – that the individual writer can contribute to shaping. The consequence is that Scottish writers necessarily write as isolated individuals; they contribute only to a personal oeuvre rather than a national tradition.’\(^8^1\) Of course, this does not mean that Kelman’s fiction bears no relation to the output of Scottish writers from previous generations. Indeed, such analysis is extremely fruitful, especially when thinking of writers such as Lewis Grassic Gibbon, whose narrative voice certainly resonates with Kelman’s strategies.\(^8^2\) However, what is significant for my purposes is that, from the vacuum in which he found himself, Kelman has gone on to become a foundational figure in what is now a critically recognised Scottish literary community. Indeed, Kelman acknowledges this at the end of the above quote, stating that ‘later on, after I had started writing… I had the good luck to meet up with folk like Alasdair Gray, Tom Leonard, Liz Lochhead and others.’\(^8^3\) Of course, there was and continues to be a network of influence between these writers, who were all members of a creative writing group led by Philip Hobsbaum at Glasgow University, which has been


\(^8^3\) Kelman, ‘The Importance of Glasgow in my Work’, p. 82
described as a ‘foundation legend for modern Scottish writing.’ However, of these writers, Kelman has often been singled out for the significance of his fiction’s influence on a generation of younger writers. Kövesi, writing in 2006, describes Kelman as ‘the senior Scottish fiction writer of urban alienation.’ He goes on to assert that ‘his work is chief among a generation of writers who follow his stylistic lead and, with their own idiosyncratic inflections, to some extent are often seen to loosely compound his worldview. Janice Galloway, Duncan McLean, Agnes Owens, Jeff Torrington, Alan Warner and Irvine Welsh are just five of many other novelists who would regard Kelman’s work as groundbreaking, influential and liberating.’

Kelman’s trailblazing contribution to contemporary Scottish literature means that an understanding of his work is both helpful and necessary when looking to identify currents of continuity as well as diversions and counterpoints within Scottish writing in recent decades.

In my discussion of Kelman’s 1994 novel How late it was, how late, I will examine his significance in claiming a cultural space for Scottish writing, framing this discussion around the controversy surrounding his Booker Prize win. I will then explore the ways that the novel itself fractures and refuses to be readily recruited in nationalistic terms, with particular emphasis on the linguistic praxis of the novel. I will then turn my analysis to the spatial imaginary of How late and focus on the novel’s overarching theme of entrapment, or being ‘cornered’. This, I contend, is key to understanding the limitations and dangers of aligning Kelman’s writing too rigidly with Scottishness at the expense of his engagement with the trans-national curtailment of individual freedom enacted under disciplinary society. I will discuss the encroachment of a panoptic state into all the spaces the novel inhabits, from the streets of Glasgow to the carceral and domestic environs that the novel’s protagonist navigates. By focusing my analysis on these ‘cornered’ spaces, and Sammy Samuels’ attempt to navigate his way out of them, I hope to better elucidate the radical ideological resistance enacted by the novel.

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85 Kövesi, p. 3. (Scott Hames also remarks upon the importance of Kelman’s influence in The Edinburgh Companion to James Kelman, p. 2, adding A. L. Kennedy and Alan Bissett to the list of those he has influenced).
Janice Galloway

Kelman, in a very practical way, was influential in the beginnings of Janice Galloway’s writing career; as a judge in a short story competition he encouraged her to send her writing to the *Edinburgh Review*.\(^6\) Certainly, her writing shares concerns with making visible the lived experience of urban working class Scottish characters. However, her work is also in tension with these labels. In an interview for the *Edinburgh Review*, Galloway takes issue with the publishing industry’s fixation with Scottishness as a marketing strategy – what she calls the “Scottish” sales tag… this mild feeding-frenzy that happened with Scottish writing.\(^7\) She sees the tendency of this enthusiasm as a kind of homogenisation at odds with her writing. In the same article, Galloway signals her distance from the ‘adolescent blokey’ image projected of Scottish writers.\(^8\) While this image probably has more in common with the *Trainspotting* phenomenon than Kelman’s work, nonetheless his writing is masculine, or ‘blokey’ in a way that is simply not true of Galloway’s work. Her fiction places female experience at the centre of the narrative, unapologetically claiming fictional space for women who have been under-represented in both Scottish fiction and publishing stereotypes.

Galloway’s first novel, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (1989) was widely celebrated upon its publication. The text was shortlisted for the Whitbread First Novel, Italia Premio Acerbi and Aer Lingus Awards, and won the MIND/Allan Lane Book of the Year. It is now regarded as a key canonical text in contemporary Scottish writing. The experimental novel chronicles the experience of the school-teacher Joy Stone in the aftermath of the traumatic death of her partner. Her struggles with anxiety and depression are exacerbated by her physical and social isolation, as she lives in a peripheral housing estate and her closest friend has temporarily relocated to America. I will discuss both of these factors in spatial terms, framing my analysis through the concept of overspill. This term is taken directly from the discourse of town planning; overspill was the name given to the estates built to ease the overcrowding of cities. However, it also offers a helpful framework through which to


\(^8\) Ibid.
discuss the construction and maintenance of boundaries, and the spatial imaginary of the novel more broadly. I will trace the way that the novel’s overspill tendencies complicate access to identity narratives, and productively destabilises cultural nationalist readings of Galloway’s text.

Focusing on the spatial practices of devolutionary fiction is particularly important when considering Galloway’s novel, given her stated intention to redress the masculine stereotypes at play in the marketing and reception of Scottish fiction. The ‘spatial turn’ in critical discussion similarly offers a way to evade masculinist theoretical tendencies. Important work has been done in this regard by Doreen Massey, who discusses the importance of spatial analysis in gendered terms. Like both Craig and Soja, she argues that in the space/time dichotomy, time has been privileged. However, she is more alert to the gendered aspect of this binary, arguing that:

It is a formulation in which time is the privileged signifier in a distinction of the type A/ not-A. It is, moreover, time which is typically coded masculine and space, being absence or lack, as feminine. Moreover, the same gendering operates through a series of dualisms which are linked to time and space. It is time which is aligned with history, progress, civilization, politics and transcendence and coded masculine. And it is the opposites of these things which have, in the traditions of western thought, been coded feminine.99

Like Massey, Galloway is attentive to the damaging effect of gendered dualisms on women. The narrative of The Trick is to Keep Breathing repeatedly insists upon the importance of the disadvantaged, ‘feminine’ sides of these binary oppositions. For Galloway, space is certainly invested with a complexity and dynamism that makes it impossible to read it as absence, or lack. By focusing on space, rather than time, in my analysis I hope to draw out Galloway’s insistence on the validity and complexity of women’s position in devolutionary Scotland, and by looking at overspill in particular I will examine the interregnum dynamics of ideological change focalised through the text’s gendered spatial praxis.

Alan Warner

Like Galloway's novel, Warner's text is also concerned with the position of women in devolutionary Scotland, and is focalised through the eponymous Morvern Callar, flatly narrating her experiences in the aftermath of her boyfriend's suicide. Though it was published in 1995, only a year after James Kelman's Booker Prize win, the critical reception to Alan Warner's *Morvern Callar* was quite different. This is in no small part a result of the change to the Scottish literary landscape wrought by the phenomenal success of Irvine Welsh's debut novel *Trainspotting* in 1993. In the first two years after its release, Welsh's novel sold an already impressive 100,000 copies, but the release of Danny Boyle's 1995 film adaptation assured the work its place in the 90s zeitgeist. By 2005, the novel had sold around 1 million copies in the UK alone. This huge commercial success afforded both visibility and a certain cultural (and counter-cultural) cachet to new Scottish writing.

Though *Trainspotting*’s date of publication precedes both *How Late* and *Morvern Callar*, the iconic presence of Welsh’s novel exerts different pressures on the two subsequent novels. By 1993, Kelman had already been publishing for two decades (his first short story collection, *An Old Pub Near the Angel*, was published in 1973), so despite the chronology of *How Late* and *Trainspotting*, Kelman is still firmly positioned as Welsh’s antecedent. Though the phenomenal commercial success of *Trainspotting* brought wider critical attention to Kelman’s work, the significance of the his existing oeuvre prevented *Trainspotting* from impinging too much on the *How Late*’s reception.

This was certainly not the case with Warner’s novel, and at the time of its publication reviews of *Morvern Callar* often made reference to Welsh’s novel as a way of setting the literary scene. *Morvern Callar* was discussed as part of a new generation of Scottish writers, spearheaded by Welsh, who focused on a youth culture of drink, drugs and raving that they not only narrativised but also embodied in their own lives. The most striking (and, arguably, problematic) example of this tendency is demonstrated in Lesley Downer’s 1996 article for the New York Times Magazine, which describes a session in the pub with ‘The Edinburgh Beats’:

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91 Ibid.
92 This is a genealogy that Welsh would endorse; he has emphasised the importance of Kelman’s *The Bus Conductor Hines*, and stated ‘Kelman was like Year Zero’. Quoted in Kelly, *Irvine Welsh*, p. 11.
In a cyber era in which literary circles are usually metaphors, they hang out together in Edinburgh’s pubs, clubs and rave bars. Few of them can support themselves by writing; some are on the dole, taking full advantage of the steady income and enforced leisure it provides. They live the life of Edinburgh beats -- get up at noon, drink, talk and write the day away, and party through the night. All are young and fiercely working class. They write about people on the margins of society: the young, the poor, the dispossessed, junkies, Ecstasy users, football hooligans and people who live on the dole in housing projects.93

Downer’s characterisation of the group seems improbable, and certainly deals in idealised generalisations about the life of a writer in the 90s. However, the inclination to organise writers into literary movements is understandable; a similar impulse is at work in the mythologisation of Philip Hobsbaum’s creative writing group at Glasgow University, and even earlier in the depiction of the Poet’s Pub during the Scottish Literary Renaissance of the mid 20th century.94 There are also tangible connections between Welsh and Warner, most notably in their relationship to the subversive publishing house Rebel Inc. Founded in 1992 by Kevin Williamson, the raison d’être of Rebel Inc was to champion counter-cultural literary production (as is evidenced by the aggressive, unambiguous slogan ‘Fuck the Mainstream’). Both writers had stories featured in the Rebel Inc anthologies The Children of Albion Rovers (1997) and Disco Biscuits (1997), and were grouped together as part of the ‘Repetitive Beat Generation’95 by Steve Redhead in his critical survey of the literary scene. This association tended to highlight particular aspects of the authors’ works; notably the importance of popular culture, dance music and drugs. Rebel Inc’s credentials were built on emphasising these aspects of new Scottish writing; they eschewed traditional publishing strategies and organised readings in nightclubs and infamously published an unedited interview in which both Kevin Williamson and Irvine Welsh had taken

Such examples were not simply cynical publicity ploys (although they certainly did garner media attention), but tapped into important energies and thematic concerns of the writing that Rebel Inc. championed. Both Morvern Callar and Trainspotting focus on youth culture, and deal frankly with sex, drink and drug use, and Warner and Welsh’s insistence on the validity of these topics as literary material was a significant achievement. Their work also presents a break from the Glasgow-centred literary landscape of Kelman, Gray et al., shifting the focus from working class characters struggling with the decimation of heavy industries to a younger generation who had come of age during the Thatcherite era.

That said, Downer’s characterisation is dangerous in that, despite its positive tone, it suggests that certain stereotypes about Scottish fiction still persist. While Simon Jenkins’ characterisation of Kelman’s novel in his review as ‘the illiterate ramblings of a blind Glaswegian drunk’ is far more negative than Downer’s description of the ‘Edinburgh Beats’, the two rest on similar assumptions. By stressing the proximity of the writers’ own lives to that of the characters in their texts, Downer is demonstrating an attachment to a particular kind of authentic verisimilitude which is not worlds away from the label of transcription attributed to Kelman’s writing by Jenkins. This manoeuvre sunders them from important literary traditions and thus throws into question their value as serious literature.

Downer’s article is also problematic in that it associates Warner’s writing too closely with the Trainspotting phenomenon. Despite his absence from the group interview, Downer’s characterisation of the group positions Welsh as the ‘undisputed star,’ and risks homogenising the concerns of a disparate and divergent group of writers on the basis of the most well-known example of their work. Certainly, the long shadow cast by Trainspotting does occlude several important aspects of Warner’s work. By choosing Morvern Callar and not Trainspotting as the focus of my analysis here, I am seeking to redress these occlusions and analyse Morvern Callar in its own terms, rather than simply as an example of gritty urban realism and the Trainspotting generation. There are important geographical, formal, thematic and linguistic differences between Welsh and Warner’s work that I intend to mine and elucidate in my discussion of the novel. I am also looking to redress what I see as a critical lack;

96 Kevin Williamson, ‘Rebel Inc: 20 Years on & Ready for More (2012), <http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2012/05/02/rebel-inc-20-years-on-ready-for-more/> [accessed 17 April 2014]
there is substantially less written about Warner’s work than Welsh’s, and thus much critical engagement left to undertake. My discussion of Warner’s novel will centre around the engagement with the richly symbolic landscape of the Highlands, and how the tropes of the Repetitive Beat Generation are inflected and refracted by this rural setting. My discussion of Morvern Callar will be framed around the difficulty of locating origins, whether geographical, authorial or existential, and I will discuss the importance of repetition and circularity around these centres of meaning, emphasising the novel’s cyclical impulse of escape and return.

Jackie Kay

The mobility in Alan Warner’s text is also a constituent feature of the final text that I will discuss, Jackie Kay’s Trumpet. I will explore the interplay of mobility and memory in Kay’s first and (thus far) only novel. Kay’s text is a narrative of grief, chronicling the experience of characters undone by loss and thrust into the space of interregnum by the crisis of bereavement. This crisis is exacerbated by the unorthodox embodiment of the deceased character at the centre of the narrative; Joss Moody was a successful jazz trumpeter, father and husband who was only revealed upon his death to have been anatomically female. This revelation precipitates disorientation and confusion in those that Joss has left behind, as tabloid narratives swirl around his memory and throw into question the legacy that he has left behind. Kay’s text explores the tension between inherited understandings of selfhood, conditioned by cultural memory, and nascent forms of identity and understanding that emphasise mutability and mobility.

In her description of Kay’s novel, Ali Smith highlights this constituent tension, stressing both the ground-breaking nature of Trumpet and its place within a national literary canon. Her description aligns the text with an established and far-reaching Scottish literary tradition but also emphasises the nourishing and invigorating influence of black female writers from across the world. Smith suggests that:

There had certainly never been a Scottish book like it, yet it came from the Scottish tradition of honouring the margins, the vernacular and the ordinariness of things and lives (an “ordinariness” that is always extraordinary). It came from a literary tradition of shapeshift itself, one that finds voice in unauthorised, unexpected forms and places; one often concerned with the search for a communal form, a tradition that can be traced in writers such as Lewis Grassic
Gibbon, Hugh MacDiarmid, Nan Shepherd, Willa Muir, Alasdair Gray, Liz Lochhead, James Kelman. It came from such tradition and expanded it with influences from international black writers such as Audre Lorde, Jamaica Kincaid, and especially Zora Neale Hurston and Toni Morrison. Plus, it said things about and for that Scottish tradition, and about and for a wider British tradition as well, concerning gender and ethnicity, that had never been said before.\(^99\)

The significance of Kay’s contribution to this tradition and innovation within the Scottish canon was recognised in March of this year, when she was designated as Scots Makar. Upon being named national poet, Kay spoke directly to the link between writing and Scottish identity, themes to which she has returned time and again in both her poetry and prose. Her description of the relationship of poetry to questions of nation also resonates with her treatment of Scottishness in *Trumpet*. Kay attests:

> As Robert Burns demonstrated, poetry holds up a unique mirror to a nation's heart, mind and soul. It is the pure language that tells us who we are. I hope to open up the conversations, the blethers, the arguments and celebrations that Scotland has with itself and with the rest of the world, using the voice of Poetry in its fine Scottish delivery.\(^100\)

In this description, Kay emphasises the dialogic nature of poetry, seeing the medium as a chance to open conversations within the nation and beyond its boundaries. This sense of spatial expansiveness can certainly be found in Kay’s novel, as *Trumpet* navigates not just Scottish space but also looks beyond the boundaries of the nation. Unlike Warner’s novel, where the Scottish locale remains distinct and separate from the sections in the novel that take place in Spain, *Trumpet* is attuned to the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that operate within the nation at all times. For Kay, Scotland is imbricated and constituted by its relationship with other spaces, and this relational concept of identity is of key importance to the mobile model of selfhood straining to find expression within the novel.

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I will draw out the discourses of interregnum in Kay’s text, attending in particular to the importance of interrupted reproduction and the discourses of pathologisation. However, despite the presence of these interregnum tropes, I will argue that *Trumpet* presents a more hopeful and generous perspective on interregnum than can be discerned in the other three novels. The optimism evinced by the ending of Kay’s text is more overt than in any of the other texts, and thus it offers fitting and hopeful end to my thesis.

**Thesis structure**

In keeping with my stated intention to resist the hierarchical binary that prioritises time as a structuring principle, the texts in this thesis are not arranged in chronological order. Rather, they are organised so as to move steadily outward, pressing at boundaries of city, region and nation. In Kelman’s novel, the protagonist remains trapped in Glasgow, his planned exodus from the city left unnarrated at the end of the novel. Galloway’s text locates itself on the outer edges of this city, navigating the urban dynamics of a peripheral housing estate while glancing (in letters) over the ocean to America. Warner’s *Morvern Callar* moves to a fictionalised Oban, and sees its protagonist spend some time beyond the borders of Scotland on the Balearic rave scene, though she does return to the Port at the novel’s close. Finally, Kay’s *Trumpet* moves between England and Scotland frequently, but also encompasses a much larger psycho-geographical framework as the spatial imaginary swells to include Africa. In Kay’s novel, the continent figures both in the ‘fantasy Africa’\(^\text{101}\) of the black Scottish characters in the novel and in the memory of their genealogy, recognising the underacknowledged history of an African presence in Scotland.

Though I have imposed this structure on the novels in this thesis, it does also reflect a spatial trajectory within the individual oeuvres of the novelists that I have selected. Kelman’s writing has moved from the enclosure of Glasgow to inhabit variously an unnamed country riven by civil war (*Translated Accounts* [2001]) a Kafka-esque America (*You Have to Be Careful in the Land of the Free* [2004]) and London (*Mo Said She Was Quirky* [2012]). Christie L. March has observed that ‘Galloway’s projects in the mid-to-late 1990s increasingly moved from an exclusively

Scottish context to a more international focus.'\(^{102}\) We can see this trajectory in the settings of her subsequent two novels; Galloway’s second novel followed two Scottish women on a road trip around France (Foreign Parts [1994]), and her third fictionalised the life of German pianist Clara Schumann (Clara [2002]). Alan Warner has written several other novels that centre around Oban / The Port, but The Worms Can Carry me to Heaven (2006) takes place in Spain, and Their Lips Talk of Mischief (2014) is predominantly set in Acton, London. Trumpet remains Jackie Kay’s only novel, but her autobiographical Red Dust Road (2010) chronicles a journey that brings Africa out of the realm of ‘fantasy’ as she travels to Nigeria to meet her birth father. I hope, then, that I am justified in arranging these texts to reflect the widening spatial scope of Scottish fiction, and to depict the outward-looking impetus that colours much devolutionary fiction. Though she was speaking only this year, it seems to me that Jackie Kay’s description of Scottishness certainly reflects some of the tendencies I am trying to draw out of interregnum fiction. She observed; ‘I think Scotland is finding a way to have a really interesting conversation with itself, but also we are looking outwards to the world.’\(^{103}\) This dialogic process, looking forwards and backwards, engaging with what’s within and what’s beyond, seems to me to capture something of the character of the interregnum moment, and the ideological texture of the texts that I will explore.


Chapter one: ‘a mean man in a corner’: the architecture of entrapment in James Kelman’s How Late It Was, How Late (1994)

This study takes as its starting point James Kelman’s 1994 novel How Late It Was, How Late (How Late). I will argue that Kelman’s fiction, and How Late in particular, has frequently been read according to a cultural nationalist paradigm that is by no means a perfect fit. I suggest that in fact Kelman’s work demonstrates a nuanced and conflicted view of Scottish nationalism; at once aligning itself with the devolutionary urgencies of the nationalist cause and keeping nationalism at arm’s length. I will demonstrate the ways in which How Late participates in a nationalist project, but also its resistance to nationalism; a marker of the interregnum tendencies that structure my investigation. There is a constant tension throughout the work between the particular exigencies of the Scottish situation, in which ignoring the issue of nation is impossible, and a deep-seated scepticism for nationalism, rooted in an awareness of its shortcomings and inadequacies. I will explore this tension by examining the spaces of the novel, from linguistic space to the urban landscape Glasgow and the carceral spaces of the home and the jail.

My introductory remarks on Kelman’s pre-eminence in Scottish writing during this period provides, I hope, ample justification for the selection of the author. What remains to be explained is the choice of How Late, rather than one of Kelman’s earlier novels; The Busconductor Hines (1984), A Chancer (1985), or A Disaffection (1989). Arguably, these works might have been more chronologically obvious starting points, and certainly do not lack the stylistic adventurousness and formal experimentalism that have been so crucial in assuring Kelman’s eminence in the devolutionary Scottish canon. Indeed, in her study Carole Jones considers three of Kelman’s novels side by side, arguing that ‘repetition is a formal strategy in Kelman’s work and [his] reiteration of a particular model of masculinity is a broad oeuvre-wide tactic in his labour with representation.’1 The ‘skewed sameness’2 that Jones identifies means that either A Disaffection’s chronicle of a week in the life of a schoolteacher or the experiences of the eponymous Busconductor Hines would have provided similarly rich opportunities for analysis as Sammy Samuels’ blinded travails around Glasgow after a police beating in How Late.

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1 Jones, Disappearing Men, p. 32.
2 Ibid.
What marks *How Late* as a more apt beginning is this novel’s singular distinction of being awarded the Booker Prize. To date, Kelman is the only Scottish author to have received this most prestigious of literary accolades (and one of only six Scots to have even made the shortlist). For my purposes, the significance of this achievement is not a reflection of any assumed intrinsic value of the Booker Prize; I certainly do not wish to suggest that this award attests automatically or unproblematically to the quality or importance of the novel upon which it is bestowed. It would be short-sighted indeed to think that winning the Booker means that *How Late* is quantifiably better than Kelman’s previous work, or that the fact that so few Scottish writers have been considered for the award is a reliable indication of the calibre of the modern Scottish novel. Rather, the significance of *How Late*’s Booker win is connected to the reaction the award provoked: from judges, critics and the author himself. The strength of feeling articulated in response to Kelman’s win, as well as the terms in which these opinions were articulated, provide fertile ground for analysis and shed light on the cultural nationalist paradigm my work seeks to interrogate.

**The Booker Prize: a flashpoint for cultural nationalism**

The awarding of the Booker Prize is frequently (some might say unfailingly) heralded by varying degrees of discordant debate, but the reaction to the choice made by the judging panel in 1994 is certainly located towards the more significant end of this spectrum of controversy. One of that year’s judges, Rabbi Julia Neuberger, was particularly vocal in her objection to the decision of the panel, calling it ‘a disgrace’ and underlining the absolutism of her position as ‘implacably opposed to the book’.

Her point of view was echoed by a significant proportion of media commentators. Chief amongst Kelman’s detractors was the then *Times* columnist Simon Jenkins. In his spectacularly sneering article he described the Booker panel’s selection of *How Late* as ‘literary vandalism’, and accused Kelman of ‘acting the part of an illiterate savage’, who had done nothing more than ‘transcribe the ramblings thoughts of a

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blind Glaswegian drunk.\textsuperscript{5} Though his article is perhaps the most oft-quoted and vituperative, similar sentiments were also voiced by other reviewers and cultural critics. Miller and Rodger describe the strength of this reaction as ‘a wave of mainstream media critical revulsion for Kelman and his works’ in which ‘it’s hard not to see a political agenda – not to say a class war.’\textsuperscript{6} Of course, there were those who (even in 1994), wrote in support of the Booker committee’s decision. In his defence of the novel, John Linklater was vitriolic in his condemnation of such reviewers, asserting that Kelman’s Booker win precipitated ‘a suppuration of racist, xenophobic class hatred’ and dismissing those reviewers who (even when not overtly hostile to Kelman) placed emphasis on the novel’s expletives\textsuperscript{7} as ‘prissy literary editors counting words instead of reading them.’\textsuperscript{8} Indeed, much of the discussion of \textit{How Late} that immediately followed Kelman’s Booker win implicitly or explicitly evoked the book’s Scottishness as the constituent factor in their analysis.

The stormy reception of \textit{How Late}’s win was not limited to the critical perspective; Kelman’s own reaction to the accolade was an important contribution to the disharmony. At the award ceremony, he utilised the platform afforded by his victory to give a caustic speech about the entrenched prejudices endemic within the English literary establishment and the educational system. In this speech, he located his fiction defiantly within a ‘movement towards decolonization and self-determination’ that assumes ‘the validity of indigenous culture […] and […] the right to defend in the face of attack’. This tradition, he asserts, is ‘premised on a rejection of the cultural values of imperial or colonial authority, offering a defence against cultural assimilation, in particular imposed assimilation.’\textsuperscript{9} He vigorously defended the language so many reviewers had found distasteful, and branded their assessment of his novel as not only elitist but tantamount to racism. In positioning his novel, and the critics of it, in such terms, Kelman’s speech resonates closely with the discourse of

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[]\textsuperscript{5} Jenkins, 1994.
\item[]\textsuperscript{7} Blake Morrison approximates that the word ‘fuck’ appears just under 4000 times in his review of \textit{How Late}; ‘Spelling Glasgow in four letters’, \textit{The Independent}, 27 March 1994 <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/book-review--spelling-glasgow-in-four-letters-how-late-it-was-how-late--james-kelman-secker-1499-pounds-1431910.html> [accessed 27 June 2012]
\item[]\textsuperscript{9} James Kelman, ‘Elitist Slurs Are Racism By Another Name’ (Booker Prize Acceptance Speech), \textit{Scotland On Sunday}, 16 October 1994: Spectrum Supplement.
\end{itemize}
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cultural nationalism. Kelman has subsequently argued that critics misinterpreted the speech, that it was ‘not a plea [...] for nationalism’, and while a categorisation of his speech as such would risk overstating the case, the rhetoric Kelman harnessed (especially phrases such as ‘self-determination’ and ‘indigenous culture’) certainly suggests an affinity with nationalist sentiment, especially in postcolonial contexts. Given this, Kelman’s disavowal of nationalism elsewhere in his writings and public remarks could be seen as somewhat disingenuous, but also points to the constant tension in his work between the necessity of recognising the Scottish cultural context and a hesitance to endorse nationalism wholeheartedly.

It is also significant that in Kelman’s acceptance speech he takes pains to make explicit the vital importance of language as contested ground. Literary language is a powerful weapon that can be turned to the services of both those who would uphold and those who would resist cultural imperialism whenever the balance of power between two nations is uneven, as is the case between England and Scotland. Kelman outlines the way language has traditionally functioned; the accepted wisdom used to disbar everything but Standard English from the lofty domain of literature:

[T]he gist of the argument amounts to the following, that vernaculars, patois, slangs, dialects, gutter-languages etc. etc. might well have a place in the realms of comedy (and the frequent references to Billy Connolly or Rab C. Nesbitt substantiate this) but they are inferior linguistic forms and have no place in literature. And a priori any writer who engages in the use of such so-called language is not really engaged in literature at all.

This procedure is a way of inferiorising not just non-standard linguistic expression, but also the people whose lives and cultures are conducted and constructed using language in this way. As Kelman has noted elsewhere, it is fallacious to speak of

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language and people as if the two can be neatly separated; ‘[i]t should be an obvious point that we can’t use terms like superior or inferior when we speak about cultures and languages, not unless we’re willing to use these terms of actual peoples.’

This formulation also suggests the inseparability of culture and politics, a fusion constantly at the forefront of Kelman’s writing.

In this assessment of the importance of language Kelman recalls the arguments put forward by Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong’o in his seminal work *Decolonising the Mind* (1981). In this volume, Ngugi argues forcefully that African writers must abandon the use of English in their creative endeavours in order to combat the insidious and crippling cultural imperialism caused by renouncing indigenous languages. He describes how cultural violence has replaced physical violence as the primary weapon of neo-colonialism. The effect of this ‘cultural bomb’ has been ‘to annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves.’ In order to combat this toxic inferiorisation, and re-assert the validity of indigenous culture, writers must have the confidence to utilise their own voices and languages as vehicles for artistic expression.

It might seem over-zealous to claim that Ngugi’s insights are applicable in a Scottish context, given that Scotland’s colonial status is far from clear-cut. Certainly, it would be impossible to claim that Ngugi’s project in *Decolonising the Mind* could be transplanted wholesale to a country as complicit in the imperial project as Scotland. As Michael Gardiner observes, ‘it is now widely accepted that the Scottish contribution to empire was often disproportionately large, from the Ulster Plantation through Hong Kong trading to the defence of the African colonies.’ Nonetheless, there are important parallels to be drawn between Ngugi’s linguistic call to arms and Kelman’s approach to language. Such a comparison is given historical credence when we examine 18th century attitudes to Scots language. In *Devolving English Literature*, Robert Crawford elucidates the linguistic climate in Scotland after the 1707 Act of Union:

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To play a full part [in the entity of Britain], Scottish people would have to move from using Scots to using English, an English which was fully acceptable to the dominant partner in the political union. This English, it was argued, both had to replace Scots and had to be purged of what we would now call ‘markers of Scottish cultural difference’, purged of Scotticisms.\textsuperscript{16}

Admittedly, this expurgation was initiated not by English colonial oppressors but by Scots themselves; it was ‘not an anti-Scottish gesture, but a pro-British one.’\textsuperscript{17} It is also important to note that similar processes were at work to incorporate English regional accents, and that:

By obscuring a similar history of cultural incorporation within England itself, the suggestion that this process constitutes the English colonization of Scotland performs a nationalist function by transforming the modernization of Scotland from an endogenous process of development into an exogenous form of oppression.\textsuperscript{18}

It is important to stress, then, that the process of linguistic assimilation was not analogous to the forced assimilation of the African colonial encounter. However, the deliberate censorship of Scots linguistic markers nonetheless amounted to assimilation, perhaps more akin to neo-colonial attitudes which saw aping the coloniser as the quickest route to power. These attitudes had such purchase in 18\textsuperscript{th} century Scotland that they resulted in a systemic and lasting devaluation of the Scots language as an educated mode of expression.

I include the word ‘educated’ in the last phrase deliberately. The importance of this is twofold. Firstly, the universities of Scotland were key proponents of the ‘improvement’ of Scottish language ‘as a move from the barbarous Scottish to the polite British.’\textsuperscript{19} This suggests the importance of class, as well as national distinctions in linguistic praxis. Given that those who attended university were almost certain to

\textsuperscript{17} Crawford, \textit{Devolving English Literature}, p. 13.
\textsuperscript{18} Liam Connell, ‘Modes of Marginality’, p. 44.
\textsuperscript{19} Crawford, \textit{Devolving English Literature}, p. 22.
be more wealthy, it stands to reason that a concerted effort amongst this community to use language in a more ‘English’ fashion would inculcate a distinction whereby the language utilised by the lower classes would be seen as more authentically Scottish. This distinction also participates in the process whereby the locus of Scottishness is narrowed to include only a specific portion of the population, problematically restricting the scope and variety of possible Scotlands. This conflation of, and tension between, class and nation reverberates down the centuries right through to the reception of Kelman’s work. For this reason it is often difficult, if not impossible, to dissect the prejudices espoused by reviewers (and prize judges) with regards to Kelman’s language. Because the Scottish working class became the de facto carriers of Scots language, it is a vexed question whether nation or class is the primary cause of revulsion espoused by some critics in response to Kelman.

The second reason why it is important to stress the fact that Scots was no longer seen as an ‘educated’ mode of expression is that the word emphasises the distinction between written and oral language. Traditionally, the written has been privileged over the oral in colonial contexts. Cairns Craig elucidates the role of the written word in assuring the dominance of colonising powers:

One of the major requirements for control of space in the period since the invention of printing has been the control of linguistic space. The establishment of England and France as the core states of Europe was paralleled by their achieving the highest degree of linguistic integration, whether deliberately carried through or accidentally achieved. Cultural homogeneity assured a space which would be extended outwards without threat of inner rupture: precisely the opposite was the case, of course, on the peripheries, which acquired the language of the core cultures as an invasion of their space.20

This experience of linguistic invasion could account in part for a disjuncture that became evident after the Act of Union, as Scotland formalised its status as a peripheral nation to England’s core. While Scots might have remained a tolerable mode of expression for oral communication, it was no longer appropriate for educated, written discourse. Crawford points out that those eminent Scotsmen and advocates of linguistic assimilation, David Hume and Lord Kames, both peppered

20 Cairns Craig, Out of History, p. 115.
their speech with native vernacular but sought to eradicate these aberrations from their written work.\textsuperscript{21} It seems that they had a great deal more success in training their pens to conform to an English ideal than they did training their tongues to follow suit. This strikes a chord with Ngugi’s description of the cultural imperialism at work in an African context, whereby ‘the new, imposed languages could never completely break the native languages as spoken, [so] their effective area of domination was […] the written.’\textsuperscript{22} The result of this linguistic dissonance is to divorce the cultural production of a nation from the lived reality of language used in daily life, reinforcing a hierarchy in which vernacular, spoken language is always figured as inferior to standardised, English written forms. This dissonance also produced a psychic split for speakers of a marginalised language. Quoting Edwin Muir, Cairns Craig speaks of the “inerradicable psychological damage of a divided linguistic inheritance, caused by the gradual supplanting of Scots by English after the Union of 1707, and the consequent fact that “Scotsmen feel in one language and think in another”’.\textsuperscript{23} The divided self is at once identifiably Scottish, but also defiantly anti-essentialist, given that it cannot be anything but multiple.

In a Kenyan context, Ngugi demands that African writers redress the process of inferiorisation, and heal the psychic split, by abandoning the imposed colonial language in their creative endeavours. He exhorts them to do ‘what all writers in world history have done for their languages by meeting the challenge of creating a literature in them, which process later opens the languages for philosophy, science, technology, and all the other areas of human creative endeavours.’\textsuperscript{24} It does not seem to be such a stretch to argue that the language used in Kelman’s fiction might be engaged in a similar project. Certainly, responses to his work frame the debate in similar terms; the distinction between oral and written language was raised frequently in discussions of Kelman’s Booker win. I have already noted that Jenkins refers to \textit{How Late} as an act of transcription, aligning it with oral, rather than written culture. Alan Clark dismisses \textit{How Late} on similar grounds. He suggests that the novel could be described as:

\texttt{Compiled? Scripted? I am trying to avoid the word ‘written’ […] The work consists of a series of transcripts taken from a running tape (there can be no

\textsuperscript{21} Crawford, \textit{Devolving English Literature}, p. 23.  
\textsuperscript{22} Ngugi, \textit{Decolonising the Mind}, p. 17.  
\textsuperscript{23} Craig, \textit{The Modern Scottish Novel}, p. 15.  
\textsuperscript{24} Ngugi, \textit{Decolonising the Mind}, p. 29.
other explanation) of a mauldering old drunk who has been at the window table in the public bar since opening time.\textsuperscript{25}

Such reviews are testament to the endurance of the pernicious hierarchy that would confine Scots language to the realm of orality, and thus deny it the value and status afforded to proper (English) literature. Even almost a decade after Kelman received the accolade, Luke Strongman asserted that Kelman’s receipt of the Booker ‘lends rough and rugged dignity to a working-class northern spirit of devolution that has hitherto been but sparely represented in British literature.’\textsuperscript{26} This analysis, though not deliberately critical of \textit{How Late}, once again undermines the status of Scots demotic fiction as ‘proper’ literature until it receives the approval of the English cultural elite. Strongman highlights the nationalistic impulse only to suggest that its importance is contingent upon the status conferred by the Booker, enacting a process of appropriation that seems to co-opt and undermine the very devolutionary spirit Strongman identifies in the novel. In the aftermath of a Scottish Booker win, such reviewers and critics confirm Cairns Craig’s assertion that ‘from the perspective of English speakers and of English culture, Scots is a language of leftovers, the detritus of proper speech and good writing, a supplement poisonous to the health of the real language of its society.’\textsuperscript{27}

The 1994 Booker Prize proves a helpful analytical flash point precisely because it brought to the fore the latent prejudices of the English cultural establishment towards Scottish fiction, particularly that written in demotic Scots, as well as the antagonistic cultural nationalist response such prejudices elicited. Here, it is worth reiterating the fraught political climate that formed the backdrop to the controversy, as this context is key to understanding the urgency evident in responses to the work. In 1994, many Scots (Kelman included) were still reeling after the failure of the 1979 devolutionary referendum, and at this point were still 3 years away from the election of the New Labour government that would offer a second chance. In interregnum terms here, England at this point was no longer ‘leading’ in Scotland, but rather ‘dominating’. The particular exigencies of this inter-referendum political moment meant that nationalist concerns were necessarily brought to the fore. Kelman argues far more obviously and forcefully for cultural nationalism in his Booker speech than in many subsequent polemics. At this point, devolution had not

\textsuperscript{25} Alan Clark, ‘A Prize Insult to the Courage of Scotland’s Finest’, \textit{The Mail on Sunday}, 23 October 1994.
\textsuperscript{26} Strongman, p. 215.
\textsuperscript{27} Craig, \textit{The Modern Scottish Novel}, p. 76.
been achieved; indeed many perceived that it had been thwarted. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to suggest that such a climate might necessitate the use of inflammatory nationalist rhetoric, even by those whose feelings towards nationalism were much more complicated and ambivalent. The heightened political situation was in part responsible for the prevalence of a critical tendency to read Kelman’s novel as primarily nationalistic in its political impulse.

As I have suggested, the central focus of such analysis tended to be the language used in the novel. The reason for this is clear; the use of Glaswegian demotic throughout \textit{How Late} is the most significant marker of the novel’s Scottishness. Though it is by no means analogous to Ngugi’s African context, the linguistic strategy of \textit{How Late} does sustain comparison that aligns it with post-colonial expressions of cultural nationalism; its Glaswegian demotic is unavoidably and deliberately political. As Jeremy Scott argues:

\begin{quote}
[T]he very motivation to write in this fashion [Glaswegian demotic] springs largely from pressing socio-political concerns engendered by the perceived suppression of these voices by the establishment, and from a passionate belief on Kelman’s part that Standard English diegetic narrative voice can never be transparent. It does not constitute a clear window onto a fictional world, he asserts, especially when that world lies outside of the borders of England. For Kelman, the language of the English (rather than the English language per se) is fatally flawed when it comes to representing a Scottish context.\textsuperscript{28}
\end{quote}

However, to use the novel’s language to recruit Kelman’s fiction unproblematically for an endorsement of Scottish nationalism would be misleading. Such analysis of \textit{How Late} risks segueing into a reductive act of misappropriation, whether it applauds or criticises Scottish nationalist sentiment. I will examine the language used in \textit{How Late} more closely in order to elucidate the ways in which it does participate in linguistic cultural nationalism, but also the ways in which it problematises this paradigm, demonstrating a contradictory ambivalence that is characteristic of the interregnum moment. For Kelman’s Glaswegian demotic is by no means a simple valorisation of a national Scots language; it is locally inflected, mongrelised, inconsistent and defiantly anti-essentialist. That is to say, the ambiguities, specificities and contradictions that

characterise the linguistic world of the novel refuse to be easily co-opted into a fixed cultural nationalist paradigm. *How Late* therefore enacts at a linguistic level the important tension I have identified in Kelman’s work, a tension between the political necessity of Scottish cultural identity and a simultaneous awareness of the pitfalls and inadequacy of this national formulation.

**Refusing consistency and claiming linguistic space**

I have already acknowledged that it is the language of Kelman’s novel that signals most obviously and immediately that it is a Scottish text. As Nicola Pitchford argues, to elide this glosses over the fact that ‘as the book’s critics have repeatedly emphasized, it is impossible to read [the novel] without being constantly aware that Sammy et al. – and Kelman – are Scots, and that’s what all the fuss has been about.’ The novel is rendered almost exclusively in Glaswegian vernacular, with scant concessions or translations for non-Scottish readers. This narrative voice is one of the central strategies of Kelman’s anti-colonial methods. The reader is confronted directly with a Scottish voice that will not be silenced or make itself more congenial to Standard English linguistic norms, enacting political intent in linguistic form. Stylistic choices are inseparable from the ideological impetus of *How Late*; as Jeremy Scott puts it, ‘the novel’s medium is its own message, rather than simply a messenger.’

In *How Late*, Scots is not merely the oral language spoken by characters, it also assumes responsibility for narrative exposition. No linguistic distinction is made between dialogue and narrative, the two are rendered in the same transliterated phonetic Scots, and even the speech marks that would conventionally divide the two realms of language are dispensed with. There is a deliberate conflation of character, narrator and author at work within *How Late*, all of whom use language in the same way. An important effect of this muddling is to dismantle the hierarchy which has often been produced and sustained by traditional literary form and problematise the

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30 It is worth noting here that Kelman himself objects to descriptions of the language he uses as ‘dialect’, arguing that the word acts as a way of inferiorising the people who use language in this way (see Theo Tait, ‘In his own words’, *The Guardian*, 12 April 2008, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2008/apr/12/featuresreviews.guardianreview22> [accessed 26 August 2012].
elitist distinction between oral and written language. According to Kelman’s (admittedly generalising) view, in the traditional English novel the narrative is rendered in Standard English, implicitly setting the narrator up as superior to the characters whose (oral) mode of expression is vernacular. Kelman describes the political necessity of his narrative technique to combat the damaging effects of this process:

In prose fiction I saw the distinction between dialogue and narrative as a summation of the political system; it was simply another method of exclusion, of marginalising and disenfranchising different peoples, cultures and communities. I was uncomfortable with ‘working-class’ authors who allowed ‘the voice’ of higher authority to control narrative, the place where the psychological drama occurred. How could I write from my own place and time if I was forced to adopt the ‘received’ language of the ruling class? Not to challenge the rules of narrative was to be coerced into assimilation.32

The narrative voice of How Late forcibly rejects the limitations of such norms and demonstrates that Scots language is as adequate a vehicle as Standard English to express the complexities of all aspects of narration, not just dialogue. This narrative voice is one of the features of How Late that aligns it most clearly with cultural nationalism, in that it acts throughout as a defiant marker of the text’s Scottishness, an assertion of national, cultural difference.

Within the novel, Sammy’s experience also dramatises the constant pressures applied to vernacular speakers to coerce them into conforming to standardised linguistic practice. On several occasions, Sammy is told to modify his language to make it closer to Standard English. As he navigates the layers of incomprehensible bureaucracy in the aftermath of his beating, it becomes increasingly clear that his language is as much a stumbling block as his recent sight loss. Ally, a lawyer who appears uninvited to offer his services as a ‘rep’ for Sammy about half way through the novel, suggests that his prospective client might censor his swearing:

Look eh pardon me; just one thing, ye’re gony have to watch yer language; sorry, but every second word’s fuck. If ye listen to me ye’ll see I try to keep an eye on

32 Kelman, ‘And The Judge’s Said…’, in And The Judge’s Said…, p. 40.
the auld words […]. I'm no meaning nothing; it's just it's a good habit to get into for official purposes. Ye annoyed? Don't be. 33

This suggestion is repeated during Sammy's interview in the police station, when he is instructed; ‘Don't use the word ‘cunts’ again, it doesnay fit in the computer’ (p. 160). The reason the police officer gives for his instruction makes explicit the connection between this linguistic policing and the oral/written dichotomy as outlined above; while Sammy's language might be (just about) acceptable to listen to, it is incompatible with the regulations governing written discourse – and not just those on a police computer programme.

Throughout the book, the written word can be seen working for a state depicted as repressive, the state as an agent of oppression. Once Sammy's articulations are committed to written form, he no longer has ownership of them and they become open to misinterpretation and misrepresentation. During his interview to file a claim for Dysfunctional Benefit, Sammy panics when he realises his words are being transcribed. He attempts to ‘scrub’ the claim, but is unable to erase the transcription. Though no longer any use to Sammy, the interview remains on the computer, ‘filed as a withdrawn claim’, (p. 110) to be used at the convenience of the authorities. Indeed, it is not long before Sammy is confronted with his own words used as evidence against him during his police interrogation. The police officer, reading from ‘a statement ye prepared with our colleagues', highlights Sammy's inconsistency (something also picked up on by Ally), that 'he’s not always very precise. And he retracts statements. Have you noticed that? as easy as he makes them, he retracts them' (p. 164). Once again, official, written discourse seeks to rein in the multiplicity and heterogeneity of Sammy’s spoken language, to ‘fix’ the words into their final, unalterable form. The ‘retracking’ identified by the officer wholly undermines Sammy’s credibility with the police, given their adherence to a linguistic equation whereby inconsistency is the same as untruth.

It is safe to say that this equation is not one that Kelman endorses. If we examine almost any page from How Late, we can see that nearly every thought that passes through Sammy's head is beset with contradiction. In his perception of the novel’s pivotal plot point, his beating at the hands of the police, Sammy is unable to settle for one interpretation. Often in the same breath, he oscillates between blaming

33 James Kelman, How Late it was, How Late (London: Vintage: 1998), p. 238. Further references are given after quotations in the text.
himself and the police for his predicament: ‘ach it was all his own fault anyway […]
What was his own fault for christ sake there he went blaming himself for something
that had fuck all to do with him it's fucking typical. It wasnay his fault he was fucking
blind! Ye kidding!’ (p. 46). This inconsistency is not born of intent to deceive; Sammy
is not lying either when he apportions blame to himself, or when he abdicates it.
Rather, the contradictions are an acknowledgement of the mobility and multiplicity of
interpretation. The novel refuses to subscribe to an ideology that restricts and
confines narrative (and experience) by always insisting on consistency.

One important marker of the text’s ‘inconsistency’ is the constantly shifting
use of pronouns (from ‘he’ to ‘ye’), which make it almost impossible to discern
categorically whether the novel is written in first, second or third person. Cairns Craig
describes the anarchic power of this unorthodox narrative voice, that it reveals ‘an
inner heterocentricity in which Sammy becomes the site of “I”, “ye” and Sammy, each
in dialogue with the other. In Kelman’s narrators the ‘self as other’ has been
internalised as an other self, other selves.’34 This multiplicity of identity demonstrated
by the choice of pronoun is a rejection of fixity and an embrace of a fluid, dynamic
and dialogic conception of self. In this, Kelman is demonstrating his resistance to
totalising, essentialist concepts of identity such as, we might argue, Scottish
nationalism in both its political and cultural forms.

The novel’s constituent contradictions are also rendered at an orthographic level,
with words spelled differently throughout the novel, depending upon context.35 This
flexibility and inconsistency points to something else Cairns Craig has identified in
the text: Kelman does not seek to instate some kind of fixed, perfected Scots
alternative to English literature (we might contrast him here to Hugh MacDiarmid and
his Lallans, or ‘synthetic Scots’). Rather, the language in How Late ‘is not rendered in
terms of an ideal of the Scottish working-class as maintainers of a distinctive Scots
language, but in terms of a specific geographic pronunciation.’36 Language is not a

34 Craig, The Modern Scottish Novel, p. 102.
35 For example, ‘over’ and ‘ower’ both appear in the novel, as do ‘naw’ and ‘no’.
Kelman’s spelling is also inconsistent between different texts. He has argued that ‘it
depends on the story, the rhymes, and the character. Spelling in a story will alter. I
would demand a writer alter every story.’ Quoted in Christine Amanda Müller, A
Glasgow voice: James Kelman’s Literary Language (Cambridge: Cambridge
36 Cairns Craig, ‘Resisting Arrest: James Kelman’ in The Scottish Novel Since the
Seventies, ed. by Gavin Wallace and Randal Stevenson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh
marker of a nationalist ideal, but rooted in the particularity of a Glaswegian milieu. Jeremy Scott argues that this locatedness is one of the features of demotic fiction that demarcates its difference from that written in Standard English:

[In demotic fiction], language is viewed as having an inherent and essential connection to place, rather than being simply a means of expression and communication. This connection to place is irretrievably not a defining aspect of Standard English; rather, Standard English becomes associated with a connection to economic and political power.37

This emphasis on local particularity, rather than an assertion of national (or class) homogeneity, demonstrates that the cultural nationalist tendency at work here is more complicated than simply a valorisation of Scots over English. The slippery, fluctuating transliterations suggest that there is no such thing as ‘authentic’ Scots, and the language of How Late refuses to be co-opted into an ideological system (be it imperial or cultural nationalist) that adheres too rigidly to a fixed linguistic code.

Kelman’s emphasis on the particularity of Sammy’s language in How Late suggests a multiplicity of possible Scottish voices and emphasises the linguistic heterogeneity of the nation. Willy Maley identifies this heterogeneity as a central, indeed perhaps even a defining feature of Scottish literature more broadly. He describes the diversity of voice he experienced when reading a collection of contemporary Scottish poetry,38 that the ‘anthology offered poetry in all the languages and dialects of Scotland, and displayed a richness and diversity of voice that I had come to expect.’39 This cacophony was in direct contrast to a comparable anthology of Irish poetry40 which was ‘much more monologic, full of the samey and the sonorous, with very few exceptions.’41 These radically different approaches to the representation of regional linguistic variations in literature have serious implications for cultural nationalism. Maley goes on to elucidate this point with reference to Edwin Muir’s comments on language and national identity in the influential 1935 volume

37 Scott, p. 53.
41 Maley, ‘Ireland, verses, Scotland’, p. 15.
Scott and Scotland. In this text, Muir is primarily arguing against the Lallans favoured by Hugh MacDairmid. Though Lallans (unlike Kelman’s demotic Scots) certainly does not attempt to transcribe Scottish as it is used in everyday life, MacDairmid’s synthetic Scots is not utterly divorced from regional specificity. Geographical particularity is encoded in its very name, ‘Lallans’ being a contraction of lawlands, or lowlands. In opposition to this located language, Muir had argued that Scotland should follow the example set by Ireland (and more specifically, Yeats), and abandon regional inflections in favour of a unifying literary language which the whole nation could share. In Muir’s view, there was no choice but for this language to be English.

Maley reproduces Muir’s conclusion on the subject in full, and it bears repetition here not only because of its continued relevance to debates on what language means for national identity, but because it draws attention to the relationship of Scottish literature to its Irish counterpart, which will prove a useful point of comparison at several points throughout this thesis. Muir argues:

Scotland can only create a national literature by writing in English. This may sound paradoxical: in support of it I can only advance my whole case in regard to the Scots language… and the contemporary case of Ireland. Irish nationality cannot be said to be any less intense than ours; but Ireland produced a national literature not by clinging to Irish dialect, but by adopting English and making it into a language fit for all its purposes. The poetry of Mr Yeats belongs to English literature, but no one would deny that it belongs to Irish literature pre-eminently and essentially. The difference between contemporary Irish and contemporary Scottish literature is that the first is central and homogeneous, and that the second is parochial and conglomerate; and this is because it does not possess an organ for the expression of a whole and unambiguous nationality. Scots dialect poetry represents Scotland in bits and patches, and in doing that it is no doubt a faithful enough image of the present divided state of Scotland. But while we cling to it we shall never be able to express the central reality of Scotland, as Mr Yeats has expressed the central reality of Ireland; though for such an end the sacrifice of dialect poetry would be cheap. The real issue in contemporary Scottish literature is between centrality and provincialism; dialect poetry is one of the chief supports of the second of these two forces; the first can
Muir posits that centrality and homogeneity are the intrinsic values towards which a nation must strive in order to secure its very existence. Writing in dialect is incompatible with these values, because the variety and heterogeneity of languages used within the country fractures national unity and occludes the ‘central reality’ of Scotland. This ‘central reality’, so cherished by Muir, could not be further from the highly individualised, specific and subjective experience charted in *How Late*. Kelman is defiantly positioning himself against homogeneity by insisting on the particular and idiosyncratic nature of Scottish language, and of Scottish experience. *How Late* draws attention to the specificities of the ‘bits and patches’ rather than aiming to reveal a global truth. If the Scottish nation is to exist in any meaningful way then, for Kelman, it must be as a tapestry of these different experiences, a plethora of voices articulating a myriad of different realities. Through the linguistic inconsistency within *How Late*, Kelman is setting his face against Muir’s conception of the nation as ‘a whole and unambiguous nationality.’ In his description of Kelman’s narrative strategy, Hames goes even further than this in his assessment of the effect created by the individualised lexical patterns of the novel. He argues that *How Late* is a ‘novel whose extreme particularism seems to cancel any form of collective belonging or identity, and to erode the shareable narrative space of the imagined community.’

Hames’ conclusion has merit, but goes perhaps too far in his assessment of Kelman’s rejection of national community. To attenuate this conclusion, it is perhaps worth turning once more to Muir’s discussion. That Muir presents Irish literature as a guiding example that Scotland might follow is also telling. Comparative analysis of the literature produced by the two nations can often prove fruitful because, as Marilyn Reizbaum asserts, ‘they have comparable colonial histories with respect to England… and because their status as minority cultures, which has more or less continued in psychic and/or political ways, has had a similar impact not only on the dissemination of their respective literatures but on the nature and means of the

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However, despite these similarities it is also important to recognise the crucial differences between the two countries, especially in matters of nationhood. While Scotland only made inroads towards a degree of political separation from the United Kingdom in the late 20th century, by this point Ireland had already attained partial independence. In 1921, the Anglo-Irish Treaty granted Home Rule to 26 of the 32 Irish counties, though it was not until 1949 that full sovereignty was achieved and the Irish Free State proclaimed itself a republic. However, the path to this independence was marked by prolonged and bloody violence, and accompanied by divisive sectarian tensions that still reverberate through the nation. It also led to the partition of the island in 1920, with the six northern counties of Antrim Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry and Tyrone forming Northern Ireland. Given this history, and the ongoing conflict bound up with Irish nationalism, it does not seem likely that contemporary, or devolutionary, Scottish writers would look as admiringly as Muir towards the example across the water. It might even be possible that writers of Kelman’s generation look to Ireland and garner from its history a heightened awareness of the potential pitfalls of nationalism. Therefore, we might suggest that, in rejecting Muir’s advice and insisting upon Sammy’s Glaswegian idiolect, Kelman is just as informed by Ireland as Muir was in the 1930s, but that Irish experience has led him to imbue his writing with a kind of anticipatory anti-nationalism. Insisting on specificity and maintaining the unique character of Sammy’s patch of Scotland is a way of guarding against the kind of nationalist homogenisation that would paper over the latent fault lines within any national identity, and in doing so risk solidifying them into points of open conflict.

When examining the commitment to inconsistency within Kelman’s use of language, as well as the connection to place, it is important to comment on the historical perception of Glasgow vernacular. The 1936 Scottish National Dictionary asserts that ‘owing to the influx of Irish and foreign immigrants in the industrial area near Glasgow the dialect has become hopelessly corrupt.’ The corruption of How Late’s speech patterns can be traced to a hybridisation of the language spoken in Glasgow that led to a consequent perception of the city’s Scottishness as diluted. This context is key; How Late’s language is a consequence of Glasgow’s complex and convoluted linguistic development. In the novel, there is no pretence to an

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illisory pure Scots language, but rather an attempt to render the protagonist’s inner life though his particular Glaswegian vernacular accurately, in all its heterogeneity. The Glaswegian particularities of Sammy’s speech point once more to the tension between the undeniably Scottish cadences of the text, and the fault lines that fracture this national unity if we examine the novel more closely. As Mary McGlynn phrases it, “Kelman’s writing comprises a seemingly contradictory blend of distinctively Scottish speech rhythms and an utter disavowal of Scottishness.” Sammy’s speech is a celebration of a specific idiolect, rather than Scots as a national language. How Late aligns itself much more clearly with a valorisation of highly individualised and geographically specific orality than with a valorisation of Scots as a national language. In the novel, Sammy himself is conscious of the individual specificity of voice, at one point in the novel marvelling at the astonishing vocal diversity of the world as something almost divine. He muses ‘[i]t was funny how people had their own voices, everybody in the world, everybody that had ever been. If there was god he was some man. Unless he was a woman. Sammy laughed for a moment’ (p. 207). Here, voice is figured as an indelible marker of individuality, not community. Nonetheless, the text does demonstrate a real sense of affection for the communal functions of voice. In his interview with the police, Sammy describes a Glasgow voice as a cheering marker of belonging; a kind of anchor in a disorientating world:

I’m no kidding ye, he said, even just out walking first thing in the morning, ye forget where ye are, then that first Glasgow voice hits ye; it makes ye smile, know what I’m saying, cause it’s a real surprise. (p. 160)

Scott Hames outlines the significance of the dual motion of this vernacular strategy in Kelman’s writing. He argues:

As a register of autonomy as well as rootedness, [Kelman’s] vernacular writing resonates with a political condition seeking firm anchorage as well as flexibility, and operating quite comfortably in the zone of “marginality” which casts the Scottish subject as Other vis-à-vis one representative order –

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Standard English – but without hegemonic obligations to construct and enforce its own.\(^47\)

Strikingly, this resonates with the Gramsci’s theorisation of ideological interregnum. Hames’ description of Kelman’s linguistic strategy emphasises its detachment from and rejection of the old order (standard English), but also the inadequacy of instating Kelman’s highly particularised demotic as a replacement. It is significant that, in Hames’ formulation, allowing the text to resist hegemonic representational obligations is key to maintaining the subversive political impulse of the novel, rather than co-opting it as a herald of the more conservative processes of parliamentary devolution.

**Navigating Glasgow**

As well as its linguistic profile, the Glasgow of the novel also has implications when assessing the significance of *How Late*’s relationship to representation, nation and nationalism more broadly. Several critics have suggested that it is helpful to consider Glasgow, and not Scotland, as the most important spatial category when talking about Kelman’s work. One reason for this shift is that it emphasises the fact that, historically, urban spaces (and Glasgow in particular) have been viewed as less Scottish than other parts of the country. Traditionally, Scottish literary identity has been represented by depictions of rural parts of the country, most significantly the highlands and islands. Christopher Whyte argues that ‘until the 1950s, the dominant strand in a renascent Scottish literature identified Scotland with Scots-speaking rural areas or even with a Gaelic-speaking heartland’.\(^48\) Glasgow was doubly divorced from this ideal of Scottishness, even more marginalised than other cities. Willy Maley suggests that Glasgow’s close links to imperialism (as ‘Second City of the Empire’) and history of Irish immigration have played a part in the perception of the city as insufficiently Scottish:

> Glasgow remains a centre on the margins, a city which, because of its history of heavy industry, tobacco lords, and Irish immigration, is often seen as ‘unrepresentative’ of Scotland, a city without a country, or one whose country


\(^48\) Whyte, ‘Masculinities’, p. 277.
is outwith its nation, a city ‘north of the border’ whose roots lie in an expansionist state whose putative centre is located far to the south.\footnote{Willy Maley, ‘Denizens, citizens, tourists, and others: marginality and mobility in the writings of James Kelman and Irvine Welsh’, in \textit{City Visions}, ed. by David Bell and Azzedine Haddour, (Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), pp. 60-72 (p. 60).}

Given this historical background, it is clear just how difficult it would be to claim that Kelman’s Glasgow novels could represent the nation, and be mapped onto Scotland as a whole. And yet this is exactly the reaction Kelman’s work seems to elicit. In his article, Whyte goes on to identify a ‘hegemonic shift’ that occurred in the last three decades of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, whereby ‘urban fiction in Scotland has increasingly and explicitly assumed the burden of national representation’;\footnote{Whyte, ‘Masculinities’, p. 278.} largely as a result of the success of writers like Kelman. The ‘hegemonic shift’ that Whyte identifies can, once again, be productively aligned with Gramsci’s formulation of the interregnum. Where interregnum is more helpful than Whyte’s formulation is in Gramsci’s insistence on the incompletion of the process of transformation. Certainly, it is true that the rural kailyard is no longer the centre of the Scottish cultural imagination, but it is not sufficient to simply relocate the ‘burden of national representation’ to the urban centres. Kelman’s fictions instate regional specificity and destabilise idealised rural locales, but certainly do not offer Glasgow unproblematically as ‘representative’ of the Scottish nation. Glasgow is distinct from Scotland and retains its own specificity; the transfer of the representational burden is partial and incomplete.

Indeed, utilising Glasgow as the primary category of analysis is useful in that identification with the city rather than the nation suggests affinities with urban space more broadly, thus relegating the specificities of Scotland as the primary category of analysis. The local is seen in opposition to the national rather than part of a cohesive whole. While the relationship between Glasgow and Scotland depicted in \textit{How Late} is not necessarily antagonistic, the novel makes it clear that one does not easily collapse into the other. The specificities of Sammy’s Glasgow cannot be easily generalised to paint a picture of Scotland as a whole; in fact they may well have much more in common with pockets of urban poverty outside of Scotland than many other locations within the country. McGlynn makes the case that, ‘it is Glasgow, specifically seen as an urban space, rather than Scotland, which anchors Kelman’s prose. Although he steeps his text in region-specific language and grammatical constructions, Kelman’s understanding of municipal geography leads him to
downplay any unique qualities of his hometown.\footnote{51 McGlynn, \textit{Narratives of Class}, p. 37.} Nicoll echoes this view, when he posits that, ‘though Kelman’s first four novels utilise Glasgow as a setting, this is not to suggest that there is some set of essential, far less Scottish, experiences that Kelman is trying to depict and dissect. Glasgow is sufficient, rather than necessary.’\footnote{52 Laurence Nicoll, ‘Facticity, or Something Like That: The Novels of James Kelman’, \textit{The Contemporary British Novel Since 1980}, ed. by James Acheson and Sarah C. E. Ross (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), pp. 59-69 (p. 61).}

Kelman himself confirms the veracity of this line of analysis in the ‘The Importance of Glasgow in My Work’. In this essay he describes Glasgow as simultaneously crucial and coincidental. Crucial because Glasgow is Kelman’s hometown, and as such it is intrinsic to his socio-cultural background and consequently his fictional output, given that Kelman maintains ‘I wanted to write and remain a member of my own community.’\footnote{53 Kelman, ‘The Importance of Glasgow in My Work’, p. 83.} Coincidental because ‘Glasgow just happens to be the city I was born within and where some of my family, some of my relations, some of my friends and some of my neighbours happen to live. I could have been born anywhere in the world I suppose.’\footnote{54 Ibid., p. 78.} He is aware that there is no essential Glasgow that informs his work, that his fiction is ‘filtered through my own perspective, a perspective that, okay, is Glaswegian, but in these terms ‘Glaswegian’ is a late 20\textsuperscript{th} century construct.’\footnote{55 Ibid., p. 84.} Such an acknowledgement of the mutable, constructed nature of the Glaswegian identity echoes the anti-essentialism inherent in Kelman’s approach to cultural nationalism. Glasgow, in all its constructed nature, is simply what there is, the city is the raw material Kelman has to hand, and it is no more and no less valuable a starting point than any other location from which to explore the workings of contemporary society.

\textit{How Late} does not seek to valorise or idealise its Glasgow setting, therefore, but unapologetically instates its validity as a literary backdrop. In grounding his fictions in the streets of Glasgow, Kelman is filling a void most memorably described by Alasdair Gray in \textit{Lanark}:

Think of Florence, Paris, London, New York. Nobody visiting them for the first time is a stranger because he’s already visited them in paintings, novels, history books and films. But if a city hasn’t been used by an artist not even
the inhabitants live there imaginatively. What is Glasgow to most of us? A house, the place we work, a football park or golf course, some pubs and connecting streets. That’s all. No, I’m wrong, there’s also the cinema and the library. And when our imagination needs exercise we use these to visit London, Paris, Rome under the Caesars, the American West at the turn of the century, anywhere but here and now. Imaginatively Glasgow exists as a music-hall song and a few bad novels. That’s all we’ve given to the world outside. It’s all we’ve given to ourselves.\footnote{Alasdair Gray, \textit{Lanark: A Life in Four Books} (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2007), p. 243.}

Read in this literary-historical context, it might be tempting to celebrate the success of writers like Kelman in putting Glasgow firmly on the literary map, and in so doing expanding the parameters of what Scottishness might mean. However, as I have already suggested, it seems that rather than broadening the boundaries of spaces representing Scotland in literature, Kelman’s success has, for many critics, simply moved Scottishness, relocating the national zeitgeist to Clydeside and in so doing confining a different area of the country to the periphery. Dorothy McMillan neatly summarises the paradox of this vexed predicament, that in the 1980s ‘Kelman’s pure, naturalistic fictions [came along,] calling into question any totalizing myth of Scottishness and ending up, through no fault or desire of his own, seeming to embody such a myth.’\footnote{Dorothy McMillan, ‘Constructed out of bewilderment: Stories of Scotland’, in \textit{Peripheral Visions: Images of Nationhood in Contemporary British Fiction}, ed. by Ian A. Bell (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995), pp. 80-99 (p. 85).} In this manoeuvre, which collapses local specificities into national generalities, we can see the pitfalls of the politics of representation at work. It is not enough for Kelman to present one authentic Scottish voice, this comes to be seen as the authentic Scottish voice, thus nullifying the emancipatory potential and scope of \textit{How Late}. McMillan laments that ‘it is a distressing irony that the man who took the quotation marks away from the vernacular may have instead placed them round his whole book.’\footnote{Ibid., p. 85.}

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It would be appealing to apportion blame to publishers and marketing strategies for facilitating and endorsing this conflation. Certainly they have played a role; Andrew Crumey speaks of the strategies that have been used to make Scottish literature ‘a recognisable international brand.’\footnote{Crumey, p. 42.} These include the unique phenomenon in Scottish bookstores of replacing ‘Local Interest’ with a ‘Scottish’
\end{flushright}
section, which is then stocked with fiction. He also identifies the practice of only awarding Scottish literary prizes to Scottish books, both of which ‘reflect… the continuing ambivalence of regional versus national identity’. However, highlighting such marketing strategies does not adequately explain the burden of national representation that has been placed upon Kelman’s work.

The anxiety identified by McMillan, as well as suggesting media misrepresentation, also speaks to the importance of the audience reading Kelman’s fiction: the question of who Sammy is being represented to. While it might seem that the collapsing of Glasgow into Scotland is a misguided misinterpretation of Kelman’s work, perhaps the reasons for this fusion are more prosaic (if no less analytically problematic). Kelman has always stressed the importance of maintaining links to his community who, given their shared cultural framework and linguistic praxis, would logically have no need to put quotation marks around Kelman’s language. However, the further away from Kelman’s Glaswegian constituency the readership grows, the more general and obscure these local specificities must become. To illustrate the generalising effect distance has from the object being represented, it is helpful to refer to an anecdote recounted by Kelman:

If you happen to be a Scotsman in a Scottish pub and you get talking to another Scottish man and you ask where he comes from you don’t expect him to say ‘Scotland’, you expect him to say ‘Glasgow’ or ‘Edinburgh’ or ‘Inverness’. And if you’re a Glasgow woman in a Glasgow pub and you meet another Glasgow woman and you ask where she’s from you expect her to say ‘Partick’, or ‘the Calton’, or ‘Easterhouse’ or whatever. And if you’re a Dennistoun man in a Dennistoun pub and you meet another Dennistoun man and you ask where he comes from you don’t expect him to say ‘Dennistoun’, you expect him to say ‘round the corner’ or ‘Alexandra Parade’ or ‘Onslow Drive’ etc. If we accept the common-sense veracity of this formulation, the reason that Kelman is read by many as a Scottish (rather than Glaswegian) author is simply because the readership is looking at Glasgow from a more distant perspective. The further we stand from something, the larger the spatial category we need to contextualise and

60 Crumey, p. 38.
61 James Kelman, ‘Oppression and Solidarity’ in Some Recent Attacks, pp. 69-77 (pp. 72-73).
understand its location. The generalising representational hazards are an unavoidable by-product of the geographical scale of Kelman’s readership.

Even within *How Late*, there is a moment when this problem is anticipated. It comes towards the end of the text, as Sammy describes his preparations to make his exit from Glasgow:

Know what he felt like? A can of fucking superlager. Aye no danger. He had a drouth, a drouth. Know what that means it means he’s fucking thirsty. Fuck yer coffee and fuck yer tea and fuck yer milk if ye’re fucking lucky enough to fucking have fucking any of the fucking stuff man know what I’m saying. (p. 319)

The translation of the word ‘drouth’ seems to be explicitly directed at a non-Scottish reader, suggesting for the first time that the narrator might be aware that his words are reaching outside of Glasgow. McGlynn argues that this passage emphasises the class, not national, differences between Sammy and the reader. Certainly, the fact that ‘the question of privilege enters into Sammy’s tirade’ highlights that there are class distinctions at work. However, I would contend that even a middle class reader from Scotland would have no need for a gloss on the word ‘drouth’; the word is in such common parlance that even if they would not be likely to use it, they would certainly know what it means. We can safely assume, then, that this outburst is directed at an English readership. It is a peculiar, almost metafictional moment, and acts as an acknowledgement that this narrative will travel and that neither Sammy nor Kelman will have control over what will be made of it (and him) when it does. Once more, Kelman is alluding to the slippery nature of representation, at once desirable and even necessary and yet at the same time wholly compromised.

**Representation and the difficulty of literary self-determination**

Scott Hames has written on several occasions of the pitfalls of the critical tendency to emphasise the ‘representative’ nature of Scottish devolution at the expense of their more expansive political tendencies. He argues that:

[T]he key Scottish novels of the past few decades largely reject the politics of ‘representation’ enshrined in parliamentary democracy, yet they are

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continually presented as the models and cultural guarantors of Scottish devolution understood as the (incomplete) recovery of national agency and identity via representation. But it is equally possible to understand devolution as a highly conservative state process, one that openly figures ‘cultural representation’ as the containment and deferral of democratic empowerment. We should be wary of the limiting and distorting effects—both critically and politically—of reading Scottish literature by the terms of a self-congratulatory circuit of ‘representation’ (by which formally innovative literary novels act as catalysts to a political process held to delimit ‘the political’ in Scottish writing; most often by fixating on the display and recuperation of ‘identity’).^63

His discussion of Kelman’s fiction emphasises the urgent need to decouple *How Late*’s politics from a cultural nationalist model that aligns it too closely with the parliamentary process of devolution. There are specific and important examples in the text that demonstrate Kelman’s scepticism of parliamentary practices, and gesture towards an anticipatory anti-nationalism that rejects this ideological constrainment. The interregnum development in Kelman’s novel is not foreclosed by accepting the tidy transition to devolved power as an acceptable interim step in Scotland’s national development. Rather, *How Late* maintains the subversive and disruptive detachment of Gramsci’s formulation, demanding a more complete renegotiation of the individual subject’s relationship to the state.

I contend that, in Kelman’s fiction, rather than viewing representative devolutionary nationalism as an emancipatory end goal, such processes function as a strategy to contain individual freedom within a disciplinary society. Nationalist parties are necessarily invested in a system of governance that is imbued with the ideological impetus of the broader political structure, one which seeks to curtail individual freedom by allowing its articulation only in very circumscribed and limited terms. This is an important reason why organised nationalist politics will never be an adequate framework through which Kelman’s preferred conception of radical self-determination and cultural independence could be achieved in Scotland. He is abrupt in his dismissal of all kinds of party politics, stating bluntly that ‘I have no faith in any political party, not the SNP, not the SP, the WRP, the SDLP or the RCP, not anybody

^63 Scott Hames, ‘Scottish Literature, Devolution, and the Fetish of Representation’, *The Bottle Imp*, Supplement 1 (March 2014) <http://asls.arts.gla.ac.uk/SWE/TBI/TBISupp/TBISupp1/Hames.pdf> [accessed 29 August 2016]. This argument is also pursued and developed in Hames, ‘On Vernacular Scottishness’ and ‘The New Scottish Renaissance?’.
This isn’t to say that he assumes the intentions of nationalist parties are always malevolent, just that any good intentions are necessarily thwarted when you agree to play by the system’s rules; that any acquiescence to existing systems precludes the possibility of meaningful change.

Those who advocate nationalism through official (representative) channels might helpfully be compared to the shadowy character of the ‘rep’, Ally, in How Late. In the novel, Sammy provides a succinct and telling assessment of his would-be rep and his methods, dismissive but not entirely unkind:

Guys like Ally, they made ye smile, they really did; Sammy had met them for years, inside and outside. Play the game and do them in; that was the motto; get yer whack while the going’s good. Philadelphia lawyers. Fucking eedjits man know what I’m saying, a joke’s a joke. Okay, Sammy wouldnay say he knew better, he just knew from different experiences. These optimistic cunts. (p. 320)

This kind of operative, and this kind of representative nationalism, however well-intentioned it may be, participates in the exactly the kind of suppression that Kelman cannot tolerate. It shuts out the ‘different experiences’ of characters like Sammy, an elision that is incompatible with the democratic self-determination that is at the heart of Kelman’s political and literary project.

Writing in 2012 for NY arts magazine on the subject of Scottish nationalism, Kelman argued that:

People are right to treat nationalism with caution. None more than Scottish people who favor self-determination. Any form of nationalism is dangerous, and should be treated with caution. I cannot accept nationalism and I am not a Scottish Nationalist. But once that is said, I favor a ‘yes or no’ decision on independence and I shall vote ‘yes’ to independence.

Countries should determine their own existence and Scotland is a country. The decision is not managerial. It belongs to the people of Scotland. We are the country. There are no countries on Mars. This is because there are no

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64 Kelman, ‘On the Asylum Bill’, in Some Recent Attacks, pp. 64-68 (p. 65).
people on Mars. How we move ahead here in Scotland is a process that can happen only when the present chains are disassembled, and discarded, when the majority people seize the right, and burden, of self-determination.\footnote{James Kelman, ‘On Self-determination’.
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Kelman’s intention to go to the ballot box in support of independence was also reproduced in his contribution to Scott Hames’ \textit{Unstated: Writers on Scottish Independence}.\footnote{James Kelman, ‘James Kelman’ in \textit{Unstated: Writers on Scottish Independence}, ed. by Scott Hames (Edinburgh: Word Power, 2012), p. 121.} However, much like Sammy in \textit{How Late}, as the referendum approached, he felt the need to ‘retrack’ this statement. As is the case with Sammy, this inconsistency is not a mark of deception or thoughtlessness, but rather an exercise of his unassailable freedom. Kelman is following Sammy’s logic that ‘he had made up his mind then changed it; now he was changing it back. Ye’re allowed that, changing yer mind’ (p. 264). In October 2013, speaking at the Radical Book Fair in Edinburgh, Kelman stated:

\begin{quote}
No, I’m not voting. I’m in solidarity with those who want to change things by voing Yes [to independence]. But I come from the anti-parliamentary socialist tradition. I don’t think you can ask for freedom. You take it. […] it’s like on the shop floor. They want you to ‘go to the ballot’ in a dispute. No. You fucking walk out. (23 Oct 2013).\footnote{Quoted in Hames, ‘Scottish Literature, Devolution, and the Fetish of Representation’.
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\end{quote}

Despite his solidarity with (some) independence voters’ laudable aims, Kelman advocates a more radical strategy. For Kelman, participation in the corrupted and inadequate parliamentary process is always implicitly deferential and is therefore inadequate to the kind of freedom that he valorises. The strategy of \textit{How Late}, with its insistence on the individual agency of Sammy Samuels, seems to offer one way to resist this. Self-determination, indeed nationhood, is impossible without the participation of the masses, without taking full account of all the voices that make up the country. It is in this respect that we might suggest that Kelman assumes the burden of cultural nationalism (or cultural self-determination) in \textit{How Late}. If people like Sammy are not properly represented in the political arena, by articulating the voices of such protagonists in his fiction Kelman is demonstrating their importance in Scottish cultural production.
Kelman has spoken often against the myopic, elitist focus that determines what kind of subjects qualify as individuals that are worthy of discussion in ‘proper’ literature. In his own fiction, he sets himself against such limiting parameters and asserts the validity of characters like Sammy Samuels as subjects in their own right, and not just as objects fixed, immobilised and disenfranchised by stereotype and cliché. There is a certain optimism, even utopianism, to Kelman’s own conceptualisation of the role literature can play in this respect, when he posits:

(W)ithin the process of art more and more human beings start being ‘discovered’ as particulars, witnessed as individuals, specific folk, persons; and within the process of society more and more human beings start making such discoveries themselves, and in the far-off future there won’t be any racism, no sexism, no prejudice, no colonisation, no economic exploitation, and so on and so forth, a process of elimination.

In this formulation, divesting literature of the lazy clichés, of ‘secondhand perception and imagery’, acts as a catalyst to remove those same damaging and reductive filters that stop people being perceived as individuals within society. Certainly, such thinking sounds idealistic when taken to the extremes Kelman posits above, but he qualifies and supports his lofty goals with examples of incremental progress already achieved in the arts.

There is, however, a significant problem that precludes a simple equation of using literature to make visible those who been confined to the margins with a political ideal of self-determination. Just as Sammy’s voice is not available for co-option by cliché, so too it should not be available as a vehicle for literary polemics that recruit him for cultural nationalist narratives that make claims to self-determination. This problem, once again, is founded on the issue of representation. Certainly, Sammy is a much more sympathetic and complete character than the stock role he might play in traditional English literature (‘Glaswegian working class males are drunken wife-beaters’) Nonetheless, he is unavoidably a representation.

For all that Kelman’s art aspires to an ideal of self-determination, the fictional form means that character can never be entirely unmediated: there is no way to abdicate authorial control.

69 Ibid., p. 9.
70 Ibid.
The anxiety around representation is explored within *How Late* most explicitly through the character of Ally. Matt McGuire argues persuasively that Ally functions in the novel as a kind of author-figure, and thus as a means of questioning ‘the role of author as potential agent of subjugation within the act of literary creation’.\(^{71}\) He elaborates:

The Ally/Sammy relationship is also symbolic of the literary author’s role as representative (and ally?) to his working-class subject matter. Ally continually refers to ‘reading’ Sammy’s situation. There is a suggestion that he may perhaps belong more to a literary culture than an oral one. Similar to an author and his subject matter, Ally’s relationship with Sammy is in part a financial one. If their claim is successful, he will take one third of any compensation. The author likewise profits from a convincing portrayal of his working-class subject matter. [T]he classic realist narrator would interrupt, edit and qualify the discourse of characters within the text […] Ally deems to know what aspects of Sammy’s life are relevant and what aren’t; what is worthy of inclusion within the narrative and what isn’t.\(^{72}\)

Throughout, Sammy remains unremittingly sceptical of Ally, and the suspicion that he could be an agent for the authorities is never satisfactorily dispelled. At one point, Sammy does acknowledge that he believes Ally to be who he says he is; ‘[y]e’re a rep, okay, I accept that. I didnay earlier on but I do now. I thought ye were a spook. I’m sorry. I dont think that now’ (p. 231), but when Sammy’s son speaks to Ally on the phone he raises the same doubts as his father; ‘I thought he was polis’ (p. 342). Though Ally might not be directly employed by the state, his methods implicate him in the structures of power that they control. Ally acknowledges the truth of this himself; ‘ye can get too used to the arguments… ye forget about the person, I can be as bad as them’ (p. 311). Thus, even if we are to accept that Ally is being completely honest about his intentions, the representation he offers to Sammy remains deeply problematic.

Indeed, Sammy’s frequent objections to Ally often coalesce around the thorny issue of representation. This is expressed most succinctly when he says ‘[t]here’s a difference between repping somebody and fucking being somebody; know what I’m

\(^{71}\) McGuire, p. 91.
\(^{72}\) Ibid., p. 91-92.
talking about, being somebody? (p. 241). Drawing attention to the distinction between ‘repping’ and ‘being’ is a powerful comment on the limits of literature’s influence; ‘a reminder that “including” the dispossessed in literary fiction does not bear on their actual existence.’ There is an important tension in Kelman’s work between the necessity of representation as a tool to facilitate social progress, and the inherent inadequacy of representation, because it must always fall short of the thing it strives to represent. ‘Repping’ can never replace ‘being’, but nonetheless must ever strive to do justice to its complexities. There is an almost Beckettian element to this self-defeating predicament; ‘Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.’

The dramatisation of the failings of representation (and how quickly it can become synonymous with misrepresentation) in How Late also serves as a rebuke to the political system, and the kind of nationalism that operates within it. Representative parliamentary systems must deal in generalities; it is a concentration of power that necessarily reduces the complexity of that which it represents. Representation, in order to function, must obscure or even erase the individual. As Ally puts it; ‘I dont like fighting cases on an exceptional basis anyway; every case is unique in its own wee way so ye’re better off trying to show it’s the general – I’m no talking about principles by the way. What I’m saying is if ye win with the unexceptional ye’ve a chance of establishing the general, that’s yer goal’ (p. 210). A political system invested in this kind of representation is the antithesis of Kelman’s fastidiously and directly democratic fiction, which strives tirelessly to make visible those individuals that traditional strategies of representation (both political and literary) have systematically pushed out of sight. And yet Ally’s logic haunts the text and its critical reception; Sammy’s voice has been trapped by the logic of cultural nationalism as a representative of the disenfranchised Scottish nation, making a case for the devolutionary project. This makes it all the more important to attend to the strategies in How Late that resist this representational burden, and focus instead on the novel’s attempt to evade entrapment within a system that radically constrains individual freedom.

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73 Scott Hames, ‘Eyeless in Glasgow: James Kelman’s Existential Milton’, Contemporary Literature, 50.3 (2009), 496-527 (p. 524).
Cornered: resisting state control

In order to better understand this aspect of Kelman’s text, I am going to turn to the spaces depicted in *How Late*. I contend that the spatial imaginary of Kelman’s text is characterised by entrapment and enclosure, and corresponding attempts to escape. Sammy is frequently ‘cornered’, whether literally or metaphorically, and spends much of the novel trying to evade this bounded predicament. I want to suggest that this dynamic within the novel offers an opportunity to elucidate the interregnum status of the text. Often, the cornering is linked to or produced by ideological systems that Sammy cannot accept (the tenacious ‘old order’ of the interregnum). However, his attempts to escape from this predicament are frequently thwarted, and even at the end of the novel, when he appears closest to escaping, his onward journey is left un-unnarrated; an ideological alternative posited but yet to be actualised.

It is my contention that an analysis of the role of spaces depicted in Kelman’s novel yields important insights on the political impetus, or mood, of *How Late*. By discussing the spaces that Sammy navigates I will demonstrate the tension between overarching spatial structures that restrict and curtail individual freedom, and the strategies of resistance that Kelman’s novel offers to this. I hope to tease out some of the irresolvable and productive ambiguities and ellipses that colour the text and point to its interregnum status. In this discussion, I hope to demonstrate the inadequacy of a cultural nationalist reading that limits Kelman’s ideological critique to the national context. Rather, I want to suggest that the spaces of *How Late* offer a much more portable and expansive depiction of late twentieth-century ideological struggle. The spaces navigated by Sammy certainly resonate with Soja’s description of the increasing enclosure and hostility of spatial organisation in the modern city. He contends:

Not only are residences becoming increasingly gated, guarded and wrapped in advanced security, surveillance, and alarm systems, so too are many other activities, land uses, and everyday objects in the urban environment, from shopping malls and libraries to razor-wire protected refuse bins and spiked park benches to stave off incursions of the homeless and hungry. Micro technologies of social and spatial control infest everyday life and pile up to
produce a tightly meshed and prisonlike geography punctuated by protective enclosures and overseen by ubiquitous watchful eyes.\textsuperscript{75}

In much the way that Soja describes, \textit{How Late} is from the very outset a text preoccupied with hostile spatial limitations and entrapment. As we follow Sammy’s journey after he wakes from the drunken haze of his lost day, the text constantly underlines the spatial barriers he encounters. In so doing, \textit{How Late} interrogates the way such limitations are constructed and maintained, the effects they have on individual consciousness, and demonstrates an almost constant desire to enact corresponding spatial strategies of resistance. All of this is signalled from the opening section:

Ye wake up in a corner and stay there hoping yer body will disappear, the thoughts smothering ye; these thoughts; but ye want to remember and face up to things, just something keeps ye from doing it, why can ye no do it; the words filling yer head: then the other words; there’s something wrong; there’s something far far wrong; ye’re no a good man, ye’re just no a good man. Edging back into awareness of where ye are: here, slumped in this corner, with these thoughts filling ye. And oh christ his back was sore; stiff, and the head pounding. He shivered and hunched up his shoulders, shut his eyes, rubbed into the corners with his fingertips; seeing all kinds of spots and lights. Where in the name of fuck...

He was here, he was leaning against auld rusty palings, with pointed spikes, some missing or broke off. And he looked again and saw it was a wee bed of grassy weeds, that was what he was sitting on. (p. 2)

This opening passage serves as a useful exposition of the spatial thematics that will dominate the novel in its entirety. The first point of significance is that Kelman’s protagonist wakes up ‘in a corner’, a phrasing that will be abundantly repeated throughout the text. Later in the novel, Sammy complains to his would-be representative, Ally, ‘I just dont like being cornered; cunts aye seem to be cornering me, know what I mean, it wears ye down’ (p. 242). So often has Sammy found himself in this particular spatial predicament that it has become part of his reputation, his discursive identity: he is ‘a mean man in a corner’.\textsuperscript{76} This slippage between outward spatial circumstances and individual subjectivity is an important one; the


\textsuperscript{76} Soja, \textit{Seeking Spatial Justice}, p. 167.
outward, physical context in which Sammy Samuels finds himself is inseparable from the construction of his interior world. Mary McGlynn stresses the importance of the relationship of space to subjectivity in her discussion of the opening section, arguing that the ‘explicitly physical placement of the body […] anticipates the interaction of self and environment throughout the novel’. Sammy is located, pinpointed, a product of his environment and inseparable from it. Space here is certainly not the blank canvas onto which experience is projected through time, but plays a constituent role in Sammy’s subjectivity and sense of self.

The second important aspect of the opening passage to note is that the corner in which Sammy wakes is a hostile space; one that restricts and confines his movement and, more significantly, his avenues of escape. In Laurence Nicoll’s analysis of this passage, he contends that ‘these palings and spikes suggest encirclement, entrapment, the bars of a prison.’ Once again though, the constriction of physical space has a less tangible corollary. The railings are not the only malevolent barrier Sammy faces: his own thoughts are smothering him, and some unknowable aspect of his own subconscious is preventing him from accessing the memories he strives to recollect. Sammy is hemmed in by ‘more than simply a physical constraint’. It is also significant that Nicoll discerns something specifically prison-like in the opening tableau. Indeed, it is my contention that the prison, in both its literal form and as a metaphorical trope, is one of the most significant spaces within the novel. Of course, actual prisons do feature heavily in Sammy’s narrative, but the oblique evocation of prison bars at the opening gestures towards a more overarching, Foucauldian conception of the role played by penal institutions.

In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* Foucault charts the cultural shifts that led to massive changes in the ‘economy of punishment’ during the modern age. Within a very short space of time, the western world moved from a chaotic and extremely violent system of punishment based on public spectacle, torture and executions to a highly organised and regulated penal system of discipline and surveillance, wherein, as the subtitle suggests, prisons serve as the ‘penalty par

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79 Ibid.
The disciplinary system that Foucault describes exercises its power through a specific kind of spatial organisation. In an ideal disciplinary society, space is regimentally divided, partitioned and hierarchised in order to govern individuals more efficiently. In Foucault’s analysis, such a disciplinary space finds its ideal expression in the architectural structure of Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon.

The panopticon is a circular structure, with a central tower around which the inmates are situated. From this tower, it is possible to observe the entirety of the perimeter. Each of the inmates is separated from the others, enclosed in their own individual cell. This layout precludes the possibility of organised resistance to the disciplinary regime by keeping prisoners isolated, unable to make connections with their peers because of the constant possibility that they are being observed. Foucault describes it thus:

Each individual, in his place, is securely confined to a cell from which he is seen from the front by the supervisor, but the side walls prevent him from coming into contact with his companions. He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication. The arrangement of his room, opposite the central tower, imposes on him an axial visibility; but the divisions of the ring, those separated cells, imply a lateral invisibility. And this invisibility is a guarantee of order. If the inmates are convicts, there is no danger of a plot, an attempt at collective escape, the planning of new crimes for the future, bad reciprocal influences; if they are patients, there is no danger of contagion; if they are madmen there is no risk of their committing violence upon one another; if they are schoolchildren, there is no copying, no noise, no chatter, no waste of time; if they are workers, there are no disorders, no theft, no coalitions, none of those distractions that slow down the rate of work, make it less perfect or cause accidents. The crowd, a compact mass, a locus of multiple exchanges, individualities merging together, a collective effect, is abolished and replaced by a collection of separated individualities. From the point of view of the guardian, it is replaced by a multiplicity that can be numbered and supervised; from the point of view of the inmates, by a sequestered and observed solitude.  

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81 Foucault, p. 231.
82 Foucault, pp. 200-201.
In this description, it is clear that the spatial organisation of the panopticon operates in tandem with, indeed is activated by, the possibility of observation; the existence of a visual vantage point is key to its effective functioning. The importance of this visual aspect is stressed in the original French title of Foucault's work, *Surveiller et Punir*, but was unavoidably lost in translation due to the lack of a directly corresponding English word for 'surveiller' (which suggests simultaneously observation, monitoring, and supervising rather than simply 'surveillance'). When this is considered, the Foucauldian elements of *How Late*'s opening is enhanced with the addition of uneven observation to the scene. Moments after he has awoken, Sammy finds that he is the object of observation for a group of people:

> He shook his head and glanced up the way: people – there was people there; eyes looking. These eyes looking. Terrible brightness and he had to shield his own cause of it, like they were godly figures and the light coming from them was godly or something but it must just have been the sun high behind them shining down ower their shoulders. (p. 2)

The group gradually come into focus, with Sammy first assuming them to be tourists, before realising that they are in fact 'sodjers' (police). However, in the brief moment where he first apprehends that he is the object of their inspection he perceives them simply as 'these eyes looking'; unspecific, impersonal, and above all incredibly powerful. The role of surveillance is key from the very beginning of the novel. Sammy is always aware that he might be being watched by sinister, controlling eyes that seek to regulate and control his behaviour. In fact, it could be argued that the whole novel charts his attempt to escape this gaze, to go unseen rather than have his experience filtered through distorting eyes. This gaze is not unique to the state law enforcers within the novel; it also includes the reader. Both represent world-views alien to Sammy's own that hold the possibility of distorting or misappropriating Sammy's story, of perceiving him in terms that are not his own. Scott suggests that the last words of the novel chart Sammy's successful evasion of this omnipresent surveillance, as he vanishes "out of sight", at last out of the prying eyes of the reader, who at times is made to stand in for the eyes of the ubiquitous system which Sammy is helplessly fleeing: the shadowy 'powers that be' who desire and need to know all, and the traditional omniscient narrator who accedes to these demands.\(^{83}\) This escape is important, given the pervasiveness of surveillance within the novel.

\(^{83}\) Scott, p. 96.
From the moment the novel begins, Sammy is enclosed within a spatial structure that recalls Foucault’s panopticon.

**Carceral and domestic spaces**

I posit that, in *How Late*, Kelman takes pains to emphasise the importance of prison (in the disciplinary, panoptic sense) as a structuring societal framework in his vision of late twentieth-century Glasgow. He has spoken at length about the significance of prisons to contemporary Scotland outside his fiction, and stressed the urgency of thinking more critically about the penal system ‘given that Scotland [at the time of writing] has the highest proportion of young people locked up behind bars than anywhere else in Western Europe’. He related this directly to questions of nation, asking ‘what does it tell us about Scotland itself, about what sort of society we exist in?’ In fact, at times Kelman comes remarkably close to suggesting a Foucauldian interpretation of the ideological machinations and far-reaching ramifications of the carceral system when he muses:

> Is it really true, for instance, that the penal service operates on our behalf, the public-at-large, the people? Perhaps it operates for the authorities themselves. Or perhaps it operates not on behalf of those who govern the country, but on behalf of those who remain in permanent authority, a body we might call the state – I’m speaking now about the people in permanent control. In this group we might include all sorts of civil servants in all the many institutions there are in this country, including law and order and the legal system, the military, the immigration office, the intelligence agencies, the Department of Social Security and so on, institutions which make up the infrastructural framework of society.

Kelman echoes Foucault here when he suggests that the significance of prisons spills out beyond the immediate effect on the inmates behind bars. Prisons are architectural agents that act to support an ideology that encompasses all manner of other systems and bureaucracies that regiment society more broadly. Foucault’s study of the panopticon begins, as the subtitle of the volume suggests, with its application within the carceral system: as a prison. However, he suggests that

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85 Ibid.
86 Ibid., p. 54.
organising space in a panoptic pattern might equally prove efficacious in a plethora of other settings, such as (but not limited to) schools, factories and asylums. At the end of the chapter, Foucault makes explicit that the real utility of the panopticon is that it provides an ideal model of the disciplinary principles that permeate every aspect of society. He concludes that:

The practice of placing individuals under ‘observation’ is a natural extension of a justice imbued with disciplinary methods and examination procedures. Is it surprising that the cellular prison, with its regular chronologies, forced labour, its authorities of surveillance and registration, its experts in normality, who continue and multiply the functions of the judge, should have become the modern instrument of penalty? Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?87

Chillingly, in Foucault’s analysis, it becomes clear that prisons absolutely should not be viewed as discrete institutions whose function is to separate criminals from society at large. Quite the opposite. The organisation and panoptic ideology of the prison are more accurately assessed as a distillation of the organising principles of a disciplinary society at large. The mechanisms of control perfected in the architectural framework of the panopticon seep insidiously into all facets of modern life; the whole world becomes prison-like.

This omnipresence of the ideology of the prison, and its relevance to spaces beyond the walls of the jail, is explored throughout How Late. As well as a few individual locations (the doctor’s surgery and two pubs), the novel charts Sammy Samuels’ movement through three main, recurring spaces; the flat he shares with his absent girlfriend Helen, the streets of Glasgow and the cell in which he is held by the police (despite the fact that he is never formally arrested or charged). Of these, the latter presents the most obvious analogue to a prison proper, but I contend that all of the spaces are coloured by the strategies of panopticism identified by Foucault.

Actual prison looms large over the narrative. Sammy has spent a significant proportion of his adult life in the ‘poky’, the penal system having exacted its disciplinary punishment by incarcerating him for ‘eleven years out of his life’ (p. 134). However, Sammy is deeply aware that his imprisonment did not stop when he was

87 Foucault, pp. 227-228.
no longer incarcerated. Throughout the novel there are abundant, repeated references to enclosure, suffocation and smothering. Sammy is painfully alert to the pressures being exerted upon him by the bureaucracies he must navigate in his day-to-day life. He speaks about the stifling, paralysing effect of the systemic regulations he encounters:

It's just how they suffocate ye; all their fucking protocols and procedures, all designed to stop ye breathing, to grind ye to a halt; ye've no to wander and ye've no to breathe; ye’ve no to open yer mouth; ye’re to keep in line and don’t move a muscle: just fucking stand there till ye’re telt different. (p. 321)

From the police cell to the home, to the doctor’s office, Sammy is hemmed in, trapped by protocol that is opaque to him, though its disciplinary intent certainly is not. Sammy’s narration is replete with blistering critiques of the structures of power that control and curtail his freedom to move, and he constantly ‘battles’ to keep moving forwards in spite of the obstacles put in his way. Certainly, you can see how these protestations could be recruited for a cultural nationalist narrative; reading Sammy’s position as analogous to a nation denied autonomy and self-determination. However, read in this way we must read Ally (as the intermediary between the hostile state and Sammy) as analogous to the devolutionary nationalist movement. Though less overtly malevolent, Ally still makes Sammy feel ‘cornered’ (p. 242) and Kelman’s protagonist ultimately seeks to escape both Ally and the police who are searching for him. He is not looking for representation as a way out of the corner, but rather new horizons entirely. These new horizons shift and change, sometimes in the same breath (‘Seaside, Texas, London,’ [p. 255]) but it is clear that what Sammy craves is not the slight amelioration of the status quo offered by Ally but a radical renegotiation of his relationship to the state as he fantasises about ‘getting anonymous’ (p. 255) or walking along the sand in a seaside idyll where he would be ‘so safe ye could leave the stick at the side of the promenade steps’ (p. 256). In these figurations, the state is no longer the surveilling threat that Sammy has always experienced, and he is able to assert his own autonomy free of its panoptic glare.

Sammy’s eventual escape is hard won, given the pervasiveness of the panoptic spaces that structure his world. The surveillance and restriction of prison and panopticon follow Sammy even into his domestic environment, and so it is

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88 Again, this is another key part of Sammy’s identity; ‘a battler man that was what he was’, Kelman, How Late, p. 47.
significant that his departure is signalled by posting the keys back through his letterbox, ensuring it is impossible for him to return. This is vitally important because the home is such an emotionally charged space, somehow sacrosanct, which is often held up as a locus that is (or at least, should be) beyond the failings and problems that might characterise the public arena. John Rennie Stuart asserts that:

Home is often idealized. What isn’t? But it is idealized more often than other places. It is almost as if it has become one of the places where the songs of innocence are sung. Outside, the songs of experience are heard. No matter that home is a source of work, abuse, and exploitation as well as rest, love and nourishment. In the early seventeenth century John Fletcher wrote, “Charity and beating begins at home.” Domestic abuse and child abuse are nasty in themselves, but public outrage is often heightened by the fact that they take place in the home. It is like a murder in the cathedral; a sacred place defiled. It is no accident, I feel, that in recent years the home has been seen as a sanctuary just at a time when domestic tensions are increasing. We are losing our sense of the fairness of the polity but hanging on to the notion of a domestic harmony. The image of a serene home life haunts our collective and individual imaginations. ¹⁹

This assessment of the significance of the home is astute, but does not mention the way that domestic imagery interacts quite directly with national(ist) discourse. The home has always been a particularly relevant spatial category for discussion of nation and nationalism. The semantic field of domesticity is often invoked when addressing issues of nation; native countries are referred to as homelands, nations seeking to gain independence from colonial powers fight for home rule, ²⁰ and the government agency responsible for border control and immigration in Britain is the Home Office. The use of such rhetoric means that there is an important psychic connection between health of the home and the health of the nation. Because of this, investigating the way that How Late subverts prevailing perceptions of the space of the home is certainly of national significance.

Kelman’s novel resolutely refuses to depict the home as a place of safety or sanctuary. In what is perhaps the most influential critical examination of domestic

⁰ A notable example being, of course, the Irish Home Rule movement.
space, Gaston Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space* (1958), the home is examined as a perfect example of ‘felicitous space’, or ‘the space we love’.

The house assumes such importance for him because ‘our house is our corner of the world.’

He asserts that ‘without it, man would be a dispersed being. It maintains him through the storms of the heavens and through those of life. It is body and soul. It is the human being’s first world. Before he is “cast into the world,” as claimed by certain hasty metaphysics, man is laid in the cradle of the house.’ Bachelard identifies the home as a nurturing environment that provides much-needed shelter. Home, for Bachelard, is a place of safety. In *How Late*, what we see is quite the inverse. The depiction of Sammy’s home demonstrates the strategies of marginalisation that operate on a state and national level. That is to say, the home as Bachlardian sanctuary is never available to Sammy. In part, this is because the domestic realm cannot be separated from the ideological entrapment and observation that he is subject to elsewhere throughout the rest of the narrative. The implication of the home in panoptic structures of power is most evident when the police infiltrate the flat to arrest Sammy. This encounter demonstrates the all-pervasive power of the state, showing that it is able to assert its authority over Sammy even when he is firmly located within the private realm. Sammy is lying in the bath, and for a fleeting moment this allows him to find some respite from his situation:

[S]inking down under the water, sliding along till his feet hit the end of the tub. Safe at last. He lay there all warm and comfy, the world gone, all the trials and tribulations, out the fucking window, just him existing in the middle of a massive big ocean, a wee toty island, just lying there. (p. 153)

However, Sammy cannot sustain this feeling of security for long. His next musing is much darker and more paranoid. The relaxation he has been enjoying becomes dangerous and debilitating: ‘the only problem being how ye’re so vulnerable, just so relaxed, the ideal time for some cunt to reach ye - how easy it was, the ideal time, the ideal place, and he didnay have one weapon to hand; not one’ (p. 153). The very fact that the bath, and the home, act as havens of respite is what makes them the ideal places for an enemy to attack. In this equation, the perception of safety becomes synonymous with weakness. The tension continues to

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92 Ibid., p. 4.
93 Ibid., p. 7.
build, occluding all positive elements of bathing, until Sammy is finally pushed to abandon his soak and investigate his gut feeling:

Just that sudden feeling man right in the gut, right in the fucking pit. He raised his head to listen. Then gripped the sides of the bath and pulled himself up out the water. It took a minute for the water noises to die down. Still that buzzing in his ear too it interfered with things, if ye were trying to concentrate; plus the radio was on too loud – he had left the living-room and bathroom doors open so he could hear it uninterrupted and that fucking outside door man he hadnay fucking snibbed it for fuck sake he hadnay even fucking snibbed it! imagine no even snibbing the fucking thing! fucking idiot man, fuck sake, crazy fucking
Okay. (p. 156)

Moments later, it becomes clear that this is not simply delusional paranoia, and that the police are indeed inside the flat. As he realises that he is not alone, Sammy moves from fear (‘that sudden feeling… right in the gut’) to self-reproach (‘fucking idiot man’), to acceptance (‘okay’). This sequence, and its rapidity, might be viewed as a succinct example of the process by which the tenets of disciplinary society are internalised. Sammy’s train of thought suggests that the police were able to gain such easy entry to the flat because he had failed to securely enclose himself – all the doors were open, or at least not properly locked. This is not to assume that the police would have been unable to get into Sammy’s home had he remembered to snib the door. Rather, what this detail demonstrates is that, to Sammy’s mind, the safety of the home is contingent upon enclosure: to fulfil its function as sanctuary, a home must be made to resemble a jail.

This is not the only way in which How Late refuses to conform to the ideal of the home as depicted by Bachelard – and idealised in nationalist discourse. The oneiric house depicted in The Poetics of Space emphasises the verticality of the structure; the house is ‘space that is polarized by the cellar and the attic.’ This depth and the different functions of the various floors within the house create a ‘polarized space [that] can serve to illustrate very fine psychological nuances.’ These psychological nuances depend not on the house as a universal conceptual framework, but on a specific, located style of housing. Moran identifies this house as

94 Bachelard, p. 18.
95 Ibid.

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'a particular kind of Euro-American settlement, made of brick or stone, with a rectangular structure which allows it to be divided into separate rooms connected by stairs and hallways. Bachelard suggests that the layering and subdivisions of this kind of house allow its collective unconscious to intersect with private languages and personal affinities. In its separate floors, secret rooms and secluded alcoves, memories can be clearly differentiated and classified.\(^{96}\) Despite Bachelard's claims to cultural universality, Moran infers from this that Bachelard's idealised depiction of domestic space is firmly anchored in a nostalgic evocation of the rural Champagne of his childhood. Such an experience of the house is not available to urban inhabitants of more modern architectural organisations of domestic space. Bachelard's depiction of the tower blocks in Paris demonstrates the necessary changes that modernist architectural changes have wrought upon the possibilities available in the imaginative life of their inhabitants. He laments that:

In Paris, there are no houses, and the inhabitants of the big city live in superimposed boxes [...]. The number of the street and the floor give the location of our “conventional hole,” but our abode has neither space around it nor verticality inside it. They have no roots and, what is quite unthinkable for a dreamer of houses, sky-scrappers have no cellars. From the street to the roof, the rooms pile up one on top of the other, while the tent of a horizonless sky encloses the entire city.\(^ {97}\)

This slightly threatening, impersonal slice of a ‘superimposed box’ bears a much closer resemblance to Sammy’s dwelling in a Glaswegian tenement than does Bachelard’s celebrated ‘felicitous space’.

Indeed, when Sammy first describes the block of flats it is in wholly negative terms:

The fucking wind blowing in from the corridor as usual. That was the trouble with this place ye were aye faced by the elements. Sometimes it made ye hear things. It did. If the wind was up then it made things creak and sometimes at night if ye were coming home ye thought ye heard things, it could even get a bit scary, there

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\(^{96}\) Joe Moran, ‘House, Habit and Memory’ in *Our House: The Representation of Domestic Space in Modern Culture*, ed. by Gerry Smyth and Jo Croft (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 27-42 (p. 29).

\(^{97}\) Bachelard, p. 26-7.
was a lot of shadows; and even just now, even though ye couldnay see shadows and stuff like that, it was still a bit funny, like there was somebody hanging about watching him, just dodging about out his footsteps, something like that man stupid, ye just ignored it, yer imaginings; that was what it was. (p. 58)

Mary McGlynn argues that the building is ‘alienating – not only can Sammy hear the comings and goings of nearby neighbors, but the boundary between outdoors and indoors seems permeable, both features depriving tenants of privacy but failing to create community.’\(^9^8\) This latter point is corroborated by the fact that, when Sammy needs to borrow a saw, he must introduce himself to his neighbour Boab for the first time. Even after Boab proves to be helpful, Sammy remains suspicious and decides against placing further trust in him. This suspicion, and the isolation it breeds, is directly linked to where they live. Sammy muses ‘maybe [Boab] could be trusted, but it wasnay him ye were worried about, no necessarily. Word travels. This wasnay the best of places. People’s doors were aye getting tanned. A lot of dope on the go’ (p. 80). The tenement block is shown to be a frightening ghetto, rife with crime and violence. Crucially, this perspective is coming from a character living inside that ghetto, rather than as a homogenising judgement from without. *How Late* demonstrates that, by constructing these suburban tenement blocks, urban planning has pushed a whole plethora of people to the peripheries of the city, lumping them together but without creating any meaningful connection. From this compromised and threatening location, Sammy cannot but be further disenfranchised by his home environment. That Kelman writes from this location challenges this disenfranchisement; as McGlynn puts it, ‘Kelman’s move to write within the consciousness, voice, and locale of Glasgow’s periphery is designed not so much to convey alienation to middle-class readers as to combat that alienation.’\(^9^9\) She argues that this is because it is class, and not nation, that defines Sammy’s experience of this peripheralised location. The kind of home depicted in Kelman’s fiction does not lend itself to an idealised sense of national belonging. Rather, it gestures towards a solidarity with the disenfranchised working class more globally. The novel fractures and contests the ‘deep, horizontal comradeship\(^1^0^0\) that Benedict Anderson has argued is key to understanding national sentiment, replacing it with the suspicion and isolation of the tenement block. In this way, Sammy’s cornered location, and his insistence on its validity and specificity, acts as a site of resistance to homogenising

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\(^9^8\) McGlynn, *Narratives of Class*, p. 77
\(^9^9\) Ibid., p. 58.
\(^1^0^0\) Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 7.
narratives in its insistence on Sammy’s own self-determination and individual experience.

**Wandering the city blind**

When he is not locked up in police custody or catching what respite he can at Helen’s flat, the novel shows Sammy navigating his way through the streets of Glasgow. *How Late* insists throughout on the urbanity of its location. References to specific places are not as frequent as in other novels firmly anchored to specific cities (such as *Mrs Dalloway* or *Ulysses*), rather, the novel evokes the urban environment more obliquely. The faceless tenement block in which he lives is captured in brief phrases such as ‘concrete square’ (p. 315). A hazy but nonetheless striking picture of Glasgow is sketched as Sammy narrates the obstacles he faces to move through the city. The perilous, impersonal bustle of Glasgow streets is conjured in the depiction of Sammy’s first sightless journey through the busy city:

> But how many crossings to the main road? How many wee streets before the big one! It was laughable, no knowing. There were all these things ye think ye’ve committed to memory but have ye! have ye fuck. He needed to ask somebody but how the hell do ye know somebody’s coming when ye cannay see them and there’s a lot of noise about, traffic and fucking the wind man, fuck sake that fucking wind, hell of a breezy. (p. 36)

Even the wind participates in the characterisation of the urban environment as simultaneously known and newly disorienting, a technique that recurs several times throughout the novel. Unable to visualise his surroundings, Sammy nonetheless feels anchored (if not comforted) by the weather; ‘the wind felt familiar. It was a Scottish wind. Scottish winds fuck ye. They do in yer ears’ (pp. 252-253). Here, as with the newly defamiliarised streets, there is a tension and ambiguity between comfort and confusion of the Glaswegian environment. Once again, the text simultaneously insists upon its rootedness while precluding any romanticisation of national belonging. In fact, Sammy muses that; ‘when ye come to think about it he didnay really like Scotland. It was his country, okay, but that didnay mean ye had to like it’

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(p. 256). Sammy describes a resigned affinity with the nation without affection that disrupts any attempt to recruit the text as a document of devolutionary cultural nationalism.

A similar disruption can be discerned in Sammy’s subversive navigation of the streets Glasgow. Sammy’s movement through the city offers an opportunity to investigate How Late alongside de Certeau’s theorisation of walking in the city as a subversive, tactical act of resistance to the spatial controls enacted under disciplinary society. In some ways, de Certeau’s model acts as an adjunct and corollary to Foucault’s theorisation of the panoptic, surveilling organisation of space. He posits that individual, unsanctioned and tactical use of space can open up powerful avenues of resistance to panoptic structures, elucidating ways of operating that expose the fault lines left unexplored in Foucault’s endlessly self-perpetuating model.

Written five years after Foucault’s Discipline and Punish, de Certeau’s The Practice of Everyday Life seeks to redress an important omission in Foucault’s theory (and in social science more generally); that of the active role and agency of the subject. De Certeau argues that because of a critical tendency to fixate on the structures and mechanisms by which power operates, the subject has been reduced to a passive state (we can think here of Foucault’s ‘docile bodies’).¹⁰² De Certeau seeks to redress this balance by focusing on the ways in which the subject (or ‘user’, to follow de Certeau’s terminology) might operate in such a way as to subvert the mechanisms of power. He phrases it thus:

This essay is part of a continuing investigation of the ways in which users – commonly assumed to be passive and guided by established rules – operate. The point is not so much to discuss this elusive yet fundamental subject as to make such a discussion possible; that is, by means of inquiries and hypotheses, to indicate pathways for further research. This goal will be achieved if everyday practices, ‘ways of operating’ or doing things, no longer appear as merely the obscure background of social activity, and if a body of theoretical questions, methods, categories, and perspectives, by penetrating this obscurity, make it possible to articulate them.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Foucault, pp. 135-169.
De Certeau argues that such a project is all the more necessary if we are to accept (as we have thus far) Foucault’s assessment of the power and scope of disciplinary mechanisms:

[If] it is true that the grid of “discipline” is everywhere becoming clearer and more extensive, it is all the more urgent to discover how an entire society resists being reduced to it, what popular procedures [...] manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them, and finally, what “ways of operating” form the counterpart, on the consumer’s [...] side, of the mute processes that organize the establishment of socioeconomic order.\(^{104}\)

In de Certeau’s model, one locus for resistance is the modern city. He begins the chapter ‘Walking in the City’ with a panoptic spectacle of Manhattan viewed from on high, from the World Trade Center. From here, one no longer participates in the city, the vantage point ‘transfigures him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was “possessed” into a text that lies before one’s eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god.’\(^{105}\) The bird’s-eye view of the authoritative, panoptic gaze renders the city legible. However, seductive as this gaze might be, it is not all-powerful, for the masses down below, the pedestrians walking the city, are the people responsible for the creation of the city as text. ‘The ordinary practitioners of the city live “down below,” below the thresholds at which visibility begins. They walk – an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, Wandersmänner, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban “text” they write without being able to read it.’\(^{106}\) Pedestrians, ‘users’ of the city, hold the possibility of navigating space in a subversive way, weaving their own paths, utilising and creating a city that refuses to be contained by the regimented view from on high. Pedestrians cut corners, take short cuts, wander; they do not subscribe to the ideal use of space that panoptic power would endeavour to enforce.

Mitch Miller and Johnny Rodger have noted the relevance of de Certeau’s thought to Kelman’s political and aesthetic ideals; arguing that de Certeau’s ‘characterisation of everyday ‘users’ as non-passive producers of culture is strikingly

\(^{104}\) De Certeau, p. xiv.
\(^{105}\) Ibid., p. 92.
\(^{106}\) Ibid.
similar to Kelman’s views on the same topic.”*107  Certainly, on a very banal level, Sammy is a man who walks, a ‘user’ who actively encounters urban spaces on foot rather than peering down at the city in its totality from above. In the novel, we are told; ‘Sammy had walked all ower the place, one end of Glasgow to the other, one end of London to the other’ (p. 71). To borrow the linguistic analogy that runs through de Certeau’s work; Sammy’s ‘bod[y] follows the thicks and thins of an urban “text” [he writes] without being able to read it.*108  Of course, this analogy, rather than simply equating the production of space with the production of text, is literalised in a crucial way within Sammy’s narrative because he is blind. I contend that this blindness could be viewed as a ‘morbid symptom’ in Gramscian terms. It signals a profound change in Sammy’s experience of space, and his access to the city; his beating at the hands of the police has profoundly changed his relationship to the ideological processes of hegemonic power. From when he wakes up in the cell after being beaten by the police, all of his experiences are coloured by the fact that he has lost his sight. Given that vision and observation are of crucial importance to the way that power operates in Foucault’s model, the fact that Sammy cannot see must necessarily have an impact upon the efficacy of these ideological strategies. Whether Sammy’s blindness amplifies the power of the panopticon or renders him more able to resist is, as is so often the case in *How Late*, never completely resolved. Once again, Gramsci’s formulation, with its emphasis on irresolution, proves an instructive matrix through which to examine Kelman’s novel.

Sammy’s blinding is so significant because, in a disciplinary society, visual acts are wielded as powerful weapons of control. Within the schema of the panopticon, the possibility of constantly being watched is so powerful that constant observation actually becomes unnecessary. The very threat of being observed is enough to ensure obedience. The power of the potential gaze suffuses the entire structure, and thereby removes the necessity of perpetual observation. Foucault reaches the conclusion that:

The major effect of the panopticon [is] to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. […] [T]his architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it;

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108 De Certeau, p. 93.
in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers.\footnote{Foucault, p. 201.}

The atomisation, enclosure and exposure that characterise panoptic space function so seamlessly that the burden of discipline is not imposed by a sovereign power, but actually assumed and internalised by those who are subject to it. This procedure is managed on visual terms; the constant threat of surveillance is what ensures the uninterrupted functioning of the disciplinary state.

Immediately after Sammy wakes to discover his blindness, his thoughts turn to a memory of his school years, and the way that vision operated even at that young age as an implement of power:

With one weird wee image to finish it all off: if this was permanent he wouldnay be able to see himself ever again. Christ that was wild. And he wouldnay see cunts looking at him. Wild right enough. What did it matter but what did it matter; cunts looking at ye. Who gives a fuck. Just sometimes they bore their way in, some of them do anyway; they seem able to give ye a look that’s more than a look: it’s like when ye’re a wean at school and there’s this auld woman teacher who takes it serious even when you and the wee muckers are having a laugh and cracking jokes behind her back and suddenly she looks straight at ye and ye can tell she knows the score, she knows it’s happening. Exactly. And it’s only you. The rest dont notice. You see her and she sees you. Naybody else. Probably it’s their turn next week. The now it’s you she’s copped. You. The jokes dont sound funny any longer. The auld bastard, she’s fucked ye man. With one look. That’s how easy you are. And ye see the truth then about yerself. Ye see how ye’re fixed forever. Stupid wee fucking arsehole. Laughing with the rest because ye’re feart not to, feart to stand out from the crowd ye’re just a wee fucking coward, trying to take the piss out an auld woman man pathetic, fucking pathetic. (p. 12)

In the moment his eyes meet the teacher, Sammy is ‘fixed forever’. The teacher’s gaze functions in a remarkably similar manner to that of the guard in the tower of Foucault’s panopticon. The act of observation individualises the object of the gaze (‘it’s only you’), policing undesirable behaviour (‘the jokes don’t sound funny any
longer’) and producing not just momentary shame but a long-lasting internalisation with a profound effect on how the subject perceives themselves (‘ye see the truth then about yerself’). Crucially, though, this visual episode is reciprocal. The disciplinary moment is created in the instant Sammy’s eyes meet his teacher’s, and he sees himself being seen. What effect, then, does blindness have on such encounters?

In the aftermath of his violent encounter with the police, Sammy is no longer able to participate in the economy of vision in the same way; he can’t even see himself, let alone see himself be seen. In one way, this might be viewed as a kind of liberation from the shackles of discipline. De Certeau treats blindness in this way when he discusses tactics of users to subvert mechanisms of power. In ‘Walking in the City’, users operate in opposition to the legibility of the planned, regimented, panoptic space of city planners, and, through their everyday practices, produce an ‘opaque and blind’ mobility characteristic of the bustling city.\[110\] Miller and Rodger utilise Kövesi’s analysis of How Late to align Sammy directly with this de Certeaudian subject:

Sammy has a recurrent technique of responding to his environment that strongly resembles de Certeau’s notion of the consumer as an active, independent user: ‘He assesses his physical situation: his pains, his damage, then through simile, and then memory, he tries to express, ostensibly to himself, a conception of what he is experiencing’ [Kövesi 140]. Bereft of visual cues and instructions on how to interpret where he is and what is happening, Sammy must draw his conclusions based on the touch, taste and feel of what is around him, more directly and intimately than before – as Kovesi notes of the text: ‘the day-to-day stuff, the minute-to-minute points of order. The actual living’. [In so doing, Sammy constructs] a Glasgow based on what his consumption of the material, concrete, literally ‘in your face’ city can tell him.\[111\]

Sammy is no longer beholden to the Glasgow of urban planners. He is self-reliant (if incredibly vulnerable), constructing a city based entirely of his own experience. Thus, while I have described the blinding as a Grasmscian ‘morbid’ symptom, perhaps there is embedded within its morbidity a kind of liberation. Though Sammy can no

\[110\] De Certeau, p. 93.
longer see, his blindness forces him to engage with the world differently, and offers new ways of knowing his environs. As Kövesi argues:

Sammy’s blindness necessitates a heightened and newly unfamiliar, envisioned version of the city space, negotiation through which requires the continuous activation of memories at every tentative step: the articulation of reference points, the forging of multiple links to build scaffolding and ladders between what was seen with eyes before, and what is touched and heard now.¹¹²

Upon first discovering his sightloss, Sammy himself attempts to frame his blinding in these terms; ebulliently describing it as a new beginning:

A fucking new beginning, that was what it was! He got out of bed and onto his feet and there was hardly a stumble. The auld life was definitely ower now man it was finished, fucking finished. (p. 11)

This perspective is appealing in its optimism, but of course the realities of Sammy’s situation soon start to make themselves felt, and his enthusiasm proves difficult to maintain. While Sammy’s initial reaction suggests a clean break from his former experience, later in the novel he imagines another situation (not too dissimilar to the schoolroom anecdote) that demonstrates how his blindness is a subtle shift in the power of surveillance rather than a complete renunciation of it. He describes a scene in a pub:

[Y]e can imagine it, if okay ye’re blind, ye’re blind and ye’re sitting there, just minding yer own business, relaxed, ye’re enjoying a quiet pint. But cause ye’re blind ye dont know it but every cunt’s staring at ye, staring right into ye, like one of these terrible wee nightmare movies, the Twilight Zone or something. The only good thing is ye cannay see. That’s the only good thing about it. Ye dont know they’re doing it. (pp. 274–5)

Here, Sammy’s inability to see has no bearing on the actions of the observers; their gaze is uninterrupted, and the only small mercy granted by the blindness is one of ignorance. There is a change, certainly, but it is piecemeal and partial; less a clean

¹¹² Kövesi, p. 145.
break from the old ideological processes than a limited destabilisation of their norms. Once more, Gramsci’s model of interregnum offers a more nuanced way of understanding Sammy’s plight than Kövesi’s more optimistic reading.

The second reason that I cannot wholly endorse a positive assessment of the impact of Sammy’s blindness is the impact that Sammy’s sensory deprivation has upon his ability to wander. Wandering, after de Certeau, is exactly the kind of non-productive, unpredictable utilisation of space that subverts the panoptic structures of power. Before he went blind:

Sammy had aye like wandering. That was one thing. He didnay so much like it, he loved it, the auld wandering; up hill and down dale, ye wander up ye wander down, that was Sammy. Even in the fucking poky, even if he couldnay wander, it didnay mean he didnay love doing it, just they wouldnay fucking let him! Sammy chuckled. Naw but it was quite funny; amusing, that was what it was, amusing. Imagine a life where ye could wander; money no object. Wherever ye fucking want man know what I’m saying ye just go. Imagine it! Ye cannay. (p. 285)

However, without the faculty of sight, such wandering is curtailed:

This being blind, one thing he was gony miss; how the fuck can ye wander? Cause ye dont go out unless ye’re going someplace, someplace in particular. Plus there’s nay point wandering if ye cannay see fuck all. (p. 126)

Wandering is now impossible for Sammy; each journey he makes must be carefully planned, his trajectory mapped out in his mind. This pre-meditation, and the act of mapping (in that it makes space legible), suggests that while there are aspects of de Certeau’s immersion in the city necessitated by his blindness, his navigation through it remains subject to panoptic, disciplined procedures. Later in the novel, the impact on his mobility leads Sammy to muse that ‘[i]t was an added bonus to them, the blindness, it meant he was more trapped’ (p. 189) Here, the blindness comes full circle; recruited into the narrative of entrapment and cornering that I have argued characterise the spatial imaginary of How Late. This perhaps demonstrates the true morbidity of Sammy’s blindness, elucidating the ambivalent ideological impasse at which the novel stands.
Sammy’s blindness is also significant when examining How Late’s exploration of textual space, because it emphasises Sammy’s connection and allegiance to orality even within the written form. As McGlynn asserts, ‘the fact that Sammy is blind… exerts a particular weight on the novel’s voices.’\textsuperscript{113} Though we are accessing Sammy’s story as a text, he himself is completely divorced from the written word. As Sammy laments, being blind means he is no longer able to read; ‘a pity about the reading. From now on it would have to be these talking books. Or Braille.’\textsuperscript{114} As Kövesi observes, ‘removed from access to written textuality, Sammy inhabits a purified and intellectualised aurality and orality. In this sense, Sammy is Kelman’s ideal subject: articulacy and sound are more important than writing for Sammy while blind, even if paradoxically in the form and forum of this printed novel.’\textsuperscript{115} This extra-novelistic paradox mirrors the linguistic tensions and spatial contradictions that are explored within the frame of the novel, where rootedness grapples with flexibility and Scottishness with individuality. It is one of the particular strengths of Kelman’s work that the critiques embedded in the narrative expand to enfold the novel itself, demonstrating the fallibility and imperfection of the medium, and implicating the literary form in the architecture of entrapment against which Sammy rails throughout.

\textbf{Conclusion}

As these tensions demonstrate, Kelman’s novel, far from acting as a document of cultural nationalism, is constituted by contradictions and deeply critical of any narratives that purport to offer resolution. Rather, as a testament of interregnum, the novel unflinchingly and often uncomfortably exposes the inadequacies of current ideological formations, whilst placing no confidence in the alternatives on offer. How Late emphasises the crippling and constant effort required to extricate ourselves, however partially, from ideological entrapment. Any alternative to this predicament is deferred and unnarrated; the new order is certainly unable to be born and remains, like Sammy at the novel’s close, ‘out of sight.’

\textsuperscript{113} McGlynn, Narratives of Class, p. 38.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., p. 66.
\textsuperscript{115} Kövesi, p. 136.
Chapter two: ‘an annexe of nowhere’: spaces of overspill in Janice Galloway's

*The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (1989)

In my discussion of Kelman’s novel, I identified the tension between Kelman’s combative assertion of the validity of Scottish culture and what I termed ‘anticipatory anti-nationalism’ that resisted incorporation within a homogenising, fixed idea of Scottish identity. In Janice Galloway’s work, the ambivalence towards Scottishness is brought into focus sharply by the close relationship between Scottish nationalism and Scottish patriarchy; her novels explore the ways in which the two frequently operate in concert to marginalise female experience.¹ Galloway’s work exposes the insufficiencies of inherited notions of Scottishness, and grapples with the difficulties of what should supersede them. Her liminal, interregnum writing interrogates this nexus, and morbid symptoms abound. Quoting Ali Smith, Cristie L. March identifies that Janice Galloway’s writing “states a terrible dilemma of identity” within Scottish literature – the need to accommodate the female voice within Scottish culture and the imposition of a masculinist literary tradition that has always excluded that voice.²

The dynamics of exclusion and inclusion are key to Galloway’s writing, and she persistently probes the structures and conventions that are employed to valorise certain social groups, people and places at the expense of others. In a 1999 interview, she asserted her commitment to writing against prevailing narratives that consistently belittle and marginalise female experience:

> Simply for a woman to write as a woman, to be as honest about it as possible, is a statement; not falling into conventions and assuming guy stuff is ‘real’ stuff and we’re a frill, a fuck or a boring bit that does housework and raises your kids around the edge. That stuff is not round the edge! It’s the fucking middle of everything. Deliberately pointing up that otherness, where what passes for normal has no bearing on you or ignores you – that fascinates me.³

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It is significant that the language Galloway employs here rejects the traditional core-periphery model, which would consign women’s experience to the ‘edge’ instead of its rightful place, in ‘the fucking middle of everything.’ Galloway’s writing refuses to adhere to the narrative conventions that tacitly endorse and facilitate this perspective, and in so doing draws attention to the limits and construction of normative categories. McGlynn observes that ‘Galloway… writes from the position of the outsider, due largely to her language, her nation, and her choice of themes and subject matter.’\(^4\) While this is true, I would add that Galloway also challenges this position of outsider, rejecting the implication that the experience she documents can be easily separated from what occurs on the ‘inside’. The spatial imaginary of Galloway’s work offers new ways of thinking and navigating the boundaries and restrictions that demarcate the occupation of space, both materially and conceptually. From the intimate geographies of the female body to the social and practical limitations of the housing estate, her fiction is preoccupied with the difficult necessity of applying pressure to the peripheralising practices that consign so much experience to the margins.

As I framed my discussion of Kelman’s spatial imaginary around the experience of being cornered, I contend that Janice Galloway’s novel is best understood through its engagement with the spatial category of ‘overspill’. I will investigate the deconstructive impulse latent within the notion of overspill, viewing it as a concept that simultaneously suggests both an assertion and a transgression of boundaries. Overspill implies excess and permeability but also acknowledges the strong attachment to, even the necessity of, spatial demarcations. This dual motion, with its sense of attachment to discredited ideological formations, once more calls to mind the ambivalence of Gramsci’s notion of interregnum. Galloway’s text occupies a fraught and productive space, at once striving to move past demarcations and definitional boundaries while simultaneously and necessarily revealing an investment in the spatial categories whose bounds have burst.

Overspill resonates with the work of Dorren Massey, and the category might allow for a re-thinking of spatial categories, such as nation, in line with her call for the establishment of a ‘global sense of place’. In her essay of the same name, Massey acknowledges the anxiety over the impact of ‘time-space compression’ on place-based communities and their coherence, identifying the link between these anxieties

and ‘defensive and reactionary responses [such as] certain forms of nationalism.’\(^5\) Instead of dismissing or belittling the desire for specificity of place, Massey argues that this specificity should be sought not from an essentialised internal history, be it national or local, but instead “constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus.”\(^6\) She argues that:

> Definition in this sense does not have to be through simple counterposition to the outside; it can come, in part, precisely through the particularity of linkage to that ‘outside’ which is therefore itself part of what constitutes the place.\(^7\)

Admittedly, in this essay Massey is particularly concerned with combating xenophobic and reactionary defences of local specificity against newcomers. However, I would contend that her insights are equally valid and important when a particular place or community is faced with perceived threats to unity that come from within as well as from without. The idea of ‘overspill’ suggests precisely this movement, presenting the image of a particular receptacle, be it physical or conceptual, bursting its banks, no longer able to contain the multitude of which it is composed. Thought of in this way, overspill helps to elucidate the reformulation of Scottish cultural nationalism that I suggest is being explored in Galloway’s novel; her novel gestures towards a nationalism which recognises that Scottishness has the capacity to be both restrictive and expansive. *The Trick* acknowledges the continued power and attraction of definitional and geographical boundaries whilst revealing (as yet incomplete) strategies to move towards a more inclusive, relational and outward-looking configuration of Scottish identity.

*The Trick* was published in 1989, right in the middle of the devolutionary period. Given the date of its publication, it is not surprising that Galloway’s novel has been pressed into the cultural nationalist critical framework elucidated in my introduction. The novel charts the experience of Joy Stone, a drama teacher struggling to keep going from one day to the next (‘lasting’, as it is referred to in the text) and suffering from mental illness and anorexia in the aftermath of her lover’s death (narrated in the novel through a series of italicised flashbacks). In the introduction, I have already discussed the issues with Cairns Craig’s positioning of Galloway’s novel as making a case for Scotland. Here, I want to examine the pitfalls

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\(^6\) Ibid., p. 28.
\(^7\) Ibid., p. 48.
with such an analysis in more depth. In Craig’s analysis of the text in his 1999 study, *The Modern Scottish Novel*, he concludes his discussion of *The Trick* with a reading that recruits the novel, and more objectionably the body of its protagonist, as national allegory. In this extract, he discusses a scene where Joy undergoes an ultrasound scan to verify that her lack of menstruation is not due to pregnancy; an incident that reveals the extent to which medical professionals are misreading the physical symptoms of her anorexia. Craig imposes his own reading of Joy’s empty scan, depicting her body as a symbolic representation of the stateless Scottish nation:

That ‘black hole’, that ‘nothing at all’ is the image not only of a woman negated by a patriarchal society but of a society aware of itself only as an absence, a society living, in the 1980s, in the aftermath of its failure to be reborn. The conflict between the typographic medium and the life which it seeks to record is the dramatisation of a society no longer capable of articulating itself. At the same time, however, it is the demonstration of the author’s refusal to submit to the imposed conditions of external authority: these novels transform ‘stone’ to ‘joy’ in their extravagant play with typography. The characters survive the emptiness, the black hole, and the novel celebrates their survival by revealing the author’s playful control over the medium which has been the culture’s domination and self-repression – typography transformed from jailor to the muse of a culture recovering its authentic voices – regaining control over its typographic representation just as much as over its democratic representation.\(^8\)

In this extract, Craig not only equates the female body of the protagonist with Scotland, he also explicitly claims the novel’s textual innovation as evidence of resurgent national confidence. Unsurprisingly, many subsequent critics (including Carole Jones, Aileen Christianson, Glenda Norquay and Kirsten Stirling) have taken issue with this particular passage in Craig’s analysis of Galloway’s work.\(^9\) They are right to insist by privileging national concerns, Craig’s conclusion diminishes the importance of gender in Joy’s oppression, and that the trope of woman-as-nation has

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\(^8\) Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel*, p. 199.

far-reaching and damaging consequences. I share these objections, and feel uncomfortable with Craig’s enthusiastic recruitment of Galloway’s text as national allegory on these terms.

However, while it is reductive and deleterious to read *The trick is to keep breathing* as an allegory for Scotland, I also think it is vitally important to situate the novel in its specific national context. In my analysis, I want to explore the ways that Galloway’s text works both with and against cultural nationalism, reconfiguring the paradigm to produce a more fractured and ambivalent version of Scottishness. From location to vernacular, Galloway’s novel is suffused with specifically Scottish detail. However, it is crucial to note that the text does not offer up its Scottishness uncritically. The novel unflinchingly illuminates the problems within Scottishness as a bounded category and insists upon the shifting dynamics of inclusion and exclusion at work within the nation. The novel insists that the experience of and access to narratives of nation is always positional, and thus examining the location of the text is vitally important.

I have identified a tendency in Kelman’s novel to focus on spaces in which characters are trapped or ‘cornered’, arguing that such locations emphasise the text’s interregnum status. In *How Late*, this ideologically fraught moment is manifested spatially as a kind of entrapment against which Kelman’s protagonist continually railed. In a similar way, Galloway’s novel is also preoccupied with borders and boundaries. From city limits to the contours of the body and from the margins of the printed page to the physical and conceptual limits of the Scottish nation, Galloway’s text relentlessly interrogates spatial demarcations, examining how boundaries are constituted, enforced and challenged. Galloway negotiates the dynamics of boundedness by occupying spaces of overspill. This term is taken directly from the novel; in the text it refers directly to a particular post-war town planning policy, and this aspect of the novel will be the point of departure for the first section of my analysis. However, I want to suggest that overspill might be a useful metaphor for thinking about the conceptual construction of space more broadly, in order to elucidate the inherent, and inherently fraught, ambivalence of spatial and conceptual categories such as the nation. The notion of overspill that I am seeking to elucidate owes something to Homi Bhabha’s influential formulation in *The Location of Culture*, stressing that ‘we should remember that it is the “inter” – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *inbetween* space – that carries the burden of the
meaning of culture.'\(^{10}\) There is a between-ness implicit in the word overspill; that which occupies the space of overspill is in transition, dislocated from its previous mooring and not quite transmuted into something wholly separate from its previous coordinates. Overspill is a space of contestation and negotiation, a space of flux, a space of interregnum.

Bhabha’s work is also a reference point used by Aileen Christianson in her article ‘Gender and nation: debatable lands and passable boundaries’, which explores the difficulties encountered by Scottish women writing at the intersection of gender and nation and the strategies by which they navigated their position. She posits that:

> In twentieth-century writing… imaginative travel is necessary to where gender interacts with nation so that nation cannot be narrated as exclusively male or, indeed, exclusively female. Any exploration must be tentative, flexible, non-linear as the only certainty carried by ‘debatable lands’ is that of uncertainty, of border crossings, dispute, contiguity and interaction, equivalent, perhaps, to Bhabha’s ‘inscription and articulation of culture’s hybridity.’\(^{11}\)

Christianson’s use of Bhabha is instructive because she insists upon the possibility of antagonism and insecurity in this hybrid space even as she stresses its importance. I will follow this example in my treatment of overspill. I want to stress that this is a space of interregnum, of thorny and difficult negotiations rather than a straightforward space of emancipation. I will attend to the morbid symptoms produced in this moment, necessary by-products and testimonies to the difficulties of occupying this space, productive as it might be. In relation to this, I will also attend to the limits of what can be achieved from this ‘between’ space. It seems to me that ‘overspill’ is a more useful concept than ‘hybridity’ in Galloway’s case precisely because of its link to the lexicon of town planning and its negative connotations that reveal a continued investment in boundaries, borders and limitations. This prevents the term from being utilised as a straightforward celebration of hybrid possibility and limits the text by stressing what remains impossible. In an earlier version of her article, Christianson praises Galloway’s writing because it ‘allow[s] for a thinking across boundaries,
making them passable boundaries.'\textsuperscript{12}\hspace{1em}While this characterisation is appealing in its optimism, it is also important to stress that though boundaries are revealed to be passable, they are not always passed. As much as Galloway's novel opens conceptual possibilities, for the protagonist of \textit{The Trick}, these possibilities are only realised in a very partial way. The novel ends with Joy deciding to move away from the overspill estate of Bourtreehill, back to her own cottage (despite the fact that it is infested with dry rot). Mary McGlynn lauds this as an affirmative, positive step, asserting that 'her decision to move back within the realm of reliable public transport and to fight the dry rot speaks to her renewed willingness to engage with society.'\textsuperscript{13}

This reading is compelling, and resonates with Christianson’s notion of ‘passable boundaries.’ However, despite the emancipatory potential of Joy’s future plans, it is vital to recognise that the emancipatory potential of these decisions is undercut at the novel’s close, which sees her precisely where she started, drink in hand, in the living room of the house that is not her own, trying to last through the night. Certainly, there has been some conceptual progress, but this progress is limited and grounded by the material reality of Joy’s situation at the end of the novel; the next chapter of her life is left unwritten. This points to the continued force exerted by established boundaries, and the tremendous effort required to transgress them. Once again, we have the impetus of interregnum at work, as the tenets of the old order are revealed to be inadequate, but still tenacious enough to prevent nascent ideological possibilities from being actualised.

This interplay of possibility and limitation is inherent in the concept of overspill, emphasising the persistent discord and ambivalence that runs through \textit{The Trick}. Thought of in this way, the concept of overspill is helpful to rethink the relationship between Galloway’s text and the devolutionary moment; the novel is both inescapably connected to narratives of nation and deeply sceptical of them. The novel acknowledges the continued power, attraction and importance of definitional and geographical boundaries whilst utilising subversive strategies to gesture hopefully towards a more nuanced, positional and expansive configuration of Scottish identity that is yet to be realised.


\hspace{1em}\textsuperscript{13} McGlynn, \textit{Narratives of Class}, p. 150.
My use of the term overspill is drawn from discourse of town planning, and this is an apt place to begin my discussion of Galloway’s novel. To understand the significance of setting in *The Trick*, we must situate it in the context of Glasgow’s transformation during and after the industrial revolution. This transformation is what necessitated overspill policy, because of the rapid population increase (or even ‘population explosion’, to use Moira Burgess’ term) in Glasgow from the middle of the nineteenth century. Andrew Gibb explains that, ‘in just over seven decades, between the census of 1841 and the outbreak of the First World War, Glasgow quadrupled its population.’ The housing available in the city was woefully inadequate to meet the needs of the swollen populace, leading to overcrowding of existing dwellings and concomitant problems of public sanitation and health. Until the end of the Second World War, attempts were made to combat these problems through a programme of slum clearance and the construction of housing schemes in Glasgow. However, this did not succeed in reducing overcrowding to acceptable levels, and the city was still left with, as Andrew Gibb asserts, ‘horrifyingly high inner city densities.’ At this point, planning policy shifted away from construction within city limits to focus on directed migration, housing Glasgow’s overspill in expanded existing towns and specially designated New Towns. This overspill policy had a dramatic effect on Glasgow’s population, and it dropped from 1,065,017 in 1961 to just 740,536 in 1987.

The scale and significance of this policy is such that its terminology bleeds into the novel itself. Joy uses the word ‘overspill’ in her first description of the housing estate in the novel. Joy’s introduction to her local area is filled with resignation and antipathy:

> On the map, it’s called Bourtreehill, after the elder tree, the bourtree, Judas tree; protection against witches. The people who live here call it Boot Hill. Boot Hill is a new estate well outside the town it claims to be part of. There was a rumour when they started building that it was meant for undesirables:

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16 Ibid., p. 159.
17 Ibid., p. 160.
difficult tenants from other places, shunters, overspill from Glasgow. That’s why it’s so far away from everything. Like most rumours, it’s partly true.\(^{18}\)

Joy’s description here succinctly encapsulates the movement from town planning intentions to lived experience, as the name is transmuted from its intended natural referent to the harsh, violent monosyllable ‘Boot’. Her musings also reveal the difficulty of belonging in such a place; Boot Hill makes a claim of belonging to the nearby Glasgow, but the sarcastic tone of Joy’s narration makes it clear that this claim is not easily substantiated. Bourtreehill estate has a real-life corollary of the same name; it is located outside Irvine, a North Ayrshire town designated in 1965-6 as the fifth and final New Town to ease the overpopulation of Glasgow. Picking up on the significance of the inclusion of town planning vocabulary, Mary McGlynn identifies a ‘dehumanization present in the term overspill’; a dehumanisation that could equally be applied to the frequently disastrous consequences of Glasgow’s post-war town planning.\(^{19}\) As I have stressed previously, this troubled legacy is hugely significant in preventing the term ‘overspill’ from functioning as a straightforwardly emancipatory concept.

One of the problems with overspill policy was the sheer distance of some of the overspill sites from the city itself. This is certainly the case with Boot Hill, as Irvine is situated a significant distance from Glasgow (approximately 22 miles as the crow flies); the estate is nearer to the Ayrshire coast than to the city. Nonetheless, there is a strong suggestion in the text that Joy does commute to the city for her work as a drama teacher. Given that she does not have a car, her journeys are lengthy and difficult. To get home, she must first endure a car share with colleagues that is weighted with social awkwardness, and when their journeys are over and they drive away in comfortable companionship, Joy remarks that it still ‘takes two buses to get to where I have to go’ (p. 13). The use of the imperative here is significant; it creates a sense of foreboding and menace about Joy’s eventual destination. Joy ‘has to go’ to Boot Hill, there is no warmth or enthusiasm in her description of her home environs. Rather, she is compelled to go there seemingly against her volition; Boot Hill is imposed upon her. This compulsion nods to the history of peripheral housing estates like Bourtreehill. Though they were frequently conceived with the best of intentions, these conurbations were often experienced by those who were relocated


\(^{19}\) McGlynn, *Narratives of Class*, p. 144.
as a kind of enforced exile that ruptured the sense of community fostered by older
kinds of housing (inadequate though they were in many other ways). The description
of the estate in the novel elucidates some of the reasons for this:

Boot Hill is full of tiny, twisty roads, wild currant bushes to represent the great
outdoors, pubs with plastic beer glasses and kids. The twisty roads are meant
to make drivers slow down so they get the chance to see and stop in time.
This is a dual misfunction. Hardly anyone has a car. If one does appear on
the horizon the kids use the bends to play chicken, deliberately lying low and
leaping out at the last minute for fun. The roads end up more conducive to
child death than if they had been straight. What they do achieve is to make
the buses go slow. Buses are infrequent so the shelters are covered in graffiti
and kids hanging from the roofs. Nobody waits in these shelters even when
it’s raining. It rains a lot. The buses take a long time. When I was small I
always wanted a red front door. This front door is bottle green. The key never
surrenders first time. I have to rummage through my bag and every pocket
while I stand at the door as though I’m begging to be mugged. (pp. 13–14)

Joy’s description demonstrates the gulf between town planning intention and the
lived experience of residents of housing estates. This extract demonstrates the way
that abstract problems, such as a high concentration of children (common in
peripheral housing estates), limited amenities and a lack of public transport provision
creates an atmosphere of fear and hostility for the residents of Bourtreehill. The
attempts which have been made to mitigate these problems ring hollow: the
placement of wild currant bushes is at best incongruous and at worst disingenuous;
their representational impulse is clear enough, but the evocation of the pastoral falls
flat, revealing its emptiness and irrelevance to this suburban landscape. However,
Joy is not uncharitable towards the town planners responsible for the estate. She
acknowledges the benevolent logic behind Boot Hill’s ‘tiny, twisty roads’, but here
again the gulf between conceptual thinking and the reality produces a ‘dual
misfunction.’ Those responsible for the design of Boot Hill are clearly out of touch
with the socio-economic group for whom they are designing. Their underestimation of
car ownership renders the roads dangerous, and encumbers the already inadequate
public transport service, further peripheralising an estate that is already a good
distance from ‘the town it claims to be part of.’ The failure of the housing estate to
live up to the desires and aspirations of its residents is encapsulated in Joy’s
description of her front door; she had always wanted red. The one she has is green.
Mary Mcglynn utilises this description of Boot Hill to link the estate to a broader economic context. She suggests:

... that *Trick* depicts a space that is at once general and specific – that a few of its elements suggest a general urban feel (most of the novel takes place in dystopic suburban spaces), but that, more importantly, it evokes not so much a specific city as a specific sort of city. Boot Hill *could* be on the outskirts of Bradford or in Swansea, because it constitutes a particular set of responses that various British councils and housing authorities tried to make to specific economic and social conditions. Beyond this economic context, there are elements of the text that are regionally specific as well, outlining a notion of Scottishness consciously at odds with stereotype yet perceptively different from other British identities, adding another layer to the creation of the loco-specific.²⁰

Both aspects of McGlynn’s formulation are helpful, it is important to observe the de-individuation and non-specificity of the housing estate, as well as identifying the specifically located aspects of the text. However, McGlynn’s assertion that Boot Hill ‘*could* be on the outskirts of Bradford or in Swansea’ under-acknowledges the importance of local specificity in the novel. I would argue that the estate could not even be a housing scheme on the outskirts of a different Scottish city, let alone Bradford or Swansea. The specific ‘Greater Glasgow’ location of the housing estate in *The Trick* has specific implications when thinking about the novel’s exploration of Joy’s breakdown, and for its location within the contemporary Scottish canon. The reason for my insistence upon Glasgow’s importance is linked to McGlynn’s assertion that the novel produces a ‘notion of Scottishness consciously at odds with stereotype.’ To understand the stereotype Galloway is working against, it is useful and necessary to return to the conflicted and shifting relationship of Glasgow to Scottish identity more broadly.

As I have elucidated in the preceding chapter, Glasgow has a particularly fraught relationship to Scottish national, and literary, identity. When discussing Kelman, I focused on the city’s hybridised linguistic identity, which meant that in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the city had been viewed as insufficiently Scottish. Glasgow’s

urbanity, coupled with a high emigrant population and the city's importance within the British Empire meant that the city had traditionally been relegated behind the rural highlands as a location of authentic Scottishness. Viewed like this, Glasgow is doubly peripheralised; subordinated firstly to Scotland's more powerful southern neighbour, and again within its own national boundaries. However, in Galloway's novel, when viewed from Boot Hill, Glasgow functions as a core space to and by which the housing estate is subordinated and peripheralised. Glasgow's prominence in the novel parallels the city's rise to prominence within the literary sphere. With the advent of the Scottish cultural revival between the referenda, Glasgow has shifted to a dominant position in Scotland's cultural landscape. With the ascendance of male writers such as James Kelman, Alasdair Gray and Tom Leonard during the devolutionary period, Clydeside became firmly emplotted as a nexus of contemporary Scottish culture. The vision of Glasgow depicted in the work of these writers has attracted much media attention, and is partly responsible for the perception that all Glasgow novels are about men, the hard inhabitants of this notoriously macho city. This perception of Glasgow writing (which has in recent years occasionally been presented as synonymous with Scottish writing) has become something of a critical orthodoxy, one that marginalises experiences that do not fit the mould.

Galloway's work has been grouped with this 'Glasgow school' – in *The Modern Scottish Novel* Cairns Craig explicitly links Galloway's textual innovation to the work of Alasdair Gray (he asserts that she is 'the writer who has made most effective use of Gray's example'). This link is valid and important. However, it is equally important to insist upon the distance of Galloway's text from these writers, and to do so in geographical terms. As a corrective to this perspective, it is worth insisting on the specificity of Galloway's location: the novel's setting in Boot Hill at once invokes the specifically masculine stereotypes and traditions of the Glasgow novel, and sets itself apart from them. The majority of the text is set inside Bourtreehill, and the narrative only infrequently looks out to Glasgow proper. The housing estate location, not the city to which it is nominally connected, is the focus of the novel and assumes centrality because most of the narrative takes place there, inside Joy's cold, under-furnished house. *The Trick* is unflinching in its depiction of

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21 In 'Masculinities in Scottish Fiction', Christopher Whyte argues that in urban fiction 'the city [...] deprives characters of their native Scottishness', p. 274.
22 Burgess, p. 288.
this troubled and troubling space of overspill, insisting simultaneously upon its
abjection and the validity of its inclusion into broader Scottish cultural narratives.
Galloway articulates the excess, the overspill that has been shunted away from the
normative ‘core’ spaces, both those demarcated by literal city limits and those
circumscribed by limited cultural construction of Glasgow that feeds on the success
of the city’s iconic male novelists.

However, while we have established that Glasgow has an important function
within the novel, we must attend to McGlynn’s first point, that Boot Hill is
representative of a ‘specific sort of city’. Thinking of the housing estate as a type,
rather than a specific, aligns this space with Marc Augé’s theorisation of ‘the non-
places of supermodernity’. These ‘non-places’ include supermarkets, airport lounges
and motorways. He defines these non-places as ‘spaces formed in relation to certain
ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure), and the relations that individuals have
with these spaces.’24 The housing estate is another clear example of Augé’s
synthetic, anonymous ‘non-places.’ Augé describes the housing estate as
somewhere that ‘people do not live together and which is never situated at the centre
of anything (big estates characterize the so-called peripheral zones or outskirts).’25
Housing estates, for Augé, are definitionally peripheral, atomising, rootless and
devoid of community. This accords with Alison Ravetz’s description of housing
estates. In her study, she describes such locations as ‘planted environments, [with]
few legacies of past evolutionary processes.’26 This anonymising commonality is also
echoed in Joy’s description of her experience in Bourtreehill, where ‘[n]obody knows
anybody... We keep ourselves to ourselves for various reasons’ (p. 26). There is no
sense of community or shared identity narratives in Boot Hill, merely isolated
individuals so disconnected that even their isolation does not share a common cause
– they keep to themselves ‘for various reasons.’

Augé contrasts such atomised and anonymising spaces with what he terms
‘anthropological place’, which is characterised by its investment in ‘identity […]
relations and […] history.’27 Augé elaborates his definition of this anthropological or
‘storied’ space:

1995), p. 94.
27 Augé, p. 52.
'Anthropological place' is formed by individual identities, through complicities of language, local references, the un-formulated rules of living know-how; non-place creates the shared identity of passengers, customers or Sunday drivers. No doubt the relative anonymity that goes with this temporary identity can even be felt as a liberation, by people who, for a time, have only to keep in line, go where they are told, check their appearance.\(^{28}\)

We might extrapolate from this definition that a nationally specific Scottish space would fall within the category of ‘anthropological space.’ As McGlynn asserts, throughout the description of Boot Hill that I have quoted above, there are certain ‘regionally specific’ markers. These suggest that, despite its synthetic, non-place affinities, the estate is also operating as a variety of specifically Scottish anthropological space. The name ‘Bourtreehill’, and the folk etymology offered by Joy evokes Celtic connotations (though these are troubled or refused by the estate’s residents’ choice of appellation), the word ‘shunters’ in Joy’s description is a specifically Scottish lexical choice and, of course, the overt naming of Glasgow ties Boot Hill to a specific Scottish city. Such details are in tension with the homogenising non-specific tendencies of Augé’s non-places. This demonstrates the continued power and inescapability of anthropological place, with its implications of historical and national specificity. Scottishness intrudes upon and spills over into the synthetic non-place of the estate. Once again, here, the ‘old order’ is in tension with the new ideological forces that would supersede it.

Significantly, neither the anthropological aspects of the estate or its non-place construction appear to be contributing positively to its residents’ lives. Rather, Scottishness and supermodernity act in concert to the detriment of Joy’s health and wellbeing. Gibb’s analysis of the psychological impact of housing estates suggests that this experience is far from isolated. He argues that, in housing estates, ‘isolation leads to social withdrawal and confinement and ultimately ill-health, in young and old.’\(^{29}\) Joy’s housing situation certainly seems to be complicit in the decline of her mental health, the conflicting ideological impulses of her home producing ‘morbid symptoms’ that are characteristic of Gramscian interregnum.

\(^{28}\) Augé, p. 101.
\(^{29}\) Gibb, p. 171.
Morbid symptoms: RD Laing, ‘madness’ and anorexia

The complicity of Joy’s environment in her psychological distress has also been remarked upon by Edwin Morgan, who remarked that Boot Hill appears to have been ‘perfectly designed to be of least help to someone trying not to go mad.’

At first glance, Morgan’s assertion appears to be sympathetic to Joy’s situation. However, his use of the word ‘mad’ is significant, and suggests some measure of judgement for Joy’s predicament. Taking this as a starting point, I will discuss the way that Joy’s mental distress is pathologised by authority figures throughout the novel, and how this aligns her madness with Gramsci’s ‘morbid symptoms’. Discussing Joy’s experience of grief, depression and anorexia as ‘symptoms’ offers the opportunity to interrogate the ideological tensions that produce her distress. Framed in these terms, I hope to argue that Joy’s pathologised experience is an all too comprehensible response to the impasse created by the tenacity of an old order whose structures and hierarchies are incompatible with her lived experience, while she remains too isolated to offer a robust challenge to their strictures. I will argue that the ‘morbid symptoms’ present in Galloway’s novel offer a vital and necessary critique of the damaging and inadequate ideological structures operating in devolutionary Scotland, and that the novel’s acute and sympathetic depiction of Joy’s malaise demonstrates a willingness to think outwith the confines of these structural constraints.

Throughout the novel, Joy is grieving in the aftermath of her lover’s death. Her distress is compounded by the lack of support she receives and the social stigma heaped upon her because of the perceived illegitimacy of her relationship with Michael, a married man. Two instances in particular demonstrate the extent to which her experience is excluded from the official narratives of public discourse. In the first, Joy is nearly made homeless by the officious housing officer, whose investment in patriarchal authority is signalled explicitly by his name, Mr Dick. Despite the abundance of vacant houses on the estate, he insists that ‘there were difficulties in my [Joy’s] getting tenancy’, because ‘[s]trictly speaking, we’re under no obligation to house you at all, not when you were never registered as a tenant. We needn’t do anything at all, strictly speaking’ (p. 18). The repetition of the phrase ‘strictly speaking’ insists upon the importance of procedure, formality and fixity, which serves by contrast to emphasise the transgressive nature of Joy and Michael’s living situation. They are so unorthodox, so beyond the boundaries of what is permissible,

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that the system does not have a mechanism by which to recognise Joy. She is only able to retain possession of the undesirable house by presenting herself as compliant (‘I said I was sorry about all the trouble they were having on my account and appreciated how good they were being’ [pp. 18–19] and acquiescing to Mr Dick’s petty demands (‘I paid for the missing things’ [p. 19]).

Joy’s second instance of exclusion is even more hostile to her relationship, and her grief. In a memorial service for Michael at the school where the couple both worked, Rev Dogsbody asks the congregation to take a moment of silence to extend their sympathies to Michael’s wife and family. By excluding Joy from this moment, the (once more) aptly named Reverend ignores and invalidates her relationship with Michael and de-legitimises her mourning. Joy describes her understanding of the sermon in terms of erasure:

1. The Rev. Dogsbody had chosen this service to perform a miracle.
2. He’d run time backwards, cleansed, absolved and got rid of the ground-in stain.
3. And the stain was me.
I didn’t exist. The miracle had wiped me out. (p. 79)

To different extents, Joy’s very existence is undermined in both of these encounters. Within the scope of the official narratives (both religious and secular), there is no space to accommodate a relationship that transgresses the codified rules of marital union. Rather than modifying the boundaries to accommodate the concrete reality of Michael and Joy’s life together, both Mr Dick and Rev Dogsbody adhere to rigid conventions that serve only to write Joy out of her own life. It is in response to these repeated stresses that Joy’s mental health begins to deteriorate; the emergence of the morbid symptom and her experience of ‘madness’ stems from the complete refusal of those in positions of authority to acknowledge the validity of her experience.

This understanding of madness, as a comprehensible response to individual experience at odds with the expectations of others, resonates with the existential anti-psychiatry of R. D. Laing. In The Divided Self, Laing argues for a radical re-conceptualisation of psychosis and schizoid tendencies. He argues that everyday social interaction is supported by a shared consensus on the nature of the identities of all parties involved. He phrases it thus:
[W]hen two persons meet, there appears to be a reciprocal recognition of each other’s identity. In this mutual recognition there are the following basic elements:

(a) I recognize the other to be the person he takes himself to be.
(b) He recognizes me to be the person I take myself to be.\(^{31}\)

When this basic formula is not fulfilled, and there is a rupture or discord between the identities at stake, then psychosis is the necessary result. Laing deduces that ‘the critical test of whether or not a patient is psychotic is a lack of congruity, an incongruity, a clash, between him and me.’\(^{32}\) While many of Laing’s methods and conclusions (especially in his later work) have been widely critiqued and roundly ridiculed, this premise appears humane and astute. Certainly, it proves helpful in elucidating Joy’s predicament in this novel. Her conception of her own identity, as Michael’s grieving partner, is entirely at odds with the version of herself espoused by others. The people and institutions that are contradicting and undermining her sense of self are both powerful and influential. Because of this, they seem to naturally occupy the position of the ‘sane’ according to Laing’s formulation. If we accept the logic of this argument, then Joy really has no choice but to retreat, to use Morgan’s terminology, into madness.

There is a developing body of research that seeks to situate Laing’s insights in a specifically Scottish context, and certainly his discussion of ‘the divided self’ resonates with the Caledonian antizyzygy that I have discussed in my introduction. Gavin Miller positions his monograph on R. D. Laing in terms that resonate with the cultural nationalist position of Beveridge and Turnbull. He argues that one of the reasons that Laing is not regarded as a serious and worthy object of study stems from his national context; that Laing was ‘doubly disadvantaged […] because [n]ot only does he criticise a complacent scientific establishment, he also comes out of a nation which has, of late, shown little interest in its culture.’\(^{33}\) Miller directly positions his study of Laing as an endeavour to participate in a necessary ‘archaeology of Scotland’s intellectual heritage.’\(^{34}\) Part of this endeavour includes an extended

\(^{32}\) Laing, p. 36.
\(^{34}\) Ibid., p. 4.
discussion of the influence of Scottish philosopher John MacMurray on Laing's thought (Miller notes that he ‘perhaps is the only Scottish philosopher Laing explicitly mentions in his published work’). Miller draws connections between the two thinkers with regards to the division they both saw as inherent within conventional philosophy, a division that draws its roots from the Cartesian privileging of the mind (a topic to which I will return in my discussion of anorexia in Galloway’s novel). With reference to J. B. Baillie, Miller argues that, following the logic of these Scottish thinkers, there is a case for shifting the burden of pathologisation from the schizoid subject onto the philosophically sanctioned and celebrated rationality of the Cartesian logic that sunders the mind from the body. More directly, his argument runs ‘that thinking is pathological when detached from day-to-day life.’

Madness, then, appears not as deviance or chaos, but as the necessary conclusion of a particular set of social relations and philosophical traditions. It is perhaps possible to extrapolate here that madness operates in a way that is analogous to both overspill and interregnum. The schizoid or psychotic (to use Laingian lexicon) is thrust outside the boundaries of sane society, but it is precisely the norms and conventions of this society that produce and designate ‘mad’ subjects, aligning it with the spatial category of overspill. Joy’s madness is also produced very directly by the failures of the old ideological order to adequately accommodate her lived experience and the absence of any viable alternative through which to structure and orient her sense of self.

In the novel, Joy’s mental distress manifests in several different ways. On several occasions throughout the novel, she is seen drinking to excess. More explicitly, Joy reveals that she regularly cuts herself:

The pillowslips haven’t been washed for weeks so the patterns of blood stay. There are marks on the sheets too: trails from half-hearted cuts. I don’t menstruate but I bleed other ways. The scratches on my wrists purse like clam mouths in the water, refusing to open. (p. 92)

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35 Miller, p. 5.
36 Ibid., p. 74.
37 ‘Gin’ is referenced on nine occasions in the novel –p. 36, 45, 62, 76, 87, 90, 190, 192, 299, and ‘whisky’ twice, pp. 234-5 and p. 66.
This deliberate cutting is supplemented by the ‘domestic wounds’ (p. 38) that Joy acquires around the house; oven burns, scratches from moving furniture, even bleeding gums from deliberately zealous teeth brushing. Such acts of self harm intimately link Joy’s surroundings, and all the ideological baggage associated with it, in the symptoms of her mental disorder. McGlynn argues that Joy’s attempts at performing domesticity demonstrate the ideological entanglement of the space of the home with an ideal of femininity that is no longer tenable, but still exerts a potent pressure on Galloway’s protagonist. She argues that Joys ‘efforts, including the preparation of food she never eats and the sewing of clothes, reveal how deeply the notion of home is intertwined with ideas of female domesticity, a model Joy resists and yet enacts throughout the novel.’

Of course, the most significant symptom of Joy’s breakdown is her anorexia; a word that haunts the text without once being uttered. Rather than using medical terminology, Joy’s eating disorder is explicitly revealed to the reader in an epiphanic moment prompted by, of all things, a can of vegetable soup:

There was a can of vegetable soup in the cupboard: individual size. I found the opener and dug it into the top, lifting it higher with each turn of the handle. Some of the stuff inside smeared on my knuckle. It felt slimy, unpleasant. Inside the can the surface was a kind of flattened jelly, dark red with bits of green and yellow poking through. Watery stuff like plasma started seeping up the sides of the viscous block. It didn’t look like food at all. I slid one finger into it to the depth of a nail. The top creased and some of the pink fluid slopped up and over the jagged lip of the can. It was sickening but pleasantly so. Like a little kid playing with mud. The next thing I knew, I’d pushed my hand right inside the can. The semi-solid mush seethed and slumped over the sides and onto the worktop as my nails tipped the bottom and the torn rim scored the skin. I had to withdraw carefully. Soup stung into the cuts so I used my other hand and scooped up as much of the mess as I could and cradled it across the room, red soup and blood dripping onto the lino. There, my cupped hands over the sink, I split my fingers and let the puree slither, spattering unevenly onto the white porcelain. I was learning something as I stared at what I was doing; the most obvious thing yet it had never dawned

38 McGlynn, Narratives of Class, p. 139.
on me till I stood here, bug-eyed at the sink, congealing soup up to my wrists.
I didn’t need to eat.
I didn’t need to eat. (p. 38)

The extract opens with precise, exact attention to detail, building suspense as the mundane details of opening a can of soup assume weighty significance. The description of the episode is sensuous, the sibilance of the language ‘semi sold mush seethed and slumped’ onomatopoetically evoking the sounds of her interaction with the food. In many ways this scene is the heart of the novel. There is something mythic and originary about the encounter, suggested by the reference to her child-like response and possible implications of the mundane vegetable soup as a metaphor for soup of the more primordial kind. There are also fairly overt sexual overtones to the extract, as Joy assumes the traditionally masculine gender role by pushing her hand inside the can. This gendered move is further emphasised by the use of the verb ‘cradled’ to describe her handling of the soup, invoking ideas of maternity and nurture only to disregard them as Joy spills the liquid across the room. In this extract, Joy’s renunciation of food is linked to a renunciation of her feminine qualities.

This extract occurs almost 40 pages into the novel, and is the first point that Joy’s eating disorder is fully expressed. However, given that the novel’s temporality does not move in a straightforwardly linear way, it is not unreasonable to assume that the opening depicts Joy in the aftermath of this monumental discovery. Indeed, we can see evidence of Joy’s anorexic tendencies from the beginning. After a brief and cryptic flashback to the scene of Michael’s death, the novel’s present tense narrative opens with the line ‘I watch myself from the corner of the room’ (p. 7). This sense of surveillance recalls Sammy’s opening lines in *How Late*, and the hostility of the gaze under which he finds himself. However, here, that hostile gaze requires no external interlocutor; Galloway’s protagonist takes on the roles of both observer and observe. I contend that this self-surveillance and split subjectivity is characteristic of the text’s exploration of anorexia as a morbid symptom. Admittedly, this jarring and peculiar assertion does not immediately suggest itself as representative of an anorexic subjectivity, in the sense that there is no mention whatsoever of food. However, what it does dramatise starkly is a radical division between self and body, as the mind of the narrator is able to observe its corporeal form from a distance. By introducing Joy in this way, the novel taps into philosophical traditions with deep roots. This de-alignment of the body from the mind can be traced back through
history, perhaps finding its purest expression in Descartes assertion of the primacy of the mind in his formulation ‘I think, therefore I am.’ In her wide-ranging study *Unbearable Weight*, Susan Bordo sketches a history of this kind of dualistic thought, insisting that it not only separates mind/spirit from body, but sets the two aspects of the self in a hierarchical relationship which ultimately devalues the corporeal end of the binary.

What remains the constant element throughout historical variation is the construction of body as something apart from the true self (whether conceived as soul, mind, spirit, will, creativity, freedom…) and as undermining the best efforts of that self. That which is not-body is the highest, the best, the noblest, the closest to God; that which is body is the albatross, the heavy drag on self-realization.39

This propensity to devalorise the body has specifically gendered implications. In the formulation outlined above, the valorised non-corporeal aspect of the self (soul/mind etc.) is implicitly or explicitly coded as male, and its counterpart (the body) is correspondingly coded as female. Elizabeth Grosz describes this as ‘the correlation and association of the mind/body opposition with the opposition between male and female, where man and mind, woman and body, become representationally aligned.’ She continues, asserting that ‘[s]uch a correlation is not contingent or accidental but is central to the ways in which philosophy has historically developed and sees itself even today.’40 This persistent valorisation of the non-corporeal, and the corresponding degradation of the body by comparison have had profound effects for women. Bordo argues that:

If, whatever the specific historical content of the duality, the body is the negative term, and if woman is the body, then women are that negativity, whatever it may be: distraction from knowledge, seduction away from God, capitulation to sexual desire, violence or aggression, failure of will, even death.41

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41 Bordo, p. 5.
Viewed in light of such statements, the de-feminising aspects of Joy’s epiphanic moment take on new resonances. Bordo suggests that anorexia represents, for women, the apotheosis of this kind of dualistic thinking, as the female subject takes it upon herself to repudiate her own perfidious corporeality in the most drastic terms:

The extremes to which the anorectic takes the denial of appetite (that is, to the point of starvation) suggest the dualistic nature of her construction of reality: either she transcends body totally, becoming pure “male” will, or she capitulates utterly to the degraded female body and its disgusting hungers. She sees no other possibilities, no middle ground.⁴²

The radically split subject of the opening to _The Trick_ demonstrates precisely this disjunction, revealing itself as perfectly in keeping with Joy’s denial of food throughout the novel.

The fact that the opening of the novel utilises the verb ‘watch’ is also significant. There is also an important voyeuristic and surveilling content to Joy’s eating disorder; her body is objectified under a hostile gaze. Joy’s objectification of her own corporeality is demonstrated throughout the novel. The most striking of these images occurs in Joy’s ‘Bathing Ritual’, a mundane task which is overladen with religious connotations of corporal self-punishment. Joy insists that ‘[t]he bathwater must be hot: warm isn’t good enough. I wait till the water is scalding’, and her bathing glove suggests itself as an imaginative instrument of self-flagellation, it is ‘made of matting, knotted in rows’ (p. 46). Most significantly, throughout the episode she observes her body in a mirror which effectively decapitates her image; ‘[t]he mirror cuts off my head as I sit and steady my lungs, feeling the flesh under the surface turn raw’ (p. 46). The bath is an attempt at a kind of rebirth, to divest the body of its dirty, fleshy desires. Joy describes with relish ‘draining away the ordinariness that floats with the scum on the water’ (p. 46). Even as innocuous an event as taking a bath demonstrates Joy’s deep and violent antipathy to her own body. This antipathy is also registered more subtly throughout the novel through the use of grammar. Repeatedly, Joy refers to her various body parts with the definite, rather than possessive article. Rather than claiming ownership of her physicality by using ‘my’, she distances herself from her body by using ‘the’, and repeatedly insists upon the separateness of each aspect of her body, from herself and from each other.

⁴² Bordo, p. 8.
There is a fundamental disunity not just between Joy’s body and mind, but also between specific parts of her body. Joy’s physicality does not move in tandem, but rather through a series of isolated but connected acts; ‘[h]ands are bastards: so many separate pieces’ (p. 8). Describing the motion of getting up from a chair, she narrates ‘[t]he muscles in the thighs tightening as the feet push down and the stomach clenching to take the weight then I’m out the chair, shaky but upright’ (p. 8). These grammatical effects subtly but insistently act as a reminder of Joy’s alienation from her physicality, acting as anorexic markers even when there is no discussion of food.

Certainly, Joy’s relationship both to food and to her own body appears extreme, as well as extremely damaging. However, the formulations above suggest that, in fact, there is an undeniable logic to Joy’s position that derives from a venerated philosophical tradition. In the novel, Joy’s anorexia is presented as comprehensible rather than pathologised. This approach resonates with feminist discussions of eating disorders, which seek to contest the ready distinction between pathology and normality, instead of positioning disorders such as anorexia on a continuum with ‘normal’ experiences of femininity. Unlikely as it may seem, this also resonates with treatment model for schizophrenia urged by R D Laing in *The Divided Self*. This model is built on a desire to understand, rather than dismiss, the logic of the ‘mad’ patient’s condition. He argues that ‘[w]hat is necessary, though not enough, is a capacity to know how the patient is experiencing himself and the world.’

This kind of empathy and understanding are notable by their absence in Joy’s treatment by medical professionals and authority figures in *The Trick*. Over the course of the novel, Joy is hospitalised in a mental institution; her emotions and behaviour are so at odds with what is considered ‘normal’ that she must be physically separated from the rest of society. However, the novel takes pains to demonstrate the ways in which Joy’s anguish is, in large part, produced by the pressures exerted on her by the regulations governing societal norms. Occupying this space of madness-as-overspill, though hardly an option to be advocated, might be read as an act of protest; perhaps the only form of protest available to Joy in a society which seems so driven to undermine and erase the reality of her experience. As Mary McGlynn asserts, ‘on the one hand, an anorexic woman reveals an impulse to conform to external, societal standards of feminine appearance, but on the other, she resists reproductive

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44 Laing, p. 34.
stereotypes, refusing to menstruate and demonstrate her womanhood, actively choosing anorexia as an effective yet dangerous means of asserting an identity."^{45}

The depiction of Joy’s anorexia in *The trick is to keep breathing* bears striking similarities to the poem ‘Anorexia’ by the contemporary Irish writer Eavan Boland. The opening of this poem, like Galloway’s novel, depicts the anorexic’s struggle in terms of split subjectivity, a radical and violent disjunction between mind and body:

Flesh is heretic
My body is a witch
I am burning it.

Yes I am torching
her curves and paps and wiles.
They scorch in my self denials.

How she meshed my head
in the half-truths
of her fevers till I renounced
milk and honey
and the taste of lunch.

I vomited
Her hungers.
Now the bitch is burning.\(^{46}\)

In Boland’s poem, this disjunction is even clearer: the body is referred to as ‘she’, whereas in Galloway’s case the definite pronoun is retained. However, the depiction of heretic flesh that must be burnt resonates in particular with the ritualised and ordinary violence of Joy’s cleansing in the bathing scene. The sinister pride evident in Boland’s poem (I am starved and curveless/ I am skin and bone/ She has learned her lesson)\(^{47}\) is also evinced by Joy as she revels in the thinness of her body:

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^{45} Mary McGlynn, ‘I Didn’t Need to Eat: Janice Galloway’s Anorexic Text and the National Body’, *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 49.22 (2008), 221-240 (p. 224).


^{47} Ibid., p. 59.
In bed, I run my hands over the reclaimed ribs, the bony shoulders like wingsprouts. I balance the gin on the edge of the rug and feel the flat bowl of my hips. They’re sharp on either side for the first time I remember. Like a man’s. Laughter shakes the mattress. I laugh till the neighbours thump the wall. (p. 90)

The similarities in the two women’s depiction of anorexia perhaps has something to do with a certain similarity in their contexts. Boland has written extensively about the difficulties of writing poetry as an Irish woman. In Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time, she articulates the difficulty of reconciling these apparently incompatible aspects of her identity:

I know now that I began writing in a country where the word woman and the word poet were almost magnetically opposed. One word was used to invoke collective nurture, the other to sketch out self-reflective individualism. Both states were necessary – that much the culture conceded – but they were oil and water and could not be mixed. It became part of my working life, part of my discourse, to see these lives evade and simplify each other. I became used to the flawed space between them. In a certain sense, I found my poetic voice by shouting across the distance. 48

Galloway has spoken in similar terms about the difficulty of reconciling her female concerns with national ones. Here, it is worth repeating Galloway’s discussion of the definitional pressures exerted by gender and nation already quoted in my introduction. Galloway contends:

Scottish women have their own particular complications with writing and definition, complications which derive from the general problems of being a colonised nation. Then, that wee touch extra. Their sex. There is coping with that guilt of taking time off the concerns of national politics to get concerned with the sexual sort: that creeping fear it’s somehow self-indulgent to be more concerned for one’s womanness instead of one’s Scottishness. 49

48 Boland, Object Lessons, p. xi.
49 Janice Galloway, Meantime, pp. 5-6.
It is worth noting here that Galloway speaks of femaleness in terms of surplus, ‘that wee touch extra.’ Here, sex is positioned as excess, overspill from the central concern of nation. Both Galloway and Boland refuse to accept this formulation and its fallacious separation of issues of nation from issues of gender. Rather than abandoning nation in order to privilege female concerns, both writers seek to write of nation through femininity, and vice versa. Boland speaks of a need to reconceptualise national myths rather than jettisoning them; ‘I thought it vital that women poets such as myself should establish a discourse with the idea of the nation. I felt sure that the most effective way to do this was by subverting the previous terms of that discourse.’\(^{50}\) It seems to me that a similar impulse is at work in Galloway’s writing.

We might see the anorexic split subject within Galloway’s text as a subversion and expansion of the tenacious trope of Caledonian antisyzygy. Here, this disunity is inflected by her status as a woman and the gendered implications of the divided self are laid bare. In *The Modern Scottish Novel*, Cairns Craig posited that the pathologisation of the divisions in Scottish culture were misguided and too wedded to fallacious ideals of unitary culture, nation and selfhood. Viewed in opposition to this, Craig argued for a revalorisation of the Scottish divided self because and not in spite of its contradictions and disunities. He suggested that ‘[a] Scottish culture which has regularly been described as ‘schizophrenic’ because of its inner divisions is not necessarily sick: it is engaged in the dialogue with the other, a conversation in different dialects, a dialectic that is the foundation not only of persons but of nations.’\(^{51}\) This optimistic re-formulation is appealing, but Galloway’s text reveals its limitations; the division within the self, and the nation, is not an equal one. Rather, it is based upon the subordination of one aspect of the divided subject (whether individual or national) to another. Crucially, this distinction is gendered, and so reveals how the structure of the national psyche acts to replicate and reinforce the ideological tenets of patriarchal dominance. The morbid symptoms of Joy’s eating disorder and anorexic subjectivity dramatise the consequences of this hierarchical split.

\(^{50}\) Boland, *Object Lessons*, p. 148.

Marianne: America and overspill

However, while Joy does not seem able to completely overcome the constraints of the ideological impasse of interregnum, hovering around the edges of the text we can discern an alternative. The character who seems to embody this more hopeful subversion and reconceptualisation of the relationship of gender to nation is Joy’s best friend, Marianne. Marianne, in the present-tense narrative of *The Trick*, has emigrated to America to take up a teaching post for a year. She appears in the text in memories and mementos as well as phone calls and letters even though she is physically absent. Despite the important issues her character and experience raises, the role of Marianne has been neglected in many of the critical responses to the novel. This is probably as a result of the character’s location outside Scotland. Indeed, McGlynn asserts that the novel ‘evades exploration of female friendship in part by sending Marianne abroad’[52]. While it is true that Galloway’s second novel, *Foreign Parts*, deals more thoroughly with the minutiae of female friendship, Joy’s relationship to Marianne is not simply evaded. Despite their physical distance, the women’s friendship is perhaps the most important bond in *The Trick*. One of Joy’s repeated refrains throughout the novel is that of ‘lasting’; ‘just getting on with the day to day till it got less terrible’ (pp. 54–55). Though it is certainly not a flawless strategy for recovery, Joy’s reiteration of her intention to ‘last’ represents a commitment to the future that is the closest she comes to articulating a progressive, healing narrative. Importantly, Joy’s ‘lasting’ is almost always presented in the form of a (usually imagined) question to Marianne: ‘what will I do while I’m lasting?’ (p. 15, 36, 114, 140 and 201). This demonstrates the key role that Marianne plays in Joy’s recovery, despite her absence. That their friendship is conducted long-distance does not diminish the strength or significance of the relationship; it is in fact one of the most hopeful aspects of the novel. Indeed, Marianne’s emigration to America presents a compelling case for the emancipatory possibilities of overspill, and a hope for the future beyond the interregnum of the text.

To understand the significance of Marianne, it is important to attend to the particular resonances of her trans-Atlantic location. To illuminate this, it is useful to return briefly to Kelman’s novel. Though America is not figured as literally as in Galloway’s novel, America figures in *How Late* through imagination of Kelman’s protagonist as the ultimate escape. On several occasions, Sammy discusses his

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intention to flee to Luckenbach, Texas. Part of the appeal of this destination is his perception that it lies outwith the structures that govern his cornered and curtailed experience of Glasgow. Sammy insists ‘he was bound for Luckenbach, follow the outlaws, follow the fucking outlaws, know what I’m saying, nay danger, nay fucking danger’ (p. 285–86). The American destination of Sammy’s fantasy is not the capitalist ideal of the American Dream but the renegade territory of ‘outlaws’ who make their lives on the edges of and in opposition to societal structures. In this, Sammy’s conceptualisation of America seems to resonate with Frederick Turner’s ‘frontier theory’ and the constant renewal that Turner posited went to the heart of the nation’s character. Turner argued that the rolling colonisation of the western frontier formed an essential part of American identity. He posited that ‘American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character.’ In contrast to the cornering and curtailment of Sammy’s experience in Glasgow, Luckenbach offers the opportunity for reinvention and renewal, a space where he can shake off the suppression of disciplinary society and make himself anew. Similarly, in The Trick, Marianne’s experience in America functions in direct opposition to the bounded historical determinism that tethers and constrains Joy’s experience of Scotland. Joy finds it impossible to accurately imagine Marianne’s experience, because it is so at odds with the circumscribed spatial possibilities available in a Scottish context. Upon Marianne’s departure, she thinks ‘I couldn’t believe she was going far: you never go too far on an island. Eventually you reach water’ (p. 35). In this formulation, American space functions as the antithesis of Scottish space; characterised by vast, wide-open plains of possibility as opposed to a small island delimited and confined by watery boundaries and circumscribed cultural conventions.

To date, there is limited research devoted to charting the Scottish experience of emigration in the 20th century, but what scholarship there is tends to agree that the motivation behind leaving Scotland can generally be characterised as aspirational rather than exilic. Though she is talking more specifically about emigration to England, Marjory Harper observes that ‘underpinning the outflow [of Scots migrants] was the negative perception among many Scots that their homeland had only a past.

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not a future.\textsuperscript{54} In his wide-ranging study, Tom Devine identifies the popularity of America as a destination for Scots migrants; asserting that '[m]ore than half of all emigrating Scots embarked for the USA between 1853 and 1914. A higher proportion made it their final destination, after having first crossed the Atlantic to Canadian ports before moving south across the border.\textsuperscript{55} More significantly, he contrasts the Scottish experience of emigration to America with the much more widely documented example of the Irish. He found that, while Irish nationalist sentiment tended to be amplified by their distant vantage point, no such phenomena was observable in the Scottish case.

Though both Scottish and Irish emigrants to America sought to relocate in order to improve their standard of living, the conditions that motivated Irish emigrants were (broadly speaking) more extreme than their Scottish counterparts. Irish emigrants were often fleeing extreme poverty and hardship (frequently imposed by punitive English policies). Devine argues that the inflection of the migration of Scots who chose to travel to America was different, that rather than being pushed out of Scotland they were drawn into America ‘by higher wages (often three to four-fold increases), opportunity, advancement and the search for “independence”’.\textsuperscript{56} This movement was aspirational and outward-looking, focused on the possibilities offered by America rather than the losses of leaving Scotland. It is clear that the associations of possibility and advancement still retain force in the Scottish conceptualisation of America. In Janice Galloway’s autobiographical novel \textit{This is not about me}, she recounts an incident from her childhood where her older sister gives her an American dime. To her eyes:

This wasn’t money. It was a token from a magic place, a country rife with washing machines and fridges like wardrobes and flashy cars, the country of Snow White, Elvis and Lassie. It might have been kissed with pixie dust, had lines radiating from its surface marked \textit{splendour}.\textsuperscript{57}

To the young Galloway, the American money symbolises the possibility of wealth and opportunity far beyond what is attainable in her native country. It is significant that the

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., p. 144.
\textsuperscript{57} Janice Galloway, \textit{This is not about me} (London: Granta, 2008), p. 86.
washing machine is the first item associated with America, as this appliance is
treated throughout the text as a luxury, viewed by her mother as a benchmark of
social standing. This aspirational view of America, coupled with an absence of
romanticisation of Scotland, accounts for the fact that Scottish emigration tended not
to produce the same kind of long-distance nationalism\(^{58}\) that characterised the Irish
experience. Once they had arrived in America, Scottish emigrants were likely to
slough off their Scottish allegiances much more readily than their Irish counterparts.
They did not settle in exilic nationalist communities (unlike the ‘semi-ghettoized urban areas’\(^{59}\) occupied by Irish emigrants) and there is no such phenomenon as the
‘Scotch vote.’\(^{60}\) When Scottishness did find expression in America, and this only
occurred as late as the 1970s, it was in the form of a heritage industry that Devine
describes as ‘an indigenous American development, managed and directed by the
transatlantic diaspora and often containing elements which native Scots find risible
and even offensive.’\(^{61}\)

Marianne’s experience of America affirms the synthetic and sometimes
confused nature of the particular brand of Scottishness cultivated in America. In her
letters to Joy, she describes an American man who ‘played me Danny Boy because
he thought it was Scots. It was a good try’ as well as supplementing her teaching
responsibilities with talks about country dancing; an endeavour which receives a
telling one word parenthetical commentary; ‘ridiculous’ (p. 150). However, Marianne
does retain an attachment to Scotland even while she is away. When she speaks to
Joy on the phone, she says:

*Listen I need you to send some stuff. Cheese. Cheese. Can you believe
they’ve never heard of cheddar? maybe some oatcakes. Are you still there?
Listen to me… It’s so good to hear you, not to have to say everything twice.
They all make out they don’t know what I’m saying over (pp. 203–04)*

The things that Marianne misses from home are not the romanticised clichés of
Scottish identity (which appear to be alive and well across the Atlantic), but
mundane, everyday comforts – like oatcakes and familiar accents. Marianne’s
experience in America demonstrates the disjuncture between the reality of Scottish

\(^{59}\) Devine, *To the Ends of the Earth*, p. 142.
\(^{60}\) Ibid., p. 140.
\(^{61}\) Ibid., p. 277.
experience and the stereotype of Scottishness that still circulates in contemporary culture, and not just in America. 62

Marianne manifests a different and more positive kind of Scottishness, a less debilitating sense of national and gender belonging, than Joy. This contrast hinges upon her mobility. This is not just manifest by her grand journey to America, but also colours what we know about her life while she was in Scotland. While Joy is beholden to the previously mentioned inadequate public transport system (‘it takes two buses to get to where I have to go’ [p. 13]), Marianne can drive. When, through flashback, we learn of Joy’s hazy almost-suicide in the snow, it is Marianne whose mobility rescues her; leading by example and guiding Joy to safety. Alone in her empty house, she thinks of this episode and recalls Marianne’s hazy example as ‘the shape ahead in the snow’ (p. 90). While Joy is confined by the pressures of home, region and nation, Marianne has been able to overcome these boundaries, and in doing so produce a more relational example of Scottish subjectivity. Glenda Norquay, in her brief discussion of Marianne’s role in The Trick, identifies that as a ‘Scotswoman out of Scotland’, her interaction with and assembly of ‘the artefacts of the culture – Burns, oatcakes, country dancing – can produce only a subversive version of Scottishness, offering a ‘rough repair’ of national identity. 63 Marianne presents a mobile model of Scottish subjectivity in process and in dialogue. Even her name has transnational resonance, given that Marianne is one of the most iconic symbols of the French republic. In its original form, this woman-as-nation figure is certainly something of which we should be sceptical. 64 However, by re-casting Marianne as a Scotswoman in America, the cross-cultural connotations of Marianne’s nomenclature and her transatlantic perspective act in concert to thwart any attempt to read her reductively or simplistically as a unifying symbol for any nation.

62 I will discuss the pervasive and tenacious commodification of Scotland (particularly in the form of Highland kitsch) further in my chapter on Warner’s novel.
64 See Marina Warner, Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form (California: University Of California Press, 1985), and Kirsten Stirling, Bella Caledonia, p. 11.
way for Joy to follow. In the flashback, all Joy had to do ‘was keep her in sight and follow in the same tracks. [She] didn’t even have to cut [her] own path’ (p. 89). However, this description belies the difficulty of the task; Joy only managed to last 20 minutes before she abandoned herself to the blizzard. How much more difficult, then, will it be for Joy to summon the will to follow the path that Marianne has forged in the development of her transnational subjectivity? It seems much more likely that, once again, Marianne will have to come back for Joy as she did in the snow, re-entering the ideological interregnum from which the temporary overspill of her American sojourn offers respite.

**Location and experimentation**

*The Trick* does not simply occupy the spaces of overspill through its setting, or through the inclusion of an emigrant character, but also enacts overspill through its experimental form. The use of formal experimentation has a specific national heritage; indeed it is often identified as one of the hallmarks of devolutionary Scottish literature. Indeed, it is this feature of Galloway’s writing that most strongly associates her with forebears like Alasdair Gray. Liam McIlvanney has asserted that the devolutionary political situation rendered Scottish novelists particularly sensitive to ‘the politics of form.’ I suggest that, while it is important to situate Galloway’s typographical innovations in a specifically Scottish context, we can also read the experimental form of *The trick is to keep breathing* as a way of making visible and inescapable its location in the contested spaces of overspill.

Galloway’s text abounds with marginalia; ambiguous fragments repeat elliptically without ever explicitly signalling their relationship to the main body of narrative that they both surround and invade. It is this dual motion of surrounding and invading that aligns Galloway’s marginalia with the overspill impulse that I am seeking to elucidate. The truncated words form fractured almost-sentences that are at once separate from and intrinsic to the narrative of the text. One striking example of this occurs during the narration of the evening Joy spends with her over-bearing boss Tony. The spare, almost numb, description of Tony’s increasingly forceful and unreciprocated sexual advances is surrounded by splinters of marginalia (pp. 174–175). We might assemble these fragments across the two pages to read ‘sometimes presentiments that stop before it’s too late but often we ignore the warnings so when

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65 McIlvanney, p. 186.
the worst happens we can only blame ourselves”; which appears to correlate with and comment on the rape that is occurring in the main narrative. However, to enforce this coherence on the marginalia ignores the repetition within it and fills in the blanks where words are left unfinished. This act of reading imposes a clarity that is pointedly lacking in the text itself. Additionally, smaller parts of this assembled sentence have appeared at other points in the novel, which makes the reading of it as a direct comment on this particular moment even more problematic. When Cairns Craig reads an earlier incidence of the fragment ‘presentim’ that we also find on this page, he stresses its ambiguity, asking ‘Is it ‘present time’, ‘present him’, ‘represent him’, compressed and truncated? Or is it ‘present I’m’ without grammatical and typographical markers?’.

There is an essential ambivalence inherent in this typographical overspill; Galloway’s novel both sustains and resists multiple acts of interpretation. Once again, this ambivalence aligns the novel with the instability and insecurity of interregnum. The incompletion of the marginalia echoes the incompletion of interregnum and maintains the subversive and unsettling ideological impasse of interregnum.

As well as this unruly and disruptive marginalia, the text also includes a single footnote, which is the novel’s most explicit reference to the interaction of Scottishness and gender. It reads:

*Love/Emotion = embarrassment: Scots equation. Exceptions are when roaring drunk or watching football. Men do rather better out of this loophole.

(p. 82)

Here, with characteristic concision and dark humour, Joy perceptively identifies and ridicules the stereotypes upon which categories of gender and national character are constructed. However, the regulated overspill of the footnote form (as opposed to the unsanctioned and incomplete marginalia that appears elsewhere) lends an air of academic authority to the ‘Scots equation’ that undercuts this ridicule and acknowledges the entrenchment and enduring power of such demarcations. Once more, the conflicted ideological investment of overspill is revealed; at once exposing the inadequacy and insufficiency of discredited models of selfhood whilst simultaneously revealing their enduring authority.

Conclusion

By occupying the spaces of overspill, Galloway’s writing draws attention to the construction, tenacity and limits of normative categories such as gender and nation. The spatial imaginary of Galloway’s work offers new ways of thinking and navigating the boundaries and restrictions that demarcate the occupation of space, both materially and conceptually. Spaces of overspill, precisely because of their ambivalence and instability, demand the reconceptualisation of the bounded categories that necessarily produce them. To elucidate this, it is helpful in conclusion to return to Augé’s discussion of place and non-place. He argues that:

Place and non-place are rather like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed; they are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten.67

This mobile and shifting territory is the overspill territory inhabited by Galloway’s novel. Her writing acts as a palimpsest, participating in a constant, vital and ongoing re-negotiation of identity categories. The subjects and nation produced in this space of interregnum must, necessarily, be unstable. It is this constant flux that produces both morbid symptoms and generative possibilities. Though these generative possibilities are by no means necessarily realised – sometimes old boundaries must win the day – the space of overspill insists that every identity category, however rigid it may seem, is susceptible to the re-writings that are yet to come.

67 Augé, p. 79.
Chapter three: ‘I could never leave here or I’d just burn up on re-entry’: locating and escaping origins in Alan Warner’s *Morvern Callar* (1995)

In the terms outlined at the end of the previous chapter, Alan Warner’s *Morven Callar* might be viewed as an example of both the urgency of re-writing inherited narratives of nation and subjectivity, and of re-writing’s limitations. The novel charts the experience of the eponymous protagonist, a 21-year old woman who works as a shelf-stacker in ‘the port’ (a loosely fictionalised Oban), in the aftermath of her boyfriend’s suicide. The novel opens almost like a crime thriller, with Morvern’s gruesome discovery of her boyfriend’s body on their kitchen floor. His hand is all but hacked off and He’s lying in a pool of blood under the flashing lights of the Christmas tree. Here, though, the novel spectacularly denies expectations (either those based on the generic conventions of crime fiction or realist novels). Rather than heading to the phone box to report His death, Morvern instead heads to work as usual, and then heads out drinking and dancing at a local club. In the weeks that follow, she first moves his body to the attic before hacking it into more manageable pieces and burying them one by one in the nearby Highlands.

Morvern’s unorthodox grieving process does not end there. As well as an elliptical suicide note, Morvern’s boyfriend has left behind a substantial inheritance from His father and a final draft of His first novel, which He implores Morvern to send out to publishers so that He is ‘not lost in silence’. Ignoring this request, she replaces His name on the novel with her own, and combines the money garnered from the publishers’ advance with His inheritance to fund a lengthy sojourn on the Balearic rave scene. The end of the novel sees her returning after an unspecified number of years to the outskirts of the port, penniless after having spent all of the money and pregnant with ‘the child of the raves’ (p. 229). From this, we can see that Warner’s novel offers a striking literalisation of Gramsci’s aphorism. The spectre of old ideologies looms large in the dead body that provides the impetus for the plot, and the insipient possibilities of ideological change remain imperilled and ante-natal at its end, as Morvern, carrying her unborn child, shivers her way back towards the port.

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1 The pronouns and determiners for her dead partner, significantly, always appear capitalised within the novel. The implications of this orthographic strategy will be discussed at further length in this chapter.

The experience of reading the novel is both compelling and confounding. In her review of the novel, Jenny Turner says something similar when she compares Warner’s novel to *The Great Gatsby*. Turner observes several formal and stylistic similarities between the two texts:

The same effortless surface, with an immaculate craft going on underneath. The same bold, lucid use of outrageously gilded images, worked into the texture of an otherwise quiet prose. The same structural ambivalence. All of which are just pretentious ways of trying to say something like: you’ll whizz through it like a hot knife through butter, but I’ve read it now several times and I still can’t pin it down.³

I am interested in exploring what it is that makes Warner’s novel so difficult to pin down, and how this constitutive ‘structural ambivalence’ might resonate with the category of interregnum. I will suggest that a productive way of discussing this ambivalence is by examining the presentation of origins in *Morvern Callar*. I contend that *Morvern Callar* is a novel preoccupied with the dual motion of locating and evading origins, whether they take the form of the figure of the author, the mythic Highlands, the meaning-generating subject of existentialism or the genealogy of family lineage. Throughout the novel, these originary centres of identity are problematised and discredited; their inadequacies and incompatibility with 20th century experience laid bare. However, despite the novel’s problematisation of these categories, they nonetheless remain at the centre of the narrative, exerting a sort of gravitational pull that is impossible to ignore. This instills a kind of ‘structural ambivalence’ within the novel, a constituent circularity that propels the narrative back to these imagined centres of meaning even as it strains to evade them.

My discussion will explore the inherent tension in the novel’s engagement with these various loci of origin. Warner’s text demonstrates an acute awareness that these ‘fixed’ points are always compromised; that they are contingently produced rather than eternal and immutable and that often act to enforce damaging, essentialising tendencies. Despite this, the novel also acknowledges the continued influence exerted by narratives of origin. Though they might be theoretically untenable, these narratives offer structure and succour to the characters within the novel, providing a framework that allows their experiences and identities to become

intelligible. Warner’s novel takes seriously this deep attachment to the stabilising coordinates of origin while simultaneously presenting a trenchant critique of their essentialising tendencies. *Morvern Callar* negotiates an uncertain path, incorporating these two contradictory impulses and producing a novel that is, as a result, profoundly unsettling and entirely in keeping with the ideological impetus of interregnum.

There is a continuity to be drawn here between the unsettling effects of the compromised origins in *Morvern Callar* and the operations of overspill in Galloway’s work. Both texts produce a kind of instability that is also a state of possibility and negotiation, where it is possible to reflect on and reconfigure the coordinates and meanings of space, gender and nation. The frustrated circularity of *Morvern Callar*, with its repeated cycles of evasion of and return to loci of origin, also resonates with the entrapment endured by Sammy in *How Late* and his dreams and schemes of unnarrated escape from Glasgow, despite the different experiences of the two characters (*Morvern* does escape, at least for a while).

**Cross-writing and authorship**

One of the clearest ways that this interregnum status manifests itself in Warner’s novel is in the negotiation of gender within the novel. In my introduction, I discussed Warner’s relationship with Rebel Inc. and the so-called ‘Repetitive Beat Generation’. These connections are undeniable, however it is important to insist upon the ways in which *Morvern Callar* is distinct within this grouping. It is hard to overstate the importance of the gender of Warner’s protagonist in setting *Morvern Callar* apart from a group of writers who have been linked to ‘laddism.’ Indeed, *Trainspotting* (the text at the centre of this movement) is an overwhelmingly masculine novel, with only three of the forty-four sections narrated from a female perspective. By contrast, one of *Morvern Callar*’s defining features is its focus on the minutiae of female experience from the perspective of the first person female narrator (albeit one created by a male author). Indeed, this is an aspect of Warner’s writing that has been remarked upon

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4 Redhead, p. xix.
frequently by reviewers and critics alike. Melissa Denes opens her survey of
Warner’s work by asserting that:

In his debut, Morvern Callar, and in The Sopranos, his raucous book about a
school choir trip, Warner showed us that he knew a thing or two about girls -
about friendships and fallings-out, about matching leopard-print underwear,
Dark Cherry nail polish, toe dividers and Rimmel eye liner. It’s uncanny, the
things this man knows.  

Much of Morvern Callar is set in intimate, female spaces, detailing the conversations
that occur between women in changing rooms and bathroom stalls. Warner certainly
has an eye for detail, and chronicles some aspects of the minutiae of female
experience both perceptively and convincingly.

Nonetheless, opinion is divided about the validity of Warner’s ventriloquism of
female experience. For Berthold Schoene, ‘despite the manifold misgivings about
Warner’s representational style, the fundamentally pro-feminist intentions of his
project are, in my view, beyond doubt.’ By contrast, critics such as Jones have
raised valid questions as to whether Warner’s cross-writing can ever position him as
‘more than just a male “colonist” of female experience.’ I tend to stand somewhere
between these two points of view, concurring with Janice Galloway’s assessment of
Warner’s depiction of female experience; that male writers cannot but produce ‘male
interpretations of women. Male visions…. Alan Warner’s women for example. Never
done fiddling with their stockings.’ Galloway draws attention to the voyeuristic power
encoded within the narratorial structure, acknowledging that while the technique does
not ‘invalidate what he’s saying’, it ‘does remind you Alan’s doing the observing.’

Galloway’s assertion neatly highlights the importance of the first locus of
origin at stake in the novel: the author. What the debates around the validity (or

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<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/may/25/fiction.features> [accessed 27 May
2016].
7 Berthold Schoene, ‘Alan Warner, Post-feminism and the Emasculated Nation’ in
Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature, ed. by Berthold Schoene
8 Carole Jones, ‘The “Becoming Woman”: Femininity and the Rave Generation in
9 March, ‘Interview’, p. 94.
10 Ibid.
otherwise) of Alan Warner’s adoption of a female narrative persona reveal is that, contrary to what life in the aftermath of poststructuralism might suggest, there is still continued critical investment in the figure. Authorship confers power, and the continued truth of this is brought into sharp relief when it interacts with the operations of gender inequality. That said, similar to the way that *How Late* is structured to offer a critique of its own form, there is a metafictional awareness and disruption of the operations of authorial power built into the layers of authorship depicted within *Morvern Callar*. The precise network of authorial relationships at work in the novel is a difficult knot to untie; standing outside the text we have Alan Warner, who bears several striking similarities to the first author within the text, Morvern’s boyfriend. Sophy Dale observes that ‘he is roughly the same age when he commits suicide as Warner was when he wrote the novel, both were brought up in hotels outside the real and imagined Oban, they share an obsession with trains.’¹¹ By opening the novel with His death we might argue that Warner is consciously abdicating the position of authorial power that this autobiographical connection might instate. However, Dale interprets this symbolic death as an actualisation of Barthesian poststructuralist thought, but one with important caveats:

This takes the critical theory of the “death of the author” to one of its possible extremes – kill off the autobiographical author figure and inhabit the voice of the Other, the female. “He” goes unnamed, in a novel which obsessively names everything else, perhaps because naming confers power and infers ownership, and despite Morvern’s posthumous appropriation of his money and his novel, she knows the limitation of her power over him during his lifetime. The device of always referring to “Him” with an intitial capital is deeply disturbing, increasing the sense of “His” power, by equating it with God’s – the author of all creation.¹²

In this framework, the adoption of a female voice is not a colonisation of female experience but a deliberate renunciation of male authorial power. However, there is ambivalence even here, as Dale’s characterisation of His capitalisation demonstrates. Even dead, the figure of the author-god exerts continued power over Morvern’s linguistic expression, He is capitalised while she remains lowercase, just as the residual shadow of author as origin haunts reading practices outside the novel.

¹² Ibid.
This shadow persists despite Morvern’s best efforts over the course of the novel. Morvern shows contempt for His attempts to secure posthumous fame through his writing; she usurps and complicates His authority by refusing to accede to his last request and preserve his legacy through literature so that he is not, as His suicide note emphatically puts it, ‘LOST IN SILENCE’ (p. 82). Instead, she publishes the novel he has left behind in her own name; in Jones’ words ‘by this act of plagiarism she steals a life from his death.’\(^{13}\) Significantly, she undertakes this act of appropriation without having read the work, and without any discernible interest in its contents. She expresses bafflement as to what the purpose of a ‘novel thing’ is:

This novel thing was page after page of words then a number then more pages of words and another number. You had to read to get to the end; you couldn’t see the point in reading through all that just to get to an end. (p. 82)

Her appendage of the word ‘thing’ emphasises the materiality of the novel; insisting on the physicality of the object rather than attending to its conceptual or cultural characteristics. This shift further denigrates authorial power, as the novel (and, by implication, its creator) is robbed of its transcendent qualities. Morvern evaluates the text purely in terms of the economy of things she interacts with in her daily life, and lists obsessively throughout the novel; Walkman, makeup, cigarettes etc. In comparison to these items, the novel comes up wanting, even pointless. However, even here there is room for ambiguity. The argument could be made that, in depicting Morvern’s absolute indifference to this ‘novel thing’, Warner is commenting on Morvern’s ignorance of high culture (as embodied in the novel form). Whether this comment is ironic, or patronising, is rendered inscrutable by the flat, first person narrative voice in which it is delivered.

When Morvern returns to the port at the novel’s close, it appears that her attitude to the merits of writing has changed somewhat. While she shelters in the tree church before setting off into the night, the reader sees that she is writing something: ‘I lit the lighter and lifted up the big notebook. I had to grip the pen good and tight while writing a few sentences, then when it got burny-hot I put the lighter out’ (p. 228). It would be reasonable to assume (though, as with so much in this novel, it is by no means certain) that the sentences we see Morvern writing here form part of the

\(^{13}\) Jones, *Disappearing Men*, p. 168.
novel we currently hold in our hands. Significantly, though the act of writing suggests a shift in her perspective on the value of novels, the focus remains on the physicality of the moment. Morvern’s writing is conditioned by her situation – she can only snatch the time to write a few sentences before the heat of the lighter forces her to stop. By insisting upon the minutiae of the physical details that make her act of writing possible, the novel forecloses the possibility of interpreting Morvern’s writing as transcendent. Here is not an all-powerful author-god, but a young woman sheltering from the cold, scratching a few lines in her notebook. Her authorship is presented as located, conditional and partial; quite a transformation from the intimations of ‘His’ capitalisation at the start of the novel.

Given this, we might be tempted to say that at its close Warner’s novel has done much to complicate notions of author as origin. However, the displacement of male author-god by a partial, female voice is an imperfect one. Within the frame of the novel, all the events that unfold and eventually lead to Morvern’s awakening as a writer are contingent on His suicide; an event over which she had no control. What power Morvern does accrue over the course of the novel is always compromised by the fact that it is facilitated by His decision. Her nascent creativity is also contingent upon the fact that she has (even for a short time) spent time outside Scotland. When she does begin to write, it is as a returnee, suggesting the necessity of transgressing national boundaries in order to gain even some small measure of agency over her own story and shake off His influence. All of this goes to emphasise the difficulty of displacing the archetypal figure of the male author-as-origin.

Outwith the fictional world of the novel, the persistent impulse to mythify and elevate the figure of the author is even clearer. The attachment to the male author as locus of authentic origin is revealed in many profiles of Warner. It is striking how many reviews make reference to Warner’s masculine physicality, as well as his drinking. Melissa Denes manages to incorporate nearly all of them into her article, which describes Warner thus:

Physically, there is not much to hint at Warner's feminine side. He is a rangy, big-boned man of 37 - large hands, long legs, impressive cheekbones - with a sudden maniacal laugh. He likes a drink, and though he was up all hours with
his editor last night, orders a midday Guinness and whiskey chaser at the gloomy wood-panelled bar.\textsuperscript{14}

If the male author in the novel is killed off on the first page, then this review makes it clear that his counterpart outside the text is alive and kicking (as well as drinking and laughing maniacally). It is striking how frequently hyper-masculinised descriptions of Warner occur, and this perhaps goes to show the continued investment of the literary establishment in this particular embodiment of the author figure. In comparison to the focus on femininity in his fiction, Warner’s public persona seems to be exaggeratedly masculine. We might draw an analogy here to the processes of hypermasculinisation outlined in my introduction, whereby (under colonialism) an excessive association with femininity produces subjects who perform an exaggerated and excessive masculinity. Whilst Warner’s public persona does not approach the extremes of the hard men of Scottish fiction, it is certainly interesting to note that the focus on female experience in his fiction produces a concomitant desire in journalists to depict the author’s own masculinity. This journalistic trope perhaps signals the continued investment in a certain type of intelligible Scottish masculinity that is hard to shake off both within fiction and without.

\textbf{Interrogating Highlandism}

Of course, the configuration of gender relations is not the only area in which Warner’s fiction is freighted with national resonance; the imagined geography of the nation also exerts significant pressure on his work. Warner’s oeuvre does not sit easily within the same geographic framework as Kelman and Galloway, or with \textit{Trainspotting’s} Leith environs: his fiction is not set in the urban conurbations of Glasgow or Edinburgh, but is instead mostly rooted in ‘the port’, a fictionalised version of Warner’s native Oban. This distinction seems obvious, but is of central importance to understanding \textit{Morvern Callar}. In my first two chapters, I have discussed texts that are firmly anchored to urban Scottish space. However, \textit{Morvern Callar} moves into different territory altogether. That the text’s setting signals an important shift is signalled by the blurb on the 1995 Jonathan Cape edition of the text, which concludes: ‘Alan Warner’s novel shifts the focus away from the male-dominated urban realism of much contemporary fiction and marks the arrival of a

\textsuperscript{14} Denes, 2002.
startling new Scottish writer.'\textsuperscript{15} The association implied in this description between location and gender is significant, and perhaps does not tell the whole story. As Whyte argues, rural Scotland does have a particular investment in ‘a “femininity” acceptable to male authors [that] came to be identified with closeness to the land, or with the land itself (as in Chris Guthrie in Lewis Grassic Gibbon’s \textit{A Scots Quair} trilogy [1932-1934]).\textsuperscript{16} However, this brand of femininity has a necessary masculine corollary, a stable and secure Highland male who is by no means less dominant than the ‘hard man’ of urban Scottish fiction. For the blurb of Warner’s novel to suggest that the rural setting of the novel inherently destabilises male dominance is misleading indeed, and ignores the participation of pastoral landscapes in naturalising a particular set of gender relationships which are by no means more hospitable to female emancipation than their urban counterparts.

What is true, however, is that the rural setting of Warner’s novel exerts quite different pressures than those explored in my previous chapters. While it might be argued that Glasgow, until the devolutionary period, had been insufficiently represented in literature, the same cannot be said of the setting for \textit{Morven Callar}. Warner’s Highland locale had been richly imagined and narrativised for centuries before his debut, and holds a pre-eminent position in the conceptualisation of the Scottish nation. Tom Devine comments on the potency and frequency of Highland imagery in twentieth century representations of Scotland:

\begin{quote}
To the rest of the world in the late twentieth century Scotland seems a Highland country. The ‘land of the mountain and the flood’ adorns countless tourist posters and those familiar and distinctive symbols of Scottish identity, the kilt, the tartan and the bagpipes, are all of Highland origin.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

Given this, Warner’s novel is treading on territory heavy with symbolic resonance, suffused with significance for the Scottish nation. While Kelman might have felt himself writing into an imaginative void, Warner is writing into a space that has been richly imagined in a very particular way.

To understand the ways in which Warner’s text interacts with and challenges received ideas about the Scottish Highlands as a locus of origin, it is important to first

\textsuperscript{15} Quoted in Dale, p. 74.
\textsuperscript{16} Whyte, \textit{Masculinities}, p. 274.
understand something of the historical processes by which the region came to hold a position of such prominence. For the Highlands are by no means a necessary or obvious emblem for the modern Scottish nation. Far from it, in fact. Devine has remarked upon the peculiarity of the Highlands’ symbolic significance for modern Scotland. He contends that:

[T]his curious image is bizarre and puzzling at several levels. For one thing it hardly reflects the modern pattern of life in Scotland as one of the most urbanized societies in the world and the fact that, by the later nineteenth century, Scotland had become an industrial pioneer with the vast majority of its people engaged in manufacturing and commercial activities and living in the central Lowlands. Most rural areas by that time were losing population rapidly through migration to the big cities of the Forth and Clyde valleys. Yet, ironically, it was one of these regions, the Highlands, the poorest and most underdeveloped of all, that provided the main emblems of cultural identity for the rest of the country. An urban society had adopted a rural face.\(^\text{18}\)

As Devine rightly observes, the Highlands are not a logical locus for Scottish identity, as they simply do not represent the experience of the vast majority of the nation’s inhabitants. In this extract Devine highlights the modern disparities, which are certainly striking, but the differences between Highland and Lowland Scotland are centuries old. Indeed, Devine observes that the term ‘Highlands’ itself was a way of codifying the region’s ‘otherness’. He argues that “[w]hen the Highlands did become part of the vocabulary in the medieval period, it was in response to a need to isolate and distinguish a part of Scotland that differed in cultural and social terms from the rest.”\(^\text{19}\) At its inception, then, the term was meant to isolate this region, and it is curious indeed that from this genesis the Highlands should have come, in the twenty-first century, to be used so freely to metonymically represent the nation as a whole.

The transformative appropriation of Highland culture, which has culminated in the romanticised iconography that persists into the 21st century, has a very precise historical inception. As Peter Womack stresses, ‘[t]he Highlands are romantic because they have been romanticised. This happened, at an identifiable point in time, in response to a specific ideological requirements and contradictions which are

\(^{18}\) Devine, *The Scottish Nation*, p. 231.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., p. 231.
both exhibited and disguised by its eventual form. Both Devine and Womack chart the beginning of this process in 1745, after Culloden and the failure of the Jacobite rebellion, a decisive defeat that meant that a process could begin to incorporate the Highlands into the Union. This process is possibly best exemplified by the treatment of that most pervasive of Highland symbols: the kilt. In the aftermath of the Jacobite defeat, the ‘45 Disarming Act banned the wearing of Highland dress, a sartorial symbol of the Highlands’ rebellious tendencies. Instead this symbol was only permitted for the Highland regiments fighting for the British army. Thus, the combative associations of the kilt were simultaneously maintained and neutralised as they were mobilised in support of, and not against, the Union. The reputation of these battalions grew in prestige, and during the Napoleonic Wars Highland dress was taken up by many Scottish soldiers, rather than just those of direct Highland descent. The embrace of tartan by the Scottish military as a whole signalled an important shift in the place of Highland iconography. As Devine concludes:

[T]he military tradition had long been an important part of the Scottish identity; now that was being decked out in Highland colours and the kilted battalions depicted as the direct descendants of the clans. Crucially, however, they now represented the martial spirit of the Scottish nation as a whole rather than a formerly despised part of it.

The process by which the kilt was established once and for all as Scotland’s national dress reached its culmination in 1822 with George IV’s state visit to Edinburgh. Devine describes the visit as ‘a series of extraordinary pageants, all with a Celtic and Highland flavour… stage-managed by Sir Walter Scott for his delectation.’ Womack views this as a particularly damaging moment, when ‘the real and imaginary Highland clansmen paraded through the streets of Edinburgh in a sort of collective ‘hallucination’ which temporarily effaced the actual lives and traditions of the overwhelming majority of Scots, to say nothing of the real contemporary breakup of Highland society itself.

This effacement is of crucial importance; it must be stressed that the process by which the Highlands and their customs were elevated had a deleterious and

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23 Ibid., p. 235.
24 Womack, p. 144.
deforming effect on the culture. Lowland Scots were suddenly expected to identify profoundly with an array of national emblems that had little to do with their lived experience of Scotland, and those who were from the Highlands saw their culture and traditions co-opted and commodified, wrenched from their context in the service of an ideology far removed from the Highland way of life. Womack aligns this phenomenon with the semiotic method of Barthes’ *Mythologies*. Womack suggests that the Highlands came to function as a myth, appropriated by ideology in such a way that their meaning was both charged and changed. In Barthesian terms, myth is a ‘second-order semiological system’ whereby the first-order sign (signifier + signified in de Saussure’s formulation) assumes the status of signifier, acting as a carrier of ideology in a way that is more than simply symbolic, but rather actively fused with and inseparable from the associations with which it is imbued. The Highlands, Womack argues, are a perfect example of this process: they have been ‘colonised by the empire of signs’ as they are assigned the burden of national representation. He uses the example of heather, arguing that ‘trying to see that neutral, unappropriated flower would be like trying to see, say, a swastika as nothing but an abstract design.’

This image of the Highlands, and of the Highlandism alluded to by Devine has, in large part, been shaped by its treatment in literature. Murray Pittock argues that ‘the creation and accentuation of this “fixed image” came in three stages: the Ossianism of Macpherson, the showmanship of Scott, and the endorsement of Queen Victoria.’ Of these three stages, the Ossian cycle is perhaps the most relevant to our present concerns. Published in the 1760s, MacPherson’s epic cycle was presented as a translation of an ancient Scots Gaelic manuscript, originally composed by the poet Ossian, that had come into MacPherson’s possession. Though its authenticity was thrown into question almost immediately, the poems had a powerful and pervasive impact both within and beyond Scotland. The widespread popularity of the text reveals something of the society’s zeitgeist; MacPherson’s work, even if inauthentic, addressed a yearning to tap into the lost nobility of a more primitive way of life. Devine argues that the Ossian cycle:

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26 Womack, p. 1.
27 Ibid.
caught an intellectual and spiritual mood at a time of massive economic, social and political change which saw ‘primitive’ societies possessing virtues that ‘modern’ societies had lost. This was a notion that could easily be transferred to the eighteenth-century Highlands because there, too, into the contemporary period, lived a ‘primitive’ people amid a landscape which seemed hardly to have altered since the time of Ossian.29

The desires that were sated by the narratives of Ossian were thus available to be mapped directly on to the contemporary Highlands. They delivered far more than just an originary Scottish myth; they uncovered the fact that Scots had been living, all this time, with a region that was a veritable repository of untainted primitive virtue annexed inside the nation. In this move, the Highlands were manoeuvred seamlessly back into a holistic, progressive narrative in which the region figured as the lost past of the whole nation. Devine argues that ‘in this way, the Highlands were effectively incorporated as part of Scotland; they were no longer an alien world beyond the pale but a living illustration of the social mores of the Scottish past.’30

The Highlands, then, came to be figured in the Scottish imagination as a kind of living locus of origin, a reified region that gives succour and stability in a changing world. Yet this figuration is neither innocent nor harmless; it is the product of an overarching ideology that seeks to co-opt and neutralise difference by riding roughshod over a history of disenfranchisement. Despite the omissions and misrepresentations of Highlandism, its legacy as synecdoche for modern Scotland has been surprisingly tenacious. Indeed, the romanticism associated with the Highlands has been marshalled as a powerful marketing tool. VisitScotland, the national tourism organisation, states on its corporate website that in the course of their research into how best to market the national brand, they found ‘that Scotland has world famous icons such as whisky, tartan, golf and castles along with strong, romantic and rich imagery.’31 Half of the icons cited are linked directly to the Highland region and the nebulous ‘imagery’ identified as key to Scotland’s appeal certainly resonates with the discourse of Highlandism. This legacy is also very much at work in the reception of Alan Warner’s writing, which frequently figure him as a ‘Highland

autodidact’, as if the progressive trajectory of learning was somehow antithetical to a setting so primitive. It is also, more subtly, operating in another recurring trope in reviews of Warner’s work: a mention of his old-fashioned writing methods. Larry Weissman, Melissa Denes and Stuart Jeffries all note that Warner still writes longhand, a peculiar detail that perhaps suggests an enduring investment in the authenticity implied by writing practices unmediated by technology. This implicit valorisation of a more primitive creation of texts is closely linked to the mythologisation of the idealised, originary Highlands.

This, then, is the fraught, symbolic landscape in which *Morvern Callar* begins and ends. Warner’s novel negotiates, confronts and confounds received ideas about Highland life, and this subversion is one of the clearest ways that the text rejects the ideological insufficiencies of the old order. *Morvern Callar* acknowledges the symbolic significance of its setting, deliberately invoking mythical tropes and simultaneously undercutting them with an insistence on the lived realities of late twentieth century Highland life. In this way, Warner fits neatly into the schematic outlined by Douglas Gifford when he hails ‘a new period of synthesis of Scottish fiction’; a movement of writers whose work seeks to reconfigure, rather than abandon, the mythopoeic resonance that characterised the Scottish Renaissance. Gifford aligns this new period with a particular kind of negotiation with origins and authenticity; this synthesising writing combines a commitment to specificity, locatedness and difference with an avowedly irrational ‘desire to retain amidst the plethora of possible Scotlands a unifying sense or a force-field or web of connections which hold together what would otherwise deconstruct into meaningless regional variants, each of them susceptible to further deconstruction, so that as “authenticity” is lost, so also is any awareness of identity or permanence.’ This is a delicate and ambivalent balance to strike, an ideological attitude that functions in precisely the opposite way to the consoling romanticisation of the Highlands elucidated above and instead enacts the ideological impasse and ambivalence of interregnum.

Indeed, most of *Morvern Callar* is not set in a kind of Highlands that would be recognisable from a tourist poster. Rather than focusing on the bens and glens of the romanticised Highlands, Warner locates his novel in the built-up area of the port. Far from being a rural idyll, the port is depicted mostly through the network of pubs, workplaces and railways around which Morvern navigates her monotonous, repetitive existence. Warner stresses the heavy drinking and drugs culture within the port, whose inhabitants seem to spend all the time they are not working getting ‘mortal’ (the Scots word used throughout the novel to describe extreme drunkenness) in one drinking venue or another. Indeed, as Warner’s association with the Repetitive Beat Generation would attest, the Mantrap and the Kale Onion seem to have more in common with the Leith subculture inhabited by the cast of Irvine Welsh’s *Trainspotting* than the primitive clansmen of the rustic Highlands. However, that is not to say that the experience of drugs charted in the two novels operates in precisely the same way. Indeed, Warner’s novel insists upon the port’s particularity and insularity. Morvern is able to identify immediately if people she encounters are locals, observing that a couple of boys in the Mantra ‘werent port, maybe villages’ (p. 15). In this formulation, ‘port’ is something that you either are or aren’t, not just somewhere you are from; local belonging, on a very small scale, is linked intimately to identity. The Panatine, perhaps the heaviest drinker in the novel, describes his feelings for his hometown in terms that recall this formulation: ‘see this port, I love it. I just love it, best crack on earth. I could never leave here or I’d just burn up on re-entry’ (p. 60). Though his assessment appears hyperbolically positive, it does suggest a kind of entrapment (albeit, in the Panatine’s case, a self-imposed entrapment) exercised by the town; the port’s drinking den acts as a ‘Mantrap’ in more ways than one.

There is, too, a pervasive sense of claustrophobia about the port, a tightknit community where everyone knows everyone else, and their business. This is one of the crucial reasons why Morvern does not report His death – she knows that as soon as she does ‘all in the port would know’ (p. 2). This profound lack of privacy is also demonstrated when Morvern tells an architecture student she meets at a party that her aspiration for her dream house is simply ‘one where you couldn’t hear men go to the toilet’ (p. 22). What Morvern desires is her own space; something that is simply impossible within the confines of the port. There is much here to align Morvern’s experience with that of Sammy in *How Late* and Joy in *The Trick*: all three protagonists experience their housing situation as claustrophobic; compromised by the inescapable and enforced proximity to others. Warner’s unflinchingly detailed
presentation of the lives of the port’s inhabitants also aligns him with Kelman and Galloway; like them Warner aligns himself with spaces that have been peripheralised through his attention to their particularity. Through this narrative strategy, he also avoids a reductive portrayal of life in the Highlands. The picture he paints is resolutely un-romantic; at times life in the port appears unendurably bleak – more akin to urban grind than rural idyll. The lives of these late twentieth-century Highlanders are subject to the same economic pressures as the rest of Scotland, facing the demands of rising unemployment and a disaffected youth. These pressures are simply differently inflected when seen through the prism of this remote, isolated region. Morvern is just as trapped in the port as Sammy is in Glasgow, or Joy in Boot Hill; all three are characters pushing against the ideological and physical entrapment of a bankrupt old order whose tenets curtail and confine their experience.

The sense of claustrophobia felt by Morvern in the port is illustrated early in the novel when she climbs the circular folly above the port, from which the whole community is visible:

Up there in the darkness you could see the lights of the whole port, from The Complex round the back to the piers below, like a model with the small hotels, little lights, circling toy cars and still boats in the bay. (p. 13)

Jones asserts that this scene acts to ‘illustrate Morvern’s entrapment.’ Even though her elevated view inverts the normal sense of scale, Morvern remains ‘part of the Port, trapped in this environment.’ The small size of the port from Morvern’s vantage point suggests the curtailment of her experiential possibilities while she remains there. The port is small enough to be seen in its entirety; Morvern can comprehend the whole of her life in the vision of its ‘little lights’ and ‘small hotels’; there is no room for grander hopes and dreams. At this point of the narrative, the shift in perspective attained by her elevation is merely symbolic – as is evidenced by Morvern’s small act of violence before her descent: ‘I put the empty bottle on the stone of the folly and, for a moment, port lights were gathered in it: I smashed it against the granite circle’ (p. 13). I would tend to agree with Jones that ‘[t]his is less a symbolic destruction of the Port itself than a protest against it as a place of containment and oppressive relations.’

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36 Jones, Disappearing Men, p. 174.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., p. 175.
bottle further miniaturises the port, and in smashing it Morvern explodes the vessel that structures, contains and limits the bright possibilities that she yearns for.

The proportions evoked by this panoramic view of the town are reprised later in the novel in the description of the model village built by Morvern’s boyfriend in their attic. The model is a perfect replica of the port, dazzling in its attention to detail and more perfect than the reality in its ‘always summerness’ (p. 51). The model has clearly been of significant importance to Morvern’s boyfriend in life; when Morvern tells Lanna that he has gone away, one of the first things she asks is what will happen to ‘yon stuff he puts on His computer and the model train set?’ (p. 34). Here, the train set/model village is equated with his novel (which, we assume, is ‘yon stuff on his computer’). Both are exercises in creation, artefacts of which he is the origin and architect. His construction of the miniature village is an expression of his agency over Highland domain. Whereas Morvern experiences the view from the folly as confirmation of her entrapment, her boyfriend has built the model as ‘an exercise in containment and control.’

It can hardly be an accident, then, that Morvern destroys His life’s endeavour so completely, bringing his body crashing down upon the model village:

His toes at the far end of the pass. His face beyond the railway line. His body crushed the hotel with its pointing-up tower at the top of the stairs. The Tree Church on the sgnurr above where he lay back upon the land. (pp. 52–53)

This destruction recalls the smashed bottle on the folly, only here Morvern’s gesture of resistance is intensified and its scale expanded. By obliterating His treasured construction with his own body, Morvern seems to be rejecting the strictures and structures of patriarchal port life symbolically, before literally escaping to the Spanish rave scene. As his body comes crashing down upon the model village, his appendages reach out beyond the boundaries of the port, transgressing its claustrophobic confines and obliterating its history. The cathartic significance of this destruction is made clear by Morvern’s response to it; immediately after these lines she climbs down from the attic and changes her soundtrack. In an novel whose emotional flatness makes charting the protagonist’s feelings difficult, the music that Morvern listens to provides a vital index to her state of mind. It is therefore significant that, upon the destruction of the model village, she ‘put on some of [her] own music

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39 Jones, Disappearing Men, p. 174.
rather than his’ (p. 53). From this, it seems that the symbolic destruction of the port has acted as a kind of release for Morvern as she replaces His choices with her own in a small but significant statement of her agency.

Before she can escape physically and not just aurally, however, His body must be disposed of. This is the only section of Morvern Callar that takes place against the specific kind of Highland background readily recognisable as the landscape of tourist posters. In this powerfully subversive episode, Morvern takes a camping trip near Beinn Mheadhonach in order to bury the various parcelled-up parts of His dissected body. From a high vantage point on her trip, we see yet another panoramic perspective of the port and its surroundings:

From up there you could see all that land; from the Back Settlement westwards where the railway moved into the pass, following the road toward the power station, the village beyond where the pass widened out towards the concession lands. Birches clustered in sprays where the dried-up burns dipped into the streams. One stream ran under the concrete bridge by the sycamore where sweet primroses were spreading thickly. Flickers were coming off the loch and the massive sky seemed filled with a sparkly dust above those hot summer hills, fattened with plants and trees. You could hear the water-falls down in the gulley. They would be spraying onto ferns there and drops of water would be hanging from their tips. I looked out at the landscape moving without any haste to no bidding at all. I yawned a big yawn. (pp. 90–91)

The extract certainly contains some features we would readily associate with a romantic view of the Scottish Highlands; the word ‘loch’ in particular anchors us to this imaginative context. The timelessness and independence of the landscape is also emphasised – it moves ‘without haste’ and ‘to no bidding at all’, suggesting that the Highlands is exempt from the economically driven temporality of life in the port. There is something comfortingly familiar and predictable about the natural processes which surround Morvern in this locale. She describes the evocative sound of the waterfall, which allows her to imagine in some detail what would be happening further downstream. The predictability and rhythms of the natural world are shown to be in direct contrast to the relentless, repetitive monotony of her work in the superstore. These aspects of her description certainly resonate with the view of the Highlands as a pre-capitalistic space of ‘authentic’ bucolic existence, evoking a kind
of contemporary Scottish pastoral that imagines a way of life uncorrupted by the pressures of modernity.

However, Morvern’s description of her surroundings cannot be co-opted so easily into this reassuring narrative. Significantly, her description of the view does not begin with the familiar bens and glens, but with how man-made features like the railway and the power station interact with the landscape. The Highlands might be idyllic in many ways, but they are not as readily separable from economic life as it might appear. The inclusion of the railway is of particular significance in this regard; it functions as a highly evocative symbol of industrialisation and political struggle.40 Writing about Trainspotting, Aaron Kelly argues that ‘in terms of the onset of modernity and contemporary capitalist society, railways are also highly charged artefacts as the train was one of the driving engines of the industrial revolution and its attendant social transformation.’41 The railway’s function in the novel is also more than symbolic; Red Hanna (Morvern’s foster-father) is employed as a train driver, and at the end of his working career has his early retirement snatched away on a technicality by the company. The railway is ideologically opposed to Red Hanna’s leftist politics; his sanction is less to do with the lager shandies cited in their complaint than the fact that ‘they love to get an old commy and union activist’ (p. 168). By featuring the railway so prominently in her description of the Highlands, Morvern demonstrates that this space is not exempt from this kind of political wrangling and disenfranchisement. The Highlands are manifestly not that far removed from the temporality of the rest of the port. Neither are the Highlands a purely untouched rural idyll; Morvern mentions a ‘concrete bridge’, a decidedly un-rustic addition to the beauty of the landscape.

By presenting these features side by side, Warner’s text acknowledges he imaginative history of the Highlands but refuses to allow the region to be held apart from modern life in a way that would both revere and reify the landscape. Warner holds in tension a kind of natural timelessness and an insistence on modernity. This is also demonstrated when Lanna arrives to visit Morvern. Smearing mud on their faces, Lanna and Morvern perform a kind of play-acting primitive ritual:

Cmon, do the fertility dance, says Lanna.

41 Kelly, Irvine Welsh, p. 38.
We both leaped up and hunched over, circling and grunting in a dance. Lannna’d taken her top off and brown-ness blackishness was splattered down her tits. Escape harmful rays with this remarkable Factor Twelve, goes Lanna flickering her eyes. (p. 99)

Their surroundings clearly still hold, for the young women, strong connotations of a more mythic, pre-modern society; a society of circling, grunting fertility dances and not of casual sex and the Pill. However, this imaginative association barely lasts the length of their dance – Lanna ruptures the mood by comparing the mud masks they sport to sunscreen, mimicking the language of advertising and pulling the pair back into the recognisable world of late-twentieth century capitalism. Through such instances, Warner subtly but insistently both acknowledges and problematises reified conceptions of the Highlands. This double movement is characteristic of the interregnum ambivalence at work in Warner’s text, where tradition and modernity are held in tension; neither fully endorsed nor completely disavowed. While much of Warner’s narrative strategy appears to traduce or refuse Highland myth, it also demonstrates the enduring power of these mythic narratives as affective or unconscious structures for the port’s community.

‘there’s no place like the port’: escaping and returning to Scotland

Another important way that Morvern Callar engages with the originary pre-eminence of the Highland landscape is by setting a significant part of the novel away from the port. As soon as her finances allow, Morvern leaves Scotland for the Balearic rave scene, first for a holiday and later for a more extended period of time. The distance she has travelled from the world of the port is emphasised in her description of the resort:

I tread water and looked in. Where you would expect a jumble of hills and a circular folly above a port: none. Where you would expect piers with a seawall between and an esplanade of hotels beyond: none. Where you would expect stone houses hunched round a horseshoe of bay with The Complex tucked away round a back: none. The resort I was looking at was really another place. (p. 151)
In some ways, this comparison vindicates Morvern’s escape from the limiting possibilities offered by her home. However, it also emphasises the pre-eminence of the port in her conceptualisation of space and place. She obsessively compares all aspects of the resort to where she has come from. The port, as Morvern’s point of origin, continues to act as her baseline, and its geographical and architectural particularities are imprinted on her mind. The repetition of the word ‘expect’ highlights the difficulty Morvern has in banishing the port from her mind, so thoroughly is she implicated in its boundaries. In the call-and-response structure of her description, the repetition of ‘none’ to her expectations suggests something of the blankness that surrounds her now that she has escaped the physical entrapment of the port (if not its potent imaginative presence). This new space is unwritten and unmapped, perhaps analogous to the unborn new order of interregnum; a new space that holds both potential and trepidation. Morvern’s unwillingness, at this stage in the narrative, to embrace this new environment is signalled by her movement in the sea – she is not moving forwards but simply treading water.

A more successful break from the port is suggested in Morvern’s second Spanish sojourn. Morvern’s days are described as a series of blissful, timeless repetitions. The similarity of one day to the next is most obviously demonstrated in Morvern’s interaction with the waitress at mealtimes. In the morning, she walks into the restaurant and ‘without having to do the asking the waitress with the little mole brought me the usual breakfast’ (p. 191). This procedure occurs again in the evening, when ‘without me having to do the asking the waitress brought me the meal as per usual along with the last night’s bit of wine still left in the cold bottle’ (p. 198). The repetition that colours the Spanish section of the novel emphasises the circularity and repetition of her experience. Morvern’s time in Spain is cyclical rather than linear, each day unfolding as a perfect replica of the one before. This allows Morvern to evade, at least for a while, the influence of teleological narratives that she finds so baffling and limiting (such as, for example, the narrative structure of His novel). While in Spain, Morvern’s experience is resolutely focused on the present, and her enjoyment of sensory pleasures.

This emphasis is evident in her description of her meals and her time dancing in the raves. She describes in detail the physicality of eating olives:

I skinned the flesh from each olive with my two top front teeth so if you fished the olive out you could see the little square cuts on it. After I’d bitten off most
of the flesh, my tongue passed the stone further back in my mouth where I rubbed the rest off. Then I sucked the stone with its sharp little ridge before popping it out on my hand and lining it up with the other stones. (p. 199)

The extract breaks a brief moment into minute details, highlighting the particular sensations and mechanics of each stage of the process. Morvern is intimately in tune with her own body, isolating each individual part of her mouth used as it participates in her gustatory experience. A similar attention to corporeality is evident in her description of dancing at the raves:

I was so close some boy or girl that their sweat was hitting me when they flicked arms or neck to a new rhythm. I slid my foot to the left. You felt the whole side of a face lay against my bare back, between shoulder blades. It was still part of our dance. If the movement wasn’t in rhythm it would have changed the meaning of the face sticking there in the sweat. You didn’t really have your body as your own, it was part of the dance, the music, the rave. (p. 203)

Here, Morvern is both intensely aware of her own corporeality and dispossessed of it; giving herself over to the rave. This is, perhaps, the moment where the novel gets closest to a complete disavowal of origins. Here, Morvern is aware only of the physical immediacy of the dance, surrendered utterly to the immediacy of the present moment.

However, we should be wary of idealising Morvern’s experience in Spain. Though this section of the novel is occasionally blissful in its description of sensory pleasures, it is worth pausing for a moment to consider that the structures here have not necessarily altered as much as we might hope from the entrapment and enclosure of port. The cyclical structure of Morvern’s days in Spain is not actually that different to her experience in Scotland; indeed, the whole novel is characterised by repetition and return, and it is only His death that interrupts this process and jolts Morvern’s existence off its cyclical course. This is subtly marked in one of the first acts that Morvern undertakes after she finds His body; she ‘took the last pill in that cycle’ (p. 2). Indeed, there are markers of circularity scattered throughout the opening section of the novel. We see this in the Walkman that Morvern receives for Christmas which has an Auto-reverse function that ensures the seamless and uninterrupted repetition of the music; as Morvern exclaims, it ‘turned the cassettes
without having to take them out!’ (p. 4). It is evident, too, in the behaviour of the inhabitants; Morvern remarks that ‘boys in cars were circling the port roads. You recognised the same cars again and again’ (p. 12). Circularity is also implicit in the routine unfolding of Morvern’s experience; the assumption that she will continue to go to work day in day out, and then get mortal at the Mantrap in the evenings. The experiences in Spain and the port are different, yes, but both are coloured by a temporality characterised by circularity and repetition. Even the physicality of the rave scene has a corollary in the port; Morvern’s sexual liberation is hardly simply a product of her Spanish environs. Early in the novel, she has sex with her friend Lanna and two boys they meet at a party. Morvern describes the encounter in ways that resonate with her description of the dance where ‘you didn’t really have your body as your own’. She describes abandoning herself to the others, as she ‘let them do anything to [her]’ until ‘the wave of something went across so strong [she] was smiling’ (p. 26). Morvern lives in an eternal present in both the port and the rave scene; though her location is different, the structure of her experience is not. We might align this temporal strategy with the moment of interregnum as a kind of static and endlessly repeating present.

The significance of circularity is made abundantly clear by Morvern’s eventual return to Scotland at the end of the novel. The close of the text sees Morvern making her way back to the port in darkness, the money from His inheritance finally exhausted. Despite her avowed desire not to return to the port (p. 221), this is nonetheless where she is heading. The port seems to exert a gravitational pull on Morvern, and despite her desire for liberation she is pulled back into its orbit. The ideological impulse of this is evident by the fact that Morvern navigates her way in the darkness not by a map but by her recollection of His model village; ‘from the model I remembered the route across the graveyards’ (p. 227). The enduring power of His continued ability to orient Morvern quite literally suggests that the ideological coordinates offered by this male-authored model are similarly hard to shake off. Jones suggests that this is a ‘melancholy conclusion’42 that signals Morvern’s return to a society of gender normativity and patriarchal and economic entrapment.

That Morvern is pregnant at the novel’s close complicates this reading. On the one hand, we might argue that her pregnancy serves to enhance her entrapment; her female physicality (despite the fluid sexuality of the raves) is what necessitates

42 Jones, Disappearing Men, p. 179.
her return to the port. However, this reading would undercut any possibility of Morvern’s agency over her pregnancy. The second page of the novel revealed that, at the start of the novel, Morvern was on the contraceptive pill (‘I took the last pill in that cycle’ [p. 2]), so we know that she had previously exercised some control over her own fertility. It is not too much of a stretch, then, to imagine that the child that she is carrying was conceived consciously and deliberately outwith the socially sanctioned framework of the couple, whether married or unmarried. The ‘child of the raves’, thought of in this way, is a profoundly subversive introduction to the port. The transformative potentiality of this pregnancy is revealed by the messianic overtones to Morvern’s return; she takes refuge in the ‘Tree Church’, where she prays before a quasi-baptismal anointing with the ‘icy-cold drop’ of snow water (p. 228). Once again, Warner invokes the pastoral only to undercut it with the ‘loud click and a hum’ (p. 229) of a nearby pylon. The ancient Tree Church is juxtaposed with the modern pylon, just as the messianic overtones of the episode are held in tension with the unapologetic sexuality of the rave scene. Here, Warner re-invents Morvern as a Scottish madonna, but a madonna whose Christ-child is far from a virgin birth, and is revealed in a subsequent novel These Demented Lands (1997) to be female. In this sense, the old order is in tension with the new, literalising Gramsci’s aphorism that in times of interregnum the new order is unable to be born. This ending leaves open both the possibility that Morvern’s return signals a capitulation and the port offers an opportunity for the revitalisation of its stagnant and circular cultural norms.

Jones also acknowledges that the end of the novel ‘also lends itself as an existential allegory’43 that signifies Morvern’s acceptance of death. Admittedly, this acceptance is a compromising one, as it means a re-entry to His world, ‘a world where death is preferable to the search for new male identity.’44 However, Morvern returns to the port changed by her experience, not least because she is pregnant, suggesting that though she will have to re-engage with the value system she found so debilitating, the terms of that engagement must necessarily be different. Indeed, it might be considered a brave decision to return to the port rather than turning her back on everything she has left behind. We might suggest that her return presents an opportunity for re-negotiation, not simply capitulation. The ending of the novel sustains both of these readings, and more, and in doing so produces and inhabits a deeply ambivalent space of interregnum. It is in this space, I argue, that radical

43 Jones, Disappearing Men, p. 179.
44 Ibid.
reconceptualisation of categories such as nation and gender become possible, even as the difficulty of this undertaking is laid bare.

**Existentialism and choice**

Here, it is worth dwelling for a moment on Jones’ invocation of the word ‘existential’, because it points to another important strand in criticism of Warner’s novel. *Morvern Callar* has been described as an existentialist text with some frequency. The author himself has described *Morvern Callar* as ‘an old existential novel recast in today’s colours’; and the jacket of the 1996 edition, published by Vintage, includes a quote from the *Scotland on Sunday* that compares the novel to Albert Camus’ *The Outsider*. To a certain extent, this comparison can be borne out by textual analysis. Camus’ novel famously opens with the Meursault’s impassive reaction to his mother’s death: ‘My mother died today. Or maybe yesterday, I don’t know.’ Though the opening of *Morvern Callar* is decidedly more gruesome, there are echoes of Camus’ unmoved protagonist in Morvern’s reaction to her boyfriend’s suicide:

> He’d cut His throat with the knife. He’d near chopped off His hand with the meat cleaver. He couldn’t object so I lit a Silk Cut. A sort of wave of something was going across me. There was a fright but I’d daydreamed how I’d be. (p. 1)

This stylistic blankness, and the profound ambiguity it produces, can certainly be read in existential terms. In his 1943 commentary on Camus’ novel, Sartre compares the experience of reading the text to watching a man through glass:

> Glass seems to let everything through. It blocks only one thing: the meaning of their gestures. The glass still needs to be chosen: it will be the Stranger’s consciousness, which is really transparent, since we see everything it sees. However, it is designed in such a way that things are transparent and meanings opaque.⁴⁷

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⁴⁵ Weissman.
⁴⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, ‘Commentary on The Stranger’ in *Existentialism is a Humanism*, trans. by Carol Macomber (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 73-98 (p. 91).
The effect of the narrative strategy, according to Sartre, is to provoke a confrontation with existential absurdity. The reader gropes to understand the meaning for the protagonist’s actions, but the narrative provides only depthless description and denies the reader the comfort of any explicatory analytical insight. The whys and wherefores of events and actions are unexplored or withheld; despite the intimate access granted by the first person narrative, the character’s motivations ultimately remain occluded.

The similarity of narrative styles continues throughout Camus’s novels; in her note on the translation of *The Outsider*, Smith remarks that ‘the most lyrical passages in the novel are the striking descriptions of nature, in particular the sun and sea imagery.’ This could equally apply to Warner’s text, which is at its most poetic when describing the ‘loveliness’ (p. 104) of the Highlands during a heat wave on Morvern’s camping trip and the beauty of her surroundings during her Balearic interlude. Morvern’s description of the dreamlike end of her rave spree in particular recalls the lyrical emphasis on sun and sea in Camus’ work:

> Piles of cloud sat out to sea jammed against the horizon and the first of the sun behind was all citrusy in the pine till cloud out at sea started to curl and light fell in masses on the water; the bottom of a cloud bank broke away while a bar of sky was stained pinkish then the purple-like shadows changed into a peach roof above. (p. 211)

Crucially, these natural scenes bring the reader no closer to understanding the internal life of the characters. The lyrical descriptions do not function as a kind of pathetic fallacy, whereby their function as shorthand to demonstrate the emotional state of the protagonist would outweigh the value of the clouds in themselves. Instead, the terminology used to describe them is an extended, but not entirely changed continuation of the descriptive vocabulary employed by Morvern throughout the novel. The sky is pinkish, the sun citrusy and the shadows purple-like in much the same way as her lighter is ‘goldish’ and her stockings ‘yellowish’ (p. 3).

While such stylistic similarities between the two novels are striking, I am hesitant to endorse Warner’s description of *Morvern Callar* as an existential novel unreservedly. In Sartre’s lecture ‘Existentialism is a humanism’, he explains that

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48 Sandra Smith, ‘Translator’s Note’ in *The Outsider*, p. viii.
existentialism ‘declares that man’s destiny lies within himself.’ At the heart of the philosophy is the total freedom of each individual to choose, and in so doing to define himself. While existentialism has no truck with essentialisms, it nonetheless instates its own variety of origin in the form of the radically free meaning-generating subject. Within the novel, we might well describe Morvern as such a subject. She certainly avails herself of freedom to make radical decisions, first in her decision not to disclose His death and subsequently to leave behind her life in the port and relocate to the Balearic rave scene for an unspecified number of years. So far, then, so existentialist. However, I want to suggest that Morvern’s freedom is both curtailed and enabled by factors outside her control, making manifest an unresolvable tension within the philosophical framework. She is at best an imperfect originary subject, demonstrating the elisions within existentialist thought, and the material contingencies upon which the supposedly universal subject depends.

The first factor that impinges upon Morvern’s freedom, and prevents me from wholly accepting an unproblematised existential reading, is the contingency of so many of Morvern’s ‘free’ choices upon money. She is only able to leave the port because of His financial resources (first the money in his personal bank account, and then his father’s inheritance). When describing her holiday to Tom and Susan she concludes; ‘all I know is over there in that resort, with a couple of thousand pounds, happiness was as easy as your first breath in the morning’ (p. 164). She is able to choose her destiny, to choose herself in existentialist terms, only because she has the funds to do so.

Morvern’s foster father, Red Hanna, elucidates at length the fundamental, inescapable inequality of access to choice:

[N]o big pleasures for the likes of us, eh? We who eat from the plate that’s largely empty. I’ve saved for this early number, now it’s coming I feel empty, the overtime has just gobbled up the years and heres you, twenty-one, a forty-hour week on slave wages for the rest of your life, even with the fortnight theres no much room for poetry there, eh?

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49 Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, p. 40.
The hidden fact of our world is that there is no point in having desire unless you’ve money. Every desire is transformed into sour dreams. You get told if you work hard you get money but most work hard and end up with nothing. I wouldn’t mind if it was shown as the lottery it is but oh no. The law as brute force has to be worshipped as virtue. There’s no freedom, no liberty; there’s just money. That’s the world we’ve made and no one tells me to find more to life when I’ve no time or money to live it. We live off each other’s necessities and fancy names for barefaced robbery. Yet what good is all the money in the world to me now when all I want to do is stare out the bungalow window at the mountains? Money would destroy what I’ve learned to accept over the years. In plain language, I’m fifty-five: a wasted life. (pp. 44–45)

Red Hanna’s drunken loquacity cannot be dismissed as the embittered ramblings of an ageing would-be revolutionary, though they are certainly coloured by his political leanings. In his assessment of the world he also gives voice to the pervasive sense of lives constrained by poverty that colours all sections of the narrative set in the port. The markers of this atmosphere can be found throughout the text, woven into the mundane fabric of life in the port. It might seem unremarkable that Morvern describes three of her Christmas presents as ‘dear-looking’ (p. 3, 43, and 50), but this reflects an appreciation for money born of never having quite enough – early in the narrative Morvern looks in her purse and remarks ‘I wasn’t going to have enough till payday’ (p. 5). Dale observes that ‘money matters to [Morvern] in a way which is alien to anyone who has never had to worry about how to stretch a tiny income in enough directions to cover the bare necessities.’

This heightened awareness of monetary value is clearly not confined to Morvern; when she wears her new steerhide jacket to the superstore it is remarked upon by almost every person she encounters (p. 6, 7 and 9). Dale uses such examples to lead her to the conclusion that ‘poverty is a “fact of life” in the port.’ Morvern’s steerhide jacket represents, perhaps, an example of the ‘small pleasures’ which Red Hanna concedes are accessible to the inhabitants of the economically depressed port. Financial imperatives necessitate a limiting of horizons; the choices each individual is able to

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51 Dale, p. 52.
52 Ibid., p. 49.
conceive of are circumscribed by their economic situation. This is borne out by Morvern’s reaction when she discovers His bank balance:

You’d never have dreamed of so much money being yours, never in a month of Sundays. I withdrew the daily limit. He used to get me to withdraw on His card for telly, video, electric and rent. I put the Autocard back in my purse. With that kind of money there were cassettes you could get from the mail list and you could send away for bobby-dazzler clothes out the catalogue and get extra driving lessons on top the ones He’d already paid for. I walked straight to the travel agent. (p. 55)

The possibilities opened by Morvern’s unexpected windfall are simultaneously extraordinary (‘never in a month of Sundays’) and relatively limited in scope (tapes, clothes, driving lessons, and a fortnight at Club Med). Morvern’s breathless adumbration of the possibilities afforded to her by the £6,839 windfall demonstrates major elisions within the existentialist notion of choice. Sartre insists that choice is an absolute, even definitional, feature of human existence, arguing that ‘what is impossible is not to choose. I can always choose, but I must also realize that, if I decide not to choose, that still constitutes a choice.’\(^{53}\) This is true enough, and Morvern exercises her ability and responsibility to choose by walking straight to the travel agent. However, what remains unacknowledged in Sartre’s formulation is that choices are not only constrained on a very practical level by the resources available, but that the economic situation can also produce a circumscription of the choices available in a more insidious fashion. Sartre speaks of and for a universalised bourgeois male, and as such his philosophy elides the impact of class and gender on the radical freedom he so valorises. To elucidate what I mean here, it is helpful to refer to Renton’s infamous tirade in Irvine Welsh’s *Trainspotting* (1993):

Choose us. Choose life. Choose mortgage payments; choose washing machines; choose cars; choose sitting oan a couch watching mind-numbing and spirit-crushing game shows, stuffing fuckin junk food intae yir mooth. Choose rotting away, pishing and shiteing yersel in a home, a total fuckin embarrassment tae the selfish, fucked-up brats ye’ve produced. Choose life.\(^{54}\)

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\(^{53}\) *Sartre, Existentialism is a Humanism*, p. 44.

\(^{54}\) *Welsh, Trainspotting*, p. 187.
In Renton’s angry formulation, choice is evacuated of the humanist potential highlighted in Sartre’s lecture. Choice, as he describes it, is revealed to be synonymous with consumer choice and, in effect, the negation of true or meaningful choice. In late twentieth century neoliberal society, the options masquerading as choice are reduced to an enactment of mindless activities producing identikit subjects devoid of real agency. The choices opened to Morvern by the initial access to His money fit neatly within this schematic; she is unable to conceive of choice outwith the parameters of her own experience. Arguably, it is only her time away raving (when she absconds from Club Med) that gives her the tools to make the more radical choice later in the novel and abscond for a longer period of time to Spain, returning pregnant. Had she remained in the port, such a decision would simply have been inconceivable. This goes to the heart of a problem within Sartrean existentialist thought, pertaining to the central tenet that ‘existence precedes essence’. Herbert Spiegelberg asks, pertinently: ‘[h]ow could such essence-less existence do any such thing as “choose” without having at least potentialities and the kind of structures underlying them that would allow it to actualize them?’ He goes on to concede that existences could conceivably rest on fluid, impermanent essences, but what interests me more is his suggestion that pre-existing structures must, to some extent, determine the potentialities of choice. The universalising dislocation of existentialism denies the influence of such structures, which determine not just what choices are available but what choice actually means.

As a corrective to this, we might look to the model of subjectivity elucidated by Althusser in his essay ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses’. He proposes a radically anti-humanist conception of ideology, whereby it is figured not as a false belief, but as an overarching system implicated in the constitution of human subjects. Ideology, in this formulation, is an indispensible means by which our sense of self comes into being. This ideology has a material existence, inscribed in ritualised actions enacted within the institutions of ideological state apparatuses (such as the family, education, law and the arts), as a complement to repressive state apparatuses (such as the police and the army). In thus extending the reach of ideology to include ‘the private domain’, Althusser insists upon its pervasiveness.

57 Althusser, p. 18.
Ideology suffuses all aspects of human existence and is enacted and ritualised materially even in situations we perceive to be ideologically neutral. Althusser’s theorisation does not reinstate an essential reality that is masked by ideology. Instead he insists that it is ideology itself that is a structuring principle by which we are interpellated into subjectivity. As Althusser puts it, we are ‘always-already’ subjects; even before we are born we are inextricably bound up in ‘forms of family ideology’ that pre-suppose all manner of attributes of the subject-to-be.\(^{58}\) In this model, there is no outside of ideology; it functions seamlessly and, for the most part, unperceived.\(^{59}\)

The ramifications for a subject so intimately bound up with ideology seem rather bleak. Althusser entirely collapses the celebrated meaning-generating subject of existentialism, and humanism more broadly. In its place is left an always-already determined subject whose apparent agency and coherence are in fact no more than ideologically conditioned illusions which enable him (and the Althusserian subject is indeed masculine) to function as part of a cohesive society. In accordance with Althusser’s avowed anti-humanism, the subject is stripped of all freedom but that ‘of freely accepting his submission.’\(^{60}\) Althusser’s essay makes for uncomfortable reading in that it posits an intolerable situation of oppression, whilst simultaneously appearing to leave little room for resistance or individual agency. The essay’s assault on the subject as ‘a free subjectivity, a centre of initiatives’\(^{61}\) problematises the common sense acceptance of the primacy of individual volition. Althusser’s reconfiguring of the relationship between ideology and the subject means that not only is what we choose ideologically significant, but that the concept of ourselves as autonomous subjects with the ability to make a choice is, in fact, a necessary ideological illusion.

Warner’s novel seems to hold these two models of subjectivity in tension. In the port, the influence of ideological state apparatuses is pervasive, stultifying and inescapable, leaving little room for resistance to the overarching capitalist system. However, by escaping to the rave scene, Morvern is able to find a way out, albeit

\(^{58}\) Althusser, p. 50 and p. 46.
\(^{59}\) The description of Althusser’s ISAs utilised in this section is drawn from my MA essay “‘Choose Life’: the Ideological Subject in Althusser and Trainspotting”. There, it was used to illuminate the model of subjectivity developed in *Trainspotting* whilst here it is brought into dialogue with existentialist readings of *Morvern Callar*.
\(^{60}\) Althusser, p. 56.
\(^{61}\) Ibid.
temporarily. This ruptures the seamless, self-perpetuating pessimism of Althusser’s system (if only by suggesting the potential for change), and goes some way to supporting an existentialist reading. However, this rupture is only possible because of the influx of His father’s inheritance, and this fundamental contingency undermines any meaningful celebration of the freedom of her choice. It is also not insignificant that the novel’s close sees Morvern returning to port, financial constraints driving her back to where she began.

Morvern’s description of the process by which she became inculcated into the drudgery of work at the superstore illustrates the stealthy erosion of her capacity to exercise meaningful choice by societal expectation and economic necessity:

Cause of tallness I had started part-time with the superstore when thirteen, the year it got built. The superstore turn a blind eye; get as much out you as they can. You ruin your chances at school doing every evening and weekend. The manager has you working all hours cash in hand, no insurance, so when fifteen or sixteen you go full-time at the start of that summer and never go back to school. (p. 10)

The pronominal shift in this extract is significant. Morvern begins by describing her own experience, explaining that her height had meant an early induction into working life. However, the second sentence shifts immediately to the second person. This suggests that, while Morvern’s ‘tallness’ was exceptional, the rest of her experience was not. The use of ‘you’ implicitly broadens the scope of the observations beyond the personal experiences of the narrator, suggesting that there is a kind of systemic inevitability to the co-option of young people in the port into deadening, dead-end jobs. This grammatical shift hints at the machinations of the ‘soft’ power exercised by Althusser’s ISAs in structuring the expectations of the port’s youth.

Dale suggests that Morvern’s ‘work at the supermarket has brutalized her – she is used to handling cascasses, and well used to the sight of blood.’ Morvern describes, in a characteristically matter-of-fact but nonetheless stomach-churning fashion, the experience of working on the meat counter:

\[^{62}\text{Dale, p. 50.}\]
I used to work in the meat. You cleaned up each night. Afterwards you smelled of blood and it was under your nails as you lifted the glass near your nose in the pub. You pulled the bleeding plastic bag of gubbins, cut open by bones, to the service lift. Blood spoiled three pairs of shoes. You were expected to supply your own footwear. (pp. 11–12)

Again, this extract employs the same pronominal shift, highlighting the unexceptional nature of Morvern’s experience. The last line almost appears to have been lifted directly from a training manual (an instrument of education – another example of Althusser’s ISAs), further emphasising the procedural repeatability of what she describes. Morvern regurgitates this mantra, its vocabulary invading her own. It is not too much of a stretch to suggest that Morvern’s experience of working ‘in the meat’ is part of the reason she is so comfortable with the dismemberment of her boyfriend’s body. In fact, she describes this experience in very similar terms, packaging up the various bits of Him much like a ‘bleeding bag of gubbins’:

You don’t get difficulty with the head or limbs, it’s the organs pushing out from the torso sodden through with blood. The two torso packages needed almost twice as much wrapping but I made a good job of them. (p. 81)

The link between Morvern’s work at the superstore and her highly unorthodox treatment of His body is made even more explicit when she remarks, as she traverses the Highlands with His head bumping against her back, that ‘soil was all under my nails like at work’ (p. 88). This casual remark makes explicit the close relationship that working at the superstore has on Morvern’s arguably desensitised, psychopathic behaviour. These materialist emphases rupture the freely choosing humanist subject of existentialism, two models of subjectivity (and origin) – the materialist and the existential – held in uneasy tension in Morvern’s actions. Once more, then, we can see the ideological impulse of the interregnum at work, as the difficulty of formulating new models of subjectivity is emphasised by the tenacity and pervasiveness of the old order.

Working in the superstore, for Morvern, is both an economic necessity and an expectation she has grown up with, rather than a freely exercised choice. Despite this, she despises her job and acts on this hatred in material ways, making a special effort never to shop there and to always turn carrier bags inside out so as to limit her association with her place of work (p. 50). The same spirit is evidenced in the
summertime, when Morvern describes the scramble of young women like her to make the most of her lunch hour:

During the week at lunchbreak I had took a summerbag so’s I could get in a short dress and sunglasses. I’d walk up and down the seawall with an ice pole or nicked fruit from the fridges. Some shopgirls with nowhere to change at work would dash up to their parents’ place in The Complex and get into a blouse and short skirt just to give them a half hour in sunglasses. (p. 76)

The enthusiasm evinced for this brief half hour out of uniform serves to demonstrate just how unfree these low paid workers are the rest of the time. However, such descriptions sit in uneasy tension with existentialist notions of choice. It seems belittling to applaud such small acts of resistance as expressions of absolute authenticity, and positively cruel to reproach people in this situation in existentialist terms for not properly exercising their radical freedom to choose. As Genevieve Lloyd observes ‘the ideal of radical freedom and the associated idea of bad faith can be seen… as in some ways just adding an extra burden of self-recrimination on those – male or female – who find themselves caught in oppressive situations.’

It is also important to note that, despite the generalising impulse of the second person pronoun, the experiences Morvern describes above are only applicable to a specific set of people, from a specific geographical area. It is significant to note that all the shop girls in the quote above return to The Complex to change; it is the inhabitants of the council estate who share Morvern’s experiences. Again, the link between context (in terms of location and social class) and access to freedom is made starkly obvious. Indeed, Morvern’s work at the superstore puts her in contact with people whose experience is wildly different from her own. She elucidates the disjunction between her life and expectations and that of her wealthier customers in the description of a stint on the till at Christmas time:

At the till I filled plastic carrier bags with Christmas stuff for folk. A woman with a well-to-do south voice told me to wash my soily hands before touching her messages. Some bills came to hundreds of pounds. They all paid with these credit cards. I put the bags in trolleys and pushed them to the Volvos. I had a well-to-do family and their voices. The biggest bill and a trolley just for

63 Lloyd, p. 98.
wine. A daughter my age who looked on while I loaded the boot. No change for a tip cause they used credit card. The husband went, Merry Christmas. (p. 11)

Money allows this family to be insulated from life’s less pleasant aspects, like, on a very trivial level, Morvern’s soily hands. They lack any insight into her reality, as is evidenced by the replacement of a tip with a hollow ‘Merry Christmas’. The fact that the family have a daughter Morvern’s age highlights the dissimilarity of their experiences; though the two characters appear comparable, their different financial positions mean that they experience ‘choice’ quite differently, illustrating the tension between the emancipatory potential of existentialist philosophy and the material reality of lived experience.

This is articulated even more compellingly when Morvern is visiting Lanna’s grandmother, Couris Jean, and encounters a woman bringing her a hot meal:

The Meals on Wheels arrived for Couris Jean. The woman driver told about how she couldn’t get to some houses and how some old folk couldn’t afford heating. The big metal soup urn was in the open air and some snow was stuck to the bottom of it, as if poor people were in a war that no one else was. (p. 34)

The comparison of poverty to a state of war is a powerful one, but Morvern does not dwell on this arresting observation; the comment seems almost throwaway. Perhaps this is because, as someone who has grown up in The Complex, there is nothing either shocking or new about this comparison. For someone in her position, it is patently, unchangeably obvious that this is the case. Taking on board this simile, we might refer to the opening sentence of Sartre’s ‘La république du silence’, which states ‘jamais nous n’avons été plus libres que sous l’occupation allemande’ [we were never more free than under the German occupation (my translation)].64 By this, Sartre meant the proximity of death that came with the German occupation heightened the authenticity of choices made by the occupied French. According to this maxim, Couris Jean’s poverty should enhance, rather than negate, her fundamental freedom. As Spiegelberg remarks, like Sartre’s comments about French freedom under Nazi occupation, such a position would be ‘so paradoxical as to seem

pervasive. Morvern’s description of poverty as war certainly does not evoke Sartre’s perversely optimistic reading; poverty does not provoke a closer communion with authentic existence, but acts to stifle, limit and constrain freedom.

There is another important differential that demonstrates the unevenness of access to existentialist/humanist choice within the novel: that of gender. As previously discussed, much has been made, particularly in reviews of Warner’s work, of his ability to write convincingly about female experience. In her appraisal of Warner’s writing, Melissa Denes contends that ‘his familiarity with female behaviour and private ritual is frankly spooky. He seems to have been places boys aren’t invited - locked toilet cubicles, single-sex classrooms, teenage bedrooms.’ One example she gives to substantiate this is a description, taken from The Sopranos, of the specificities and intricacies of the Saturday night grooming regime of some women. Similar examples can be found throughout Morvern Callar. The first of these instances occurs very early on, as Morvern dresses for work after discovering her boyfriend’s body. After a deliberation on the merits of various combinations of trousers and stockings, Morvern details her makeup regime:

I used a touch of Perfect Plum Glimmerstix and Rasberry Dream powder blush then did my lips with Unsurpassed Wine. When I held the tissue taut to take the excess of the paper ripped so I did a deep breath and used another. My nails were in a state as per usual so I sat blowing on them after putting a little more Dusky Cherry on. (p. 4)

This extract is strikingly similar to Joy Stone’s description of applying makeup in The Trick, even down to the names given to their blushers (Joy also uses a dreamlike fruit-coloured tint, ‘Peaches and Dream’ [p. 47]). In The Trick, however, makeup is explicitly depicted as a tool to aid sexual attraction, worn to maximise male gratification, thus colluding in her own objectification. Joy explains how David’s possible reactions dictate the choices she makes for her appearance: ‘I smear my lips with clear wax from a stick (red is too vivid and leaves marks, so may make him cautious), I am to be entirely inviting, in case. In case’ (pp. 47–48). Joy’s makeup is clearly depicted as a tool employed to solicit the male gaze, and so participates in the reduction of the female body to the status of object. In this objectified position, woman’s capacity to exercise choice is curtailed and limited; her needs subordinated

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65 Spiegelberg, p. 207.
66 Denes.
to the prerogative of the male, meaning-generating subject. The depictions of the beautification processes undertaken throughout *Morvern Callar* are subtly different. The extract quoted above, which is the most comprehensive description of Morvern’s preparations, occurs after she discovers His body. The gesture is thus differently inflected, and less obviously directed than Joy’s makeup regime in *The Trick*. Morvern’s boyfriend is dead; his perspective cannot be the motivating factor behind her efforts to improve her appearance. However, while the specific male gaze of her partner is absent, the novel illustrates throughout the near-constant sexualised scrutiny to which female inhabitants of the port are subjected. Some of the instances described appear relatively minor. One such example is Morvern’s driving examiner; ‘though I’d saw him dart a look at the creaminess of skin under the black low-denier stocking you knew he was an okay sort’ (p. 78). Morvern constantly evaluates and registers male presence as predatory and voyeuristic, even if, as in this case, the stolen glance does not foreclose the possibility that he’s ‘an ok sort.’ Indeed, such ‘harmless’ instances of unwanted sexual attention take on sinister overtones when incorporated into the broader picture of generalised, aggressive misogyny endemic in the port. Early in the novel, a group at the Mantrap trade stories that amount to a shocking litany of pervasive, violent sexism:

That’s nothing to what men will do, says Lanna, and told about Pheemy her pregnant sister who lives up the stair from them in The Complex. Lanna heard another argument so she ran up and let herself in. The brother-in-law had her sister’s face in the scullery sink. He gave up and threw her on the lino shouting that if the dishes had been done like a decent wife should, the water would have been deep enough to drown her properly. Tequila Sheila told about the first time she came to The Mantrap in high season, a boy asked her to dance and when she said No he pulled a flick-knife on her. (p. 16)

Morvern does not escape this menacing atmosphere when she relocates to Spain. This is abundantly demonstrated in the sexualised, sexist poolside games at the Youth Med resort that she and Lanna visit. Girls are forced into the nipple hardening competition and humiliated, while the boy in the sack with Morvern is sexually stimulated by their bathing suit cross-dressing. In contrast, Morvern remarks ‘this is like living hell on earth’ (p. 142); a living hell that is recorded and commodified in video form, available for sale in order to prolong the (implicitly male) gratification of the episode. This pornographic voyeurism recalls Morvern’s brief, even casual,
mention of a family on The Complex in which ‘one young husband owned a camcorder so his four married brothers and him swapped porno videos of their unknowing wives’ (p. 43).

It is against this backdrop of constant, occasionally threatening sexual surveillance that we must analyse Morvern’s incessant, ritualistic beauty regimen. The male gaze is diffuse but omnipresent even when there are no men observing her. This is made most obvious when we witness Morvern maintaining the standards of her feminine appearance even though she is on a camping trip in the remote Highlands and hugely unlikely to encounter anyone else. Nonetheless, she is rigorous in her commitment to upholding grooming standards, shaving her legs, moisturising and re-painting her toenails (with the aid of a pedicure set [pp. 85–86]). She performs her femininity even when no one is watching. As in Kelman’s text, this calls to mind Foucault’s panoptic conception of self-discipline, whereby the mechanisms of power are so pervasive as ‘to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power… in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers.’

However, here the gaze is gendered; it is the male gaze that is no longer necessary because Morvern has assumed the responsibility of policing and performing her own gender identity. The incessant nail-painting that punctuates the narrative acts as a periodic reminder that Morvern’s gender impinges upon her subjectivity in a fundamental way, emphasising the interpellative power of the social constructions of gender.

Conclusion

Ultimately, then, Morvern Callar, rather than enacting the tenets of existentialism, in fact demonstrates the fault lines within the philosophy. Existentialism, with its optimistic humanist impulse, does not sufficiently acknowledge the impact of class and gender upon the central ideal of choice. This tension is analogous to the broader interregnum impulse of the novel and its profound structural ambivalence and ambiguity. Morvern Callar worries at origins and essentialisms, pulling away from the kind of rigid determinism they suggest. However, despite exposing both the constructed nature and fragility of these origins, the novel at its close remains unable to completely shake off their continued influence, both emotional and practical. Like

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67 Foucault, p. 110.
Sammy in *How Late*, and Joy in *The Trick*, at the novel’s close Morvern’s position is remarkably similar to the start. The transformative potentialities in all three of these novels are left unnarrated, the ideological impulse of interregnum pushing them to the cusp of change but no further. While Morvern is more successful than Joy or Sammy in her attempts to escape – after all, she does make it, for a time at least, outside the national borders – the novel insists upon the inevitability of return. Not only this, but the old order of patriarchy and class shadow her wherever she goes, leading her inexorably back towards the port. Despite this circularity, her return to the Highlands is neither comforting nor homely. The landscape that welcomes her is cold, desolate and barren, and it is revealed in *The Man Who Walks* that the Highlands will be the death of her; Morvern pops up in Warner’s later novel as the ‘runaway foster-daughter drowned crossing the Sound on the little illegal ferry.’⁶⁸ Even if we discount this bleak subsequent revelation, the circularity of the novel is emphasised in the child who will be born in the same place, into the same poverty. Once again, rather than an uplifting and transformative narrative, we are left grasping at Beckettian straws: ‘Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.’⁶⁹

Chapter four: ‘a small black mark’: memory and mobility in Jackie Kay’s *Trumpet* (1998)

In many ways, Jackie Kay’s 1998 novel *Trumpet* is quite different from the texts that have been the focus of my analysis thus far. Kay’s novel tells the story of a black Scottish jazz trumpeter, Joss Moody, who, upon his death, is revealed to be biologically female. The novel reflects on his life and death through the fragmentary, grieving narratives of the family he left behind. These chapters are interspersed with episodes narrated by those, such as the doctor, funeral director and registrar, who encounter Joss only in a professional capacity after his death. Kay’s novel engages with the experience of marginalised characters in a more sustained and intersectional manner than any of the other three novels; examining the interaction of gender non-conformity, a relationship outside heteronormative expectations, and the black diaspora in Scotland. *Trumpet* explores issues of race that are untouched in the other three texts, using the experience and heritage of Joss and his adopted son Colman to insist upon the under-acknowledged presence of the African diaspora in Scottish history, imbricating Scottish identity with the legacies of colonialism.

Kay herself explicitly frames her position as a writer in these terms, citing her position as a kind of double marginalisation not dissimilar to that discussed with regards to female Scottish experience in my chapter on Galloway’s work. However, in Kay’s case this marginalisation is amplified further by the racism that she has suffered:

> [m]ost Scottish people are aware of how England has treated them and how they’ve suffered like the Irish at the hands of the English and how the English have so many stereotypes of Scottish people… What interests me particularly is the way in which you can be in a society that is cordoned off and oppressed but also be oppressed within that society, or divided within that or not belong to the common group in exactly the same way. I do think that sense of being outside with being inside Scotland – with being very proud of the country and very proud of being Scottish, and also being outside in terms of receiving a lot of racism from other Scottish people – is what fuels my sense of how and what I write.¹

Like the other writers I have discussed, this description makes it clear that national identity is of crucial importance to Kay's writing. However, they way that Kay positions her experience as being both within and outside expected conventions of Scottishness (a location that echoes the overspill location of Galloway's fiction) might offer a reason why Kay makes more space in her novel for that which is outwith the nation's boundaries, both stereotypically and physically. Just as the novel broadens the parameters of Scottishness to include a greater variety of genders, sexualities and races, so the spatial scope of the novel is concomitantly larger. *Trumpet* encompasses not just Scotland (both rural and urban), but also London and the vast, sprawling 'fantasy Africa'² that colours the imagination of both Joss and his son Colman.

Kay's novel is notably more mobile than the three that have gone before. Though *Morvern Callar* did relocate briefly to Spain, I have discussed this sojourn as the outer limit to a cyclical movement that is drawn inexorably back to the Highlands. The same is not true of Kay's novel; Colman has grown up outside Scotland, and has had to embrace a more shifting and de-centred geographical bearing as a result. He explains that 'a lot of my childhood was spent on the road. Touring. Place to fucking place. I'd have been happier at home watching Star Trek with a bowl of cornflakes' (p. 47). As this quote reveals, the mobility that characterises *Trumpet*'s spatial imaginary has not shaken off the desire for fixity and stasis against which characters in the other novels often rail. In fact, Colman longs for intelligible, mundane spaces of home rather than the 'razzamatazz' (p. 47) of life on the road. His nomadic childhood has left him more sensitive to the value of the social intelligibility – the way that the self is understood by others according to prevailing categorisations – that is offered by remaining in one place. In keeping with this sensitivity, Kay's novel is attuned to the significance of memory (be it national, cultural, familial or personal), accumulated by the spaces through which it moves. This is evident not only in the settings of the text but also in *Trumpet*'s exploration of the practices of signification that produce and police cultural understandings of spaces such as the human body and the novel form. Indeed, the interplay of memory and mobility is one of the clearest ways in which *Trumpet* illustrates the dynamics of interregnum.

While this tension does demonstrate the ambivalence that is characteristic of

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interregnum novels, *Trumpet* is also structurally different to the other three texts that I have discussed. This structural difference is perhaps most obvious in the novel’s narrative voice. *Trumpet* attempts to fictionally reconstruct the life of the central character after his death by composing a polyphonic narrative, a collection of voices that work both together and against one another to give a more complete and complex portrait of the deceased. Kay’s novel is mainly focalised through Joss’s grieving widow, Millie, who had full knowledge of his secret embodiment since the beginning of their relationship, and their adopted son Colman, who only finds out upon his father’s death. However, the text also includes sections narrated by officials who encounter Joss post-mortem (doctor, undertaker and registrar), a would-be ghost writer / biographer and a member of his jazz band. At the centre of these narratives is a whirling, sensuous description of Joss in the midst of a performance on the titular trumpet, written as a kind of stream of consciousness in which he reduces himself, through his music, to ‘a small black mark’ (p. 131). The other voices swirl around this central point, weaving a contrapuntal narrative that echoes the improvisational texture of the jazz music that was so central to Joss’s life.

Kay herself has emphasised the influence of jazz on the form of her novel, explaining ‘I was interested in how a story can work like music and how one note can contain the essence of the whole. I wanted to write a novel whose structure was very close to jazz itself.’ Carole Jones discusses the significance of jazz music as a model for identity, with foundations rooted in community and tradition, but which emphasises mutability through improvisation and performance. She argues that jazz music is necessarily a collaborative process, that each performance is ‘part of a process of handing down tradition, and it illustrates something like a communally produced musical identity, as opposed to a purely self-contained, individualistic formation.’ The polyphony of Kay’s novel enacts this idea of a ‘communally produced identity,’ a formal strategy that sets it quite clearly apart from Kelman, Warner and Galloway. All three of the other texts have been firmly anchored to one character, with the narrative filtered almost exclusively from their perspective. Indeed, in the case of the two male authors it is the individuality of the narrative voice that has drawn the most critical attention. *How Late* would be unimaginable without

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the specificity of the narrator’s Glaswegian vernacular, and Morvern’s flat, emotionless voice is the most arresting feature of Warner’s novel. By contrast, the polyvocal narrative utilised in Trumpet is a key strategy used to further the novel’s thematic engagement with identity and community. Through its form, Kay’s novel refuses to privilege any one version of Joss’s life, insisting on the overlapping partiality of multiple voices rather than the primacy of one authorial perspective. There is some similarity here to be drawn with Warner’s novel, and the layers of authorial presence enacted within Morvern Callar. However, where Warner’s novel, despite its network of authorial negotiations, remains preoccupied with the figure of the singular author, Trumpet happily and emphatically relinquishes this notion through its polyvocality.

Given this narrative strategy, it would be tempting to argue that Trumpet seeks to comprehensively undo the possibility of a stable, knowable origin. However, I hope to elucidate that, in addition to this destabilising impulse, the novel is simultaneously unable to completely break from essentialising understandings of origin. Much like Morvern Callar, Trumpet acknowledges the continued pull of stable identity categories, and their importance, even necessity, for the successful articulation of a socially intelligible identity. This dual motion, I contend, is a constituent feature of devolutionary fiction, textually enacting the limitations and potentialities inherent in Scotland’s period of interregnum. As in the other texts that I have analysed, we can find striking enactments of Gramsci’s formulation in Trumpet; in the text’s mediation on the dying patriarch, in the disruption of reproductive relationships depicted in the novel’s plot and in Kay’s exploration of the discourse of pathologisation.

Cross-dressing and category crisis

One of the most obvious similarities between the four texts under discussion is, as Carole Jones has observed, that Trumpet, Morvern Callar and The Trick all derive their plot impetus from a dead male body. How late, of course, is different in that the novel begins with a man who is merely wounded, although nonetheless striving to disappear. Admittedly, in Joss we have come a long way from the Glasgow hard man that haunts Kelman’s work, but the exploration of gender in Trumpet is still, in Jones’s words, ‘reflexively engaged with a variety of cultural discourses around male
anxiety prominent at the time.\textsuperscript{5} It is worth noting here that these anxieties are coloured by Scotland’s historic investment in a particular kind of (hyper)masculinity, elucidated in my introduction and further developed later in this chapter in my discussion of Colman. However, Colman’s father only once exhibits the kind of violent temper that we might associate with the hypermasculine ‘fighting Jock.’\textsuperscript{6} Joss’ female corporeality does not seem to have inculcated a hyper-masculine response (as outlined in Nandy’s formulations). Rather, in Joss Moody’s masculinity, we see enacted both the attraction to stable, essentialising categories and their ultimate inadequacy.

In life, at least in his public persona, it seems that Joss Moody had done little to disturb gender conventions (leaving aside, for a moment, his racial deviation from the expected whiteness of the archetypal Scottish male). As Kähkönen explains, while he was alive Joss ‘[did] not undermine or transgress the hetero-normative masculinity of his social and cultural context.’\textsuperscript{7} Joss fulfilled the expected roles of husband and father, and his gender identity was so seamlessly presented that it was never in question; he performed his masculinity flawlessly. Millie describes him on their first meeting as ‘well-dressed, astonishingly handsome’, (p. 11) and even in death, the funeral director is struck by the persuasiveness of his performance. Despite his prurient curiosity about Joss, the undertaker Albert Holding is forced to admit that he had in front of him ‘a woman who persuaded him, even dead, that he was a man, once he had his clothes on’ (p. 115). It is only upon his death that the subversive quality of Joss’ masculinity becomes apparent, and Holding is forced to acknowledge the inadequacy of his corporeal framework for understanding gender. He muses that ‘all his working life he has assumed that what made a man a man and a woman a woman was the differing sexual organs’ (p. 115). Faced with Joss’ corpse, such categorical certainty is no longer tenable. Once dead and undressed, Joss’ masculinity is presented as profoundly disruptive and disorienting.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[6] A term used by Gerard Carruthers, that he explains is ‘due not so much to historical reality but as a convenient cultural and literary (or expressive) site of resistance.’ \textit{Scottish Literature} (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 30. The only instance of violence we see from Joss in the novel is when he slaps Millie during a discussion about possible names for Colman. Interestingly, this altercation has a racial component – his anger stems from the fact that ‘white people always laugh at black names.’ p. 5
\end{footnotes}
It is significant that both of the descriptions above focus on the importance of clothing in maintaining Joss's outward gender identity. Indeed, the initial revelation to the reader of his female anatomy is presented as a kind of ceremonial disrobing. We discover Joss' secret the first time he undresses in front of Millie: ‘[h]e keeps unwrapping endless rolls of bandage. I am still holding out my hands when the first of his breasts reveals itself to me. Small, firm’ (p. 21). Later in the novel, Millie recounts the ritualistic nature of Joss' sartorial routine; every morning she would help him to bind his breasts before he dressed:

I did it without thinking about it. He put a white T-shirt over the top. Over that another T-shirt. Over that, a buttoned shirt. He put on his boxer shorts and I turned away whilst he stuffed them with a pair of socks. He pulled on his trousers, constantly adjusting his shirts and the stuffing. He was always more comfortable once he was dressed. More secure somehow. (p. 238)

Millie recognises that Joss' comfort and security are contingent upon his clothing; the couple both recognise the powerful role that attire plays in the maintenance of Joss' masculinity. In Millie’s description, the repetition of ‘over’ emphasises the many layers of clothing Joss dons before he feels prepared to enter the public sphere. While we might well suggest that this is a pragmatic decision intended to add bulk and further disguise Joss’ bound breasts, the four layers he wears also suggest stratified complexity, refusing to situate gender identity solely in the body. Through his clothing, Joss refutes biological essentialism, successfully uncoupling sex from gender.

Given this repeated emphasis on the significance of clothing, it is perhaps helpful to suggest that part of Joss’s subversive power, and the challenge that he mounts to stable masculinity, is derived from his identity as a cross-dressing subject. Here, Marjorie Garber’s theorisation is instructive. Garber argues that ‘one of the most important aspects of cross-dressing is the way in which it offers a challenge to easy notions of binarity, putting into question the categories of “female” and “male”, whether they are considered essential or constructed, biological or cultural’. Cross-dressing mounts this challenge by destabiling the binary construct by which gender is classified; the cross-dressing subject cannot be identified as either male nor female.

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Garber specifically rules out the terms “androgyne” and “hermaphrodite” that would neutralise this disruptive energy. As a ‘third’ term, cross dressing is not a specific, stable category, rather it is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of possibility. Three puts in question the idea of one: of identity, self-sufficiency, self-knowledge. In creating and inhabiting this space, cross-dressing destabilises not just the gender binary the cross-dressing subject transgresses, but manifests a broader ‘category crisis… a failure of definitional distinction, a borderline that becomes permeable, that permits of border crossings from one (apparently distinct) category to another.’ I would suggest that Garber’s description of category crisis might also serve as a particularly apt articulation of the liminal devolutionary moment, in which insecurity with regards to the nation’s political status creates a space of possibility that is also a space of crisis, a moment of flux in the development of what the category of Scotland might mean.

Several critics have noted the resonance of Garber’s formulation to Kay’s novel, though not specifically with reference to specific concerns of national identity. Hargreaves and Walker utilise Garber’s work on category crisis to explore the conditions of identity production; Walker argues that Trumpet ‘offers a valuable illustration of the problematic nature of identity’ and Hargreaves suggests that Kay’s novel asks ‘on what basis, according to whose authority, can an identity be, or not be, named as legitimate and legible?’. LaGuarida suggests that it is not just Joss who occupies this ‘third’ space, but the novel itself, and makes use of Garber’s work to elucidate the text’s fictional status, arguing that, given that Trumpet was inspired in part by the real life of American jazz pianist Billy Tipton, who ‘passed’ as a man, the novel itself ‘acquires the quality of a “third term” because of its liminal status between fact and fiction.’ LaGuarida disputes the validity of the proliferation of narratives after his death by which ‘his (or her) transvestism [was] normalized, by interpreting it in the register of socio-economic necessity.’

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9 Garber p. 11.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid., p. 16. This discussion of Garber’s work is developed from my MA essay ‘In what ways and for what purposes do any two of the works you have looked at this semester blur the distinction between fact and fiction?’
like that written by Diane Middlebrook,\textsuperscript{16} published a year before Kay’s novel, which recast Tipton’s cross-dressing as a less subversive and more socially intelligible progress narrative. Middlebrook argued that Tipton had adopted a male identity out of professional expediency, that this decision was motivated by the masculine nature of jazz culture. This interpretation simplifies the disruptive energy of cross-dressing, denying it the ‘third’ term status that is valorised by Garber. Narratives such as Middlebrook’s are invested in maintaining stable categories and casting gender non-conforming lives in the form of linear, teleological narratives. Such progress narratives are utterly incompatible with the disruptive impulse that is so central to the moment of devolutionary interregnum, and therefore it is perhaps no surprise that Kay eschews the conventions of biography, instead translating Billy Tipton’s story across the Atlantic and fusing it with elements of her own experience as a mixed race adoptee in Scotland.

In \textit{Trumpet}, the reconstruction of Joss’s life is as much an investigation of the motives of biography, of the writing or narrating subject, as it is of the dead subject of the writing. In the novel, Colman muses on his father’s scepticism towards the attempts of biographers to narrate a life. Colman recollects; ‘That’s what Oscar Wilde said, isn’t it. ‘Every man needs his disciples but it’s Judas that writes the biography’ (p. 62). This formulation links biography to betrayal, and even in the midst of his anger Colman understands that his collusion with the tabloid hack–cum–ghost writer Sophie Stones is just that, affirming ‘I’ll write his fucking biography. I’ll tell his whole story. I’ll be his Judas’ (p. 62). Like the characters in the novel, Judith (Jack) Halberstam’s study of transgender biography also considers these projects deeply suspect, seeing the imposition of normative, stabilizing narratives as a betrayal of the contradictory complexity of lived experience. Halberstam lauds \textit{Trumpet} for its successful resistance to the imposition of these kinds of progress narratives, arguing that ‘Kay shows that biography as a project is inevitably bound to deception and manipulation in its own way.’\textsuperscript{17} In Kay’s multivocal novel, the narrative Sophie Stones is constructing is revealed to be the furthest removed from the truth of Joss’s life. Millie asserts that ‘she is a liar. This Sophie Stones is a liar. There is no doubt about it’ (p. 41). Sophie Stones is exactly the kind of biographer castigated by Halberstam, one who has ‘convince[d] herself that her own life is normal, beyond reproach,

honest, who therefore approaches her subject from a morally superior position of judgement. Her ability to write from such a position is contingent upon the maintenance of hierarchical binary categories, and so she must shut down the ambiguity of Joss Moody’s life and present both him and his wife as deviant and deceptive.

In opposition to these tendencies, Kay’s novel roundly refuses to reduce Joss’ male identity to an act of deception intended to improve his career prospects. In the novel, the masculinity of the jazz world is only alluded to on two occasions. In the first, Joss encourages Colman’s girlfriend to shake up the jazz world and give them ‘a nice wee fright’; insisting that all it would take to buck stereotypes and gain access to this world would be ‘interest and intuition’ (p. 119). In the second instance, after Joss has died, a group of women write to Millie asking her permission to form a band and name it ‘The Joss Moody Memorial Band’ (p. 268). Crucially, neither of these instances suggest that it is impossible for women to participate actively in the jazz scene, and so seem to undercut this potential avenue of neutralisation for Joss’ cross-dressing. Indeed, Sophie Stones is the only character to suggest that Joss’ gender identity was professionally motivated, musing that it was ‘all for the sake of playing a trumpet’ (p. 127).

Equally, Kay refuses to affirm binary categories by figuring Joss’ cross-dressing as deception. Millie asserts, quite simply, that ‘I didn’t feel like I was living a lie. I felt like I was living a life’ (p. 95). Indeed, the prominence of Millie Moody is of central importance in refuting the Sophie’s Stones’ reductive narrative, and the gender categories that the ghostwriter seeks to uphold. In fact, Sophie’s character stands in stark opposition not just to Millie, but to all of the other voices in the novel. One of the most telling ways that this is demarcated is in her use of pronouns. All of the other characters refer to Joss using the masculine ‘he’ and ‘him’; even the sceptical funeral director, whose chapter studiously employs neutral terms like ‘the body’ whenever possible, only slips into the feminine at the very end, and Holding admits that he cannot think of what else to call Joss than ‘Mrs Moody’s husband’ (p. 111). Only Sophie insists on referring to Joss as ‘she’ and ‘her’ throughout her sections of the narrative, and her gleeful mis-gendering appears all the more inappropriate because she is the only character to do so.

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18 Halberstam, p. 71.
In contrast to this rigidity (suggested even by the weighty symbolism of Sophie Stone's surname), Joss' bereaved wife is the much more sympathetic main focaliser throughout the novel. Halberstam notes an important difference between Kay's novel and Middlebrook's biography of Billy Tipton; that, crucially 'unlike Tipton's wife, Millicent Moody… is depicted as having full knowledge of the “facts” of her husband’s embodiment.'\(^{19}\) Despite Millie’s knowledge of Joss’ anatomy, throughout the novel she depicts her relationship with her husband (including the sexual aspect) in broadly heterosexual terms, rejecting the label of ‘lesbian’ as a word that simply ‘doesn’t fit’ (p. 154).\(^{20}\) Before the revelations upon Joss’ death, Millie, Joss and Colman fulfilled the roles expected of a normative nuclear family. Hargreaves argues that this makes their relationship all the more disruptive, subversive, and threatening to people like Sophie Stones and the binary understanding that she represents. She argues that:

> It is precisely Millie’s ordinariness that is the source of the threat she poses to dominant sex-gender systems; neither consciously queer, nor camp, nor femme to Joss’s butch, Millie’s love for Joss quietly announces that anatomically differentiated bodies need not, as Judith Butler observed in her influential *Gender Trouble*, be the guarantee of heterosexuality.\(^{21}\)

Millie refuses to submit to reductive frameworks, fighting tabloid attempts to label either her or Joss with their ‘terrible vertigo names’ (p. 154). Because of this refusal, within the narrative framework of *Trumpet*, Joss’s cross-dressing retains the subversive power celebrated by Garber. In an immediate sense, this problematises binary conceptions of gender and sexuality, but it also demonstrates the fallibility and insufficiency of all such formulations. Transvestism’s disruptive resistance to classification is at the heart of the difficulty Colman has in processing the revelation of his father’s embodiment:

> My mother got into a double bed every night for the past thirty odd years and slept with my father, a woman. I am not being funny, right, but I think that’s completely out of order. It’s not that I hate gays or anything like that. If my

\(^{19}\) Halberstam, p. 69.
\(^{20}\) This discussion of Garber’s work is developed from my MA essay ‘In what ways and for what purposes do any two of the works you have looked at this semester blur the distinction between fact and fiction?’
\(^{21}\) Hargreaves, p. 4.
mother had been a lesbian or my father a gay man, I don’t think I would have got all het up about it. (p. 66)

Here, Colman is personally experiencing Garber’s ‘category crisis’. His anger does not stem from the material reality of his parents’ relationship; what he is ‘all het up’ about is his inability to codify their sexuality in the terms available to him. It is telling that the phrase utilised by Colman to express his disapproval is ‘completely out of order’. Colman’s writing style is peppered with colloquialisms and slang, so it is safe to assume that he uses the expression to mean that their behaviour was wrong, or unacceptable. However, the choice of this particular phrase reveals more about the cause of his opinion; his parents were wrong because their relationship was neither straightforwardly heterosexual nor unequivocally gay. Joss and Millie’s love (and sex life) is a third term, outside of conventional order.²²

**Interrupted reproduction: family, futurity and form**

Millie and Joss’ disorderly ‘third term’ relationship also has implications for the family structure the couple create together. One of the ways that they challenge heteronormative ideals is through the presence of interrupted reproduction within their family unit. Here, we once again see a striking literalisation of Gramsci’s characterisation of the interregnum. Given Joss’s anatomy, he and Millie are unable to conceive together, and so, in Colman’s words, ‘[t]hey got [him] from the Scottish Adoption Agency in Edinburgh’ (p. 50). Colman goes on to elucidate the happy accident of the adoptive match in racial terms, recollecting that his parents ‘told [him] that agency was extremely pleased with them given [his] colour. They said the agency called them ‘a find’ as I remember. A find. I am the same kind of colour as my father. We even look alike. Pure fluke’ (p. 50). The Adoption Agency’s pleasure in the adoptive match is a result of the fact that Joss and Colman’s racial similarity will allow the family unit to ‘pass’, in the eyes of strangers, by virtue of the father and son’s resemblance. In this, then, we find another third term analogous to Garber’s cross-dressing; a family whose deviance from biological models of kinship hides in plain sight. Just as Joss is ‘passing’ in his gender, the Moodys as a family unit are ‘passing’ as blood relations. It is telling that even after Colman asserts that the resemblance between himself and his father is a ‘pure fluke’, he immediately

²² This analysis is developed from my MA work ‘In what ways and for what purposes do any two of the works you have looked at this semester blur the distinction between fact and fiction?’
undermines this apparent randomness and offers an alternative explanation. He muses that ‘maybe I copied his smile so much I look like his carbon copy’ (p. 50). This alternative explanation suggests an element of performativity in the father-son resemblance, reframing it as imitation rather than accident and bolstering the argument that Trumpet is seeking to loosen the bonds that tie the construction of identity to biological essentialism.

However, the subversive ‘third term’ familial structure that the Moodys create is not straightforwardly celebrated in the novel. In fact, the couple’s inability to conceive biologically is initially depicted as a source of profound conflict for Joss and Millie (this is especially significant as before Millie revealed her desire to have a child the couple had ‘never rowed before’ [p. 39]). Early in the novel, Millie describes the emotional upheaval that she experienced upon realising the implications of her husband’s biology for her reproductive future: ‘Weeks go by with me obsessing about babies. The very sight of them makes me cry. I feel jealous of mothers; spiteful’ (p. 37). Despite her love for Joss and acceptance of his embodiment in the face of heteronormative expectations, in this description Millie appears unable to let go of the powerful narrative that conflates femininity and motherhood. She has been inculcated with these essentialising gender expectations since childhood; she remembers a school mate doodling a ‘daft ditty’ in her autograph book: ‘first comes love, then comes marriage, then comes Millie pushing a baby carriage’ (p. 37). Though she recognises the triviality of the rhyme, it nevertheless exerts a potent emotional pressure on her. Despite the fact that Millie has proven herself more than capable of loving Joss in all his unconventional embodiment, Millie’s capacity for transgression flounders at the realisation that she may be unable to have children. Millie equates childlessness with an absolute lack of futurity: ‘I feel like there is no tomorrow. If I can’t have a baby, I can’t have tomorrow. I’ll be trapped in today and never have tomorrow’ (p. 39). This formulation is strikingly similar to the ‘pervasive invocation of the Child as the emblem of futurity’s unquestioned value’ that Lee Edelman argues forcefully against in his seminal Queer Theory polemic No Future.

There is a clear allusion to the societal conditioning that valorises family and children as a representation of stability and continuity in a wry aside in Kay’s description of the funeral director to whom Joss’ body is conveyed. The description of the idiosyncratic undertaker explains that:

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For twenty-five years, Albert has run Holding and Son even though he has no son and his father was not an undertaker. (The name So and So and Son is reassuring no matter whether it is a butcher’s or a cobbler’s.) (p. 104)

Albert Holding’s adoption of the misleading familial moniker for his business is gently mocked, but its ideological import is clear: the invocation of a stable family lineage is good for business. The valorisation of reproduction runs deep, and its repercussions travel beyond the limits of the family itself. Edelman contends that the conflation of the figure of the child and futurity has been central to maintaining and perpetuating heteronormative ideological limits in what he has labelled ‘reproductive futurism.’ Edelman argues that, rather than acceding to this logic and attempting to make themselves amenable to it through gay marriage and adoption rights, queer subjects should accept and even embrace negativity in opposition to reproductive futurism; a radical possibility that is very much opposed to the cosy domesticity of the Moodys’ married life in *Trumpet*. Kay’s novel, while undoubtedly invested in the ‘opening up of our notions of identity’ is also sympathetic to our continued investment in socially sanctioned, if ultimately illusory, identity categories. We might argue that Millie’s inability to think outwith heteronormative goals and chronology gestures to the tenacity with which children have become yoked to futurity, and therefore suggests a limit to the novel’s challenge to normative narratives. Despite its more conservative tendencies, Millie’s yearning for motherhood is not treated with the same contempt as Sophie Stones’ worldview, and Kay presents Millie’s desire for a child with compassion and understanding, even as the ideological conditioning that has produced her desire is laid bare. The tension between old ideological formations (in this case, the reproductive imperative) and nascent challenges to this (here, Milly and Joss’ subversive ‘third term’ relationship) marks this text as a testament of interregnum. Despite the fact that, for years before Joss’ death, the Moody family fulfilled the familial ideals of the ‘old order’, his death reveals the subtle way that their kinship network had always been fracturing such notions. Interregnum, in this text, lurks beneath the surface, only brought to the fore in the aftermath of Joss’ death.

Another element of the novel that signals its situation as an interregnum narrative is its form, and we might look to the narrative tense of *Trumpet* as a site of

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24 Edelman, p. 2.
resistance to its apparent investment in ‘reproductive futurism’ avant la lettre. Though Millie does succeed in overcoming the inaccessibility of her ‘tomorrow’ through the adoption of Colman, we might suggest that the strategy of the novel refuses to enact this endorsement of futurity through its tense. Though the novel frequently narrates memories that would appear to belong more logically in the past tense, the vast majority of Trumpet is nonetheless rendered in the present. The novel ranges across time, and yet these temporal shifts are not always announced by a concomitant shift in tense. This is perhaps most noticeable in the transition between chapters like ‘Money Pages’ and ‘Music’, (pp. 130–131) where the narrative present of Sophie Stones’ prurient tell-all biography is juxtaposed with a blistering and immediate account of the now-deceased Joss’ journey down into the category-defying depths of jazz performance with no shift in grammar. Here, the stark opposition of the two versions rendered in the same temporal frame of reference illustrates the gulf between the two versions of Joss’ life. The novel also contains more subtle examples of a slippage of the past into present; Millie’s memories are frequently rendered with the same urgency and precision as her grief-stricken present. For just one example, remembering of her first dates with Joss, Millie describes the jazz music with sensuous immediacy: ‘I am sitting in the middle of the long slow moan of the sax, right inside it. I feel something in me go soft, give in’ (p. 18). Millie’s recollection of the early days of her relationship with Joss is rendered with the same immediacy as her narrative present as she grieves for him after his death. This present tense narration muddles the distinction between memory and present and thus throws into question teleological understandings of time. The urgency of Millie’s present tense narration of the past speaks to its continued hold on her; she laments that ‘the only thing that feels authentic to me is my past’ (p. 37). After Joss’ death, she finds herself trapped in a kind of stasis, trapped between a vivid past and an uncertain, even hostile, future. This interregnum impasse is enacted through Millie’s choice of narrative tense.

In Writing Degree Zero, Barthes argued that the past tense was intimately linked with continuity, causality and order. He observed that ‘through the preterite, the verb implicitly belongs with a causal chain, it partakes of a set of related and orientated actions, it functions as the algebraic sign of an intention.’ Barthes viewed this as suspect, asserting that:

The narrative past is therefore a part of a security system for Belles-Lettres. Being the image of an order, it is one of those numerous formal pacts made between the writer and society for the justification of the former and the serenity of the latter.  

In contrast, Barthes suggested that writing in the present tense had the possibility to destabilise this comfortable order, since it was ‘fresher, more full-bodied, and nearer to speech.’  

In Kay’s novel, it is certainly true that Millie’s lucid and immediate present tense narration of her memories adds clarity to her grief, as the reader is plunged into the tangible reality of her life with Joss. In contrast, the actual narrative present is much less certain; the cause and effect chain that Barthes cites as a constitutive feature of past tense narration has been ruptured by the crisis of Joss’ death. Millie asserts this temporal disconnect on the very first page, staring at photos of herself in the papers and remarking; ‘I look unreal. I look unlike the memory of myself’ (p. 1). In Trumpet, the vividly remembered past has not been allowed to unfold into something that Millie can understand as her present, so it makes sense that her narrative is not rendered in a tense that is implicated in reproducing this sense of orderly linearity.

Of course, it is important to acknowledge that Barthes’ observations are a little dated in light of developments in late twentieth and twenty-first century fiction. It is now much more common to encounter novels that are written entirely in the present tense, so much so that the technique (or ‘trend’) has received criticism from some quarters for its ubiquity. However, the present tense as employed in Trumpet is certainly neither modish nor an affectation. Rather, the temporal dislocation provoked by the novel’s predominantly present tense narration enacts the moment of interregnum at which the text stands. The temporal strategies of Trumpet are part of what make it such a profoundly uncertain novel. The equalising immediacy of the present tense refuses to discriminate between past and present. Memories intrude at every turn, and the present tense narration means that the past is often ‘present’ in a way that problematises the comforting chronology that Barthes castigates as the preserve of the potentially reactionary ‘literary’ preterite tense. There is a comparison

27 Barthes, Writing Degree Zero, p. 32.
28 Ibid.
to be drawn here between Kay’s novel (Millie finds herself ‘sitting in the middle of the long slow moan of the sax’ [.18]) and the ecstatic sensory descriptions in the Spanish sections of *Morvern Callar* (Morvern gives herself over to the music ‘You didn’t really have your body as your own, it was part of the dance, the music, the rave.’ [p. 203]). Though Millie’s grief at Torr and Morvern’s dancing on the Balearic rave scene are radically different experiences, the temporality of the two moments is comparable, as both women are held in a sort of suspended present. We might suggest that what conditions this temporal similarity is the shared experience of grief that these two characters are traversing. Once again, Gramsci’s aphorism is instructive in his insistence that the old order is ‘dying’, its mortality in process rather than complete. Despite the conclusive deaths of Joss and Him in these two texts, we might still view their loss as ongoing because of the continued pressure that their memory exerts on their bereaved partners.

**Masculinity in crisis**

However, Millie’s paralysed, temporally interrupted response to Joss’ death is not the only expression of grief that is explored within *Trumpet*. Colman responds to his father’s death with rage, bewilderment and vindictiveness, aligning himself with the tabloid endeavours of Sophie Stones in order to process his loss. The emotional responses of anger and confusion are only one aspect of Colman’s response to his father’s corporeality; he also perceives himself to be changed physically by the revelation. After he examines Joss’ body in the funeral home, Colman imagines a transformation in his own anatomy. He muses that his father’s death has enhanced his virility, that ‘[h]is cock seems bigger since his father died. Bigger and harder’ (p. 140). Colman seeks to shore up his own masculinity in the face of what Jones has referred to this as ‘the insecurity that comes with the undermining of the stability of masculinity.’ Colman responds to his father’s ambiguity by reassuring himself of his own anatomical maleness, insisting on the primacy of his phallus as a way of defending himself from the vicarious emasculation that he experienced at the funeral home.

Colman responds to the threat of feminisation manifested by his father’s corpse with a performance of hypermasculinity, imagining a sexual encounter in which he dominates his would-be ghost writer, Sophie Stones, ‘shoving it right up her, swearing at her’ (p. 140). When he has finished masturbating, he immediately

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30 Jones, *Disappearing Men*, p. 117.
considers the episode in terms of failed reproduction, surveying his emission and asking himself 'how many kids could he make with that? A fucking population' (p. 140). On the one hand, this is a way of separating himself from his adoptive father and celebrating the fact that, unlike Joss, Colman is biologically capable of fathering children. However, it is important to register that this ejaculation is masturbatory; though he could have fathered children, in this instance he has not. These hypothetical offspring might be seen as a marker of interregnum, another small symbol of the reproductive stalling that characterises so many of the novels that I have discussed. These devolutionary texts are suffused with potential that they do not (or cannot) narrate, and this potential is often evoked by disrupted reproduction, and symbolised, as in Gramsci’s formulation, by children who go unborn. In his grief, confusion and anger, Colman looks towards a potential future that cannot be actualised, even positing that his sperm could have fathered ‘a fucking population’; generalising his reproductive failure beyond his personal circumstances. In this particular episode, interrupted reproduction is figured as wasteful, and Colman’s desultory contemplation of his potential children speaks to the anxiety involved in transitional moments, when the future is rendered uncertain by the crisis of the present. However, it is important to note that, like the ultrasound scan in The Trick, this dispiriting episode occurs about halfway through the novel. Both novels depict reproductive failure as a moment of crisis for their respective characters, but do not leave their readers with this picture of emptiness or waste. In both texts, there is time yet to recognise any possibly transformative potential of unconventional genealogies and kinship networks.

We might also speculate that Colman’s sexual fantasy is precipitated by the fact that he feels that his own gender identity has been undermined by his father’s female anatomy. After all, his father inducted him into the rituals of adult masculinity, and through these everyday performances Colman is reminded of Joss even after his death. Colman muses at length about his father teaching him to shave; thinking of how his father ‘was into the shaving business. He got all elaborate about it. Loved the ritual of it all. He passed that on to Colman’ (p. 122). Colman remembers receiving his first shaving set fondly, regarding it as an ‘honour… coming into manhood’ (p. 123). However, when he recounts the story to Sophie Stones, he casts the episode as something much more calculated and deviant, suggesting that his father:
... had to do this big masculine number on me because he didn’t have one. He wanted one and he didn’t have one, did he. We know what he had. So, it was perfect that he had a son to play with. He had it made. It’s pure sick, man. (p. 123)

Viewed in this way, Colman’s own masculinity becomes synthetic, a ‘number’ performed by Joss upon his son as compensation for his own lack of a penis. Even though Colman does not quite believe this, and tells the story in the full knowledge that ‘it’s not the truth exactly’ (p. 123), his petulant rejection of his masculine bond with his father speaks to the crisis Colman is undergoing, as he questions the memories that form the foundations of his own identity. He had modelled his masculinity after his father; admitting early in the novel that ‘I pretended I didn’t give a flying fuck what my father thought of me. But I supposed I did. I suppose I wanted him to be proud of me as a man, as a black man’ (p. 49). He feels undone by the reality of his father’s embodiment, with the man he worshipped now changed utterly. Significantly, this legacy is not just one of gender but of race. As a mixed-race adoptee who has lost his black parent, he is doubly unmoored from the coordinates of his identity. As a result, he cuts off contact with his grieving mother, unable to accept her complicity in what he perceives to be his father’s deception, and turns instead towards the voyeuristic opportunism of Sophie Stones, retreating into the articulation of a bullish but socially intelligible masculinity. This procedure demonstrates the perils of the interregnum moment; absent a roadmap for the future, it is all too easy to slip back into the old order of the past, which, for all its pitfalls and inadequacies, at least offers the comfort of the known.

Mobility, performativity and origins

However, Colman’s crisis of identity is not entirely precipitated by Joss’ death. The novel reveals that Colman has always been deeply ambivalent about the implications of his adoption, and its concomitant obscuring of origins, for his sense of self. In one breath, Colman emphatically asserts ‘I didn’t give a toss about my real parents. My thinking was if they weren’t interested in me, then I wasn’t interested in them. Simple as that’ (p. 57). However, in the very next paragraph he admits ‘[i]f I’d got the chance I’d have probably liked to see a photograph of my mother and one of my father. I don’t even know which one was black or where the black one came from’ (p. 58). The reason for this is connected to his inability to narrate his history, and by implication his identity, for others. Exasperatedly, he recounts that ‘[p]eople are
always coming up to me and asking if I’m from Morocco, Trinidad, Tobago, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Jamaica’ (p. 58). Though he is able to rationalise the conceptual irrelevance of this knowledge (‘[w]hat does it matter anyway?’ [p. 58]), his inability to make himself intelligible to others nonetheless causes a day-to-day inconvenience and no small amount of internal anguish.

In this, we might helpfully compare him to Warner’s protagonist. Like Colman, it is clear that Morvern’s lack of known familial origins has had a detrimental impact upon her. The longing for secure coordinates of origin, despite their shortcomings and inaccessibility, can be seen in both Morvern Callar and Kay’s text. Both texts depict unconventional family structures and protagonists grappling with self-definition. Though Morvern’s narrative only gives fleeting suggestions of her emotional response to her parental void, it is clear that her orphaned status has influenced her profoundly. The first time Morvern speaks out loud in the narrative is to recount a childhood story of being publically ridiculed and rebuked for her unknown genealogy:

I told about a day in geography when we all had to do a talk about the village where we were born. When my turn came I’d goes that I didnt know what village I was born in so the whole class laughed and the teacher scolded me. (p. 19)

Even if Morvern herself was comfortable with her absence of knowable origins, this anecdote makes it clear that other people are unable to accept her ignorance of her own history. Like geographical belonging, secure family lineage is an important way that people become socially intelligible within her community. Morvern’s inability to shore up her sense of self in these terms makes her a target for ridicule and abuse, as well as a possible agent for change. This encounter demonstrates the ambivalent position of the orphan figure in the interregnum. Though reconfiguration through dismantling of originary narratives and familial memory might offer scope for reinvention, it is also a profoundly painful position to occupy.

It is also significant that for Colman, like Morvern, the unintelligibility of identity is linked directly to place. It is not simply the ‘who’ of their ancestry that is lacking to Morvern and Colman, but also, and crucially, the ‘where’. In Trumpet, Colman demonstrates a real desire for some geographical fixity to his heritage, even if this comes from his adopted father rather than his biological parents. Joss is both
unable and unwilling to provide this for Colman. He encourages Colman to choose his origins for himself: ‘you make up your own bloodline, Colman. Make it up and trace it back. Design your own family tree – what’s the matter with you? Haven’t you got an imagination?’ (p. 58). Throughout the novel, Joss’ identity is closely linked to this idea of performativity and choice. He insists on the primacy of the individual imagination in self-creation and identity, eschewing fixed and knowable origins. He is so committed to his imagined heritage that he resolves never to visit Africa. He contends that he had ‘built up such a strong imaginary landscape within himself that he said it would affect his music to go to the real Africa. Every black person has a fantasy Africa, he’d say. Black British people, Black Americans, Black Caribbeans, they all have a fantasy Africa. It is all in the head’ (p. 34). Such statements as this could be used to argue that origins are not so vital after all; that self-determination and choice are far more important in determining identity. However, by revealing the depth of feeling he has towards his ‘fantasy Africa’, Joss is admitting the powerful force exerted by myths of origin, even if they aren’t true. By asserting that members of the black diaspora hold versions of ‘fantasy Africa’ the world over, Joss is acknowledging the universal necessity of connection to a geographical starting point, even if this starting point bears little resemblance to reality. Joss’s description of his Africa of the mind demonstrates the emotional force exerted by origins and understands that people have a profound and unshakeable need to be able to grasp their roots, even if they are imaginary.

This preoccupation with origin is also evident in the central chapter of the novel, ‘Music’, where Joss blows his trumpet in a virtuosic performance encompassing a huge swathe of memories, both cultural and personal, that twist and change as he ‘blow[s] his story’ (p. 136). Even in a performance that confronts him with an almost total loss of identity and brings him ‘face to face with the fact that he is nobody’ (p. 135), there still remains an indelible essence, however small, deep down at the heart of his improvisation: the ‘small black mark’ (p. 131) for which this chapter is titled. Matthew Brown remarks upon this, noting the limits to the radical self-fashioning potential opened by this novel. He argues that:

Kay remains sceptical about the ultimate feasibility of such radical self-expenditure, for despite Joss’s relentless, self-immersing pursuits of jazz music to the point of ecstatic erasure […] Kay’s narrator insists that some
essence always remains: that ‘pinpoint’ of the self, that enduring ‘small black mark’.  

Once again, Kay’s text confronts us with the ideological limits of interregnum, where the emancipatory potentialities of new modes of being are brought up short by the tenacity of the old order. Joss’ performance is riddled with the dynamics of contradiction, as his music feeds on and articulates a series of opposites balanced perilously at the liminal moment of the turn of the century. In a series of rhythmic, truncated utterances that echo the staccato beats of his trumpet solo, Joss adumbrates and gathers his contradictions side by side:

So when he takes off he is the whole century galloping to its close. The wide moors. The big mouth. Scotland. Africa. Slavery. Freedom. He is a girl. A man. Everything, nothing. He is sickness, health. The sun. The moon. Black, white. Nothing weighs him down. Not the past or the future. He hangs on to the high C and then he lets go. Screams. Lets it go. Bends his notes and bends his body. His whole body is bent over double. His trumpet pointing down at the floor then up at the sky. He plays another high C. He holds on. He just keeps blowing. He is blowing his story. His story is blowing in the wind. He lets it rip. He tears himself apart. He explodes. Then he brings himself back. Slowly, slowly, piecing himself together. (p. 136)

These contradictions, as the description of Joss’ solo makes clear, have both destructive and salutary energies. The divergent potentialities of Joss’ constituent parts enact the ideological energy of the interregnum, as the dead man blows his story from beyond the grave, piecing himself together in a form that is, as yet, unknown.

**Morbid symptoms**

These radical splits signal a divided self that also resonates with the discourses of Caledonian antiszygy. While *Trumpet* does not depict Joss’ identity as

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schizophrenic, he certainly embodies a self that is constituted of contradictions, and this is never more apparent than in the passage cited above. In order to rationalise and render comprehensible Joss’ comprehensively divided subjectivity, some characters within the novel frame his identity as deviant and pathological. As Kähkönen argues, ‘Sophie Stones’ perspective demonstrates a stance that tries to stabilize Moody’s life story by representing it as strange and pathological. Kähkönen’s use of the word ‘pathological’ is significant here for the purposes of my analysis, as it aligns Sophie’s perspective with Gramsci’s aphorism. Like The Trick, Kay’s novel is interested in probing the production and designation of ‘morbid symptoms’. Better understanding how bodies are classified as deviant or pathological is a key part of the subversive strategy by which the novel disrupts the assumptions that structure societal understandings of identity categories.

In Trumpet, the first time Joss Moody is revealed to be biologically female to anyone but is wife is when the doctor examines his body post mortem. The revelation of his corporeal femininity after his death is thus rendered in medicalised terms, his corpse separated from the charismatic husband and musician who inhabits the jazz clubs of Milly’s memory. After death, his body becomes imbricated in a discourse of pathologisation. Throughout his life, for reasons that become understandable in death, Joss has avoided doctors. This much is made clear to us by both Milly and Colman (p. 87 and p. 68, respectively). However, in death this avoidance is no longer tenable. When the doctor arrives at the Moody home to sign his death certificate, there is an air of fatigued compassion to her narration. Her professional proximity to mortality means that she is familiar with the smell of death, and she muses that ‘it was the only time that she wished she was a hospital doctor and could hide in the sanitized smell of a hospital death’ (p. 42). Despite this, she approaches Joss’s body with a reverence for the newly departed that she recognises as unusual, noting that ‘so soon after death, it was not just a body to her. It was a man, a person. Even a soul’ (p. 43). Here, Kay takes care to present the woman as sympathetic, understanding and kind. Doctor Krishnamurty is distinctly different from the prurient, predatory Sophie Stones. Nonetheless, upon her examination of Joss’ body she feels compelled to affirm his corporeal gender not once but twice:

32 Save in a barbed description by Colman, which will be discussed at more length shortly.
33 Kähkönen, p. 13.
She got out her red pen from her doctor’s bag. What she thought of as her emergency red pen. She crossed out ‘male’ and wrote ‘female’ in her rather bad doctor’s handwriting. She looked at the word ‘female’ and thought it wasn’t quite clear enough. She crossed that out, tutting to herself, and printed ‘female’ in large childish letters. (p. 44)

It is interesting to note that the ‘red pen’ used to assert Joss’ femininity is sourced specifically from her ‘doctor’s bag’. The object has no necessary connection to her profession, but is linked to her diagnostic responsibilities here both by its provenance in this passage and her categorisation of it as an ‘emergency’ instrument. This resonates with her experience of discovering Joss’ breasts. She peels layers of bandages from his chest, musing that ‘each bandage felt unmistakeably like a layer of skin. So much so that the doctor became quite apprehensive about what injury the bandages could be hiding’ (p. 44). In her disrobing of the body, Doctor Krishnamurty prematurely diagnoses Joss’ concealed female body parts as a kind of wounding and also imagines that she herself, in the process of her revelation, is inflicting harm by stripping Joss of his skin. This misreading of Joss’ breasts as scars or wounds echoes the earlier revelation of his torso to Milly, during which she imagines that ‘all he is worried about is some scar he has. He should know my love goes deeper than a wound’ (p. 21). However, while Milly wishes to hasten the disrobing, Krishnamurty, despite her profession, is almost reviled by the procedure.

In this encounter, I contend, Kay is exploring a ‘morbid symptom’ that comes close to Julia Kristeva’s theorisation of abjection. Both Gramsci’s aphorism and Kristeva’s formulation share a fascination with death; Gramsci’s symptoms are ‘morbid’ and Kristeva cites the horror of being confronted with a corpse as ‘the utmost of abjection.’ Both, too, are concerned with borders and liminality; for Gramsci the transition between hegemonic regimes and for Kristeva the boundaries of selfhood, instigated by the confrontation with ‘the me that is not me.’ Thought of in these terms, Joss’ corpse embodies not finality but crisis, acting as a provocative challenge that ripples out beyond the identity of the man himself. Indeed, though she is a stranger to him, the doctor finds that the image of Joss’ breasts stays with her; ‘she thought of them again driving home, how strange they looked’ (p. 43). His body forces the doctor to think differently, despite her instinctive reach for the

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35 Kristeva, p. 5.
pathologising ‘violent red pen’ (p. 79). Her encounter with Joss Moody has forced her to re-examine that which was once familiar, and perhaps, however briefly, re-orient her understanding of the categories around which she organises her own identity.

Xavier Aldana Reyes\textsuperscript{36} has also identified a sense of Kristevan abjection in Colman’s reaction to his father’s physicality, citing as evidence Colman’s nauseated response upon contemplating his father’s puberty; ‘That's disgusting, isn’t it? There’s no way around it. The idea of my father getting periods makes me want to throw up’ (p. 67). Colman experiences his newfound knowledge of his father’s corporeality with a profound sense of disgust, emphasising his rejection of the unsettling knowledge of Joss’ female embodiment through his desire to vomit. It is worth noting that Colman refers repeatedly to his father’s body in crude, vulgar terms: ‘my father had tits. My father didn’t have a dick. My father had a pussy. My father didn’t have any balls’ (p. 61). Like the hypermasculinity evinced by Colman after he is faced with his father’s corpse, this characterisation of Joss’s body could be seen as another attempt by Colman to distance himself from his filial relationship to Joss. Colman spits out the expletives as a kind of rejection; his characterisation acts as a repudiation of his father’s lived experience that attempts to reduce Joss to a body distinguished only by the presence or absence of sexual organs. Like Sophie Stones’ discourse of pathologisation, Colman’s vulgar description of his father’s body seeks to close down complexity and render Joss’ life comprehensible by emphasising his corporal deviance.

Colman also reaches to the discourses of mental illness and pathologisation in order to better codify and thus comprehend his father’s gender identity. Significantly, this diagnosis is precipitated by a discussion of Colman’s own linguistic split between Scots and English. Colman muses that:

When we moved down to London I still called an ice-cream a pokey hat when I was with my parents and called it an ice-cream with my mates. There were lots of words like that that I used because it cheered them up. I was practically schizophrenic. But now I come to think about it, I wasn’t nearly as

Colman’s condemnation of Joss’ actions demonstrate a longing for identity that is entirely self-sufficient; unified, unchanging and always consistent. In this, he betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of subjectivity, as enacted both in his own linguistic choices and his father’s gender performance. Colman’s position here is remarkably similar to the diagnostic tendency identified by Craig in the description of the Scottish ‘divided self’ cited in my introduction. Craig argues that, rather than viewing this division as pathological, we should embrace it as:

the exploration of the limitations of notions of the self which have themselves reduced the self from its true complexity in order to produce a false unity in which the person is simply a spectator and a social function; it is a concern with the limitations of those notions of self and society which are founded on false assumptions about the fulfilment of identity being the achievement of singularity and unity. To explore and to celebrate the multiplicities of the self is to recognise the fact that the self is never self-contained – that the ‘divided self’ is not to be contrasted with the ‘undivided self’ but with the ‘self-in-relation’: the ‘divided self’ is precisely the product of the failure of the dialectic of ‘self and other’ rather than the outcome of the self’s failure to maintain its autonomy and singularity.  

Colman, in diagnosing Joss as schizophrenic, is retreating from the contingency of his own selfhood upon factors that lie beyond his control. Colman’s experience of grief renders him desperate to categorise and delimit his father’s legacy precisely because it has brought him face to face with his own inescapable position as a self-in-relation. His conception of his own masculinity is inherited, dependent upon the father that he is now bereaved of twice over, once in death and once in the revelation of his physicality. Grief has crystallised a powerful truth about his own subjectivity. As Judith Butler has argued:

[i]t could be that in this experience [of grief] something about who we are is revealed, something that delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us that those ties constitute a sense of self, compose who we are, and that when we lose them, we lose our composure in some fundamental sense: we do not know who

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we are or what we do. Many people think that grief is privatizing, that it returns us to a solitary situation, but I think it exposes the constitutive sociality of the self, a basis for thinking a political community of a complex order.\textsuperscript{38}

Millie and Colman both experience Joss’ death as an un-making of their identity. Millie opens the novel saying as much, musing that ‘I look unlike the memory of myself. I feel strange now. It used to be such a certain thing, just being myself. It was so easy, so painless’ (p. 1). Echoing this, Colman states bluntly that his father has ‘made us all unreal’ (p. 60). Faced with this unreality, this unmooring of subjectivity, Colman and Millie must find a way to reconfigure their identities, moving forward towards an uncertain future.

\textbf{Return to Scotland}

Some hope for the possibility of this reconfiguration is offered by the spatial trajectory of the novel, as Colman moves increasingly closer to his mother over the course of the text. After Joss’ death, Millie travels to Torr, retreating to a Scottish village that she has visited since her childhood. Scotland, for Millie, is figured as a sanctuary in the face of tabloid hounding. She describes the ‘relief as [she] crossed the border into Scotland [and] let down the windows to sniff the different air’ (p. 2). The chapters that are set here are designated ‘House and Home’, and Ali Smith contends that ‘[p]retty soon it becomes clear that ‘House and Home’ stands for a clash between the private and public worlds.’\textsuperscript{39} This clash is at the heart of the novel; will Torr be co-opted by the prurient public discussion about Joss’ pathological existence, or will it remain the sanctuary of love and acceptance created in the Moody’s marriage?

This domestic environment is suffused with memory, and part of the sanctuary that it offers to Millie at the beginning of the novel stems from the fact that its allegiance is clearly more to the past than the present. When she arrives, Millie remarks that ‘the cottage seemed as if it possessed a memory of its own, one of those memories that remembers the distant past better than the recent’ (p. 7). For a time, this sleepy Scottish fishing village allows Millie some respite from the unwanted attention of the tabloid press in the wake of Joss’ death. However, not even the sleepy fishing village is immune to the crisis wrought by Joss’ death. Colman gives

Sophie Stones his mother’s address, and soon letters from her invade the cottage, rendering the space *unheimlich*, hostile and disorienting. Millie notes that:

Torr is not the same Torr any more. Since the letters came. It is a new place, with a new chubb and yale. It is familiar the way a memory is familiar, and changed each time like a memory too. Utterly changed. The size of rooms are different today. Much smaller. The kitchen shelves are higher. The kettle’s whistle is much shriller. The flush in the bathroom is so loud it makes me jump every time I flush it. The mirrors in the cottage make me look different too. I barely recognise myself. (p. 92).

If *Trumpet* offers hope for a healing resolution of interregnum’s morbid symptoms, it is in the reclamation of Torr from Sophie Stones’ toxic tabloid narrative, reinhabiting the cottage as the site of reconciliation between Colman and his mother within the boundaries of the Scottish nation.

This national context is important, as Colman’s interaction with his Scottish heritage plays a significant role in his dislocation throughout the novel. Given his mobility (as a young man raised predominantly in England), Colman does not feel the same kinship with Scotland as his mother. Throughout his life, he has rejected his father’s assignation of Scottish national identity as incompatible with his nomadic upbringing. Early in the novel, Colman explains that; ‘[m]y father kept telling me I was Scottish. Born there. But I didn’t feel Scottish. Didn’t feel English either. Didn’t feel anything. My heart is fucking stone’ (p. 51). Colman does not experience his freedom from national belonging as emancipatory, unbounded cosmopolitanism. Rather, his national dislocation has a deadening effect, aligning him with Sophie Stones’ amoral vacuity through his metaphorical invocation of her surname. Later in the novel, when he travels north to meet with Joss’ mother, he returns to his musing on national identity:

His father was always telling him: you are Scottish, you were born in Scotland and that makes you Scottish. But he doesn't feel Scottish. He doesn't speak with a Scottish accent. He can do a good one, like all children of Scottish parents, but it’s not him. What is him? This is what he’s been asking himself. It’s all the train’s fault: something about the way the land moves out of the window; about crossing a border; about seeing a cow’s tail spin round and round its arse to get the flies away. (p. 190)
What is significant in this passage is Colman’s new understanding that his location has precipitated his meditations on selfhood and belonging. He lays the blame on his mobility, linking his angst to the motion of the train and the crossing of borders before bathetically undercutting the symbolic implications of such contemplations with the crude image of the circling cow’s tail. Nonetheless, the import of this meditation is clear enough; Colman’s unsettled identity has much to do with his unsettled location.

Conclusion: ‘the future is something else entirely’

It is perhaps cause for hope, then, that the close of the novel sees Colman heading to Torr to reunite with his mother. Brown contends that:

Kay concludes *Trumpet* by asking whether his father’s legacy will inspire Colman to reconstitute his identity within the space of Scotland, where he is about to return at the book’s end to reconcile with his mother.

Brown’s formulation is appealing because of its incompleteness. While the return to Scotland in Kay’s novel is certainly more hopeful and optimistic than Morvern’s poverty-stricken trudge towards the port, the mother-son reunion is left unnarrated. As readers, we are optimistic, certainly, but the constitutive ambivalence of the interregnum is retained in the deferral of this meeting beyond the final page of the novel.

Colman is lead back to Torr by a letter sent by his father before his death. Joss’ letter to Colman seems to empathetically understand that his son’s present moment cannot but be experienced as a kind of interregnum, in terms of his sense of self, his fractured masculinity and his displaced Scottishness. More than this, there is a measure of universality in this predicament. Joss’ missive acknowledges that the human condition is, to some extent, imbricated in irresolvable contradictions. These contradictions are bound up with issues of legacy, engagement with the past and deep emotional bonds. However, Joss’ voice of certitude from beyond the grave

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40 This scene has an interesting corollary in Andrew O’Hagan, *Our Fathers* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004 [1999]), where musings on a train are interrupted by the potent Scottish symbol of Irn Bru; ‘Up and down the empty aisle, a bottle of Irn Bru.’ (p. 57).

41 Brown, p. 226.
frames these dilemmas kindly and lightly. It seems that he is speaking both to his son and to the reader as we hear him in his own words for the first time in the novel:

I am leaving myself to you. Everything I have got. All the letters I have kept hidden. I’ve discovered a strange thing that it is probably only possible to discover when you are dying – so don’t try it! – I’ve discovered that the future is something else entirely. That our worries are too wee. It is quite simple: all of this is my past, this is the sum of my parts; you are my future. I will be your son now in a strange way. You will be my father in telling or not telling your story.

[...] You will understand me or you won’t. You will keep me or lose me. You will hate me or love me. You will change me or hold me dear. You will do either or both for years. But I am going. I am off. My own father is back by the bed here singing. The present is just a loop stitch. *Heil Ya Ho, boys, Let her go, boys.* (p. 277)

His exhortation here is a fitting point at which to conclude my discussion of Kay’s novel. Joss reaches for the Scottish sea shanty sung by his African father, a song that Rice has called ‘a symbol of continuity and circularity’⁴² to bid his son farewell, invoking movement, cultural synthesis and musicality in his final line. More significant for our purposes, however, is his characterisation of the future as ‘something else entirely’. While this characterisation of what is yet to come does not constitute a roadmap out of the interregnum, it does offer some solace, and hope, for what will come next.

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Looking forward: two more referenda and an uncertain future

All four texts that I have discussed are marked as novels of interregnum by their ambivalent disposition; manifest as a refusal to either rest comfortably in established ideological patterns or to whole-heartedly endorse radical alternatives. Rather, they remain unsettled and unsettling, occupying the liminal space of insecurity and possibility that is characteristic of interregnum. Following Joss’ final words in Trumpet, it is perhaps now time to attend to the intervening years and to establish whether, in fact, the future has unfolded as ‘something else entirely.’ From Trumpet’s position on the cusp of the new millennium, it certainly seemed that this new beginning was not so far away. This perspective was, to some extent, endorsed by the periodisation of Whyte’s article, wherein he hoped that ‘the setting-up of a Scottish parliament will at last allow Scottish literature to be literature first and foremost, rather than the expression of a nationalist movement.’¹ Certainly, there have been some shifts in the dominant critical paradigm since the opening of the parliament at Holyrood, but I contend that the first decade and a half of the twenty-first century has not inculcated the kind of overhaul within the Scottish cultural landscape that many critics (and writers) might have hoped for. The interregnum, it seems, is not over yet.

I contend that it is all the more urgent to reconsider the critical framework by which we understand the devolutionary period in the wake of the continued disorientation and ambiguity that has been wrought by the beginning of the twenty-first century. In Scotland, the new millennium has seen a whole host of changes to the political landscape. These only began with the establishment of the devolved Scottish parliament just nine months before the turn of the century; since then Scotland has also seen the unprecedented electoral successes of the SNP, the 2014 independence referendum and this year’s Brexit vote. Indeed, Gramsci’s formulation is as relevant to Scotland’s political situation in 2016 as it was in 1994. Many of the interregnum tendencies that I identified in my introduction have yet to be resolved, and 16 years into the new millennium Scotland’s place in the world looks all the more in flux.

Tellingly, the rhetoric of interregnum was implicitly mobilised during the independence campaign, harnessed by campaigners on both sides of the vote. The

¹ Whyte, ‘Masculinities’, p. 284.
Better Together’ camp utilised the insecurity inherent in interregnum as an argument to preserve the union. At the launch of this campaign, Alistair Darling warned would-be Yes voters against ‘going on a journey with an uncertain destination’, while writer and Yes campaigner Alan Bissett suggested that Scotland was going ‘through a period of distortion before assuming a new form’. Both characterisations map onto Gramsci’s aphorism; one appealing to a retrenchment of old forms as a way of guarding against future uncertainty, and the other emphasising the distortion (or morbid symptoms) as a necessary stage in a hopeful process of reinvention.

The political disenfranchisement that I discussed in my introduction also seems to be alive and well in the 21st century. The voting records of the EU referendum earlier this year demonstrate how the electoral systems that precipitated such political disjunction in late twentieth century Scotland are still alive and well. John MacKenzie argues that ‘it was no surprise to find that Scottish voting practices in the referendum of 23 June 2016 were so strikingly different from those of the English and the Welsh. In Scotland, all 32 local authority areas voted to remain.’

That Scotland now faces the prospect of leaving the EU against the democratically registered wishes of its electorate demonstrates that the rule by dominance, characteristic of interregnum has, rather than being dismantled, remained steadfast since the devolutionary period. In our introduction to the forthcoming issue of C21 Literature, Kate Turner and I argue that:

These political events continue to present uncertainty around ideas of Scottishness and indeed, post-Brexit, the idea of British identity has been thrown into a similar state of distortion. Therefore it seems inevitable that themes of disorientation and uncertainty must continue to form a central feature of contemporary critical work on Scottish fiction. Indeed, this will continue to bear relevance to contemporary scholarship that is framed by nationhood in relation to the United Kingdom more broadly.

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These political changes have also undoubtedly impacted the terrain of Scottish literature. Certainly, the independence referendum invigorated debates about what Scotland, and Scottish literature, might mean. As Turner and I argue, ‘if the prospect of independence suggested, at least for Bissett, the possibility of Scotland taking a new form, then its failure to materialise in September 2014 undoubtedly furthered the uncertainty underpinning ideas of Scottishness and the role of the arts in Scotland. Indeed, Bissett wrote that the ‘No’ vote prompted “a new ambivalence about what the Scottish arts are for.”’ As they had been during the devolutionary period, writers were very much engaged in the independence conversation. This is evidenced by organisations such as the ‘National Collective’, whose slogan during the referendum campaign stated their intention to ‘imagine a better Scotland.’ Scott Hames argued that the referendum signaled that it was no longer tenable to position writers as the vanguard of resurgent Scottish confidence. He posits that ‘we have probably reached the end of this narrative [...] If they ever were, Scottish writers are no longer ‘out in front’ of public debate, coaxing the people and their representatives onto fresh terrain. They speak from the middle of the pack, as articulate citizens rather than trailblazers or towering visionaries.’ It is now the whole country, and not just its writers, who are engaged in negotiating interregnum.

One possible corollary of this shift is that, in Hames’ words, ‘[[i]t may become more difficult to articulate political dissent in forms of art that are markedly engaged in “representing the nation.”]’ The ideas that were so energising during the devolutionary period now risk seeming prosaic or outdated in the post-indyref political landscape. Persisting with the cultural nationalist paradigm risks what Gramsci feared was a possible outcome of interregnum; a retrenchment of old ideological forms and an acceptance of stasis rather than a leap into the unknown.

Therefore, it is my contention that the category of interregnum, as well as suggesting a useful development and complication of cultural nationalist narratives of devolution, might also prove useful in the critical debate around Scottish fiction in the

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9 Ibid.
21st century. Interregnum, with its unruly energy and turbulent ambivalence, refuses to settle into comforting, knowable structures. As a category, interregnum requires critical flexibility, a willingness to follow dead ends and to embrace uncertainty. These skills will certainly be necessary as the next generation of Scottish fiction finds new routes by which to navigate the nation.
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