FANTASISING THE SELF: A STUDY OF ALASDAIR GRAY'S 'LANARK', '1982 JANINE', 'SOMETHING LEATHER' AND 'POOR THINGS'

Eva Martínez Ibáñez

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St. Andrews

1999

Fantasising the Self: A Study of Alasdair Gray's *Lanark*, *1982 Janine*, *Something Leather* and *Poor Things*

Eva Martínez Ibáñez

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of St Andrews

May 1999

Abstract

This thesis explores the use of fantasy in Alasdair Gray's major fictions: *Lanark* (1981), *1982 Janine* (1984), *Something Leather* (1990) and *Poor Things* (1992).

The main purpose is to study the way Alasdair Gray borrows elements from different forms of fantasy – magical realism, pornography, the Gothic and science fiction – in order to explore and resolve the internal conflicts of his characters. In the introduction current definitions of fantasy are surveyed. Also explored is the concept of magical realism, as one of the objectives of the thesis is to demonstrate that some of Gray's work, particularly *Lanark*, presents some of the characteristics of this branch of Postmodernism.

The first chapter concerns *Lanark*. The juxtaposition of fantasy and realism is explored in order to show the fragmentation of the self represented by the figure of Thaw/Lanark. Also paradoxes and contradictions at the heart of this work are investigated from the point of view of form and content. Of particular importance is the conflict between the individual and society.

In the chapter dealing with *1982 Janine*, the concept of deidealisation is introduced to show how Jock deals with the figures in his past, Scotland and himself. Jock's personal conflicts and damaged psyche are explored through his pornographic fantasies.

In chapter III *Something Leather* is compared to works by Sade, particularly their use of sadomasochistic and homosexual fantasies as a form of social subversion.

Chapter IV discusses *Poor Things* from the point of view of how characteristics typical of the Gothic novel are parodied to explore gender issues such as the construction of female identity by a male Other. Parallelisms between this novel and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and John Fowles' *A Maggot* are also explored.

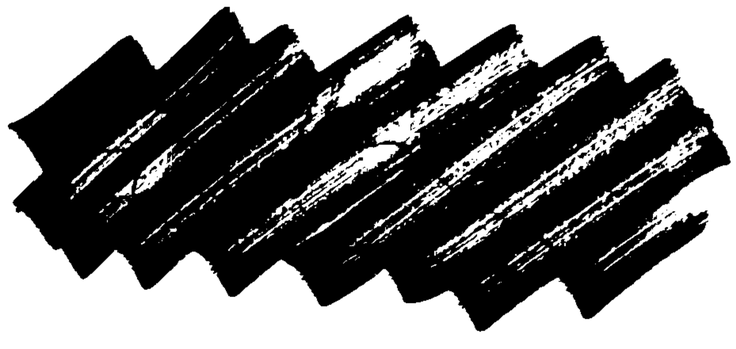
In the conclusion the main concerns and obsessions of Gray's fiction are explored through a discussion of his shorter fiction.

Declaration

i. I, Eva Martínez Ibáñez, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 83,500 words in length, has been written by me. that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

Date 28/5/99 signature of candidate 

ii. I was admitted as a research student in September, 1995 and as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in September, 1996; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St. Andrews between 1995 and 1999.

Date 28/5/99 signature of candidate 

iii. I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of St. Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

Date 28/5/99 signature of supervisor 

In submitting this thesis to the University of St Andrews I understand that I am giving permission for it to be made available for use in accordance with the regulations of the University Library for the time being in force, subject to any copyright vested in the work not being affected thereby. I also understand that the title and abstract will be published, and that a copy of the work may be made and supplied to any *bona fide* library or research worker.

Date 28/5/99 signature of candidate 

A mis padres

Acknowledgements

I owe special debt to Professor Douglas Dunn for supervising this thesis and for his encouragement. I would also like to thank Professor Robert Crawford for providing some material for this thesis, Professor Gustavo San Román from the Spanish Department of the University of St Andrews for his useful suggestions and bibliography and Professor Susan Sellers for reading chapter IV and making useful suggestions.

I am also grateful to Anthony Storr for advice on bibliography for Chapter III, to Mr James Kidd of St Andres University Library for his help with bibliography on Alasdair Gray and to the staff of the Manuscript Section of the National Library of Scotland.

I would also like to thank Sam for forcing me to forget about Alasdair Gray from time to time and Kirsti for putting up with my whingeing. I am particularly grateful to Rupin for his help with word processing, and to Ray for reading countless drafts of the chapters and for his encouragement and interest in my work.

Most of all I want to thank my family for their unquestioning support, patience and encouragement. This thesis is dedicated to all five of them, including Pipo.

List of Contents

List of Abbreviations

(*L*)	*Lanark*
(*J*)	*1982 Janine*
(*SL*)	*Something Leather*
(*PT*)	*Poor Things*
(*AM*)	*A Maggot* (Fowles)
(*MCh*)	*Midnight's Children* (Rushdie)
(*S of O*)	*Story of O* (Réage)
(*PNE*)	*The Passion of New Eve (*Carter)
(*USM*)	*Unlikely Stories, Mostly*
(*TTTT*)	*Ten Tales Tall & True*
(*AHM*)	*A History Maker*
(*LT*)	*Lean Tales*
(*FKW*)	*Fall of Kelvin Walker*
(*MB*)	*Mavis Belfrage*

A man sets himself the task of drawing the world. Throughout the years he fills a space with images of provinces, kingdoms, mountains, bays, ships, islands, fish, rooms, instruments, stars, horses and people. Shortly before he dies, he discovers that the patient labyrinth of lines traces the image of his face.

J.L. Borges. El hacedor (Epilogue)

Introduction

> I assume that things which excite and depress me sexually, socially, intellectually, politically, will have a similar effect on others, so if a story moves me in a certain way as I write it then the reader will be similarly moved. Put it another way. I am essentially the same as other men, women and children, so if I am careful and I talk honestly to myself they will be able to hear me.[1]

The candour of this comment by Alasdair Gray conveys one of the main attractions of his work. However, as is customary with Gray, matters are never as simple as they appear at first sight. The directness, the simplicity of the message seems strangely at odds with the highly elaborate nature of much of his work. Indeed, with those few words, Gray seems to dismiss all suggestion of artificiality or, to use a riskier term, of Postmodernism. In fact, some of his fiction is rather Spartan. At times it even displays a deadpan quality. An example of such style is some of his short stories, particularly those included in the appropriately titled *Lean Tales* and short novels such as *The Fall of Kelvin Walker* and *McGrotty and Ludmilla*. In 1978, he remarked in connection with his style: "I am trying to make my writing very clear and definite, with a grammar which looks as simple and ordinary as possible".[2] In any case, there is a contrast between the simplicity of what Gray intends and the structural and imaginative artistry present in some of his best works, particularly in the novels discussed in this thesis.

---

[1] Alasdair Gray, "Interview with Alasdair Gray", interview by Carol Anderson and Glenda Norquay. *Cencrastus* 13 (Summer 1983), p. 7. A typescript of this interview can be found in Accession 9247, folder 52 (a). National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh.

[2] Alasdair Gray, "A Resident Reports", Feb-March 1978. Gray reporting on his first six months as writer-in-residence at Glasgow University. Accession 9247, folder 44, MS page 1. National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh.

Usually, Gray tends to dress his disturbing honesty in the alluring costume of fantasy, be it the creation of dystopian worlds, pornographic cliché, grotesque monstrosity or science fiction. There is a clear connection between such strategies and the exploration of the individual's psychological conflicts. Referring to pornography Peter Michelson points out:

> [W]e forget that contemporary pornography is a natural product of the contemporary moral and aesthetic imagination. Our sense of the beautiful has become too psychologically complex to permit its reduction to either moral idealism or artistic formalism. For Plato the True was necessarily the Beautiful. For us the true is much more likely to be the ugly or grotesque.[3]

Pornography, as a form of fantasy, can be used to examine personal and social dilemmas. However, readers and critics who have not cared to go beyond the texts' façades have very often been offended by such tactics. What I shall do in this thesis is examine how behind postmodern stylistic pyrotechnics an apparent intention to shock the reader is confronted with a penetrating and unadulterated exploration of the individual's personal monsters. Of particular interest here is the treatment of the self in some of Gray's fiction. He employs different types of fantasy to explore his characters' psyches. Fantasy in the form of dystopia, pornography or Gothic fiction is vital in order to understand the protagonists' identities, their conflicts and their struggles to attain self-knowledge.

Novels investigated are *Lanark, 1982 Janine, Something Leather* and *Poor Things*. They have been chosen in particular because they are the ones that best display the concerns and obsessions of Gray's work. Contrary to Mark Axelrod's suggestion that Gray's trademark is "the diversity of his texts not just

---

[3] Peter Michelson, *The Aesthetics of Pornography*. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), p.12.

in content but in context as well",[4] I have chosen to explore what looks like a pattern in Gray's work. That is, characteristics typical of `fantastic literature are used to disclose the workings of his characters' minds. Indeed, these novels connect with each other. Issues introduced in *Lanark* are explored more intensively and intimately in *1982 Janine*. Moreover, as J. Christopher Bittenbender points out, "the orgy of Donalda, Senga, June, and Harry mirrors Jock's fantasies and the creation of Bella by Godwin is much like Jock`s fictional authoring of Janine".[5] Therefore, there is an evolution in Gray's treatment of fantasy. In *Lanark* it is not clear to the reader whether the fantastic section is simply a nightmare engendered by Thaw's deranged mind or an account of his afterlife as Lanark. In *Something Leather* June, Harry, Senga and Donalda bring Jock's erotic dreams to life. Fantasy reaches an extreme in *Poor Things* where the female protagonist, Bella, has become a construction of the male imagination.

From a compositional point of view, these novels share a similar structure: all of them are "fractured". Even if in a novel such as *1982 Janine* this does not appear obvious from the layout of the text, these works are divided in two basic sections: a realistic and a fantastic one. This disjointed structure is a reflection of the mental state of the protagonists. That is to say, it mirrors some kind of disintegration in the protagonist's identity. The only opportunity Gray`s characters have of reaching self-fulfilment or a deeper knowledge of themselves is through fantasy, by "inventing" fantastic worlds or by re-imagining

---

[4] Mark Axelrod, "Alasdair Gray: An Introduction, of Sorts". *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 15 n 2 (Summer 1995), p.103.

[5] J. Christopher Bittenbender, "Beyond the Antisyzygy: Bakhtin and some Modern Scottish Writers". (Ph.D. diss., St Andrews, 1996), p. 159.

themselves. Duncan Thaw, Lanark, Jock, Harry, June and Bella are in different ways all at odds with conventionality. Even characters such as Jock and June who would be considered "normal" by society struggle to find their place in it. Gray's characters are disillusioned with life and struggle to make sense of themselves. Among Gray's many gifts is a capacity to observe disaffection within the conventional. Ian A. Bell considers that this is a trend in Scottish fiction since the 1980s:

> Refusing to collaborate with a transcendental, totalising and finally determining sense of national identity, be it supportive or critical, Scottish novelists since the early 1980s have concentrated instead on individual moments of crisis, alienation and fragmentation, moments dramatising the loss and discovery of self, as they are articulated through the lives of some of those conventionally excluded from the story of Scotland...[6]

According to Colin Manlove this soul-searching process is characteristic of Scottish fantasy literature: "[i]n a sense Scots fantasy is inward-looking, concerned to discover something hidden within. It is much more frequently an expression of the psyche of its central figure...".[7] The outcome of Gray's stories is positive. Even Lanark discovers moments of happiness in his life. Characters are redeemed, a new more confident self appears that has been constructed through fantasy.

Gray's fiction is conditioned to a great extent by his remarkable honesty, a result of his peculiarly candid use of autobiography. In *Lanark* and *1982 Janine*, and in some of his short stories, the autobiographical functions as a

---

[6] Ian A. Bell, "Imagine Living There: Form and Ideology in Contemporary Scottish Fiction", in *Studies in Scottish Fiction: 1945 to the Present*, ed. Susanne Hagemann. *Scottish Studies* 19 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996), p. 226.
[7] Colin Manlove, *Scottish Fantasy Literature. A Critical Survey*. (Edinburgh: Canongate Academic, 1994), p.11.

powerful link to reality no matter how prominent the fantastic element may be. As Douglas Gifford has pointed out:

> There's a difficult issue behind Gray's two major works of how far a writer can say his work is a novel and how far he can implant clues as to this being his autobiography, and I concede that I can't yet pinpoint why I feel that Gray is trying to have his cake and eat it in this respect.[8]

Autobiography is a delicate and complex issue and it should be stressed that it contributes to the conspicuous candour of Gray's writing. The Thaw section of *Lanark* is autobiographical. The origin of *1982 Janine* and the Edinburgh Festival section of that work can be traced to episodes of his own life. The "Dad" character in *Something Leather* was originally based on his *Saltire Self-Portraits* autobiography. *The Fall of Kelvin Walker* is based on his experience of the BBC in the mid sixties, while in "Mavis Belfrage" (*MB*) and the short story "A Night Off" (*MB*) he uses incidents from his first marriage and his time as a school teacher. "A Report to the Trustees" (*LT*) was a real report and "The Answer" (*LT*) is based on a real event.[9] This is very different from the use of autobiography in a totally autobiographical work. He uses reality, his own private reality, and turns it into fiction. Ultimately, Gray transforms himself into a fiction. Just as he plays with the memory of his fictional characters (particularly in *Lanark* and *1982 Janine*), he enacts the same process with his own memory. Memory, in his own case and that of his characters, is manipulated and distorted but it also helps interpret and understand their reality. The issue of autobiography

---

[8] Douglas Gifford, "The Richest Collection in Years" rev. of *1982 Janine*. *Books in Scotland* 15 (Summer 1984), p.10.

[9] Alasdair Gray, replies to a written questionnaire sent by E.M (May 1997). A transcript of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix II.

has to do with his honesty as we have seen in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter. Gray's appeal and success derive from his ability to reach the intimate turmoil we all share. *1982 Janine* is his most successful work in this respect as we feel that Jock's conflicts are the author's and also our own. From very private concerns Gray represents universal conflicts. Jock becomes all of us: he is an Every(wo)man.

Despite his extensive use of fantastic material, his novels are not exclusively fantastic in any sense. He is less interested in the creation of fantastic worlds as a form of escapism than in fantasy – be it pure fantasy or pornography – as a technique to interpret the individual. Therefore, in these novels a solid link is formed between the worlds presented, the world of the imagination and the world as we think we know it. Gray's fiction poses the question of what happens when the boundaries between fantasy and reality are violated, when these two worlds overlap, or collide. He shows one world within another to foreground the existence of multiple realities. He explores the totality and complexity of the individual through the confrontation of different worlds. By means of the invention of imaginary domains he travels to the world inside the self. Fantasy is an option which assists in the exploration of areas obscured by reality. For Gray, traditional realism is inadequate to the expression of the reality which realism by its very name and nature pretends to replicate. Therefore his fiction transcends the shortcomings of fantasy and realism because it depends upon blending both approaches.

As already indicated, one of Gray's recurrent themes is the anxiety on the part of his protagonists to find meaning in their lives. This search involves issues

related to politics, religion and sex. Therefore, the private and the public merge in his work in a fashion similar to his handling of fantasy and realism. The real world is always firmly in place and the reader never loses sight of it. Always in the background, it is used as a backdrop to the fantasies of his characters. Speaking about the imaginary setting of *Lanark*, Gray indicates that the foundations of his fantasies lay principally in his real world: "I meant to write an exciting story about the world I was in, of which Glasgow was the biggest and nearest part".[10] Therefore, in *Lanark*, something as real as the city of Glasgow is fantastically deformed and transformed in the cities of Unthank and Provan which in their turn share their names with real places.

The instability of the characters' identity is illustrated by the kaleidoscopic representation of multiple worlds using different literary traditions and forms. Gray presents a series of lives that struggle to comprehend their present through the use of different types of fantasy. He exploits characteristics of science fiction, pornography and the Gothic novel in a thoroughly postmodern manner, that is he parodies them. Fantasy does not signal an escape from reality. Rather, it is a way to penetrate it. For example, Gray does not use elements typical of science fiction in order to create a world radically different to or the opposite of our own. Instead what he does is demonstrate that we cannot escape it because that dystopian world *is* our own. Similarly, the use of pornographic motifs is concerned more with their effect on the characters' psyches than with sexual excitement. Interestingly, Susan Sontag considers that science fiction and pornography share a series of characteristics:

---

[10] Mark Axelrod, "An Epistolary Interview, Mostly with Alasdair Gray". *The Review of*

> The ahistorical dreamlike landscape where action is situated, the peculiarly congealed time in which acts are performed – these occur almost as often in science fiction as they do in pornography. ... The fact that the site of narrative is an ideal *topos* disqualifies neither pornography nor science fiction from being literature. Such negations of real, concrete, three-dimensional social time, space, and personality – and such "fantastic" enlargements of human energy – are rather the ingredients of another kind of literature, founded on another mode of consciousness.[11]

In the fiction discussed here, fantasy is very often connected with the notion of displacement and progress. The characters move through labyrinths of the mind and this search is mirrored by their external peregrinations. In the works I examine, the notion of the journey between the worlds of fantasy and reality is, therefore, crucial. In *Lanark* the journey takes place literally, in time and space. Characteristics of magical realism and elements of science fiction are juxtaposed with a realistic narrative. The text is structured like a labyrinth and Lanark and Thaw journey through it, changing forms, in search of sunlight and a key. In *1982 Janine* erotic fantasies overlap with reality. Jock's journey happens inside his head – his is not an external voyage but an intimate and private quest. The external labyrinth found in *Lanark* has become an internal one here and Jock manages to find a way out of it. In *Something Leather* the relationship between fantasy and reality is more of a problem, what happens exclusively in Jock's head in *1982 Janine* becomes here vivid and real. June is also involved in a labyrinthine journey of self-discovery that starts when looking for The Hideout, the leather shop where she meets Donalda and Senga. In *Poor Things*, a parody of Gothic fiction, the protagonist travels the world not once but twice. The "editor" plays with the possibility that we are indeed in the presence of a

---

Contemporary Fiction 15 n 2 (Summer 1995), p. 106.

document of historic importance. Gray clearly confronts two extreme realities. History and fiction are played against each other.

One of the main characteristics of Gray's work is its political concerns. His fiction uses fantasy to subvert the notions which he wishes to attack. In the same way that science fiction and pornography have characteristics in common, pornography and the Gothic novel can also be compared with each other. Both literary genres share the use of taboos, ex-centric characters and extreme states of mind. One of the notions Gray wants to criticise in his work is not only the relationships between men and women on a sexual level but between individuals. Sadomasochistic practices reflect the manipulation and exploitation at the heart of these. In order to subvert the conventional view of what these relationships should be he uses elements typical of pornographic literature. One critic has correctly pointed out that the constant topic of Gray's work is "the tension between tenderness and cruelty, in sexual relationships, between parents and children, and in society. Cruelty comes from thwarted tenderness; violence, not sex, is pornographic".[12] As Angela Carter has written:

> … sexual relations between men and women always render explicit the nature of social relations in the society in which they take place and, if described explicitly, will form a critique of those relations, even if that is not and never has been the intention of the pornographer.[13]

Something Leather is the clearest example of such use of pornography. Homosexuality and sadomasochism are employed to subvert the accepted notion

---

[11] Susan Sontag, "The Pornographic Imagination", in *Styles of Radical Will*. (London: Secker & Warburg , 1969), p. 46.
[12] Maggie Gee, "Cruel and tender fight" rev. of *Poor Things*. *The Observer*, 13 September 1992.
[13] Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: and the Ideology of Pornography*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979), p. 20.

of how women should act. This is the reason why I explore the employment of these two taboo elements in contrast to Sade's work. His fantasies can be considered "the most extreme articulations of a desire for transgression in our cultural history".[14] I want to demonstrate the way Gray uses similar elements to subvert conventional beliefs about gender and conventionality.

Peter Michelson regards the desire to undermine and refute what is intellectually or morally the accepted standard of the age as an anarchic quality of obscene writing. According to him, pornography and obscenity let us see that accepted standards are destructive.[15] Satire of whatever kind would also share this anarchic quality with pornography. Therefore, fantasy is exercised by Gray as a form of exposing and rebelling against manipulation and external power. He uses the transgressive character of that literary genre to criticise aspects of society. He exploits literary traditions and genres such as science fiction, pornography and the Gothic as ways of acknowledging the tradition which he simultaneously parodies.

George Donaldson and Alison Lee suggest that:

> Gray's work comments on the structures of political, institutional, and sexual power that present themselves as "normal." As a postmodern writer, Gray both uses and abuses these structures, just as he does literary conventions and genres.[16]

Randall Stevenson's opinion concurs with this idea when he points out that whatever "games" Gray may be playing in his texts they "tend, on balance, not to

---

[14] Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy. The Literature of Subversion*. (London & New York: Routledge. 1981), p. 74.
[15] Peter Michelson, p. 17-18.
[16] George Donaldson and Alison Lee, "Is Eating People Really Wrong? Dining with Alasdair Gray". *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 15 nº 2 (Summer 1995), p. 155.

diminish but to add to the satirical, political directions which are a central feature of his work".[17]

Central to my discussion of *Lanark*, is the fragmentation and disintegration of the main character. This fragmentation is obvious in the manner in which Lanark and Thaw appear as characters in two different stories but are related to a single subjectivity. We encounter different characters – Lanark. Thaw, the Oracle, Nastler and ultimately the author – who are versions of one single "I". This disintegration is directly mirrored in the order of the books. The physical separation between the realistic part – the Thaw section – and the fantastic – the Lanark section – also foregrounds the idea of fragmentation. It is clear that fantasy plays a fundamental part in attaining an integral image of Lanark/Thaw. Without the fantastic part we could not be able to imagine the whole character. As a political and social allegory, *Lanark* is difficult to define. At first sight it looks like a metaphor of the individual's struggle against the forces that control society and that eventually destroy him. However, it can also be read as a defence of such forces. After all, Thaw/Lanark alienates himself through his deliberate rejection of them.

1982 Janine is the work that exemplifies most clearly the role of the imagination, of fantasy, when it comes to constructing a new idea of the self. As I hope to prove Gray's use of pornography is far from gratuitous. Erotic fantasy plays the same role and has the same value as the pseudo science-fiction elements in *Lanark*. Pornographic dreams are used by Jock to exorcise the feeling of guilt

---

[17] Randall Stevenson, "Alasdair Gray and the Postmodern", in *The Arts of Alasdair Gray*, eds. Robert Crawford and Thom Nairn. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), p. 61.

caused by his troubled personal relationships. The emotional conflict arises when Jock realises that real life and fantasy characters are muddled in his mind. Through a process of what I refer to as "deidealisation", he succeeds in finding the humanity behind the mythified figures who have controlled his life so far.

In *Something Leather* the employment of pornographic material – which is a mere product of Jock's imagination in *1982 Janine* – is developed further. Now this fantastic element has become real. However, in both works pornographic motifs are used to subvert conventional political, social and sexual structures. Moreover, sadomasochism and lesbianism demonstrate how the exteriorisation of something that exists only in the imagination – a fantasy – can promote a deeper knowledge of oneself. Harry recreates the fairy tale that began in the boarding school and around which her life revolves whereas June sees her life become a male pornographic fantasy and turns the situation to her advantage. Considered taboo in our society, such fantasies allow the author to destabilise and mock the conventionality of the middle classes.

In the chapter on *Poor Things* I study the formation of the "I" of the female character – Bella – by the male characters who surround her. To all of them Bella is a fantasy. Her identity has been fragmented and remodelled by a succession of male fantasies. She is literally a monster, a human creation, and, more specifically, a male fabrication. Bella is necessary to these surrounding male characters – a need that shows their desire for a creature of the imagination that exists only in their minds. Fantasy, therefore is used in all these novels to stress its role in the development of the characters. Through fantasy characters rewrite themselves or are rewritten by others.

Throughout the thesis I draw parallels between Gray's work and that of non-Scottish authors. While acknowledging the profound "Scottishness" of Gray's work my conviction coincides with Peter Zenzinger's suggestion that:

> The experimental writers, in particular, have ... shown that it is possible to be distinctly Scottish without excluding influences from abroad. In fact, Scottish literature has often been best when the national tradition was enriched by elements of foreign origin.[18]

I consider the time is now right for Gray's work to be approached from the perspective of international literary trends. Juxtaposing Gray with John Fowles, Salman Rushdie and Angela Carter but, especially, illustrating how some of his writing shares characteristics of magical realism, I foreground the cosmopolitan aspect of his achievement. While concentrating exclusively on the Scottish aspect of his literary production is entirely justified and productive it can also detract from his interest as an international author. As Moira Burgess has suggested:

> ... it is hard to think of any previous Glasgow novel which could have been discussed at such length or mined for meaning to such an extent as *Lanark*. Yet *Lanark* presents in Books One and Two the kind of realism frequently found in the work of earlier Glasgow writers. Gray has started from the same place but taken a great leap forward.[19]

Gray employs some of the peculiarities of the Scottish fantasy tradition and also shares in the postmodern interest in stylistic Gongorism, typographical experimentation, fantasy and parody. Both traditions complement each other and have some features in common. For example, in Gray's fiction the topic of the double has developed into a poststructuralist concern for the fragmentation of the

---

[18] Peter Zenzinger, "Contemporary Scottish Fiction", in *Scotland: Literature, Culture, Politics*, ed. Peter Zenzinger. *Anglistik & Englischunterricht* 38/39 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1989), p. 235.
[19] Moira Burgess, *Imagine a City. Glasgow in Fiction.* (Argyll: Argyll Publishing, 1998), p. 258.

self. Lanark and Thaw can be considered to derive from the tradition of the double, while Janine functions as Jock's female counterpart. June also has two faces, the conventional civil servant of the beginning of *Something Leather* and the leather-clad woman of its conclusion. The conventionally Victorian Victoria has been transformed into the forward-looking and independent Victoria McCandless of the last section of *Poor Things*. However Bella's overall image is that of a fragmented female figure created by the male characters through whom her femininity is defined, a thoroughly poststructuralist topic. Therefore, we encounter a superstructure, a layering of traditions out of which Gray's work emerges. As Richard Todd points out, Alasdair Gray has managed to "free Scottish literature from the exclusively realist and other limitations".[20] The works where postmodern elements are combined with the Scottish tradition are the most accomplished.

I will now summarise some attempts at defining the concept of fantasy and then I will attempt a definition myself. Then I will deal with the concept of magical realism and its use of fantasy.

Definitions of fantasy

If there is some point of agreement among critics concerned with fantasy and the fantastic in literature it is that of the impossibility or the difficulty of defining the term. Such difficulty is reflected in the vagueness with which some critics approach the genre. For example, Colin Manlove before giving his definition justifies his use of it "because most people … apply it to the books we

---

[20] Richard Todd, *Consuming Fictions. The Booker Prize and Fiction in Britain Today.* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), p. 161.

shall be considering".[21] Similarly, Brian Attebery characterises fantasy as "the set of texts that in some way or other resemble *The Lord of the Rings*".[22] Such loose definitions seem to be made tongue in cheek and hardly amount to literary criticism.

Admittedly though, a major problem with the term fantasy stems from the varieties of fiction that have been considered as belonging to it: the Gothic novel, the horror story, the fairy tale, legends, myths, science fiction, the allegory, etc. Referring to the limits of the fantastic Lucie Armitt finds it curious that traditional critics have tried so hard to limit the boundaries of fantasy through attempts to define it. For her,

> the fact that the fantastic concerns itself with the world of the 'beyond' (beyond the galaxy, beyond the known, beyond the accepted, beyond belief) should immediately alert us to the attendant difficulties it has coping with limits and limitations.[23]

For Rosemary Jackson the value of fantasy resides precisely in its resistance to definition.[24]

Two main points must be considered when dealing with fantasy literature. One concerns the link between fantasy and imagination with regard to fiction. Some critics, such as Lucie Armitt,[25] Kath Filmer,[26] and Antonio Risco,[27] remind us of something that sometimes is not that obvious, that literature, understood as

---

[21] Colin Manlove, *Modern Fantasy. Five Studies*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 1.
[22] Brian Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy*. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 14.
[23] Lucie Armitt, *Theorising the Fantastic*. (London: Arnold, 1996), p.4.
[24] Rosemary Jackson, p. 1.
[25] Lucie Armitt, p. 1.
[26] Kath Filmer, *Twentieth-Century Fantasists. Essays on Culture, Society and Belief in Twentieth Century Mythopoeic Literature*. (New York: St Martin's Press, 1992), p. 2.
[27] Antonio Risco, *Literatura y Fantasía*. (Madrid: Taurus Ediciones S.A, 1982), p. 13.

a product of the writer's imagination, is a "fiction" and, therefore, fantasy. Even the most realistic works are fantasies in the sense that new or parallel worlds have been created by the author. Mimesis and fantasy are not opposites for Brian Attebery:

> They can and do coexist within any given work; there are no purely mimetic or fantastic works of fiction. Mimesis without fantasy would be nothing but reporting one's perceptions of actual events. Fantasy without mimesis would be a purely artificial invention, without recognizable objects or actions.[28]

This brings us to the second point, which refers to the relationship between external reality, as we perceive it, and the reality presented by authors of fantasy. First of all, as Todorov rightly reminds us the question of the limits between the real and the unreal is a "property characteristic of all literature".[29] The focal point of fantastic texts is, however, the special relationship that develops between these two realms. That is the reason why, for Todorov, this particular relationship between the real and the unreal in fantastic texts makes fantasy "the quintessence of literature".[30] Critics such as Anne D. Wilson consider the reality that is presented in fantastic texts as severed from the world as we know and experience it. She defines fantasy as "a form of thinking which is magical in character, 'magical' because *it is free from the laws and realities of the external world*".[31] Similarly, W.R. Irwin sees fantasy as a "story based on and controlled by an overt violation of what is generally accepted as possibility; it is the narrative result of

---

[28] Brian Attebery, p. 3.
[29] Tzvetan Todorov, "The Fantastic in Fiction". *Twentieth Century Studies* 3 (1970), p. 91.
[30] Tzvetan Todorov, p. 91.
[31] Anne D. Wilson, *Magical Thought in Creative Writing. The Distinctive Roles of Fantasy and Imagination in Fiction.* (Stroud: The Thimble Press, 1983), p. 15.

transforming the condition contrary to fact into 'fact' itself".[32] For him, the fantastic is not only outside "reality" but also in "knowing contravention" of that reality. The concept of fantasy involves a struggle "for credence in which an assertive 'antirreal' plays against an established 'real'".[33] On the other hand, there are critics who like Ann Swinfen see fantasy literature as closely connected to "man's rational being and perception of the natural world".[34] It is obvious that his particular kind of literature needs to use elements taken from reality, from the world as we understand it. These elements may be transformed or treated in a manner that produces an unease in the reader. However, in order that the effect of the fantastic work is credible or plausible these transformed elements must imitate real ones.

In the same way, Rosemary Jackson believes that fantasy does not invent non-human worlds. It uses and recombines elements of this world, "in new relations to produce something strange, unfamiliar and *apparently* 'new', absolutely 'other' and different".[35] Brooke-Rose shares this view: "obviously there is a realistic basis in all fantastic narrative, and even a fairy-tale will have some point of anchorage in the real, since the unreal can only seem so as against the real".[36] Eric Rabkin also shares the opinion that the fantastic is wholly dependent on reality for its existence. According to him, the fantastic is reality

---

[32] William R. Irwin, *The Game of the Impossible: A Rhetoric of Fantasy*. (Urbana; London: University of Illinois Press, 1976), p. 4.
[33] William R. Irwin, p. 8.
[34] Ann Swinfen, *In Defence of Fantasy. A Study of the Genre in English and American Literature since 1945*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), p. 3.
[35] Rosemary Jackson, p. 8.
[36] Christine Brooke-Rose, *A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, Especially of the Fantastic*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 81.

"turned precisely 180° around".[37] Fantasy, therefore, contrary to what Wilson and Irwin think, cannot have an existence apart from the real. It maintains a "parasitical or symbiotic" relationship with the world.[38]

Belief in a strong link between the fantastic and the real world leads Colin Manlove to consider that only "unprejudiced realists" can create true fantasy because "only those who know one world thoroughly can make another with the inner consistency of reality".[39] For him, the worlds the fantasy writer sets out to create should be "as real as our own".[40]

In studying the fantastic at least three approaches are possible: the historic, the thematic and the structural. Critics are divided as to what they believe are the origins and chronology of fantasy literature. Some, like Irwin maintain that fantasy does not have a history, that it has no continuous developmental movement: "[i]nherent in fantasy is a fixity of method that, for all the variety possible within it, precludes development over the course of repeated performances".[41] Antonio Risco, however, points to the end of the eighteenth century as the transitional period from the marvellous to the fantastic in the strict sense. The Enlightenment led to the separation of the empirical and scientific truth from religious faith with the consequence of a difficult and complex relationship developing between both cultural dimensions. This contributed to

---

[37] Eric S. Rabkin, *The Fantastic in Literature*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 28.
[38] Rosemary Jackson, p. 20.
[39] Colin Manlove, (1975), p. 260.
[40] Colin Manlove, (1975), p. 12.
[41] William R. Irwin, p. x.

the emergence of a truly fantastic literature, that is, a literature in which rational ordinariness is incoherently mingled with the irrational and supernatural. [42]

Other critics connect the genre with Romanticism and with the countries in which that particular movement flourished, particularly Germany and England. A parallelism could be made, then, between this new type of literature, and the beginning of the Romantic period. Therefore, the nineteenth century would be considered as the general setting of fantastic literature.

Manlove distinguishes between post-Romantic and earlier fantasy. Before the Renaissance the writer and his/her reader shared the belief that such fantastic worlds and beings could exist. During the Romantic period the idea was that the writer could create his/her own fantastic worlds that need not have any connection with the real one shared by him and his readers.[43]

When attempting to define the term, some critics choose to do so from a thematic standpoint, that is, concentrating on the constitutive elements of the fantastic. However, the acknowledged difficulty in defining fantasy and its boundaries has as a consequence the problem of separating and differentiating this concept from others that share some of its characteristics, such as the marvellous, the legend, science fiction, the ghost and horror story, the utopia, the allegory, the travel book, cybernetics, philosophy.... In general, though, critics agree that what all works of fantasy share is their concern with the impossible. For Rabkin, every work of art sets up its own ground rules and fantasy can only take place when the perspectives enforced by the ground rules of the narrative

---

[42] Antonio Risco, p. 17.
[43] Colin Manlove, (1975), p. 258-259.

world are diametrically contradicted. The reconfiguration of meanings must undergo "an exact flip-flop, an opposition from up to down, from + to -".[44]

Manlove considers fantasy

> a fiction evoking wonder and containing a substantial and irreducible element of supernatural or impossible worlds, beings and objects with which the mortal characters in the story or the readers become on at least partly familiar terms.[45]

By "supernatural or impossible worlds, beings and objects" Manlove understands "whatever is treated as being beyond any remotely conceivable extension of our plane of reality or thought". He considers that once this supernatural aspect becomes possible we are in the presence of science fiction but not fantasy.[46] In science fiction, the author, unlike the fantasy writer "throws a rope of the conceivable from our world to his".[47]

To complicate matters further, Ann Swinfen refers to "the marvellous" as the main characteristic of fantasy which she considers as "anything outside the normal space-time continuum of the everyday world".[48] This marvellous element can never exist in the world of empirical experience. However, other authors such as Ana González make a distinction between the marvellous and the fantastic. For González, the difference lies in the diverse nature of the connection established between reality and the narration. In the marvellous the action, the characters and the time-place coordinates are totally detached from our reality, this detachment is indicated by expressions such as "once upon a time". In the

---

[44] Eric S. Rabkin, (1976), p. 8.
[45] Colin Manlove, (1975), p. 1.
[46] Colin Manlove, (1975), p. 3.
[47] Colin Manlove, (1975), p. 7.
[48] Ann Swinfen, p. 5.

fantastic story popular topics such as the confrontation between the forces of good and evil are used to bring the story closer to our reality. At some point though the closeness between reality and the story will be severed by the author. The fantastic story, therefore, will include a break with reality as presented by the author. The break would affect three elements of the story: the identity of the character, time, and space.[49]

The fantastic, then, is characterised by the irruption of the inexplicable in what is considered as daily life. What we take to be reality is broken by something that cannot be explained by reason alone. However, Antonio Risco accuses this view of relativism. If we regard the disruption of what we consider as "real" as the main characteristic of fantastic literature, our understanding of what belongs or does not belong to it will depend on our conception of reality. Therefore, Risco concludes that from a thematic standpoint, each historical period has its own fantastic genres.[50]

In agreeing with Risco, Jackson points out that

> definitions of what can 'be', and images of what cannot be, obviously undergo considerable historical shifts. Non-secularized societies hold different beliefs from secular cultures as to what constitutes 'reality'. Presentations of otherness are imagined and interpreted differently.[51]

Gary K. Wolfe raises the question of how the impossible can be recognised and distinguished from a culturally accepted myth or a private psychosis.[52] For him, this violation of reality which is fantasy must lie between these two extremes. He

---

[49] Ana González Salvador, "De lo fantástico y de la literatura fantástica". *Anuario de Estudios Filológicos* VII Universidad de Extremadura (1984), p. 214.
[50] Antonio Risco, p. 15.
[51] Rosemary Jackson, p. 23.
[52] Gary K. Wolfe, "The Encounter with Fantasy", in *The Aesthetics of Fantasy Literature and Art*, ed. Roger C. Schlobin. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), p. 6.

goes on to make the point that "the irreality of fantasy must gain some of its power from socially determined notions of what is possible and impossible".[53] Therefore, from a thematic point of view we should conclude that different countries and epochs generate their own fantastic genres in accordance with their own cultural determinants.[54]

Tzvetan Todorov approaches the subject from a structuralist perspective. His definition of the fantastic is based on the hesitation experienced by either a character in the narrative and /or by the implicit reader when confronted by a supernatural event that irrupts in the world as we know it:

> In a world which is very much our own world, just as we know it, without devils, sylphs or vampires, there takes place an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this familiar world. The person who perceives the event has to opt for one of the two possible solutions: it is either a question of sensory illusion, a product of the imagination – which means that the laws of our world remain unaffected. Or else this event has actually happened, it is an integral part of reality; but in that case, such reality is governed by laws we do not know. Either the devil is imaginary, an illusion; or else he really exists, on a par with other living beings; the only thing is, one rarely meets him. The *fantastic* dwells in the moment of uncertainty between these two possibilities. The moment we choose one answer or the other, we must abandon the domain of the *fantastic*, and move into a neighbouring genre, the *uncanny* (*l'étrange*) or the *marvellous* (*le merveilleux*). To define the *fantastic*: it is the hesitation felt by someone who knows only natural laws, when he is faced by an event which is apparently supernatural. [55]

Todorov points to three conditions that all fantastic literature must fulfil. The first condition refers to the reader exclusively: "the text must make the reader envisage the fictional world as a world of living people, and hesitate between natural and supernatural explanations of the events portrayed". Therefore, the event takes place in a world that the reader can recognise as his/her own. The

---

[53] Gary K. Wolfe, "The Encounter with Fantasy" in Roger C. Schlobin. p. 6.
[54] Antonio Risco, p. 15.
[55] Tvzetan Todorov, pp. 76-77.

second refers to a character in the narration who must experience the same hesitation, "in this way, the reader's role is, so to speak, entrusted to a character". Thirdly, "the reader should adopt a certain attitude towards the text: he will reject both allegorical and poetic readings" because allegories and poetry do not provoke hesitation in the reader.[56] The reader must choose interpretations that are literal and referential in contrast to those of a figurative and non-representational nature.

The fantastic, then, lasts only as long as the hesitation does. If there is no hesitation, then – according to Todorov – the text does not belong to the fantastic. When the moment of hesitation is resolved by the implicit reader and/or the character then we abandon the territory of the fantastic. If the reader decides that the supernatural event has an explanation according to natural laws, we are in the presence of the uncanny. If, on the other hand, s/he decides that there is no explanation to the events and, therefore, the supernatural is accepted as such, then we are dealing with the marvellous. The focus of Todorov's definition of the fantastic is based primarily on the reader.

For Brian Attebery, the structure of the fantastic is basically comic. Fantastic texts begin with a problem and end with a resolution. It does not matter that the ending is not a happy one. More crucial altogether is that "the problem initially posed by the narrative has been solved, the task successfully completed".[57]

Disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, and psychoanalysis have also expressed an interest in the nature of fantasy. Anthropology considers it as a

---

[56] Tvzetan Todorov, p. 77.

perception of reality that brings us nearer to the symbolic and that unites us to the sacred. The devil, sorcery, death, vampires, ghosts, doubles, monsters, reality versus dream, the haunted house, the modification of time coordinates, all find their roots and coherence in folklore. Rosemary Jackson, therefore, considers that modern fantasy has its roots in ancient myth, mysticism, folklore, fairy tale and romance.[58] However, for Ana González, these popular roots that were obvious in the first fantastic texts have tended to be blurred as the genre has developed although they have never disappeared. The fantastic story still retains its interest in the unprecedented, the exceptional and the abnormal.[59]

As a result of fantasy's connection with the irrational, superstition and magic, some critics have viewed this literature as reactionary and traditionalist. Others consider it as revolutionary and progressive because it presents the reader with a provisional irreality and a possible future. For them, fantasy is used in fiction to transgress what has been censored and considered taboo by society. These critics point to the importance of fantastic literature as a form of social and cultural criticism.[60] Fantasy, according to this view breaks with the established social order and beliefs. This is clearly the case with Gray. In *Lanark* the use of corpses for food and fuel is a metaphor of the exploitation of the individual. Dragonhide is an externalisation of men's selfishness. By using lesbianism and sadomasochism in *Something Leather* Gray is exposing society's expectations of women. In *Poor Things* we find a similar example of gender construction, the

---

[57] Brian Attebery, p. 15.
[58] Rosemary Jackson, p. 4.
[59] Ana González Salvador, p. 214.
[60] Kath Filmer, p. 2.

female character Bella is only a reflection of the male characters' expectations of her.

Ana González sees the fantastic text as the manifestation of a lack, of a limit established by morality and law of a given time, and also by the human condition. According to this vision, fantasy uses fiction to infringe some kind of taboo and censorship. Among the tropes used to accomplish this are life in death, vampires, ghosts, living dead; and love for death, necrophilia, is surrounded by eroticism.

Todorov expands on this same point. For him, the social – and literary – function of the supernatural is to break the law, within society or within a narrative. He believes that there are certain taboo themes that tend to appear in fantastic works: incest, homosexuality, group love-making, necrophilia, sensual excesses. These subjects have been censored by society and, as a result, by the subject. For Todorov then, "[t]he *fantastic* is a method of circumventing both types of censorship: unbridled sexuality will be more readily accepted by any censor if it can be blamed on the devil".[61] The same happens with the question of madness:

> the introduction of supernatural elements is a means of avoiding society's condemnation of madness. The function of the supernatural is to remove the literary work from legal jurisdiction, and by this very fact to break the law.[62]

For Armitt transgression is at the root of fantasy "not only as structure but also as content".[63] She also points out that the fantastic can be used to explore socio-

---

[61] Tvzetan Todorov, p. 87.
[62] Tvzetan Todorov, p. 88.
[63] Lucie Armitt, p. 97.

political marginality and ex-centricity due to the "dangerous threat to established notions of fixity and conformity" posed by these texts.[64]

In his preface to Filmer's study of fantastic literature, David Jasper identifies the "inherited traditions of 'realism'" with "subtle forms of coercion". According to Jasper, fantasy literature would allow us to escape those traditions and "reestablish a vision of society beyond the impossible demands of post-modernity, and the economic and cultural traps of twentieth-century ideologies".[65]

Ann Swinfen notices the "profound moral purpose" of most of this literature, to the extent that even when the action is set in remote worlds or different historical periods, it "display[s] a concern for contemporary problems and offer[s] a critique of contemporary society".[66] On the other hand, Irwin believes that "fantasy does not fundamentally attack the norms it denies". Nothing "is destroyed or overturned by it." Fantasy may work against convention but with no desire to "alter or subvert".[67]

Works of "high fantasy" such as Kingsley's *The Water Babies* and Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, are treated to Rosemary Jackson's severest criticism. For her, they function "as conservative vehicles for social and instinctual repression".[68] These works "avoid the difficulties of confrontation, that tension between the imaginary and the symbolic which is the crucial,

---

[64] Lucie Armitt, p. 33.
[65] David Jasper, foreword to Kath Filmer, p. x.
[66] Ann Swinfen, p. 2.
[67] William R. Irwin, p. 183.
[68] Rosemary Jackson, p. 155.

problematic area dramatized in more radical fantasies".[69] She recognises that fantasy functions to subvert and undermine cultural stability, it "throws back on to the dominant culture a constant reminder of something 'other'".[70] However, Jackson admits that "it would be naïve to equate fantasy with either anarchic or revolutionary politics".[71]

From a psychoanalytic point of view fantastic literature is, in the words of González, "the return to a universal archetype to which is added the will to project the personal ghosts of each individual".[72] Or in the plainer words of Jacqueline Rose, "what you get up to when the surveying mind and surveying society are both looking the other way".[73] The fantastic story narrates what is hidden and should have never been exposed. Jackson finds a relationship between fantastic literature and desire:

> The fantastic is a literature which attempts to create a space for a discourse other than a conscious one and it is this which leads to its problematization of language, of the word, in its utterance of desire. The formal and thematic features of fantastic literature are similarly determined by this (impossible) attempt to find a language for desire.[74]

T.E. Apter is opposed to the psychoanalytic approach to fantasy as she thinks that "psychoanalytic interpretation tends to constrict language within the sphere of unconscious personal or human history, forcing its references back to repressed desires and discarded beliefs despite its desperate attempts to delineate human

---

[69] Rosemary Jackson, p. 156.
[70] Rosemary Jackson, p. 69-70.
[71] Rosemary Jackson, p. 14.
[72] "la vuelta a un arquetipo universal a la que se suma la voluntad de proyectar los fantasmas personales de cada individuo". Ana González Salvador, p. 219. (My translation)
[73] Jacqueline Rose, *States of Fantasy*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 2.
[74] Rosemary Jackson, p. 62

reality."[75] In conclusion, I consider fantasy a literary genre that is necessarily linked to our notion of reality. This view of reality is determined by time and place and is inverted or transformed in fantastic works. Fantasy can have a transgressive nature which can be used to comment or criticise on social and personal issues.

The late twentieth century has seen the emergence of a new type of 'realistic' literature in which fantastic elements are a vital part of the action. Lucie Armitt considers that the most interesting trends in contemporary literature derive from fantasy forms.[76] For Kath Filmer the use of "dream imagery, allegory, symbol, archetype and fantasy" in these contemporary works "adds meaning and depth to the unfolding plot".[77] As a result, the traditional dichotomy fantasy / reality has virtually disappeared. According to Cornwell, the fantastic is becoming "'the dominant', as it continues to develop not only its dialogical, interrogative, open and unfinished styles of discourse but also a strong social, political and ethical thrust".[78] Postmodernists blur the distinction between fiction and truth, as no text "is a mirror of reality". For these writers history is principally a form of storytelling.[79] This is clearly related to the postmodern view of history and truth as something untrustworthy and doubtful and the inability to have an objective knowledge of them. In the twentieth century, the perception of reality is not as secure as it used to be. What would have been regarded as unreal

---

[75] T.E Apter, in *The Literary Fantastic. From Gothic to Postmodernism*, ed. Neil Cornwell. (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), p. 212.

[76] Lucie Armitt, p. 2.
[77] Kath Filmer, p. 2.
[78] Neil Cornwell, p. 211.
[79] Brian Attebery, p. 42.

or impossible until a few years ago is now part of our daily lives. After all, in the twentieth century reality has surpassed fantasy in many instances – two World Wars, the Holocaust, worldwide epidemics, the exploration of the universe. In our time, fantastic literature does not require extraordinary events to surprise the reader. The extraordinary is already with us. Very often and thanks to the media, particularly the video and virtual reality, we contemplate reality as if it were fantasy.

Alasdair Gray is among other contemporary Scottish writers such Iain Banks, Irvine Welsh, A. L. Kennedy, and Alan Warner who use fantasy in their work. However, he does not produce purely fantastic works; realism is a key part of them. Deformation or transformation of reality creates secondary realities to produce alternative and plural images of Scotland. This is not new in Scottish literature and it has, in fact, been considered an essential characteristic of the Scottish fantastic tradition. Whereas authors such as Gray and Irvine Welsh use fantasy and the surreal to represent urban Scotland, George Mackay Brown employs the supernatural to explore the sense of community of Orkney. When blended fantasy and realism share some characteristics with what has come to be known as magical realism. Gray manipulates reality in a very similar way to some Latin American writers.

Magical Realism

This irruption of fantasy in works that are otherwise of a realist nature has been termed by critics as magical realism. The concept has been used mainly in

connection with fictions by Latin American writers such as Gabriel García Márquez, Alejo Carpentier, Juan Rulfo, Carlos Fuentes and Isabel Allende among others. Often, the term refers to a particular type of fiction that originates in post-colonial societies. However, authors from different nationalities such as Günter Grass, Salman Rushdie, Patrick Süskind, Toni Morrison, and Milan Kundera have also been included within this literary current.

The term was originally used by the German art critic Franz Roh in 1925 to designate a group of German painters – Max Beckmann, Georges Grosz and Otto Dix – who, in a reaction against Expressionism, were painting everyday objects again "only they were doing so with amazed eyes because ... they were contemplating the world as if it had just reappeared from the void, in a magic recreation".[80] Roh used the term *Magischer Realismus* in reference to Post-Expressionism and its return to realism in contrast to Expressionism's "exaggerated preference for fantastic, extraterrestrial, remote objects".[81] For Roh, magical realism is a means of unveiling the mystery that lies behind objective reality: "With the word 'magic', as opposed to 'mystic', I wish to indicate that the mystery does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it". [82] In 1958, however, Franz Roh used a new term *Neue Sachlichkeit* – New Objectivity – to refer to those same Post-Expressionist painters.

---

[80] "sólo que lo hacían con ojos maravillados porque ... contemplaban el mundo como si acabara de resurgir de la nada, en una mágica re-creación". Enrique Anderson Imbert, *El realismo mágico y otros ensayos*. (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, C. A., 1976), p. 7. (My translation)

[81] Franz Roh, "Magic Realism: Post- Expressionism", in *Magical Realism. Theory, History, Community*, eds. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 15.

[82] Franz Roh, "Magic Realism: Post- Expressionism", in Parkinson Zamora and Faris, p. 16.

The term magical realism was introduced in Latin America in 1927 when Roh's book *Nach-Expressionismus, Magischer Realismus: Probleme der neuesten Europäischen Malerei* was translated into Spanish.[83] In Latin America the concept was then applied to literary production, particularly to fiction. Over time it has received a variety of names, such as "*lo real maravilloso*", "*realismo fantástico*", "*realismo mágico*", "*lo fantástico*", "*Neue Sachlichkeit*" or "*lo real maravilloso americano*". This last appellation was used by Alejo Carpentier in the preface to his book *The Kingdom of This World.*[84] Carpentier sees "*lo real maravilloso americano"* as something intrinsically American, different from European "marvellous literature" and profoundly linked to the continent's native mythology and folklore.[85]

Like Carpentier, some critics use the term to refer only to the literature created by Latin American authors, while others extend it to include post-colonial writers elsewhere. David Danow, for example, divides in two groups works that have been considered magical realist by other critics. He makes a clear distinction between the magical realism of Latin America and "the works of disparate writers scattered throughout the world". For him, then, magical realism is an exclusively Latin American phenomenon as it "responds to the magical beliefs that still animate the world of indigenous tribes living in the southern half of the Western hemisphere".[86]

---

[83] Franz Roh, *Realismo mágico, post expresionismo. Problemas de la pintura europea más reciente.* (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1927)
[84] Alejo Carpentier, *El reino de este mundo.* (México: Edición y Distribución Iberoamericana de Publicaciones, 1949). *The Kingdom of this World* (New York: Knopf, 1957)
[85] Alejo Carpentier, "On the Marvellous Real in America", in Parkinson Zamora and Faris, p. 83-88.
[86] David K. Danow, *The Spirit of Carnival. Magical Realism and the Grotesque.* (Lexington: Ky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995), p. 6.

The critic Jaime Valdivieso, following Carpentier, also makes a distinction between "Western" and "Third World" types of magical realism. According to him, *realismo mágico* is found in

> those literary works and incidents that involve a mythical and magic cosmic vision of the world, ahistorical, where the limits between culture and nature are not clear, where objects and phenomena have anthropomorphic attributes with beneficial or adverse powers, a mode of reality previous to rational principles and the laws of causality. [87]

On the other hand, *lo real fantástico* finds its roots in the German Romantics and more recently in Kafka and Surrealism. It

> arises from a rationalist vision of the world, from an individual effort of the imagination that seeks through deliberate invention the best medium to explain itself and reveal the reality that the senses do not perceive.[88]

However, Ralph Flores in his article "El ámbito del realismo" denominates authors such as Kafka and Borges *realistas "híbridos"* – "hybrid" realists. These authors use "exaggerated elements as part of their general realist strategies".[89] Their distortions are a means of explanation and clarification.

In 1954 the critic Angel Flores used the term *"realismo mágico"* in reference to authors such as Borges and Cortázar and pointed to the importance of Kafka's influence on their work. In contrast to Roh's perception of the concept of magical realism as the uncovering of the magical element in reality, Flores

---

[87] "... aquellas obras y episodios que implican una cosmovisión mítica y mágica del mundo, ahistórica, donde no están claros los límites entre materia animada e inanimada, entre cultura y naturaleza, donde los objetos y los fenómenos tienen propiedades antropomórficas con poderes benéficos o adversos, un modo de realidad anterior a los principios racionales y a las leyes de la causalidad". Jaime Valdivieso, *Realidad y ficción en Latinoamérica.* (México: Cuadernos de Joaquín Mortiz, 1975), p. 65. (My translation)

[88] "... surge dentro de una visión racionalista del mundo, de un esfuerzo individual de la imaginación que busca en la invención deliberada el mejor medio para explicarse y revelar la realidad que no perciben los sentidos". Jaime Valdivieso, p. 67. (My translation)

[89] "... elementos exagerados como parte de sus estrategias realistas generales". Angel Flores. *El Realismo mágico en el cuento hispanoamericano.* (México, D.F: Premià Editora, 1985), p. 13. (My translation)

considered that the main trait of magical realism was "the amalgam of realism and fantasy".[90]

Despite the multitude of labels and the difficulty among critics in agreeing on a definition of the term that would include all the works that have been considered magical realist we can find a set of characteristics shared, to a greater or lesser extent, by the literary works that have been included under this literary concept. In general, literary critics agree in considering magical realism as a stem of Postmodernism, sharing with it a set of characteristics.

The earliest literary figure mentioned in connection with magical realism is Kafka and his story *Metamorphosis.* In fact, Gabriel García Márquez refers to this particular literary work as the one that made him decide to be a writer. "It was the revelation that through literature it was possible to explore this other reality that was hidden behind immediate reality".[91] This is exactly the principal characteristic of magical realist works, that is, their use of magic. This "magic", according to Jon Thiem "emerges from the interpretation of irreconcilable worlds".[92] The clearest case in Gray's work is *Lanark* in which post-war Glasgow is blended with a hellish image of that city. The mixture of both worlds, one realist and the other fantastic, only works in combination. Gray's message about loneliness, exploitation and the inability to love derives from the combination of both sections. The fantastic section enables us to see something beyond the realist section. In the same way, the conventionality of Jock McLeish

---

[90] "... la amalgama de realismo y fantasia". Angel Flores, p. 20. (My translation)
[91] Gabriel García Márquez, interview with Gabriel García Márquez . *New York Times*, 25 November 1979, quoted in Angel Flores, footnote in p. 7.
[92] Jon Thiem, "The Textualization of the Reader in Magical Realist Fiction", in Parkinson Zamora and Faris, p. 244.

and June contrasts with the fantastic element of their lives, while Victorian Glasgow is enriched by the Gothic aspect of *Poor Things*. The flexibility that magical realism shows in delineating, exploring and transgressing boundaries is for him one of the main advantages of this literary mode. Brenda Cooper sees this transgression of borders in the plots of these fictions:

> A syncretism between paradoxical dimensions of life and death, historical reality and magic, science and religion, characterizes the plots, themes and narrative structures of magical realist novels. In other words, urban and rural, Western and indigenous, black, white and Mestizo – this cultural, economic and political cacophony is the amphitheatre in which magical realist fictions are performed. The plots of these fictions deal with issues of borders, change, mixing and syncretizing. And they do so, and this point is critical, in order to expose what they see as a more deep and true reality than conventional realist techniques would bring to view.[93]

Therefore, as Rawdon Wilson points out, what is required of the reader when reading magical realism is "a faculty for boundary-skipping between worlds".[94] Transgression of borders is reflected in the use of motifs such as ghosts, and body metamorphoses. The former are like two-sided mirrors, situated between the two worlds of life and death while the latter "embody ... the collision of two different worlds".[95] Both Cooper and Faris refer to the Carnivalesque aspect of much magical realist fiction: its celebration of the body, reconstructions of human shapes and forms, aberrations, the joker, laughter and the profane.[96] For Faris this

---

[93] Brenda Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction. Seeing with a Third Eye*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 32.
[94] Rawdon Wilson, "The Metamorphoses of Fictional Space: Magical Realism", in Parkinson Zamora and Faris, p. 210.
[95] Wendy B. Faris, "Scheherazade's Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction", in Parkinson Zamora and Faris, p. 178.
[96] Brenda Cooper, pp. 22 and 25.

is what attracts postmodern writers to magical realism, "its wilfully oxymoronic nature, its exposing of the unrepresentable", and "its activation of differences".[97]

However, magic does not function autonomously; it operates from within or side by side with reality. Realist and fantastic elements are combined in such a way that magical elements grow organically out of the reality portrayed.[98] Magical elements are enclosed within a framework of historical reality and/or ordinary, everyday events that, taking into account geographical and cultural differences, can be recognised by the reader. Therefore reality and fantasy, fact and fiction do not work separately but in conjunction. The magic realist writer is not creating an imaginary world out of an individual effort of the imagination. On the contrary these fantastic events that impregnate otherwise realist accounts constitute a different means of experiencing and analysing objective reality. That is why James Higgins, referring to Spanish American magical realist works, writes that "the new narrative is based in large part on what might be described as a broader concept of realism, one which takes account of the complex, multifaceted nature of reality".[99]

This juxtaposition of recognisable historical and everyday events with marvellous ones and the description of the latter from a traditionally realistic point of view forces the reader to consider reality in a new light.

---

[97] Wendy B. Faris, "Scheherazade's Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction", in Parkinson Zamora and Faris, p. 185.
[98] Wendy B. Faris, "Scheherazade's Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction", in Parkinson Zamora and Faris, p. 163.

[99] James Higgins, "Spanish America's New Narrative", in *Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction*, ed. Edmund J. Smyth. (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd, 1991), p. 95.

James Higgins, when drawing a distinction between purely realist Latin American writers – called *regionalistas* – and those writing within magical realism, alludes to the aspiration of the latter to be, above all, "creative artists". Therefore, they set as their principal aim to create a "well- crafted work of art that stands up in its own right as an autonomous reality".[100] However, even if Higgins seems to place particular emphasis on the fictionality of these works, magical realism does not pursue the Modernist principle of art for art's sake. Unlike the latter literary movement, it shares with Postmodernism its ontological concerns, dealing with man's intellectual pretensions to understand the world and his inability to do so. This distrust of reality has as a consequence the fusion of reality and magic. Mere escapism is not the purpose of this mixture, but another way of expressing the social, political and psychological reality of the writer's country. Gray shares with these Latin American novelists not only an interest in fantasy but also their aim to express opinions on the political and social situation of the society they live in. Despite the extensive use of fantasy in his work – as we will see – Gray, too, is interested in political and social comment. He employs fantastic techniques to examine issues that have usually been explored within the realist tradition, that is political, social, sexual and religious issues.

Magical realism, therefore, is political in nature. Theo D'Haen points to "the notion of the ex-centric, in the sense of speaking from the margin, from a place 'other' than 'the' or 'a' center" [101] as one of the main features of magical realism. That is the reason why critics find that this kind of fiction thrives

---

[100] James Higgins, 'Spanish America's New Narrative' in Edmund J. Smyth ed., p. 92.
[101] Theo L. D'Haen, "Magical Realism and Postmodernism: Decentering Privileged Centers", in Parkinson Zamora and Faris, p. 194.

particularly in post-colonial societies or societies that are far from the privileged centres of literature. For writers belonging to these societies the blend of fantasy and realism is a way of participating in the literary legacy of the West and, at the same time, of recuperating their collective memory through the use of myth and folklore. They are employing the narrative techniques of the "centre" but instead of presenting a mimetic reality they are creating fantastic worlds. For them it is a way of subverting the dominant discourse. Their use of fantasy "disturbs 'rules' of artistic representation and literature's reproduction of the 'real'".[102] Brenda Cooper sees magical realism as the two sides of a coin. It is

> alternatively characterized as a transgressive mechanism that parodies Authority, the Establishment and the Law, and also as the opposite of all of these, as a domain of play, desire and fantasy for the Rich and Powerful.[103]

In the case of Western authors, magical realism distances them from "their own discourses of power" and allows them to speak on behalf of those in the margins of their own societies.[104]

A consequence of the aforementioned inability to understand the world is the writer's lack of confidence in the validity of words to express reality. Therefore, we encounter language games and a narrative structure very different from the traditional one we find in traditional realist fiction. From a formal point of view magical realism and Postmodernism have a great deal in common. One of the characteristics that magical realism shares with postmodern fiction is the use of metafictional devices. However, for Faris, magical realism "tends to

---

[102] Rosemary Jackson, p. 14.
[103] Brenda Cooper, p. 29.

articulate those [metafictional] concerns in a special light, to emphasize the magical capacities of fiction more than its dangers and inadequacies".[105]

Intertextuality has also been considered one of the main characteristics of Postmodernism. Very often in magical realist texts, verbal magic is created through the use of this postmodern trait. Characters from other fictions are liable to appear in these literary works. According to Faris, intertextual magic "celebrates the solidity of invention and takes us beyond representation conceived primarily as mimesis to re-presentation".[106]

The world depicted in magical realist works is not coherent and ordered. Time is also distorted and elusive and, therefore, so is the narrative. Linear plots are abandoned for a more disconnected narrative. Reality includes time and if the writer does not feel sure s/he can understand both his/her external and internal reality, then the concept of time will no longer be privileged.[107] New narrative techniques reflect the incoherence, the discontinuity and disorder of life. Alternation of multiple narrators is a reflection of the ambivalence of reality.

Language, however, is devoid of baroque-ism and the style is sober in accordance with the everyday manner in which magical events are presented. Everyday, ordinary language is used to describe magic events that are presented in a matter-of-fact way and without comment: "they thus achieve a kind of defamilarization that appears to be natural or artless".[108] In fact, one of the characteristics of

---

[104] Theo L. D'Haen, "Magical Realism and Postmodernism", in Parkinson Zamora and Faris, p. 195.
[105] Wendy B. Faris, "Scheherazade's Children", in Parkinson Zamora and Faris, p. 176.
[106] Wendy B. Faris, "Scheherazade's Children", in Parkinson Zamora and Faris, p. 176-7.
[107] Donald L. Shaw, *Nueva Narrativa hispanoamericana*. (Madrid: Cátedra, 1992), p. 83.
[108] Wendy B. Faris, "Scheherazade's Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction", in Parkinson Zamora and Faris, p. 177.

Gray's fiction is the way he expresses extraordinary events, like those in *Lanark*, with a deadpan, unemotional language. Literal metaphors, that is, a metaphorical event made real, contribute to the magic atmosphere characteristic of these fictions. As George Donaldson and Alison Lee point out, the literalisation of metaphors gives new life to metaphors that may be familiar to the reader. Therefore they can be used to make political and social statements such as we find in *Lanark* and *Poor Things*. Something that may be familiar has been transformed and can be seen as if for the first time.[109] In fact, one of the attractions Gray finds in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is its use of metaphors.[110]

Despite the fact that Gray shares a great deal of magical realist characteristics with García Márquez or Rushdie, the kind of magical realism that he creates is not the same as theirs. As in the case of the Latin American writers, fantasy literature in Scotland is influenced by the environment, the geography; it is imbued with what Manlove refers as the "sense of the land".[111] However, it does not have the same "exotic" feeling. In my opinion, this is due to obvious geographical and cultural differences. Magical realism written by European writers and located in a European environment does not allow the reader the cultural distance to recognise it as "exotic". Therefore, in the case of Gray we cannot talk about a Latin American or "Third World" brand of magical realism, but of what could be called a "magical realism for cold countries", a magical

---

[109] George Donaldson and Alison Lee, "Is Eating People Really Wrong? Dining with Alasdair Gray", p. 160.
[110] Alasdair Gray, replies to written questionnaire sent by E.M. (May 1997)
[111] Colin Manlove, (1994), p. 3.

realism of the North. The exotic atmosphere is replaced by bareness, darkness and underground locations. Curiously enough, Gray did not feel interested in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and his favourite magical realist authors do not belong either to the twentieth century or to post-colonial countries. These authors are Herman Melville, Edgar Allan Poe, James Hogg and Ibsen. Indeed, the influence of Hogg and Stevenson can be felt in Gray's work, a mixture of realism with the fantastic and grotesque.

Chapter I: *Lanark*: Magic in hell

In *S/Z*, Roland Barthes distinguishes between *scriptible* and *lisible* texts.[1] According to Barthes, a realist or traditional novel offers the reader a 'closed' text, that is, it only allows him /her to be a consumer; it offers a limited and fixed meaning. He refers to these types of works as *lisible* in contrast to what he calls *scriptible*. *Scriptible* texts allow the reader to be a producer of the text; they offer multiple meanings which do not have to be definite or "correct". One of the characteristics of such texts is that they lack a beginning. The reader enters them through different entrances none of which can be considered the main one. Similarly, some Latin American writers, such as Jorge Luis Borges, Carlos Fuentes and Julio Cortázar, believe that a permanent book is one that can be read in different ways or that allows diverse readings. The reader can enter the labyrinthine narrative from different places. According to these authors, it is this multiplicity of interpretations that gives strength and vitality to fictions.[2]

Lanark[3] can be considered both *scriptible* and *lisible* at the same time due to the fact that the novel is, in fact, composed of two very different parts. One belongs to the realist tradition and the other is purely fantastic. The Thaw section of the novel is a portrait of life in Glasgow after the Second World War, whereas the Lanark section is a dystopian fantasy that takes place in a city without sunlight where people suffer from strange diseases and disappear mysteriously.

---

[1] Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 3-4.
[2] Ludmila Kapschutschenko, *El laberinto en la narrativa hispanoamericana contemporánea.* (London: Tamesis Books Limited, 1981), p. 46.
[3] Alasdair Gray, *Lanark*. (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1981)

The mixture of traditional and postmodern methods of narration is not the only opposition at the heart of this work. In fact, the whole novel is an immense paradox. The configuration of *Lanark* is based largely on the juxtaposition of apparently conflicting sets of concepts: narrative innovation versus traditionalism, fantasy versus realism and the struggle of the individual in his search for freedom against a repressive society. One of the most interesting aspects of *Lanark* is the manner in which the tension between the extremes of these sets of oppositions is resolved and how they relate to each other. This set of paradoxes associates *Lanark* with the use of hybridity in magical realism. Of particular interest in this sense is the relationship between realism and fantasy. As in Gray's other works, fantasy plays a key role in the development of the characters.

The question of traditionalism and innovation can be understood in relation to form and content. There is a strong relationship between the content of *Lanark* and the way in which it is presented. One of the topics of the novel is the search for self knowledge in a timeless and labyrinthine journey. The structure also resembles a labyrinth in which time has been shattered. Furthermore, the deformation of humanist ideals is mirrored in the distortion of the traditional novel. For Irlemar Chiampi this is a consequence of the use of fantastic elements, as "any novel with a magic realist content presents, necessarily, a questioning of its enunciation".[4] Non-linear narrative is used to question both the stable world of

---

[4] "toda novela que tenga un 'contenido' real-maravilloso presenta, necesariamente, el cuestionamiento de su enunciación". Irlemar Chiampi, *El Realismo maravilloso. Forma e ideología en la novela hispanoamericana.* (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, C.A., 1983), p. 100. (My translation)

the reader and the kind of texts s/he is used to. Regarding the narrative method, *Lanark* shares characteristics that can be associated with Latin American authors such as Mario Vargas Llosa:

> The fragmented narrative cultivated by Vargas Llosa, for example, is intended to replicate the way in which we experience real life, in that events and information are presented to us in a disjointed fashion and it is only when we have lived through the reading experience that we are able to piece it all together with the benefit of hindsight. This is not to say that the novels are unstructured, of course. Indeed, montage plays a crucial role in enriching the reader's view of reality, for narrative units are arranged in such a way as to create an interplay, so that they bring fresh perspectives to bear on one another and are mutually illuminating. Another favourite technique is the use of multiple narrators to give differing views of the same reality.[5]

In *Lanark*, narrative innovation in the form of a fragmented, and apparently unstructured, story told by different narrators from different points of view is used, paradoxically, as an accurate reflection of real life.

The story plunges *in medias res* with Book 3, therefore lacking a traditional beginning. Like Barthes' *scriptible* texts it lacks a main entrance. Nevertheless, the text is a complex structure of literal and metaphorical entrances and exits. The purpose of these is to indicate different ways to approach the story. Every time the reader encounters a door, a window or any other sort of entrance, s/he is faced with a change of perspective. We enter the novel through a literal entrance: "The Elite Café was entered by a staircase from the foyer of a cinema". (*L*,3) Then we are introduced to the character Lanark and we follow the story through his eyes. At the end of chapter six the mouth in the ground that swallows Lanark is an exit in the form of a birth canal, an entrance into another world, the Institution:

---

[5] James Higgins, "Spanish America's New Narrative", in Edmund J. Smyth, p. 95-96.

> The great grip stopped, he slid downward, the garments slid upward, freeing mouth and nose, and then the sides contracted and crushed him harder than ever. Most senses abandoned him now. Thought and memory, stench, heat and direction dissolved and he knew nothing but pressure and duration.
> (*L*,48)

The Oracle is a metaphorical door into the past and "[a] voice to help you see yourself". (*L*,105) It introduces the reader and Lanark to the realist section of the novel. The clearest instance that entrances provide different viewpoints from which to examine the story is Rima's claim that it is her story to which she and Lanark have just been listening, therefore putting a whole new light on the Thaw section. The most important doorway in the novel is, of course, the one that introduces us to the "room" of the Epilogue as it gives the reader the "author's" view on how to read the novel.

It is this multiplicity of perspectives – represented by the entrances and exits in particular – that Ian Spring considers particularly original:

> the crucial factor in understanding *Lanark* is Gray's use of perspective, which is innovative and various. At times, the descriptive elements of *Lanark* are traditionally focalised, from a single, unitary point of view; at times, versions of an alternative, fragmented perspective appear, notably in the final sections of the book. Similarly, the narrative plays with the use of perspective, moving, on occasions, towards and away from the point of view of the eponymous Lanark.[6]

It has been mainly the novel's "alternative, fragmented perspective" that has prompted critics to refer to *Lanark* as a postmodern novel. Randall Stevenson does not hesitate in describing it as such even if he suggests, at one point, the term post-Postmodernism.[7] Although he stresses the importance of the social and political content of Gray's fiction, Stevenson's criterion for labelling it

---

[6] Ian Spring, "Image and Text: Fiction on Film", in *The Scottish Novel since the Seventies*, eds. G. Wallace and R. Stevenson. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), p. 213.
[7] Randall Stevenson, "Alasdair Gray and the Postmodern", in R. Crawford and T. Nairn, p. 56.

postmodern is mostly stylistic. He bases his assumption on such typically postmodern formal characteristics as the abandonment of conventional or ordered chronology, metafiction, the appearance of the figure of the author, intertextuality, parody, and the use of science fiction and dystopia.

Metafiction and intertextuality are two of the postmodern traits of which Gray makes extensive use, not only in *Lanark* but in the rest of his work. These two features are present throughout the novel, particularly in the Epilogue:

> "I will start," said the conjuror, "by explaining the physics of the world you live in. Everything you have experienced and are experiencing, from your first glimpse of the Elite café to the metal of that spoon in your fingers, the taste of the soup in your mouth, is made of one thing."
> "Atoms," said Lanark.
> "No. Print."
> (*L*, 484-5)

And

> "I am prostituting my most sacred memories into the commonest possible words and sentences. When I need more striking sentences or ideas I steal them from other writers, usually twisting them to blend with my own."
> (*L*, 485)

However, as is usual with Gray, he claims that what he is aiming at is nothing more than parody. Referring to the Epilogue, he says:

> [W]hen I came to write a section of *Lanark* I thought – 'Yes, this is going to be the academic part of the book.' Like the best parodies it had to be a good example and as close to academicism as possible while fouling it up a bit and making it untrustworthy – though perfectly trustworthy as part of that book.[8]

Ludism is another extremely important postmodern characteristic in Gray's fiction. He appears to be deriding his own stylistic and erudite fireworks. In his work "imagination mock[s] what it pretends to be doing … imagination laugh[s]

---

[8] Alasdair Gray, "1988 Alasdair", interview by M. Crawford and J. Brown. *Gown Literary Supplement* (January 1989), p. 16.

at its own pretensions".[9] However, his ludic use of humour and comedy is contrasted with a marked tendency to moralise overtly.

Apart from those already mentioned, Edmund Smyth points to other features as characteristic of Postmodernism: fragmentation, discontinuity, indeterminacy, plurality, heterogeneity, decentering, and dislocation.[10] Fragmentation is one of the most important aspects of the novel, both at the level of form and content. In *Lanark* we encounter different levels of time, space and identity which have been exploded in a postmodern fashion. Time, for example, is treated in a manner that is both realist and postmodern and it contributes to the magic aspect of the novel. There is an intriguing contrast between the insistence on the disappearance of time throughout the Lanark section – expressed through the superfluity of the use of clocks, the lack of sunlight and the blurring of past, present and future – and the link between the two sections of the story which the reader interprets as being a temporal one. The Thaw section, which appears physically in the middle of the Lanark section, is interpreted as preceding it and the Oracle could be simultaneously telling us two different stories: Thaw's and Rima's. In the Lanark section the passage of time is accelerated. Sometimes it disappears and on other occasions it just explodes. Time, like the interpretation of the story, can be linear, circular and cyclical.

Richard Todd, however, refuses to read *Lanark* in a strictly linear or cyclical way:

---

[9] Raymond Federman, "Imagination as Plagiarism (an unfinished paper…)". *New Literary History* 7, p.563-78. Quoted in David Seed, "In Pursuit of the Receding Plot: Some American Postmodernists", in Edmund J. Smyth, p. 43.
[10] Edmund J. Smyth, p. 9.

> although we may speak of duplication, the entire structure of the text, in which the Thaw narrative – recounted by an oracle – is impacted within Lanark's, militates against a purely cyclic, duplicative reading, and in this way forces us to hold such a reading in an uneasy equilibrium as we attempt to balance it against the arguable legitimacy of a linear reading.[11]

Despite Todd's refusal to read *Lanark* cyclically, both sections display a series of parallelisms that stress the repetition of time by producing a pattern of recurrence in the story. The arrival of Lanark in Unthank runs parallel to the arrival of the Thaw family in Glasgow after the war. (*L*,17 and 147) Also, Thaw's encounter with Macbeth and Molly Tierney at Brown's (*L*, 230) is reminiscent of the meeting with Sludden and Rima in the Elite Café at the beginning of the Lanark section. Dragonhide is a fantastic reduplication of Duncan Thaw's eczema and the apocalyptic final scene of the novel recalls his painting of the Monkland Canal. (*L*, 279) The episode of the prostitute that embarrasses Duncan Thaw when she rejects him after she notices his skin complaint (*L*, 344) is similar to the scene between Rima and Lanark in which she sends him away after an unsuccessful sexual encounter. (*L*, 37)

Memory, like time, is also an important theme as it can help to clarify the key issue presented in the text, that is, the relationship between the two sections. Is Thaw's life a memory of Lanark's past life, as the Oracle tells him, or is Lanark and the nightmarish city of Unthank just a fantastic world created by Thaw's feverish imagination? After all, the reader is told that Duncan Thaw's childhood is saturated with fantasy. After leaving Glasgow during the war, the

---

[11] Richard Todd, "The Intrusive Author in British Postmodernist Fiction: The Cases of Alasdair Gray and Martin Amis", in *Exploring Postmodernism*, eds. Matei Calinescu and Douwe Fokkema. (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1987), p. 127-8.

narrator points out that "[t]he vivid part of his life became imaginary". (*L*. 134) Therefore there is a possibility that the Lanark section is merely a story within a story in a fashion similar to that of *Poor Things*. Douglas Gifford considers that *Lanark* exemplifies the workings of memory:

> ... it seems to me that part of the book's meaning is a satiric comment on our inability to organise memory and experience – so that, as "authors" of our own lives, we bungle in recall, we cheat in interpretation, we glamourise or falsify just as Gray does about Thaw or Lanark.[12]

This can also be applied clearly to works such as *Poor Things* and to a certain extent to *1982 Janine*. *Lanark*, like memory, is fragmented, unpredictable and deceptive.

Fragmentation of time and memory is mirrored in the fragmentation of the self. Indeed, one of the principal questions concerning Poststructuralism is the question of subjectivity and the fragmented self. By subjectivity we understand "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her [or his] sense of herself [or himself] and her [or his] ways of understanding her [or his] relation to the world".[13] Poststructuralism rejects the concept of the Cartesian subject, that is, the idea of a unified subject. For poststructuralist critics, mainly Lacan, Derrida and Foucault, the subject is a construct, a construct of language. The subject finds his/her identity as s/he addresses and is addressed by others, that is, s/he is constructed by and through language. Lacan argues that we depend on the Other in order to achieve our own subjectivity: "[i]n a way, the

---

[12] Douglas Gifford, "*Lanark* towers above all else". *Books in Scotland* 9 (Winter 1981-82), p. 11.
[13] Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), p. 32.

Other is the real witness and guarantor of the subject's existence".[14] Lanark/Thaw's identity is created by what the characters surrounding them and the different institutions they are involved with "say" about them. For the "I" in *Lanark* is in a constant process of change and evolution as it is written and rewritten by the Other. That is, both the rest of the characters and the reader participate in a narrative continuum the outcome of which is rarely if ever accomplished.

Referring to postmodern characters, Thomas Docherty points out that postmodern figures are always differing, not just from other characters, but also from their putative "selves". He goes on:

> At every stage in the representation of character, the finality of the character, a determinate identity for the character, is deferred as the proliferation of information about the character leads into irrationality or incoherence and self-contradiction.[15]

The question of the fragmentation of the self is not only reflected in the structural disconnection between the two main characters in *Lanark*, but also in the different points of view given by the different narrators. The duality of what seems a single self and the multiplicity of narrators is also echoed in the physically fragmented structure of the novel that allows for multiple interpretations. As Douglas Gifford points out: "Thaw is on a quest; his quest takes him to underworlds, of the mind or of actuality – in the end it's immaterial which, since the novel destabilizes any possible single interpretation".[16] We are

---

[14] Madan Sarup, *Jacques Lacan.* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf , 1992), p. 98.
[15] Thomas Docherty, "Postmodern Characterization: The Ethics of Alterity", in Edmund J. Smyth, p. 182
[16] Douglas Gifford, "The Return to Mythology in Modern Scottish Fiction", in Susanne Hagemann, p. 34.

presented with a kaleidoscopic view of what is happening, therefore the possibility of a single interpretation is annulled. Even the illusion of a definite conclusion is deceptive as there are two endings, one apocalyptic in which Unthank is destroyed, and the other hidden in the "Index of Plagiarisms" (*L*, 485-499) found in the Epilogue. Some of these notes refer to chapters that do not appear in the actual text and thanks to them the reader learns about a battle involving monkeys (*L*, 490), the death of Rima (*L*, 492) and the seduction of God by an android. (*L*, 493)

For Rosemary Jackson the fragmentation of the self constitutes the most subversive characteristic of fantasy literature.

> The many partial, dual, multiple and dismembered selves scattered throughout literary fantasies violate the most cherished of all human unities: the unity of 'character'. It is the power of the fantastic to interrogate the category of character – that definition of the self as a coherent, indivisible and continuous whole which has dominated Western thought for centuries and is celebrated in classic theatre and 'realistic' art alike.[17]

Disintegration turns *Lanark* into a game that Alasdair Gray seems to be playing with the reader. In *Lanark* the reader reconstructs a jigsaw of meanings and identities. Lanark, like Bella Baxter in *Poor Things* and to a certain extent Jock McLeish in *1982 Janine*, is divided into multiple selves.

The identity of Lanark and Duncan Thaw is clearly related to the connection between the two sections. The reader is left wondering whether the two characters are both representations of one self. However, if we take into account the admittedly autobiographical base of the novel and the appearance of the "author" as a character in the Epilogue, as well as what appear to be its roots

---

[17] Rosemary Jackson, p. 82-3.

in a re-imagined, pre-revival Glasgow, the question is complicated further: do Lanark, Duncan Thaw, Nastler, and the author form versions of the same "I"? As one critic has put it: "what looks like a proliferation of new faces is actually the same people reappearing".[18]

In *Lanark* the question of the self is addressed from the point of view of the writer who creates his own characters while his own subject as "author" is produced by the reader. At the same time that Gray, the author, is "writing" the image of Lanark as a character, so is the reader as s/he encounters him for the first time. Furthermore, so is Lanark creating himself as he literally "sees" an image of himself reflected on a window:

> I stood up and walked about and was shocked to see my reflection in the carriage window. My head was big and clumsy with thick hair and eyebrows and an ordinary face, but I could not remember seeing it before.
> (*L*,16)

The autobiographical games Gray plays with the reader are an overt invitation to create his own self in the process of creating those of his characters. Also, the autobiographical material exists as a new level of narration. Its role is to foreground the fictionality of the text by blurring the boundary between what is fiction and what is real.[19] Apart from the Epilogue,[20] autobiographical details proliferate throughout the text.

> Also he knew something about writing, for when wandering the city he had visited public libraries and read any stories to know there were two kinds. One kind was a sort of written cinema, with plenty of action and hardly any thought.

---

[18] John Crawley, "From Unthank to Glasgow and Back", rev. of *Lanark*. *The New York Times Book Review*, 5 May 1985.
[19] Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*. (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 203.
[20] "... it was a kind of joke. There was a party I once went to at which a friend in a slightly slurred diction introduced me as Nastler Gray, and another friend has used it as a friendly nickname ever since, 'Ah, hello Nastler, how're you doing?' And I suppose that as the bloke was presented as, not a god really, but a demi-urge..." Alasdair Gray, "Alasdair Gray Interviewed", interview by Sean Figgis and Andrew McAllister. *Bête Noir* 5 (1988), p. 22.

> The other kind was about clever unhappy people, often authors themselves, who thought a lot but didn't do very much. Lanark supposed a good author was more likely to write the second kind of book. He thought, 'Sludden said I should write to express myself. I suppose I could do it in a story about who I am and why I have decided to write a story.'
> (*L*,14-15)

And

> My tongue felt for a word or syllable from a time earlier than the train compartment, and for a moment I thought I remembered a short word starting with *Th* [Thaw]or *Gr* [Gray] but it escaped me.
> (*L*,20)

When Mr Thaw asks Duncan about his intentions for the future, he answers: "I want to write a modern Divine Comedy with illustrations in the style of William Blake" (*L*,204) and

> I had this work of art I wanted to make, don't ask me what it was, I don't know; something epic, mibby, with the variety of facts and the clarity of fancies and all of it seen in pictures with a queer morbid intense colour of their own, mibby a gigantic mural or illustrated book or even a film.
> (*L*,210)

Something very similar to *Lanark* in any case. Even Lanark is referred to as "the writer" (*L*,29) by one of the characters. Of course, we are dealing with Alasdair Gray, therefore the possibility of a game should be taken seriously as this seems to be what he is hinting at when he makes one of his characters, "the tall man", say:

> "Metaphor is one of thought's most essential tools. It illuminates what would otherwise be totally obscure. But the illumination is sometimes so bright that it dazzles instead of revealing".
> (*L*,30)

By giving us multiple points of view and fragments of identities, Gray is creating a unified vision of a single life story, that of Thaw/Lanark. He aspires to form a complete, whole identity and is, therefore, going against postmodern lines that

foreground the fragmentation of the self and that he himself uses in *Lanark*. Instead, Gray aims at a unity of subjectivity by stressing the importance of realising the different levels of reality. That is, by realising the kind of relationship that develops between the real and the imaginary. Thaw uses fantasies and art in an attempt to fulfil himself as a human being, to achieve his object of desire. In this sense Thaw continues the quest as Lanark in Books 3 and 4. In the Thaw narrative, wholeness is symbolised by a metaphorical key:

> The key was small and precise, yet in its use completely general and completely particular. Once found it would solve every problem: asthma, homework, shyness before Kate Caldwell, fear of atomic war; the key would make everything painful, useless and wrong become pleasant, harmonious and good.
> (*L*,169)

In the fantasy section the key has been transformed into sunlight. Lanark says to Nastler: "I never wanted anything but some sunlight, some love, some very ordinary happiness". (*L*, 484) For Lanark, the search for the sun and sunlight symbolises the desire for completeness and fulfilment in life. As he tells Sludden the sun helps him to measure the time and therefore gives his life a feeling of order. (*L*,5) Lanark, of course, has arrived without memory in a clockless city. Daylight, therefore, in a sense of "time of day" is a crucial part of the unsettling atmosphere of Book 3.

The search for wholeness can also be interpreted as a pursuit of origins, and is again linked with Time. When Lanark attempts to write his own story, he starts with the sentence:

> *The first thing I remember is*
> After a few more words he scored out what he had written and started again. He did this four times, each time remembering an earlier event than the one he described. At last he found a beginning and wrote steadily…
> (*L*,15)

In contrast to Gray, Lanark starts at the beginning of his story. Something similar happens when he is asked for his name. Unable to remember it he tries to think of the earliest name he can recall which is a word he noticed under a photograph in the train compartment. Lanark's death also feels like a return to his origins after he has completed a kind of pilgrimage in search of self knowledge. His death by water mirrors Thaw's death by drowning and reinforces the sense of renewal and return. This same idea is at the heart of the episode in the Necropolis where Lanark lets himself fall into the mouth in the ground. The image of death is generated by the surroundings – a graveyard – whereas images of life emerge from the similarity between the mouth in the ground and a birth canal, and from Lanark's cure in the Institute. Therefore, Lanark's death at the end of the novel can be considered as an open ending.

Lanark, Thaw, Jock McLeish in *1982 Janine* and Harry in *Something Leather* show "a vision of life in terms of a peregrination through the almost incomprehensible towards a profoundly longed for, although vaguely defined, goal".[21] What Lanark and Duncan Thaw are seeking is expressed by Duncan: "I've once or twice felt moments when calmness, unity and … and glory seemed the core of things" (*L*, 285) but he laments: "must these moments always be lonely? Won't love let us enjoy them with somebody else?" (*L*, 285) This aspiration contrasts with Lanark's wish to be free expressed elsewhere in the novel (*L*, 70) which he understands as being free from other people. As Colin Manlove aptly points out, "*Lanark* is about the emotionally crippled, the socially

---

[21] "una visión de la vida en términos de una peregrinación a través de lo casi incomprensible hacia una meta intensamente anhelada, pero sólo vagamente definida". Donald Shaw, p. 207 (My translation)

disabled: it is about the embarrassment of being, or rather, the embarrassment of not being able to be properly".[22] Isolation and marginality connect both characters.

Lanark's inability to communicate is reflected in his complaint: "We can't understand ourselves, how can we understand others? Only maps and mathematics exist to be understood and we're solider than those, I hope". (*L*, 97) It stresses the inability to understand one another and the loneliness that derives from that fact. That is why Lanark, like Rima, becomes a dragon – he is too self-absorbed to relate to other people:

> "The heat made by a body should move easily through it, overflowing the pores, penis, anus, eyes, lips, limbs and finger-tips in acts of generosity and self-preservation. But many people are afraid of the cold and try to keep more heat than they give, they stop the heat from leaving through an organ or limb, and the stopped heat forges the surface into hard insulating armour".
> (*L*,68)

The Oracle is a hyperbolisation of this remoteness. He prefers to describe people objectively because otherwise they are too fluid and changeable, "shifty and treacherous". (*L*,108) The lack of interrelationships makes it exist "as a series of thoughts amidst infinite greyness". (*L*,111) It is interesting that the realist part of *Lanark* comes through the Oracle. Even though it is pure fragmentation and dissolution he produces solid representation.

Lanark, like the rest of Gray's novels is concerned with a quest for self-knowledge. Lanark goes in search of sunlight travelling through worlds to fulfil that desire. He never succeeds, and neither does Duncan, in his search for "the key". *Lanark* is the story of a frustrated attempt to search for that wholeness.

---

[22] Colin Manlove, (1994), p. 199.

Gray's following works have a more positive outlook and show that it is possible to attain some level of happiness in life.

As we have seen, Gray uses postmodern topics and aesthetics such as the fragmentation of the subject and the parodic use of science fiction to present what looks like a wholly antipostmodern desire for an integrated and rounded self.

Alison Lumsden also considers that the conclusions Gray reaches in his work are far from radical and innovative. Lanark's only desire in life is

> "... life in a city near the sea or near the mountains where the sun shines for an average of half the day. My house would have a living room, big kitchen, bathroom and one bedroom for each of the family, and my work would be so engrossing that while I did it I would neither notice nor care if I was happy or sad. Perhaps I would be an official who kept useful services working properly. Or a designer of houses and roads for the city where I lived. When I grew old I would buy a cottage on an island or among the mountains – "
> (*L*, 74)

The virtues and satisfactions of an ordinary life are what Lanark searches for. Even his obsession with time and ways to control it seem rather old fashioned, morbid and tedious to Sludden:

> "Instead of visiting ten parties since you came here, laying ten women and getting drunk ten times, you've watched thirty days go by. Instead of making life a continual feast you chop it into days and swallow them regularly, like pills."
> (*L*,5)

As we will see later on, for all of *Lanark*'s postmodern radicalism it appears to be a defence of the systems it pretends to attack. For Lumsden, Gray's innovation lies in his style rather than in his content:

> Interesting and well handled as this thematic exploration is, however, it may hardly be described as innovative in any real sense, for the conclusions which Gray's work implies are in fact fairly traditional, classically bourgeois ones.[23]

---

[23] Alison Lumsden, "Innovation and Reaction in the Fiction of Alasdair Gray", in G. Wallace and R. Stevenson, p. 118.

Postmodern topics such as the fragmentation and decentering of the self are used here for a conclusion that is more traditional than radical.

Despite critics' comments on his style, Gray dismisses the idea that he is producing something "new" when he puts the following words in the mouth of the "author", Nastler, in the Epilogue: "I want *Lanark* to be read in one order but eventually thought of in another. It's an old device. Homer, Vergil, Milton and Scott Fitzgerald used it". (*L*, 483) Using Nastler as his mouthpiece, Gray is pointing to a traditional way of interpretation. In the first sentence he indicates a more chronologically conventional form of understanding the story. In his second sentence, Nastler situates his work within the acknowledged and accepted literary tradition.

Despite the use of these postmodern strategies, Gray is not departing from traditional storytelling. In fact, *Lanark*, *1982 Janine*, *Something Leather* and *Poor Things* rely heavily on the realist tradition. The extensive use of postmodern techniques together with traditional storytelling makes the relationship between the two sections of *Lanark* difficult to explain. However, it is clear that there is a relationship between the two main sections, a cohesion that allows the reader to understand the text. There are no basic contradictions in the actions of the two sections. One story flows from the other and the issues dealt with are identical. Linda Hutcheon points out that "[t]he postmodern novel … begins by creating and centring a world … and then contesting it".[24] When dealing with *Lanark* one of the questions that has to be answered is exactly which world is being

---

[24] Linda Hutcheon, "Discourse, Power, Ideology: Humanism and Postmodernism", in Edmund J. Smyth, p. 108.

decentered. The reader is presented with two readings. One is to consider the fantastic section a sequential development of the realist section. The other is to understand the fantastic section as encompassing the realist part. In the latter case, Gray would be deconstructing the traditional hierarchy that considers realism a superior form of narrative to fantasy. According to this interpretation, Lanark – or rather the Oracle – imagines the Thaw section. If we read the story as Nastler advises us to, does Gray use the realist part to introduce a world and, then use the fantastic part to decenter it? The structure of the novel, however, presents us first with the fantastic section and then with the realist. Marie Odile Pittin avoids the problem by dismissing any clear-cut distinction between the two sections:

> The Lanark/Thaw duality cannot be viewed as a manichean relationship of the Jekyll and Hyde type, but as a *mise en abyme* of a new genre, since it can be observed to work both ways. The two characters' experiences are reflected by distorting mirrors, with Thaw's story as viewed in a convex mirror, giving a "realistic" picture of the character, whereas Lanark's, examined through its reflection in a concave mirror, provides a "fantastic" picture of the same character. As the novel starts with Lanark's story it shows a picture blown out of proportion by the fantastic element; the "thinning" effect of the convex mirror restores Thaw's story to a seemingly "realistic" picture. The combination of those two perspectives bridges the gap between appearance and reality, while contributing to a blurring of the border between them. The visual metaphor provides a link with the pictorial notion of point of view that is of paramount importance in Gray's artwork.[25]

For her, there is no relation of consequence or precedence, no temporal relationship between Thaw and Lanark and between realism and fantasy.

Although all these interpretations would be equally acceptable there are clues that favour reading the fantastic section as subsequent to the realist section.

---

[25] Marie Odile Pittin, "Alasdair Gray: A Strategy of Ambiguity", in Susanne Hagemann, p. 201.

At the end of Book 2, Duncan Thaw kills himself – literally or metaphorically – and we meet him again as Lanark at the beginning of Book 3. He finds himself in a dystopian world in search of that fulfilment that was denied him in his "real" life. This is represented, as we have seen, by sunlight in the fantastic section and by a key in the realist. Lanark's "real" – or past – life is symbolised by the rucksack he carries with him in the train. He knows that it belongs to him and that it contains "something nasty". Wearily, he checks its contents and throws some of them – a wallet, a map, a key and a diary – out of the window. Later, the reader finds out that the items he throws away are those Duncan Thaw had with him at the moment of committing suicide. This is one of the clues that suggest that the "correct" reading would be the one that sees Duncan Thaw as a past life of Lanark. Lanark is "feeling safe again" once he has freed himself from the remains of his past life. However, this act of rejection proves unsuccessful as he finds himself in a very similar situation to his past life. Even when he escapes Unthank for the underworld of the Institute, the past seems to have followed him. The female dragon he wants to save – Rima –knows everything about his past self:

> "Oh, I know you, Thaw, I know all about you, the hysterical child, the eager adolescent, the mad rapist, the wise old daddy, oh, I've suffered all your tricks and know how hollow they are so don't weep! Don't dare to weep. Grief is the rottenest trick of all."
> (*L*, 88)

These reminders of his past make it more difficult for the reader to consider the fantastic section of the novel as a "beyond" detached from objective reality. The Lanark section feels more like a natural extension of the Thaw section. The world of fantasy flows from the world of reality. Fantasy is not an alternative reality

superimposed upon objective reality but an essential part of life. Gray uses a fantasy world to prove not that it is opposite to the real world, but that it is a reflection of it. Fantasy worlds are a reproduction of the real one. As Colin Manlove has pointed out, Scottish fantasy's "gaze is directed more in at this world than out at the next"[26] and Gray's fiction proves it. We encounter a similar situation in *1982 Janine* where pornography – another form of fantasy – plays a key role in Jock's life and eventually helps him to solve the conflicts that threaten to destroy it. Pornography is a form of fantasy that, however idealised, deals with profound issues of the human psyche.

The mixture of fantasy and reality brings us to the topic of genre. Colin Manlove has difficulty in situating *Lanark* within any particular genre: "it is not a single literary mode, but a mélange, a fictional city, of allegory, novel and fantasy: we are not allowed to settle to any one world or genre…".[27] This attempt at defining the genre to which the novel belongs seems to point to magical realism as this is a branch of postmodern fiction which critics find equally difficult to define.

The most visible characteristic of magical realism is, as we have seen in the Introduction, a mixture of fantasy and realism. Gray is fond of such a combination: "I particularly liked *The Water Babies* because of the business of mixing genres. I realise that the works I liked were ones that brought in what

[26] Colin Manlove, (1994), p. 16.
[27] Colin Manlove, (1994), p. 198.

seemed every possible genre".[28] Talking about magical realism in English fiction Delbaere-Garant points out that:

> magical realism may be considered an extension of realism in its concern with the nature of reality and its representation, at the same time that it resists the basic assumptions of post-enlightenment rationalism and literary realism. Mind and body, spirit and matter, life and death, real and imaginary, self and other, male and female: these are boundaries to be erased, transgressed, blurred, brought together, or otherwise fundamentally refashioned in magical realist texts.[29]

In *Lanark* the most important blurred boundary line is that between reality and fantasy. Due to the way the books have been ordered, the reader cannot perceive the way reality is invaded by a supernatural event as it would happen in a classic magical realist text. The erasure of boundaries between fantasy and realism is reflected in the dissolution of boundaries between life and death. Not only can the question of Thaw's death never be answered, but also it never becomes clear whether Marjory's murder is real or imagined. This is a novel of dissolution, where fantasy and reality are structurally disconnected but firmly fused together.

At first glance, *Lanark* seems different from the magical realism of Latin Americans authors; Gray's magical realism is not "exotic". This "exoticism" of Latin American writers derives from the reality of their countries; their magic is based firmly on their physical surroundings and culture. However, this is also the case with Gray; his "magic" is also firmly based on the reality of Glasgow at a particular moment of its history (1950s - early 1960s).

---

[28] Alasdair Gray, "Alasdair Gray Interviewed", interview by Jennie Renton. *Scottish Book Collector* 7 (1988), p. 3.
[29] Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, "Introduction: Daiquiri Birds and Flaubertian Parrot(ie)s", in Parkinson Zamora and Faris, p. 6.

Early in the novel we are told that when Lanark looked out from the window at the Institute "[t]he act of seeing became an act of flight". (*L*, 57) What Lanark sees, though, is nothing out of the ordinary:

> He saw this peak was not a simple cone but a cluster of summits with valleys between them. One valley was full of lakes and pasture, another was shaggy with forests, through a third lay a golden-green ocean with a sun setting behind it.
> (*L*, 57)

Seeing the ordinary can produce the same feeling of wonder as imagining the most fantastic scene.

The section of *Lanark* called the Prologue is based on a short story called "A Complaint". The story ends:

> Why is reality playing these tricks on me? Why is my world increasingly empty and vacant? The only answer I can believe is that somewhere a man exists for whom the world is unusually rich and visible and lively, a man who enjoys, not just his own share of reality but the part stolen from me. I only hope he is worthless and obscure, as much an outcast from my sort of world as I am from his.[30]

With this comment Gray warns about escapist fantasy and the need to see fantasy anchored in reality. For Gray "[a] conjuror's best trick is to show his audience a moving model of the world as it is with themselves inside it..." (*L*, 493) and this can be done undeniably within the boundaries of the fantastic. Randall Stevenson points out that *Lanark* "illustrates the paradox that the most transparently, ostentatiously artificial texts may be the ones most likely to redirect their readers' attention upon reality".[31]

When asked about the blend of realism and "science fiction" in *Lanark* Gray answered:

---

[30] This short story appears in the same folder as the story called "The Star" which was published in *Unlikely Stories, Mostly*. Accession 8799, folder 13. National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh. Gray acknowledges that this story is the origin of "The Oracle" in Accession 9247, folder 32 (b). National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh.

> It's always a pleasure to recognize the sort of people and places you know in a story – that is why realism stimulates. It is always a relief to see the people and places you know exaggerated to the level of the grotesque and exotic – that is why fantasy stimulates.[32]

Alasdair Gray, like his Latin American counterparts, has an ability to see the fantastic in the world that surrounds us: "my tendency to think the world catastrophic or apocalyptic came from the experience of it. … Our world is apocalyptic, don't you think?"[33] Realism is very much at the heart of the fantastic visions in the Lanark section. Even the apocalyptic end takes place in the Necropolis of Glasgow, Lanark's last sight is that of Knox's statue and Ian Spring thinks that the Institute has been modelled on the Royal Infirmary.[34] Dorothy Porter points out that Gray creates "a number of different kinds of city and different perspectives from which they may be viewed".[35] However fragmented these visions are, they are still a vision of Glasgow that progressively becomes more hellish. Gray has always stressed that the reason for writing about Glasgow is because that is the city he knows best. All he knows "of Hell and Heaven was learned here, so this is the ground I use, though sometimes I disguise the fact".[36] This reinforces the realist tendency in his work. In fact, for Frederic Lindsay the use of fantasy is the only way of representing Glasgow:

> If … while still wishing to stay in touch with Glasgow as it is, we want to deal with the late twentieth century dilemma of boundless power over nature being

---

[31] Randall Stevenson, "Alasdair Gray and Postmodernism" in R. Crawford and T. Nairn, p. 60.
[32] Alasdair Gray, "Replies by Alasdair Gray, to Questions from Christopher Swan and Frank Delany, August 1982", interview by C. Swan and F. Delany. *Saltire Self-Portrait* 4, pp. 16-19. The typescript with some variations, can be found in Accession 9247, folder 52 p.3-4 National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh.
[33] Alasdair Gray, "An Epistolary Interview, Mostly with Alasdair Gray", interview by Mark Axelrod. *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 15 n 2 (Summer 1995), p. 106.
[34] Ian Spring, *Phantom Village. The Myth of the New Glasgow*. (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1990), p. 60.
[35] Dorothy Porter, "Imagining a City". *Chapman* 63 (Spring 1991), p. 44.
[36] Alasdair Gray, interview by C. Swan and F. Delaney, p. 5.

> accompanied grotesquely by a generalised assault upon the prime place of reason in human affairs, the realist novel will not suffice for those of us who inhabit imaginatively a city lacking sources of political and financial significance.[37]

The significance of imagination for Gray is expressed in the following – much quoted – comment by the Oracle. For the Oracle Glasgow is: "the sort of industrial city where most people live nowadays but nobody imagines living". (*L*,105) As Manfred Malzhan points out: "[t]he implication is that to stir people's imagination something other than realism is needed".[38] What Gray is trying to do with *Lanark* is achieve "an interesting, imaginative account of themselves"[39] – i.e. the Scottish people. He considers that such an account has not been achieved "between Galt's *The Entail* [(1822)] and Archie Hind's *Dear Green Place* [(1966)]" and blames such failure on "a combination of poverty and an unimaginative education".[40] Therefore, what Gray wants to do is change a stereotypical image of Glasgow by using fantasy and not the stark social realism used in the "few bad novels" (*L*,243) that have represented the city in literature:

> Glasgow, a place of change for the last thirty years, has sometimes seemed to be burdened, as far as its novelists are concerned, with certain stereotypes of approach, where image does not necessarily take over from reality but instead distorts reality through crude overcolouring and selective melodrama.[41]

Gray moves away from this distorted reality and uses fantasy to represent the atmosphere of the real city.

Gray seems to be including himself in that group of writers with profound social concerns that since the 1960s onwards have written in a way that a

---

[37] Frederic Lindsay, "The Glasgow Novel: Myths and Directions". *Books in Scotland* 21 (Summer 1986), p. 4.
[38] Manfred Malzhan, *Aspects of Identity. The Contemporary Scottish Novel (1978- 1981) as National Self - Expression. Scottish Studies* 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1984), p. 84.
[39] Alasdair Gray, interview by C. Anderson and G. Norquay, p. 7.
[40] Alasdair Gray, interview by C. Anderson and G. Norquay, p. 7.

"realist" reader would consider fantastic.[42] Like authors who write within magical realism, he is undoubtedly a writer with such social considerations and has chosen to refer to very real issues "exaggerated to the level of the grotesque and exotic".[43] The issues of the realist section of the novel are expressed in its fantastic part in a hyperbolic and monstrous fashion. This is the case not only in *Lanark* but in Gray's other novels as well, particularly *Poor Things* where the manipulation of people by other people is represented by the creation of a monster. This originates from his opinion that "[m]odern afterworlds are always infernos, never paradisos, presumably because the modern secular imagination is more capable of debasement than exaltation". (*L*, 489) Richard Todd suggests that this is a common characteristic of British contemporary fiction, as he points out that "the realism of the action has become a realism of excess, of magic or of the dreaming world".[44]

For the "author", Nastler, the transition from Thaw's world to Lanark's is not merely a movement from reality to fantasy. It is "a chance to shift him [Thaw] into a wider social context". (*L*, 493) It is clear that Gray is using fantasy to show the ills of society. That is why Nastler rejects the idea that he is creating escapist science fiction:

> The conjuror's mouth and eyes opened wide and his face grew red. He began speaking in a shrill whisper which swelled to a bellow: "*I am not writing* science fiction! Science-fiction stories have no real people in them, and all my characters are real, real, real people! I may astound my public by a dazzling deployment of dramatic metaphors designed to compress and accelerate the action, but that is not science, it is magic! Magic!"

---

[41] Edwin Morgan, "Tradition and Experiment in the Glasgow Novel", in G. Wallace and R. Stevenson, p. 89.
[42] Antonio Risco, p. 23.
[43] Alasdair Gray, interview by C. Swan and F. Delaney, p. 4.
[44] Richard Todd, (1996), p. 165.

(*L*, 497-8)

Even though at times *Lanark* looks like science fiction everything happens in places that are of this world. Illnesses, isolation, exploitation have only been grotesquely magnified. This is the reason why *Lanark* cannot be considered science fiction. As Scott L. Malcomson points out: "Though it is cast as science fiction, the conflicts in *Lanark* are very much of this world. Gray has so little respect for the generic protocols of sci-fi that fans of this genre may be disappointed".[45]

In the words of Randall Stevenson: "Gray's dystopian vision uses fantasy to enlarge and make objective some of the problems of this history, emphasising how urgently they need to be addressed".[46] For Gray there is no distance between this world and that depicted in *Lanark*:

> [T]he organisation of the world presented in *Lanark*, is very much like the organisation of the world we live in. In showing its hellishness I was sickened by it, the offering of a hell I was describing, though in describing it I felt completely outside it, in charge and free, which I was because I was just sort of floating above, and after all I was just making a map. A map of hell.[47]

Ernesto Sábato considers that the "true writer" cannot escape from his/her own reality: "For good or for evil, the true writer writes about the reality he has suffered and sucked, that is, about his native land, although sometimes it looks as if he is writing stories set in remote times and places".[48]

---

[45] Scott L. Malcomson, "Alasdair Gray paints himself out of a corner", rev. of *Lanark*. *Voice Literary Supplement* (1984), p. 15.
[46] Randall Stevenson, "Alasdair Gray and the Postmodern", in R. Crawford and T. Nairn, p. 57.
[47] Alasdair Gray, Interview by Neil Irons, "Alasdair Gray. Just Making Maps? A Dissertation of his Life and Work".(Duncan of Jordanstone School of Art, 1986). Accession 9503, p.6. National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh.
[48] "Para bien y para mal, el escritor verdadero escribe sobre la realidad que ha sufrido y mamado, es decir sobre la patria; aunque a veces parezca hacerlo sobre historias lejanas en el tiempo y en

By using two structurally disconnected sections to present alternative realities, *Lanark* seems to be distancing itself from Latin American magical realism. However, this is only the case because of the physical separation of the novel into four different books. In magical realist works reality acts as a base for the magical, whereas in *Lanark* the fantastic part surrounds the realist. A closer look at the two parts, however, shows that the fantastic section is not purely magical in itself and that the realist part is saturated with fantasy. Although *Lanark* starts with the fantastic part – Book 3 – the description that introduces the novel, Lanark and Sludden's encounter in The Elite Café, is highly descriptive. Even though the narration starts half way through the action, the reader is not thrown into the fantastic world of *Lanark* abruptly but is introduced gradually. We are not aware of the bizarre circumstances in Unthank until we are told about the scarcity of daylight and the mysterious disappearances. Gray plays on the expectations of the reader by gradually introducing us to a defamiliarised representation of Glasgow. Lanark does not seem disturbed by these circumstances and his lack of bewilderment when confronted by magic is one of the characteristics of magical realist texts.[49] Even when the mouth appears to him in the ground of the Necropolis he is not surprised; in the Institute he is only revolted by the use it makes of the dead bodies. Lanark seems to accept that there is no sunlight, that "dawn" is something of the past. He even dismisses the mystery of the disappearances in Unthank after wondering about it for a few moments. The relationship between Lanark and the world around him is not one

---

el espacio." Ernesto Sábato, *El escritor y sus fantasmas*. (Barcelona: Seix Barrall, 1979), p. 17. (My translation)

[49] Irlemar Chiampi, p. 73.

of wonder but disgust. He rejects what he sees but does not consider it uncanny. All the strange circumstances taking place in Unthank, the Institute or Provan do not appear as surreal to Lanark but as truly part of his world.

As Alison Lee points out, "[i]n Unthank … fantasy is created through literalized metaphor".[50] The darkness is not metaphorical, the lack of clocks to measure time is real and personality dysfunctions become physical illnesses. This process of literalisation is also a characteristic of magical realism. Rosemary Jackson points out:

> The topography of the modern fantastic suggests a preoccupation with problems of vision and visibility, for it is structured around spectral imagery: it is remarkable how many fantasies introduce mirrors, glasses, reflections, portraits, eyes – which see things myopically, or distortedly, or out of focus – to effect a transformation of the familiar into the unfamiliar.[51]

This is clearly not the case in *Lanark*. What Lanark sees through the window in the ward of the Institute is the familiar world of his past life; in the case of the empty space in the wall in the Security Office what is missing is the reassurance of a clock. What Lanark sees reflected in the window of the railway compartment is nothing sinister, only his own reflection which he cannot recognise. Therefore, even in the fantastic worlds of Unthank and the Institute, reflections and glasses only reflect memories of reality.

On the other hand, the Thaw section has an atmosphere of fantasy. Duncan starts to see the magic behind things and people:

> Walking down streets and corridors his feet hit the ground with unusual force and regularity. All sounds, even words spoken nearby, seemed dulled by intervening glass. People behind the glass looked distinct and peculiar. He wondered what they saw in gargoyles, masks and antique door knockers that they

---

[50] Alison Lee, *Realism and Power. Postmodern British Fiction*. (London & New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 101-102.
[51] Rosemary Jackson, p. 43.

> couldn't see in each other. Everyone carried on their necks a grotesque art object, originally inherited, which they never tired of altering and adding to. Yet while he looked on people with the cold interest usually felt for things, the world of things began to cause surprising emotions. A haulage vehicle carrying a huge piece of bright yellow machinery swelled his heart with tenderness and stiffened his penis with lust. A section of tenement, the surface a dirty yellow plaster with oval holes through which brickwork showed, gave the eerie conviction he was beholding a kind of flesh. Walls and pavements, especially if they were slightly decayed, made him feel he was walking beside or over a body. His feet did not hit the ground less firmly, but something in him winced as they did so.
> (*L*, 228)

The importance of fantasy for Duncan Thaw is stressed in his time at school.[52] In that environment the contrast between the world of the real and the world of the imagination is more acute. In one of his stories for the school magazine, he tries "a blend of realism and fantasy which even an adult would have found difficult". (*L*,155) Duncan is not alone in finding a fantastic atmosphere in the world around him. The idea of Glasgow as Hell that will be manifested later in connection with the world of Unthank is expressed in the realist part of the book by Dr. McPhedron: "I was six years a student of divinity in that city. It made Hell very real to me". (*L*,144) Like the Oracle, the maths teacher stresses that there is "no room for dreamers in her class". (*L*,151) For this reason Duncan thinks that nothing the science master teaches him can "bring an increase of power or freedom". (*L*,151) He equates fantasising and the creation of new worlds with escape. His childhood and adolescent fantasies are very similar to Jock McLeish's. Like Jock, Duncan is fascinated by an advertisement in a shop window. Both advertisements depict women they fantasise about. Their erotic fantasies are their only ways of feeling close to women "when rescuing them, and

---

[52] The section of *Lanark* referring to Duncan Thaw's time at school is very similar to the story 'Mr Meikle' from *Ten Tales Tall & True*.

[they] often envied the villains who could humiliate or torture them". (*L*. 158) These erotic fantasies are a form of escapism: "To keep sexually excited he had been forced to imagine increasingly perverse things and now whatever in the outer world recalled other experiences upset him by its irrelevance". (*L*,180) The feeling of despondency that follows Thaw's fantasies is identical to Jock McLeish's:

> As Sludden, Toal and McPake leapt to their feet he would knock them down with a sweeping sideways blow, then drive the squealing girls into a corner and rake the clothes off them. Then the image grew confused, for each of his fantasies tended to dissolve into another one before reaching a climax. After these dreams he would become dismally cold and depressed.
> (*L*,41-42)

Three levels between traditional realism and fantasy can be distinguished in *Lanark*. The first level is the Thaw section; the second is the city of Unthank. As already indicated, this section is not presented as proper fantasy. After only a few pages something eerie about this city is readily detected. The Institute is the third level; it is the underworld of fantasy. Therefore, Thaw/Lanark are going deeper and deeper into a surreal world. For Manlove, Scottish fantasy literature concerns itself more with the "vertical" than the "horizontal", not only from a physical but also from a psychological point of view.[53] In Gray, clearly, verticality is related to the issue of introspection and search for self-knowledge.

> In *Lanark*, as in *1982 Janine*, the reader moves together with the protagonists from the world of reality to the fantastic. The movement from one to the other is made through the act of attempted – in the case of Jock McLeish – or successful suicide. In *Lanark* suicide leads us into a fantastic world whereas in

[53] Colin Manlove, (1994), p. 13.

1982 Janine it brings Jock in touch with reality. When Duncan Thaw walks into the water, he submerges himself and the reader into the fantastic world of Unthank. Water has a powerful symbolic meaning: it refers to the creation of life, purification and regeneration.[54] Death is also represented as a trip across water as in the myth of Charon. This symbol appears repeatedly in Gray's fiction. In *Lanark* water is both death and rebirth at the end of the Thaw section and at the end of the novel. In *Poor Things*, water means also death and rebirth for Bella. In *Something Leather*, June's bath after her ordeal makes her feel like a baby again and signals the emergence of her new self.

As Roderick J. Lyall accurately points out, Unthank "is an *interior* landscape, a city of the mind".[55] Thaw's and Lanark's descent into the underworld is a representation of their own mental states. Duncan, Lanark and also Jock McLeish travel to the depth of their own loneliness and as a result of this journey, they discover something about themselves. Duncan Thaw discovers that he is too weak to go on living, Lanark that he has managed some glimpses of happiness, while Jock finds out that he has the strength in himself to change his life. Jeanne Delbaere-Garant refers to this kind of magical realism generating from the mind as "psychic realism":

> Late-twentieth-century English texts labelled "magic realist" reintegrate, as it were, into the realistic mode "fantastic" elements that have been excluded from the mainstream. They usually center on an individual whose fissured self renders him or her particularly sensitive to the manifestations of an otherwise invisible

---

[54] Martha L. Canfield, "Paradoja, cliché y fabulación en la obra de García Márquez", in *La invención del pasado. La novela histórica en el marco de la posmodernidad*, ed. Karl Kohut. Publicaciones del Centro de Estudios Latinoamericanos de la Universidad de Eichstätt. Serie A: Actas 16 (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 1997), p. 92.

[55] Roderick J. Lyall, "Postmodernist Otherworld, Postcalvinist Purgatory. An approach to *Lanark* and *The Bridge*". *Littérature écossaise: voix nouvelles. Scottish Studies - Études Écossaises 2* (Grenoble: Université Stendhal, 1993), p. 43.

> reality and whose visionary power can be induced by drugs, love, religious faith or … erotic desire. The "magic" is almost always a reification of the hero's inner conflicts, hence the vagueness of the spatial setting … and the thematic recurrence of elements linked with the initiation journey.[56]

Higgins seems to have something similar in mind when he points out that:

> The new narrative also extends the scope of realism by according to the world of the mind the same status as to that of the physical and social world. Subjective reality is treated as no less than so-called objective reality, and what is thought, felt or imagined is recorded as if it were literally true.[57]

Therefore, the confusion between reality and fantasy in a novel like *Lanark* is a reflection of the troubled psyche of the protagonists. Alternative reality becomes an essential part of life where Thaw and Lanark try to find something their present cannot give them. For Lanark the images he sees through the windows of the Institute are as fantastic as the grotesque worlds of Thaw's imagination. They are like Jock McLeish whose erotic fantasies are part of his life and like Harry whose life has no meaning if she cannot put her fantasies into practice.

Another of the main conflicts at the heart of *Lanark* is that between the individual and his/her wish for freedom and the need to comply with society's rules. Critics such as Alison Lumsden and Robert Crawford[58] have aptly pointed to entrapment as the main topic of Gray's fiction:

> It is certainly the case that what concerns Gray thematically is the ways in which his protagonists are entrapped within systems and structures – be they political, economic or emotional – which serve to limit their capacity for love and freedom, and bring about their personal and societal dissolution.[59]

---

[56] Jeanne Delbaere-Garant, "Psychic Realism, Mythic Realism, Grotesque Realism: Variations on Magic Realism in Contemporary Literature in English", in Parkinson Zamora and Faris, p. 250.
[57] James Higgins, "Spanish America's New Narrative", in Edmund J. Smyth, p. 96.
[58] Robert Crawford comments on the topic of entrapment in the "Introduction" to R. Crawford and T. Nairn, pp. 3-7.
[59] Alison Lumsden, "Innovation and Reaction in the Fiction of Alasdair Gray", in G. Wallace and R. Stevenson, p. 115.

Undeniably, entrapment is an essential aspect of *Lanark*. Lanark and Thaw struggle against society's demands; they want to feel free from its constrictions, but they also struggle to fit in. They want to love and be loved but their selfishness prevents them from achieving that. They want a happiness that entails complying with society's demands and that is something they are not prepared to do. Alison Lee also thinks that "*Lanark*'s primary concern is with structures of power, from familial, governmental, and corporate control, to the manipulation of the reader and the character, Lanark, by the very structure of the text".[60]

Like fragmentation, the issue of control and freedom can also be approached from the point of view of form and content. For example, in the Epilogue we are free to go through it in the order we choose, reading first the footnotes and then the body of the text or vice versa. The same happens with Chapter Eleven in *1982 Janine*. Bruce Charlton points to the freedom the reader has to interpret the novel:

> It seems Gray will not decode for us but in the final analysis prefers to leave the interpretation of applicability to "the thought and experience of readers" because "no author should rely on" the one-to-one link up of allegory to compel the reader's attention and limit their freedom.[61]

The autonomy of the reader is illusory, though. In fact, Gray is obsessed with the authority his role as author bestows on him and is determined to let the reader know that he is in control even if that means giving the game away, that is, displaying the fictionality of his work.

---

[60] Alison Lee, p. 100-1.
[61] Bruce Charlton, "The Literature of Alasdair Gray". (M. A. diss., University of Durham, 1988), p. 17.

The order in which the books are placed may be interpreted as a freedom the author gives the reader to approach the work through different entrances. However by doing so he is forcing us to approach it in an unconventional way, in the middle of the action. The footnotes, the columns, etc. can be read in any order we wish but he is pressing us to modify and improvise a new way of reading. As McHale points out:

> the out-of-order numbering of *Lanark* is not designed to give the reader a real choice among alternatives, but merely "lays bare" this novel's *in medias res* structure. … So after all the misnumbering of *Lanark* is not as radical a violation of conventional format as it might first appear. Nevertheless, it does foreground the order of reading.[62]

As Marshall Walker points out: "Gray's cheekiest trick is to exemplify control by blatantly pulling his readers' strings, … gleefully manipulating us with his stories, his gamesome typography and book design, his batteries of 'Notes, Thanks and Critic Fuel'".[63] The result of this authorial control is that the reader never forgets that s/he is in the world of fictionality; s/he becomes aware of the book as a real object, to which the illustrations introducing the books contribute. Every time the reader enters the world of fiction, s/he is awakened by the need to make conscious choices about the process of reading.

The question of freedom of movement or lack of it relates both to reader and character. In *Lanark* the characters keep moving from one place and time to another. Constant movement contrasts with the claustrophobic and repressing atmosphere of the novel. Even though Ian Spring considers that the city in Books 3 and 4 is in a state of continuous flux,[64] the claustrophobic ambience of the

---

[62] Brian McHale, p. 193.
[63] Marshall Walker, *Scottish Literature Since 1707*. (London: Longman, 1997), p. 339.
[64] Ian Spring, (1990), p. 71.

fantastic part of the novel is characterised by the Gothicism and darkness of it. with its necropolis, cathedral, empty buildings and mysterious disappearances. The house where he meets "the tall man" and Provost Dodd and the Institute belong to those enclosed spaces that Gray tends to use in his works as we will see in *1982 Janine* and *Something Leather*.

The obsession with control is also expressed in the characters' lack of freedom as they feel they are, like Jock McLeish, characters in someone else`s fiction. Gray is eager to stress in his work the anguish felt at losing control of one's life and the entrapment of the individual by forces external to his characters. However, the outcome of these novels seems to be the partial success of these characters in coming to terms with their lives.

Scott L. Malcomson points to two issues in *Lanark*:

> In Gray's portrayal of postwar Glasgow, there are two linked political themes: the problem of marginality, and the choice between grudging cooperation and rebellion. Marginality in Lanark goes from being a specifically Scottish problem to being a universal state of being. [65]

What this critic calls "choice between grudging cooperation and rebellion" is central to *Lanark*. Some critics have tended to blame Lanark's and Thaw's unhappiness on their being trapped within the structures of society. In my opinion, it is their inability to love and their selfishness that are also to blame. Nastler tells Lanark what his problem is: "The Thaw narrative shows a man dying because he is bad at loving. It is enclosed by your narrative which shows civilization collapsing for the same reason". (*L*, 484) There is a contradiction between Thaw's and Lanark's desperate search for fulfilment and their inability

---

[65] Scott L. Malcomson, rev. of *Lanark*, p. 15.

to give love. Some critics have pointed out that the characters' social outcastness stems from being manipulated into situations in which they have no wish to find themselves. However, as Douglas Gifford has pointed out, they are selfish characters and their isolation is a result of that:

> Duncan Thaw does not have to contend with the indifference or contempt of most other people – indeed, it's a major point of the story that he fails to recognise the saintliness of his father, his mother's goodness, the way in which friends try to help and the frequent way headmasters and registrars of colleges go out of their way to bend the rules to accommodate his selfish egotism.[66]

It is this "selfish egotism" that makes Duncan Thaw obnoxious and the reader incapable of relating to him. As Isobel Murray points out: "Duncan Thaw in *Lanark* has many of the hallmarks of the Justified Sinner".[67] In a way, the balance is redressed in *1982 Janine* when Jock reassesses his feelings for his parents. However, Lanark and Thaw are not completely negative characters. Isobel Murray and Bob Tait are correct in identifying some hope for human understanding in the novel:

> [I]n so far as there is a central hope which is explored, illuminated and then dashed in *Lanark*, it is the hope of all the male protagonists (Thaw, Lanark, 'the author'/the author) that they might find a basis for the sharing of human bonds of trust and care.[68]

Alasdair Gray finds that concepts of heaven and hell are interesting:

> … well human beings do find them interesting. That's why they have been invented so many of their stories are about forms of heaven and hell [sic]. I'm not a religious person, but I regard the constructions of heaven and hell as important, in fact the main human business. I don't see it as being other worldly.[69]

---

[66] Douglas Gifford, "Fifty Years of Scottish Fiction". *Books in Scotland* 15 (Summer 1984), p. 15.
[67] Isobel Murray, "Slippery summit of ambition", rev. of *The Fall of Kelvin Walker*. *The Scotsman*, 23 March 1985.
[68] Isobel Murray and Bob Tait, *Ten Modern Scottish Novels*. (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1984), p. 228.
[69] Alasdair Gray, interview by Neil Irons, p. 5

Lanark and Thaw are to blame for collaborating to create their own Hell. Even though Thaw and Lanark want love and trust, they are unable to provide these themselves as they are inherently selfish.

For Gray this is true of Lanark, Thaw and Jock McLeish: "there are very large connections between everyone's hell and their neighbour's".[70] In *Lanark*, we encounter the same type of situation that Gray identifies in *1982 Janine*. Both characters consider themselves somehow above the rest:

> I had the notion of a - I suppose I was really thinking of myself at the time - it was the idea of somebody who had a smug sense of him being potentially greater than anybody, which he could only maintain by being nobody. [71]

Lanark and Thaw think they can avoid the constraints society forces on its members. However, they can only find a certain degree of happiness within that system of values which they cannot accept and which they reject. Lanark sees work, time and love as oppressive:

> Sludden thinks I am content with too little. I believe there are cities where work is a prison and time a goad and love a burden, and this makes my freedom feel worthwhile.
> (*L*,23)

However, fifty pages later these words evoke freedom and self-satisfaction:

> "Yes, it's a comic word. We're all forced to define it in ways that make no sense to other people. But for me freedom is …"
> He thought for a while.
> "… life in a city near the sea or near the mountains where the sun shines for an average of half the day. My house would have a living room, big kitchen, bathroom and one bedroom for each of the family, and my work would be so engrossing that while I did it I would neither notice nor care if I was happy or sad."
> (*L*, 74)

---

[70] Alasdair Gray, interview by Neil Irons, p. 5.
[71] Alasdair Gray, "Alasdair Gray Interviewed', interview by Kathy Acker. *Edinburgh Review* 74 (1986)

Lanark rejects the synthetic stupor and alienation of those living in the mohomes and whose only freedoms are provided by screens showing bucolic scenery or escapist violence. He also refuses the cosy life of the Institute where people cannot bear to watch a similar screen, because they are already drugged by having all their needs catered. Therefore, Lanark refuses to be stupefied by fantasies and also refuses to accept the status quo the Institute represents. His wish to escape from what he considers as traps is reflected in Ozenfant's remark about dragons that grow wings, like Rima. "Only unusually desperate cases have wings, though they cannot use them". (*L*,67) Their wish to fly and escape from reality is a cruel contrast to their being trapped in their armour. Rima, like Lanark, wants to escape not only from other people but also from herself, as Thaw had done.

Political, economic, sociological and emotional systems and their discourses construct an individual's identity. In *Lanark* Thaw and Lanark are confronted with different types of discourse, the familiar, the education system, religion, institutions and the political. Both have their identities constructed and limited by them. The tall man suggests Lanark join the Army, (*L*,29) the Institute classifies him first as a patient (*L*, 53) and later as a doctor, (*L*, 59) the structure of the family makes him a father, (*L*, 421) the Author appropriates them as his own creation, (*L*, 481) and lastly a group of politicians name him Provost Lanark of Greater Unthank. (*L*, 464) In the Thaw narrative, the pressure exerted on Thaw by family and society to get "certificates" exemplifies the power of discourses on the individual. Mr Meikle, his English teacher, tells Thaw:

> "Remember, Duncan, when most people leave school they have to live by work which can't be liked for its own sake and whose practical application is outside their grasp. Unless they learn to work obediently because they're told to, and for no other reason, they'll be unfit for human society."
> (*L*,168)

Each of these discourses addresses Lanark and Thaw and each imposes a different identity on them. *Poor Things* also explores this issue. Bella Baxter has not only her identity but also her body created by a male Other. Lanark knows that the power of language is not innocuous: "Talk, I suppose, is a way of defending and attacking...". (*L*,73) Failure to find fulfilment is due to the protagonists' inability to adapt themselves to those discourses, that is, to the Law, which is established through the power of social and moral conventions.

Lanark, then, presents the frustrated search for unity and wholeness of a man – Duncan Thaw / Lanark – who is unable to come to terms and accept the identity imposed on him by the Other. The impossibility of "unity" has its roots in the perception that others have of Thaw and Lanark. Neither of them will ever achieve their object of desire because they are unable to relate to the Other. *Lanark* seems to suggest that they could have fulfilled it had they complied with the laws of society. This conflict is acutely exemplified in Thaw's unsuccessful relationships with women:

> "I see no way out, no way out. I want to be close to Kate, I want to be valued by her, I suppose I want to marry her. What bloody good is this useless wanting, wanting, wanting?"
> (*L*,174)

However, Lanark and Thaw have not embarked upon any kind of personal crusade against the structures of personal and collective alienation. Even Lanark's obsession with time and clocks, with which no one bothers any longer in Unthank, paradoxically reveals his yearning for a normal, ordinary life with few surprises:

> "But why do you like daylight? We're well lit by the usual means."

> "I can measure time with it. I've counted thirty days since coming here. maybe I've missed a few by sleeping or drinking coffee, but when I remember something I can say, 'It happened two days ago,' or ten, or twenty. This gives my life a feeling of order".
> (*L*,5)

In spite of Lanark's struggle, a sense of fulfilment is not totally denied to him. Lanark may not have achieved what he was searching for but he dies content because he has managed to see glimpses of it. Throughout the novel we find moments in which he attains for a split second a glimpse of completeness. One such instance is his contemplation of a brief dawn at the beginning of chapter Two: "This race with the wind toward a fading dawn was the finest thing he had done since coming to that city". (*L*, 11-12) Also there is the episode with his son Alexander climbing a mountain which is foreseen in the Thaw narrative. After Thaw has been asked to contribute a story to the school magazine he feels euphoric: "The elation in his chest recalled the summit of Rua. He remembered the sunlit moor and the beckoning white speck and wondered if these things could be used in a story and if Kate Caldwell would read it and be impressed". (*L*, 154) The only instances of true happiness in Lanark's life are related to the birth of his son and the moment of awareness of his own death. When he discovers that Rima is pregnant he cannot help laughing, "for he felt a burden lifted from him, a burden he had carried all his life without noticing". (*L*, 386) The supreme moment of near perfection comes, as well, in connection with his son:

> Up the left-hand curve, silhouetted against the sky, a small human figure was quickly climbing. Lanark sighed with pleasure, halted and looked away into the blue. He said, "Thank you!" and for a moment glimpsed the ghost of a man scribbling in a bed littered with papers. Lanark smiled and said, "No, old Nastler, it isn't you I thank, but the cause of the ground which grew us all. I have never given you much thought, Mr. cause, for you don't repay that kind of effort, and on the whole I have found your world bearable rather than good. But in spite of me and the sensible path, Sandy is reaching the summit all by himself in the

> sunlight; he is up there enjoying the whole great globe that you gave him, so I love you now. I am so content that I don't care when contentment ends. I don't care what absurdity, failure, death I am moving toward. Even when your world has lapsed into black nothing, it will have made sense because Sandy once enjoyed it in the sunlight."
> (*L*, 515)

Thaw's paintings reflect this urge for plenitude as well as its failure. He pretends to embrace in his paintings the totality of what he wants to express with the result that he never finishes what he sets out to achieve:

> The enlarged landscape would show Blackhill, Riddrie, the Campsie Fells, the Cathkin Braes and crowds from both sides mixing around the locks in the middle. Over 105 square feet of canvas he wove, unwove and rewove a net of blue, grey and brown guidelines. He was contemplating them glumly one night when McAlpin entered and said, "What's wrong?"
> "I wish the shapes weren't so restless."
> "A landscape seen simultaneously from above and below and containing north, east and south can hardly be peaceful. Especially if there's a war in it."
> (*L*, 287)

That is the reason why he wants to paint the mural depicting the Creation in the condemned church: "The Old Testament has everything that can be painted in it: universal landscapes and characters and dreams and adventures and histories". (*L*, 325)

For all its complex structure and genre combination, *Lanark* illustrates the common topic of the protagonist's quest for happiness. Alison Lumsden has indicated that "while the vast economic and political structures which form systems of entrapment … may be difficult, if not impossible, to challenge, the individual may nevertheless find some kind of freedom *within* these frameworks".[72] It rather seems the case that Lanark/Thaw would only be able to achieve "humanity" by accepting these structures. Lanark/Thaw consciously

---

[72] Alison Lumsden, "Innovation and Reaction in the Fiction of Alasdair Gray", in G. Wallace and R. Stevenson, p. 118.

reject the systems that may restore them from their ex-centricity, yet they unconsciously pursue a role in them, as these systems are able to provide the characters with some sort of stability. Therefore, at the core of *Lanark* lies a paradoxical situation. Systems which entrap the individual provide him/her with the sole opportunity of social and emotional realisation. In *Lanark*, then, fulfilment can only be achieved not through an idealistic confrontation with the systems that shape society and the subject, but by belonging to and accepting those same systems. This is exemplified by Sludden who succeeds in obtaining what Lanark fails to achieve. Lanark strives to attain happiness through love and work which for Sludden are "ways of mastering people", and so represent and embody power:

> "By work I don't mean shovelling coal or teaching children, I mean work which gives you a conspicuous place in the world. And by love I don't mean marriage or friendship, I mean independent love which stops when the excitement stops."
> (*L*, 5-6)

Sludden succeeds in conquering power and Lanark fails; the search for Life is the search for Power. Without love you do not master or are mastered, therefore, you don't belong to the power game, you are neither Master nor Slave. In fact, Sludden departs from a position more radical and marginal than that of Lanark. He refuses to see the need of bourgeois institutions such as work and a disciplined life. Progressively and without many scruples he manages to move into a position of privilege and success, having everything Lanark aims at, a family and a comfortable home. The Institute is repulsive to Lanark because it is a literal metaphor of capitalist society, the exploitation of human beings by other human beings. However, for Rima it is a safe and comfortable place in which they may have been happy if they did not ask themselves too many questions.

Eventually, Rima will leave Lanark for Sludden because he represents the adaptability to these systems of entrapment. Sludden's success and Lanark's failure foreground the paradox in the novel. Those who, like Sludden, learn how to enter and play the power game will be able to thrive within the power systems. There is no hope for those who like Lanark and Thaw are unable or unwilling to join in.

Therefore, Lanark fails in his search for fulfilment because he is unable to relate to the Other. He sees that Other as a threat to his freedom. "I want to be free, and freedom is freedom from other people!" (*L*,70). He excludes himself from and rejects any sort of relationships with others. He admits to himself that "'You watched the sky because you were too cowardly to know people'". (*L*,14) By cutting off the possibility of meaningful personal relationships he is renouncing ever knowing himself. Lanark shares with other of Alasdair Gray's characters – such as Jock McLeish in *1982 Janine* – an inability to display anger or bitterness. Inability to express his feelings and communicate with people affects his own sanity. Lanark's and Thaw's identities are fragmentary because they are unable to address the Other that would be able to bestow identity upon them. Therefore, Lanark finds himself restless "whenever his thoughts blundered on the question of who he was"(*L*, 15) and is unable to describe himself. (*L*, 67)

Initially, Gray presents Lanark/Thaw entrapped in a spider's web of social, economic and emotional systems. Lanark/Thaw refuse to accommodate themselves to these external structures; the characters struggle to preserve their independence. The conclusion the novel reaches, perhaps in spite of itself, is that Lanark/Thaw's chance for happiness lies, precisely, in their success in becoming

part of that system and not, as the novel pretends to demonstrate on its surface, in shunning the Other. Lanark/Thaw refuse to have their identities imposed and formed by others, and therefore invent their own. Even after he admits to not being able to identify himself, he refuses to be given a name by Social Security and names himself, thus refusing to be named by the system. This refusal contrasts with the answer he receives after asking somebody the name of the city he is in – "Mr. Lanark, I am a clerk, not a geographer". (*L*, 22) He receives a similar answer when he wants to know how deep down the Institute is – "I don't know. I'm a doctor, not a geologist". (*L*, 58) Lanark's lack of identity is opposed to the interlocutor's definite one. Lanark very often feels that he has been forced by society to become what he did not want: "I was a writer once and now I'm a doctor, but I was advised to become these, I never wanted it. I've never wanted anything long. Except freedom". (*L*, 74) There is a clash between what he considers himself to be and what others see and want to impose as his own identity. As Rima puts it: "Names are nothing but collars men tie round your neck to drag you where they like". (*L*, 73) From this gap between the internal and the external that Thaw/Lanark refuse to fill stems the question of fragmented identity in *Lanark*. Lanark seeks an ideal image of himself which he is unable to fulfil because it is one that does not match the identity others force on him. There is a break between his ideal identity and his projected one. The image Lanark/Thaw has of himself is false, one that can never be achieved:

> He saw himself at the school of art, a respected artist among artists: prominent, admired, desired. He entered corridors of glamorous girls who fell silent, gazing at him and whispering together behind their hands. … He soared into dreams of elaborate adventure all dimly associated with art but culminating in a fancy that culminated all his daydreams.
> (*L*, 213)

> (Duncan) meant to forge a new, confident, sardonic, mysterious character for himself; ....
> (*L*, 224)

> Pausing outside the door he made his face expressionless, softened it with a thoughtful frown and entered. There was an explosion of laughter....
> (*L*, 240)

He wishes for a match between the ideal image he has of himself and the one that other people have of him. However, Lanark/Thaw will never be able to belong to these systems that seem to entrap them because they are unable to relate to this vast Other outside themselves, or as Nastler puts it, in a more sentimental way, they are incapable of love. The very same systems that entrap the individual enclose their freedom. Lanark /Thaw belong outside the system; therefore, it is not surprising that, unconsciously, they long to belong to it.

Colin Manlove writes that:

> In *Lanark* as a whole we are thus given opposed views of human nature: one, that it is trapped and driven by society; the other, that it defeats itself. And we will find that in fact the novel is pervaded by such incompatible views and realities – indeed that it is part of its nature as fantasy to offer not only alternative words but alternative philosophies.[73]

As we find in others of Gray's novels generally the only way of achieving self-knowledge is through fantasies in particular of power and sex. Duncan Thaw, Harry and Jock McLeish create their own alternative reality because they feel at odds with society. David Danow explores this point when he claims that permeating literature

> is the need – against great odds imposed as much by historical and political upheaval as by natural event – to survive. Survival, after all, is an overriding

[73] Colin Manlove, (1994), p. 201.

> theme. And one possible mode of self-preservation is to engage the realm of the creative imagination.[74]

This is one of the central topics in the novels I am dealing with. Alasdair Gray uses creative imagination as a process to self-knowledge.

---

[74] David K. Danow, p. 69.

Chapter II: Deidealisation in *1982 Janine*

1982 Janine[1] was published in 1984 and is, despite Alasdair Gray's dislike for interior monologue,[2] his best work.[3] The origin of the story relies on an episode in Gray's life. A lecturer in art appreciation, he found himself obliged to spend time in hotels where he had no-one to talk to; and this is the situation in which Jock finds himself at the beginning of the novel.[4] The action takes place in a hotel room in Greenock during the night of 25th to 26th March 1982 and is in the form of an interior monologue by the main character, Jock McLeish.

It is structured in two sections, the first of which is what could be labelled psychic mimesis. It is a conglomerate of present and past tenses and includes Jock's fantasies saturated with episodes and characters typical of pornographic

---

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

[2] "*1982 Janine* is a first person narrative from a single view point, the kind of book I used to dislike and had no intention of writing". Alasdair Gray, "The Devil's Audience", interview in *The Printer's Devil. A Magazine of New Writing*. Issue D (1994), p. 24.

[3] "I was able to say all the things I believe in from the standpoint of bitter invective. I feel it's my best book". Alasdair Gray, interview by M. Crawford and J. Brown, p.16.
"I think *1982 Janine* is my best, because … it's shorter than the other one. And also I think I managed to get away from the 'me' persona, … anyway, away from the semi-autobiographical Thaw bits in *Lanark*". Alasdair Gray , interview by S. Figgis and A. McAllister, p. 19.

[4] "I thought of the story eight or nine years ago in the Waverley Hotel Dumfries, where I stayed overnight once a week to give extra-mural lectures in art appreciation. I had nobody to talk to, and usually drunk [sic]a few large brandies then went to bed with a triple-brandy, a pint and my thoughts. And I imagined a Scottish alcoholic, respectable, hugely inhibited, holding a decent job, who maintains a secret feeling of superhuman superiority to the universe. I meant him to have no sex-life atall [sic], and meant the whole portrait to be two or three pages long, because like yourself, I don't much care for interior monologue. … I decided to make my man more real by giving him all the small raw messy casual sexual adventures which never occur to me when I review my sex-life as a whole. And suddenly thought (with the feeling of freedom which bursts in at a real new idea) that I should also give him the detailed fetichistic porn fantasies which have consoled my own loneliest times. … Four years ago, when *Lanark* was completed, and rejected by Quartett books, who had shown such a positive interest in it, I decided viciously (since I was short of money, owed a lot of it, and could not even get work as a clerk or a telephonist) to write a vicious commercial book. And achieved a few chapters before I got the university job. And did not burn them".
Alasdair Gray , MS letter to Tina Reid, (nd). Accession 8799, folder n° 36. p. 2. National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh.

fiction. The second part is organised in a chronological fashion and is largely autobiographical.

As Gray himself has pointed out, there is an affinity between *1982 Janine* and *Lanark*. [5] The structure of both novels is very similar, the action plunges *in medias res* and then works backwards. In *Lanark* the reader encounters Lanark in Unthank and only after some one hundred pages does s/he read about his past self Thaw. In *1982 Janine* the reader can only fully understand Jock`s personal turmoil after reading chapter Twelve. However, in contrast to *Lanark*, the treatment of time in *1982 Janine* is more traditional. The synthesis of two different narratives – a realist and a pornographic one – that are intertwined in the first part of the novel reaches a climax in a typical postmodern section where Jock talks with God (end of chapter Eleven). After such postmodern fireworks, the narrative then moves into a realistic, chronological form.

Jock McLeish is an alcoholic who, as he himself admits, has a problem with sex but not with alcohol: "My problem is sex, not alcohol. I am certainly alcoholic, but not a drunkard". (*J*,12) He enjoys devising pornographic stories that resemble "a combination of *Playboy* and *Dallas*"[6] and in which women are usually mistreated and raped. Despite his drinking and fantasising, he has succeeded in keeping an appearance of normality about him: his "self-control is perfect", (*J*,12) and his job as a security systems engineer has never been affected, until now. "In Gray's fiction", according to George Donaldson and

---

[5] Gray has suggested that if *1982 Janine* is, like *Lanark*, "read in one order but eventually thought of in another" (*L*, 483), that is, starting with Chapter Twelve it may be less "hard to take". particularly for women. Alasdair Gray, interview by S. Figgis and A. McAllister, p. 19.
[6] Christopher Harvie, "North Sea Oil and Scottish Culture", in Susanne Hagemann , p. 177.

Alison Lee, "maintaining what seems to be incontrovertibly normal leads to repression and violence".[7] We have seen exactly this situation in *Lanark* where the pressures of achieving love and success in his work become too great for Thaw to bear. Similarly, in *Something Leather*, June eventually finds an escape from daily routine in sadomasochistic fantasy. Like Duncan Thaw, Bella, the female protagonist of *Poor Things*, commits suicide when she finds it impossible to cope with her life as a Victorian wife.

Through this particular night during which the novel takes place Jock drinks whisky, fantasises about women, reflects upon his miserable life and deplores the state of Scotland. Early in the morning he tries to put an end to his misery with an attempt to commit suicide. However, after the intervention of God he forces himself to vomit the pills he has taken. In the second part of the novel he finds the courage to face his past life by recounting it in "the difficult old fashioned way" (*J*,192) and accepting his mistakes. This takes the form of a typical realist narration and follows a chronological pattern. In a confessional mode, Jock talks to himself facing the mirror of his past. The novel ends with the suggestion that Jock has regained some control over his life.

As with *Something Leather*, one of the aspects of the novel that has attracted more attention, particularly at the time of its publication, is the author's use of pornographic material. Even Gray expected the novel to be "execrated".[8] Indeed, critics such as Stephen Boyd have considered *1982 Janine* a

---

[7] George Donaldson and Alison Lee, "Is Eating People Really Wrong? Dining with Alasdair Gray", p. 155.

[8] "Because of the porny bits. I was so old fashioned that I did not notice they were now fashionable" Alasdair Gray, answer to questionnaire sent by E.M. (May 1997)

pornographic novel. In his article "Black arts: *1982 Janine* and *Something Leather*" he examines the pornographic aspect of the two novels. For him, Jock McLeish is not only a consumer but also a producer of "the second-worst kind of pornography … that which proffers images of violence against women".[9] He concedes that *1982 Janine* is an allegory of the state of Scotland but still a pornographic one. Humour and pathos do not constitute an adequate excuse for Boyd. "A book may be funny or touching at one moment" he writes "and thoroughly pornographic at the next, which is the case here."[10] He acknowledges that pornography is used in the novel "as a means of researching the truth about Jock", by which he means that his fantasy world "must not be seen in a wholly negative way".[11] However, overemphasising and misunderstanding the pornographic aspect of Gray's novels – particularly *1982 Janine* and *Something Leather* – can only act as a distraction from their genuine subject-matter which is the search for and construction of a new self by the protagonist. Indeed, "the full power and feeling of this novel isn't fully appreciated unless it's also understood as a final and therapeutic confession".[12]

There is no doubt that Gray is making use of pornographic imagery in the novel. The pornographic sections are Jock's fantasies but they play a very different role from the typical obscene material in truly pornographic novels. In

---

[9] Stephen Boyd, "Black Arts: *1982, Janine* and *Something Leather*", in R. Crawford and T. Nairn, p. 110.
[10] Stephen Boyd, "Black Arts: *1982, Janine* and *Something Leather*", in R. Crawford and T. Nairn, p. 111.
[11] Stephen Boyd, "Black Arts: *1982, Janine* and *Something Leather*", in R. Crawford and T. Nairn, p. 116.
[12] Douglas Gifford, "Private Confession and Public Satire in the Fiction of Alasdair Gray". *Chapman* 50-51 (Spring 1987), p. 115.

Jock's search for a new self, pornography – as a form of fantasy – plays a central role. As in the three other novels we are examining, Gray uses in *1982 Janine* a shocking device in order to explore the inner conflicts of the protagonist. He has used the issue of madness and social inadequacy in *Lanark*, homosexuality and sadomasochism in *Something Leather*, and in *Poor Things* he uses the Gothic motif of the monster.

In the same way that *Lanark* is not science fiction, *1982 Janine* is not pornography even though it makes use of it. It is not about *women* being raped and sexually exploited by *men*, it is about *Jock* being raped and exploited, and Jock exploiting and manipulating other people. Pornography plays a key role in *1982 Janine* – of that there can be no doubt – but not as an excuse to titillate the reader. Instead, it is used as an expression of the misuse people make of other people. Pornography, then, is used by Jock as a way "to relate to [his] environment and exorcise some of its power over [him]".[13]

Alasdair Gray, through Jock, is using and abusing the clichés of pornographic aesthetics in a fashion similar to the use of sadomasochism in *Something Leather*. Jock is a user and producer of pornography but he is not a typical pornographer. In fact, Jock, like Gray, dismisses Sade as "disappointing", and considers *Story of O* boring except for the first few pages.[14] For Jock, pornography is not "dramatic enough" and uses "too few characters". (*J*, 28) Jock is dissatisfied with the very characteristics that constitute pornographic literature:

> One feature of this branch of literature – no doubt one of its attractions for devotees, who do not like surprises – is an incredible monotony in situations,

---

[13] Peter Michelson, p. 38.
[14] "I find Sade a bore". Alasdair Gray, answer to questionnaire sent by E.M. (May 1997)

> descriptions, and activities. The men are identical, tireless in sexual prowess; the women are all the same, insatiable.[15]

According to its definition, pornography's only aim is to provoke sexual pleasure and reach a climax. Jock's view of pornography demonstrates that he is not using his fantasies to that particular end. According to him, the pornographic author "has only one sort of climax in mind, and reaches it early, and can only offer more of the same with variations which never excite as much again". (*J*, 28-9) Jock, on the contrary, tries to avoid reaching any sort of climax because it only engenders feelings of loneliness, despondency and emptiness. (*J*, 55-56)

Pornographic fiction belongs to the field of fantasy. This particular kind of fiction is not only "generally devoid of reality" but also "purposely distort[s] reality in order to better suit the over-all purpose of this type of literature as psychological aphrodisiacs".[16] However, Gray in this novel uses pornography as an extended notion of reality. The fantasies in Jock's head are part, and a very real one indeed, of his daily life. Writing about the use of subjective reality in Postmodernist fiction, James Higgins says:

> The new narrative also extends the scope of realism by according to the world of the mind the same status as to that of the physical and social world. Subjective reality is treated as no less real than so-called objective reality, and what is thought, felt or imagined is recorded as if it were literally true.[17]

Gray uses pornography as a form of fantasy in the same way that he uses other types of fantasy in his fiction. Fantasy is central to understanding the characters

---

[15] David Loth, *The Erotic in Literature. A Historical Survey of Pornography as Delightful as it is Indiscreet*. (New York: Dorset Press, 1961), p. 202.
[16] Eberhard and Phyllis Kronkhausen, *Pornography and the Law. The Psychology of Erotic Realism and Pornography*. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1959), p. 285.
[17] James Higgins, "Spanish America's New Narrative", in Edmund J. Smyth, p. 96.

in novels such as *Lanark*, *Something Leather* and *Poor Things*. Similarly, Jock's pornographic fantasies have a role to play in his life; they serve a purpose and are justified. Characters like Jock and Lanark are in search of wholeness. In *Lanark* this quest is expressed externally, as a journey to other worlds. Jock's trip, however, is a labyrinthine voyage of internal discovery.

As Ian A. Morrison writes:

> We find almost immediately we open the book that the story of the novel is again to be told using the resource of fantasy as a means of illuminating the true meaning behind the events of its "real", material world. A series of fantastical narratives (Jock's pornographic daydreams) again provide a more objective view of this material world than the traditionally realistic narrative, which this time holds a central position in the novel, can.[18]

Instead of offering the reader gratuitous porn, Jock's fantasies uncover the workings of a mind struggling to come to terms with and defeat its own ghosts. Those ghosts form a black hole in his brain "where light once shone, a hole which will get larger day by day until everything I know, everything I am has slid into it". (*J*,113) In the case of *1982 Janine*, Jock's use of this particular type of fantasy helps him analyse his present life and relate his problems to his past life and, hopefully, at the end of the book face his future. As Manlove points out, Scottish fantasy has an inward looking aspect and this is patent in this novel in which we see the internal journey of self discovery of an individual who is entangled in a life of fantasy.[19] In this chapter I intend to show how the use of pornography as a type of fantasy is used by the author to explore and resolve the inner conflicts of the protagonist.

---

[18] Ian Alexander Morrison, p. 95.
[19] Colin Manlove, 1994, p. 11.

For Boyd, however there is a "subtle propriety" to Gray's use of pornographic elements. After all MacDiarmid used them as well.[20] Gray himself acknowledges his indebtedness to Hugh MacDiarmid's *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* in the epilogue to the novel. The poem bears a great influence on *1982 Janine*. For John Linklater it is the closest work in fiction to MacDiarmid's poem.[21] Both works are written in search of the protagonists' identity. Jock, like "the drunk man", tries to "*seek, in this captivity, / To pierce the veils that darklin fa.'*"[22] At the beginning of the novel, Jock struggles with his brain so that the veils that cover the past stay intact. He uses erotic fantasies as a barrier against memory because these are easier to understand than the real narratives of everyday life:

> Real people are inexplicable. Since I cannot understand myself, how can I understand others? We are mysteries, every one of us. No wonder we turn from ordinary facts of life to religions, philosophies, stories, films and fantasies. These can be completely understood because people have made them for people.
> (*J*,100)

The first words of the novel (excluding the epigraph from Valéry) in the Table of Contents, already point in this direction. Jock wants "to be anyone, anywhere" (Table of Contents) because not wanting to confront his true self he chooses to escape into a world of fantasy. Pornography plays a key role in the process of fleeing from his self. He refuses to remember; he desperately wants to forget. Pornographic fantasies, together with alcohol, consciously help to submerge his

---

[20] Stephen Boyd, "Black Arts: *1982, Janine* and *Something Leather*", in R. Crawford and T. Nairn, p. 108.
[21] John Linklater, "Bondage of Jock McLeish", rev. of *1982 Janine*. *Glasgow Herald*, 14 April 1984.
[22] Hugh MacDiarmid, *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*. Annotated Edition by Kenneth Buthlay. *The Association for Scottish Literary Studies* 17 (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987), ll. 205-206.

memories. He enjoys these erotic fantasies but at the same time struggles with them because they conceal his monsters. Jock's erotic fantasies do not make him free, they cripple him. He may think at the beginning of the night that his fantasies are a way of escaping reality but they are not. Those erotic dreams are the products of his inner conflicts.

However, only by making the effort to remember will he be ready to move on at the end of the night and recuperate his past life. Jock finally admits to himself that he has a problem. Pornography is not, as he has tried to fool himself, a way of forgetting but a representation of the problem. He has to admit to himself that what he considered harmless fantasising encloses his personal ghosts.

Madan Sarup emphasises the importance of remembering in the construction of a new identity:

> An important aspect to the construction and negotiation of identity is the past-present relation and its reconciliation. The past figures importantly in people's self-representations because it is through recollections of the past that people represent themselves to themselves. We know that the past always marks the present, but often the past consists of a selectively appropriated set of memories and discourses. This may be because the stories people tell of their pasts often have much to do with the shoring-up of their self-understanding.[23]

Unconsciously, Jock rewrites his inner conflicts in his pornographic fantasies. He also compensates for his real self by creating a new identity – that of a cruel master to his risk-loving girls.

---

[23] Madan Sarup, *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World.* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), p. 40.

Jock's problem is not that he is a pornographer, but that his pornography embodies his inner turmoil. His particular use of pornography is a reflection of his dilemmas. Therefore, after having come to terms with his past by the end of the novel, pornography has ceased to be a reminder of his internal conflicts. However, it does not look as if Jock has abandoned his pornographic fantasies. He is now just a common consumer of pornography.

1982 Janine is an interior monologue. However, the second half could be described as a first person narrative of a different kind, it is more impersonal, as if it had been edited for others to see. Jock's mind is the centre and origin of the story. There is an element of pornography about this fact as Jock is actually stripping his mind in front of the reader. The feeling that we are voyeurs peeping through a keyhole into something too private to look at is reinforced by Jock's obsession not to talk to other people in case he betrays himself. The epigraph from Paul Valéry is revealing in this context:

> There are boxes in the mind with labels on them: To study on a favourable occasion; Never to be thought about; Useless to go into further; Contents unexamined; Pointless business; Urgent; Dangerous; Delicate; Impossible; Abandoned; Reserved for others; My business; etcetera.

The epigraph exemplifies the difference between the first part of the novel and the second half. In the first part conflict is postponed, avoided, and never confronted openly. It is "dangerous, impossible", and therefore, "abandoned". The second part is constructed as if Jock knows that someone is watching. His story is "tidied up", as it is not only for himself – he has now made his life "his business" – but also for the others.

There is something paradoxical about the use of the technique of interior monologue, particularly when it appears in conjunction with postmodern

strategies such as those in chapter Eleven. For Brian McHale, such stylistic and graphic pyrotechnics make the process of reconstructing the world presented in the novel more difficult and therefore more visible.[24] The reader is suddenly confronted with the fictionality of the story, with the physical reality of the book. The Epilogue of *Lanark* has a similar effect of "awakening" the reader. However, what makes this postmodern strategy particularly striking in *1982 Janine* is that what it is interrupting is a flow of interior monologue. Therefore, a form of narration that induces a level of intimacy between text and reader reveals its pure fictionality. Typographical games such as these are very much in contrast with the high degree of honesty and sincerity that pervades Gray's work.

In the words of McHale, "the spacing-out of the text, along whatever axis or combination of axes, induces an ontological hesitation or oscillation between the fictional world and the real-world object – the material book".[25] Use of graphics in chapter Eleven not only shatters the intimacy between reader and text but also separates the section of the novel in which Jock is deluding himself with fantasies from the realist part in which he summons his past life. It is interesting to see how the break is produced by unsettling the reader from the comfortable world of fiction and confronting him/her with the "reality" of the text as an artefact. Not only is Jock being forced from the world of pleasurable fantasy into another more "real" world but so is the reader.

In view of the importance of the typographical text, I agree with Christopher Bittenbender when he writes that:

---

[24] Brian McHale, p. 156.
[25] Brian McHale, p. 184.

> Gray's fictions, in a very postmodern way, make the text itself a character in the literary event. The text itself becomes an additional voice in the polyphony and it carries on important dialogues with the reader, the hero, other characters within the work, as well as the author himself.[26]

As he adopts a confessional tone, Jock is simultaneously subject and object of his narrative. In chapter Twelve he eventually forces himself to tell his life story and, by contemplating himself as the object of that story, he will be able to (re)interpret himself.

Madan Sarup in his study of identity and culture stresses the importance of telling one's story in the process of constructing one's identity. For him,

> we are all … detectives looking for clues, little pieces of the jigsaw puzzle (stories, memories, photographs) about our parents and our childhood. The story gradually unfolds. But it does not only unfold; to some extent we construct our story, and hence our identity.[27]

Jock's autobiographical account is an act of interpretation by which he tries to construct his own identity as he tells his life story and reconstructs his past. The "little pieces of the jigsaw puzzle" that form the first part of the novel unfold into a coherent story. Jock is aware that the clue to his sanity is in retelling his past and in the process reconstructing himself. However, he finds the past too painful to remember:

> I am sick of fantasies. O I will return to them but later, please God much later. I don't want to remember the past either. The past is a flowering minefield. All the goodness I have known grows there but grows among explosives which drive shrapnel into my brain whenever I disturb them. Try thinking about the future. The future is nothing. Nada.
> (*J*,133)

For Sarup identity is

---

[26] J. Christopher Bittenbender, p. 172.
[27] Madan Sarup, (1996), p. 16.

> a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings blend and clash. These writings consist of many quotations from the innumerable centres of culture, ideological state apparatus and practices: parents, family, schools, the workplace, the media, the political parties, the state.[28]

In Jock's mind these "quotations" – mother, father, teacher, lovers, historical events and fantasy figures – form a chaotic muddle that only demonstrates in Jock's eyes that he is to blame not only for the mess his life has become but also for everything that is evil in the world:

> Thinking is a pain because it joins everything together until my mother father Mad Hislop Jane Russell mushroomcloud miniskirt tight jeans Janine dead friend Helen Superb Sontag editor sad lesbian police Big Momma and the whore under the bridge surround me all proving that I am a bad man, I am what is wrong with the world, I am a tyrant, I am a weakling, I never gave what they wanted, I grabbed all I could get.
> (*J*,66-67)

Jock will have to establish a new relationship with these aspects of his life – present and past, real and fantastic – in order to achieve self-understanding. He manages to do so by placing the figures in his life in their proper place. Bruce Charlton argues that "[w]hat Jock most fears" and what he really needs is "to connect his fantasies to ordinary life, to view his life all-at-once and see how it fits together".[29] However, Jock is striving to do exactly the opposite; he already knows that his fantasies are a reflection of his real life conflicts. He is aware that the only way to proceed is "to keep fantasy and reality firmly separate because surely that is the foundation of all sanity?" (*J*, 41) Pornography plays a major part in that process, as Jock disentangles real figures from fantasy ones. This is accomplished by using a realist mode in the second part of the novel, particularly

---

[28] Madan Sarup, (1996), p. 25.
[29] Bruce Charlton, "The World Must Become Quite Another: Politics in the novels of Alasdair Gray". *Cencrastus* 31 (Autumn 1988), p. 40.

chapter Twelve. By the end of the novel fantasy and reality have been separated and each is allocated a different place in Jock's mind.

As in *Lanark, Something Leather* and *Poor Things*, fantasy plays a fundamental role but reality is always firmly in the background and the reader is always aware of the realistic backdrop of the stories. It seems obvious that Gray considers fantasy central to the development of the human psyche and in the recreation of new identities. In his fiction, characters keep crossing the border between fantasy and reality, trying to find in an alternative world what this one denies them.

Jock's abuse of alcohol, and his erotic fantasies, mean that he leads a double life. His mental life compensates for and balances his real life and both are intimately linked by the question "Who holds the power?" Power relations are recreated mainly through language, through the psycho-narratives and characteristic designs of pornographic fiction: particularly bondage and through more straightforward biographical narrative. His fantasies reflect a sense of gender typical of pornographic fiction, the males are dominant, powerful figures whereas the women have to submit to their domination. His erotic fantasies always involve a prostitute or a prostitute-like figure who is raped and maltreated. In real life it is Jock who feels used as a prostitute. Therefore, the use of pornography is an indication of the kind of relationship Jock has experienced with women. Early in the novel he finds himself reflecting upon rape. Reality and fantasy figures become entangled as his imaginary rape of Superb brings to mind his own rape by one of his lovers, the editor:

> After Superb had been thoroughly raped in my absence I had meant to return and prepare her for other sorts of astonishment, but alas I did the job myself and

> now I feel like a miserable nothing. The editor made me feel like this whenever we made love.
> (*J*,58)

But it was not only the editor who raped him "three times to stop me raping her"; Helen, his wife, also raped him when she was "ready to leave". (*J*,59) Sontag – another of his brief lovers – did not rape him physically but intellectually. (*J*,60) However, his worst rape was by Helen's father when he burst into Jock's bedroom and demanded that he marry his supposedly pregnant daughter.

Jock's troubled notion of sex and sexual relationships is the result of an absence of mature and healthy relationships with women, with the exception of his first girlfriend Denny. Apart from his unsuccessful love life, Jock has been dominated by a series of power figures who have suppressed his emotional side and his self-respect. However, he eventually confronts and defeats these figures.

Jock's life has always revolved around two main axes: women and powerful father figures. These figures have dominated his life to the extent of wrecking it. The figures of the mother and father are the most important. Jock feels guilty about his father because he has become something his father would have despised, a cynical conservative. He also feels guilty about his mother because he has achieved exactly what his mother wanted for him: a secure job as a security systems supervisor that provides him with good money but that is killing him.

Alasdair Gray's comment about the man on the cover of the novel can be applied to Jock:

> … it occurred to me to use this figure slightly derived from Vitruvian Man as shown in Leonardo's sketch. But again in my version of it the notion was that instead of the intellectual man demonstrating that his body and proportions are the measure of the universe, he has drawn a careful little circle around himself which identifies the universe as shutting him in completely. It was the idea of measurement as restriction. That instead of that image that Michelangelo used, man as the measure of all things, and that Blake adapted to make 'Glad Day' and

> 'Apollo' and 'Los' and 'The Triumph of Imaginative Reason and Understanding in The World', instead this was a bloke who goes, 'Aha! Here I am and this is how it goes, here I am.' He's trapped himself in what he's able to measure. He's not content with it and knows it isn't enough.[30]

These figures have become obsessions that prevent him from achieving any successful relationship, particularly with women. Jock has mythified, magnified and deformed these images and only by deidealising them will he be able to exorcise them. Women, father figures, and even Scotland have been depleted of their original familiar significances and attained the condition of symbols. The gap created between the subject and the mythified object is such that they can no longer be perceived as familiar entities. Therefore, the connection between Jock and the objects of his mythification is based purely on what they represent for him: manipulation and rejection in the case of women figures and power in the case of the father figures.

The objects of this process of deidealisation are familiar ones such as Jock's mother, father, Mad Hislop – Jock's English teacher and possibly his real father – Denny (his first girlfriend), Helen (his ex-wife) and the rest of the women with whom he has ever been involved. The image of Scotland is, likewise, subjected to a process of what could be called "reversed deidealisation" as Jock will eventually reach a new vision of the nation by stripping all the myth and caricature bestowed on it. In the case of Jock's vision of Scotland, we see how the individual and the collective come together and one is reflected on the other.

Ian A. Bell points to this trend in contemporary Scottish fiction:

---

[30] Alasdair Gray , interviewed by S. Figgis and A. McAllister, p. 23.

> In all of these novels, whatever formal method they may adopt, the personal is always and unquestionably political. On examination it becomes obvious that by dramatising individual breakdowns and crises, and by elaborating these apparently peripheral and insignificant life histories, the newer Scottish novelists are articulating a wider collapse of confidence in the pseudo-coherent and totalising notions of national and individual identity put forward by the more popular writers on the so-called 'story of Scotland'.[31]

Mother, father, women and the nation constitute the cornerstones of Jock's existence. Each of them has dominated different stages of Jock's life, always succeeding in manipulating him emotionally. Jock has just become a lump of clay in their hands, modelled at their will. Interestingly enough however, Jock's process of deidealisation is actually a process similar to manipulation. Through the rewriting of his own history, he will recreate, resituate and master the figures that dominated him previously. By bidding farewell to them, these myths can become familiar figures once again. As Alison Lumsdem puts it, "Jock is released into temporality"; his past becomes a "past-tense narrative rather than an ongoing nightmare".[32] What Lumsden is suggesting is the difference between interior monologue of the first half and the first person narrative of the second. The first part is a nightmare in which real and imaginary characters are mixed; they are used and abused. In the second, they become disentangled and they are shown respect.

The Table of Contents anticipates these exorcisms: "and dismiss my father the teacher who struck my spark of manhood"; "Schweik helps me bid Dad good night"; "defeat Hislop and prepare to depart".

---

[31] Ian A. Bell "Imagine Living There: Form and Ideology in Contemporary Scottish Fiction", in Susanne Hagemann, p. 227.
[32] Alison Lumsden, "Innovation and Reaction in the Fiction of Alasdair Gray", in G. Wallace and R. Stevenson, p. 117.

By the end of the novel, these figures have regained what should have been their natural status as woman and father figures. By deidealising them, Jock eventually "resign[s] from being a character in someone else's fiction" (Table of Contents) and becomes his own author. Jock establishes himself as subject – not merely object – of his own story and establishes a new relationship with each of these figures.

Women are at the root of Jock's living hell. He admits that his "problem is sex, or if it isn't, sex hides the problem so completely that I don't know what it is". (*J*,16) His only healthy relationship was with Denny. He left her because he preferred Helen whom he mistakenly thought was glamorous and sophisticated. He was then forced by Helen's father to marry her because she thought she was pregnant. He felt trapped in that marriage and from that moment he has wanted "revenge on a woman who is not real". (*J*,16)

The idea of women is closely linked in Jock's mind with traps and clothes because his mother manipulated him as a child by always choosing what he could wear. One of the main thrills Jock gets from his pornographic fantasies is the opportunity to design elaborate – if predictable – clothing for his women. That this aspect of his fantasies is closely linked with the idea of his mother choosing clothes for him is seen in this quotation in which his fantasy runs into a memory of his childhood.

> But Janine is not (here come the clothes) happy with the white silk shirt shaped by the way it hangs from her etcetera I mean BREASTS, silk shirt not quite reaching the thick harness-leather belt which is not holding up the miniskirt but hangs in the loops round the waistband of the white suede miniskirt supported by her hips and unbuttoned as high as the top of the black fishnet stockings whose mesh is wide enough to insert three fingers I HATED clothes when I was young. My mother made me wear far too many of them, mostly jackets and coats.
> (*J*,18)

She also hindered his chance of a healthy childhood by keeping him indoors. Daydreaming of Hollywood actresses was a form of escape from his smothering if comfortable surroundings:

> My happiest moments were passed with that woman. She kept me indoors but she never interfered with my mind. Between the pages of a book I had a newspaper clipping to carry my thoughts miles and miles away, an advert for *The Outlaw* - MEAN! MOODY! MAGNIFICENT! above a photograph of Jane Russell, her blouse pulled off both shoulders, leaning back against some straw glaring at me with this inviting defiance.
> (*J*,19)

The only woman he has ever loved, Denny – his first girlfriend – made him feel common because she was an inarticulate working-class girl. Finally, Helen – his ex-wife – trapped him by pretending she was pregnant and like the rest of his "real" women used him as a prostitute. His married life with Helen is very similar to his comfortable but claustrophobic childhood. After his forced marriage to Helen he knows that "[f]rom now onward Glasgow and the universe would feel like my parents' house, and in some centre of myself a voice whispered, "Quite right too", and sniggered meanly". (*J*,301)

Therefore, he creates a world in which women are prostitutes, are raped and tortured, fall into traps because they are greedy, cowardly and lecherous. The roles have been reversed and he will exert his power over them by setting the traps and dressing them as prostitutes. Jock has duplicated the obsessions and nightmares of his reality into the characters of his fantasy life. He has never had the control of his own life so he relishes being the master of his imaginary sexual world. He is a ringmaster of his own private and squalid circus. Thus, by imagining women in perverse situations he has "that illusion of ABSOLUTE

MASTERY which real life has never never never allowed me in any way whatsoever". (*J*, 43)

Jock admits that he fell into the trap – "[w]e all have a moment when the road forks and we take the wrong turning" (*J*, 26) – and that he never tried to go back and correct it because he is a coward. He had the freedom to choose but he chose wrongly. He could have married Denny but he considered himself too good for her so he married Helen and fell into the trap. His erotic fantasies are full of deception. His victims are deceived – as he himself was by Helen – and driven to places from where there is no escape. As in the case of Superb, it is very often a known person – in this case her husband – who leads the victim to the trap. In Jock's case it was Helen. The woman who had looked so sophisticated ended up by driving him into the trap of a doomed marriage.

Early in the novel we realise that Jock is intimidated by women. He is confused by the invitation to sexual intimacy that their clothes seem to convey and the freezing rejection in their minds:

> Do I like women's clothes more than their bodies? Oh no, but I prefer their clothes to their minds. Their minds keep telling me, no thankyou, don't touch, go away. Their clothes say, look at me, want me, I am exciting. It would be perverse not to prefer their clothes to their minds.
> (*J*, 14)

The key role of clothes in Jock's imagination has already been described. Dressing someone or, rather, choosing what a person will wear, means, for Jock, to dominate and manipulate. The paragraph in which Jock tells us how his mother used to instruct him in which clothes he should wear is entitled "Clothes that are bondage". Bondage as clothes is an idea repeated in many of his stories. Here Janine's shoes will frustrate any attempt to escape from her trap:

> Each shoe is tied on by three slender white thongs with small gold buckles which fasten straight across the toes, diagonally over the arch of the foot, and encircle the ankle so that (how happy I am) if the car slows or stops she can't slip them off, fling open the door and run.
> (*J*, 20)

We have seen the power Jock's mother exerted on him through her choice of clothes. As a result, Jock feels the need to take revenge on his female characters by choosing, down to the finest detail, what they wear. This fetishism with clothes is a recurrent motif in all his fantasies. Silk blouses, unbuttoned suede miniskirts, black fishnet stockings, open-topped shoes and stiletto heels in all kinds of combinations and permutations become the uniform of his group of fantasy women. Obsession with clothes then, while a common fetishism in pornography and in Gray's work, particularly in *Something Leather*,[33] is in *1982 Janine* also an expressive aspect of Jock's personality and dilemmas. Clothes play a key role in his fantasies because in his real life clothing is closely linked to the idea of being manipulated by women.

Jock's life is sprinkled by a series of failures, a succession of traps that he has been unable or unwilling to avoid. Accordingly, he places his victims in situations from which they cannot escape. We cannot help noticing the ironic connection between Jock's job as a security systems engineer and his obsession with power and entrapment. Jock feels a compulsive need not to reveal his inmost thoughts, to keep everything in control within himself. He transforms this urge into his means of livelihood protecting not only his privacy but that of others

---

[33] There seem to be references to what will become *Something Leather* in *1982, Janine*. The most obvious one is a reference to the purchase of a leather skirt: "At last I found a shop run by a man who made leather clothes to order, and he had a specimen white suede miniskirt better than anything I ever imagined and just the right size for Sontag". (*J*,43) Also, there seems to be a similarity between Jock and the character of "Dad".

as well. Therefore, it is not surprising that *1982 Janine* is noticeable for its claustrophobic atmosphere. Everything takes place within enclosed spaces: the body of the novel is an interior dialogue taking place in the secrecy of Jock's skull during a very definite span of time – a single night – in a hotel room. This claustrophobic mood is rooted in Jock's memories of afternoons spent with his mother. Paradoxically this sense of entrapment is tinged with a feeling of cosiness:

> All I remember about sex with her [his mother] is, sitting on the opposite side of a room which felt like a prison ... a prison that gradually became comfortable, expansive and palatial as I imagined the games I would play with Jane Russell when we were married.
> (*J*,50)

All these real spaces have an evident parallel in the imagined locations where his erotic plots take place: the Forensic Research Association with its sinisterly corrupt police station; the enclosed wood that serves as a setting for Jock's blue movie; the cattle market where Janine / Nina are being driven, etc.... Jock has become a virtuoso of technological entrapment. Even his penchant for directing fantastic pornographic films is related to the question of mastery. By imagining these films he is not only in control of their protagonists, he can also "direct" his own idealised life in which he is in control of everything.

Concerning the process of reading, the use of film plots also involves a high degree of manipulation as the author is playing with different levels of narrations. "Cinematic discourse can be interpreted", McHale writes, "... as a series of metaphors for textual strategies; but it can also be read as the sign of a

narrative level interposed between the text and the 'real'".[34] By using an extra level of narrative, Gray is forcing the reader to go one layer deeper into the fiction. Not only is Jock directing the way his "characters" act, but the author is controlling the reading process by forcing the reader to read vertically as well as horizontally.[35]

As we have seen, the figure of the mother is of crucial importance: she represents power, manipulation and rejection. She has such an ascendancy over Jock that it will determine his relationships, or lack of them, with women. Her opinion of women – " I hate bloody women" (*J*, 23) – will become his own. Between Jock and his mother, the connection is not over-affectionate but it is certainly a strong one. Jock shares many of his mother's traits, particularly an acute sense of guilt. When Jock is confronted with Helen's pregnancy he feels that it is a punishment for that time of complete freedom when he "lived in a free vast universe with no limit to the things I might do, the love and comradeship I might enjoy". (*J*, 301) When things start going wrong for him he cannot help feeling as his "mother possibly felt one morning when the postman, delivering a parcel, told her it was going to be a fine warm summer day. She said grimly,

---

[34] Brian McHale, p. 129.

[35] The same effect is achieved in an episode near the end of the novel. Janine is reading a story:

> Janine in cowhide britches in Cadillac driven by Frank to a place called the Cattlemarket realises she is reading about Nina in Cadillac driven by Frank to a place called the Cattlemarket where Nina will at last stand in a line beside a woman who is Janine. Vertigo.
> (*J*, 331)

We are reading a story about someone imagining a fantasy in which a woman is reading a story which is *her* story. Using such a narrative strategy is a form of foregrounding the fictionality of the story. This recursive narrative technique can go indefinitely and its aim is to assert the authority of the author not only over his characters but over the reader.

"We'll pay for it".[36] (*J*, 253) For Jock she has never represented the familiar figure of the mother and has no maternal connotations. He admits that he has never been aware of loving his mother much. (*J*, 171) She is purely "the Woman", a dominant figure to whom each of the women he meets throughout his life is juxtaposed. From all the powerful figures that have governed his life that of the mother is the most significant as she represents both power and womanhood. Apart from Jock himself and Janine, her character is the first to appear in the novel. The first reference to her refers to her influence on Jock: "I HATED clothes when I was young. My mother made me wear far too many of them, mostly jackets and coats". (*J*, 18) Jock does not fully realise the grip of his mother's power over him. He considers that his mother dominated him only in an external way, by not letting him mingle with the miners' children, but that she permitted his mind to wander freely. (*J*, 19)

The truth, though, is that she fashioned his mind and made it identical to her own. Jock starts wondering what was going on in his mother's mind:

---

[36] This sentence could be taken from a poem by Alastair Reid called "Scotland".

> It was a day peculiar to this piece of the planet,
> when larks rose on long thin strings of singing
> and the air shifted with the shimmer of actual angels.
> Greenness entered the body. The grasses
> shivered with presences, and sunlight
> stayed like a halo on hair and heather and hills.
> Walking into town, I saw, in a radiant raincoat,
> the woman from the fish-shop. 'What a day it is!'
> cried I, like a sunstruck madman.
> And what did she have to say for it?
> Her brow grew bleak, her ancestors raged in their graves
> as she spoke with their ancient misery:
> 'We'll pay for it, we'll pay for it, we'll pay for it!'

Alastair Reid, "Scotland", in *Faber Book of Twentieth-Century Scottish Poetry*, ed. Douglas Dunn. (London: Faber & Faber, 1992), p. 246.

> What did my mother think as we sat on opposite sides of the kitchen, and she knitted and I mixed profit-and-loss arithmetic with a stormy wooing of Jane Russell? I've never wondered what happened in her head before.
> (*J*, 23)

Jock's mind is as much a mystery to the rest of the world as his mother's was to him. She was as unable as Jock to express her thoughts. He is the only one who knows that behind the mask of the trustworthy Jock lives the mind of a pornographic fantasiser and alcoholic. Twice in the course of the night he points to his anxiety about letting people know what is going on in his mind. "People who talk give themselves away all the time. I don't talk", (*J*, 13) and "I do not often talk because people who talk give themselves away all the time". (*J*, 162) Paradoxically, that is exactly what he is doing and what will help him face his private fears.

The first step in the process of deidealising the figure of the mother comes when he wonders, for the first time in his life, what happened in his mother's head. Between Jock and his mother, the intimate connection is clearly not based on a typical mother-son relationship but on the affinity between similar minds. As a consequence, a feeling of mutual betrayal on Jock's part is introduced: he feels deceived by his mother because she abandoned his father and him for another man. At the same time, he feels he has failed her because he has always chosen the sort of woman of whom his mother would have disapproved. However, both of them will succeed in escaping from their mental prisons, even if it is Jock's mother who has shaped his vision of women. He will see them as dominant figures who want to use him. Thus his feeling of being treated as a prostitute, and his fear of women's minds, – he will never be able to know what they are thinking. Only by seeing his mother as an ordinary woman and not as a

mythical figure will he understand women as women. Pornography and the figure of the mother are closely linked in Jock's psychology. The sort of pornography Jock favours combines desirable but despicable women with the motif of violence and entrapment.

The figure of the mother is also related to the use of violent pornography in a more intricate way. Jock's mother left him and his father for another man and Jock was never able to forgive her. At the railway station, where she hopes to say good-bye to him, his impulse is to force her to stay: "I would go and talk to her in a restrained way until the porter started slamming the doors for the train to leave, then I would embrace her, lock my hands behind her and refuse to let go". (*J*, 171) This unfulfilled wish is clearly repeated in one of his fantasies when Superb is being arrested by the police: "A white beam of torchlight strikes her face. Dazzled she feels something cold snap round her wrist, the other wrist is wrenched back and with another cold snap her arms are handcuffed behind her". (*J*, 36) Episodes like this one provide Jock with a pattern for his fantasies. He admits that his fantasies deal with binding women and preventing them from "going". These women have the choice to escape but they do not.

> The woman is corrupted into enjoying her bondage and trapping others into it. I did not notice that this was the story of my own life. I avoided doing so by insisting on the *femaleness* of the main character. The parts of the story which came to excite me most were not the physical humiliations but the moment when the trap starts closing and the victim feels the torture of being in two minds: wanting to believe, struggling to believe, that what is happening cannot be happening, can only happen to someone else.
> (*J*, 193-4)

He felt in that same predicament at the station. He was trapped into a decision whether to let his mother free or prevent her from leaving. He could have said goodbye to his mother but he did not. "It would not have made her miss the train

but she would have known I cared enough to say Goodbye". (*J*, 172) The doors of the train closed on him.

This paranoiac situation in which he sees himself as both subject and object of entrapment demands a way out. His mind and his fantasies had first seemed like a liberation from his sterile life, but now they have become a new prison. Fantasies are not an escape but an embodiment of his personal nightmares. Therefore, he overdoses in an attempt to commit suicide. This action is represented by a postmodernist typographical game called "The Ministry of Voices". (*J*, 178-185) In this passage various voices get mixed in Jock's head. Two of them are those of God and the Devil.[37] Gray justifies the use of typographical excess in the following way:

> so when telling a certain story (Janine) in which a man in a nervous breakdown suffers severe audio-hallucinations of a paranoic-schizophrenic sort, I realized that a typographical chorale ensemble would be a good amusing way of combining all my most self-contradictory and deeply felt obsessions – sex, politics, religion and the groans of the poor old body burdened by these. After which, what a relief to have some pages of blank paper – perfect peace at last.[38]

After his failed attempt to commit suicide, he finally reaches the decision to face his past life and bid farewell to some of the myths that torment him:

> It behoves a man every so often, from time to time, now and again, to speak out and inform the world (that is to say, himself) just what his game is; and if (having been carried by the prevailing current up shit creek after mislaying the paddle) he has no game of his own and finds life pointless, it even more behoves him to tell truthfully how he reached this pointless place in order to say Goodbye to it and go elsewhere. If he wants a change. Which I do.
> (*J*, 191)

---

[37] There is a note with directions to the typist in one of the manuscripts of the novel: "This is God talking, you see, and unlike the devil (who talks upside down) he is a chap without pretensions who rejects capital letters and punctuation". Accession 8799, folder 32. National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh.

[38] Alasdair Gray, interview by G. Norquay and C. Anderson, p. 8.

He uses a realistic narration in chronological fashion. For Madan Sarup this is the way we construct our identity:

> A (traditional) story has a discernible form: a beginning, a middle and an end. When asked about our identity, we start thinking about our life-story: we construct our identity at the same time as we tell our life-story. I want to underline the transformative power of telling one's story.[39]

The final step in the deidealisation process comes when Jock finally lets his mother "go" by giving Janine the ability to act freely at the end of the novel. Jock acknowledges his mother's right to be happy and take her own decisions however difficult they may have been: "My mother was brave, she deserved happiness too, I see that clearly now". (*J*, 169) He realises that his mother does not represent the figure of an ideal. She was just a normal woman like the rest bored by the sort of life she was obliged to lead. This knowledge will give him power over her.

It is important to notice that when we meet Jock he has reached the bottom of his private hell. Drink is beginning to affect his work. He has been caught shoplifting (ironically enough) and the last woman with whom he has tried to have some sort of sexual relationship is a prostitute who, to make matters worse, reminds him of Denny. His relationships with women have experienced a downward turn. On one extreme of his life is his mother, who for him represents the figure of the Woman, while at the other extreme is the prostitute and in between a series of relationships characterised by their increasing levels of wretchedness: Denny, Helen, Sontag, the Editor, etc. The figure of the prostitute has a double importance. She echoes Jock's own role in his relationships, as he

---

[39] Madan Sarup, (1996), p. 15.

considers himself treated as a prostitute by all the women he has met, except Denny. At the same time, the prostitute he meets under the bridge revives in his mind the ghost of Denny as he believes he can recognise her in the prostitute. Ironically, the only honest woman with whom he has ever established a relationship has become a prostitute and he feels it is his fault. In the same way that for Jock the figure of the mother incarnates the figure of the Woman, Denny represents his only truthful relationship. Therefore the encounter with the prostitute towards whom he has felt a closeness he had never felt with anyone else except Denny functions as the consummation of a circle as honest woman and whore become one.

Whereas he manages to deidealise the figure of the mother, Denny haunts him for ever. Once he realises that his mother deserved happiness he can say goodbye to her. Jock will never be able to say goodbye to Denny because he "will never discover what you did when you stopped crying my name, Denny". (*J*, 292) Unlike his mother, Denny is still a chapter from his life that cannot be closed properly.

The use of pornographic narrative patterns and imagery in the novel is significant as Jock is employing this form of fiction characterised by an idealisation of characters and situations in order to carry out the opposite process. In pornographic fiction the main importance of characters is that they are used as instruments of pleasure, hence they lack psychological depth and are invariably denied any chance of developing as characters. However, Jock is using a particular type of pornography. His fantasies are typically sadistic. Jock is seeking to obtain release through violence. It is important to point to the fact that

this deviant side of Jock's personality is totally psychological, that is to say, he is not a pervert or a violent man in real life. The female protagonists in these fantasies stand for all the women who have used him throughout his life. These women have let him down by not being like his mother, or rather his idea of his mother; therefore he is taking his revenge by punishing them in his mind. Moreover, his anguish in having to let his mother go forces him to retain his fantasy women. For that reason, Jock's fantasies do not have, in principle, the purpose of sexual arousal. They function as a compensatory power game: on the one hand he can rape and ill-treat his fantasy women as he has been by his real women, and on the other, he can retain his mother by tying them down. For the Kronhausens, pornographic books resemble fairy tales because "everything turns out according to one's fondest fancy and every erotic wish can be lived out without punishment or any unpleasant effects whatsoever".[40] It is this aspect of pornography that seems to attract Jock. In his fantasies he can become whoever he wants in a variety of similar scenarios and most importantly he can take revenge on the women who have hurt him in real life.

Nevertheless, the end of the novel shows an evolution in the use of pornographic material. By being freed of all his monsters he can stop using violence against imaginary women and can permit them to make their own choices. In his last fantasy, it is Janine who has taken control of the situation.

> Janine is worried and trying not to show it. She concentrates on the sound of two unfastened studs in her skirt clicking with each step she takes. "That's a sexy noise," a childish voice says, and giggles.

[40] Eberhard and Phyllis Kronkhausen, p. 265.

> 'Act calm,' thinks Janine. 'Pretend this is just an ordinary audition.' And then she thinks, 'Hell no! Surprise them. Shock them. Show them more than they ever expected to see.'
> (*J*, 341)

However, whereas he can free them from a previous need to torture and humiliate them, what he cannot achieve is their complete liberation from his mind: sadistic pornography has become simply "ordinary" pornography. He has managed that by disentangling in his mind pornographic characters who belong to fantasy from their relationship to real people. The Table of Contents makes clear that these are mixed in his mind. Jock, by suspiciously over-stressing the fact that there is no connection between real and fantasy characters reveals that he is, in fact, only trying to delude himself. For example, Superb becomes his ex-wife Helen: "A Superb housewife, ripe for pleasure and not atall like my wife Helen, sets out to enjoy herself but has trouble with the police and an unexpected miniskirt" (Table of Contents); his mother is Big Momma: "A lesbian policewoman who is not atall like my mother helps me lose control" (Table of Contents); his father and himself become Hugo and Cupid: "*Caught in Barbed Wire*: an open-air film in which Janine and Helga meet a small nasty boy and big nasty man who are not atall like me and my father the good socialist timekeeper" (Table of Contents).

Jock, then, uses imaginary women for both vengeance and as a barrier against pain caused by real women. Early in the novel he makes this clear: "But real women don't frustrate me because I have this dirty imagination". (*J*, 14) He is deceiving himself because his effort in trying to differentiate between real and fantasy women only demonstrates how mixed up they have become:

> Remember nobody but Jane Russell, I mean Superb, and mother, I mean Big Momma, why did I confuse my mother with Momma, there is NO CONNECTION ATALL, my mother was a respectable woman (until she ran

> away from home) and no lesbian (she ran away with a man) she was tall and not a bit fat, I got Momma's body from that Glasgow barmaid and the whore under the bridge AND MOMMA'S NATURE IS BASED ON NOBODY REAL ATALL.
> (*J*, 53)

Once he has decided to face his past life, he re-enacts one of his typical erotic fantasies. This time, though, he uses his real women as characters which shows that he has successfully untangled real from fantasy figures:

> Whoring. I have this delicious vision of all the women I ever liked. Jane Russell Denny Helen Diana Sontag the editor the whore under the bridge all all all stand in a row before me for inspection with their arms behind their backs to present their breasts in white cotton blouses …
> (*J*, 236)

Now Jock is free to continue imagining dirty but non-violent stories because he is in a position to dispense with the need for revenge. His erotic fantasies need no longer be used as a system of closed psychological vengeance but as sexually exciting material. Ian Alexander Morrison thinks that

> the fact that the novel ends with the continuation of his fantasy (on a more optimistic note, reflecting the changes he has effected in himself) seems to me an intimation that Gray sees an acceptance of his character's need for fantasy as being preferable to a condemnation of it on the grounds of its moral iniquity.[41]

I do not agree that Gray chooses to have Jock continue his pornographic fantasies as a way of avoiding condemning them as "iniquitous". I consider that choice to be more obvious in the case of sadomasochism and *Something Leather*. By having Jock continue with his fantasies, Gray is pointing to the fact that fantasy, whatever its type, is an essential part of life. Indeed, his last reference to Janine points to this change: "Oh Janine, my silly soul, come to me now. I will be gentle. I will be kind". (*J*, 341)

---

[41] Ian Alexander Morrison, p. 120.

As has already been indicated, the figure of the mother not only stands for womanhood in Jock's mind; she also represents power and manipulation. If Jock failed in finding a woman who would stand in comparison with his mother, at least he succeeded in getting a job that would please her. Getting rid of his mother's ghost will help Jock to escape from that other great trap of his life, his job as a security systems supervisor. Jock, as Peter Kemp aptly points out, "is hemmed in by a sense of insecurity" despite being an expert in security devices.[42] Leaving his job will restore the confidence in himself that he needs to change his life.

However, Jock's fantasies are not only populated by cheap women but by mean villains. In his mind power figures such as Mad Hislop, his father, and Helen's father, have become Max, Charlie, Sludden, Frank, Hollis, Hugo, Cupido and Stroud. Father figures stemming from his real life – like his women – have become fictionalised as the only way he has of controlling them and being able to live with them.

Mad Hislop, his English teacher and perhaps his real father, is one of the most powerful figures in Jock's life. He still haunts Jock and pervades his fantasies with his mixture of cruelty and poetry. Jock will subject his feminine characters to torture with such instruments as rubber tubes and handcuffs, which are merely extensions of Mad Hislop's Lochgelly tawse. And even though Jock claims that Mad Hislop "planted in me a sincere hatred of poetry" (*J*, 71) and that he never paid attention to his poetic ravings, the novel is saturated with poetic

---

[42] Peter Kemp, "Homely Facts and Human Bondage", rev. of *1982 Janine*. *Times Literary Supplement*, 13 April 1984, p. 397.

references. Recollections of Mad Hislop's violent behaviour towards his pupils are replayed in his fantasies. When Terry/Superb is at the police station, her husband Max phones her:

> "Terry, have you something for me?"
> After a pause Superb says, "Max ... Max, you must *know* I don't have anything just now".
> "That's the wrong answer," says Max.
> (*J*, 48)

This is a reworking in Jock's mind of a childhood scene involving Mad Hislop.

> "Lisp for me . Anderson. Say *lisp*. Distinctly."
> "Lithp, thir"
> "Oh dear. Say *stop*, Anderson"
> "Thtop, thir."
> "Worse and worse. I will not ssstop, Anderson, until you distinctly tell me to ssstop. Hold out your hands and double them."
> (*J*, 335-336)

As with his other power figures Jock will finally see the person behind the myth: "On Monday when Hislop entered the room I gazed at him with something like wonder. He no longer seemed a monster. He looked small, lonely and haggard, very ordinary and dismal". (*J*, 84) And, "And I saw the whole horrible pattern of Mad Hislop's soul". (*J*, 85) Jock is then aware that he is not deliberately cruel. Mad Hislop is only a sick man.

Jock may have been aware of this since he was at school but it has taken him all his adult life to admit it to himself. Once he manages to lower the position that Hislop occupied in his nightmares, Jock is apt to progress:

> Since the best whisky in the world cannot fill my mind with happy memories I must get back to a fantasy and keep control of it this time. On second thoughts, leave Superb and Charlie for a while and make a completely fresh start. Goodbye to school for ever, I hope.
> (*J*, 86)

To some extent, Mad Hislop represents Jock's alter ego. They are both aware of all the frustration and anger they bottle up inside them and which they try to keep

private through the presentation of an image of self-control, incapable of showing emotion. Both exhibit a pleasure for physical cruelty and domination. However, in the case of Mad Hislop this sadism is overt whereas in the case of Jock it is totally fictionalised.

Apart from his mother and Mad Hislop, the other important figure in Jock's life is his father. Like the rest of the characters, there is an evolution in the treatment of the figure of the father. Initially, he represents for Jock the figure of the "good soldier". He always manages to do his duty without complaining and teaches Jock not to expect much of life. The power he exerts on Jock is of a different kind from his mother's. He represents frustration, the inability to be hopeful, to expect any better from life and to bear your lot. Jock rejects his father's position, and regards his attitude as a reluctance to confront life. Jock tells himself about his father: "My father had no balls, he was worried and thoughtful all the time, no wonder I despised him. NO! I did not despise him, he was a good man. I loved him". (*J*, 138)

Jock's attitude towards his father is one in which love, pity and revolt are all combined. He refuses to read his father's letters in which he complains of his loneliness. He cannot admit to himself that his father can suffer as much as he can and refuses to see him in a pitiful condition: "I had never encountered my father when he was in an inferior position and I refused to do so. Was this cowardice? I think it was respect". (*J*, 98) Gradually, then, he comes to be treated as an equal and not as a power figure. Jock manages to reduce his father to the same level as himself and this is done by realising the brutal side of his father's life, by seeing him as a killer during the war. His father was a good soldier in two

senses: he obeyed orders but he was a killer as well. However, he refuses to lower his father any further:

> A quiet death in the night without convulsion, choking or disarray. A suitable death for a man like that. A good death. I am glad we were friends before it happened and that we said goodbye properly.
>
> Dad.
>
> What is this ache inside me? It is pity, a slimy disgusting creature worming toward the surface of this face in order to split it open but by God it won't succeed. I hate pity. It does not work, it does no good, it is a device vicious people use to persuade themselves that underneath it all they are decent human beings. Why should I pity my father? He was a killer.
> (*J*, 146)

Finally, there are other familiar figures in Jock's life who also go through a process of deidealisation that brings them closer to Jock. He eventually comes to terms with the fact that they were people with as many hopes and fears as himself. Years after his experience as a theatre technician in the production of a play on the Edinburgh Fringe, he meets the play's director and Jock cannot help being disappointed because "[h]e sounded exactly as if he was me. I could not let him get away with that". (*J*, 327) The Editor, one of his brief lovers, "had a stroke which paralysed her right side and keeps her indoors". (*J*, 53) Even Helen has become an ordinary middle-aged woman:

> A long time after that, when Sontag had definitely finished with me, I stood in a bus queue beside a gaunt, slightly eccentric old lady with an attractive figure. She looked at me with an air of inquiry and suddenly I recognised Helen.
> (*J*, 74)

A different case is Alan, who was Jock's best friend until he died in an accident.[43] His relationship with him does not evolve and still he blames him for dying. Jock feels that he has betrayed Alan's friendship by becoming a man Alan

---

[43] The character of Alan is based on Alan Fletcher, an artist and friend of Alasdair Gray, who died in an accident in Italy. "Alan Fletcher is the only artist I know who naturally looked like the

would have despised: "That man was my friend and I have turned into *this* man. Oh never remember Alan again". (*J*, 113)

The relationship between Jock and the question of Scotland is a complex one. As Thomas C. Richardson points out, "[m]etaphors of self appear as metaphors of nation"; and it is through Scotland's predicament that the private and the collective become tightly bonded in *1982 Janine*.[44] Jock does not see his own life as an isolated case.[45] His particular situation connects him to many individuals in Scottish society. If the connection is authentic, then, at least at the level of Gray's claim, it is reinforced by Jock's name. He consciously universalises his particular situation in an attempt to escape the prison of the mind. From the first page we witness an effort on the part of Jock to depersonalise, to break away from the limitation of his own existence. The first references to his name and surname are postponed until as late as pages 63 and 149. Even then, his surname has changed from MacLeish to McLeish. In the very first line of the novel he points to the fact that the room "could be in Belgium, the U.S.A, Russia perhaps, Australia certainly, any land...", that he could be "hundreds of men just now". He then places the action in Scotland without setting it in any particular town: "Behind the bluebells on these curtains is the

---

Bohemian artist of legend. He was the free-est soul I ever met, and impressed me so mightily that a diminished version of him has been a main character in all the novels I ever wrote. He had to be diminished, or he would have stolen attention from my main characters, who were versions of me".
Alasdair Gray, introduction to *5 Scottish Artists Retrospective Show*. (Gartocharn: Famedram, 1986). Accession 9247, folder 49. National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh.

[44] Thomas C. Richardson, "Reinventing Identity: Nationalism in Modern Scottish Literature", *Nationalism in Literature*, eds. Horst W. Drescher and H. Völkel. *Scottish Studies Series* 8 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989), p. 120.

[45] In an interview Gray pointed out that "my characters are stoics resigned to loneliness because I think everyone is essentially that". Alasdair Gray, interview by G. Norquay and C. Anderson, p. 6.

main street of a town that was fairly prosperous when these bedknobs were carved - Nairn, Kirkcaldy, Dumfries, Peebles". (*J*, 11-12)

Jock seems to coincide with his author in that "there are very large connections between everyone's hell and their neighbour's".[46] His situation, then, seems to stand for that of a great number of other people. As Gustave Klaus points out, "[t]he story of the brilliant technology student turned into a dull safety expert, of the tender young lover mutated into a lonely pornographic fantasist, has, and is meant to have, a pathetically normal ring".[47] With grim humour, Jock wonders:

> Are there many people without illness or disability who sit at home in the evening with clenched fists, continually changing the channel of a television set and wishing they had the courage to roll over the parapet of a high bridge? I bet there are millions of us.
> (*J*, 72)

Jock is what the male protagonist of one of Gray's short stories puts in a rather straightforward manner. For him, we are all "a pain in the arse with a case history behind it".[48]

The connection between the personal and the social is also emphasised by Jock's feeling that Scotland has been used as a prostitute in the same way as he has. His feeling that he lacks any kind of worth is paralleled by his sense that Scotland has no value either. Denny is also shown as a representation of what is

---

[46] Alasdair Gray, interview by Neil Irons, p. 5.
[47] Gustav Klaus, "1984 Glasgow. Alasdair Gray, Tom Leonard, James Kelman", in *Littérature écossaise: voix nouvelles. Scottish Studies - Études Écossaisses* 2 (Grenoble: Université Stendhal, 1993), p. 32.
[48] Alasdair Gray, "Loss of the Golden Silence", in *Ten Tales Tall & True* (Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd.: London, 1993), p. 56.

wrong with Scotland.[49] She is poor, inarticulate, clings to the more cultured Jock and shows no hope for the future. However, as in his pornographic fantasies Jock has become one of Scotland's abusers:

> But if a country is not just a tract of land but a whole people then clearly Scotland has been fucked. I mean that word in the vulgar sense of *misused to give satisfaction or advantage to another.* Scotland has been fucked and I am one of the fuckers who fucked her and I REFUSE TO FEEL BITTER OR GUILTY ABOUT THIS. I am not a gigantically horrible fucker, I'm an ordinary fucker. And no hypocrite. I refuse to deplore a process which has helped me become the sort of man I want to be: a selfish shit but a comfortable selfish shit, like everyone I meet nowadays.
> (*J*, 136-7)

Therefore, his situation runs parallel to that of Scotland. His inability to choose for himself is shared with Scottish society. Scotland is like Janine and Superb, in that its people cannot control the situation it is in: "it would be a luxury to blame ourselves for the mess we are in instead of the bloody old Westminster parliament". (*J*, 66)

Indeed, *1982 Janine* depicts these two situations - the private and the public, the individual and the collective. Exploitation is what links those two areas. Jock considers himself a typical product of Scottish society and if he is to succeed in reconstructing his own identity by telling "the story of *how I went wrong*" (*J*, 191) he will also be forced to review his image of Scotland. Gray through the character of Jock McLeish

> is attempting to deconstruct the certainties of the Scottish identity as presented in the discourse of popular historiography and embedded in popular culture, and take on the grander questions of national identity in an oblique way.[50]

---

[49] Some critics have drawn a parallelism between the character of Janine and Scotland. For example, Moira Burgess, p. 291.
[50] Ian A. Bell, "Imagine living There: Form and Ideology in Contemporary Scottish Fiction", in Susanne Hagemann, p. 233.

The process he has to go through in creating a new image for Scotland is aptly expressed by P.H. Scott: "We cannot hope for a constructive attitude to the problems of Scotland until the myth is seen for what it is, and that can only come from an unprejudiced look at our history".[51] By the end of the night, Jock has managed to demythify some of the ghosts of the past but if he wants to attain full self-knowledge he has to renegotiate his own personal image of Scotland. As Richardson points out, "the process of reinventing identity is necessary to deal with change".[52]

However, in this case Jock's image of Scotland will be subjected to "reverse deidealisation" (as I have called this phenomenon). Jock and Scotland are put through the same process of rewriting as both are emptied of their own ghosts. His vision of Scotland develops from a bleak opinion coloured by tartanry and cliché. It is that "perverted collective self-image" that Lindsay Paterson considers to be "the enemy to national development".[53]

Jock's attitude towards Scotland does not show anything positive:

> "Who spread the story that the Scots are INDEPENDENT people?
> (...)
> The truth is that we are a nation of arselickers, though we disguise it with surfaces: a surface of generous, openhanded manliness, a surface of dour practical integrity, a surface of futile maudlin defiance like when we break goalposts and windows after football matches on foreign soil and commit suicide on Hogmanay by leaping from fountains in Trafalgar Square.
> (*J*, 65-6)

This concept of inferiorisation is the one that Beveridge and Turnbull found to be pervasive in some Scottish intellectuals:

---

[51] P.H. Scott, "Scotch Myths –1". *The Bulletin of Scottish Politics* 2 (Spring 1981), p. 66.
[52] Thomas C. Richardson, "Reinventing Identity: Nationalism in Modern Scottish Literature", in Horst W. Drescher and H. Völkel, p. 125.
[53] Lindsay Paterson, "Scotch Myths –2". *The Bulletin of Scottish Politics* 2 (Spring 1981), p. 68.

> The darkness of pre-union Scotland, the catastrophic influence of Calvinism, Scottish inarticulacy, the peculiarly deformed character of Scottish popular culture – inferiorism is to be defined in terms of the potency of such obsessions.[54]

The mood of Jock's quotation is expressed by Paterson as the "cancerous national inferiority complex". For him this complex is

> the result of believing that we are a community of pawky inadequates: staunch, kindly, and occasionally mischievous, no doubt – rising even, at times, to some ephemeral protest – but always in the end laughable, blindly loyal (...), and certainly not really up to running our own affairs.[55]

Jock's lack of confidence in the Scots' skill in conversation is another image that is reflected in this inferiority complex together with the image of "the Drunken Scot, the Repressed Scot and the Mean Scot".[56]

When the group of Scottish actors with whom Jock is working meets an English company they feel tongue tied:

> The Scots could not play this game. It was not a game in which we could be beaten, like football, it was a game in which we displayed ourselves, like beachball, and we had been taught *not* to display ourselves, taught that it was wrong to talk in class, unless the teacher asked a question and we knew exactly the answer he wanted.
> (*J*, 256)

Speaking of the Referendum of 1979 Jock cynically considers that "not for a minute did I think it would make us more prosperous, we are a poor little country, always have been, always will be". (*J*, 66) Even the author is not free of this mood of disenchantment: "Perhaps (outside football matches and historical serials) we feel too commonplace to be interesting".[57] However, by the end of the

---

[54] Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull, *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture. Inferiorism and the Intellectuals*. (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1989), p. 14-15.
[55] Lindsay Paterson, p. 71.
[56] Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull, p. 10.
[57] Alasdair Gray, "Instead of an Apology" TS. Article printed in the *Glasgow Herald*. 18 April 1969. Accession 9247, folder 39. p. 5. National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh.

book these ideas have been transformed into a more positive view: "*God, I no longer think Scotland worse than elsewhere...*". (*J*, 311)

Personal and social history interact in *1982 Janine*. Douglas Gifford considers that Jock's "highly erotic fantasies ...[are] a brilliant way of demonstrating how Jock's sickness is the world's".[58] Therefore, there is "a pornographic analogy between the body personal and the body politic".[59] At the same time that the chronological narration of his history will put his life in order, the understanding of how his life has been influenced by his Scottishness and how this Scottishness has determined his vision of Scotland will help to create a new vision of the nation more in accordance with the new image he has created of himself. Through a process of deidealisation and levelling, Jock finds his right place in relationship to other people, i.e. to society. He therefore discovers the strength to consider his potential as an individual. He stops being "a plague and pest to himself".[60] By reflecting on the effect of his actions upon others and the effect of other people's actions on him, he has been able to find his place in life. Intrapersonal narration triggers off the process by which he accomplishes the deidealisation of his own image. Jock is "a memory that fingers old regrets".[61]

Throughout his nocturnal trip Jock psychoanalyses himself by putting his dreamlike fantasies into words and, therefore, getting rid of an inferiority complex by announcing it. He comes to terms with his own image by reducing and deidealising the myths that have populated his life. By lowering these figures

---

[58] Douglas Gifford, "Private Confession and Public Satire in the Fiction of Alasdair Gray". *Chapman* 50-51 (Spring, 1987), p. 114.
[59] Peter Michelson, p. 156.
[60] Alasdair Gray, interview by C. Swan and F. Delaney, p. 19.
[61] Alasdair Gray, from the poem "Predicting", in *Old Negatives*. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1989)

from the pedestal where he had placed them or, in the case of Scotland, by overcoming the negative stereotype which was Scotland's fate, he searches for his past mistakes. He then finds the courage not only to accept them, but to correct them.

1982 Janine, then, depicts Jock McLeish's "long night of the soul". God seems to have listened to Jock's cry for help so that he can "become less mysterious to [him]self". (*J*, 194) As a Scots Everyman's descent into the inferno of his own circumstances, Jock has proved that "To be yersel's - and to mak' that worth bein'. / Nae harder job to mortals has been gi'en".[62]

---

[62] Hugh MacDiarmid, (1987), ll. 745-746.

Chapter III: *Something Leather*, Sade and the Sadomasochistic Homotext

Something Leather[1] was published in 1990, six years after *1982 Janine*. Although both narratives differ in some aspects – stylistically, a shift from first person interior monologue to third person narrative, and the election of the figure of a woman as main character instead of a man – they share the use of pornographic motifs.

However, there is a difference in the use of such material. Whereas in *1982 Janine* the masochistic plot is entirely restricted to Jock`s sexual fantasies in *Something Leather* the theme of masochism or, rather, sadomasochism, appears not merely at a mental level but also at a physical one. Pornographic fantasies of domination have become a reality and play a central role in the evolution of the female characters, particularly June. Similarly, the question of lesbianism, which was not crucial to Jock McLeish's fantasies, is a central motif in this later novel. The only lesbian character in *1982 Janine* is Big Momma and she seems to be representing the role of abusive lesbian typical of some pornography.

As in *1982 Janine*, fantasy plays a key role in *Something Leather*. Even if to June rape and caning are real, the final chapter of the novel looks like a typical male pornographic fantasy. Gray is again using fantasy to exemplify how the enactment of personal fantasies can change one's view of oneself and their role in fulfilling a need to go against the conventional.

---

[1] Alasdair Gray, *Something Leather*. (Jonathan Cape: London, 1990)

The topic of this novel is expressed very aptly by Donalda: "unless we bring one of our wicked dreams just a wee bit to life we live like zombies – the living dead – slaves like my Mammy, right?" (*SL*, 20) Bizarre as it may seem, by dressing like a sadomasochistic male fantasy June has reached a deeper knowledge of herself and has awakened from her conventional life represented by her work as a civil servant.

The use of sadomasochistic material has compelled some critics to denounce the novel as being "a shameless and shameful book".[2] In his review of it, S.J. Boyd remarks that

> the suggestion, which seems clearly to be present in *Something Leather*, that forcibly subjecting a woman to criminal savagery and torture might be *doing her a good turn* is surely outrageous and dangerous. Publishing titillating fantasies which carry this suggestion is shameful.[3]

For Boyd, Gray's use of the theme of rape and the pornographic material in some of his work – some of it admittedly autobiographical – shows us "Mr Hyde within the decent Dr Jekyll".[4]

With regards to the topic of pornography, *Something Leather* poses similar difficulties to those presented by *1982 Janine*. When it was published some critics rejected it on the basis of its obscene content and its offensive treatment of women's sexuality. Victoria Glendinning wonders "[w]hy is it that so many highly intelligent male novelists, when they spill out on to paper their fancies about what most women want, come up with banal and brutal clichés of

---

[2] Stephen Boyd, rev. of *Something Leather*. *Scottish Literary Journal* 133 (Winter, 1990), p. 35.
[3] Stephen Boyd, rev. of *Something Leather*, p. 37.
[4] Stephen Boyd, rev. of *Something Leather*, p. 37.

bondage and sadomasochism?".[5] Some of the adjectives applied to *Something Leather* could easily have been applied to Sade's works. Harry Ritchie dismisses the novel as purely pornographic: "June's introduction to a world of high heels and handcuffs still reads, as does every such passage in the novel, like prose written with three essential aids - paper, pen and Kleenex".[6] Other reviewers found the novel, particularly the chapter "Class Party", sordid, charmless, squalid, tedious and distasteful.[7]

Sade's novel *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, in which a girl is initiated to the secrets of debauchery by a group of libertines, revolves around a political pamphlet. The treatise, called "Yet Another Effort, Frenchmen, if you Would Become Republicans", appears to have been Sade's reason for writing the novel. As with *Something Leather*, however, it is the obscene argument surrounding the pamphlet that has received the attention of disgusted critics.

Chapter One – "One For The Album" – and Twelve – "Class Party" – for example, were considered as gratuitous obscene fantasy, all the more outrageous

---

[5] Victoria Glendinning, "Flippant Glesga Rudery", rev. of *Something Leather. The Times*, 12 July 1990, p. 19.

[6] Harry Ritchie, "High heels and handcuffs", rev. of *Something Leather. The Sunday Times*, 15 July 1990.

[7] "The slight tale of a sado-masochistic encounter between June, Senga, Donald [sic] and Harry is fleshed out by flashback chapters which are in themselves whimsical, sordid and arch and add nothing to character or plot development … This is an ill conceived, sloppy book. Charmless and squalid, it aims low yet fails to deliver even the qualified promises Gray feels able to make for it".
Pete Whittaker, "Leering Presence", rev. of *Something Leather. Tribune*, 17 August 1990.
"This chapter [Class Party] is at once tedious and distasteful: tedious because it is about sex, yet (with the brief exception of Donalda lapping happily at her lover's labia) there is no real sexual behaviour in it - just humiliation and degradation; distasteful, precisely because of that degradation … [I]t is, all the same, disappointing that a novel which previously appeared to have a refreshingly relaxed attitude to lesbians should, in the end, resort to the usual, stereotypical male menopausal fantasies. It is all the worse because June, following her ordeal, appears to have been "liberated" by it … [T]he work is no worse than appears in a thousand sub-literate sex magazines".
Stuart Bathgate, rev. of *Something Leather. The* List, 13-26 July 1990.

as they deal with lesbianism and sadomasochism. The structure of the novel, however, collaborated to create such an impression as the chapters that appear bracketed between the story of June's seduction – chapter One – and subsequent rape by Harry, Senga and Donalda – chapters Twelve and Thirteen – were viewed as a cover up for an otherwise obscene story. For Moira Burgess, the "realistic" chapters "irrupt with odd effect" in the sadomasochistic fantasy surrounding them.[8]

Clearly, these critics consider the book obscene in the way that Malamuth and Linz discuss the term. For them, obscenity establishes connections with ideas of filth, disgust, shame and the insult to accepted moral standards.[9] Obscene material goes against what are considered immutable social and moral values: marriage, heterosexuality and the traditional role of women. However, for other critics such as the philosopher Abraham Kaplan, this commonly accepted definition of obscenity is imprecise and vague. He proposes four categories of obscenity. Conventional obscenity "attacks established sexual patterns and practices" as a form of dealing with social, economic and political injustices. Dionysian obscenity, on the other hand, "celebrates man's unity with nature" in a Lawrentian way, while perverse obscenity presents sex mainly as "dirty, fearful, and secretive". Lastly, pornography of violence presents sex transformed into acts of aggression.[10] It would be difficult to situate *Something Leather* into any of these classifications as it seems to partake of all of them except, I would say, the

---

[8] Moira Burgess, p. 301.
[9] Daniel Linz and Neil Malamuth, *Pornography*. Communication Concepts 5 (Newbury Park, California; London: Sage Publications, 1993), p. 2.
[10] Michael J. Goldstein and Harold Sanford Kant, *Pornography and Sexual Deviance*. (Berkeley: University of California Press 1973), p. 8.

sort of pornography that makes sexuality into something dirty. The main point, as we will see, is to study in which sense *Something Leather* is a sadomasochistic work and how sadomasochistic elements such as whips, chains, torture, sexual anonymity, submission and power and homosexuality are employed to criticise the manipulation and exploitation at the heart of human relationships.

As we can deduce from critical comments on *Something Leather*, Gray faces the same risk as pornographers such as Sade, that is, being condemned for the crimes committed in his books. It should be pointed out from the start, however, that Gray never approaches in his fiction the levels of horror and farce that Sade – "the secret chronicler of sexual nightmares and gleeful cruelty"[11] – is able to convey in much of his work. Moreover, Gray, while writing *Something Leather*, was deeply aware of the danger of producing vulgar pornographic material. For him it was important that the novel was "more than a chronicle of perverse repetitions, a wanker's hand book".[12] In a revised epilogue for a new edition of *Something Leather*, Gray is eager to make clear the subject matter of the work – even if in an ironic manner: "My fantasies are charicatures [sic](these can show truth) of how the four main British classes (propertied/ professional/ working class/ casualty) get on terribly well together".[13]

The conception of *Something Leather* and Sade's novels seems to share a similar origin. Sade in a letter to his wife written in 1783 holds her responsible for the creation of his fictional characters: "You brought my brain to the boiling

---

[11] Donald Thomas, *The Marquis de Sade*. (London: Weidenfield & Nicolson, 1976), p. 155.
[12] Alasdair Gray, MS letter to Tom Maschler of Jonathan Cape Ltd., dated 25 January 1988. Accession 10371, folder 3, page. L. National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh.
[13] Alasdair Gray, fax to Rachel Kerr, dated 27 September 1990. Accession 10749, folder 88. National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh.

point. You caused me to conjure up fanciful creatures which I shall have to bring into being".[14] It is clear that Sade had only himself in mind as receptor of much of his literary production. Similarly, the origin of *Something Leather* lies in a short story which Gray wrote in August 1987 with the intention of publishing it in a magazine as he considered that "the literary editors of thick glossymags like Vogue, Tatler, Esquire might think it a piquant item to insert between their advert for dear clothes, perfume and holidays in tropical climates".[15] In another letter, Gray describes *Something Leather* as "a private sexual entertainment",[16] conceived merely as "an erotic fantasy written to entertain self and friends but having brought it to a certain point, I was pleased with it artistically".[17]

As we have already seen in *Lanark* and *1982 Janine*, the question of autobiography is always present in Alasdair Gray's work. The use of autobiographical material in the published version of *Something Leather* is less evident than in his other two previous novels but still there. In fact, early versions show the use of a significant amount of autobiographical material. Gray planned to use "short stories based on my plays" together with "literary and historical

---

[14] Quoted by George May in "Novel Reader, Fiction Writer". *Yale French Studies* 35 (December, 1965), p. 7.
[15] Alasdair Gray, letter to Tom Maschler of Jonathan Cape Ltd., dated 25 January 1988. Accession 10749, folder 88, page K, 1. National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh.
[16] Alasdair Gray, letter to unknown correspondent. Accession 10749, folder 88. National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh. Gray also points somewhere else that it was "a short story to entertain May Hooper". Accession 10371, folder 2. National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh.
[17] Alasdair Gray, MS note on a MS draft of a letter to Tom Maschler dated November 1987. Accession 10371, folder 3, page D. National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh.
Gray gives a different account of the novel's origin three years later: "I wrote that first chapter to seduce somebody I found very attractive and had a perfectly friendly relationship with, but with whom I hadn't become more intimate than pleasantly conversational". From an interview in *Tatler* May 1990.

essays" and " frank autobiographical sequences in which only the names of friends would be altered to avoid embarrassment".[18]

Chapter Eleven is entitled "Dad's Story" and includes a portrait of someone looking very much like Gray. Furthermore, it is the only chapter of the novel written in the first person. In fact, in earlier drafts this chapter was entitled 'Author Perhaps' and contains literal transcriptions from Gray's autobiography published in the *Saltire Self-Portrait Series*.[19] The topic of the chapter – the story of a professional humorist on whom all the characters of the novel converge through a network of personal relationships – and the name "Dad" seem to point to the authorship of the novel. There are plenty of clues in the chapter to signal that the character known as Dad is Alasdair Gray's alter ego and the name, therefore, must refer to the paternity of the novel.[20] This "Dad" character can excite himself only by fantasising about "wicked things".

> On this night I imagined a beautiful discontented customer walking into a shop like the one where Donalda works, a shop I have never visited. For some reason I cannot imagine wicked glamorous men nowadays or any sort of penis, but only women who seduce each other in sly cruel ways which have no base in my experience – the lesbians I know are rational folk who never seem to humiliate each other. The lesbians I imagine, however, did many things to this lovely discontented woman which made her completely content and helped Donalda and me to a satisfying conclusion.
> (*SL*, 197)

---

[18] Alasdair Gray, note in Inventory. Accession 10371, folder 7. National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh.

[19] Alasdair Gray, *Alasdair Gray. Saltire Self- Portraits 4* (Edinburgh: The Saltire Society, 1988) Referring to the chapter "Dad's Story", he says it was an extension of the self portrait at the start of the Saltire Self-Portrait. However, he points out that later the biographical material was dropped. Accession 10371, folder 5 (1). National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh.

[20] In earlier versions of "Dad's Story" there is an important use of biographical material. There seem to be references to *1982 Janine*. The woman who calls him Dad (*SL*, 199) seems to be reading it. She says in this earlier version: "It's a while since I wore one of these skirts. I think I'll get one." Dad explains then to the reader that "women who have sexual adventures in the second book wear a common pattern of denim skirt".
Referring to his second book he says "that was five years ago". *1982 Janine* was published in 1984 and *Something Leather* was written during 1989.

From this particular standpoint, the story of Harry, Donalda, Senga and June would be an extended sadomasochistic fantasy springing from the mind of "Dad", a character also remarkably similar to Jock McLeish.

Dad, a professional humorist, complains about his rather limited repertoire:

> Unluckily I have only one basic joke. Conan Doyle, O'Henry and Thurber were like that, but my joke is about sex which makes it painfully obvious. I carefully set each story in a different time and place with characters whose voices, faces and jobs were different too. I hoped this would fool readers into thinking the joke was also different, and that readers who weren't fooled would read on to see how I disguised it next time.
> (SL, 191-2)

This complaint matches Gray's in the section of *Something Leather* entitled "Critic-Fuel – An Epilogue", where he makes a very similar kind of comment about his own fiction:

> A few years ago I noticed my stories described men who found life a task they never doubted until an unexpected collision opened their eyes and changed their habits. The collision was usually with a woman, involved swallowing alcohol or worse, and happened in the valley of the shadow of death. I had made novels and stories believing each an adventurous new world. I now saw the same pattern in them all – the longest novel used it thrice.[21]
> (*SL*, 232)

Similar to the character "Dad" and Gray himself, the Marquis de Sade is also an author troubled by the question of repetitiousness in some of his works. However, this is not the only point of contact between Sade and Gray in relation to *Something Leather*. As in *1982 Janine*, Gray is concerned with what Colin Manlove refers to as "containers of the self",[22] that is, houses, rooms and clothes.

---

[21] Gray seems to be referring to *Lanark* and *1982 Janine*. In *Lanark* "the longest novel", Duncan Thaw unsuccessfully tries to seduce Marjory and Lanark fails to form a relationship with the catalyst and Rima.
[22] Colin Manlove, (1994), p. 13.

In Gray's work they do not symbolise protection but control and domination. Jock used to be dressed by his mother and forced to stay indoors; the same happens to June. She is trapped in her own flat and is dressed up in leather by her captors. However, whereas the settings and conventions of Jock's pornographic fantasies in *1982 Janine* are those belonging to common pornographic novels and films, the settings and sexual deviations of *Something Leather* have more in common with those used by Sade and the Gothic novel and that all subsequent works with sadomasochistic motifs have reproduced. The exclusive boarding school where the aristocratic Harry is educated together with a small group of selected rich girls, recalls the convent of Panthémont attended by Juliette and Justine. Juliette's "instruction" by mother Delbéne, a lesbian nun, emulates that of Harry by Ethel, the headmistress, who is also a lesbian. The private world of the forest and its little refuges where the girls are free to stage their fantasy worlds evokes the isolated monasteries, Benedictine abbeys and castles that populate the surreal works of Sade. Even the orgy in June's flat takes place in a timeless and claustrophobic atmosphere. Nobody phones or visits and June looses track of time as her own home becomes a cellar where she is trapped. The erasure of time and space coordinates emphasises the irreality of the situation.

In order to clarify the role lesbianism and sadomasochism play in *Something Leather*, it would be helpful to place the novel within the framework of what has been termed the "sadomasochistic homotext". Douglas B. Saylor considers Sade the originator of this kind of text "in which homosexuality,

sadomasochism, paternity and the problem of language play dominant roles".[23] Saylor bases his study of sadomasochistic homotextuality on Freud's myth of the murder of the primal father. According to this myth, the brothers killed their violent and powerful father as a revenge for having driven them away in order to keep the females of the tribe for himself. They also devoured him so that they could identify with him and inherit his strength. However, the brothers not only hated the father, they loved him as well, with guilt the result of his murder. Therefore, the attempt to overthrow the powerful father figure had failed.

Homosexuality was the only form of sexuality left to the brothers once they were driven away by the father. In the texts that Saylor examines a group of homosexuals revolt against father figures of authority and power and try to replace them without ever succeeding. For Saylor, the group of libertines that are one of the central motifs in Sade's works, particularly in *The One Hundred & Twenty Days of Sodom* and *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, "represent the rebellious brothers who seek to subvert every law of the Father in their quest for pleasure".[24]

Sade's *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, and *The One Hundred & Twenty Days of Sodom*, and some of Gray's novels share a similar structure. As we have seen before, the seven dialogues that constitute the main part of *Philosophy in the Bedroom* include a subplot: the political pamphlet "Yet Another Effort, Frenchmen, If You Would Become Republicans". This pamphlet plays a similar

---

[23] Douglas B. Saylor, *The Sadomasochistic Homotext. Readings in Sade, Balzac and Proust.* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), p. 16.
[24] Douglas B. Saylor, p. 44.

role in the work as the chapter that expresses Gray's view of the role of Glasgow as "European Cultcha Capital" and which is entitled "Culture Capitalism".

The central plot of *The One Hundred & Twenty Days of Sodom* – the withdrawal of a group of wealthy libertines and their entourages of wives and sexual slaves to an isolated castle for the purpose of debauchery – contains within it a number of subplots formed by the stories which a group of prostitutes recount to the audience and which, in their turn, enclose a list of detailed perversions. *Something Leather* presents a similar structure. In a letter to his publisher, Gray refers to the structure he has planned for the novel:

> But if, in concentrating on this start, Something Leather does not become a whole well-shaped thing in itself I will resort to devices derived from The Arabian Nights, The Saragossa Manuscript, Tristam Shandy and Pantagruel: the story which becomes a container of another story, and not always another story of the same sort. … Something Leather might resemble a conjuror pulling a rabbit out of his top hat, which rabbit wears a bowler which appears to be the size of the original topper, from which bowler the rabbit (not the conjuror) removes a small alligator wearing a Mexican sombrero, etc.[25]

However, it is not only the use of this "arabesque" device that connects the works of Sade and Gray from the point of view of narrative structure. Sade's most important works such as *Juliette, Justine, The One Hundred & Twenty Days of Sodom*, and particularly *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, show a multilayered structure. They alternate a pornographic narrative with social and philosophical discourse. Both kinds of discourse are interrelated as Sade's stories of debauchery and sadism serve to enlighten his extremely ambiguous philosophy and attack God and Christian morality. Sade's libertines take as much pleasure in their endless and tiresome philosophical tirades as in their acts of depravity. It

---

[25] Alasdair Gray, letter to unknown correspondent, (nd). Accession 10749, folder 88, p. 4. National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh.

appears as if their sadomasochistic routines were only an excuse to expand their bizarre theories.

In *Something Leather*, even though the characters interact among themselves at a social and sexual level, both pornographic and social discourses are structurally disconnected in a manner that Sade's are not. Chapters One and 12 deal with the sadomasochistic lesbian relationship between the main female characters – June, Senga, Donalda and Harry – whereas the chapters in between deal with those same characters at a social level. To its author the novel is

> a socially realistic sketch of city life from the 60s through to the eighties, framed in an erotic adventure. The last began with a passive professional class woman meeting a manipulative artisan class woman and passive (or manipulated) woman of the artisan class. They start to excite each other – the chapter ends. Then the next four chapters are flashbacks showing the lives all three women wanted to escape from into infantile eroticism, since maturity presented nothing but more slavery.[26]

Therefore, both in *Something Leather* and in Sade's works we encounter two kinds of power relationships, one of a "pseudo-sexual" nature and one among characters belonging to different social classes.

The combination of pornographic material and social discourse in *Something Leather* would situate the novel within a pornographic tradition that ended in the early nineteenth century. Before that time pornography was always attached to other types of discourse, mainly social. The pornographic narrative "was most often a vehicle for using the shock of sex to criticize religious and political authorities" and expose the hypocrisy of conventional morality.[27] It is only by the middle or end of the eighteenth century that narrative pornography

---

[26]Alasdair Gray, Accession 10371, folder 12. National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh.
[27] Lynn Hunt, ed., *The Invention of Pornography. Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity. 1500 –1800*. (New York: Zone Books, 1996), p. 10.

starts detaching itself from political and religious discourse and becomes what is nowadays considered pornography.

Sade seems aware of this distinction when he refers to purely pornographic works as "these miserable little volumes composed in cafés or brothels" that show "simultaneously two voids in their authors – their heads and their stomachs are equally empty".[28]

Something Leather belongs to the same pornographic tradition as Sade's works in the sense that both combine the social and political. However, Sade's characters relate to the kind of pornography which in part he was inventing. people tend to become types, mere bodies that represent either vice or virtue and divide themselves into torturers and valueless victims. At its most extreme, even the body is annihilated in the name of desire. Sade's characters lack individuality and are never physically described except when their repugnant bodies complement the depravity of the situation. Victims particularly are practically always faceless, mere figures in a cataloguing process. According to Allan Lloyd Smith the characters typical of Gothic fiction share this lack of depth with pornographic characters:

> the individuality of characters in Gothic fiction is usually much less than in the novel generally; they are universally remarked to be flat, two-dimensional, without development, except as representative of various neuroses and tabooed desires.[29]

---

[28] Marquis de Sade, *Juliette ou les Prosperités du Vice*. III, p.97 (undated reprint). Quoted by Geoffrey Gorer, *The Life and Ideas of the Marquis de Sade*. (London: Peter Owen Limited, 1934), p. 9-10.

[29] Allan Lloyd Smith, "Postmodernism/Gothicism", in *Modern Gothic. A Reader*, eds. Victor Sage and Allan Lloyd Smith. (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 12.

Sade had difficulty in creating credible portraits of women. The submissive and predictable Justine – the embodiment of masochism – is an even more highly improbable character than Juliette. She exists only in relation to her torturers and her belief in virtue after all her ordeals and her short-lived suffering make the reader unable to identify with her.

Susan Sontag points out that characters in pornography "are seen only from the outside, behavioristically. By definition they can't be seen in depth..."[30] The reader can only "see" what they do, not what they think. This lack of depth in the building of characters is necessary if the main purpose of pornography is to be successfully achieved. The reader must be able to identify with one of the characters physically and place himself in that almost empty body so that he can be sexually aroused. For Mark Temmer, Sade's "impersonally rigid and relatively pure" language, together with a "well-structured" syntax prevents "the expression of individual traits".[31]

However, Gray's characters in *Something Leather*, possibly with the exception of Harry, are not "types". They manifest a development and suggest a consciousness and a personal and social (hi)story to which the central part of the novel is devoted. Even in the case of *1982 Janine* a large number of fantasy characters play what looks like a merely titillating role at first, but become more articulate and acquire individual identity through their connection with Jock's real life.

---

[30] Susan Sontag, p. 54.
[31] Mark J. Temmer, "Style and Rhetoric", *Yale French Studies* 35 (December 1965), p. 26.

Gray's use of pornography, both in *Something Leather* and *1982 Janine*, is related to a postmodern preference for extreme states of consciousness or de-centred selves. Similarly to Gothic fiction, Postmodernism seems attracted to "the unspeakable and the criminal".[32] In *Something Leather*, though, marginal or ex-centric characters – a group of sadomasochist lesbians – are used in order to see middle-class beliefs in a new light and challenge them. Also, we see how through the enactment of fantasy the identity of the characters is transformed.

June, Harry, Donalda and Senga constitute what Saylor considers the primal horde of brothers trying to subvert the law of the father through sexual deviance such as homosexuality and sadomasochism. *Something Leather* "upsets" rather than "sooths" [sic] "some idea the reader lives by".[33] Susan Sontag in her essay on pornography also acknowledges the use in contemporary writing of structures typical of pornographic fiction. She finds "valid as a subject for prose narrative" those "extreme states of human feeling and consciousness … so peremptory that they exclude the mundane flux of feelings and are only contingently linked with concrete persons – which is the case with pornography".[34]

Peter Michelson considers the use of pornography "at its most ambitious", such as in the work of Burroughs, Genet, Pauline Réage, Henry Miller and Sade, as an attempt "to fuse the subcultural conventions of "hard-core" pornography with the moral seriousness endemic to western artistic tradition".[35] In *Something*

---

[32] Allan Lloyd Smith, "Postmodernism/Gothicism", in Victor Sage and Allan Lloyd Smith, p. 12.
[33] "I believe that every book sooths [sic] or upsets some idea the reader lives by". Alasdair Gray, interview by C. Anderson and G. Norquay, p. 9.
[34] Susan Sontag, p. 42.
[35] Peter Michelson, p. 87.

Leather, Harry, "hopelessly resigned to an ancient and terrible wrong"(*SL*, 149) is the only character who possesses genuine Sadeian traits. She lives in an almost autistic world of her own and it is this lack of language and verbal communication that turns her almost into a type. Her imaginary world is identical to those imagined by Sade and Pauline Réage, author of *The Story of O*,[36] worlds where physical pain generates an exquisite mystical pleasure.

> Every work of art Harry made shows part of her imaginary world's enigmatic furniture, scenery or architecture. It is a world where imaginary pains produce some real ecstasy. Everyone recovers immediately from injuries, everyone is ravishingly beautiful, nobody grows old or sick or dies, and certainly not Hjordis.
> (*SL*, 152)

The worlds of Sade and *The Story of O* invariably include a group of aristocratic and socially powerful libertines who while away their time raping and whipping innocent girls in prisonlike locations. As has already been mentioned, in *Something Leather*, the boarding school, The Fortress in the forest, The Hideout and ultimately June's flat, play the same role as the castle of Silling deep in the Black Forest of *The One Hundred & Twenty Days of Sodom*, the convent, the monastery and the boudoir in Sade. They are safe locations for a group of extravagant characters to indulge their eccentric behaviour.

Likewise, the boarding school managed by Ethel, the headmistress, is populated by girls who, despite their wealth, or because of it, have developed peculiar habits that isolate them even more from the external world: Harriet talks only in monosyllables and spends her time climbing up trees or stretching herself in the gym. Linda clings to her father's Cockney accent, Clara does not relate to

---

[36] Pauline Réage, *Story of*. (London: Corgi Books, 1996)

anybody except her piano even though she is tone deaf, while Hjordis takes pleasure in playing the tyrant to the twins and gives free rein to her frustrations with long and aristocratic diatribes. Hjordis, like many of Sade's libertines, is not "contented merely acting out [her] fantasies, [she] must also discourse on them".[37] Something happened in her childhood and as a consequence "that beautiful charming Hjordis hates and fias everybody who is not unda ha thumb". (*SL*, 30)

The forest near the boarding school belongs exclusively to the girls because, according to the headmistress, "[i]t is important that children have freedom to invent private worlds of thea own". (*SL*, 28) The Fortress, as we have seen, is a typical Sadeian setting where a tyrant, Hjordis, creates a world of her own with its strict rules and laws, with unconditional servants and perpetual applicants. During her stay at the boarding school Harry forms part of this exclusive group whose leader, Hjordis, shares, as Harry does, some of the traits of the Sadeian hero, particularly those of lacking in depth and being a master of gratuitous terror. When the group finally dissolves Harry finds herself lost and lonely. Later in life, the group formed by Senga, Donalda, Harry and June will constitute a frustrated attempt to revive the original boarding school gang.

According to Leopoldo María Panero, impossibility is the topic of Sade's works. For Panero impossibility is synonymous with what is "forbidden", not by a particular law but by what every law forbids because it escapes social reason.[38] Therefore, the impossible is the asocial and the asocial as a form of subversion is

---

[37] Lawrence W. Lynch, *The Marquis de Sade*. (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984), p. 44.
[38] Leopoldo María Panero, "Sade o la Imposibilidad", in Marqués de Sade, *Cuentos, historietas y fábulas completas*. (Madrid: M.E. Editores, S.L. 1994), p. 5. (My translation)

central to the sadomasochistic homotext. The central purpose of Sade's works is not merely to mock bourgeois morality but the destruction of the society based on it. *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, for instance, is dedicated to the libertines so that they listen to their own impulses as the voice of Nature:

> To libertines
> Voluptuaries of all ages, of every sex, it is to you only that I offer this work; nourish yourselves upon its principles: they favor your passions, and these passions, whereof coldly insipid moralists put you in fear, are naught but the means Nature employs to bring man to the ends she prescribes to him; harken only to these delicious promptings, for no voice save that of the passions can conduct you to happiness.[39]

Sade embarks on such destruction by attacking and destroying the most sacred moral laws of society such as marriage, the prohibition of adultery, homosexuality and incest. Marriage is the social convention that Sade despises the most: "We libertines wed women to hold slaves; as wives they are rendered more submissive than mistresses, and you know the value we set upon despotism in the joys we pursue".[40]

Similarly, in *Something Leather*, Gray, like Sade, uses the two taboo subjects – lesbianism and sadomasochism – that are central to the sadomasochistic homotext. He uses them to foreground middle class conventionality in order to mock it, to display its comical and absurd aspects, but not, like Sade, to destroy it.

> The wicked thrill of imagining a modest, conventional woman forced to dress like that was followed by speculations on how it might change her behaviour. For the better, I thought, if she had health and vitality. Self-conscious conventionality is bred from vanity and cowardice. It assumes everyone may be watching us closely and must be given no strong reason for finding us attractive or repulsive.
> (*SL*, 235)

---

[39] Marquis de Sade, *Philosophy in the Bedroom*. (London: Arrow Books Limited, 1991), p. 185.
[40] Marquis de Sade, *The One Hundred & Twenty Days of Sodom*. (London: Arrow Books Limited, 1991), p. 192.

Also, the group of female characters can free themselves from the restrictions they feel society is imposing on them by putting into practice activities and attitudes that are seen as unacceptable and that are only tolerated as long as they are kept locked in the mind.

However similar the group formed by Senga, Donalda, Harry and June may seem to the sadistic groups that populate the novels of Sade, their purpose is not to subvert the law of society but to contest it. Sade's groups are always composed of noblemen, clergymen and people in powerful positions within society. In the case of Gray, we can see that the group is formed by people belonging to different social classes. However, the upper classes, represented by Harry, still use the lower classes – Senga and Donalda – to obtain their pleasure. This is further evidenced by the conclusion to the novel. Harry becomes romantically involved with June therefore rejecting the less socially powerful members of the group. However, the second possible ending that appears in the "Epilogue" reverses the situation and June chooses Senga as her lover.

Therefore, there is in *Something Leather* a willingness to unsettle the bourgeois principles of self-righteousness. In *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, Sade criticises what he considers the quixotic attitude of the self-righteous who judge and condemn those who behave differently from their norm. Angela Carter points out that "the more pornographic writing acquires the techniques of real literature, of real art, the more deeply subversive it is likely to be in that the more likely it is to affect the reader's perceptions of the world".[41] In *Something Leather* and *1982*

---

[41] Angela Carter, (1979), p. 19.

Janine pornographic fantasy is always portrayed against a background of realistic fiction.

Bourgeois principles are represented by the characters of *Something Leather* who belong to the middle classes. These characters are "invaded" at a given moment in their contented and fulfilled lives by bizarre individuals belonging to a world the existence of which had never crossed their minds.

In *1982 Janine* class relationships are also expressed within the framework of sexual relationships. Jock McLeish refers to the intrusion of Helen's father into his bedroom forcing him to marry her as "rape". Helen's father thinks, at first, that Jock belongs to the upper-class and plays the injured honour game. When he realises that he is only the son of a miner, he exploits his social superiority to Jock and his parents. (*J*, 297-8) His relationship with Denny fails because she belongs to the economically deprived classes and he cannot help manipulating her for sexual purposes. This situation has the approval of the government in that it can save money by claiming that he is supporting her. (*J*, 242)

The intrusion into June's unsatisfied but comfortable world is carried out by a group of lesbians – Harry, Donalda and Senga – and their sadomasochistic practices. June's entrance into this new world acquires a symbolical tone. When the reader first encounters her, she is in search of some new item of clothing that will make her feel "that life, after all, might become an exciting adventure". (*SL*, 10) In her search for Senga's shop, significantly named The Hideout, she leaves the "fashionable district" behind and enters a poor area. The Hideout, as its name suggests, proves difficult to find. It is in a derelict building with a "dark little entry smelling of cat-piss". As with many of Sade's settings the entrance into this

hidden shop will change June's life in a way she had not predicted. Indeed, the difficult-to-find shop is a version of Sade's monasteries hidden in the interior of woods, castles high up in the mountains and obscure dungeons.

In Chapter Four, "the man who knew about electricity",[42] who, like June, belongs to the educated and prosperous middle classes, comes in contact with the lower classes. On his way home from university, someone who looks like a beggar asks him to change his bulb. He feels it is his duty to help the old man. After all "his parents have taught him to tell the truth and give help when folk ask for it". (*SL*, 65) Nevertheless, he has misgivings as "[h]e is sure his parents would think it unwise to help beggars of the old man's sort". (*SL*, 65) Again, as when June is looking for The Hideout, he enters a world he has never imagined existed.

> They turn a second corner into a street which seems part of a city bombed by powerful enemies. The ground on each side is mostly torn earth, weeds, rubble and rags. Some remaining tenements have windows broken, or boarded up, or blind with dirt. The student did not know there was such a street near his university.
> (*SL*, 66)

The university represents the middle classes, so scared of the "casualty class" (*SL*, 75) that, by not looking at them, they ignore their existence. When "the man who knew about electricity" tries to remember what he used to see when looking out of the window at the university "[h]e remembers a wide view of various buildings which did not interest him, he had preferred to look at the surrounding hills". (*SL*, 66)

---

[42] This chapter – "The Man Who Knew About Electricity" – is based, almost word by word, on a 20 minute television play of the same name produced by Naomi Capon for the London BBC arts magazine programme "Full House" (1972). Accession 9247, folder 21. National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh.

However, when he leaves the derelict building where he has met Donalda he has to run "to use some of the great power he feels inside him. He also feels the world is a more exciting place than he realized, and will allow him delicious experiences he secretly dreams of, but had never expected to make realities". (*SL*, 80)

Acquaintance with ex-centricity provides the characters with a kind of thrill similar to the feeling of power and transgression the sadist feels in the enacting of his/her fantasies. After all sadism, as well as masochism, are both concerned with relationships of dominance and submission. "The man who knew about electricity" takes pleasure, like the sadist, in his own power and control over his/her victim, and, at the same time he experiences a masochistic – and Christian – pride in sacrificing himself at the expense of personal pain and inconvenience.

In the chapter entitled "Quiet People" [43] we see a reaction similar to that of the main character in Janice Galloway's short story "Plastering the Cracks".[44] Mr and Mrs Liddel's reaction of fear against what is not known is so exaggerated that the result is highly comical. When Mrs Liddel opens the door to her prospective lodgers – Donalda, her lover and her baby – she is unable to answer

---

[43] The chapter "Quiet People" is based on a radio play for the BBC (1968). Gray notes that "the play on which this chapter is based provides the start of it, but has extra character and a plot from which the chapter diverges further than *Mr Lang and Ms Watson* (later the chapter 'Mr Lang and Ms Tain') diverge from their original source, though not as much as Dad's Story diverges from *The Saltire Self Portrait*". Accession 10371, folder 24. National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh.

[44] Janice Galloway, "Plastering the Cracks" included in the collection of stories *Blood*. (London: Minerva, 1992). In this story, the female protagonist, feels exhilarated that she can deal with a couple of plasterers, though her discomfort and distrust grows when she realises that communication is impossible because she cannot make out what they are saying. The lack of communication is highlighted by the lack of description of the plasterers who are referred to by their features, not by their names – "the face", "the fat man" and "the bobble hat". The story

Donalda's questions because she is "so full of a wish to take the child into her bathroom and wash it". (*SL*, 123) Mr Liddel finds it impossible to sleep at night imagining that the new lodgers are using the bedroom as a brothel. When he has to dispose of the pornographic book a lodger has left in the rented room, he "spends an hour tearing the book into small pieces and flushing them down the lavatory pan – if he put it in the midden a cleansing worker might find it and think a tenant of the close had been reading it". (*SL*, 123)

In Chapter Three – "The Proposal" – Senga, who belongs to a lower class than her boyfriend Tom, finds that the only thing she likes in Tom is her power over him.[45] However, Tom's parents do not share Tom's fascination for Senga because she is "different". Tom and his family live in a villa and therefore they "feel more important than those in the tower-blocks and tenements". (*SL*, 51) Their rejection of Senga is based purely on social prejudice: Tom's father owns his own paper shop whereas Senga's mother works in Woolworths. It is the fear of the unknown, the marginal, that intrudes on their lives. They are eager for Tom to join the conventional and respected middle classes by going to university where he will be able to meet a girl of his "own sort".

The relationship between the different social classes resembles a sadomasochistic one of mutual need and, at the same time, of mutual rejection. All the characters experiment with the perverse thrill of the unknown when they

---

contains some extremely comical passages that accentuate the absurdity of the situation and make the tone of Galloway's story very similar to "Quiet People".

[45] This chapter is based on *Martin*, a TV play for BBC Scotland Schools Television. The play was recorded on January 6, 1972. Accession 10371, folder 11. National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh. The use of a play written for children in one of Gray's most controversial novels shows his ability for almost cannibalistic recycling.

interact with characters belonging to a different social class. However, in both sexual and social relationships the stronger dominate the weaker. In a previous version of the chapter entitled "Class Party", the exploitation of the working classes by the middle and upper class is shown on a sexual level of understanding and dramatisation:

> What is happening here is very simple. Our teacher is rich. Don't be fooled by our teacher's overalls. She is upper class, a really big owner. You are a sexual worker - the proletariat. Peggy [Donalda in the final version] and I are dressed alike because we are solidly middle class. She has paid us to help her fuck you.[46]

After Donalda finishes making love to June she proceeds into a soliloquy very similar to those used by Sadeian characters after they have raped and whipped their victims. However, in this case the barrier between victim and tyrant is blurred and it is not completely clear who is pleading to whom.

> "You haven't once asked who I am or how I feel or what I want in life – I think you care for nobody but yourself but I must tell you about me. I come from a really big family, three older brothers and three younger sisters and I had to help my Mum look after the lot of them. I really loved my Mum, she was a really good woman who never thought of herself, she made herself old before her time slaving from morning till night for all those men and young lassies who never gave a damn for her. Well, when I turned fifteen I couldn't take any more – I was sick of helping her so I left home, I suppose because I'm wicked. We all have wicked dreams, don't we? And unless we bring one of our wicked dreams just a wee bit to life we live like zombies – the living dead – slaves like my Mammy, right? Right? Answer me! *Please!*"
> (*SL*, 19-20)

This is not one of Sade's Enlightenment libertine's tirades defending the law of Nature against the law of God and Society to justify debauchery, but an outburst by one who blames her "wickedness" on her family circumstances.

---

[46] Alasdair Gray, Accession 10371, folder 20. National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh.

The conclusion to *Something Leather* makes clear that even in a relationship that is outside the established norms of society and therefore rejected as perverse, the powerful can still reject and abuse the weak. After her "illuminating" weekend, June receives a phone call from Harry proposing a less crowded relationship because "the good bits wa just you and me we don't need these otha little people don't you agree?". (*SL*, 226) Throughout the novel, Senga and Donalda are dominated both socially, sexually and psychologically because they are "little people". Even their "pleasurable" experience with June takes place as a result of a financial transaction. Both in Sade's novels and in *Something Leather* relationships, whether social and sexual, are always based on power and money. Characters belong either to the group of the slaves as Donalda's mother or to the bosses as Harry's. But even though the topic of money is of key importance, characters in *Something Leather*, unlike the characters in Sade's works, are not driven, as it would seem, exclusively by selfish impulses but by love. Whereas in Sade's novels slaves will always be whipped and raped and masters will always remain in power, in *Something Leather* the situation is different. By the end, June, the reticent disciple, becomes an accomplished master and Harry, Donalda and Senga yearn to be her willing slaves.

Sadomasochism and homosexuality are used in the sadomasochistic homotext as a challenge to our accepted notion of sexuality. Referring to Sade, Saylor observes the fact that "in each work, a group of rebels seek to overthrow the conventions of society, and homosexuality is a integral part of this

rebellion."[47] In *Something Leather* these taboo subjects are juxtaposed with an accepted morality that stems not only from characters such as the Liddels or "the man who knew about electricity" but also the reader's expectations. The effect achieved is, as a result, almost explicit in its mockery.

In the "Acknowledgement" section of the novel, Gray regrets his choice of title for the novel, as "[i]t directed the attention of half the critics who noticed the novel to Chapters One and Twelve, so they reviewed it as if it was mainly a sadomasochistic Lesbian adventure story". (*SL*, "Acknowledgements") As much as Gray may regret such treatment, lesbianism and sadomasochism play a vital role in *Something Leather*. He admits in the "Critic-fuel" section that it sprang from June's story line:

> I imagined a woman whose world was full of that ache, whose life was years of ordinary frustrations patiently endured before a chance suggestion led her further and further away from the familiar things she normally clung to. The woman need not have been beautiful or her adventure perverse, but these notions brought my imagination to life again. While writing the first chapter of this book I enjoyed a prolonged, cold-blooded sexual thrill of a sort common among some writers and all lizards.
> (*SL*, 233-4)

In a critical discussion of the topic of homosexuality in *Something Leather*, it is important to notice that the female characters are not originally lesbian except for Harry. However, it is clear that the author is playing with transvestism in the names Harry / Harriet while Senga – even if it is a popular Scottish name – as an inversion of Agnes is an obvious wordplay denoting gender change. June and Senga have been previously married and Donalda has, at the moment when the action of the novel takes place, a relationship with the comic writer, known as

---

[47] Douglas B. Saylor, p. 44.

Dad, the protagonist of Chapter Eleven. Even Harry is not exclusively homosexual as her fascination with the former Lord Provost, or rather with his accent, seems to suggest. Moreover, Harry, as far as we know, has never been sexually involved with either a man or a woman. Harry's interest in women seems to originate in her recollections of a sadistic Scottish nanny and an imaginary sadomasochistic relationship with Hjordis. Also it signals Harry's surrender to her mother's wish for a son instead of a daughter.

Lesbianism, that is homosexuality, blurs sexual differentiation. Therefore, during the orgy, not only are the different social classes mixed but also the barrier between heterosexuality and homosexuality is masked. Furthermore, Harry's voluntary and June's forced baldness help to obscure the barrier between male and female by erasing the erotic symbolism of hair.

Lesbianism comes late in life for Senga, Donalda and June. They turn to women in search of an affection that men have been unable or unwilling to give them. The effects of that evolution from heterosexuality to homosexuality are more striking and positive in June. At the beginning of *Something Leather* June is presented as a good-looking and honest civil servant. Admiration of her beauty provoked in men turns into resentment when she refuses their sexual advances. When looking for a job at Mr Lang's company June plays down her own appearance:[48]

> Ms Tain has subdued her appearance in a charcoal grey suit and sweater, low-heeled shoes, no jewellery. Her dark brown copious hair is fixed in a bun on the nape of her neck. She wears just enough cosmetic to make her pale skin look ordinary. She cannot subdue her finely shaped figure and face which strike some people as romantically Spanish, some as classically Greek.

[48] The chapter "Mr Lang and Ms Tain" is based on a play called "Sam Lang and Miss Watson" (1973). Accession 10371, folder 16 (6). A copy of the play can be found in Accession 9247, folder 22. National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh.

(*SL*, 82)

Like the virtuous Justine she does not want to compromise her honesty. However, June has a powerful personality that Justine and for that matter most of Sade's female characters lack. When Mr Lang tries to force her to do two jobs and only be paid for one, she replies in a fashion innocent Justine would never dream of:

> [Mr. Lang] "Listen! I need a receptionist and you need a job."
> [Ms Tain] "That's no reason why I should eat dirt!"
> (*SL*, 86)

She learns to use her femininity to gain power and soon discovers that men cannot provide her with what she needs. She first finds a substitute in clothing and eventually in homosexuality and a re-creation of her external self.

Harry, obsessed by the loss of her beloved Hjordis, sees in June a replacement for both her and her Scottish nanny. Hjordis plays a key role in holding the imaginary and real world of Harry together. When Harry finds out that Hjordis is dead she needs someone to keep her fantasy world working: "The dream world becomes a reminder of death and of absence, then vanishes also. Harry cannot now imagine anyone who adores or desires her, cannot imagine anything at all". (*SL*, 152) Harry's life, then, belongs to the mind; her ability for oral communication is impaired and her affective relationships with others have to be physically violent. Like Sade's libertines, she sees the other as a body to be mastered. Paradoxically, too, she is a sculptor unable to create human forms. When the gang dissolves at the boarding school she models some figures to substitute them: "[t]he twins are a single body with two heads. Hjordis is biggest, with distinct breasts and a sting in her tail". (*SL*.139) She needs a figure like

Hjordis to keep her world working. Now that she is dead Harry searches for a replacement.

Donalda, Senga, June and Harry will form a grown-up substitute for the gang at the boarding school. Senga and Donalda are "the twins" and they will be "shut out" from June and Harry's relationship as Hjordis had promised Harry she would do if she became her friend. Harry and June will be able to enjoy the world that Harry had rejected when she was a child at the boarding school, the imaginary world of The Fortress, a womblike universe whose inmates are protected from the real world.

> *I've a lovely tin of delicious biscuits and all sorts of gorgeous things fo you! Chocolate and scent and a silk scarf and a little hampster in a cage shaped like a doll's house who's called Limpy Dan because one of his feet doesn't work but you can call him anything you like please come down! Please I'm so lonely!* (*SL*,153)

Saylor sees a connection between masochism, narcissism and homosexual acts. We enjoy what we are doing to our double as if we were doing it to ourselves. If we torture our double, we are torturing ourselves. [49] Again, as in the case of homosexuality, the barriers are blurred, in this case one between torturer and victim. However, in the case of sadomasochism the roles of victim and torturer are clear. The sadomasochistic relationship is a reflection of the domination and submission of one sex by the other and one social class by another.

According to Maurice Charney, sexuality in Sade is "a form of debasement for both subject and object" and "pain and cruelties and tortures are necessary in order to assure the libertine that he is alive".[50] At the heart of sadism

---

[49] Douglas B. Saylor, p. 49.
[50] Maurice Charney, *Sexual Fiction*. (London & New York: Methuen, 1981), p. 36.

there is pleasure but only as a result of destruction. As Angela Carter suggests, "[w]hen she [the victim] suffers, she exists. She will embrace her newly discovered masochism with all her heart because she has found a sense of being through suffering".[51] However, the masochistic relationship between the female characters in *Something Leather* awakens a latent vitality. June becomes alive through her physical pain. June does not discover the masochistic side of her nature; instead, she discovers an aspect of her femininity that had been dormant within her. The lesbian-sadomasochist relationship in *Something Leather*, central to the novel as it is, should be considered within the more ample context of personal self-discovery through the enactment of socially unacceptable fantasies. As John Linklater points out, the underlying purpose of the novel "has little to do with sex".[52]

Homosexuality and sadomasochism are the forms which rebellion against society and established morality take in the novel. In relation to this point it is important to note that the only truly sadomasochistic character is Harry. Donalda and Senga are involved in the sadomasochistic orgy only for the money. For them it is a business transaction as Senga's reference to her "clients" makes clear. Donalda and Senga are paid by Harry to stage the orgy. June is sold to Harry for £3000. Power and misuse of money are topics that lie beneath *Something Leather*'s sexual plot. The story Harry reads in the book called *Another Part of the Forest* in which a black woman accepts a large sum of money to be insulted by her white employer is a further reflection and a development of this subject.

---

[51] Angela Carter, (1979), p. 75.
[52] John Linklater, "Tanned Hide", rev. of *Something Leather*. *The Listener*, 19 July 1990, p. 25.

Something Leather has at the core of its plot a typical sadomasochistic male fantasy. The novel itself seems to be one extended fantasy that belongs to the character "Dad". Also, the headmistress's justification of the use of sadomasochism is typically male:

> "Everybody, Harriet, has ideas which make them tingle, ideas which make stroking themselves and even stroking otha people moa fun. These ideas a to be found in litritcha, art, films, advertisements and the games we play. Some of these ideas would be harmful if taken seriously but only stupid people take ideas seriously. The French – Germans – Russians – Irish sometimes take ideas seriously, but in England we a all liberals at heart, as wise as serpents and harmless as doves. We know that the wildest ideas a just ways of adding funny tingly feelings to a world managed by old-fashioned business methods, methods no serious person questions".
> (*SL*, 141-2)

Psychiatrists agree on the important role of the family and the school in the development of masochistic fantasies. Particularly in the case of feminine masochism the figure of the mother seems to play a central role. At the root of Harry's masochism is Reik's perception that "unconsciously we love ourselves later on (in life) with the affection given us, as if we had incorporated those who loved us and who thus continue their existence in us".[53] Lack of parental love, resulting in its substitution by physical pain, leads to her inability to express affection in any other terms. Sadism is her expression of love and also a representation of the kind of love bestowed on her.

Fantasy is the source of and an indispensable element in masochistic behaviour. This behaviour involves the actual representation of those fantasies and daydreams that excite the masochist. He or she wants to transfer those

---

[53] Theodor Reik, "Masochism in Modern Man", in *Of Love and Lust. On the Psychoanalysis of Romantic and Sexual Emotions*. (London: Souvenir Press Ltd., 1975), p. 164.

fantasies into reality. These fantasies usually refer to situations that are familiar to the masochist.

For Michelle A. Massé "the intertwining of love and pain is not natural and does not originate in the self": it is fiction and culture that teach women masochism. For her, therefore, "masochism's causes are external and real".[54] It is clear that in *Something Leather* Harry's fantasies have their root in her nanny, Hjordis and, to a certain extent, Ethel the headmistress. Harry is careful to arrange everything in such a way that the image of Hjordis is revived in June during the orgy. Leather garments, June's baldness and wasps tattooed on her face – such a calculated self-representation – bring to mind the image of Hjordis and the way she used to make herself up in the Forest.

> Hjordis deliberately uses white face powder, scarlet lipstick, dark eye-shadow and eyebrow pencil to model herself on the Wicked Queen in Walt Disney's *Snow White*. She wears a black dress and black opera cloak lined with scarlet silk which flutters behind her ....
> (*SL*, 38)

According to Jean Paulhan,[55] fairy tales are the erotic novels of children and for Wilhelm Stekel they frequently form the nucleus of sadomasochistic fantasies.[56] Jacques Guicharnaud seems to share the same view as he considers that the novels of Sade are "long fairy tales without fairies, but in which, according to the traditional genre, the characters' universe is made up solely of privileged places and impetuous acts".[57] Hjordis' image as the cruel stepmother in *Snow White* is

---

[54] Michelle A. Massé, *In the Name of Love. Women, Masochism, and the Gothic*. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 3.
[55] Jean Paulhan, "A Slave's Revolt", in *Story of O*, p. 270.
[56] Wilhelm Stekel, *Sadism and Masochism. The Psychology of Hatred and Cruelty*, vol 2 (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1935), p. 419.
[57] Jacques Guicharnaud, "The Wreathed Columns of St. Peter's". *Yale French Studies* 35 (December, 1965), p. 29.

one of the central masochistic images in *Something Leather*. For Harry, her nanny is, if not her biological mother, the only mother figure she has known and therefore can be considered her stepmother. Hjordis embodies in her disguise of witch and also in her need for Harry, the paradoxical synthesis of pain, terror and love that lies at the heart of masochism.

We saw the importance of clothing in Gray's fiction in the last chapter. Forcing somebody to dress up in a determined way or dressing somebody up is not only an act of manipulation and control but also of imagination. The choice of fancy dress in some of Gray's fiction is a clear indication of his need to dress up some of his obsessions. Items of clothing, especially uniforms, play a key role in the sadomasochistic world of *Something Leather*. The same is the case in Sade and in Pauline Réage's *Story of O*. In *Justine,* the girls held prisoner by the monks in the monastery of Sainte-Marie-des-Bois wear clothes of different colours according to their age. In *Story of O* the servants of Roissy, the palatial house where O is confined, wear clothes that make them more easily "available" to their masters. In *Something Leather* the leather skirt is the "school uniform", which Donalda, Senga and June have to wear for Miss Cane, the wicked "schoolteacher" during their orgy.

Clothes are a form of physical bondage and an imposition that only foregrounds the dominant role of the master. Both in *Something Leather* and *Story of O* the very material, leather, is an ever present reminder of the whip in contact with the skin, therefore making it impossible for the victim to forget his or her position of total submission. But at the same time, by dressing up, the old self can be disguised and a new one brought to the surface. Imposed items of

clothing can be, therefore, a release for the victim: O finds the tight bodice she has to wear "exceedingly comfortable and, up to a certain point, relaxing". (*S of O*, 50) The only clothes that Senga and Donalda have left for June are uncomfortable, extremely tight and leave much of her body uncovered. Like O, June feels that "[t]he tightness comforts" (*SL*, 225). However, June's clothes have not been imposed on her as a proof of her master's power over her but as a token of love.

Although there is violence and cruelty in *Something Leather*, it never achieves – nor seeks – the levels of depravity of Sade's novels or *Story of O*. There is physical pain but not hatred in the manner in which June is treated by Senga, Donalda and Harry. The role of love makes *Something Leather* radically different from the works of Sade where such feeling has to be avoided at all costs if society is to be destroyed. The orgy is saturated with love in spite of the whipping, binding and gagging. Massé sees a search for love and a confirmation of the masochist's identity behind the self-inflicted pain:

> Even the pain she may inflict upon herself can be a way of maintaining control of her own identity and of warding off more dangerous external threats. Her acceptance of the suffering others impose is necessary to her psychic and physical well-being: she, like all of us, must have whatever form of "love" is available to create and preserve a coherent identity.[58]

This need is also expressed in sadism when the masochist needs to see her own existence reflected on the other.[59] Harry is desperate to possess and love June and be loved by her. However, the spectacle requires the building up of tension, of anxiety in the masochist so that her excitement is even greater. Senga forces

---

[58] Michelle A. Massé, p. 51.
[59] Michelle A. Massé, p. 50.

Harry to wait for half an hour before she can have June. However, in the case of Harry, the eagerness to love and possess exclusively is more important than the creation of a sexual tension.

In the orgy that takes place at the end of *Something Leather* it is clear that the protagonist is not Harry but June. Harry is forging a new Hjordis. The whole orgy is not a gratuitous show, the main purpose is to attract the bored June to the group formed by Senga, Donalda and Harry, to show her that there is something beyond her self-contented life. At the beginning of *Something Leather*, June has a job which does not fulfil her. She feels a void in her life that she tries to fill through the acquisition of expensive and stylish clothes. When she goes to The Hideout she is looking for a leather garment but does not know exactly what she wants. At that point she starts a "hunt for something she cannot yet imagine" (*SL*, 11) and that is embodied by the leather skirt. The leather skirt fulfils a role in June's life similar to the key and the sunlight in Duncan Thaw's and Lanark's lives. Entering The Hideout and purchasing the leather skirt means for June that the hole she has felt in her life so far has been filled. The skirt, like the key Duncan Thaw searches for, "make[s] everything painful, useless and wrong become pleasant, harmonious and good". (*L*, 169)

June's experience does not terminate in the satisfaction attained through physical pain. In *Something Leather*, sadomasochism is presented as a road to self-knowledge and it is the aspect of the work that critics find more difficult to accept. The violent experience June endures makes her more beautiful and gives her the possibility to recreate herself.

Susan Sontag thinks that

> whereas Sade is interested in the obliteration of personality from the viewpoint of power and liberty, the author of *Story of O* is interested in the obliteration of personality from the viewpoint of happiness.[60]

In *Something Leather* June's personality is not obliterated but strengthened. When June sees a picture of a woman bonded and dressed in leather she finds her more interesting, more attractive than in normal clothes: "If the woman gossiping by the sewing machine … is the woman in the photograph she is more interesting, more enticingly beautiful in the photograph". (*SL*, 13) The picture fills June with a strange feeling of vitality.

> She is haunted by daydreams of a picturebook showing temptingly available victims and tyrants. Her heart beats faster at the memory. She feels – while knowing this irrational – close to a gladness and freedom she has not enjoyed since she was eleven and sex was a thrilling secret shared with a few special friends, not an anxious negotiation with a potentially dangerous adult.
> (*SL*, 15-16)

Freud considers that sadism and aggression represent an impulse to return to the original state of nothingness. In the *Story of O* the result of torture is a state of non-existence in which the victim is not in control of her own self any more but belongs physically and psychologically to her torturers:

> But at the first word or gesture you will stop in the middle of whatever you happen to be doing, addressing yourself to your one primary task, your only significant one duty, which is to avail yourself to be used. Your hands are not your own, neither are your breasts, nor, above all, is any one of the orifices of your body, which we are at liberty to explore and into which we may, whenever we so please, introduce ourselves.
> (*S of O*, 25)

However, in *Something Leather* the result of physical pain is a feeling of well-being that goes beyond nothingness.

> The pain which follows is so astonishing that June does not try to scream but jerks her body at each hard regular stroke with a small indrawn cry of "ah". After the second stroke she feels nothing exists but her body and Miss

[60] Susan Sontag, p. 56.

> Cane. After the twentieth she feels only the strokes exist, nothing else, not even her body, and when only the strokes exist each one evokes, as a kind of echo, a sensation of luxury. The luxury grows until she chokes with laughter and is about to faint.
> (*SL*, 213)

June, like O, must wonder after she has been bathed "why terror should have such a sweet taste". (*S of O*, 35) "She cannot remember having enjoyed such delicious peace in every part of her body yet the sensation is surprisingly familiar. Was being a baby like this?" (*SL*, 214)

In *Story of O*, O's self is annihilated to the extent that "She was – who? Anyone at all, no-one, someone else". (*S of O*, 57) She is no longer considered a human being:

> The chains and the silence which ought to have sealed her isolated self within twenty impenetrable walls, to have asphyxiated her, strangled her, hadn't; to the contrary, they'd been her deliverance, liberating her from herself.
> (*S of O*, 57)

For O the chains are a liberation from her own self. June, however, has acquired a new manner of perception through them:

> But what makes this room unlike all others past or possible is the strong tones, clear colours, distinct edges of everything, everyone in it; also an ache of sexual longing. June feels this ache like the solid presence of a fifth person who knows them all intimately, has brought them all together, who stands invisible among them but cannot be handled.
> (*SL*, 219-20)

This fifth presence is the new June, who is also the essence of Hjordis. Through masochism June discovers a new self, a new life inside herself: "Baldness and wasps still give this head discarded doll look but look of *expensive* doll discarded because it is a *dangerous plaything able to act for itself*". (*SL*, 225)

According to Stekel, a sadist "strives originally for the total annihilation of the object. Every sadist is really a murderer".[61] For him, cruelty is the expression of the sadomasochist's readiness to hate. Hate, therefore, is at the core of sadomasochistic behaviour. The sadomasochist also is incapable of love. In Sade's work every relationship between the characters has its root in hatred. However in *Something Leather* it has its root in the search for love. Similarly in *Story of O*, O's passivity stems from her love for René:

> She did not want to die; but if torture were the price she was to have to pay for her lover's continuing love, then she only hoped he would be happy because of what she had undergone, and she waited, very mild, very mute, for them to take her back to him.
> (*S of O*, 40-41)

In opposition to the case of other sadomasochists, in the case of Harry, pain has not come as punishment due to misbehaviour. She cannot associate pain as a consequence of bad behaviour. In fact, punishment came to Harry gratuitously and unprovoked, as love does. For her, being beaten amounts to being loved and in her search for love she needs to be punished. We could say, therefore, that she is not a proper sadist because Harry is not incapable of love. Indeed, it is what she strives to achieve. By caning June, she tries to bring her closer to her. She shows affection in the only way she knows.

Harry's sadomasochistic enactment has typically two elements, pain and pleasure. The orgy is a repetition of some incidents in Harry's life: the unprovoked beatings of the nanny, the bath after the whipping that is reminiscent of the bath scene in the boarding school, and the dressing-up of June which parallels the way Hjordis used to dress at the forest. For Harry, the re-enactment

---

[61] Wilhelm Stekel, p. 407.

of this fantasy is the only way to express herself and show love and emotion. Being beaten and ill treated was the first human contact she experienced. The feeling of pain brought with it a sensation of pleasure very similar to an erotic experience. Therefore, as we have seen, Harry is always looking for a lover who can restore to her that sexual feeling she first experienced through the beatings of her nanny. She demonstrates with her actions how she wants to be loved. She finds it in Hjordis because she rules people through bribes and terror as her nanny did. Harry daydreams of Hjordis at the boarding school and the time she – Harry – had asked to be beaten.

> The daydreams which make Harry tingle are about Hjordis spanking people, but are unlike what happened in the shrubbery. That event was so unexpected and so quickly over that she hardly noticed it at the time. Gradually her imagination has falsified it into something splendid with Hjordis an enthroned witch-queen ordering the twins to spank Harry in terrible ways; sometimes ordering her to spank them back.
> (*SL*, 142)

Harry is not merely a masochist; she is a *sado*masochist because even in pain she does not want a lonely relationship. She wants to give as much as she takes; she needs a partner with whom to share her pain that is also her expression of love.

It is important to note that at the end of the novel, the sadomasochistic relationship evolves into a love relationship of a homosexual kind between June and Senga and June and Harry. June asks Senga when they meet for the first time after the orgy: "We don't need to be cruel to each other, do we?". (*SL*, 242) This seems to exclude a sadomasochistic relationship, but Senga's words indicate that love, like sadomasochism, is a power relationship between unequal partners:

> "Not when it's just you and me now, like this. We're just starting together so we're fresh and equal. But sooner or later one of us will be up and the other down because nobody in love ever stays equal …"
> (*SL*, 242)

A rebellion against father figures of authority and power is another key aspect of the sadomasochistic homotext. For Saylor, sadomasochism and homosexuality "threaten the power of patriarchy, and represent a challenge to the structures of culture".[62] In the case of Harry authority figures are female and they are incarnated by the mother and the nanny. These "father figures" are later reincarnated in Harry's fantasies in the image of Hjordis as a witch queen.

The Scottish nanny plays the role of the mother; therefore, Harry's search for a substitute acquires an incestuous character. For Harry love is a form of dependency. By engaging in sadomasochistic practices, she is re-enacting the kind of relationship she had with her Scottish nanny, "the one person in the world she was allowed to depend on". (*SL*, 24) Harry's character

> has been shaped by two people: a mother who wanted a passive bit of female cleanness on which to exhibit some astonishingly expensive and fashionable little frocks, a nurse who worked to make her exactly that.
> (*SL*, 135)

The nanny has played the role of the sculptor with Harry. She sculpted her soul. Since childhood Harry has felt the need to sculpt, later becoming a famous artist. Harry objectifies people because she has also been objectified. As we have seen, she is able to represent any form or shape "apart from a life-like head or torso. The only human forms she creates are sexless, featureless dummies ….". (*SL*, 144) She fails to observe individuality in people because she has been treated as an object and her speechlessness makes her more like an object and less of a human being. Sculpting is also an exorcising of her monsters or an activity which

---

[62] Douglas B. Saylor, p. 33.

obliges her to confront them. An earlier draft of the chapter "The Bum Garden" shows clearly what is the purpose of Harry's sculptures: "This dream world is not just a masturbatory fancy. Every work of art Judy has made shows one of its monsters or totems, a piece of its architecture or machinery".[63] They serve a personal, instinctive purpose. That is why she rejects them once they are finished. Like Sade, Harry takes pleasure in her creations "with the implicit purpose of mutilating [them].[64]

Harry also uses the activity of clay modelling to rebel against her mother's obsession with cleanliness. Something similar happens to June. She feels free when she realises her head has been shaved. Her hair "was religion learned from a devout mother who taught her to love it, worship it, serve and suffer for it handfuls grabbed and twisted before she was twelve by boys, also girls". (*SL*, 225-6) Therefore, by being bald she feels free of her mother's impositions. However, the makeover forced on June, as well as having the function of modelling a new Hjordis, recreates this imposition of clothing which is central to her fantasy.

Hierarchy and rules are important in works where masochism plays an important role such as Sade's and *Story of O* and, therefore, in *Something Leather*. The sadomasochist has a "fondness for habits and ritual" (*S of O*, 99) and is afraid of spontaneity. This rigidity stems from insecurity and a need to control and be controlled. Schools embody this power and control. It can hardly be surprising that many sadomasochistic fantasies use a school as their setting.

---

[63] Alasdair Gray, Accession 10371, folder 18. National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh.
[64] Lawrence W. Lynch, p. 121.

By recreating a school atmosphere the characters are challenging the power it represents. At the "class party" June is "joining the school" which is ruled by a headmistress – Harry – who is a great believer in the power of discipline. As in Sade's work, in the sadomasochistic world of *Something Leather* there are laws that have to be obeyed, rules and procedures that must be followed. Victims and torturers have a fixed role and a definite function and no action is gratuitous. This obsession with rules and a rigid structure creates a paradoxical situation. In the sadomasochistic homotext law is opposed but at the same time there is a need for authority and control. In this kind of text, "the radical theme of rebellion is tempered by a certain conservatism".[65] Senga's prohibition to Harry that she postpone her enjoyment of June until half an hour has elapsed is an example of law and self-control as well as a way of increasing anticipation. Submission to rules is an aspect of the sadomasochistic homotext that Saylor considers extremely conservative. Sade appears to want to destroy the law of society. However, what he does is supplant one type of law for another. The law of selfishness, the law of Nature, is as constricting as the law he tries to get rid of.

> [Homotextuality] challenges the structure of power, but in challenging upholds that immutable law … Homotextuality is a threat to the discourse of the father, although it can never overthrow his reign, and is indeed created by his law.[66]

As Lawrence Lynch points out with reference to *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, Sade "continues so far in his deification of lust that lust becomes another restriction".[67]

---

[65] Douglas B. Saylor, p. 50.
[66] Douglas B. Saylor, p. 33-4.
[67] Lawrence W. Lynch, p. 29.

Interestingly enough, even when the mother and the nanny may be power figures, Harry does not seem to rebel against them. Harry's homosexuality can be connected with her mother's wish for her to be a boy, so in a way there is an attempt to submit to the mother's wishes. For Harry sadomasochism is not a revolt against power figures – her mother and nanny – but a way of showing love and affection. It is, at the same time, a form of creating beauty: "The nurse produces this perfect Harry by smacking and nipping her when they are alone together, not because Harry is bad but in order to stop her becoming bad". (*SL*, 23)

One of the leitmotifs in Sade's work, *Story of O* and *Something Leather* is the desecration of the female body. Desecration here has not only the purpose of producing pain, but also of signalling the possession of the desecrated body by an "other". In both *Story of O* and *Something Leather*, the bodies of O and June are marked, in the case of O with the initial of her master burnt deep into her skin and in the case of June by the tattooing of wasps on her body. In both instances the victim does not feel the desecration as intrusive or degrading, that is, the scars of unwanted aggression, but as a form of deliverance similar to what June feels when she contemplates her shaven head.

As we have seen, Harry sees in June the physical representation of the powerful figures of the mother, the nanny and Hjordis. However, June refuses to be recreated as the embodiment of these dominant figures by refusing to beat her. June refuses to join in any sadomasochistic adventure. This failure on the part of June to comply to Harry's perverted wishes also foregrounds the novel's attitude towards sadomasochism as sexual perversion. Gray does not engage in

sadomasochism as the novel's exclusive leitmotiv. Sadomasochism is purely a window through which Gray presents wider social questions in a humorous fashion. *Something Leather* concerns itself with sex but not exclusively.

It is also important to note that female characters in *Something Leather* are the ones in control of the situation, in contrast to female characters in Sade's work. The conclusion Gray wants to achieve is the creation of a powerful June in charge of her life again. Referring to the end he plans for the novel, he writes:

> Reconstructed June may become first President of the United British Socialist Republics or a butterfly in an intricate web of sexually entangled women, though at present I yearn for an ending grotesquely, subversively, gloriously triumphant.[68]

Another of the key points of the sadomasochistic homotext is the topic of language. This point appears in *Something Leather* under the question of accent. Accents are a fundamental aspect of Harry's daydreams: "[t]hese daydreams are not satisfactory. The voices sound wrong". (*SL*, 142-3) They sound wrong because they have not got the nanny's Scottish accent. She will eventually find that sound in Donalda's, Senga's and June's voices.

The topic of accent acting as a barrier between people of different social classes and cultures has been prominent in the work of James Kelman and Tom Leonard. Gray also deals with this issue in *Something Leather*. In Chapter Four the language barrier between Donalda and the "man who knew about electricity" provokes a feeling of mistrust. However, for Linda her father's London accent is associated with a happy and lost time:

---

[68] Alasdair Gray, MS letter to Tom Maschler, dated 6 February 1988. Accession 10371, folder 3 (O). National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh.

> Linda cannot sleep unless she first plays one of her father's records, turning the sound low, putting her ear near the speaker and dreaming he sings just to her; dreaming also that he, she and her mother still live in a brick terrace house with two cosy rooms downstairs and two up, a house with a small park near by where she can run and tumble with children whose friendly voices sound like her own. (*SL*, 31)

Linda's accent will become that of the "British inheriting and investing classes" once she is accepted into Hjordis's gang. However, this change in accent separates her from Harry who cannot feel attached to people "whose voice does not strike her as comically coarse and ill bred" (*SL*, 46) exactly like that of her Scottish nanny.

Received Pronunciation is the language of power and Gray uses its phonetic representation in a parodic way to denounce such appropriation. Gray, by using the phonetic representation of the speech of the powerful classes, demystifies the established belief that any accent that deviates from the "Queen's English" is the one that should be represented phonetically. In the way he parodies the use of an accent that embodies social and economic power he handles the question of language differently from James Kelman and Tom Leonard. Both these authors want to give a voice to what is considered "marginal" speech, that of Glasgow's working class. However, Gray draws attention to a form that is usually considered "transparent" by representing Received Pronunciation phonetically. He caricatures the language of the powerful and makes it comical.

Phonetic speech makes Received Pronunciation look foreign and collaborates to highlight one of the basic differences between Sade's work and *Something Leather*. Gray and Sade achieve a very different comic effect. The result of some of Sade's most extravagant scenes, particularly the repetitive and

tedious list of crimes that compose *The One Hundred & Twenty Days of Sodom* is not sexual arousal or horror but hilarity at its most monotonously absurd. Something similar happens in *Story of O* where the seriousness with which the protagonist acts in the situations provokes mirth instead of shock. As Donald Thomas points out, "Cruelty may shock or revolt, but the danger of such violence in literature is that it becomes tedious by repetition, or ludicrous".[69]

One of the characteristics of *Something Leather* when compared to Sade's work – or the pornographic fantasies of Jock McLeish in *1982 Janine* – is the lack of sexual repetitiveness. Whereas in *1982 Janine* we find a recurrent use of pornographic motifs and characters, *Something Leather* revolves around a single object – the leather skirt – the search for which sets the novel into action.

Something Leather also provokes amusement in the reader. However, in the case of Gray the humour is deliberate. It functions like a wink to the reader to let him into the game. It is worth noting that these highly humorous incidents take place in what some have considered Gray's most disturbing pages. We find a similar comic effect in short stories by Hogg where the cruel and the laughable are mixed, for example "The Brownie of the Black Haggs". We can see one example of this humour in the chapter entitled "Class Party", where the rather comic figure of Donalda plays down the violent situation. Laughter is difficult to avoid when Donalda excuses herself for passing near a handcuffed and hanging June and disturbing her. The reference to plastic cuffs in Senga's love letter to Harriet has an equally comic effect:

---

[69] Donald Thomas, p. 173.

> *Dear Dear Dear Dear (here I go again) Dear Dear Dear Dear June, I will not be paying you £300 when Harry's cheque comes through because the firm has had to meet certain expenses. Good handcuffs cost more than you would think possible and my customers are given only the best. Plastic cuffs hold well enough but would have been an insult.*
> (*SL*, 229)

Similarly, Donalda's refusal to whip Harry by declaring herself on strike while Harry hangs from the door lintel waiting to be whipped is highly comical when compared with the absurd seriousness with which victims are chosen in *Story of O*:

> At three o'clock, under the purple beech where the garden chairs were grouped round a circular white stone table, Anne Marie would call for the box and the disks. Each girl would take a disk. She who drew the lowest number was therewith conducted into the music room and arranged upon the stage …
> (*S of O*, 209)

In *1982 Janine* Gray used the format and characters of pornographic fiction, whether prose or film, but he did not intend to write a "dirty" novel. In *Something Leather*, Gray exploits what Storr considers the typical patterns of sadomasochistic novels:

> The portrayal of an unwilling virgin who, when raped and beaten into submission, comes to welcome and passionately desire the sexual activities she originally repudiated. Another is the boy or girl being flogged by an elegant and powerful woman who, as a parent, governess or school teacher, is in a position of authority.[70]

Something Leather seems to challenge critics whose response to the novel was to see it as purely pornographic and degrading to women. Similarly, in *Something Leather* he uses the topics of sadomasochism and lesbianism as an excuse to mock society but he is not interested in writing a sadomasochistic

---

[70] Anthony Storr, "Sadomasochism", in *Principles and Practice of Forensic Psychiatry*, eds. R. Bluglass and P. Bowdened. (Edinburgh, London, Melbourne and New York: Churchill Livingstone, 1990), p. 711.

novel. *Something Leather* is not so much a sadomasochistic novel as one that makes use of sadomasochistic imagery to make a political and social comment. Sadism and masochism are equated with social and economic power because sadism and masochism represent sexual power. Mark Axelrod also acknowledges Gray's use of sexuality "to address concerns about class and privilege". Particularly in *Something Leather* and *1982 Janine* "sexuality is politicized in much the same way that language is politicized".[71]

By moving the characters away from the most negative aspects of sadomasochism and concluding the novel with a homosexual relationship, Gray seems eager to clarify that he does not place sadomasochism and lesbianism in the same bag.

Ultimately, the group formed by Senga, Donalda, June and Harry rebel against the supreme father figure and that is the law of society represented by middle class beliefs. It is interesting to note that *Something Leather* has two endings. In the first, June establishes a relationship with Harry, whereas in the 'Epilogue' she prefers Senga. Therefore, she establishes a relationship with both upper and lower classes rendering true Gray's comment that the novel tries to show how well or how badly the British classes get on.

---

[71] Mark Axelrod, "Alasdair Gray: An Introduction of Sorts", p. 104.

Chapter IV: Plural and Partial Identities in *Poor Things*

In the acknowledgement section of *Poor Things*,[1] Alasdair Gray indicates his indebtedness to Christopher Small's study of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, Ariel Like a Harpy*.[2] He also mentions Liz Lochhead's play *Blood and Ice* based on the same topic. However, the original *Frankenstein* is not directly alluded to, and this task is left to the characters Bella Baxter and Godwin Baxter.

Godwin Baxter is a Glaswegian doctor who brings to life the dead body of a woman who has jumped into the Clyde – Bella Baxter. He replaces the cadaver's brain with that of her unborn baby. The connection between Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and *Poor Things*, however, is more profound than it at first appears. It is not merely a link between these novels as fictional narrations – *Poor Things* clearly relies on *Frankenstein* as an intertext – but between some of the episodes and people in Mary Shelley's life and those in Bella's.

Godwin Baxter's first name clearly refers the reader to William Godwin, Mary Shelley's father. Apart from the name Godwin, Baxter and William Godwin share a keen interest in education.[3] Godwin Baxter's middle name is Bysshe, the same as Mary Godwin's husband, the poet Shelley. The surname, Baxter, is the name of the family Mary Shelley lived with during her time in the Dundee area, from 1812 to 1814.

---

[1] Alasdair Gray, *Poor Things*. (Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd.: London, 1992)
[2] Christopher Small, *Ariel Like a Harpy. Shelley, Mary and Frankenstein*. (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1972)
[3] Both William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft were deeply interested in the education of children. Godwin wrote an essay on the theory of education entitled *Account of the Seminary* (1784) and later in his life he published other books especially designed for teaching the young. For more information on William Godwin and his views on education see William St Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys. The Biography of a Family*. (London, Boston: Faber and Faber, 1989), pp. 279-84.

Like Bella, Mary Shelley did not enjoy a happy relationship with her father who, like Mr. Hattersley in *Poor Things*, wanted his daughter to comply with the orthodox morality of the time. Furthermore, the episode of Bella's attempted suicide in *Poor Things* is reminiscent of the series of suicides and attempted suicides in Mary's family: both Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley attempted suicide at some point in their lives while Fanny Godwin, Mary's half sister, and Harriet Westbrook, Percy Bysshe Shelley's deserted wife, killed themselves.[4]

Lastly, Victoria McCandless's work in favour of women's rights alludes to Mary Wollstonecraft, the mother of Mary Shelley and author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and *The Wrongs of Woman*.[5] In another example of coincidence between the novel and Mary Shelley's life, we should note that Mary Wollstonecraft died in childbirth, therefore, like Bella, giving her own life for that of her child.

Predictably, many of the novel's reviewers have referred to the similarity

---

[4] After being abandoned by her lover Gilbert Imlay, Mary Wollstonecraft threw herself off Putney Bridge having first soaked her clothes in the rain. She was rescued by boatmen and revived. Harriet Shelley's body was found in the Serpentine. She was heavily pregnant.
William St Clair, pp. 160, 411-412.

[5] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of The Rights of Woman*, eds. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, *The Pickering Masters*, vol. 5 (London: Pickering & Chatto Ltd., 1989)
Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Wrongs of Woman: or, Maria*, eds. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, *The Pickering Masters*, vol. 1 (London: Pickering & Chatto Ltd., 1989)

between *Frankenstein* and *Poor Things*. [6] For Edwin Morgan, the latter is an entertaining and "swiftly readable" reworking of that well known household-name fiction which has by now acquired the status of myth. However he considers that

> we are more strongly moved by Dr Frankenstein's creation in Mary Shelley's novel: the "monster", like Bella, is a fabrication, but rouses intense sympathy as well as awe and terror in the reader and forces thought into areas of deeper import, speculation and questioning than the sociopolitical concerns of *Poor Things*.[7]

Edwin Morgan points to the socio-political concerns of the novel and seems to underestimate them. From this socio-political point of view, Morgan sees *Poor Things* developing one of the central concerns of Gray's work, "the 'vile' suggestion that it is impossible to do anything about the cruelties and injustices of society".[8] Other critics, such as Lynne Diamond-Nigh and John C. Hawley also refer in their essays on *Poor Things* to the social content of the novel. For Diamond-Nigh the novel is basically a "vitriolic satire of urban conditions, social class structure, prejudice against women, the medical and legal establishments,

---

[6] Some critics who have referred to the connection between *Poor Things* and Mary Shelley's biography are:
John C. Hawley points to the nature of Godwin Baxter as a "creator": "...there is the further irony of this constant implied reference to William Godwin (1756-1836) whose wife died in giving birth to Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley. That father gave birth to a form of anarchy, reliant upon reason; that daughter gave birth to *Frankenstein*. In *Poor Things* Godwin gives birth to both". John C. Hawley, "Bell, Book, and Candle: *Poor Things* and the Exorcism of Victorian Sentiment". *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 15 n 2 (Summer 1995), p. 176.

Edwin Morgan also refers to Godwin Baxter. "Godwin Bysshe Baxter is an ugly but benevolent surgeon who as his name tells us is a prophet like William Godwin (Mary Shelley' father) and a creator of life (indeed he is familiarly called God) like the hero of Mary Shelley's novel".
"A Misunderstood Monster", rev. of *Poor Things*. *Chapman* 72 (1993), p. 89.

Marie Odile Pittin refers to the structure of the novel, its epistolary form and the interpolation of stories, as a clear reference to Mary Shelley's novel.
Mary Odile Pittin, "Alasdair Gray: A Strategy of Ambiguity", in Susanne Hagemann, p. 210.
[7] Edwin Morgan, "A Misunderstood Monster?", p. 90.
[8] Edwin Morgan, "A Misunderstood Monster?", p. 90.

religion and various other institutionalized systems".[9] Similarly Hawley considers that "[w]hat we have in *Poor Things* is a late-twentieth-century nineteenth-century eighteenth century: an endless self-referential social experiment that views society as a sick body without a soul".[10] Despite the novel's humorous content, for Jonathan Coe *Poor Things* "has its share of openly political passages, exhilarating enough at first but noticeably bleaker than before".[11] For him, the most depressing aspect of the novel is the idea that to the contemporary reader, Victoria McCandless's idealism makes her a lovable eccentric, a crank "that failed to make the revolution".[12]

That Gray is using the novel to make a socio-political statement is beyond doubt. We have seen in his other novels that his concerns are mainly social and political, that is, he is a writer with a considerable moral purpose. As in his other novels, he uses fantasy to express his ideas on social and personal control and domination. In *Lanark* he uses characteristics that look like but are not science fiction, and in *1982 Janine* and *Something Leather* he uses pornography, sadomasochism and homosexuality, while not himself a pornographer, torturer, or gay. Here, Gray parodies the Gothic novel which he finds useful in its use of taboo topics, such as the body. Brian McHale considers the "[g]rotesque imagery of the human body", which he sees as deriving from carnival practices, as a distinctive characteristic of postmodern fiction.[13] Gray's use of the grotesque

---

[9] Lynne Diamond-Nigh, "Gray's Anatomy. When Words and Images Collide". *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 15 n 2 (Summer 1995), p. 178.
[10] John C. Hawley, p. 177.
[11] Jonathan Coe, "Gray's Elegy", rev. of *Poor Things*. *London Review of Books*, 8 October 1992, p. 11.
[12] Jonathan Coe, p. 11.
[13] Brian McHale, p. 173.

body is even more obvious in the first drafts of the novel in which the brain transplanted into Bella belongs to a malformed baby.[14] Also, Lucie Armitt considers the use of the body in fantastic literature particularly appropriate for the exploration of socio-political subversions due to the body's collective and individual significance.[15] For her, "[t]he female body remains the locus for fantastic reconstructions of monstrosity and the grotesque".[16]

For Michelle Massé there is a parallelism between pornography and the Gothic novel. She points out that:

> The two genres are linked by their similar ideological messages; in conservative versions, their only difference is in choice of vehicles. The Gothic uses the woman's whole body as pawn: she is moved, threatened, discarded, and lost. ... Pornography reverses the synecdochical relation by instead using the part to refer to the whole: a woman is a twat, a cunt, a hole.[17]

In *Poor Things*, then, Gray uses the myth of Frankenstein and its concern with fragmentation to make a political and social statement. In *Lanark* the body is also used in connection with fantasy as social commentary. The clearest example of such use is the fantastic treatment of the psychological shortcomings of the inhabitants of Unthank that become physical illnesses like dragonhide, softs, mouths, etc.

Despite their fantastic content, realism plays a central role in the novels. That is the reason why Colin Manlove refers to this novel as a "semi-fantastic narrative" in which Gray "explores multiple views, fictions, worlds".[18] *Poor*

---

[14] Accession 10749, folder 7. National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh.
[15] Lucie Armitt, p. 2.
[16] Lucie Armitt, p. 179.
[17] Michelle A. Massé, p. 108.
[18] Colin Manlove, (1994), p. 211.

Things is very similar to *Lanark* in the sense that there are two main sections in each of them, one part that can be considered realist and the other that can be considered fantastic. In the case of *Poor Things*, however, the mixture of fantasy and reality is much more obvious than in *Lanark*.

Apart from pointing to the social and political content of the novel, Edwin Morgan refers also to another key issue in *Poor Things*, that of fabrication. Bella is, indeed, a "fabrication", both literally and symbolically. Jonathan Coe points to exactly this same fact in his review:

> This conceit has to do with women and the way men construct them. I mean "construct" in a literal sense, because the heroine of *Poor Things*, Bella Baxter, is – according to at least one interpretation of events – a man-made creation, assembled on the operating table of a doctor's surgery in late 19th century Glasgow.[19]

For Coe, the motive behind Gray's female creation resides in the author's self-confessed inability to produce female characters. As Coe puts it: "for the purposes of Gray's imagination … women are only defined, only *made real*, by their relationship with men".[20] Even if Gray has admitted that this is certainly the case as he hasn't "the insight to imagine how a woman is to herself",[21] Coe's reading of the novel is reductive. In Gray's works some of the female characters are undoubtedly defined by their relationship with the male characters. This is particularly obvious in the use of male fantasies in *1982 Janine* and *Something Leather* where the female characters enact typical male sexual fantasies.

---

[19] Jonathan Coe, p. 11.
[20] Jonathan Coe, p. 11.
[21] Alasdair Gray, interview by Kathy Acker, p. 85.

However, Gray is exploring more provocative topics through his female characters, in this particular case Bella Baxter.

Reading *Poor Things* as a re-writing of Shelley's *Frankenstein* with Bella Baxter in the role of a Victorian female Frankenstein's monster is not the only connection between the two novels. *Poor Things* has been assembled along lines suggested by Gregory Evans as "that 'Frankenstein method' known as postmodernism". In particular he points to the characteristic postmodern trend of "stitch[ing] together fact and fiction, history and literature".[22] In *1982 Janine* the fantastic elements, even if they are of the pornographic type, are a central part of the life of Jock McLeish to such an extent that he lives in that fantasy world. We saw something similar in *Lanark*, where the boundaries between the real and the fantastic are blurred, as well as those between the traditional and the innovative in narrative style, and between life and death. Bella Baxter shares with Lanark/Thaw their nature as border-blurring characters; they have crossed the boundary that separates life from death. This ultimate boundary is particularly important in Gray's work. For Brian McHale postmodernist writers seem obsessed by the topic of death because it is the "ultimate ontological boundary".[23] Suicide is an important issue in Gray's fiction because it represents this boundary between worlds. It is always a door between the real and the fantastic sections of his novels. In *Poor Things* we see again this blurring of boundaries, in this case between truth and fiction. However, like these other works, *Poor Things* uses characteristics that are typical of realism. The most important is, of course, the

---

[22] Gregory Evans, rev. of *Poor Things*. *Harpers & Queen* (September 1992)
[23] Brian McHale, p. 65.

presentation of the story as "historical fiction". Gray presents a faithful portrait of nineteenth-century Glasgow but then breaks the norms by using a completely incredible story. Brian McHale calls this sort of fiction historical fantasy. According to McHale, postmodernist writers fictionalise history in order to show that history itself may be a form of fiction.[24] Therefore, in *Poor Things* history becomes a story and fiction lays a claim to history.

For Alison Lee novels such as *Poor Things* manage to create a feeling of "reality" "by representing people, places, and events which are historically verifiable". She finds, though, that:

> The use of "real" names, places, and events however, is asserted and almost immediately rendered problematic. Some of these novels borrow from the nineteenth-century tradition of displacement, in that they appear to present themselves not as novels, but as biography, autobiography, memoir, and, above all, as documentary history.[25]

Poor Things certainly uses autobiography, memoir and documentary history but then subverts them. The "editor" claims that the manuscript of the "Episodes from the Early Life of Archibald McCandless M.D. Scottish Health Officer" and Victoria McCandless's letter were found on the streets of Glasgow by a real person, Michael Donnelly, who used to work in the People's Palace. However they have been lost. (*PT*, xvi) The editor playfully teases the reader, pretending to introduce verifiable historical facts without discarding the possibility of the text being pure fiction. In his introduction he tells us: "Readers who want nothing but a good story plainly told should go at once to the main part of the book. Professional doubters may enjoy it more after first scanning this table of events".

---

[24] Brian McHale, p. 96.
[25] Alison Lee, p. 36.

(*PT*, xii) The reader is free to choose between the possibility of historically verifiable facts or their fictionality in the narrative. The editor seems to be giving the reader the same advice Godwin Baxter gives Archibald McCandless when he discloses Bella's bizarre origin to him: "you need not believe this if it disturbs you". (*PT*, 42) In fact, this suggestion encloses Gray's attitude towards possible interpretations of his fiction. Fantastic elements "make strange"; therefore, the reader has the option not to take the content seriously. However, Gray adds a hint of irony to these words: through the "making strange" of reality he is highlighting social and political concerns that *should* be taken seriously. In this case, the grotesque creation of a monster ultimately refers to issues of gender construction.

Both works – *Frankenstein* and *Poor Things* – share a similar formal construction. Mary Shelley's is based primarily on the transcription of Walton's letters to his sister. These letters contain Dr. Frankenstein's tragic description of his unnatural creation which in its turn encloses the monster's narration. Likewise, *Poor Things* contains within its covers the account of Bella's story through the memoirs of Archibald McCandless. In its turn, his memoirs contain Duncan Wedderburn's and Bella's letters, followed by her letter to her – non-existent – descendants. All this is framed by the editor's "Introduction" and "Notes Critical and Historical". At the same time, the formal structure of *Poor Things* also brings to mind Stevenson's "Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde" (1886). As in Gray's novel, the body of the story is followed by a series of notes and letters that develop the action and provide another aspect to its interpretation: "Doctor Lanyon's Narrative", and "Henry Jekyll's Full Statement of the Case".

These letters have been appended to the main body of the narration which is otherwise in the third person.

Therefore *Poor Things* is formally constructed by Archibald McCandless's stitching together of various accounts by different narrators within his "Episodes …", and is subsequently stitched by the "editor" to McCandless's wife's "letter to posterity", and then both are enclosed by his own introduction and notes. Such parallelisms between *Poor Things* and the two nineteenth-century works appear to support Gray's opinion that *Poor Things* "contained no original devices at all".[26] Gray made similar comments about *Lanark*.[27] However, these are two of Gray's most postmodern novels. That is why these comments have not prevented critics from labelling his work accordingly. It looks as if Gray, by stressing the "normality" of these novels, is in fact pointing at their artificiality. Marguerite Alexander finds that "considerations of form in postmodernist fiction can never be separated from those of theme or subject matter".[28] We saw that this was not the case in *Lanark*. It is the case, though, in *Poor Things*.

Formal patching of different accounts and the use of references to other works are postmodern devices. In a typical exercise of postmodern metafiction and intertextuality Bella discloses the origin of McCandless's "hideous progeny":

> *My second husband's story positively stinks of all that was morbid in that most morbid of centuries, the nineteenth. He has made a sufficiently strange story stranger still by stirring into it episodes and phrases to be found in Hogg's*

---

[26]Alasdair Gray, "An Epistolary Interview, Mostly with Alasdair Gray", interview by Mark Axelrod, p. 114.

[27] Using Nastler as his mouthpiece, Gray writes in *Lanark*: "I want *Lanark* to be read in one order but eventually thought of in another. It's an old device. Homer, Vergil, Milton and Scott Fitzgerald used it" (*L*, 483)

[28] Marguerite Alexander, *Flights from Realism. Themes and Strategies in Postmodernist British and American Fiction*. (London: Edward Arnold, 1990), p. 17.

> *Suicide's Grave with additional ghouleries from the works of Mary Shelley and Edgar Allan Poe. What morbid Victorian fantasy has he NOT filched from? I find traces of The Coming Race, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Dracula, Trilby, Rider Haggard's She, The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes and, alas, Alice Through the Looking-Glass; a gloomier book than the sunlit Alice in Wonderland. He has even plagiarized work by two very dear friends: G.B. Shaw's Pygmalion and the scientific romances of Herbert George Wells.*
> (*PT*, 272-3)

In a paradoxical postmodern twist we see how a novel that stresses its own existence as historical record – it is a memoir – lists many of the literary works it is based on, therefore foregrounding its fictionality. Bella, a character whom the "editor" claims is real, insists that her story as told by McCandless is pure invention, and cites a list of "real" fictions to prove it. The "Notes Critical and Historical" also connect Bella with "real" people, in particular Hugh MacDiarmid.

The Coming Race[29] deals with the discovery of a subterranean people, the Vril-ya, who live in an apparent utopia in the bowels of the earth. In this society women are the powerful and ruling sex, particularly when they are single. Gray may have adopted from Lytton Bella's utopian wish for a better world in which there is no poverty, greed, ambition or gratuitous violence. The ruling character of the Vril-ya women is also reflected in Bella's strong character which is disclosed, not in her husband's narrative, but in her 'A Letter to Posterity'.[30] (*PT*, 251-276)

---

[29] Lord Lytton, *The Coming Race & The Haunted and The Haunters*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1928). First published in 1871, anonymously.

[30] The "Notes Critical and Historical" also provide an insight into Bella's character. She belonged to the suffragette movement, (*PT*, 305) opposed the First World War, (*PT*, 305) published political pamphlets, (*PT*, 307) was in favour of birth control, (*PT*, 313) and was a friend of "real" artists of the day: Robert Colquhoun, Stanley Spencer, Jankel Adler, Hamish Henderson, Sidney Graham, and Hugh MacDiarmid. "Imaginary" letters to the latter are quoted from. (*PT*, 315-316)

In *Trilby*[31] the eponymous heroine is a young woman of English origin but born in Paris who earns her living by posing as a model to various Parisian painters. She falls in love with Little Billee, one of a trio of English art students but is discouraged by his mother from marrying him or seeing him again. Later in life she becomes a world famous singer, La Svengali, even though she had always been tone deaf. After she dies tragically, it is discovered that she was being mesmerised and then made to sing by a dubious character called Svengali. Apart from the topic of the "artificial woman", there is one passage in *Poor Things* which recalls *Trilby*. I am referring to Bella's introduction to McCandless. Like Trilby, Bella lacks a musical ear. Bella's "wildly cheerful" interpretation of "The Bonnie Banks o' Loch Lomond" (*PT*, 28) is highly theatrical:

> As Baxter unlocked his front door I thought I heard a piano playing *The Bonnie Banks o' Loch Lomond* so loud and fast that the tune was wildly cheerful. He led me into a drawing-room where I saw the music being made by a woman seated at a pianola. Her back was toward us. Curly black hair hid her body to the waist, her legs pumped the treadles turning the cylinder with a vigour that showed she enjoyed exercise as much as music. She flapped her arms sideways like a seagull's wings, regardless of the beat.
> (*PT*, 28)

It brings to mind Trilby's rendering of *Ben Bolt*:

> Miss O'Ferrall threw away the end of her cigarette, put her hands on her knees as she sat cross-legged on the model-throne, and sticking her elbows well out, she looked up to the ceiling with a tender, sentimental smile, and sang the touching song:
>
> 'Oh, don't you remember sweet Alice, Ben Bolt?
> Sweet Alice, with hair so brown?' etc. etc.
>
> As some things are too deep for tears, so some things are too grotesque and too funny for laughter. Of such a kind was Miss O'Ferrall's performance of 'Ben Bolt.'
>
> From that capacious mouth and through that high-bridged bony nose there rolled a volume of breathy sound, not loud, but so immense that it seemed to come from all round, to be reverberated from every surface in the studio. She followed more or less the shape of the tune, going up when it rose and down when it fell, but with such immense intervals between the notes as were never

[31] George Du Maurier, *Trilby*. (London: Osgood, Mc Ilvaine & Co., 1896)

> dreamed of in any mortal melody. It was as though she could never once have hit upon a true note, even by a fluke – in fact, as though she were absolutely tone-deaf, and without ear, although she stuck to the time correctly enough.
> (*Trilby*, 22)

Bella's mysterious development from a childish young woman to an intelligent female doctor is also reflected in Trilby's transformation from tone deaf artist's model to successful opera singer. As in *Poor Things* we are presented with two aspects of one character:

> 'I will tell you a secret.
> '*There were two Trilbys*. There was the Trilby you knew, who could not sing one single note in tune. She was an angel of paradise. She is now! But she had no more idea of singing than I have of winning a steeple-chase at the croix de Berny. She could no more sing than a fiddle can play itself!
> (...) Well, that was Trilby, your Trilby! that was my Trilby too – and I love her as one loves an only love, an only sister, an only child – a gentle martyr on earth, a blessed saint in heaven!
> (...) 'But all at once – pr -r-r-out! presto! *augenblick!*... with one wave of his hand over her – with one look of his eye – with a word – Svengali could turn her into the other Trilby, *his* Trilby – and make her do whatever he liked ... you might have run a red-hot needle into her and she would not have felt it. ...
> 'He had but to say "Dors!" and she suddenly became an unconscious Trilby of marble, who could produce wonderful sounds – just the sounds he wanted, and nothing else – and think his thoughts and wish his wishes – and love him at his bidding with a strange, unreal, factitious love... just his own love for himself turned inside out – *à l'envers* — and reflected back on him, as from a mirror ... *un écho, un simulacre, quoi! Pas autre chose!* ...
> (*Trilby*, 440-1)

Ludwig Horace Holly, the narrator of *She*,[32] is a character who bears a strong resemblance to Godwin Baxter. Holly is physically unattractive but extremely intelligent and strong: "Like Cain, I was branded – branded by Nature with the stamp of abnormal ugliness, as I was gifted by Nature with iron and abnormal strength and considerable intellectual powers". (*She*, 8) Holly, like Godwin, is a bit of a misanthrope as well. The character known as "She" is the

---

[32] Rider H. Haggard, *She*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991)

queen of a lost civilisation. Like Bella, she is a representation of the "femme fatale". Both are, simultaneously, seductive and frightening in their monstrosity. "She" inspires in men the same feelings of love and terror that Bella instils in Wedderburn. She is both a beautiful temptress and a heartless monster: " I have heard of the beauty of celestial beings, now I saw it; only this beauty, with all its awful loveliness and purity, was *evil* – at least, at the time, it struck me as evil". (*She*, 155)

The experience reflected by "She's" facial expressions uncannily contradicts the apparent youthfulness of her body. "She's" longevity contradicts nature, just as does Bella's very existence. Unlike Bella, "She's" face has an air of timeless experience.

> Though the face before me was that of a young woman of certainly no more than thirty years, in perfect health, and the first flush of ripened beauty, yet it had stamped upon it a look of unutterable experience, and of deep acquaintance with grief and passion. Not even the lovely smile that crept about the dimples of her mouth could hide this shadow of sin and sorrow.
> (*She*, 155)

"She's" dangerous beauty is similar to the description of Bella by Wedderburn:

> And without more ado she stood up and shook the white wrappings from her, and came forth shining and splendid like some glittering snake when she has cast her slough; ay, and fixed her wonderful eyes upon me – more deadly than any Basilisk's – and pierced me through and through with their beauty, and sent her light laugh ringing through the air like chimes of silver bells.
> (*She*, 189)

The reference to "Hogg's Suicide's Grave" is obviously to *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. The *Memoirs* show a similar formal construction to that of *Poor Things*. Both are composed by an "editor's narrative" before and after the main body of the narration and the memoirs. As in Hogg's *Memoirs*, the reader is offered a multiplicity of interpretations based on the various points of view from which the action is examined. *Poor Things* and *The*

Private Memoirs also mix fantasy and reality and claim to be a record of real history. In fact, for Colin Manlove "one of the distinctive features of Hogg's fantasy is its grip on common reality, its mixing of the supernatural and the everyday".[33] Religious fanaticism dictates the tone of the memoirs, specifically Robert's use of language which is very similar to that used by Wedderburn after being discarded by Bella. In their written accounts both struggle with feelings of anger, guilt and despair. However, in the case of Robert Wringhim, his writing is tragic in its madness:

> Still am I living, though liker to a vision than a human being; but this is my last day of mortal existence … Farewell, world, with all thy miseries; for comforts or enjoyments hast thou none! Farewell, woman, whom I have despised and shunned; and man, whom I have hated; whom nevertheless, I desire to leave in charity! And thou, sun, bright emblem of a far brighter effulgence, I bid farewell to thee also! I do not now take my last look of thee, for to thy glorious orb shall a poor suicide's last earthly look be raised. But, ah! Who is yon that I see approaching furiously – his stern face blackened with horrid despair! My hour is at hand. – Almighty God, what is this that I am about to do! The hour of repentance is past, and now my fate is inevitable. – *Amen, for ever!* I will now seal up my little book, and conceal it; and cursed be he who trieth to alter or amend![34]

In the case of Wedderburn, derangement and repentance become tragicomic:

> *As my brain tried at once to grasp and repel the hideous meaning of her words I came to know what madness is. Writhing my head from shoulder to shoulder and mouthing as if biting the air or silently screaming I retreated into a corner and slowly sank to the floor, frantically punching at the space around my head as if boxing with a loathsome and swarming antagonist like huge wasps or carnivorous bats; yet I knew these vermin were not really outside but INSIDE my brain and gnawing, gnawing.*
> (*PT*, 93)

> *You probably do not know you are Antichrist, for none are as deluded as the damned, so the Father of All Lies is condemned to know himself least of all.*
> (*PT*, 95)

---

[33] Colin Manlove, (1994), p. 53.
[34] James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. (London: Penguin Books, 1989), pp. 231-2.

> *I am horribly lonely. Mother keeps telling me to pull myself together. I long to sit close to her but when I do she fidgets and asks why I do not go out to music-hall, sports-club or other "THINGS" I used to be busy with before my trip abroad. I dread such "THINGS" nowadays. When I was little Auld Jessy cared for me when Mother got the fidgets. So now I pretend to go out for a "night on the town" but skulk round by the backdoor tradesman's entrance into the kitchen, where I sit tippling with Auld Jessy and the cook. I never drank alcohol in my Casanova days, for a devotee of Venus must abjure Bacchus. It is cold in the kitchen. I have so wasted the Wedderburn fortune that Mother cannot afford to let servants use our coals. Auld Jessy and the cook sleep together for warmth, so I sleep between them. I cannot sleep alone. Come back please warm me Bella.*
>
> *Tomorrow I will start a new life by doing three things all at once. I will make Mother rich again by undeviating devotion to the science and art of property conveyancing. I will save my Bella from Beastly Baxter by boxing with the Modern Babylon at street corners, in the open forum of Glasgow Green and through letters to the press. I will embrace the only true Catholic faith, make a vow of eternal chastity, and end my days in the peace of a cloister. I need rest. Help me.*
> (*PT*, 97-98)

The reference to *Pygmalion*[35] links the figure of Prof. Henry Higgins with Godwin Baxter. Both manipulate or transform a female character by teaching them the "proper" way to use language. Godwin, like Higgins, is an old bachelor who would not marry Eliza, his protégée. McCandless shows traits similar to those of Eliza's husband, Freddy. Both show weaker characters than their wives'. The following statement concerning marriage is expressed by the narrator and seems to share similar ideas to those expressed by Bella in relation to her marriage to McCandless:

> No doubt there are slavish women as well as slavish men; and women, like men, admire those that are stronger than themselves. But to admire a strong person and to live under that strong person's thumb are two different things. The weak may not be admired and hero-worshipped; but they are by no means disliked or shunned; and they never seem to have the least difficulty in marrying people who are too good for them. They may fail in emergencies: but life is not one long emergency: it is mostly a string of situations for which no exceptional strength is needed, and with which even rather weak people can cope if they have a stronger partner to help them out.
> (*Pygmalion*, 298)

---

[35] Bernard Shaw, *Androcles and the Lion. Overruled. Pygmalion.* (London: Constable and company Ltd., 1951)

Bella says about her husband:

> *I married Archibald McCandless because he was convenient, and as the years slipped by I came to like and rely upon the man. He was not much use to anyone else ... He helped Mrs. Dinwiddie (my faithful housekeeper) with the early nurture of our children, taking them for walks, telling them stories, crawling about the floor with them, helping them build fantastical cities out of bricks and cardboard, and draw up fantastical maps and histories of invented continents. These tales and games gave them a rich variety of ideas and information.*
> (*PT*, 251-2)

Also, in *Poor Things* there is a sort of broad intellectual comedy involving the issue of language-learning similar to that in *Pygmalion*. Comic situations involving Eliza, Bella and their progressive command of "proper" English abound in both works.

The "stitching" method to which Gregory Evans refers, is not, however, the novel's only postmodern trait. In *Poor Things* the notion of a unified self is clearly challenged. For Alison Lee, the decentering of "the humanist notion of 'individuality', of a coherent self which exists outside ideology" is one of the most important concerns in postmodern fiction.[36] Thomas Docherty points out that the reader of postmodern narratives

> is denied the possibility of producing a totalized self for the characters being processed in the reading; the totality of a supposedly enlightened truth or real essence of character is denied as a result of the proliferation of narratives which contradict such a totality.[37]

In *Poor Things* it is impossible to feel secure in a knowledge of the characters, particularly Bella but also Godwin Baxter. We have three different points of view on the latter, Archibald McCandless', Bella's and "the editor's". Gray refuses to create a finished character while the multiple points of view through which the

---

[36] Alison Lee, p. xi.
[37] Thomas Docherty, "Postmodern Characterization: The Ethics of Alterity", in Edmund J. Smyth, p. 186.

character of Bella is presented create a multiple self. There is no single point of view or focus from which to see her. Each character gives us a different version of events. Even Bella's own account of herself fails to provide a definite perspective because although it is the more credible possibility it only delivers yet another standpoint from which to interpret the story. That is why, despite all these different possibilities, the reader only gets a partial picture of Bella.

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* also deals with the topic of fragmentation within a fantastic framework. The protagonist, Saleem Sinai, is born at exactly the same instant as the state of India. Like all the babies born at that moment he has magical powers. His life and particularly his body are united to that of his native land. For that reason he disintegrates in the same way that the country of India is partitioned. By being linked to the history of India, the identity of the protagonist is given to it externally. One of the images that best expresses the fragmentariness of the protagonists in these novels is the sheet with a hole in its middle through which Dr. Aziz, Saleem's grandfather, gets a partial view of his future wife while examining her medically:

> So gradually Doctor Aziz came to have a picture of Naseem in his mind, a badly-fitting collage of her severally-inspected parts. This phantasm of a partitioned woman began to haunt him, and not only in his dreams.[38]

That is exactly the way we see Bella, through the partial accounts of the male characters. Even Bella has two versions of herself in the main part of the story. First she believes herself to be a relative of Godwin who has lost her parents in a train accident in Argentina. (*PT*, 50) Later, she meets her real father – Blaydon Hattersley – and her husband – General Sir Aubrey de la Pole Blessington – and

---

[38] Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1981), p. 26.

learns to live with another past. (*PT*, 204) So not even Bella has a definite image of herself, founded on the common or natural state of being anchored in a single past history. Her alleged loss of memory makes all versions possible.

In postmodern novels such as *Poor Things* the topic of the multiplicity and fragmentation of the subject is connected to the topic of "truth". Aptly, Lynne Diamond-Nigh considers that *Poor Things* is "a vitriolic satire of … our continual vain quest for the attainment of truth".[39] Another novel which also deals with this issue is John Fowles's *A Maggot*.[40] It concerns the disappearance, in mysterious circumstances, of an aristocratic character known as Mr Bartholomew. After Mr Bartholomew's disappearance his father employs a lawyer, Henry Ayscough, to interrogate all the people involved with Mr Bartholomew in the days before his disappearance. These enquiries form the main body of the novel. Multiple points of view are encountered as each of the characters interrogated is convinced that he or she is in possession of the truth.

At the core of these two novels, therefore, lies the questioning and subversion of the notion of a unique and exclusive truth. Both novels present multiple and contradictory accounts of one single and never clarified event. In the case of *Poor Things* the enigma is the real origin and past of Bella Baxter, whereas in *A Maggot* it is the real circumstances of Mr Bartholomew's disappearance. Mysteries at the centre of these novels are eventually solved by the reader by

---

[39] Lynne Diamond-Nigh, "Gray's Anatomy: When Words and Images Collide". *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 15 n 2 (Summer 1995), p. 179.
[40] John Fowles, *A Maggot*. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1985)

situating them within the field of science fiction or fantasy despite their authors' attempts, particularly in *Poor Things*, at creating a mood of historical veracity.[41] In order to give credibility to his story Gray uses "characters" such as Elspeth King and Michael Donnelly who are real people and who really worked in The People's Palace in Glasgow.

Playing with fact and fiction obliges the reader – who is used to a traditional closure in novels and who expects from the author a definite account of the facts presented – to engage in a game with the text. The irony of the game is as Marie Odile Pittin points out: "that in this novel, allegedly devoted to the search for "the truth", no truth is ever to be expected, which makes the quest all the more exciting".[42]

The unsettling of the formal question of closure, that is, the difficulty on the part of readers to make up their minds about the facts presented in the novels, their inability to reach a "comfortable" and irrefutable truth, is related not only to the multiplicity of points of view but also to the question of fragmentation and the challenge to authorial control. Ambiguity in the conclusion of *Poor Things* is another of Gray's tactics to tease the reader. Gray offers different versions of events, but simultaneously, exerts an obvious control on the interpretation of the text; the reader is lured into taking the editor's side. In *Poor Things*, as in *Lanark*, the closure is, if at all, outside the narration. The reader is

---

[41] In *A Maggot* the feeling of veracity is created by the use of facsimile first pages of the *Historical Chronicle* from 1736 belonging to the months during which the events took place. However, in the epilogue to the novel Fowles is clear about the fictionality of the story: "Readers who know something of what that Manchester baby was to become in the real world will not need telling how little this is a historical novel.... I repeat, this is a maggot, not an attempt, either in fact or in language, to reproduce known history". Epilogue to *A Maggot*, p. 455.

[42] Marie Odile Pittin, "Alasdair Gray: A Strategy of Ambiguity", in Susanne Hagemann, p. 211.

posed with the question of whom to believe, Bella or her husband? In the introduction, "the editor" already offers a conclusion. For him. Victoria McCandless is a deranged woman desperate to hide an obscure origin. However. Bella in her letter to her descendants offers us another conclusion: "*You, dear reader, have now two accounts to choose between and there can be no doubt which is most probable*". (*PT*, 272)

Abundant, different and contradictory accounts, interpretations and points of view of the same events, collaborate to produce multiple endings. Therefore, *Poor Things* and *A Maggot* lack a traditional narrative closure in the sense that there are as many "truths" as there are versions of Bella's origin or, in the case of *A Maggot*, of the events that took place in the cave. Bella could be a successful medical experiment carried out by the genius of Godwin Baxter or she may just be a typical Victorian woman who, unable to stand her hypocritical husband, finds a new life with Godwin Baxter. Similarly, the female protagonist of *A Maggot* may be lying about what she saw in the cave. Perhaps Mr Bartholomew did not really go to Heaven in what sounds like a flying saucer and instead Rebecca is hiding the real circumstances of his disappearance.

Plural points of view, therefore, foreground the problematic between truth and fiction. In *Poor Things*, *A Maggot*, and other postmodernist novels, "meaning is irrevocably ambiguous and plural".[43] Multiple perspectives, therefore, not only affect matters of form. Different points of view are expressed in different forms: letters, interrogations, etc., but also affect the identities of the characters, which are usually shattered.

Sheer variety in the accounts of Bella's story undermine the idea of a unified subject by presenting a multiplicity of contrasting identities. What postmodern narratives such as these try to achieve is, in Linda Hutcheon's words, "to undermine the ideological assumptions behind what has been accepted as universal and trans-historical in our culture: the humanist notion of Man as a coherent and continuous subject".[44]

Salman Rushdie's magical realist novel also deals with the question of a multiple and fragmented self similar to *Poor Things*. In a fashion parallel to that of Bella, Saleem Sinai is given a different meaning by each of the characters who surround him:

> Even a baby is faced with the problem of defining itself; and I'm bound to say that my early popularity had its problematic aspects, because I was bombarded with a confusing multiplicity of views on the subject, being a Blessed One to a guru under a tap, a voyeur to Lila Sabarmati; in the eyes of Nussie-the-duck I was a rival, and a more successful rival, to her own Sonny (although, to her credit, she never showed her resentment, and asked to borrow me just like everyone else); to my two-headed mother I was all kinds of babyish things – they called me joonoo-moonoo, and putch-putch, and little-piece-of-the-moon. (*MCh*, 129)

The paradox arising from the particular act of naming is that as we try to fix and freeze the object within an elusive meaning – the name – the object's self is fragmented into a myriad of conflicting identities. Each name given only helps to accentuate such fragmentation. At the end of *Midnight's Children*, Saleem Sinai remarks: "I have been so-many too-many persons …". (*MCh*, 445) These "many persons" result from the very act of being named, as the same character points out at the beginning of the novel: "I, Saleem Sinai, later variously called

---

[43] Alison Lee, p. 25.
[44] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism. History, Theory, Fiction*. (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), p. 177.

Snotnose, Stainface, Baldy, Sniffer, Buddha and even Piece-of-the-Moon....". (*MCh*, 9)

In a way similar to Saleem Sinai, both female protagonists in *Poor Things* and *A Maggot* have not one particular name but several. In the case of *A Maggot*, the protagonist is addressed at different points during the narrative as Rebecca, the Quaker Maid, Louise and Fanny. In *Poor Things*, the female protagonist is variously known as Bell, Bella Baxter, Mrs Wedderburn, Victoria Hattersley, Victoria Blessington, and Victoria McCandless. In this aspect, *Poor Things* differs from *Frankenstein* in that the monster has no name. As Rosemary Jackson puts it: "[the monster] is anonymous, given identity only as Frankenstein's other, his grotesque reflection (hence the common confusion of the monster *as* Frankenstein)".[45] Literary criticism, however, has corrected this by the multiplicity of interpretation that the novel has produced. Therefore, the monster's namelessness stands for any name.

In *Poor Things* and *A Maggot* the female protagonists' identities – the different interpretations of *Frankenstein* – are forced on them by the male characters through the very act of naming. These male characters "read" them in a particular and fixed way – as prostitutes, mothers, wives, saints, lunatics, etc. – and in this process of reading them they are given a specific meaning as such. Farthing, one of the male characters in *A Maggot*, objects to the aloof and evasive attitude of the female protagonist by blaming it on her name: "Now the chit's all Frenchified airs, like her name [Louise], that I'll warrant she never was born

---

[45] Rosemary Jackson, p. 99.

with". (*AM*, 37) For Farthing, her false name has to be intimately linked to her pretended haughtiness. The Quaker community calls her "Rebecca" and "the Quaker Maid" is one of the names she is known as in the brothel, together with the more explicit "Fanny".

In the case of *Poor Things*, the female protagonist has two first names: Bella and Victoria. Her Victorian father and husband want her to be really "Victoria" and comply with the morals of Victorian society. For the rest of the male characters, she is Bella. Therefore she is defined through her physical beauty.

As we have seen, Saleem Sinai, the protagonist of *Midnight's Children*, is constructed – and deconstructed – in and through the history of India, its birth and fragmentation. Alison Lee points out that "Saleem does become, in a sense, the text upon which India's story is written":[46]

> … I no longer want to be anything except what who I am. Who what am I? My answer: I am the sum total of everything that went before me, of all I have been seen done, of everything done-to-me. I am everyone everything whose being-in-the-world affected was affected by mine. I am anything that happens after I've gone which would not have happened if I had not come. Nor am I particularly exceptional in this matter; each 'I', every one of the now-six-hundred-million-plus of us, contains a similar multitude. I repeat for the last time: to understand me, you'll have to swallow a world.
> (*MCh*, 370)

In contrast to Saleem Sinai, the female protagonists of *Poor Things* and *A Maggot*, Bella and Rebecca, are not constructed only through history but also by gender.

The "things" in Gray's title – apart from the expression "Oh, you poor thing!" – refer to the these externally created images of the female protagonist.

---

[46] Alison Lee, p. 47.

Bella's and Rebecca's female identity are male constructions. Because their position as females always depends on the male consciousness with whom they happen to make contact at any particular time, they are a succession of imposed "I"s. They do not possess an intrinsic identity because they have been "named" by the male characters. Lucie Armitt points out that "nineteenth-century patriarchy forced women into a fragmentary existence which required them to function simultaneously (and in all directions at once) as wives, mothers, daughters, but never autonomously as the singular (or even the single) self".[47] They are mothers because they have children. They are prostitutes because somebody is paying for their services. They are wives because they have a husband. Bella Baxter is literally "constructed" by the male characters, including the "editor" – and ultimately by Gray – and her role changes as she is "interpreted" by each of them. As a result of her being a construction by a (male) Other, Bella is a monster of multiple and fragmented identities. For each of these male figures she comes to represent the desired female figure.

Bella plays a definite and fixed role for each of these male characters. According to McCandless' account, Godwin Baxter's principal aim when he "makes" Bella is to put into practice his father's scientific discoveries for his own benefit. Baxter, like Dr. Frankenstein, selfishly "gives birth" to this woman in order to make her his daughter-cum-platonic lover. He admits to Archibald McCandless that he "*needed to admire a woman who needed and admired me*." (*PT*,39) When Bella refuses to play the role of admiring lover, she becomes in his eyes a remarkable pupil and devoted protégée.

---

[47] Lucie Armitt, p. 141.

For Duncan Wedderburn, the lecherous lover with whom she elopes to Europe, she is an innocent and charming housemaid who unexpectedly becomes a dangerous nymphomaniac witch. In his own words she is an "Angelic Fiend". (*PT*, 87) In his melodramatic letter to Godwin Baxter, after returning from Europe, he compares Bella to some of the most desired and dangerous women in Western Civilisation:

> *[t]he Jews called her Eve and Delilah; the Greeks, Helen of Troy; the Romans, Cleopatra; the Christians, Salome. She is the White Daemon who destroys the honour and manhood of the noblest and most virile men in every age.*
> (*PT*, 94)

To Harry Astley and Dr Hooker, the two travellers whom Bella befriends on her cruise in the Mediterranean, she represents the innocent abroad. She is charmingly naïve and has to be protected from the evils of the world. After she has explained her personal view of history and the world, she says:

> *I have read* The Last Days of Pompeii *and* Uncle Tom's Cabin *and* Wuthering Heights *so know that history is full of nastiness, but history is all past so nowadays nobody is cruel to each other, just stupid sometimes when they get into betting-shops.* Punch *says only lazy people are out of work so the very poorest must* enjoy *being poor. They also have the consolation of being comic.*
> (*PT*, 134-5)

Comments such as this one project an extreme satire on Conservative political thought on the part of the author.[48] In the mouth of Bella, "innocent" observations like this one constitute a great part of her attraction. Both Mr Astley and Dr. Hooker feel they have to keep her in that state of childishness and therefore patronise her:

> *"The bitter truth I spoke of is a statistical matter – a detail of political economy. I was joking when I called it a faith – I said that to annoy Dr.*

---

[48] Political satire of a similar kind can also be found in "Culture Capitalism", chapter Ten of *Something Leather*.

> *Hooker. I am a phlegmatic fellow, so his American exuberance annoyed me. But we are both glad you find the world a good and happy place."*
> (*PT*,136)

To her husband, Archibald McCandless, she is first of all an irresistible beauty, even if a bit childish. Afterwards, she becomes a faithful wife and a perfect companion. Like the others he is also attracted to her by her mixture of childish innocence and seductiveness:

> The music stopped. The woman stood and faced us, stepping unsteadily forward then pausing as if to keep balance. Her tall, beautiful, full-bodied figure seemed between twenty and thirty years, her facial expression looked far, far less. She gazed with the wide-open eyes and mouth which suggest alarm in an adult but in her suggested pure alert delight with an expectation of more.
> (*PT*, 29)

To her first husband – General Sir Aubrey de la Pole Blessington – and to her father, Mr Hattersley, she is nothing more than a repressed and hysterical Victorian middle-class wife and daughter. The journalists who interview her at the end of her life consider her a mad old woman – The Dog Lady. She treats both sick old men and animals in her rundown surgery and feels personally responsible for the First World War. All of these roles clearly constitute conflicting and stereotypical representations of the feminine.

Bella, then, is stereotyped into different female roles by the male characters. Something similar happens in *A Maggot*. Rebecca's identity is never clear as she is portrayed at different points in the narrative as a prostitute, a lady's maid, a religious fanatic and the mother of a saint. As soon as one of the male characters fixes his gaze on Rebecca, he identifies her and gives her a meaning. At the beginning of the novel, Rebecca is physically described by the narrator, then he says: "She is evidently a servant, a maid". (*AM*, 10) In fact she is working

as a prostitute and has been hired by Mr Bartholomew as such. However, the moment the mysterious character known as "Your Grace", the father of the disappeared Mr Bartholomew, sets his gaze on Rebecca he creates his own image of her as Fanny, the prostitute: "Nor was his stare at her that of a normal man: much more that of a person sizing an animal, a mare or cow, as if he might at any moment curtly state a price that he considered her worth". (*AM*, 344) At that point, Rebecca is both a shameless and barren whore and the blessed mother of the founder of a new religious sect, the Shakers.

Likewise, Bella is, simultaneously, a dangerous nymphomaniac draining Duncan Wedderburn of energy and money and an innocent middle-class woman abroad who needs to be sheltered and protected from the wickedness and pain of the world by Mr. Astley and Dr. Hooker. By such means Bella and Rebecca are frozen by the male gaze into the stereotypical and contradictory representations of woman as virgin or prostitute. Rebecca, according to her account, has gone with Mr Bartholomew to Heaven – June Eternal –where she meets Jesus Christ and Holy Mother Wisdom. Then she returns to her community of Quakers and becomes a "sister", Rebecca. However, for the lawyer interrogating her, she is still a liar and a whore. In the same vein, Bella is seen both as an angel and as a devil by Wedderburn. When Rebecca is interrogated by Ayscough, the lawyer, he finds it impossible to see her as a new-born Christian. He expects her to act like a woman and cry at the death of the father of her baby:

> What woman hears the father of the child she bears is dead, and makes so little cry and to-do as you?....Yet who declares herself later more enamoured of him than of any other, she, why she of all women, who's known more lovers than stinking flesh has blow-flies?
> (*AM*, 426)

Rebecca is fully aware that she is being constructed by the male Other and that all women are being forced into an artificial and uniform identity. Therefore. she acts cleverly and according to male expectations:

> I say again, thee'd have me mirror of my sex, that thine has made. I will not suit. I have told thee I was harlot still, I did sate his lust; for so was he, lust incarnate, as bull or stallion. Can thee not see I am changed, I am harlot no more, I am Christ's reborn, I have seen June Eternal? I will not suit.
> (*AM*, 426-7)

Once the woman has been named she is fixed into a male meaning. The rigidity of such images is obvious in the incredulity of the lawyer interrogating Rebecca about the events in the cave: "What, you are in Heaven now? From whore you are grown saint?". (*AM*, 379)

It is clear that what attracts men to Bella is a mixture of innocence and sensuality. For them she is the embodiment of Eve and Mary. Jealous McCandless accuses Baxter of wanting "to possess what men have hopelessly yearned for throughout the ages: the soul of an innocent, trusting, dependent child inside the opulent body of a radiantly lovely woman."(*PT*, 36) Therefore, she represents, simultaneously, the purity of Mary and the sinfulness of Eve.

Bella and Rebecca are, then, in Hutcheon's terminology, "'read' subject[s] of [their] own and of others' interpretations and inscriptions of [them]. [They are] literally the female product of readings".[49] Bella's multiple selves are constituted through the various male – and her own – readings of her self. She is never seen whole and complex by the male gaze. The reader never manages to

---

[49] Linda Hutcheon, (1988), p. 161.

perceive her as a unified and complete self but as a multiplicity, as if seen through a kaleidoscope.

Not only has Bella been bestowed with different names but even her own body is perceived as disjointed. She is, at the same time, the mother of her brain and the daughter of her body because the brain of her unborn baby was used by Godwin to bring her back to life. Therefore, her body and mind are literally and metaphorically "cracked", she suffers from amnesia and her head and belly present suspicious scars. Indeed, anatomical drawings of body organs at the end of each chapter reflect such physical fragmentation (or dissection) in a way reminiscent of the labelled chutney jars with the names of chapters in *Midnight's Children* (*MCh*, 384), and the final literal disintegration of Saleem Sinai into History:

> I hear lies being spoken in the night, anything you want to be you kin be, the greatest lie of all, cracking now, fission of Saleem, I am the bomb in Bombay, watch me explode, bones splitting breaking beneath the awful pressure of the crowd, bag of bones falling down down down, just as once at Jallianwala, but Dyer seems not to be present today, no Mercurochrome, only a broken creature spilling pieces of itself into the street, because I have been so-many too-many persons, life unlike syntax allows one more than three, ...
> (*MCh*, 445)

There is a paradox in Bella's construction by the male characters. At the same time that she becomes the object of their desire, she becomes a mirror that reflects these male figures' own idealised image. In Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve*,[50] the fe/male protagonist, Evelyn, is aware of this process. Through his lover he can see reflected an image of his own inability to love her:

> She was a perfect woman; like the moon, she only gave reflected light. She had mimicked me, she had become the thing I wanted of her, so that she could make me love her and yet she had mimicked me so well she had also mimicked the

[50] Angela Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*. (London:Victor Gollancz, 1977)

> fatal lack in me that meant I was not able to love her because I myself was so unlovable.
> (*PNE*, 34)

In that same novel, the character of Tristessa, who is a transvestite, has the ability to become what the male gaze wants her to be. Tristessa has consciously constructed him/herself into the object of male desire:

> You must have thought Zero, with his guns and knives and whips and attendant chorus of cringing slaves, was a man worth the ironic gift of that female appearance which was your symbolic autobiography. I read it at a glance. You had turned yourself into an object as lucid as the objects you made from glass; and this object was, itself, an idea. You were your own portrait, tragic and self-contradictory. Tristessa had no function in this world except as an idea of himself; no ontological status, only an iconographic one.
> (*PNE*, 129)

Similarly, in *Poor Things* we can see the need McCandless has of the image of Bella he has created. McCandless dedicates his book "to she who makes my life worth living." The high dependency of McCandless on Bella is reflected in the image of Bella as "mother" recurrent throughout the novel. She is the mother of her brain; the demands of McCandless on her are the demands of affection of a child towards its mother. McCandless usually links the image of Bella to that of the Virgin Mary, the epitome of motherhood. He idealises her as a representation of the Virgin Mary. When he meets Bella for the first time, he notices an illustration of a Madonna and Child lying open in the room. At the end of the narration, when Bella is about to discover the "truth" about her origins, McCandless describes her looking at Baxter "with an expression I later saw during our Italian honeymoon on the face of a Botticelli Madonna". (*PT*, 221)

The same happens with Godwin, who admits that "*I needed to admire a woman who needed and admired me*". For him Bella is, as we have already

mentioned, his opportunity to become a parent, to compensate for having been orphaned as a child:

> "As I was educated at home, and saw no other families, and never played with other children, I was twelve before I learned exactly what mothers do. I knew the difference between doctors and nurses, and thought mothers an inferior kind of nurse who specialized in small people. I thought I had never needed one because I was big from the start."
> (*PT*, 18-9)

His birth seems to be above the issue of "cuddling" to which Bella is so attached. When Godwin inquires of his father – to whom he never called anything but "Sir Colin" – about his origins "he answered by bringing out diagrams, models, morbid specimens and giving me another lesson on how I was made". (*PT*,19) Therefore, Godwin Baxter becomes a "creator" when he brings Bella back to life. As his name indicates he becomes a "friend of God", supporting this idea is the picture on the cover of the novel. It shows Godwin protecting his "poor creatures".[51]

Language in relation to the subject of construction, deconstruction and femininity is central to *Poor Things*. Bella is created by the male characters. The reader is never permitted a glimpse of her through the eyes of a female character. Therefore, she is constructed through gender and her femininity is always foregrounded. She is a lover, a mother, a nymphomaniac, a daughter… When she tries to break moulds by becoming a doctor she is treated as a mad and evil woman who performs abortions on the poor. All this is shown through language: the story written by McCandless, the letters of Wedderburn, fragments of newspaper articles, etc. In her letters we see Bella's progress through language,

---

[51] In fact, "Poor Creatures" is the title of the novel in the first few drafts. Accession 10749, folder 4. National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh.

and her efforts to master its proper use. However, she never manages to dominate it completely as shown by her infantile use of the word "cuddle". (*PT*. 308) Together with the fragmentation of her body and the images of organs, her confused use of language contributes to the image as someone dispersed. Fragmentation of the subject is reflected through and in language. On the topic of language Juliet Mitchell says:

> The human animal is born into language and it is within the terms of language that the human subject is constructed. Language does not arise from within the individual, it is always out there in the world outside, lying in wait for the neonate. Language always "belongs" to another person. The human subject is created from a general law that comes to it from outside itself and through the speech of other people, though this speech in its turn must relate to the general law.[52]

Bella's identity is literally constructed through/in language as the reader possesses only transcribed accounts of her life: a book, some letters, poems… She is a blank page on which the writers – Wedderburn, McCandless, the journalists, the "editor" and even herself – have imprinted their reading of femininity.

In the following quotation from *Midnight's Children*, the narrator compares the growth of a foetus to that of a text; it can also be applied to Bella. She develops as if she were a text, from being like a baby to becoming an articulate woman. She develops from having the mind of a baby to possessing the intelligence of a bright woman. This growth is most obvious in her development of the use of language:

> What had been (at the beginning) no bigger than a full stop had expanded into a comma, a word, a sentence, a paragraph, a chapter; now it was bursting into

---

[52] Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, *Feminine Sexuality. Jacques Lacan & The école freudienne*. (London: Macmillan Press, 1987), p. 5.

> more complex developments, becoming, one might say, a book – perhaps an encyclopaedia – even a whole language…
> (*MCh*, 100)

Bella, like the novel in which she is the main character, is structured from fragments of different narratives. She is a text or, rather, an intertext. In the same way that the narrative constructs itself through Gray's reading of *Frankenstein, Dracula,* "Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde" and others, Bella, similarly, is the product of the Other's reading of herself. That is, like the narrative of which Bella forms a part, she is always in progress, constantly in the process of producing different meanings without ever reaching any conclusion: both the novel and Bella are *scriptible* in Barthes' terminology. The reader has to produce his or her own meaning . Bella's identity is never coherent and unified. The same happens with the novel as a whole – there is a lack of closure and therefore no single meaning to attach to it. There is no "correct" way to read it. Gray is teasing the reader from the start by presenting a story which he claims to be true, but also suggesting that he may be lying. *Poor Things* shares in the same indeterminacy that pervades the character of Bella Baxter. She never acquires a determinate identity; she does not even have a definite past. She moves incessantly from being a selfish child to being a nymphomaniac, a prostitute, a wife, a doctor, a suffragette, a mother…

Similarly, *Poor Things* as a text plays with different sorts of conventions: the Gothic novel, the historical novel, the editor's narrative, the detective story, the travel novel, and the *bildungsroman*. It is interesting to note the similarities between *Poor Things* and the Gothic tradition. Colin Manlove considers that Scottish fantasy writing derives in part from this tradition and that it has adopted

from it the use of doppelgängers and alter egos.[53] For Michelle Massé, the Gothic is not escapist fantasy but "a repetition and exploration of the traumatic denial of identity" found in that particular fiction.[54] The Gothic explores "the horror from which the heroine cannot escape" and which is "the limitation of her identity to a mirror for the self-representations of father and husband".[55]

Rebecca, in *A Maggot*, is also constructed, as is Bella, through her use of language:

> Rebecca, then, epitomizes the female figure who deploys her various tropes in order to make her language and her texts stand as the basis for determining her subjectivity. Indeed, it is her own language, her own alphabet that make her different, peripheral, "ex-centric", an eccentric female, especially when seen through the prisms of a privileged male alphabet ...[56]

Bella is entrapped within the prison of patriarchal language. All the male interpretations of her self describe her as a "lack". Even Gray, in his account of the origin of the novel, seems to have conceived of her as a kind of female blank:

> I was writing a book of short stories at that time, so was on the alert for new ideas, and I had a dream of being in a basement, in a Glasgow tenement of the older and larger kind, and seeing a woman sitting staring rather fixedly out of the window – some children were playing on the back green, or there was a Punch and Judy performance – and there was something slightly Victorian about the whole thing. A man came into the room and said something like – though these words don't appear in the book – "It's important that she see as many different things as possible, because she won't be able to think until she has things to remember", and I knew that the woman had been invented by this man.[57]

The motif of language in relation to woman and muteness appears, crucially, in the first pages of McCandless's narration. When his mother dies McCandless

---

[53] Colin Manlove, (1994), p. 8.
[54] Michelle Massé, p. 18.
[55] Michelle Massé, p. 13.
[56] Mahmoud Salami, *John Fowles's Fiction and the Poetics of Postmodernism*. (Rutherford, N.J.: Farleigh Dickinson University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1992), p. 246.
[57] Alasdair Gray, "Frankly Gray", interview by Sue Wilson. *The List*, 28 August 1992.

cannot afford to buy a tombstone to mark her grave. He remarks: "Twelve years passed before I could afford a proper monument, and by then nobody remembered the position of the grave". (*PT*, 9) The absence of a written proof of her existence in the form of a gravestone symbolises her non-existence. Bella is doubly a void. As an individual she has been dispossessed of a past, of a memory that can anchor her to an origin. As a woman/mother she has been deprived first of her unborn child and then of her sons through typically male practices: science and war. This lack is particularly reflected in language:

> A whole quarter century of my life has vanished crash bang wallop. So the few wee memories in this hollow Bell tinkle clink clank clatter rattle clang gong ring dong ding sound resound resonate detonate vibrate reverberate echo re-echo around this poor empty skull in words words words words wordswordswordswordswordswordswordswordswordswords that try to make much of little but cannot. I need more past.
> (*PT*, 61)

She is written through and in male language. Even her own readings of herself – her letters – are materially enclosed within the male narrative, encased between her husband's book and the narrator's "Notes Critical and Historical" which frustrate her attempt to have, literally, the last word. For example, the (male) editor consciously relegates her to the back of *his* book, because he has also constructed her as "a disturbed woman". (*PT*, xi) Therefore her text has no value whatsoever, and cannot be trusted as an objective account of events. It has to come second so that it does not interfere with the (accepted) male points of view. Accordingly, "the editor" decides to place his own introduction in a privileged position preceding Archibald McCandless' narration:

> I print the letter by the lady who calls herself "Victoria" McCandless as an epilogue to the book. Michael would prefer it as an introduction, but if read before the main text it will prejudice readers against that. If read afterward we easily see it is the letter of a disturbed woman who wants to hide the truth about

> her start in life. Furthermore, no book needs two introductions and I am writing this one.
> (*PT*, xi)

At the beginning of the narration Bella is almost invisible because she does not master the art of language. She is either mute (with wonder) or blathering nonsensically. Paradoxically, McCandless is introduced to Bella as "Bell, short for Bella", (*PT*, 28) therefore her name and its diminutive enclose the notion of language as sound and physical beauty. Not surprisingly, we first encounter her playing "The Bonnie Banks o' Loch Lomond" on the pianola "so loud and fast that the tune was wildly cheerful". (*PT*, 28) The first description we have of her makes reference both to her physical beauty and to her use of language. (*PT*, 29)

It is important to consider Bella's use of language in contrast to Baxter's voice. McCandless describes it as "an iron-shod carriage wheel scraping a kerbstone", (*PT*, 27); his voice sounds like "a shrill drawl (yet every word was distinct)". (*PT*, 16) In contrast to Bella's nonsensical talk, "[h]is voice was repulsive but his words highly interesting". (*PT*, 18)

Lynne Diamond-Nigh finds Bella's early use of language more authentic, "huge and pictorial".[58] Her first use of language is spontaneous, playful and poetic but the influence of Baxter and his objective – "proper" – use of language is already visible. Baxter is her master in the art of using language. The masculine eagerness to define, classify and order can be felt in her first utterances: "Hell low Miss terr Candle", she said, "new wee man with carrot tea red hair, inter *rested* face, blue neck tie, crump pled coat waist coat trou sirs

---

[58] Lynne Diamond-Nigh, "Gray's Anatomy: When Words and Images Collide", p. 179.

made of brown. Cord. Dew. Ray?" (PT, 30) and "Cord dew roy, a *ribbed* fab brick wove ven from cot ton Miss terr Make Candle". (*PT*, 30)

Bella as a woman does not dominate the written medium which is a masculine domain. As she herself writes in her vowel-less letter to Archibald: "WRDS DNT SM RL 2 M WHN NT SPKN R HRD". (*PT*, 56) Satirically and ironically, Gray asserts that the domain of the feminine is the oral, the ephemeral, whereas the written medium belongs to the masculine.

As further proof of Gray's perhaps instinctive feminism, Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* shares with *Poor Things* the topic of language and femininity. The male protagonist turned female, Eve(lyn), notices the different use of speech by her lover Leilah:

> her speech contained more expostulations than sentences for she rarely had the patience or the energy to put together subject, verb, object and extension in an ordered and logical fashion, so sometimes she sounded more like a demented bird than a woman, warbling arias of invocation or demand.
> (*PNE*, 18)

Bella has a similar ex-centric use of language:

> "He is still my little Candle, God! You were the first man I ever loved after wee Robbie Murdoch, Candle, and now I me Bell Miss Baxter citizen of Glasgow native of Scotland subject of the British Empire have been made a woman of the world! French German Italian Spanish African Asian American men and some women of the north *and* the south kinds have kissed this hand and other parts but I still dream of the first time though oceans deep between have roared since auld lang syne. Sit on that bench, God. I am taking Candle for a walk saunter stroll dawdle trot canter short gallop and circum-ambu-*lation*. Poor old God. Without Bella you will grow glum glummer glummest until just when you think I am for ever lost crash bang wallop, out I pop from behind that holly bush."
> (*PT*, 47)

Bella's mutilated language represented by the lack of vowels in her first attempts at script seem to be a reference to the mutilation that was planned on her body to suppress the "urges" that made her "an unstable woman with insane appetites"

(*PT*, 216) and that made her in the eyes of her Victorian husband and father a hysterical erotomaniac. Association of the female body with language is also reflected in her use of a fragmented language that seems to emanate from her fragmented body.

During her elopement with Wedderburn, she manages to develop both her speech and her writing. Her original and creative use of language makes her try to write like Shakespeare but she finds it "*hard work for a woman with a cracked head who cannot spell properly*". (*PT*, 111) Gradually her writing and spelling start to conform to male expectations:

> "the writing … suddenly becomes small, regular and upright; … her spelling … rapidly conforms to the standard dictionaries; in the separation between her entries … a straight horizontal line replaces the playful row of stars."
> (*PT*, 151)

However, language fails her completely when she tries to express her deepest feelings of despair as she encounters the blind girl and baby on her enlightening trip to Alexandria. Her maternal instinct is such that it makes language insufficient and inadequate as a form of communication. She then trusts Godwin Baxter to teach her the masculine method to rationalise what she is not able to express: "*tell me how to change what I cannot yet describe without my words swelling HUGE, vowels vanishing, tears washing ink away*". (*PT*, 164-5)

This form of muteness and her inadequacy to express herself effectively as a woman is reflected later in her inability to let herself be heard by her own descendants: there is no one to listen – to read – as her children are all dead. Her failure as a woman is revealed in her imperfect use of discourse – she only manages to produce an ephemeral letter – and in her inability to reproduce herself in her children.

Bella's muteness as a woman is reflected in the attitude towards the female speech of Zero, the mad poet of *The Passion of New Eve*. He does not allow her harem of women to use language: "For he did not allow them to speak in words. A rule they interpreted as a perpetual whispering; if Zero did not hear them, it was as if they had not spoken". (*PNE*, 87)

In this sense, it is only the male ear that makes their words real. Bella's voice, like those of Zero's women, cannot be heard among the multitude of powerful male voices. She produces a series of letters which include diaries, travelogues and autobiography, genres which "have traditionally been the refuges of women writers", forms that are considered "informal, private and personal"[59] – whereas her husband publishes a book – official and permanent. The impossibility of communicating with her descendants is a condemnation to silence and turns her letter into mere fiction.

However, Bella, in her letter to her grandchildren is conscious of having been turned into a male construction and tries to disengage herself from such fictionality: "*So I post the book to posterity. I do not care what posterity thinks of it, as long as nobody now living connects it with ME*". (*PT*, 251) She refuses to become the mere male fantasy of her husband's narrative: "*I am a plain, sensible woman, not the naïve Lucrezia Borgia and La Belle Dame Sans Merci described in the text*". (*PT*, 251)

By placing her inside his (male) written discourse Archibald pretends to place her within History, to take her into "posterity" together with his book.

---

[59] Keith Green and Jill Lebihan, *A Critical Theory & Practice: A Coursebook*. (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 240.

However, in a perverse move, History first condemns Archibald's and Bella's narratives to oblivion due to the annihilation of all their children during the First World War. Later, History brings them both to life thanks to the demolition of that same History which took place in Glasgow during the 1970s.

If Bella has eventually been entered into "posterity", Eve(lyn) the fe/male protagonist of Carter's *The Passion of New Eve*, enters silence in the last pages of the novel: "The rocks between which I am pressed as between pages of a gigantic book seem to me to be composed of silence; I am pressed between the leaves of a book of silence. This book has been emphatically closed". (*PNE*, 180)

In *Poor Things*, as in the rest of the novels we have been dealing with, Gray uses fantasy to comment on political and social issues. In this particular novel, he uses *Frankenstein* as an intertext to illustrate the manipulation of the female character on the part of the male characters. Bella's literal fragmentation is a reflection of the partial readings she is subjected to by the male Other. The treatment of the issue of social and personal control and manipulation in this novel is the culmination of the use of the same topic in the novels we have dealt with. Shattering of the individual, and the loss of one's self is the ultimate consequence of this manipulation. Gray tries to recuperate such loss through the use of fantasy in a clash with reality.

Conclusion

From the preceding chapters it can be concluded that Gray's work is characterised by the use of contrasts and paradoxes. These are found at the level of form and content. In *Lanark*, *1982 Janine*, *Something Leather*, and *Poor Things* postmodern techniques appear next to features belonging to traditional realism. Such combinations are a result of the employment of fantastic elements belonging to science fiction, pornography, and the Gothic through which reality is explored at one or several removes from the literal. The conflict between misuse of power and freedom is presented from the level of content and form. The individual's freedom is played against repressing organisations. In contrast to this, in Gray's work power conceals a significant degree of manipulation. Through an *apparent* lack of authorial control, the paradoxical consequence is that he attempts to lead the reader into a particular reading of the work.

Reality / fantasy posits a fundamental literary opposition or tension. Its employment in explorations of the self has already been described with reference to his four major works.

Lanark and *1982 Janine* are examples of Gray's expertise in reflecting reality most accurately when using fantastic elements in a background based on the everyday world. His treatment of fantasy could be called a "'realistic' utilization of unreality":[1]

> fantastic literature also has its roots in objective reality and is a vehicle for exposing social and political evils. So, fantastic literature becomes, in this way,

[1] Mario Vargas Llosa, "Social Commitment", in *Lives on the Line. The Testimony of Contemporary Latin American Authors*, ed. Doris Meyer. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 133.

> symbolical literature in which, disguised with the prestigious clothes of dreams and unreal beings and facts, we recognize the characters and problems of contemporary life.[2]

In Gray's work, fantasy enables him to explore areas of experience that simple realism would leave concealed. Much of his fiction is concerned with inner conflicts that can be best expressed through the medium of the fantastic. By exploring the everyday and metamorphosing it into the fantastic, he reveals the role of imagination as a central part of life. Indeed, Gray's use of fantasy is profoundly connected with real life. *Lanark* explores the plausibility of the individual's happiness within the structures of society. Society's powerful grip on the individual is represented as a series of increasingly nightmarish but familiar otherworlds. Deidealisation in *1982 Janine* is also a fantastic process by which real figures in Jock's life who have been mythologised are restored to their natural position. The veil of self-deception that has covered his life is lifted through a literary and psychological struggle to reveal a workable personal truth. What Jock finds disguised by his pornographic fantasies is reality. Sadomasochist and homosexual fantasies are employed in *Something Leather* to examine issues of self-fulfilment and self-knowledge, while *Poor Things* uses elements typical of Gothic fiction to explore gender construction.

Despite the creation of alternative worlds, Gray's fiction presents a profoundly realist base with political concerns playing a huge role. In the story

---

[2] Mario Vargas Llosa, in Doris Meyer, p. 133.

"Mr Meikle" (*TTTT*) he reveals the mixture of popular and classic literature that inspires the fantastic component of his work:[3]

> While sketching doors and corridors into the worlds of Walt Disney, Tarzan, Hans Andersen, Edgar Allan Poe, Lewis Carroll and H G Wells I was pleased to hear how the writers of *Hamlet*, *Paradise Lost*, *The Rape of the Lock* and *Little Dorrit* had invented worlds which were just as spooky.
> (*TTTT*, 159)

In contrast, his work also reveals a profound commitment to factual and objective representation. The clearest example is found at the beginning of his autobiography in the *Saltire Self- Portrait Series*. It begins:

> 10.30 PM, MONDAY THE 18TH OF MAY, 1987
> According to my birth certificate I am 52 years, 167 days, 40 minutes old. According to my passport I am 1.74 meters or 5 feet 9 1/4 inches tall. According to the scales in the lavatory I weigh 13 stones and 7 pounds...[4]

Usually, the use of fantasy in postmodern and magical realist writers evidences a "loss of faith in the supposedly simplistic, black-and-white perceptions of reality that underlay the fiction of so-called traditional realism".[5] Gray, though, does not dismiss traditional realism as the Thaw section of *Lanark*, the central chapters of *Something Leather*, and short stories such as "Houses and Small Labour Parties", "Homeward Bound", "Loss of the Golden Silence", "You", "Internal Memorandum", "Are You a Lesbian?", and "The Trendelenburg Position" collected in *Ten Tales Tall & True*[6] show clearly. However, his most successful works use fantastic elements that allow him to

---

[3] The novels selected by Alasdair Gray for discussion in his Creative Writing Course in St Andrews University provide an insight into the influences in his own work . For a list of these novels see Appendix I.
[4] Alasdair Gray, *The Saltire Self-Portraits Series* 4, p. 1.
[5] Philip Swanson, *The New Novel in Latin America. Politics and Popular Culture after the Boom.* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 21.
[6] Alasdair Gray, *Ten Tales Tall & True*. (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd., 1993)

examine reality in a more exhaustive manner. Referring to "The Start of the Axletree", "The End of the Axletree" and "Logopandocy" from the collection *Unlikely Stories, Mostly*,[7] Gray writes:

> All the stories in the volume are stylistically different, but they all play games with reality, everyday reality and historical reality. The Axletree stories are both a fairly thorough parody of world economics from the founding of the Roman Empire to the Third World War. In 'Logopandocy', the apocryphal diary, nearly half the story uses sentences which Sir Tomas Urquhart wrote. And in his dialogue with Milton I have indeed quoted Milton.[8]

As we have seen in the chapter dealing with *Lanark*, Gray's use of fantasy shares characteristics of magical realism: the everyday is transformed into the bizarre, the fantastic and the nightmarish. The fantastic becomes a part of reality and time is deformed, fluid or non-existent. Juxtapositions of the familiar and the alien help create an atmosphere of uneasiness. Magical realist elements can also be found in some of his short stories, such as "The Star". (*USM*) The protagonist, a child, swallows a star that he has found in his backyard and eventually he himself becomes one. As the last lines of the story suggest, the everyday – a classroom – and the fantastic are blended:

> The boy saw the teacher's face above him, the mouth opening and shutting under a clipped moustache. Suddenly he knew what to do and put the star in his mouth and swallowed. As the warmth sank toward his heart he felt relaxed and at ease. The teacher's face moved into the distance. Teacher, classroom, world receded like a rocket into a warm, easy blackness leaving behind a trail of glorious stars, and he was one of them.
> (*USM*, 3)

This extreme example of transformation is a metaphor for the imaginative faculty in the individual. It is a key concern of Gray's in his major works: imagination

---

[7] Alasdair Gray, *Unlikely Stories, Mostly*. (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1983)
[8] Alasdair Gray, MS letter to Stephanie (?), dated January 1981. Accession 8799, folder 36. National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh.

and fantasy belong to everyday life. Gray's use of magical realist elements presents the same aim as his use of fantasy: to present an old world in a new way in order to re-examine the everyday.

As pointed out in the Introduction, Gray's magical realism does not share the same roots as its Hispanic and South American counterpart. The latter is inescapably influenced by pre-Conquest peoples and traditions as well as European realism. Gray's is dominated by Scottish imagination and urban fantasy. Despite their clear divergence, however, both types of magical realism transgress boundaries between the real and the fantastic in order to analyse objective reality and explore political and social concerns of great urgency to the author.

Alternative worlds are sometimes presented as an escape for the characters but they do not reveal an escapist drive. "Fictional Exits", (*TTTT*) is an example of how fantasy can become a means of escape. It has two sections. In the first half the inmate of a prison cell finds a pencil and draws a door on the wall; he opens it and walks out. The narrator tells us: "Though describing how fantasy works this is a realistic story. Free will being the essence of mind, everyone who feels trapped must imagine escapes, and some of them work". (*TTTT*, 93) In the second part the police break into a blind man's home by mistake. The man is accused of a crime he has not committed in order to hide that mistake, and is taken to court where he is fined. The narrator supports the police's action because, like the prisoner in the first half of the story, they "found themselves in a terrible situation but imagined a way out. They created a fictional exit which

worked". (*TTTT*, 96) The blind man on the other hand "should certainly have used his imagination, which would have let him see in the dark". (*TTTT*. 95)

Similarly, in "The Star" (*USM*) the protagonist escapes the teacher's punishment by becoming a star himself. This transformation embodies one of the topics that appear very prominently in Gray's work: the importance and need of imaginative power in the individual, particularly during childhood. In *Lanark* and *1982 Janine* and "Mr Meikle" (*TTTT*) the protagonists find relief from the grimness of school and family life in Hollywood films and actresses, advertisements, literature and imaginative landscapes. Duncan Thaw's withdrawal into fantastic realms during his childhood years parallels Lanark's journey through underworlds. Thaw's "energy had withdrawn into imaginary worlds and he had none to waste on reality". (*L*, 157) Fantasy seems to have played an important role in Gray's childhood as his school stories show. Themes present in these earliest stories have become recurrent elements of his adult work: fantasy, morbidity, monsters, otherworlds, comedy....[9]

The Epilogue of *Ten Tales Tall & True* is illustrative of Gray's interest in imagination in childhood, and its source is almost certainly autobiographical. The epilogue is called "Mr Meikle" and is a mixture of fantasy, dream and autobiography. In it Gray remembers his school days: "My body put on an obedient, hypocritical act while my mind dodged out through imaginary doors". (*TTTT*, 156) His need to create radical fictional worlds becomes a constant of his future fiction:

> ... the extent of my addiction to fictional worlds was worse than normal, being magnified into mania by inability to enjoy much else. I was too clumsily fearful

[9] For examples of his school stories see copies of *Whitehill School Magazine*.

> to enjoy football and mix with girls, though women and brave actions were what I most wanted. Since poems, plays and novels often deal with these I easily swallowed the fictions urged on us by the teachers of English, though the actors (Chaucer, Shakespeare, Jane Austin, [sic] Walter Scott) were far less easily digested than *The Rover* et cetera.
> (*TTTT*, 156-157)

Some of the characters of Gray's stories escape the unsatisfyingly quotidian and travel to alternative worlds. However, happiness is rarely found in these worlds as they are mere reproductions of the one left behind. The clearest example of this is found in *Lanark* where Unthank, the Institute and Provan are grimmer counterparts of Duncan Thaw's Glasgow. "The Cause of Some Recent Changes" (*USM*) is in many ways similar to *Lanark*. Staff and students of an art school decide to start digging an underground tunnel as a way of escape. There is no other way out because like all the institutions and organisations that appear in Gray's work, the Education Department controls the school and those in it:

> "Instead of drinking coffee when you feel bored, go down to the basement and dig an escape tunnel."
> "But if I wanted to escape I could walk through the front door and not come back."
> "You can't escape that way. The education department would stop your bursary and you would have to work for a living."
> (*USM*, 11)

While digging, an underworld is discovered which looks disturbingly similar to the Institute in *Lanark*. The story ends with the world being destroyed when the people who have dug the tunnel find the engine that drives the earth round the sun. They decide to alter its mechanism in order to redirect the earth. The apocalyptic description that ends the story is also similar to *Lanark*'s:

> That night I was wakened by an explosion and my bed falling heavily to the ceiling. The sun, which had just set, came up again. The city was inundated by sea. We survivors crouched a long time among ruins threatened by earthquakes, avalanches and whirlwinds. All clocks were working at different speeds and the sun, after reaching the height of noon, stayed there. At length the elements calmed and we examined the new situation. It is clear that the planet has broken

> into several bits. Our bit is not revolving. To enjoy starlight and darkness, to get a good night's sleep, we have to walk to the other side of our new world, a journey of several miles, with an equally long journey back when we want daylight.
> (*USM*, 15)

Whereas the world of "The Cause of Some Recent Changes" is recognisably ours, that depicted in "A New World" (*TTTT*) has a Kafkaesque atmosphere to it. It describes the escape of the protagonist from a claustrophobic world where "[m]illions of people lived in rooms joined by long windowless corridors" (*TTTT*, 97) into another world that promises "freedom and wide spaces". (*TTTT*, 98) However, the new world is even more claustrophobic and disturbing than the old one. The protagonist ends up shrunken, reduced to becoming a child, and locked in a room much the same as his old one. He has been diminished in such a way that escape is now impossible: "The stranger goes through a door, closing it carefully after him. Our man stares up at a knob which is now and forever out of his reach". (*TTTT*, 101)

The issue that concerns us here is the use of fantasy to explore the internal conflicts of Gray's protagonists (who, largely, are based on himself). Contemporary fiction uses fantasy to create hells within the world as we know it. In relation to this dystopian fiction, Rosemary Jackson claims:

> In a secularised culture, desire for otherness is not displaced into alternative regions of heaven and hell, but it is directed towards the absent areas of this world, transforming it into something 'other' than the familiar, comfortable one. Instead of an alternative order, it creates 'alterity', this world re-placed and dis-located.[10]

---

[10] Rosemary Jackson, p. 19.

Indeed, Gray does create alternative hells or heavens – he creates them within the self. In Gray's fiction fantastic worlds stem from within the self as we saw in *Lanark*. This can be considered as originating from a characteristic of Scottish fantasy, that is, a tendency for evil to become an integral part of the self and which is clearly exemplified in Hogg's justified sinner and Stevenson's Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. Gray also uses the theme of the double but develops it into a typical postmodern concern for subject fragmentation. In *Lanark*, all the characters are fragments of the dual figure Thaw/Lanark and the female protagonist of *Poor Things* is the reflection of multiple male fantasies.

Representation of evil within the self and the double is incorporated in "The Spread of Ian Nicol", (*USM*) where the protagonist literally splits into two. After the division, each part accuses the other of stealing its identity: "as soon as both men were strong enough to walk each claimed ownership of birth certificate, union card, clothes, wife and National Insurance benefit". (*USM*, 6) As in *Lanark* and *Poor Things* one's identity depends basically on external circumstances. Duncan Thaw's and Lanark's identities are constructed by family, school, lovers, the Social Security, the Institute, etc. Bella Baxter's identity is created through male conceptions of what her roles as a woman should be: wife, daughter, lover, prostitute, and mother. In this story, though, Gray takes the matter of duality into the field of fragmentation by finishing it with both parts splitting again into two: "The latest news is that each has a bald patch on the back of his head". (*USM*, 7)

In "Logopandocy", (*USM*) the use of columns also seems to be influenced by the idea of the double as embodiment of good and evil. Gray explains:

> In *Unlikely Stories, Mostly* when I came to write Thomas Urquhart of Cromartie pastiche, which started as a double entry in book keeping (because I'd the notion

> of a man with two voices in his head, one making a list of all the good, and the other of all the bad things about himself, which he blames on other people). I decided to make the column in which he denounces his enemies get bigger and bigger until one set of typography would crush the other out.[11]

The urge to explore the dark side of self is a characteristic of Scottish fantasy. Two of the most famous examples of this exploration of evil are Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* and Stevenson's "Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde". Both bear an influence on Gray's fiction. In the latter, Stevenson hyperbolises and externalises the evil inside the self by creating a double through the influence of chemical means in the action, and, perhaps, by an instinctive adherence to the momentum of traditional Scottish fantasy. In the same way, Hogg's justified sinner is always accompanied by a creature of evil which takes the physical form of those around him. Diseases in *Lanark* – dragonhide, softs, twittering rigor, etc. – are an external materialisation of personal inadequacies.

In the four novels investigated in this thesis, Gray employs different kinds of fantasy – pornography, magical realism and the Gothic – to explore the characters' internal conflicts. These fantasy forms are characterised by their hybridity. For example, magical realism is characterised by its juxtaposition of fantasy and the everyday, the Gothic is a blend of science, fantasy, travel literature, theology, etc., and pornography magnifies and idealises the real.

Furthermore, the two works that explore the issue of self fragmentation, *Lanark* and *Poor Things*, make use of hybrid genres: magical realism and the Gothic. Therefore, Gray employs genres which are an amalgamation of different

---

[11]Alasdair Gray, "1988 Alasdair", interview by M. Crawford and J. Brown, p. 16.

discourses in order to demonstrate the fragmentation of the self and the damaged psyches of some of his characters (Duncan Thaw, Lanark, and Jock McLeish in particular).

Gray, though, is not a writer of Gothic fiction or magical realism. He borrows elements of these genres that can contribute to the exploration of the psyches of his protagonists. For example the progressively bizarre atmosphere that inhabits the first few pages of *Lanark* is a common characteristic of magical realism, as is the emergence of the fantastic in the everyday and the historical. From the Gothic, he borrows environments and settings – which give some of his work its claustrophobic atmosphere – the grotesque, the use of the taboo, and the ex-centric Other.

Transformation and deformation are two of the elements of the Gothic that Gray tends to use most often. Notable and disturbing examples of transformation are linked to one of his favourite concerns: power and control. In *Lanark* and *A History Maker*[12] corpses are used to produce fuel and food, which can be understood as a variation on the topic of necrophily. Other examples can be found in these same works. Thaw is metamorphosed into Lanark, while the inhabitants of Unthank become dragons, softs, sponges, leeches, etc. In a *History Maker* limbs lost in battle are re-grown on the wounded and the horrifically mutilated can even be brought back to life if they are left to stew in their own fluids. In *1982 Janine*, Jock's power-figures have become monsters that threaten his sanity. He succeeds in transforming them and himself from myths into human

---

[12] Alasdair Gray, *A History Maker*. (London: Penguin, 1995)

figures again. June is also transformed from conventional civil servant into a leather-clad confident woman in *Something Leather*. Striking as well are the radical transformations of Bella Baxter: she is, literally, a monster. Rebuilt with the brain of her own baby, she is later transformed from the silly and nymphomaniac Bella Baxter into the caring and articulate Bella McCandless.

The most radical process of metamorphosis is found in "The Comedy of the White Dog" (*USM*) which, despite the title, has a very disturbing feeling to it. Again, the everyday merges with legend, repressed sexuality, and the taboo. Gordon, the protagonist, is one of Gray's typical male characters. Dull, humourless and conventional, by the end of the story he has been transformed into the white dog of the title. This is a grotesque form of transformation compared to June's in *Something Leather*. However, just as the change is a renewal of June's life and turns her into a new woman, Gordon's life is altered as well:

> Toward morning Gordon woke, feeling wonderfully happy. Nan's arms clasped him, yet he felt more free than ever before. With a little gleeful yelp he sprang from the nest of warmth made by her body and skipped upon the quilt. Nan opened her eyes lazily to him, then sat up and kissed his muzzle. He looked at her with jovial contempt, then jumped on to the floor and trotted out of the house, the shut doors springing open at the touch of his nose. He ran downstairs into the sunlit street, his mouth hanging open in a grin of sheer gaiety. He would never again be bound by dull laws.
> (*USM*, 35-36)

June undergoes a similar liberation to Gordon's freedom as a dog. Instead of animal or Ovidian or Kafkaesque metamorphosis, however, her newness is depicted by her uncomfortable leather suit, her shaven head, and her body tattooed with wasps. What their new lives share, however, is a relief from the burdens of conventionality. Indeed, extreme cases of transformations and

metamorphosis such as that of Gordon and to a smaller degree June are an example of dissolution of limits and boundaries. In the case of Gordon what is subverted is the limit between the human and the animal; in the case of June it is her femaleness. Power is of key importance to these transformations. Gordon's and June's changes are not self-generated but brought about by external forces. A parallel example of the exertion of power to transform is the recycling of corpses into energy and food in *Lanark*. There are, however, two clear differences between Gordon's and June's transformation and that of Gregor Samsa in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*.[13] In the case of Gregor Samsa the transformation occurs before the action begins, whereas in the case of Gordon and June the reader is a spectator of the process. Moreover, change brings relief from the constrictions of everyday life for June and Gordon, but for Gregor Samsa it signifies death. Clearly, liberation through fantastic recreations relates to the importance in Gray's fiction of the individual's imaginative faculty.

Pornography and the Gothic share a desire for *transgression*. For Geoffrey Gorer the object of pornography and the Gothic is to provoke hallucination in the reader:

> The reader is meant to identify either with the narrator (the 'I' character) or with the general situation to a sufficient extent to produce at least the physical concomitants of sexual excitement. … the reader should have the emotional and physical sensations, at least in a diminished form, that he would have were he taking part in the activities described.[14]

Both pornography and Gothic try to engage the reader emotionally by generating either sexual arousal or fear or both simultaneously as in the case of

---

[13] Franz Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*. (London: Vintage, 1999)
[14] C.H. Rolph, ed., *Does Pornography Matter?* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), p. 32.

sadomasochistic fictions such as Sade's. They seek to involve the reader in a very particular manner so that s/he identifies with the protagonist. Gray uses elements characteristic of these genres in his pursuit to engage the reader. In this work both the form and the content implicate the reader emotionally.

A further paradox in Gray's work concerns his attitude towards women and the use of pornography and male fantasies. These are a constant in his work. *Poor Things*, for example, explores the issue of gender construction by using male representations of the female. Jock's resentment about his life takes the form of pornographic fantasies, while *Something Leather* revolves around a lesbian-sadomasochistic foursome.

Despite these images, I agree with Douglas Gifford when he writes that "No other male writer tries to empathise with the range of women's thought as genuinely and as hard as Gray".[15] Janice Galloway shares this view. She affirms that "Woman – the female principal – exists in Gray's writing the way she exists in no other current male writer's work". She adds that "[the] need to bond or communicate more fully with the unknowable experience of the other sex", is one of the most interesting features of Gray's work.[16] 'Decision'(*LT*) exemplifies Gray's understanding attitude towards women. In less than a page, in a restrained style and with a hint of irony, he condemns women's ignorance of their own bodies which enslaves them as they cannot be in control of their own lives.

Transformation and metamorphosis do not belong exclusively to the level of content. Gray constantly remodels old material into new. *Something Leather* is

---

[15] Douglas Gifford, rev. of *Ten Tales Tall & True*. *Books in Scotland* 48 (Winter 1993), p. 7.
[16] Janice Galloway, "Different Oracles: Me and Alasdair Gray". *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 15 n 2, p. 195-196.

the clearest example as the central chapters are all based on old plays. This process could be considered as self-cannibalism or self-intertextuality. Gray feeds from his past creations in the same way that society consumes its dead in *Lanark* and *A History Maker*. Indeed, there exists an exchange of material and characters between his principal works and his other fictions, in particular the short stories. Works that were originally planned as plays for theatre, radio and television have subsequently been reworked into novels and short stories, for example. *The Fall of Kelvin Walker*[17] was originally a television play, and later a theatre play. "The Loss of the Golden Silence", and "Homeward Bound", were stage plays. *McGrotty and Ludmilla*,[18] "Five Letters from an Eastern Empire" and "Near the Driver" were originally written for radio, while *A History Maker,* "A Night Off", "Mavis Belfrage" and "Mr Goodchild" were planned as television films. Another illustration is the appearance of characters with the same name in different works. In "A Night Off" we find characters who appear in other stories: McGrotty (*McGrotty & Ludmilla* 1990), Sludden (*Lanark* and *1982 Janine*) and McPake (*Lanark*). Nan is a character in "The Comedy of the White Dog", (*USM*) *A History Maker* and *Lanark*. Sandy belongs both to *A History Maker* and *Lanark*. Quantum Cortexin is a part of the Creature in *Lanark* and a ventilation system in "Near the Driver". (*TTTT*) Sir Arthur Shots appears in *McGrotty and Ludmilla* and the play *Working Legs*.[19]

---

[17] Alasdair Gray, *The Fall of Kelvin Walker*. (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1985)
[18] Alasdair Gray, *McGrotty and Ludmilla*. (Glasgow: Dog and Bone, 1990)
[19] Alasdair Gray, *Working Legs. A Two –Act Play for Disabled Performers*. (Glasgow: Dog & Bone, 1997)

Recycling old material into new work is an example not only of Gray's immense ability to redistribute his energies but also of the fact that his shorter fiction incorporates themes treated in his longer works. No matter how many different worlds Gray creates he always directs the reader back to reality. In the inside cover of the paperback edition of *Ten Tales Tall & True* Gray lists some of the elements present not only in this particular volume but also in the rest of his fiction: social realism, sexual comedy, science fiction, and satire. It looks as if Gray is anxious to define the range of his work, as if he cannot trust the reader or critic to understand what he is trying to achieve in his fiction. Clearly, this is connected with Gray's obsessive reworking of the same moral concerns throughout his work. Work after work the same topics that were clearly established in his best novels, *Lanark* and *1982 Janine*, reappear as a compulsive personal and public reminder of the object and purpose behind his fiction-making.

A History Maker includes all the topics present in Gray's work. It belongs to the genre of science fiction as the story is placed in the future and there is no blend of realism and fantasy of the kind seen in *Lanark*. Despite its futuristic tone, the setting in recognisably Scottish and the occurrence of Scottish words and expressions is higher than in any of his other works (he even includes a glossary explaining some of them). In some aspects, however, it resembles the fantastic section of *Lanark*. Corpses are used to fuel a powerplant, even if this is not shown in the exploitative light of *Lanark*. The public eye is very much like the Oracle and as in the Institute there are windows that can be opened into bucolic scenery. Wat Dryhope, the male protagonist, is, like Lanark, seduced into

the power game. Neither of them is initially interested in power but each is lured into it. The downfall of Wat Dryhope comes in the form of a female, mixed with alcohol and drugs. Like all of Gray's protagonists, he is an outsider. Like Lanark, Kelvin Walker and McGrotty he represents the dour Scotsman unable to enjoy himself.

There are also topics reminiscent of *1982 Janine*. The way Wat Dryhope, is seduced by Delilah Puddock, the female eye, brings to mind the fantasy female characters in the earlier novel. A name such "Delilah Puddock" brings to mind the character Bella/Victoria Baxter from *Poor Things*. They are both attractive and dangerous women. This can be applied, by extension, to the role of the female in Gray's fiction. Women tend to be both "Delilahs" beautiful seductresses, responsible for the destruction of the male, and "puddocks" cold amphibians that produce repulsiveness.

The Fall of Kelvin Walker and *McGrotty and Ludmilla* also explore Gray's concerns. Religion, love as a form of manipulation, language – particularly accent, as it appears in *Something Leather* – powerful father figures, Scotland, and conventionality all recur. Kelvin, like Lanark, Duncan Thaw and McGrotty is not a figure that can engage the reader's sympathy. The BBC in *The Fall of Kelvin Walker* and the corridors of power in *McGrotty and Ludmilla* play the same role as places such as the Forensic Institute in *1982 Janine* and the Institute in *Lanark*.

Politics, sex, religion, and language and the vulnerability of the individual can be reduced to one main issue in Gray's fiction: the misuse of power. Behind the mask created by the parodic use of genres such as magical realism,

pornography, science fiction, the Gothic and the use of baroque structures and humour, lies the principal concern in Gray's fiction: manipulation, control and abuse of power. Gray's moral message is expressed in *A History Maker*. The first rule in the bill of human rights is: "NOBODY WILL BE USED BY ANOTHER WITHOUT KNOWING AND WILLING IT". (*AHM*, 108)

Manipulation and exploitation take diverse forms in his work. One of the most explicit is the use of corpses for fuel and food in *Lanark* and *A History Maker*. Delilah Puddock, the *femme fatale* in this story, expresses it euphemistically: "when exploiting people it is best to think them a passive substance like oil or earth". (*AHM*, 118)

Personal relationships in his work, particularly between men and women, are always tortuous and they always involve a degree of selfishness and self-interest. They illustrate this same concern about abuse of power. "Loss of the Golden Silence" (*TTTT*) exemplifies these relationships. In this story two people who live together discover that they are mysteries to each other. They do not know what the other one does when they are not together. However, the female protagonist prefers to keep things that way. She finds that "Words do more harm than good if they aren't in a poem or play, and even plays have caused riots. Let's switch on the silence again". (*TTTT*, 58) These words testify to an inability or an unwillingness to communicate. The following exchange is typical of Gray's couples:

> "I'm depressed because now I know what happens in your head. Next time you frown I'll think, 'Damn! She's worrying about her thesis.'"
> "Why damn? Why will it upset you?"
> "Because I'll feel obliged to say something cheerful and reassuring."
> "Do you really resent making ordinary, friendly little remarks?"
> "Yes."
> (*TTTT*, 53)

It is the type of relationship that develops between Jock and Helen in *1982 Janine*. For these characters to talk about oneself is like "cut[tting] [one]self into small pieces". (*TTTT*, 56) This is also the rationale behind Jock's refusal to talk to people in order to not "give himself away".

On the dust cover of the Bloomsbury edition of the novella *Mavis Belfrage,*[20] Gray claims that this is his "only straight novel about love". However, here the issue is approached from the same standpoint as his previous work. Mavis and Colin share the same inability to love with the rest of Gray's characters, particularly Lanark and Duncan Thaw. Kelvin Walker, who is as bad at loving as the rest of Gray's male characters, puts into words this inability to express love so common in Gray's work:

> "I don't know much about love because I'm bad at it but it seems an unnatural emotion. The only people able to comfort us bring us pain. Love should not be like that. Life is sore enough already. Love should simplify and tidy, not complicate and destroy, and does it not sometimes do that?"
> (*FKW*, 46)

Personal destruction is the outcome of love in Gray's work. Women tend to destroy men. An example is the short story "Homeward Bound". (*TTTT*) Alan, a manipulator, seduces women by inducing a feeling of pity in them. He is confronted with Vlasta his ex-lover and Lillian his present one. A game of deceit, manipulation and injured feelings ensues. As is common in Gray's work, men are manipulators, women destroyers. Vlasta is described by the narrator:

> ... she has no pity for men and enjoys destroying them, especially smart manipulators like Alan. But when you have knocked such a man down, and don't

---

[20] Alasdair Gray, *Mavis Belfrage. A Romantic Novel with Five Shorter Tales*. (London: Bloomsbury, 1996)

> want to go away and be lonely, what can you do but help set him up again, like a skittle?
> (*TTTT*, 50)

The final result of this destruction is manifested in the way Delilah Puddock uses Wat Dryhope in *A History Maker* to destroy the world. After seducing him in a fashion reminiscent of Book 4 of *Lanark*, she infects him with a virus that will spread among the population.

In "You" (*TTTT*) exploitation is not restricted to a man and a woman but extends to the relationship between English and Scottish culture. The male English protagonist exploits the Scottish female protagonist for sexual purposes. After a few nights he rejects her with the following words: "A cretin may be good for three nights fucking in a filthy hole like Glasgow but three nights is the limit. Remember that." (*TTTT*, 73)

In addition to the opposition fantasy / realism, Gray's work also explores the conflict between personal freedom and control. Therefore, powerful father figures, organisations and institutions which constrain the individual abound in his novels. In *1982 Janine* these father figures make Jock's life a misery, while in *The Fall of Kelvin Walker* Kelvin's father manages to destroy Kelvin. His father is for Kelvin "the only power in the world he had ever really dreaded". (*FKW*, 133) But Gray, as "the author", also becomes a father figure to the reader. He exerts control on the process of reading and interpretation in different ways. There exists also a paradox between his denunciation of control and manipulation, the apparent lack of authorial control in his works and the firm hold he keeps both on the narrative and the reader. His fiction is guilty of the same offence that his work denounces

On a formal level, he tends to use masks to present the theme of the work. pornography in the case of *1982 Janine* and *Something Leather*. the Gothic in *Poor Things*, science fiction in *A History Maker*, etc. In this way. he controls the reading process by manipulating the reader's expectations. The clearest example is found in *Something Leather*, where the main concern is covered by a layer of sadomasochistic narrative. In *Lanark* and *Poor Things*, he appears as the "author" and the "editor" and therefore can give his own version of events. He forces. then, a particular reading of these texts on the reader. In *Poor Things* he tries to detach himself from the narration and the creation of the story. He creates an illusion of documentary reality by using letters belonging to the characters and claiming that he is only "editing" a book found on the streets of Glasgow. On the one hand, he uses the distancing device of the discovered manuscript and, on the other, he makes clear whose version of events he believes and forcing the reader to side with him.

Another device used to detach himself from the story is multiple narration. a characteristic of Gothic fiction. What the reader encounters in *Poor Things* is the writing of Archibald McCandless, Wedderburn and Bella. The story happens in the nineteenth century and the editor writes in the twentieth century. again distancing the editor from the text.

Adding footnotes, marginal notes, endnotes and appendixes – what Gray calls "intellectual afterbirth" (*MB*, 156) – is another form of exercising authority. These items are clearly connected with academia, and therefore have a claim to objective discourse. They also have the effect of making the reader aware of the artificiality of the text.

"Edison's *Tractatus*" in *Mavis Belfrage* is one of the most extreme cases of authorial control. Nothing is unaccounted for or left to the reader's imagination. In fact the story is only an excuse for the Epilogue. The Epilogue details the origin of the story, the reason for its title, the motivation behind it and the writing process.

The logic behind Gray's obsession with having complete control of his production is the existence of an overriding moral concern in his work. Again, there is a contrast between its transparency and the formal artificiality with which it is presented. This is what the protagonist of "Prometheus" (*USM*) calls the "wordgame":

> This story is a poem, a wordgame. I am not a highly literate French dwarf, my lost woman is not a revolutionary writer manque [sic], my details are fictions, only my meaning is true and I must make that meaning clear by playing the wordgame to the bitter end.
> (*USM*, 231)

This "wordgame" is Gray's most postmodern characteristic. Gray's work is highly ludic, he plays with the reader, making a point of letting him know that what s/he is reading is merely an artificial game. For example, in *Lanark* the conclusion to the story appears in the "Index of Plagiarisms", (*L*, 485-499) marginal notes that appear in the "Epilogue" (*L*, 479-499) and not at the end of the text. Similarly, in *A History Maker* the reader discovers what happens to the protagonist in the "Notes Explaining Obscurities" that appears as a glossary. By using very baroque structures such as those in "Logopandocy", (*USM*) the "Epilogue" of *Lanark* and 'The Ministry of Voices' in *1982 Janine*, Gray also makes the reader aware of the game he is playing. The reader cannnot escape the textuality of the narration. Book titles and blurbs also provide an opportunity to

pull the reader's leg. He says on a preliminary page of *Ten Tales Tall & True*: "This book contains more tales than ten so the title is a tall tale too. I would spoil my book by shortening it, spoil the title if I made it true".

It can be concluded that innovation in Gray's work usually belongs to the level of form, that is, it is basically stylistic. *Lanark*, *1982 Janine*, *Poor Things* and "Logopandocy" (*USM*) are the works where formal games and the ludic element are at their clearest. At the level of content Gray seems to position himself in a rather more conventional attitude. His work denounces exploitation in whatever form or way.

Gray's social and political concerns are better worked into his fiction when he is using fantasy, for example in "The Great Bear Cult", "The Start of the Axletree", "The End of the Axletree" and "Five Letters from An Eastern Empire" (*USM*) where he employs political allegory. Gray's use of traditional realism makes him more susceptible to one of the pitfalls of his fiction: his tendency to moralise. When illustrating his political and social views in an exclusively realistic text, it often sounds like a moral sermon, for example the beginning of the story "Money" (*MB*, 136) and "The Shortest Tale" (*MB*, 157) where political and social commentary are favoured over storyline and character development. Interestingly, he does not seem aware of the effect of moral tirades in his work. He writes in relation to moralising:

> It's a pity that storytellers cannot be moralists. They can invent people who pass moral judgements, when they are convincing and appropriate, but if they make their inventions the text of a sermon then a sermon is all they will write, no matter how well they have reflected part of the age and body of their time.[21]

---

[21] Alasdair Gray, "Thoughts Suggested by Agnes Owens's *Gentlemen of the West*". *Edinburgh Review* 71 (1985), p. 31.

"Near the Driver" (*TTTT*) is an example of such moralising. The story depicts a train crash and has a futuristic flavour to it. However, it sounds like an excuse to criticise the new privatised British Railway system and the inhumanity of modern organisations.

Other examples of moralising can be found in short stories such as "The Shortest Tale" (*MB*), sections of *1982 Janine*, *Mavis Belfrage* and *A History Maker* in contrast to, for example, "The Comedy of the White Dog" (*USM*) where the boundaries between reality and fantasy explode. Short stories where he does not use any fantasy but humour and pathos instead, such as "The Marriage Feast", (*TTTT*) "Internal Memorandum", (*TTTT*) "A Night Off" (*MB*), "Mr Goodchild" (*MB*) or "The Trendelenburg Position" (*TTTT*) are more satisfactory. In the case of the latter, meaning is disguised by a veil of cynicism. The dentist's solution to poverty is simple: virtual reality suits and helmets will make the homeless think they are on a Samoan beach while they are sleeping among the ruins of a derelict building.

There are some exceptions, though, for example "Houses and Small Labour Parties" (*TTTT*) is restrained and to the point. An old labourer is replaced for a younger one when he is not able to work as hard as before. Fantasy is absent but the controlled style and pathos with which the story is written convey injustice effectively. "The Answer" (*LT*) provides another example, suggesting that his writing is more direct and compelling when he is not trying to force a political message into it. This is the story of Donald who has just been rejected by Joan. It combines concerns common in Gray: the inability of men and women to communicate effectively, friendship and the feeling of despondency that comes

with loneliness. They are combined with candour and humour. creating a mood similar to that of *1982 Janine*.

Biographical accounts such as "A Small Thistle" (Bill Skinner), "Portrait of a Playwright" (Joan Ure), "Portrait of a Painter" (Alasdair Taylor) from *Lean Tales*,[22] engage the reader emotionally because they have been written with affection and tenderness for their protagonists. In "The Grumbler" (*Lean Tales*) the narrator comments in connection to his city, (presumably Glasgow): "We decided that our city was completely cultureless because it refused to blend imagination with political commitment". (*LT*, 270) Gray's work is at its most compelling when he achieves a balance between the two. In his short stories he tends to overemphasise the political component, therefore creating a moral tale. Gray's short stories show the best and worst of his writing: sheer fantasy and the political sermon. The limitation of the short story works against Gray. His best works are the long ones.

Puzzling paradoxes sit at the heart of Gray's fiction: the use of fantasy and stark realism, the use of playful postmodern techniques to convey a stern socialist ideology, the use of cosmopolitan writing techniques and his inescapable Scottishness. Even though Gray is an author determined to make large meanings, he is difficult to pin-down. Two of his works exemplify the fundamentally paradoxical basis of their author's mind and imagination. *Lanark* can be read as defending the role of society or at least demonstrating how the individual can only find happiness by acknowledging its rules. *Something Leather* shows exactly

---

[22] Alasdair Gray (with James Kelman and Agnes Owens), *Lean Tales*. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1985)

the opposite. It mocks middle class beliefs, conventions, and conformities. The key question is to what extent an author so engaged with social and political issues, with the abuse of power, manipulation, and selfishness can write within the framework of Postmodernism. It is Gray's achievement that he does so successfully, that the paradoxes at the heart of his work cannot be resolved. Indeed, the merit of his work is that its delicate equilibrium can never be disentangled entirely.

Appendix I

What appears below is an outline of a course on the novel and novel-writing undertaken by Alasdair Gray for students on the M.Litt. postgraduate programme in Creative Writing at the University of St. Andrews, 1993-94. It shows Gray's self-aware approach to fiction and the arts of narrative.

Novels told in the first person:

1. Stories made by authors using parts of their own lives:

   David Copperfield by Charles Dickens, *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Good Morning, Midnight* by Jean Rhys, *Tropic of Cancer* by Henry Miller. *The Street of the Crocodiles* by Bruno Schulz.

2. First person narratives by characters who are not the main part of their story:

   Moby Dick by Melville, *The Good Soldier* by Ford Madox Ford. *The Great Gatsby* by Scott Fitzgerald, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey.

3. First person narratives by people invented to tell the story:

   Robinson Crusoe by Defoe, *Gulliver's Travels* by Swift, *Kidnapped* by R.L. Stevenson, *The War of the Worlds* by H.G. Wells. *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad.

Novels told in the third person.

4. Tales made by authors out of their own lives:

   Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man by Joyce, *Sons and Lovers* by D.H. Lawrence. *In Search of Lost Time* by Proust.

5. Domestic novels about a few people: *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austin. [sic] *On the Eve* by Turgenev, *The Europeans* by Henry James. *The Death of*

the Heart by Elizabeth Bowen, *Reflections in a Golden Eye* by Carson McCullers.

6. Political novels about many kinds of people:

   Historical: *Old Mortality* by Walter Scott, *The Red and the Black* by Stendhal, *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens.

   Wealth, Power and Law in strong countries:

   Old Goriot by Balzac, *Crime and Punishmen*t by Dostoevsky. *The Bonfire of Vanities* by Thomas Wolfe. *The Secret Agent* by Conrad.

   In Warfare: *The Good Soldier Schweik* by Hasek, *Catch-22* by Heller, *Slaughterhouse 5* by Vonnegut, *The Tin Drum* by Günter Grass.

7. Fables about the state of the world and intelligence inside it:

   The Pilgrim's Progress by Bunyan, *Candide* by Voltaire, *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, *The Trial* by Kafka, *Animal Farm* by Orwell.

Appendix II

Answers to questionnaire by E.M.

1. Which Scottish contemporary authors do you read?

Chiefly Tom Leonard and Jim Kelman, who have been my friends for about 25 years: also Agnes Owens.

2. Which international contemporary authors do you read?

Can't think of any in the fiction line, unless you count Gunter [sic] Grass and similar old folk. There is so much more great stuff in earlier times that I have yet to tackle. I discovered *Middlemarch* and *Vanity Fair* a few years ago.

3. What is your opinion of contemporary English fiction?

I know too little to pass a sweeping judgement.

4. Do you consider your writing as belonging to a Scottish or an international school of writing?

Modesty forbids me to reply. Make up your own mind.

5. What importance do sex, politics, language and religion have in your work?

Great importance.

6. In *1982 Janine* Jock says: "(...) if I keep a tight hold on this small dream I will manage to pack all my obsessions into it ...".To what an extent are your novels ways of exorcising your fantasies, nightmares and obsessions?

I use these things but doubt if I exorcise them.

7. Apart from *1982 Janine* and *Lanark*, to what an extent are your other novels autobiographical?

Kelvin Walker uses experience of London BBC Television in 1964 or 5. "Mavis Belfrage" and the "Night Off" use one or 2 incidents from my early marriage and school teaching. "The Report to the Trustees" was an accurate report. "The Answer" is based on a real happening.

8. In one interview you said that you "expected *1982 Janine* to be execrated"? Why?

Because of the porny bits. I was so old-fashioned that I did not notice they were now fashionable.

9. In *1982 Janine* Jock McLeish seems to get over an inferiority complex by deidealising the powerful figures that haunt him. Do you think that Scotland undergoes a similar process that results in Jock no longer thinking "Scotland worse than elsewhere"?

Oh I hope so!

10. Do you consider the character Jock McLeish representative of the Scottish male?

He represents some Scottish males.

11. *Something Leather* and *1982 Janine* were considered pornographic and obscene by some critics. To what extent does pornography play an important role in your novels?

A part as important as the intelligent reader notices.

12. Do you think that de Sade's writings have influenced in some way parts of *Something Leather*?

No, I find Sade a bore. Pauline Réage was my main influence.

13. Why did you choose a group of lesbians when you decided to write a story with a central female character?

It was an excuse to imagine sexy games between a lot of women. I'm less interested in men being sexy.

14. Some critics have accused you of creating female characters that are not believable because they are typical male fantasies. Do you agree with this? Do you think this is inevitable if you are a male writer?

In *1982 Janine* I meant some of the women (especially Denny and Helen and the speaker's mother) to be real and possible, Janine, Big Momma etc. to be fantasies. The book is a failure if readers see no difference. On the creation of characters: I think Shakespeare and Tolstoy's women as convincing as George Elliot [sic] and Flannery O'Connors men. I agree with Brigid Brothy who said good writing was made by a union of logic which was unsexual and imagination which was presexual.

15. Why are items of clothing -particularly women's- so central to your work?

Clothing - especially women's clothing- is designed to tease us by exaggerating the social differences between men and women while screening (sometimes only a little) the anatomical differences. If you don't believe me look at some fashion magazines or clothing catalogues.

16. Would you say that *Lanark* has anything in common with novels such as Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* or Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*?

I would like to think the dramatic metaphors in *Lanark* made it as entertaining as a *One Hundred Years of Solitude* but *Midnight's Children* did not draw me into it – I read only a few pages. My favourite magic realists are Herman Melville, Edgar Allan Poe, James Hogg and Ibsen – think of Brand and Peer Gynt.

17. What is your opinion of literary critics?

They've been very useful. When not feeling bright enough to read the best work of the greatest writers I often relaxed by reading critical essays *about* such work. As to my own work, no critic has the time to give it the degree of critical attention I gave when writing it, so criticism can only influence my readers. However, sometimes a critical remark has brought tears of pleasure to my eyes because the critic noticed something important which others had not. I also think good critical responses important to maintaining literary standards – I am persuaded by Leavis that Lawrence's later novels (unlike his stories and poems) grew sloppy because the critical response to his earliest and best novels did not recognize their craftmanship. My own writings have been treated more respectfully by critics than I expected. My favourite critics (though I only agree with some of what they say) are Philip Sydney's *Defence of Poesy*, Hamlet's advice to the players, Coleridge, Ruskin, some Bagehot, Arnold, Pound, Lawrence, Leavis, some T.S. Elliot. [sic] _____I forgot to mention Johnson. Despite literature departments devoting themselves to producing critics, there are fewer excellent ones than excellent poets and story tellers.

Bibliography

Unpublished sources

Manuscript collections

The Alasdair Gray archive from the National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh. Accessions: 7538, 8799, 9247, 9417, 9503, 9705, 9824, 10191, 10371, 10749, 11160, 11203, 11295, 11318, 11332, 11338.

Theses and dissertations

Bittenbender, Christopher. "Beyond the Antisyzygy: Bakhtin and some Scottish Writers". Ph.D. diss., University of St Andrews, 1996. University of St Andrews Library. Chapter Three is devoted to Alasdair Gray's work.

Charlton, Bruce. "The Literature of Alasdair Gray". M.A. diss., University of Durham, 1988. Copy in University of St Andrews Library.

Irons, Neil. "Alasdair Gray. Just Making Maps? A Dissertation of his Life and Work". Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art, 1986. A copy of this dissertation can be found in Accession 9503. National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh.

Morrison, Alexander Ian. "Art, Morality and Tradition in the Novels of Alasdair Gray". M.Litt diss., University of Aberdeen, 1989. University of Aberdeen Library.

Published sources

Books and articles

Primary sources

Gray, Alasdair. *Working Legs. A Two-Act Play for Disabled Performers.*

(Glasgow: Dog & Bone, 1997)

_____. *Mavis Belfrage. A Romantic Novel with Five Shorter Tales.*

(London: Bloomsbury, 1996)

_____. *A History Maker.* (Edinburgh: Canongate Press, 1994)

_____. "Money". *Scotlands* 1 (1994)

_____. "Museum". *Scotlands* 1 (1994)

_____. *Ten Tales Tall & True.* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd., 1993)

_____. "Introduction" to Jack Withers, *A Real Glasgow Archipelago.* (Argyll: Argyll Publishing, 1993)

_____. *Poor Things.* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd., 1992)

_____. *Why Scots Should Rule Scotland.* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1992)

_____. "Everything Leading to the First English". *Chapman* 63 (January 1991)

_____. *Something Leather.* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1990)

_____. *McGrotty and Ludmilla or The Harbinger Report.* (Glasgow: Dog and Bone, 1990)

_____. *Old Negatives.* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1989)

_____. "A Preface to the Anthology of Prefaces plus Three Critical Commentaries". *Edinburgh Review* 78-79 (1988)

_____. *Alasdair Gray. Saltire Self-Portraits* 4 (Edinburgh: The Saltire Society, 1988)

_____. "The History Maker" (film script). *Chapman* 50-51 (Spring 1987)

_____. *Five Scottish Artists.* (Gartocharn: Famedram Publishers, 1986)

_____, James Kelman, and Agnes Owens. *Lean Tales.* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1985)

_____. *The Fall of Kelvin Walker.* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1985)

_____. "Thoughts Suggested by Agnes Owens's *Gentlemen of the West*". *Edinburgh Review* 71 (1985)

_____. *1982 Janine.* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984)

_____. *Unlikely Stories, Mostly.* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1983)

_____. "A Modest Proposal for By-Passing a Predicament". *Chapman* 35-36 (July, 1983)

_____. *Lanark.* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1981)

_____. "What's Eatin' You Hamlet?", "Ether". *Whitehill School Magazine* 66 (Summer, 1952)

_____. "Nature Notes" (cartoons), *Whitehill School Magazine* 64 (Summer, 1951)

_____. "The Gymnasium (A Serious Poem)", "Drama in Everyday Life". *Whitehill School Magazine* 63 (Christmas, 1950)

_____. "The Wise Mouse". *Whitehill School Magazine* 60 (Christmas, 1949)

_____. "After the Game". *Whitehill School Magazine* 59 (Christmas, 1948)

_____. "A Ghost Comes to Whitehill". *Whitehill School Magazine* 58 (Summer, 1948)

Secondary sources

Alexander, Marguerite. *Flights from Realism. Themes and Strategies in*

Postmodernist British and American Fiction. (London: Edward Arnold, 1990)

Anderson Imbert, Enrique. *El Realismo Mágico y otros ensayos.* (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, C.A., 1976)

Armitt, Lucie. *Theorising the Fantastic.* (London: Arnold, 1996)

Attebery, Brian. *Strategies of Fantasy.* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992)

Axelrod, Mark. "Alasdair Gray: An Introduction, of Sorts". *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 15 n. 2 (Summer 1995)

_____. "An Alasdair Gray Checklist". *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 15 n. 2 (Summer 1995)

Barthes, Roland. *S/Z.* Translated by Richard Miller. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990)

Bell, Ian. "Imagine Living There: Form and Ideology in Contemporary Scottish Fiction". In *Studies in Scottish Fiction: 1945 to the Present*, ed. Susanne Hagemann. *Scottish Studies* 19 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996)

Bernstein, Stephen. "Scottish Enough: The London Novels of Alasdair Gray". *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 15 n. 2 (Summer 1995)

Beveridge, Craig, and Ronald Turnbull. *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture. Inferiorism and the Intellectuals.* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1989)

Bloom, Harold, ed. *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein.* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987)

Bluglass, R., et al eds. *Principles and Practice of Forensic Psychiatry.*

(Edinburgh, London, Melbourne & New York: Churchill Livingstone. 1990)

Boorman, Joan Rea. *La estructura del narrador en la novela hispanoamericana contemporánea.* (Madrid, Miami, New York, San Juan: Hispanova de Ediciones, S.A., 1976)

Botting, Fred. *Making Monsters. Frankenstein, Criticism, Theory.* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1991)

Boyd, Stephen. "Black Arts: *1982, Janine* and *Something Leather*". In *The Arts of Alasdair Gray*, eds. Robert Crawford and Thom Nairn. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991)

Brooke-Rose, Christine. *A Rhetoric of the Unreal. Studies in Narrative and Structure, especially of the Fantastic.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981)

Burgess, Moira. *Imagine a City. Glasgow in Fiction.* (Argyll: Argyll Publishing, 1998)

Calinescu, Matei, and Douwe Fokkema, eds. *Exploring Postmodernism.* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1987)

Canfield, Martha. "Paradoja, cliché y fabulación en la obra de García Márquez". In *La invención del pasado. La novela histórica en el marco de la posmodernidad*, ed. Karl Kohut. *Publicaciones del Centro de Estudios Latinoamericanos de la Universidad Católica de Eichstätt. Serie A: Actas 16* (Madrid, Frankfurt: Vervuert, 1997)

Carpentier, Alejo. "On the Marvellous Real in America". In *Magical Realism.*

Theory, History, Community, eds. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris. (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1995)

_____. *El reino de este mundo.* (México: Edición y Distribución Iberoamericana de Publicaciones, 1949)

Carter, Angela. *The Passion of New Eve.* (London:Victor Gollancz, 1977)

_____. *The Sadeian Woman. An Exercise in Cultural History*. (London: Virago, 1979)

Chanady, Amaryll, ed. *Latin American Identity and Constructions of Difference*. *Hispanic Issues* 10 (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994)

Charlton, Bruce. "The World Must Become Quite Another: Politics in the Novels of Alasdair Gray". *Cencrastus* 31 (Autumn 1988)

Charney, Maurice. *Sexual Fiction.* (London & New York: Methuen, 1981)

Chiampi, Irlemar. *El realismo maravilloso. Forma e ideología en la novela hispanoamericana.* (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, 1983)

Christensen, Peter. "Language and Its Discontents in Alasdair Gray's 'Logopandocy'". *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 15 n. 2 (Summer 1995)

Cooper, Brenda. *Magical Realism in West African Fiction. Seeing with a Third Eye.* (London & New York: Routledge, 1998)

Cornwell, Neil. *The Literary Fantastic. From Gothic to Postmodernism.* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990)

Costa, Dominique. "Decadence and Apocalypse in Gray's Glasgow – *Lanark*: A

Postmodernist Novel". *Scotia* XVIII (Norfolk. Virginia. U.S.A: Old Dominion University, 1994)

Craig, Cairns. *Out of History*. (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996)

Craig, Cairns. "Going Down to Hell is Easy". *Cencrastus* 6 (1981)

Crawford, Robert, and Thom Nairn, eds. *The Arts of Alasdair Gray.* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991)

Crawford, Robert."Introduction". In *The Arts of Alasdair Gray*, eds. Robert Crawford and Thom Nairn. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991)

Daly, Macdonald. "Concplags and Totplags: *Lanark* Exposed". *Edinburgh Review* 93 (Spring 1995)

Danow, David. *The Spirit of Carnival. Magical Realism and the Grotesque*. (Lexington, Ky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995)

Day, Gary, and Clive Bloom, eds. *Perspectives on Pornography. Sexuality in Film and Literature*. (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1988)

Delbaere-Garant, Jeanne. "Psychic Realism, Mythic Realism, Grotesque Realism: Variations on Magic Realism in Contemporary Literature in English". In *Magical Realism. Theory, History, Community*, eds. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris. (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1995)

de Sade, Marquis. *Cuentos, historietas y fábulas*. (Madrid: M.E. Editores. S.L., 1994)

_____. *The One Hundred & Twenty days of Sodom*. (London: Arrow Books Limited, 1991)

_____. *Philosophy in the Bedroom*. (London: Arrow Books Limited, 1991)

_____. *Justine*. (Madrid: Espiral/Ficción, 1988)

De Toro, Alfonso. "Postmodernidad y Latinoamerica (con un modelo para la narrativa postmoderna)". *Revista Iberoamericana* LVII nº 155-156 (April-September 1991)

D'Haen, Theo. "Magical Realism and Postmodernism: Decentering Privileged Centers". In *Magical Realism. Theory, History, Community*. eds. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris. (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1995)

Diamond-Nigh, Lynne. "Gray's Anatomy: When Words and Images Collide". *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 15 n. 2 (Summer 1995)

Dixon, Keith. "Writers into Battle: Political Dissent Among Contemporary Scottish Writers". *Scottish Studies - Études écoissaises*. Hors série (Grenoble: Université Stendhal,1994)

Docherty, Thomas. "Postmodern Characterization: The Ethics of Alterity". In *Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction*, ed. Edmund J. Smyth. (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1991)

Donaldson, George, and Alison Lee. "Is Eating People Really Wrong? Dining with Alasdair Gray". *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 15 n. 2 (Summer 1995)

Drescher, Horst , and Susanne Hagemann, eds. *Scotland to Slovenia: European Identities and Transcultural Communication. Scottish Studies Series* 21 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996)

_____. *Nationalism in Literature - Literarischer Nationalismus. Scottish Studies Series* 8 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989)

du Maurier, George. *Trilby*. (London: Osgood, McIlvaine & Co.. 1896)

Dunn, Douglas, ed. *Faber Book of Twentieth-Century Scottish Poetry*. (London: Faber & Faber, 1992)

Faris, Wendy. "Scheherazade's Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction". In *Magical Realism. Theory, History, Community*. eds. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris. (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1995)

Fergus, David. "Strangers. The Supernatural in Scottish Literature". *Scottish Book Collector* 3 n. 2 (December 1991- January 1992)

Filmer, Kath, ed. *Twentieth-Century Fantasists. Essays on Culture, Society and Belief in Twentieth-Century Mythopoeic Literature*. (New York: St Martin's Press, 1992)

Flores, Angel. *El Realismo mágico en el cuento hispanoamericano*. (México, D.F.: Premià Editora, 1985)

Fowles, John. *A Maggot*. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1985)

Fuentes, Carlos. *La nueva novela hispanoamericana*. (México: Editorial Joaquín Mortiz, S.A., 1972)

Galloway, Janice. "Different Oracles: Me and Alasdair Gray". *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 15 n. 2 (Summer 1995)

_____. *Blood*. (London: Minerva, 1992)

Gifford, Douglas. "The Return to Mythology in Modern Scottish Fiction". In

Studies in Scottish Fiction: 1945 to the Present, ed. Susanne Hagemann. *Scottish Studies* 19 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996)

_____. "At Last – The Real Scottish Literary Renaissance?". *Books in Scotland* 34 (1990)

_____. "Private Confession and Public Satire in the Fiction of Alasdair Gray". *Chapman* 50-51 (Spring 1987)

_____. *The Dear Green Place? The Novel in the West of Scotland.* (Glasgow: Third Eye Centre, 1985)

_____. "Fifty Years of Scottish Fiction". *Books in Scotland* 15 (Summer 1984)

_____. "Scottish Fiction 1980-81: The Importance of Alasdair Gray's *Lanark*". *Studies in Scottish Literature* 18 (1983)

Goldstein, Michael, Harold Kant, and John Hartman. *Pornography and Sexual Deviance. A Report of the Legal and Behavioral Institute Beverly Hills, California.* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1973)

González Salvador, Ana. "De lo fantástico y de la literatura fantástica". *Anuario de Estudios Filológicos* VII. Universidad de Extremadura (1984)

Gorer, Geoffrey. *The Life and Ideas of the Marquis de Sade*. (London: Peter Owen Limited, 1934)

Green, Keith, and Jill Lebihan. *Critical Theory & Practice: A Coursebook.* (New York & London: Routledge, 1996)

Groden, Michael, and Martin Kreiswirth. *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism.* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994)

Guicharnaud, Jacques. "The Wreathed Columns of St. Peter's". *Yale French Studies* 35 (December 1965)

Hagemann, Susanne, ed. *Studies in Scottish Fiction: 1945 to the Present. Scottish Studies* 19 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996)

Haggard, Rider. *She*. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1991)

Harari, Josué V., ed. *Textual Strategies. Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*. (New York; London: Methuen, 1979)

Harrison, William. "The Power of Work in the Novels of Alasdair Gray". *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 15 n. 2 (Summer 1995)

Harvie, Christopher. "North Sea Oil and Scottish Culture". In *Studies in Scottish Fiction: 1945 to the Present*, ed. Susanne Hagemann. *Scottish Studies* 19 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996)

Hawley, John. "Bell, Book, and Candle: *Poor Things* and the Exorcism of Victorian Sentiment". *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 15 n. 2 (Summer 1995)

Higgins, James. "Spanish America's New Narrative". In *Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction*, ed. Edmund J. Smyth. (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd, 1991)

Hobsbaum, Philip. "Alasdair Gray: The Voice of His Prose". *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 15 n. 2 (Summer 1995)

Hogg, James. *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. (London: Penguin, 1989)

Humm, Maggie. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Feminist Literary Criticism*. (New York; London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994)

Hunt, Lynn, ed. *The Invention of Pornography. Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500-1800*. (New York: Zone Books, 1996)

Hunter, Ian, David Saunders, and Dugald Williamson. *On Pornography: Literature, Sexuality & Obscenity Law*. (London: Macmillan, 1993)

Hutcheon, Linda. "Discourse, Power, Ideology: Humanism and Postmodernism". In *Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction*. ed. Edmund J. Smyth. (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd, 1991)

_____. *The Politics of Postmodernism*. (New York & London: Routledge, 1989)

_____. *A Poetics of Postmodernism. History, Theory, Fiction*. (New York & London: Routledge, 1988)

Irwin, W.R. *The Game of the Impossible. A Rhetoric of Fantasy*. (Urbana, Chicago, London: University of Illinois Press, 1976)

Jackson, Rosemary. *Fantasy. The Literature of Subversion*. (London & New York: Routledge, 1981)

Kafka, Franz. *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*. (London: Vintage, 1999)

Kapschutschenko, Ludmilla. *El laberinto en la narrativa hispanoamericana Contemporánea*. (London: Tamesis Books Limited, 1981)

Kearney, Patrick. *A History of Erotic Literature*. (Bristol: Paragon, 1982)

Kerrigan, Catherine. "Nationalism and Gender: Scottish Myths of the Female". *Scottish Studies - Études écossaises*. Hors série. (Grenoble: Université Stendhal 1994)

Klaus, Gustav. "1984 Glasgow. Alasdair Gray, Tom Leonard, James Kelman".

Littérature écossaise: voix nouvelles. Scottish Studies - Études Écossaisses 2 (Grenoble: Université Stendhal, 1993)

Kohut, Karl, ed. *La invención del pasado. La novela histórica en el marco de la posmodernidad. Publicaciones del Centro de Estudios Latinoamericanos de la Universidad Católica de Eichstätt. Serie A: Actas 16* (Madrid, Frankfurt: Vervuert, 1997)

Kronhausen, Eberhard, and Phyllis Kronhausen. *Pornography and the Law. The Psychology of Erotic Realism and Pornography*. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1959)

Kurzweil, Edith, and William Phillips. *Literature and Psychoanalysis*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983)

Lee, Alison. *Realism and Power. Postmodern British Fiction*. (London & New York: Routledge, 1990)

Lindsay, Frederic. "The Glasgow Novel: Myths and Directions". *Books in Scotland* 21 (Summer 1986)

Linz, Daniel, and Neil Malamuth. *Pornography. Communication Concepts 5*. (Newbury Park, California; London: Sage Publications, 1993)

Loth, David. *The Erotic in Literature. A Historical Survey of Pornography as Delightful as It is Indiscreet*. (New York: Dorset Press, 1961)

Lumsden, Alison. "Innovation and reaction in the Fiction of Alasdair Gray". In *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies*, eds. Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson. (Edinburgh : Edinburgh University Press, 1993)

Lyall, Roderick. "Postmodernist Otherworld, Postcalvinist Purgatory. An

Approach to *Lanark* and *The Bridge*". *Littérature écossaise: voix nouvelles. Scottish Studies - Études Écossaisses* 2 (Grenoble: Université Stendhal, 1993)

Lynch, Lawrence. *The Marquis de Sade*. Twayne's World Authors Series. French Literature. (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984)

Lynne, Segal, and Mary McIntosh, eds. *Sex exposed. Sexuality and the Pornography Debate*. (London: Virago, 1992)

Lytton, Lord. *The Coming Race & The Haunted and the Haunters*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1928)

MacDiarmid, Hugh. *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*. Annotated edition by Kenneth Buthlay. *The Association for Scottish Literary Studies* 17 (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987)

Malzahn, Manfred. *Aspects of Identity. The Contemporary Scottish Novel (1978-1981) as National Self-expression. Scottish Studies* 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1984)

Manlove, Colin. *An Anthology of Scottish Fantasy Literature*. (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996)

_____. *Scottish Fantasy Literature. A Critical Survey*. (Edinburgh: Canongate Academic, 1994)

_____. *Modern Fantasy. Five Studies*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975)

Marshall, Brenda. *Teaching the Postmodern: Fiction and Theory*. (New York & London: Routledge, 1992)

Martin, Gerald. *Journeys through the Labyrinth. Latin American Fiction in the*

Twentieth Century. (London & New York: Verso, 1989)

Massé, Michelle. *In the Name of Love. Women, Masochism, and the Gothic*. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992)

May, George. "Novel Reader, Fiction Writer". *Yale French Studies* 35 (December 1965)

McCabe, Brian. "Feathered Choristers". In *The Devil and the Giro. Two Centuries of Scottish Stories*, ed. Carl MacDougall. (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1989)

McCulloch, Ian. *The Artist in His World. Prints 1986-1997 with Descriptive Poems by Alasdair Gray*. (Argyll: Argyll Publishing, 1998)

McHale, Brian. *Postmodernist Fiction*. (London & New York: Routledge, 1994)

McSweeney, Kerry. *Four Contemporary Novelists. Angus Wilson, Brian Moore, John Fowles, V.S. Naipaul*. (London: Scolar Press, 1983)

Meyer, Doris, ed. *Lives on the Line. The Testimony of Contemporary Latin American Authors*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988)

Michelson, Peter. *The Aesthetics of Pornography*. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971)

Mitchell, Juliet, and Jacqueline Rose. *Feminine Sexuality. Jacques Lacan & The École Freudienne*. (London: Macmillan Press, 1987)

Morgan, Edwin. "Tradition and Experiment in the Glasgow Novel". In *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies*, eds. Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson. (Edinburgh : Edinburgh University Press, 1993)

_____. "Glasgow Writing". *Books in Scotland* 15 (Summer 1984)

Murray, Isobel, and Bob Tait. *Ten Modern Scottish Novels*. (Aberdeen: Aberdeen

University Press, 1984)

Nash, Cristopher. *World Postmodern Fiction a Guide*. (London and New York: Longman, 1993)

O'Reilly, Robert. "Language and the Transcendent Subject in Three Works of the Marquis de Sade: *Les 120 journées de Sodome*, *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, and *Justine*". *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 249 (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation at the Taylor Institution, 1987)

Panero, Leopoldo María. "Sade o la imposibilidad". In *Cuentos, historietas y fábulas completas*, Marqués de Sade. (Madrid: M.E. Editores, S.L., 1994)

Parkinson Zamora, Lois, and Wendy Faris, eds. *Magical Realism. Theory, History, Community*. (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1995)

_____. "Introduction: Daiquiri Birds and Flaubertian Parrot(ie)s". In *Magical Realism. Theory, History, Community*, eds. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris. (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1995)

Paterson, Lindsay. "Scotch Myths – 2". *The Bulletin of Scottish Politics* 2 (Spring 1981)

Pittin, Marie Odile. "Alasdair Gray: A Strategy of Ambiguity". In *Studies in Scottish Fiction: 1945 to the Present*, ed. Susanne Hagemann. *Scottish Studies* 19 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996)

Porter, Dorothy. "Imagining a City". *Chapman* 63 (Spring, 1991)

Rabinow, Paul, ed. *The Foucault Reader. An Introduction to Foucault's Thought*. (London: Penguin, 1991)

Rabkin, Eric. *The Fantastic in Literature*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976)

Réage, Pauline. *Story of O*. (London: Corgi Books, 1996)

Reid, Alastair. "Scotland". In *Faber Book of Twentieth-Century Scottish Poetry*. ed. Douglas Dunn. (London: Faber & Faber, 1992)

Reik, Theodor. *Of Love and Lust. On the Psychoanalysis of Romantic and Sexual Emotions*. (London: Souvenir Press Ltd., 1975)

Richardson, Thomas. "Reinventing Identity: Nationalism in Modern Scottish Literature". In *Nationalism in Literature*, eds. Horst W. Drescher and H. Völkel. *Scottish Studies Series* 8 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989)

Risco, Antonio. *Literatura y fantasia*. (Madrid: Taurus Ediciones, S.A., 1982)

Roh, Franz. "Magic Realism: Post-Expressionism". In *Magical Realism. Theory, History, Community*, eds. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris. (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1995)

_____. *Realismo mágico, post expresionismo. Problemas de la pintura europea más reciente*. (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1927)

Rolph, C.H., ed. *Does Pornography Matter?* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961)

Rose, Jacqueline. *States of Fantasy*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996)

Rubio Martín, María. "Fantasía creadora y componente imaginario en la obra Literaria". *Revista de lengua española, lingüística general y crítica literaria* 4 (Alicante: Universidad de Alicante, 1987)

Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight's Children*. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1981)

Russell, Diana, ed. *Making Violence Sexy. Feminist Views on Pornography*. (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993)

Russell, Scott. "*Lanark* – the Book as Physical Experience". *Scottish Book*

Collector 3 n. 10 (April-May 1993)

Sábato, Ernesto. *El escritor y sus fantásmas*. (Barcelona: Seix Barrall, 1979)

Sage, Victor, and Allan Lloyd Smith, eds. *Modern Gothic. A Reader*.

(Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1996)

Salami, Mahmoud. *John Fowles's Fiction and the Poetics of Postmodernism*.

(Rutherford, N.J.: Farleigh Dickinson University Press: London: Associated University Presses, 1992)

Sarup, Madan. *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996)

_____. *Jacques Lacan*. (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992)

Saylor, Douglas. *The Sadomasochistic Homotext. Readings in Sade, Balzac, and Proust*. (New York: Peter Lang, 1993)

Schlobin, Roger, ed. *The Aesthetics of Fantasy Literature and Art*.

(Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982)

Schwend, Joachim, and Horst W. Drescher, eds. *Studies in Scottish Fiction: Twentieth Century. Scottish Studies* 10 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1990)

Scott, P. H. "Scotch Myths –1". *The Bulletin of Scottish Politics* 2 (Spring 1981)

Seed, David. "In Pursuit of the Receding Plot: Some American Postmodernists". in *Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction*, ed. Edmund J. Smyth. (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd, 1991)

Selden, Raman. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. (New York; London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1985)

Shaw, Bernard. *Androcles and the Lion. Overruled. Pygmalion*. (London: Constable and Company Limited, 1951)

Shaw, Donald. *Nueva narrativa hispanoamericana*. (Madrid: Cátedra, 1992)

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*. (London: Everyman, 1994)

Slusser, George, Eric S. Rabkin, and Robert Scholes, eds. *Bridges to Fantasy*. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982)

Small, Christopher. *Ariel Like a Harpy. Shelley, Mary and Frankenstein*. (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1972)

Smith, Allan Lloyd. "Postmodernism/Gothicism". In *Modern Gothic. A Reader*, eds. Victor Sage and Allan Lloyd Smith. (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1996)

Smyth, Edmund. *Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction*. (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd, 1991)

Sontag, Susan. *Styles in Radical Will*. (London: Secker and Warburg, 1969)

Spring, Ian. "Image and Text: Fiction on Film". In *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies*, eds. Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993)

_____. *Phantom Village. The Myth of the New Glasgow*. (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1990)

St Clair, William. *The Godwins and the Shelleys. The Biography of a Family*. (London; Boston: Faber and Faber, 1989)

Stekel, Wilhelm. *Sadism and Masochism. The Psychology of Hatred and Cruelty*, vol 2 (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1935)

Stevenson, Randall. "Alasdair Gray and the Postmodern". In *The Arts of Alasdair Gray*, eds. Robert Crawford and Thom Nairn. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991)

Stevenson, Robert Louis. *Shorter Scottish Fiction*. (Edinburgh: Canongate Classics, 1995)

Storr, Anthony. "Sadomasochism". In *Principles and Practice of Forensic Psychiatry*, eds. R. Bluglass and P. Bowdened. (Edinburgh. London. Melbourne and New York: Churchill Livingstone, 1990)

_____. *Human Destructiveness*. (London: Chatto. Heinemann Educational for Sussex University Press, 1972)

_____. *Sexual Deviation*. (Hammondsworth: Penguin Books. 1964)

Swanson, Philip. *The New Novel in Latin America. Politics and Popular Culture After the Boom*. (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press. 1995)

Swinfen, Ann. *In Defence of Fantasy. A Study of the Genre in English and American Literature since 1945*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. 1984)

Taylor, Alan. "Give the Dog a Bone". *The Listener*, 3 May 1990

Temmer, Mark. "Style and Rhetoric". *Yale French Studies* 35 (December 1965)

Thiem, Jon. "The Textualization of the Reader in Magical Realist Fiction". In *Magical Realism. Theory, History, Community*, eds. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris. (Durham & London: Duke University Press. 1995)

Thomas, Donald. *The Marquis de Sade*. (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1976)

Todd, Richard. *Consuming Fictions. The Booker Prize and Fiction in Britain Today*. (London: Bloomsbury, 1996)

_____. "The Intrusive Author in British Postmodernist Fiction: The Cases of

Alasdair Gray and Martin Amis". In *Exploring Postmodernism*, eds. Matei Calinescu and Douwe Fokkema. (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1987)

Todorov, Tzvetan. "The Fantastic in Fiction". *Twentieth Century Studies* 3 (1970)

Valdivieso, Jaime. *Realidad y ficción en Latinoamérica*. (México: Editorial Joaquín Mortiz, S.A., 1975)

Vargas Llosa, Mario. "Social Commitment". In *Lives on the Line. The Testimony of Contemporary Latin American Authors*, ed. Doris Meyer. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988)

Walker, Marshall. *Scottish Literature Since 1707*. (London: Longman, 1997)

Wallace, Gavin, and Randall Stevenson, eds. *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993)

Weedon, Chris. *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987)

Whiteford, Eilidh. "Engendered Subjects: Subjectivity and National identity in Alasdair Gray's *1982, Janine*". *Scotlands* 2 (1994)

Whyte, Christopher. "Alasdair Gray: Not a Mirror but a Portrait". *Books in Scotland* 28 (Summer 1988)

Wilson, Anne. *Magical Thought in Creative Writing. The Distinctive Roles of Fantasy and Imagination in Fiction*. (Stroud: The Thimble Press, 1983)

Wilson, Rawdon. "The Metamorphoses of Fictional Space: Magical Realism". In *Magical Realism. Theory, History, Community*, eds. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris. (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1995)

Witschi, Beat. *Glasgow Urban Writing and Postmodernism. Scottish Studies* 12 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1991)

Wolfe, Gary. "The Encounter with Fantasy". In *The Aesthetics of Fantasy Literature and Art*, ed. Roger C. Schlobin. (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982)

Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of The Rights of Woman*, eds. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, *The Pickering Masters*, vol. 5 (London: Pickering & Chatto Ltd., 1989)

Wollstonecraft, Mary. *The Wrongs of Woman: or, Maria*, eds. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, *The Pickering Masters*, vol. 1 (London: Pickering & Chatto Ltd., 1989)

Zenziger, Peter. "Contemporary Scottish Fiction". In *Scotland: Literature, Culture, Politics*, ed. Peter Zenziger. *Anglistick & Englisch Unterricht* 38/39 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1989)

Interviews (by date)

Gray, Alasdair. "An Epistolary Interview, Mostly with Alasdair Gray". Interview by Mark Axelrod. *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 15 n. 2 (Summer 1995)

_____. "The Devil's Audience". *The Printer's Devil. A Magazine of New Writing*. Issue D (1994)

_____. "Frankly Gray". Interview by Sue Wilson. *The List*, 28 August 1992

_____. "Art as a Working-Class Birthright". Interview by Colette Douglas – Home. *The Scotsman*, 29 January 1990

_____. "1988 Alasdair". Interview by M. Crawford and J. Brown. *Gown Literary Supplement* (January 1989)

_____. "Alasdair Gray Interviewed". Interview by Sean Figgis and Andrew McAllister. *Bête Noir* 5 (1988)

_____. "Alasdair Gray Interviewed". Interview by Jennie Renton. *Scottish Book Collector* 7 (1988)

_____. "Alasdair Gray Interviewed". Interview by Kathy Acker. *Edinburgh Review* 74 (1986)

_____. "Alasdair Gray Talking". Interview by Elizabeth C. Donaldson. *Verse* 1 (1984)

_____. "A Rainbow in His Mind". Interview by Joe Stirling. *Scottish Field* (June 1984)

_____. "Interview with Alasdair Gray". Interview by Carol Anderson and Glenda Norquay. *Cencrastus* 13 (Summer 1983)

_____. "Replies by Alasdair Gray, to questions from Christopher Swan and Frank Delany, August 1982". Interview by Christopher Swan and Frank Delany. *Saltire Self-Portrait* 4. The typescript, with some variations, can be found in Accession 9247, folder 52. National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh.

Reviews

Aitchison, James. Rev. of *1982 Janine*. *The Scottish Review* 35 (August 1984)

_____. Rev. of *Lanark*. *The Scottish Review*, 22 May 1981

Barnes, Hugh. Rev. of *The Fall of Kelvin Walker* and *Lean Tales*. *London Review of Books* 7 n. 8, 2 May 1985

Bathgate, Stuart. Rev. of *Something Leather*. *The List*, 13-26 July 1990

Boyd, Stephen. Rev. of *Something Leather*. *Scottish Literary Journal Supplement* 33 (Winter 1990)

Coe, Jonathan. "Gray's Elegy". Rev. of *Poor Things*. *London Review of Books*, 8 October 1992

Crawley, John. "From Unthank to Glasgow and Back". Rev. of *Lanark*. *The New York Times Book Review*, 5 May 1985

Evans, Gregory. Rev. of *Poor Things*. *Harpers & Queen* (September 1992)

Gee, Maggie. "Cruel and tender fight". Rev. of *Poor Things*. *The Observer*, 13 September 1992

Gifford, Douglas. Rev. of *A History Maker*. *Books in Scotland* 53 (Spring 1995)

_____. Rev. of *Ten Tales Tall and True*. *Books in Scotland* 48 (Winter 1993)

_____. Rev. of *Poor Things*. *Books in Scotland* 44 (Winter 1992)

_____. Rev. of *Something Leather* and *McGrotty and Ludmilla*. *Books in Scotland* 34 (1990)

_____. "The Richest Collection in Years". Rev. of *1982 Janine*. *Books in Scotland* 15 (Summer 1984)

_____. "*Lanark* Towers above All Else". Rev. of *Lanark*. *Books in Scotland* 9 (Winter 1981-82)

Glendinning, Victoria. "Flippant Glesga Rudery". Rev. of *Something Leather*. *The Times*, 12 July 1990

Green, Stanley Roger. Rev. of *Lanark*. *Lines Review* 77 (June 1981)

Haynes, Dorothy . "Future Fantasy". Rev. of *Lanark*. *The Scots Magazine* (May 1981)

Herbert, W. N. "Rape and the Act of Union". Rev. of *Something Leather* and

McGrotty and Ludmilla. *Chapman* 65 (Summer 1991)

Higgins, Aidan. "Wee Dram". Rev. of *1982 Janine*. *London Magazine* (April-May 1984)

Kemp, Peter. "Homely Facts and Human Bondage". Rev. of *1982 Janine*. *Times Literary Supplement*, 13 April 1984

Linklater, John. "Tanned Hide". Rev. of *Something Leather*. *The Listener*. 19 July 1990

_____. "Bondage of Jock McLeish". Rev. of *1982 Janine*. *Glasgow Herald*, 14 April 1984

Malcomson, Scott. "Alasdair Gray Paints Himself out of a Corner". Rev. of *Lanark*. *Voice Literary Supplement* (1984)

Mangan, Gerald. "Lucrative Lines". Rev. of *Something Leather*. *Times Literary Supplement*, 6 -12 July 1990

McCarra, Kevin. Rev. of *Unlikely Stories, Mostly*. *Lines* 89 (June 1984)

Morgan, Edwin. "A Misunderstood Monster". Rev. of *Poor Things*. *Chapman* 72 (1993)

Murray, Isobel. "Fantasy on that Same Old Theme". Rev. of *Something Leather*. *The Scotsman*, 7 July 1990

_____. "Slippery Summit of Ambition". Rev. of *The Fall of Kelvin Walker*. *The Scotsman*, 23 March 1985

_____. "Sex and the Dying Scotsman". Rev. of *1982 Janine*. *The Scotsman*, 14 April 1984

Ritchie, Harry. "High Heels and Handcuffs". Rev. of *Something Leather*. *The Sunday Times*, 15 July 1990

Tait, Bob. "Jock's Janine". Rev. of *1982 Janine*. *Cencrastus* 18 (Autumn 1984)

Varty, Anne. Rev. of *McGrotty and Ludmilla*. *Scottish Literary Journal Supplement* 33 (Winter 1990)

Wallace, Gavin. Rev. of *Unlikely Stories, Mostly*. *Cencrastus* 15 (New Year. 1984)

Whittaker, Pete. "Leering presence". Rev. of *Something Leather*. *Tribune*. 17 August 1990